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Countering Violent Extremism Governance and Communications Strategy Paper

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An erroneous version of this document was first published on 30 August 2022. This has subsequently been removed and replaced with the version here, which should be considered the correct and final paper.

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USAID's Africa Bureau, through institutional support contractor ZemiTek, commissioned this research in September 2020 to expand USAID's analysis of violent extremism (VE) and countering violent extremism (CVE) programming in the digital age, and support staff in USAID field offices to develop evidence-based programming at the intersection of CVE, governance, and development. It was conceived and designed by Lisa Poggiali, Angela Martin, and Razia Kimani at USAID in collaboration with the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Nairobi team, including Christopher Hockey, Michael Jones and independent contractor Martine Zeuthen. RUSI partnered with Search for Common Ground and Human Cognition to carry out this research, which concluded in August 2021. Kenya's National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) supported the process at all stages.

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The research team has translated all comments from participants into English as accurately as possible. Where appropriate, interpretations have taken account of the subtleties of the meaning of colloquialisms and the tone used to reflect the intended message.

The views expressed in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, ZemiTek or RUSI.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIAI	al-Ittihad al-Islami
AMISON	African Union Mission in Somalia
AQEA	al Qaeda in East Africa
ATPU	Anti-Terrorism Police Unit
BRAVE	Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism
CAP	County Action Plan
CBO	Community Based Organization
CEF	County Engagement Forum
CGCC	Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation
CHV	Community Health Volunteer
CIDP	County Integrated Development Plan
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CT	Counter-terrorism
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DC	District Commissioner
DCC	Deputy County Commissioner
EU	European Union
FBO	Faith Based Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICG	International Crisis Group
ID	Identification
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPK	Islamic Party of Kenya
ISD	Institute for Strategic Dialogue
JNIM	Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin
KDF	Kenya Defence Forces
K-YES	Kenya Youth Employment and Skills Program
MCAP	Mombasa County Action Plan
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MRC	Mombasa Republican Council
MYC	Muslim Youth Centre
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
NCTC	National Counter Terrorism Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSCVE	National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism
P/CVE	Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism

PSYOPS	Psychological Operations (the dissemination of information for the purposes of manipulating one's opposition)
RCAP	Rapid County Action Plan
REINVENT	Reducing Insecurity and Violent Extremism in the Northern and Coastal regions of Kenya (an ongoing five-year UK-funded security reform program)
SCORE	Strengthening Community Resilience Against Violent Extremism (a USAID-funded CVE program implemented by ACT, a Kenyan NGO, in several coastal counties)
SNA	Social Network Analysis
SUPKEM	Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
NIWETU	NiWajibu Wetu (a USAID-funded CVE program implemented by DAI across Kenya)
VBIED	Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
VE	Violent Extremism

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE RESEARCH STUDY, conducted between April and July 2021, explores the social networks and information flows of both violent extremism (VE) and countering violent extremism (CVE) and looks at localized understandings of related concepts across four Kenyan counties: Nairobi, Nyeri, Mombasa, and Kwale. It contains two main products: 1) a Governance and Communications Strategy Paper (below), which analyzes social networks and communication patterns among VE-affected communities and CVE practitioners and contains strategic recommendations for USAID and other donors who support CVE programming; 2) a Community Action Strategy, a series of six short briefs directed at government actors, religious actors, and local organizations carrying out CVE programming in the Kenyan context. Study locations were chosen, in consultation with USAID and the National Counter Terrorism Centre of Kenya. Determining factors for study locations also included where VE is a matter of concern, and locations where the team could feasibly investigate information sharing networks and evolving societal norms across urban and rural locations. Kenya was chosen for this research as VE actors, primarily al Shabaab, continue to present a threat to the country's national security and regional stability and the country has a substantial history of CVE implementation.

The research piloted an innovative methodology that combined in-depth, field-based qualitative research with social network analysis (SNA) to better understand how social networks and information and communication patterns inform community attitudes and behaviors around VE and CVE.

SUMMARY

Al Shabaab uses several social media outlets such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, Telegram to disseminate its messaging and videos. Content produced by the group's media outlet, Al-Kataib, is focused on Kenya-specific grievances, a black and white interpretation of the Qur'an and glamorizes life under al Shabaab in Somalia. This VE messaging is disseminated through peer-to-peer relationships – those both on and offline. The study findings revealed, however, significant variances across the counties as to whether or not VE messaging was passed on in-person versus online. Despite discussion of the role played by social media, most participants suggested that physical spaces remain essential to youth social structures; in traditionally reinforced locations where youth feel they can discuss ideas freely.

This persistence of overlap between on- and offline spaces for discussion on VE messaging is most illustrated by trusted friends sharing videos on chat platforms and others watching the same such videos when at *maskanis* (public spaces where youth meet to socialize) or in private homes. Though study participants across counties cited the role of social media in radicalization and recruitment, findings revealed that participants also suggested that recruiters specifically

targeted vulnerable youth, via online communication or in-person, tailoring their approach on an individual basis.

Further, the study revealed that three key variables contribute to creating a social context in which VE may come to be seen as 'morally legitimate:' widespread internet access and smartphone usage seen to undermine traditional relationships with local leaders and parents concerned that they do not know what is taking place online, the perceived materialism of the youth and communities wracked by fear – of a government they do not trust and a VE organization they are afraid to upset.

CONCLUSION

In the target counties, the research concluded that ethnicity, migration patterns, intergenerational tensions, and sectarian divisions most impacted social cohesion, VE information-sharing practices and interpretation of VE messaging. Despite the disclosure of the sharing of VE messaging and the opportunity for engagement with VE material, study participants defined sources of resilience to such messaging as follows: religious knowledge, role models, education, socio-economic opportunity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the end of the research, the RUSI team devised several recommendations: for CVE practitioners, specific to CVE communications and for the Government of Kenya. Building on the lessons learned, methodological recommendations are also provided for researchers seeking to explore similar questions.

PRELIMINARY STEPS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR CVE PRACTITIONERS

- **Assess local understandings of VE prior to engagement.**
- **Ensure buy-in from the target community by demonstrating the relevance of CVE.**
- **Recognize and challenge implicit assumptions regarding radicalization and recruitment.**
- **Stakeholders, including government personnel, should receive further training and capacity building to improve their understanding of deleterious assumptions e.g., "the issue is Islam".**
- **Manage how you and your prospective partners are perceived amongst communities (including those most 'at-risk').**
- **Recognize that individuals may share content that endorses VE, but that does not mean they agree with it. Adopt a shame-sensitive approach to programming.**
- **Consider gender-segregated communication initiatives, both online and in-person.**

- **Consider how religious identity influences communication networks.**

CVE PROGRAMMING: COMMUNICATION AND DELIVERY

- **Resolve issues around the role of financial incentives and money in programming.**
- **Focus on peer-to-peer networks, where possible working through these links when selecting a target audience.**
- **Identify emotive topics for discussion (either local or global).**
- **Strengthen local use of Arabic terms when working with religious leaders.**
- **Active efforts should be made to encourage intra-faith dialogue.**
- **Integrate messages into holistic forms of intervention; they are not sufficient when used in isolation.**
- **Use synthesized approaches and hybrid programming to account for the integrated and mutually reinforcing nature of on- and offline communications.**
- **Mainstream CVE programming within development initiatives.**
- **Consider civic education and engagement within CVE programming.**
- **Consider mentorship as a potential solution to the perceived lack of role models available to youth.**
- **Engage with the private sector to address socioeconomic and wider structural grievances.**
- **Conduct research to understand the plausibility, scope and/or implications of 'negative resilience'.**

GOVERNMENT SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Focus on tangible results.**
- **Work with NCTC to harness the potential influence of returnees and defectors.**
- **Focus on law enforcement to address procedures that can support sustainability during personnel turnover and redeployments.**
- **Explore opportunities for police-community engagement, facilitated through sport or dialogue.**
- **Sensitize frontline officers and encourage them to work more closely with youth.**
- **Understand that the deployment of law enforcement officers local to an area could improve community-police relations.**

METHODOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERALL DESIGN

- **Iterate between multiple methods (with appropriate expertise leading each component) to tackle complex questions.**

- **Avoid written consent processes in sensitive communities and adapt consent to local circumstances.**

QUALITATIVE

- **Use local researchers, not local 'fixers' or 'enumerators.' In particular, engage senior and junior researchers with extensive experience in qualitative data collection.**
- **Engage project management in data collection throughout to enable them to adapt interview questions as appropriate.**
- **Build rapport and make time for follow up interviews.**
- **Meet the participants where they are comfortable.**
- **Use semi or unstructured interviews, which solicit the best data on this topic.**
- **Ensure that the full transcripts of interviews are manually interpreted by researchers.**

SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

- **Find creative ways of building rapport and trust.**
- **Future research should examine researcher-participant trust relationships on VE topics.**
- **Include trauma support in training.**
- **Practice token protocols extensively.**
- **Add enumerators for subsequent waves.**
- **Develop timeslots for data collection to manage the process.**
- **Consider an incentive structure and bear in mind travel distances.**

RELATIONAL SURVEY

- **Begin the organization mapping phase of the work well in advance of survey administration.**
- **Consider convening an in-person meeting to explain the study and collect data.**

INTRODUCTION

RECOGNIZING THAT MILITARY solutions alone cannot bring an end to terrorism, the term 'countering violent extremism' (CVE) emerged amongst policymakers in the international community in the mid-2000s to refer to 'softer' or non-coercive approaches to deal with the problem.[1] USAID uses CVE to describe 'proactive actions to preempt or disrupt efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence, and to address specific factors that facilitate recruitment and radicalization to violence'.[2] Over the last decade, the use of peaceful interventions, including 'political, economic, and social engagement'[3] with local communities, has become an essential component of the global response to the threat presented by violent extremist organizations. Concerned about the potential impact of Somalia-based al Shabaab on national security, Kenya launched a military incursion into Somalia in October 2011, but attacks on Kenyan soil subsequently increased (for an overview of al Shabaab's history in Kenya, see Annex A).[4] Initially, the Government of Kenya responded to domestic attacks with a focus on coercive counter-terrorism security operations, which were widely condemned by human rights organizations and the international community.[5] However, the government acknowledged that an alternative approach was required alongside 'counterterrorism' operations. In 2016, President Kenyatta announced a National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE) and numerous CVE programs have been carried out since that time.[6]

Nevertheless, given its conceptual genealogy, CVE can risk importing Western-centric models and vocabularies that are not necessarily congruent with, or relevant to, local realities:

- CVE is regularly framed as a national security issue, but national security concerns do not always align with daily security concerns or development challenges of civilians[7]
- CVE often ignores the bigger picture (locally relevant important structural/socioeconomic issues), instead choosing to focus on international objectives[8]
- CVE has sometimes been underpinned by anti-Muslim sentiment that creates analytical blind spots and increases resentment due to stigmatization/profiling[9]

It has been recognized that the CVE framework does not always satisfy the immediate, often quotidian, concerns of recipient populations, creating a disconnect between policy narratives focusing on ideology and the systems of conflict, discrimination and deprivation that preoccupy daily life for 'vulnerable' segments of Kenyan society. Consequently, programs risk becoming irrelevant or counter-productive if they work to advance a set of objectives that frustrate, overlook, or misinterpret the expectations of their audience. It should be noted that such tensions are not unique to Kenya and are often experienced by other countries subscribing to the UN's Plan of Action. Additionally, government actors including the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC), have pushed for an inclusive, multi-stakeholder, 'whole of society' process to develop the NSCVE (and subsequent County Actions Plans), generating Kenyan

solutions to violent extremist threats. As this paper acknowledges, NCTC also deliberately engaged, consulted, and partnered with a range of religious figures and authorities to refine their approach and diffuse perceptions of 'anti-Muslim' discrimination.

Nevertheless, to mitigate any contention, 'local ownership' is widely considered an essential ingredient of effective and sustainable interventions, with USAID, alongside many other donors, referencing the importance of 'supporting credible stakeholders who have legitimacy among program beneficiaries in the design, coordination, and implementation of our CVE programs'.[10] However, its application is patchy due in part to the difficulties of operationalizing local agency within a 'top-down' framework that still draws on foreign norms, definitions, and priorities. Within this context, one must also not overlook the impact of donor priorities sometimes superseding host government CVE priorities. Likewise, delegating leadership to 'credible stakeholders' could translate into empowering a 'small group of local elite CSOs' (some of whom are dictated by donor requirements, bypassing buy-in entirely) that do not always represent community attitudes or interests, and may simply reproduce a similar, externally imposed agenda.[11] While civil society is undoubtedly essential in the development and delivery of projects, enabling national actors such as NCTC to balance local knowledge with internationally recognized best practice, it must be supplemented with greater community participation.

This not only includes integrating community attitudes and preferences into proposed interventions but also localizing definitions, language, and frames of reference to reflect contextual specificities and better consider how recipient relations are shaped and influenced by 'local factors.'[12] As such, they can involve an ongoing process of negotiation to devolve autonomy and agency (essential for resonance, relevance and efficacy) while preserving CVE logic and good practice as a means of ensuring strategic impact. Over time and with sufficient resources, these dynamics can be optimized by integrating (or mainstreaming) CVE considerations into other programmatic streams such as economic empowerment and wider development initiatives that more readily speak to the immediate or more quotidian interests often displayed by recipient communities.

In response to these challenges, USAID commissioned the Royal United Services Institute's (RUSI) Nairobi office – in partnership with Search for Common Ground – to study social networks and norms across Kenya's VE and CVE landscape. The research explores the information flows of both VE and CVE and looks at localized understandings of the threat across multiple Kenyan counties. With al Shabaab continuing to present a danger to the country's national security, and a substantial history of CVE implementation to draw on, Kenya provides an appropriate case study to explore information sharing networks and the role played by evolving societal norms.

This study examines how communities share information, and how such content shapes local moral ecologies (as defined below), values and norms. The research seeks to establish a better understanding of the spaces and contexts in which VE organizations can cultivate and/or exploit

a permissive environment for recruitment. The research team considered three primary questions when designing their approach:

- What VE messaging and propaganda is circulating in the target communities; how is this information shared (both online and offline); who is sharing the information and who is consuming it; and how does this information shape values, norms and perceptions; if at all?
- What CVE messaging is circulating in the target communities; who is sharing the information and who is consuming it; how does this information impact community perceptions of VE in the target locations?
- Is there any overlap between the VE and CVE networks and messages; are CVE actors reaching the 'right' groups?

The findings will contribute to existing knowledge on how communities, civil society and state institutions communicate within these environments, how information is shared and with whom. Understanding information sharing networks and how social values are formed will enable CVE practitioners to better communicate with the societies they are working with, build trust and contribute to the creation of social ecosystems that reject VE.

An innovative approach was necessary to explore social networks and information sharing patterns, leading USAID, in collaboration with the RUSI team, to design and develop a multi-faceted methodology to investigate how social factors are linked to individual decision making. This involved several mutually reinforcing methods, including content analysis of al Shabaab propaganda and their online networks, social network analysis of vulnerable youth and P/CVE practitioners, and extensive qualitative work focusing on both VE messaging and prevention efforts. With fieldwork carried out concurrently, findings from each of the methods were used to inform the approach taken in other components of the study. Critically, the qualitative approach provided explanation and color to the findings from the social network analysis. The following report collates the data produced through each method and situates the findings within the wider literature and existing knowledge base.[13]

THE KENYAN MODEL OF CVE

The Kenyan state is frequently lauded for its CVE architecture. In 2016, the government launched the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (NSCVE), one of the first countries to respond to recommendations made in the UN's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.[14] Recognizing that security measures alone cannot bring an end to terrorism, the NSCVE prescribes a suite of non-coercive, development-oriented measures that leverage 'whole of society' methods.[15] This framework was subsequently cascaded down to Kenya's 47 devolved units in the form of County Action Plans (CAPs), which, at least nominally, reflect the country's contextual diversity and the need for hyper-local solutions.[16] While their efficacy, content and scope vary across different counties, they represent an ongoing effort to create bespoke, decentralized, and inclusive approaches devised and executed by local Kenyan stakeholders themselves. However, all national and subnational CVE activities, including those funded by

international donors and delivered by civil society organizations (CSOs), are overseen by a dedicated team at the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC).

Theoretically, each CAP document structures CVE work conducted by both government entities and civil society, although their content and design vary across different locales. [17] The coordination role is delegated to County Engagement Forums (CEFs), an attendant dialogue platform and implementing body for the CAPs operating under the guidance of NCTC and the co-chairmanship of the County Commissioner (the most senior representative of the national government at the county level) and County Governor, with a multi-sectoral membership made up of civil society organizations (CSOs), public officials and religious leaders.

Kenya's coast took the lead in developing these plans, with Mombasa and Kwale being the first counties to launch CAPs in 2017. Each was built around an eclectic set of localized 'pillars' focusing on specific issue areas such as politics, the arts, faith/religion, ideology, education, justice and women. Ten counties eventually published multi-year CAP proposals before an accelerated model – one-year 'Rapid County Action Plans' (RCAPs)[18] – was introduced in response to the 2019 al Shabaab attack on Nairobi's DusitD2 hotel complex, with the aim of ensuring all counties could deliver 'prompt and concrete actions that target low hanging fruit and make an immediate impact in preventing and mitigating violent extremism'.[19]

With these policy arrangements and institutional infrastructure in place, Kenyan stakeholders are continuing to build on a wealth of CVE programming, with state officials recognizing the value of empowering and supporting both domestic and international NGOs in the design and delivery of activities. In most cases, such efforts have specifically targeted segments of society deemed to be most 'at-risk' and have often focused on tackling specific VE drivers through various schemes such as mentorship and law enforcement capacity building. However, national economic decline has severely disrupted interventions (especially following COVID-19) and left little public funding available for further implementation meaning the government is still heavily dependent on a cluster of external donors.

OUTLINE

This report first reviews in detail the study's innovative methodological approach (p. 13), noting the strengths and weaknesses in turn. The report also includes a consideration of the value of combining methodologies to obtain additional perspectives. The research team hopes that this methodological review will prove useful to future studies focusing on information sharing networks in the CVE space.

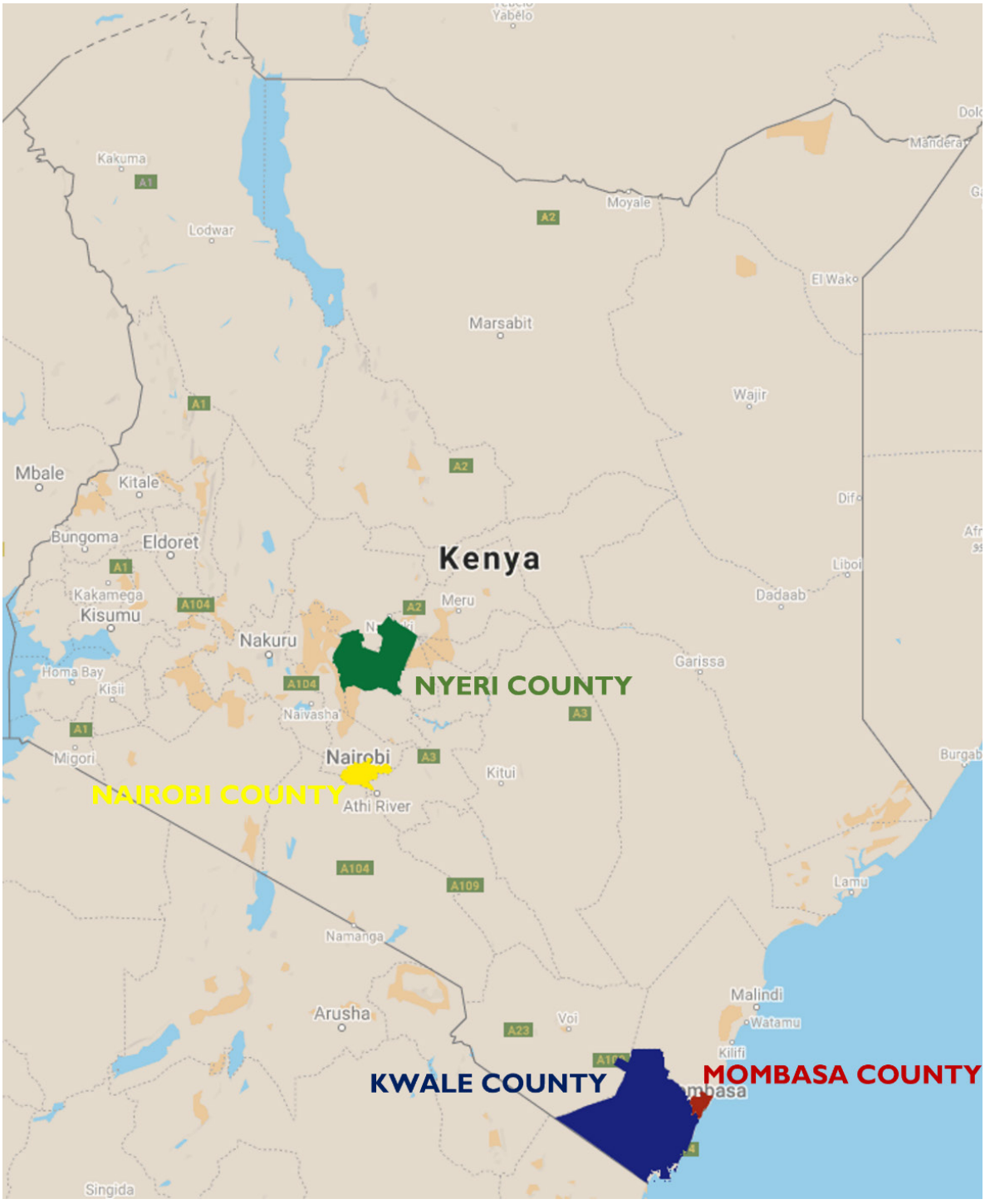
Subsequently, the report delves into the findings, first outlining community understandings of VE (p. 17) and perceptions of the relevant drivers. It examines VE networks (p. 35), including what information is circulating (p. 35), who is circulating it (p. 41) and where (p. 45). The report then discusses the various local actors involved in shaping the information space and influencing local moral action (p. 53). Here, it explores CVE information sharing networks and factors influencing sharing practices and the creation of social norms amongst 'at-risk' communities,

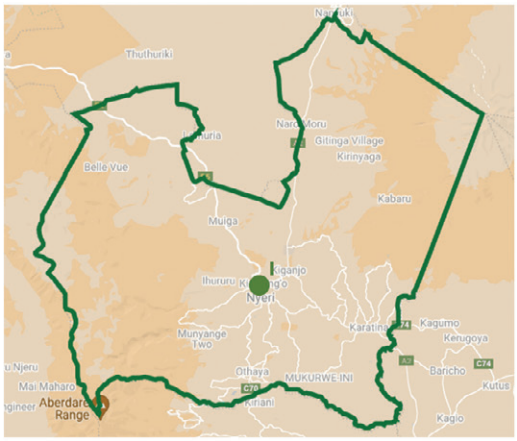
including the role of pervasive fear and the impact of the internet. Finally, the report outlines various sources of social division within the communities studied (p. 75) and explores potential sources of community resilience (p. 83).

The researchers identified stark differences in how information is shared and interpreted in the different counties, evidencing the need for comprehensive, highly granular stakeholder mapping that is specific to communities that have been identified for CVE programming. At the same time, the study highlighted shared perceptions in how different stakeholders understand VE across Kenya. After several years of CVE work in the country, understandings of the concept remain simplistic amongst communities, government actors and civil society, and perceptions are driven by quotidian experiences that conflate VE with other forms of insecurity. The researchers identified fear and personal safety as significant factors in determining how and why individuals share certain information, especially on the Kenyan Coast. The researchers found that peer-to-peer networks were much more important in shaping community values than specific personalities or local leaders, and that social media has democratized the information sharing space, arguably leading to a degradation of traditional community values. They also found that communities leaders view CVE efforts as broadly inadequate, failing to address the day-to-day grievances of those living in the areas studied.

The report contains a series of recommendations directed at CVE practitioners and policy makers both in Kenya and globally. It is anticipated the findings will assist those working in CVE to design and implement more targeted, appropriate, and effective interventions. The recommendations provide communications advice for CVE practitioners both specific to Kenya and more generally. It also includes suggestions for government actors.

Figure 1: Map of Kenya illustrating the four counties selected for the study



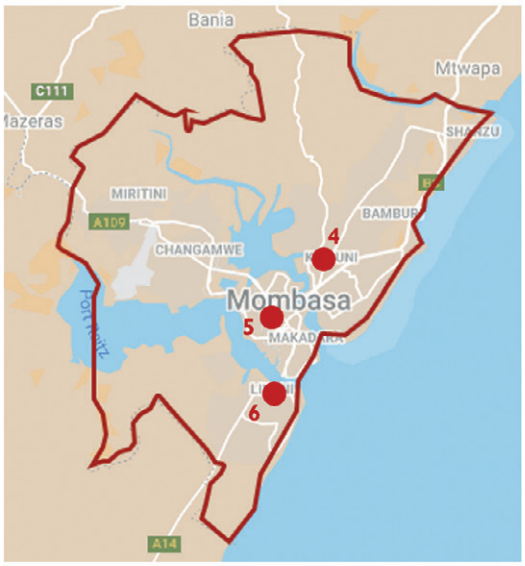


Nyeri County

1. Nyeri Town

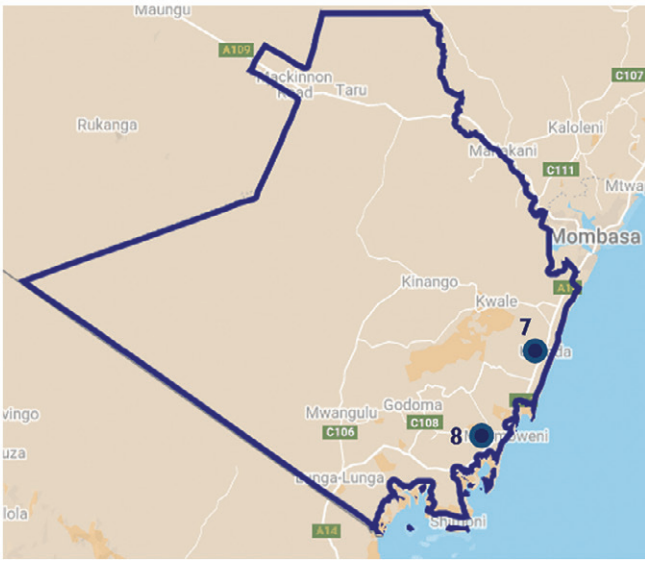
Nairobi County

2. Eastleigh
3. Majengo



Mombasa County

4. Kisauni
5. Majengo
6. Likoni



Kwale County

7. Ukunda
8. Msambweni

METHODOLOGY

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

IN ADDRESSING THE social contexts in which CVE and VE information circulates, this paper adopts a systems approach developed by criminologist Noémie Bouhana - what she calls an 'S^5 Inference Model'. This model explores the individual drivers of VE in various contexts, helping us to understand how these contexts emerge. It recognizes that individuals and communities are constantly interacting with their surrounding environment, and thus that vulnerability to VE is fundamentally dependent on context.[20] Bouhana's work provides a framework to better understand barriers to information sharing and the factors that might expose communities to extremist messaging.

The five Ss in Bouhana's model interact to establish a moral ecology which may or may not be conducive to the emergence of VE: 1) selection (potential for exposure to VE influences); 2) settings (physical or virtual spaces); 3) social ecology (community-level factors); 4) systems (structural and systemic factors); and 5) susceptibility (individual vulnerabilities to help explain 'the emergence of an extremism-supportive moral ecology')[21]. In this model, the first four Ss concern context, and each interacts with the fifth. We use the model in this study to help us understand how VE actions come to be seen as 'morally legitimate' in the Kenyan context, and to identify how information might be interpreted according to legal and social norms. Critically, Bouhana notes that individuals will usually attach greater weight to 'in group moral disapproval' over 'outgroup moral disapproval'[22], a claim corroborated by this study's findings.

Bouhana's work emphasizes the need for clear moral guidance in CVE programming, i.e., 'explicit rules of conduct that state what is considered right or wrong to do.'[23] By highlighting the importance of environmental factors, she also cautions CVE practitioners that 'supporting those we perceive to be most 'at-risk' is not enough. Changing contexts, rather than changing people, is the more effective strategy because vulnerability is inherently context-dependent.' Acknowledging the role played by the broader social ecosystem was integral to the design of the present study and the findings ultimately underlined the importance of understanding the context in determining inherent vulnerabilities to VE.

APPROACH

USAID and RUSI, in consultation with Kenya's NCTC, chose four of Kenya's 47 counties for the study: Nairobi, Nyeri, Mombasa and Kwale (see maps on pp. 10-11) and summary of county-specific findings in Annex D). We identified these locations based on the following considerations: existing levels of VE recruitment, as interest from key stakeholders such as the Kenyan Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Kenyan National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), and variables relevant to the study topic, including ethnicity, history of CVE work, majority religion and urban

versus rural setting. For an overview of the counties and justifications for their inclusion, please refer to Annex B.

To answer the interconnected research questions, four main methods were used: propaganda content analysis, social network analysis, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The methodological design enabled us to analyze the role of individuals within their wider socio-cultural ecosystems, identify interactions between online and offline information spaces, validate each of the methods' discrete findings and adapt our approach to take into account evolving findings as the research progressed.

The researchers conducted a detailed review of al Shabaab's content output over the last five years using two approaches. First, RUSI contracted *Human Cognition*, an independent online jihadist content analysis firm, to explore messaging applications, including WhatsApp and Telegram groups, and specifically identifying the presence of Kenyan phone numbers in these networks. *Human Cognition* also provided analysis of the multimedia produced by al Shabaab's official media outlet, Al-Kataib. Second, we supplemented this research with a detailed literature review of academic publications that discussed al Shabaab's approach in reaching a Kenyan audience. The researchers also explored government and civil society messaging around CVE.

With this baseline established, the researchers adopted two principal field methods to understand how this messaging reaches the communities selected, and how it is interpreted and filtered through social settings to influence local value systems. The techniques we used are detailed in full in Annex C[24]. First, *Search for Common Ground* executed a Social Network Analysis (SNA) to understand 1) CVE communications networks, and 2) community sharing of VE information. They circulated a relational survey amongst CEF members and disseminated another through a snowballing method in each community[25]. Second, RUSI conducted qualitative interviews such as focus group discussions and key informant interviews to explore the attitudes and perspectives of a range of community stakeholders, including 'at-risk' youth, civil society actors, law enforcement personnel and local government leaders. These methods sought to provide insights into local social networks and the variables conditioning relationships. The SNA identified key influencers (or nodes) within the networks, while the qualitative approach provided additional explanations and served to substantiate the patterns observed. After initial data analysis, the RUSI team held validation workshops with the communities involved in the research in each county. SNA and qualitative participants at these events were able to challenge the analysis and preliminary findings as well as identify key factors that were missing. RUSI incorporated the feedback from the workshops into this final report.

Given the inherent sensitivities involved in a study of this nature, the proposed methods were subject to evaluations by both RUSI's ethics board and the Kenya National Commission for Science and Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) ethical review process. These ethical reviews considered consent, anonymity, and data storage. The safety of the researchers and participants was paramount at all times. Where appropriate, the researchers relied on proxy or secondary populations, rather than those who had themselves been members of al Shabaab. The RUSI team, though keen to learn more about information sharing patterns amongst members

of communities at-risk, recognizes that those surveyed would not necessarily act in the same manner as already radicalized individuals. As such, informed inferences were made when seeking to understand the extremism-enabling environments in which VE messages circulated.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF VE

THIS RESEARCH FOUND that establishing a clear, mutually agreed upon definition of VE is critical when establishing CVE programming because the definition helps inform the nature and outcome of programming. VE is particularly challenging to define because "what a society perceives as extremist is subject to change and may differ widely from what another society would consider extremist."[26] In a multi-ethnic, multi-faith, country like Kenya, the challenge is especially difficult because what is considered extreme on the Kenyan coast may be completely acceptable in another part of the country. The definition of VE is critical as the definition can shape the nature and outcomes of programming. Practitioners may seek to adopt the definition of a donor, for example, but communities may understand the term differently.

Despite the country hosting CVE interventions for several years, the research team found that the concept of VE remained incompletely and inconsistently understood across Kenya. This uneven understanding was shown to be true amongst both local communities considered 'at-risk' and community-based civil society organizations, including those working in the CVE space. Very rarely did the definitions proposed by research participants reflect broadly accepted understandings held by the donor community, i.e., that VE is the use of and support for violence in pursuit of ideological, religious, or political goals.[27] Unlike donors, the goals and objectives of VE organizations were not considered important to definitions of violent extremism amongst community participants. Rather, communities usually placed greater emphasis on the act of violence in and of itself.

Definitions varied depending on demographics and nature of occupation. Government figures were the most likely to define VE through ideology. Community-based research participants, however, usually interpreted VE through their own lived experiences. Thus civilians, both young and old, frequently conflated VE with other forms of insecurity including gang activity. Older participants were found to be more likely to speak about political violence. Asked to explain their understanding of the term, some religious leaders considered VE to be a 'misconception' of Islam. Other imams criticized the fact that VE was often associated with Islam and argued that the concept was used against their religion. They stressed that VE actors could be Christians or politicians too.

Understandings of CVE interventions and objectives amongst research participants also varied considerably. First, most research participants did not distinguish between counter-terrorism (CT) efforts and CVE. Some participants associated researchers and CSOs with "softer" approaches such as dialogue and non-coercive efforts, in contrast to "harder" approaches such as security responses and surveillance, which are often associated with CT work. However, they did not link these "softer" approaches in any way to the concept of CVE. Communities associated government actors with security responses and surveillance, not dialogue and non-

coercive efforts. Second, some CSO participants confused CVE with broader development efforts, meaning that interventions risked losing relevance to CVE. Although CVE interventions do not necessarily need to be labeled as such, CVE objectives should be maintained throughout if they are to have an impact or target those at risk. CVE mainstreaming is discussed further in the section on 'socio-economic opportunity' on page 84 and in the recommendations section.

HOW THE GOVERNMENT OF KENYA DEFINES VE

In order to situate local understandings of VE within the national context, it is worth first reviewing how the Government of Kenya defines the problem. The Government's broad definition, which is derived from the 2016 NSCVE, emphasizes two variables, politics and ideology:

> "Violent extremism refers to the actions of radicalized individuals who are prepared to engage in, or actively support, acts of violence and furtherance of radically illiberal, undemocratic political systems or ideologies."[28]

This definition creates some confusion.[29] In part due to the persistent reference to politics in state discussions of VE, many in Kenya consider all politically motivated violent groups to be VE actors. Others using the state definition stress the importance of ideology and downplay the significance of more structural considerations, making it easier to externalize the causes of VE or to blame it on religious actors. Indeed, some research participants expressed that the Government of Kenya relied on reductive interpretations of VE that focus predominantly on religion.

HOW KENYAN COMMUNITIES DEFINE VE

Rarely did research participants mention the threat of recruitment into VE – or indeed VE attacks – as their most immediate concern. Most key informant interviewees and focus group discussants were able to speak about al Shabaab to a degree, but often shifted the conversation to more immediate issues affecting their lives. Provided with an opportunity to speak about insecurity, people wanted to discuss the most quotidian concerns facing their community; rather than VE.[30] Thus, in Nyeri, political violence, Mungiki[31] and alcohol abuse were often the topics of choice. In Kwale, the most common subject of interest was police brutality. In Mombasa and Nairobi, participants would discuss gang crime and their distrust of authorities. Participants often conflated violent action and other forms of insecurity with VE[32] and claimed that practitioners of witchcraft, other religions, domestic abusers, the 'rich' and politicians were VE actors. For example, a youth in Mombasa stated: "violent extremism is criminals using wild ways in doing their criminal acts." Conflation was most acute in Nyeri, the county with the least exposure to VE amongst the sample locations but was prevalent across all four study locations.

Many discussed how politicians use local youth, especially during elections. Politicians are said to emphasize ethnic divisions, for example, for electoral gain. Participants who raised this issue appeared to actively blur the lines between VE and political violence. One CEF member in Kwale referred to it as "political extremism," while several others suggested it was politicians who fomented VE. This trend must be seen in the context of the upcoming general 2022 elections,

with claims that several organized criminal groups had already started to re-emerge in recent months across Kenya's urban centers.

Rather than translating VE as 'itikadi kali' (a direct translation of VE) or 'msimamo mkali' (extremism), some participating religious leaders in Kwale referred to the phenomenon as "imani potofu" (false beliefs) or "msimamo potofu" (misconceptions). Another individual in the county suggested "jihad kali" (extreme jihad). As with the government's definition, these understandings of VE promote an ideology-centric response to the problem and risk ignoring the many legitimate social grievances within these communities.

Other commonly held beliefs about VE (as stated by study participants) included:

- VE is an action one is forced to take against one's will by another individual (especially in Kwale)
- VE actors are "brainwashed" (especially in Mombasa and Nyeri)[33]
- VE is an ideology taught by external actors
- the police are VE actors and/or are driving VE recruitment through extrajudicial killings and excessive force (mainly in Kwale)
- land grabbing by politicians is a VE act
- VE is "extreme" violence of any sort, especially that driven by criminal gangs (especially in Nyeri) and "juvenile gangs"[34] (especially in Kwale and Mombasa)
- intolerance is a key feature of VE (especially in Nyeri)
- VE is not just enacted by Muslims since the Government of Kenya could be considered a VE actor (especially in Kwale)
- the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC)[35] (especially in Mombasa and Kwale) and/or Ansar al Sunna[36] (especially in Kwale) should be classified as VE organizations.

Although conflation was a feature of definitions in all areas, including those where CVE interventions were well established, the RUSI team identified a promising correlation in which levels of understanding amongst CEF members were evidently much higher in the counties where CVE work has a longer history. Thus, Nairobi and Mombasa CSO participants were able to discuss the challenges they faced with greater nuance, drawing on past experiences.[37] In Nyeri, on the other hand, the lead researcher realized that participants simply regurgitated the sort of language they may have heard at CAP workshops. Notwithstanding these variations, understandings of VE were assessed to be relatively weak amongst at least some CEF members in all the counties studied. A lack of clarity on fundamental concepts could well translate into interventions with poorly articulated objectives.

Some participants considered joining al Shabaab to be a rational decision as part of efforts to cope with legitimate concerns. It was argued that the routine use of violence (as experienced through police brutality and clashes with rival gangs) means that the actions of al Shabaab have (to an extent) become normalized. Research participants suggested that their communities experience so much violence at home that there is little fear in the unknowns faced in travel

to Somalia; this reality might make certain individuals within these communities more open to recruitment.

Law enforcement, government actors and village elders, in particular, often spoke about VE purely based on hearsay, but with no pretense at having access to any insider information. Rumor was particularly challenging in some contexts, where participants pointed fingers at particular institutions and individuals with little evidence to support their claims. At the other end of the spectrum were individuals who proclaimed to know granular details about recruitment practices or to have themselves participated in VE groups, but whose credibility might be questioned due to their failure to provide any verifiable details. Research participants in Kwale, meanwhile, were often well informed on the subject matter being discussed but were unwilling to open up until a degree of trust had been built with the researchers. The potential implications of speaking to the wrong people were always apparent.

The varied perspectives on VE illustrated above demonstrate why practitioners should consider working with beneficiaries to establish a mutually agreed upon definition and a shared understanding of the objectives of any CVE intervention. Doing so would make interventions more likely to be relatable and not seen as externally imposed. Scholars have been suggesting for almost ten years that local ownership of programs could be strengthened 'by integrating community participation in the inception, design, implementation and evaluation of local programming',[38] but very few CVE programs have done this. Of course, the overall objective of any program needs to be maintained, but interventions do not need to be labeled CVE for them to have an impact.[39] In locations, such as Kwale, where the state is seen as a VE actor, it may be best to frame programming around a broader objective, such as a reduction in the use of violence, in order avoid unhelpful debates about what groups or individuals should be categorized as VE actors.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION OF LOCAL INTERPRETATIONS OF VE, SEE ANNEX E

VE AND CRIME

The conflation of VE with organized crime is not new. USAID's NIWETU program similarly found that communities across the North-East and in Nairobi considered seemingly criminal gangs to be VE actors, as far back as 2016. To a degree, this conflation is a result of the Government of Kenya's broad definition of the term. However, other factors are also worth considering. First, some communities believe that there are viable links between organized criminal groups and al Shabaab. Research participants in Nyeri, for example, suggested that members of Mungiki may leave under the right conditions (Islamist radicalization, offers of more money etc) to join al Shabaab. Such a move may be motivated by a desire for protection from the Kenyan state. Participants in Mombasa also felt that the socio-economic and political conditions conducive to organized crime can serve to enable VE:

> "There tends to be a link between recruitment of members within juvenile gangs directly to violent extremism, violent extremist organizations".

Second, in Mombasa and Kwale the researchers found that some criminal groups have adopted religious justifications for their attacks against non-Muslims. In such a scenario, the divisions between VE organizations and local criminal gangs are blurred and the moral distance between them narrowed. Criminals argue that robbing and attacking '*kafirs*' (i.e., "nonbelievers") is '*halal*' and therefore justified. Seemingly inspired by VE entities like al Shabaab, these criminal groups misinterpret scripture to justify criminal acts targeting individuals from 'upcountry'. With the added presence of a facilitator or radicalizing agent, it is possible to see how gang members could associate with al Shabaab or conduct attacks on behalf of the group.

CVE and CT practitioners often cite a 'crime-terrorism nexus.' This term suggests that organized criminal groups and terrorist entities are well positioned to support each other logistically and/or financially. A formal relationship between al Shabaab and organized criminal groups in Kenya has never been proven, despite the undoubtable mutually reinforcing objectives of the two sides. Zeuthen and Sahgal, both with extensive experience as CVE practitioners in the Kenyan context, found limited evidence of connections between crime and al Shabaab during a 2019 study at two prisons in Mombasa.[40] While anecdotal evidence has historically pointed to high-level links between narcotics barons in Mombasa and al Shabaab,[41] research participants discussed the relationship between crime and religious extremism on a much more local scale.

Perhaps, this is not surprising considering the extent to which violence has seemingly been normalized in the target communities as a result of frequent conflict of various kinds, be that between rival gangs or with the state. Across the four counties in the SNA snowballing survey, 50% of participants felt that violence was at least sometimes justifiable. One might argue, that on an individual level, those who see violence as justifiable will be more susceptible to recruitment into a VE group. Indeed, CVE practitioners often assume that those attracted to gangs could equally be encouraged to join al Shabaab if approached. This is supported by the findings of a study conducted in Zurich, Switzerland, which concluded that 'those who already espouse justifications for violence and rule breaking are more vulnerable to extremist violent pathways.'[42] The argument posits that the social ecosystems which these individuals help shape and exist within exposes them to both gangs and VE organizations. In such a scenario, joining VE groups can quickly be seen to be a rational, even logical, decision.

Furthermore, criminologists have suggested that criminals and terrorists have transferable skills.[43] Links between those with criminal backgrounds and recruitment into terrorism have been evidenced in studies conducted in Europe[44] and the United States[45]. The 2019 report from the UN Panel of Experts on Somalia also suggested that al Shabaab was targeting criminals for recruitment purposes.[46]

However, the evidence in Kenya is circumstantial and the conjecture often relies on a series of assumptions: firstly, that potential recruits into both al Shabaab and gangs are primarily motivated by money and not ideology; secondly, that individuals joining either type of group would consider the risks associated to be little different; and thirdly that joining a local gang and joining al Shabaab be equally viable logistically.

Whether an acceptance of violence and shared religious views makes some individuals more open to recruitment remains unconfirmed. The assertion assumes that a 'moral commitment' to the use of violence is tantamount to acceptance of an 'extremist moral system'. In reality, it should be recognized that an individual's willingness to turn to violence is not always related to their belief system.[47] In some cases, youth seemed to suggest that criminal groups and VE entities merely held overlapping views, not that individual criminals were necessarily any more likely to join al Shabaab. One assumes that the moral obligations required of al Shabaab members would likely be very different to those who associate with a local gang. Indeed, gangs do not necessarily promote their 'behavior as morally legitimate' in the way that an ideologically driven extremist group might.[48] The relationship between extremism and gangs is perhaps better interpreted as pragmatic, with cooperation only where and when interests align.

COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE DRIVERS OF VE

THE FACTORS LEADING to VE according to participants can be placed into five main interrelated categories of grievances: 1) law enforcement abuses, 2) discrimination and marginalization, 3) structural grievances around employment and poverty, 4) social change, and 5) religion and ideology. However, there was significant variation between counties and the demographic profiles of research participants. For example, government actors were much more likely to discuss ideology and the misinterpretation of Islam, while youth and CSOs universally mentioned unemployment and state abuses. Similarly, participants in Nyeri universally identified poverty and unemployment as the causes of VE, while participants at the coast (Mombasa and Kwale) emphasized that the drivers were individual, with some joining al Shabaab to become brides, others for ideological jihad and others for material gain. As a note, this study was intended to collect the understandings of those living within 'extremist-enabling environments'. The police perspective was not relevant to the study.

Broadly speaking, these five categories of grievances are not new, having been identified by numerous previous studies.[49] However, the study was able to provide community-specific detail regarding each of these grievances and the research team focused on exploring the drivers of VE as understood by communities. A few nuances are worth emphasizing. First, the homogenization of the youth is serving to prevent an accurate understanding of grievances. Second, participant emphasis on Muslim grievances in other parts of the world appears to be growing, with the Israel-Palestine conflict mentioned by respondents in several communities. Rapidly expanding access to social media and the internet is undoubtedly playing a part in broadening perspectives and linking Kenyans with those previously out of reach. Third, the apparent level of animosity between police and the youth was striking, with the police themselves considered to be the VE actors (especially in Kwale), despite considerable efforts to reform law enforcement and strengthen community policing initiatives over recent years. Fourth, there were perceptions shared amongst participants that CVE programs undervalue the importance of individual incentives, especially the promises of jobs and money. While alone these factors do not explain VE, there was a perception in communities that practical considerations are critical.[50]

Understanding perceptions of the drivers of VE can also provide some indication as to how recruitment might be taking place in a practical sense. If financial incentives, rather than ideology, are assessed to be the main driver of recruitment, then the radicalization process is less significant, perhaps even taking place after recruitment and travel to Somalia. In cases in which ideology is the main driver, it is likely that radicalization is taking place in Kenya, prior to travel.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SECURITY SERVICES

Community participants repeatedly stated that a fear of state security forces directly leads to recruitment into VE groups as individuals seek protection or revenge. CVE practitioners have long been aware of these concerns,[51] but empirical evidence clearly substantiates the critical role that law enforcement personnel can play (or are seen to play) as a driver of VE.

Personal experiences were mentioned by community members and women expressed concern that their children were growing up in the same environment (and moral ecology) in which their father, brother or uncle had disappeared. There is acknowledgement that some incidents are linked to extremist groups targeting 'informers' or government collaborators, but the majority are blamed on the police. These divisions have led communities, especially on the coast, to see the police as a driver of VE, rather than a solution. As has been found in past studies,[52] revenge against the state (as represented by the Police) was seen as a key motive for joining al Shabaab.

Besides the alleged harassment from police officers, others across several contexts argued that it was worthless reporting to the police because they were not willing to tackle the issue. The risk of speaking to the police was not worth the potential benefit to the community. Police were said to be unlikely to act on the intelligence, and if they did then the suspect would be released shortly afterwards anyway.

Although elders and chiefs were also frequently tarnished with the same brush, the police were clearly recognized as the face of the Kenyan state. The fact that "officers are not local" and "come from upcountry" was particularly problematic to those in Mombasa who struggled to relate to them. Constant transfers of police officers from location to location were to said to have further undermined trust; research participants suggested that when an officer begins to gain the trust of youth in the community, that officer is transferred.

Despite some, if anecdotal, evidence of an improvement in relations across the country, the coercive response to COVID-19 has led to several steps backward.[53] The weak social contract between state law enforcement and communities, especially on the Coast, has reinforced an 'us vs them' mentality. Ineffective social control, as implemented by the State, has created a vacuum, providing the space for the emergence of extremist socialization.[54]

DISCRIMINATION AND MARGINALIZATION

Approximately 11% of Kenya's population is Muslim.[55] The vast majority reside at the coast and across the north-east. With Islam present on Kenya's coast for more than 1,000 years,[56] Coastal and Muslim identities are intrinsically linked. Communities living on the coast have distinguished themselves from those inland since long before the arrival of the British in eastern Africa towards the end of the 19th century. This differentiation is based on 'spatial definitions conceptually bound to race, ethnicity, and religion'.[57] Moreover, some of these communities equate Nairobi's continuing control over the coast with the internal colonization of Kenya by "upcountry" Christians.[58] Over the almost sixty years since Kenya won independence in 1963,

narratives of marginalization have emanated from the Kenyan coast.[59] Complaints normally relate to the underrepresentation of Muslims in national government and alleged challenges faced by Muslims in obtaining national ID cards or title deeds. Several previous studies have identified marginalization by the Kenyan state (real or perceived) as significant drivers of al Shabaab recruitment.[60] These narratives usually take one of two forms; claims of oppression and ostracization of Muslims or of the entire Coast region.

While research participants' allegations against the state were often related to their lived experiences, many also mentioned abuses against Muslims in Palestine and various other parts of the world. This suggests that transnational events and narratives may be shaping how Kenyan Muslims interpret their lived experiences. This is relevant given that al Shabaab has recently shifted the tone of their propaganda to include narratives around international issues facing Muslims. Thus, Kenyan Muslim research participants' preoccupation with Palestine could be significant. A recent series of videos produced by al Shabaab's media arm, Al-Kataib, was entitled 'Al-Quds (Jerusalem) will never be Judaized' and featured footage of al Aqsa Mosque. While most analysts of al Shabaab's recruitment narratives in Kenya have focused on references to domestic Kenyan Muslim grievances,[61] the fact that Muslim Kenyan participants were evidently aware of and angered by events in Israel and Palestine suggests that Al-Kataib's internationalist messaging may also resonate with potential recruits in Kenya.

As previous studies have suggested, very often complaints related to struggles with and administrative delays in obtaining national ID cards or title deeds. A lack of formal documentation can make activities such as obtaining a job, opening a bank account, and registering a phone-line challenging. Recognizing that for marginalized communities, identifying with the Kenyan state is not necessarily advantageous, these communities seek to align themselves with alternative value systems.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Unemployment and poverty were major concerns for youth across all four counties.[62] There were countless examples from all four counties in which the promise of employment with al Shabaab was considered of paramount importance. In most cases, research participants discussed promises of money made by recruiters to poorly educated individuals and people in a state of long-term unemployment and financial destitution[63]. In some cases, research participants framed the transaction in purely economic terms with no pretense of an ideological justification. A local official from Majengo in Nyeri suggested that "most of the youth here go to fight there in order to get money, not for religion" and that those "targeted are the less fortunate youth that are ready to do anything for money". Others lamented that national and county government recruitment drives for the Army or law enforcement positions do not consider youth from Majengo due to their poor levels of education or because they are unable to offer the necessary bribes. Instead, this research's findings reveal that these people turn to extremist organizations where they are not expected to provide evidence of their qualifications. This finding resonates with studies from Somalia in which individuals in low-level roles within al Shabaab (foot-soldiers, for example) are recruited by the lure of financial incentives (Khalil et al 2019).

Most participants acknowledged that financial promises made by al Shabaab were rarely fulfilled. A Nyeri participant discussed how recruits become trapped in Somalia, unable to return to Kenya due to the threats posed by both al Shabaab and law enforcement personnel. The insinuation was that, through a lack of alternatives, these individuals are forced into becoming terrorists. Other participants spoke of broken promises of employment opportunities in Isiolo, Mandera, Mombasa or abroad, often the Middle East. Many appeared to suggest that these offers were not made directly by individuals known to be associated in any way with al Shabaab. Rather, individuals would offer a job based in an unknown location that ended up being in Somalia.

SOCIAL CHANGE

CSO staff, government actors and parents across all four study locations complained that things have changed: youth are no longer respectful; communal traditions have been lost; parents no longer know how to bring up their children. Many lamented that the traditional nuclear family has broken apart and that single parents find it difficult to earn an income while simultaneously supervising their children. Kwale participants ubiquitously suggested that society had lost its communal spirit, with individuals only looking out for themselves. There was a sense of nostalgia for a time when communities were less divided, and youth better behaved. There was also said to be a growing divide between youth and elders, particularly recognized in Nyeri and Kwale, the two more rural counties. In the context of socio-economic hardship, youth were criticized for being unwilling to put in the hard work. Rather they were said to want an immediate reward and would listen to anyone with money, regardless of "where that money has come from". If it was provided by a gang or VE entity, then they would jump at the opportunity.

These changes were described by a Nairobi peace committee member as a "general moral decay". Applying Bouhana's model, the forces influencing moral ecologies have changed, with individuals now lacking a moral compass and becoming open to exogenous influences that may increase their vulnerability to recruitment. Youth are said to have become increasingly hedonistic, driven by nothing more than greed. They have rejected community traditions and values. These feelings were echoed across very different contexts. In both Nyeri and Kwale, participants lamented that children used to be the responsibility of the entire community, whereas now people would be angry if someone else in the community disciplined their child. A bishop in Nyeri blamed the issue on "Westernization," stating that it had "led to individualism whereby the children no longer belong to the community as was the case back in the day when we were growing up". Many community issues were said to be linked to social fracturing and the degradation of community resilience due to globalization and digitalization (e.g., the rise of social media). It was clear, especially in Kwale and Nyeri, that many community leaders believe that a renewed emphasis on 'traditional values' would serve as a buffer against external (often used synonymously with malign) influences.

Many of society's ills were blamed on the youth's access to Facebook, TikTok and WhatsApp.[64] CSO members, elders and seemingly any participant who considered themselves older than a 'youth' suggested that Kenya's young population spends too much time on social media.[65] These participants suggested that young people are losing touch with their heritage, are no longer

able to communicate with their elders, are increasingly materialistic and money oriented, have less time to engage in genuine debate, and no longer pray as much as they should.[66] It was clear that those who do not understand social media fear it and see it as both disruptive and dangerous. Parents find the lack of control they have over their children's interactions with strangers frightening.

The omnipresent nature of the topic of social change during interviews renders the subject worthy of recognition. Youth were perceived to be driven by social media, rather than their families or religious communities. This suggests that greedy young people lack any moral judgement and base their decision-making processes solely on personal ambition, and that ideology and morality are not important. This perception of the youth would indicate that young people join al Shabaab in response to promises of financial compensation alone.

However, these perceptions are unlikely to be accurate. Most of the allegations appear to be based on very standard, if misplaced, expressions of nostalgia that things were better and young people were more polite in a previous era. Older research participants described youth in homogenous terms[67], which meant they ignored the very different challenges faced by different segments of society (e.g. those defined by ethnicity, religion, gender and age). In addition, most participants – especially government actors – were quick to blame young people for not showing any initiative, an accusation that fails to recognize the structural challenges faced by young people in the study locations. These perceptions of the youth serve to entrench division and decrease the likelihood that any challenges young people face will be adequately addressed, leading to misunderstandings and frustrations that could lead some to reject existing social rule systems and search for alternatives.

RELIGION AND IDEOLOGY

Most research participants appeared to suggest that ideology played only a secondary role in driving VE recruitment. In a paper for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), Villa-Vicencio et al. (2016) noted that it was only in Mombasa that 'extremist religious messaging' was perceived to be a driver of VE. Research participants in this study across all four counties mentioned ideology and misinterpretations of the Qur'an but rarely did they cite them as standalone motivators for joining al Shabaab.

Notably, it was government officials that often stressed the significance of religion or ideology. An official in Mombasa recognized that while employment opportunities were likely the primary motivator for travel to Somalia, ideology played a role at a later stage. In such a scenario, radicalization takes place after recruitment. Indeed, those said to be primarily motivated by money likely experience most of their 'radicalization' once they travel to Somalia.

Here, it is worth considering individual differences as well as the difference between attitudes and behaviors, recognizing that all individuals will vary in the extent of their extremist beliefs and their willingness to actually commit violent acts.[68] Put simply, although one individual may

be more willing to travel to Somalia to engage in violence, they may be less committed to the ideological tenets of al Shabaab than a sympathizer who remains at home in Kenya.

Occasionally, research participants made it clear that al Shabaab recruiters had tried to change the way individuals practiced Islam. In Nairobi, a mother explained that recruiters had discredited Islam as practiced in the community, urging followers not to celebrate the Prophet's birthday, Maulid, for example.[69] When participants who identified as religious leaders discussed ideology, they commonly argued that narratives used by recruiters demonstrated a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the Qur'an. Others suggested that recruiters purposefully manipulated quotes from the Qur'an, especially around the concept of Jihad and the potential rewards that awaited the mujahideen. The offer of 72 (participants also suggested 7, 42, 70 or "around 12") virgins was one incentive that repeatedly came up in interviews as an example of religious polemic used by recruiters.

References to ideological justifications were much less common in Nyeri, where poverty and lack of opportunity was the overwhelming explanation for recruitment. It was unclear whether this focus on structural grievances amongst participants was due to a lack of understanding and awareness, an attempt to distance recruitment from religion, or the result of a desire by participants to emphasize the economic struggles of Majengo. Some Nyeri participants claimed that those known to have left the area for Somalia had actually spent considerable time in mosques, potentially undermining the frequent assertion that ideology did not play a part in their decision to leave.

The SNA survey identified that participants who stated that they frequently agreed with the political perspectives and religious interpretations shared through al Shabaab media also tended to believe that violence is always justifiable when defending their values or community. This suggests that those adhering to a world view consistent with al Shabaab media are more likely to support the use of violence.

Considering the widespread concerns expressed by adults about social fragmentation, one might hypothesize that religion could provide an alternative moral framework for young people. However, religious figures repeatedly claimed during interviews that young people's understanding of religion was poorer than it used to be and that recruiters target those "who does [sic] not know the religion very well." Indeed, by this same logic, recent converts (or 'reverts') – especially in Nyeri and Nairobi – were said to be vulnerable due to their lack of fluency in scripture. Consequently, religious leaders told the researchers that improved knowledge of scripture could provide protection against radicalization. Recent research on the role of religion in radicalization supports this claim.[70]

EXTERNALIZING THE PROBLEM

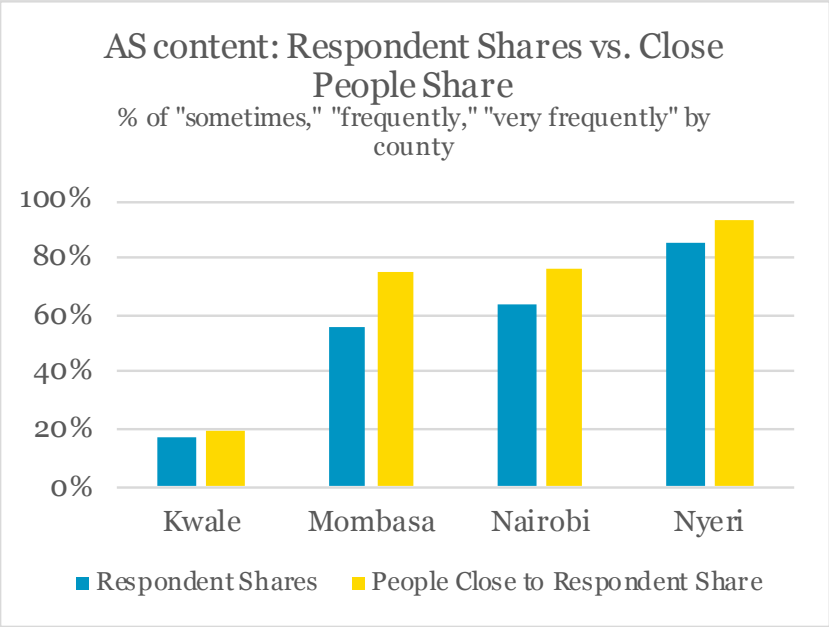
The research team found that most stakeholders in Kenya – including state officials, civil society actors and religious figures – externalized the problem of VE, blaming exogenous influences. In their 2013 study, the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC) similarly

found that 'violent extremism was viewed as an external threat'.[71] Despite all the indications of a growing 'homegrown' issue since that time with large-scale attacks conducted by Kenyan nationals on Kenyan soil,[72] various government actors continued to identify foreign sources as the cause of the problem. Thus, externally created ideologies are said to be finding their way into Kenyan mosques and Somalia's instability is facilitating recruitment. At best, these attitudes risk ignoring the grievances that exist at home. At worst, they have fed into a prevailing racism against ethnic-Somalis over the last ten years, reinforcing existing discriminatory narratives in the north-east of the country and in the urban areas where Somali communities are based.[73]

On another level, the study revealed that individual leaders are keen to absolve their local areas of responsibility for any VE recruitment. Community leaders in Kwale considered extremism to be the responsibility of exogenous forces, imposing their ideas within communities on the coast. Local leaders engaged in the study distanced their immediate localities from the threat, suggesting the next village might have a problem but their community lived in absolute peace. Similarly, security commanders across the counties stressed that the VE "situation is under control" in the areas under their jurisdiction. In the case of local civilian leaders, any fear noted in the study may be due to concerns over the potential actions of the police if they were to admit to the presence of extremists in their community. However, this shame-inspired displacement of the threat might also be motivated in part by pride and efforts to demonstrate the impact of their authority.

Young participants were more likely than older ones to accept the fact that extremism might exist in their locality. In some locations, such as Likoni in Mombasa, the threat was pervasive and could not be ignored by the local community. In others – Majengo in Nyeri, for example – the problem was more isolated and those not involved were happy to talk openly about the threat in the hope that a solution might be found.

Figure 2: AS Content: Respondent Shares vs. Close People Share



However, a desire to distance oneself from VE was also identified by the SNA data. Something of a paradox emerged that may have several sociological interpretations or methodological explanations. Participants frequently stated that people close to them were sharing al Shabaab content but were less likely to state that they themselves share such content. Additionally, participants stated that people close to them had considered or taken action more frequently than the participants themselves. Furthermore, a correlation was identified between those who agreed with al Shabaab content and the suggestion that 'people close to them' had taken action in response to such content (see Resonance box). However, people were less willing to admit to having personally taken action. They were more likely to suggest that they had considered taking action but not followed through.

Given the nature of the recruitment prompt in the snowball sample, and that the exercise asked participants to recruit those with whom they most frequently discuss problems affecting their communities, participants presumably recruited subsequent participants who were close to them. In short, we would expect higher numbers of participants stating that they share al Shabaab content or were inspired by al Shabaab material themselves based on the number of participants who said people close to them share the content or were inspired by it.

The survey suggested that those with friends or relatives that share VE content were likely to share material with others who similarly claimed to have friends and relatives that share VE content. By surveying the corresponding individuals with whom sensitive issues are discussed (based on the prompt), it was possible to make inferences about peoples' willingness to be open about the information they share. It was clear, for example, that participants were reticent to admit to viewing and sharing VE content but were happy to talk about their friends doing so.

One possible, but fairly unlikely, explanation is that the "close people" sharing information with participants are different from the people with whom participants most frequently discuss problems affecting their community and with whom they are likely to share media. A second, more likely, explanation is that the extent to which individual participants share or act on al Shabaab content is underrepresented in the data, because of social desirability bias and/or fear of self-incrimination and the repercussions from the authorities, despite all efforts to reassure participants of their anonymity. It is also possible that a sense of shame made them unwilling to admit to their role in the spread of that information. If this was the case, then it suggests that societal moral values do not necessarily condone the sharing of this information. The finding evidences the extent to which such information circulates "chini ya maji" ("under the water" in Kiswahili), as so many qualitative participants claimed.

Box 1: Resonance

Simon Papale (2020) notes that al Shabaab propaganda efforts make use of 'frame resonance' (ensuring coherence and plausibility) and 'frame alignment' (a convergence of interests between the target audience and the group) to ensure their message is relevant to a Kenyan audience. Thus, messaging focuses on how involvement with al Shabaab will provide answers to the very specific quotidian 'needs and demands' of potential participants.

The success of this approach was tested by the SNA questionnaire, which provided a picture of the extent to which al Shabaab content has inspired action among the respondent networks.* Respondents who frequently agreed with al Shabaab content tended to state that people close to them had taken action to address the issues raised in the content. Following a similar trend, those who sometimes agreed with al Shabaab content less frequently stated that people close to them have acted to address issues raised by al Shabaab and less frequently stated that they had acted. The portion continues to diminish for those who never agree with the extremist content. However, when respondents who frequently agreed with al Shabaab content were asked if they had been inspired personally to act based on al Shabaab content, they tended to state more frequently that they had considered action but not followed through or that they had never considered action.

Another key finding across the four counties was that respondents share al Shabaab content with which they do not necessarily agree. Moreover, though not statistically significant, findings suggested that respondents tend to discuss problems in their community with others who share their level of agreement with the religious and political perspectives in al Shabaab content. Respondents who stated that they frequently agree with the political perspectives and religious interpretations shared through al Shabaab content also tended to believe that violence is always justifiable when defending their values or community.

** Due to conflict sensitivity and do no harm principles, the research team administering the questionnaires did not probe further on what types of action the respondents took or considered*

VE MESSAGING NETWORKS

IN EXPLORING EXISTING VE information networks in Kenya, this section considers how al Shabaab have 'built their brand' in the country.[74] Communications expert Matt Freear explains that 'branding strategy' differs from the concept of 'strategic communications' in that 'the latter seeks to change the minds and behaviours of an audience, whereas the former provides a distinct identity for a consumer to relate to.'[75] Al Shabaab has been able to develop 'powerful name recognition' that demonstrates 'a deliberate investment in recruitment'.[76] Freear demonstrates that brand strength requires trust to be built over a long period of time during which actions support the promises made. Unlike strategic communications, brand building is about relationships 'based on a distinct, emotionally resonant identity', not merely communicating a terrorist message.[77] Al Shabaab tries to 'identify' with the challenges faced by the Kenyan electorate, for example by making reference to the price of corn flour, an essential commodity in Kenya. For Freear, this 'is not messaging per se' as the organization is not promising to directly solve these problems. Rather 'it is about resonance, building loyalty and undermining existing connection to the state'.[78]

Communities broadly echoed existing narratives in al Shabaab propaganda, including local structural grievances, religious polemic, and discussions of life under al Shabaab. However, the extent to which communities actually viewed official al Shabaab content was not clear, with many participants basing their comments on speculation or hearsay. Any extremist content in circulation is consumed as part of a wider information ecosystem in which other stakeholders may be generating content containing alternative viewpoints. These various sources are given meaning through social relationships and day-to-day experiences. Individuals were found to pick and choose elements of the messages (from government sources or extremist groups) that were relevant to them.

One key shift in message circulation that the RUSI research team identified was a decrease in the role of religious leaders in circulating extremist messaging and an increase in the focus of extremist actors in Kenya towards peer groups, who are able to harness social media and to operate "underground". To an extent this change could be a response to increased surveillance by law enforcement agencies. However, this study found that physical spaces such as *maskanis* or 'bases' nevertheless remain essential to understanding information sharing practices and meaning creation in Kenya.

WHAT INFORMATION IS CIRCULATING?

Al-Kataib, al Shabaab's official media outlet, was established in approximately 2009. Since this point, the group's content has been professionally produced and cleverly edited.[79] Material has been released in several languages, including Kiswahili. Africanists Anderson and McKnight (2015) suggest that Al-Kataib started targeting a Kenyan audience around 2012, at a time when

al Shabaab began referring to a formal Kenyan arm, which it called 'Al-Hijra'. Al-Kataib produced content specifically for a Kenyan audience that resonated with the quotidian experiences of those facing daily violence at the hands of Kenyan security forces and feeling marginalized by elites in Nairobi.[80] Whether or not this content was directly consumed by those across Kenya, participant understandings of the group confirm that al Shabaab has been able to build a powerful, locally resonant brand.[81]

There is some evidence that, through Al-Kataib, al Shabaab has increasingly provided an internationalist message and has been seen to align itself with al Qa'ida's agenda, the organization it formally pledged allegiance to in 2012. Statements following major recent terrorist attacks in Kenya – at Manda Bay in January 2020 and a year earlier at 14 Riverside – alluded to US policy on Jerusalem as a major motivation. At the same time that al Shabaab linked 14 Riverside to the US and Jerusalem, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) – an al Qa'ida affiliate in the Sahel – made a similar claim in connection to an attack against a UN base in Mali. Military analyst Evan Matos argues that this indicates al Qa'ida's overarching control over the propaganda released by its various branches.

However, this study notes that when discussing VE messaging circulating in their communities, largely via social media, research participants did not make reference to al Qa'ida or to the international objectives of global jihad. Rather, their statements fall into three main themes:

- local grievances,
- religious polemic,
- life under al Shabaab.

First, messages focusing on local grievances leveraged tropes of marginalization, socio-economic disenfranchisement, and state abuse. In particular, participants suggested that recruiters focus on land poverty, police brutality and claims that Muslims in Kenya have to fight to obtain official ID cards, when Christian Kenyans do not face the same challenges. Coastal populations were purportedly encouraged to oppose the *wabara* or the *wageriengе* (Kiswahili and Mijkenda for "upcountry" Kenyans) by persecuting them, chasing them out of the area and not marrying them. These grievances were primarily filtered through a local lens; thus, images were circulated depicting a Kenyan police officer "stepping on someone's head".

Second, messages mischaracterized Qur'anic verses and the Prophet's Hadith to portray violent jihad against the *kafir* as a religious obligation. Reformed gang members in Mombasa that participated in the study emphasized that the content of al Shabaab's online messaging was primarily religious in nature rather than graphic or violent. Polarizing narratives urged 'good' Muslims to take up arms to defend their faith against attacks both in Kenya and globally. In the context of the Kenyan Coast, recruiters allegedly persuaded people that the *wabara* (upcountry people) and more broadly the Kenyan state were *kafir* and therefore legitimate targets for attacks. Based on the findings, fighting in Somalia is depicted as a 'religious war' pitting al Shabaab against the infidel government. In return for protecting Islam, those who join al Shabaab are told they will be rewarded by Allah. They are promised houris (beautiful young virgin women) and

a direct trip to heaven when they are martyred. These narratives are widely discussed in the Kenyan media. While it is likely that some participants merely regurgitated what they had read, the study appeared to validate the prevalence of such messaging amongst young populations.

A third, but apparently less prominent, category of message related to the advantages of life under al Shabaab in Somalia. Participants discussed videos depicting Kenyans doing well in Somalia, receiving money or "having a good time." Youth in Mombasa stated that "people still watch videos on [...] how people live there." Training clips also circulate on various social media sites. The training videos target those who are seeking a sense of adventure or "heroism." One of the county commissioners interviewed said that they had recently viewed a video showing "combat in Somalia which they [al Shabaab] are glorifying as acts of heroism."

The SNA snowballing survey suggested that pro-al Shabaab material was the most widely shared of the output produced by the four groups included in the questionnaire (others were MRC,[82] Islamic State[83] and Hizb ut-Tahrir[84]). On average across the four counties, 64% of participants indicated that they have people close to them who share media produced by al Shabaab, at least occasionally. Moreover, 56% of participants stated they personally share al Shabaab content with others occasionally (32%), somewhat frequently (15%), or very frequently (9%).

While specific examples of official al Shabaab media propaganda were not necessarily widely discussed within the communities studied, it seems that some of the broader ideas are being shared in local social media groups. Interview and focus group participants clearly knew about the group and its broad objectives, especially in Kwale, Nairobi and Mombasa. People were aware of al Shabaab's claims to be creating an Islamic state, where Muslims can supposedly practice their faith freely and in accordance with (al Shabaab's interpretation of) the Qur'an. The al Qa'ida/al Shabaab worldview was also evident. Similarly, suggestions that the Government of Kenya was seen as an apostate authority occupying Muslim land was visible in the labelling of upcountry Kenyans as '*makafiri*' by criminal movements, a framing that apparently legitimized their robbery and victimization.

However, this content was not necessarily disseminated through official al Shabaab channels and many of the strategic messages identified across the group's formal propaganda were not referenced by research participants. There were no mentions of the Kenya Defence Forces' failings in Somalia - as discussed in Islamic studies scholar Christopher Anzalone's 2020 analysis of al Shabaab's 'PSYOPS' campaigns - nor of specific al Kataib video releases. Participants were much more concerned with their day-to-day lives, what social scientist Simon Papale refers to as the 'profane':[85] rather than discussing the merits of Kenya's presence in Somalia, they would speak about the government's failure to support their community. Indeed, there was limited evidence identified through interviews and focus group discussions to suggest that people were actually watching al Kataib material.[86] If they did, then they were picking out those parts which directly relate to their lived experience.

Anzalone (2020) observes that for al Shabaab media campaigns to have any influence, the material needs to be viewed by the target audience. Significantly, most SNA survey participants had not

even heard of the pro-al Shabaab Shahada News, with only 5% of those in Kwale suggesting they 'occasionally' or 'somewhat frequently' read content from the media house. Shahada was most popular in Nairobi's Eastleigh and Majengo, but even there only 24% were aware of its existence. Although it is possible that answers to this question were limited by concerns over self-incrimination, these findings are striking and come in spite of the apparent increase in the focus on Kenya in many Shahada articles.

The implication is that analyzing al Shabaab's formal propaganda output is essential but, alone, insufficient. This is because extremist messages are rarely received in isolation and are likely interpreted by local individuals and recirculated amongst immediate associates. Most studies of the group's media output primarily focus on the narrative and intended impact of messages.[87] For example, in discussing al Shabaab propaganda, Papale recognizes the importance of social interaction in the creation of meaning. He argues that al Shabaab propagandists have purposefully sought to relate to 'profane' local narratives of marginalization. His analysis provides the clearest explanation to date of how the group seeks to entwine local and global, as well as secular and religious, narratives in the Kenyan context. However, even this assessment places its emphasis on al Shabaab's message and not on how individuals interpret that message against a vast array of alternative viewpoints.

Kenyan communities have access to a range of sources of information. For a start, mainstream media (both local and national) were identified by SNA participants in all counties as important sources of information (see Annex H). Kenya's media space was historically considered relatively independent, as guaranteed by the national constitution, especially in relation to the reporting of incidents relevant to national security.[88] However, more recently, concerns have emerged over threats to this autonomy.[89] Very little research has been conducted into Kenyan press coverage of terrorism and violent extremism. Reports of attacks are often characterized by the simplistic use of labels and a failure to discuss why certain areas are targeted or how the local socio-political environment might make an attack feasible, beyond the security dynamics. Arguably, media houses usually adhere to the official narrative, and reporting is informed by a desire to appease the authorities by promoting a sense of patriotism.[90] At worst, the media has been directly accused of propagating Islamophobia through the stigmatization of certain ethnic groups.[91] Such criticisms are of significant concern given the reported centrality played by mainstream media as a source of information amongst participants in the communities studied.

Social media of course also represents an increasingly accessible alternative resource. In Kwale, al Shabaab content was viewed alongside the controversial – if not extremist – messages of local groups like Ansar al Sunna (noted on p. 19). In Nyeri, criminal groups such as Mungiki may also disseminate information in support of their own agenda. Research participants suggested that details of the conflict in Palestine were circulating on TikTok channels with no obvious links to al Shabaab. Mainstream news reports about events in Somalia were also evidently popular. As grievances build, al Shabaab seeks to position itself as an outlet through which to express frustrations that are formed through a wide variety of influences. It was suggested by participants that recruiters are able to create very personalized packages of content for individuals who are identified by al Shabaab as potential recruits.[92]

As information circulates from various sources, those who are already angry at marginalization, police brutality and a lack of job opportunities (all perceived by the communities studied to be drivers of VE) may be particularly receptive to Shabaab's messaging, finding that the narrative matches their daily experiences. Susceptible individuals – lacking access to alternative moral value systems (such as those that delegitimize violence or promote tolerance and social pluralism) – may be further encouraged by the proclamation that joining al Shabaab can be justified in religious scripture. Additional enablers include weak governance, where (on and offline) mechanisms regulating and enforcing moral norms may be impaired, distorted, or damaged to such a degree they can no longer suppress extremism-supportive moral contexts.[93] Under such conditions, a moral ecology conducive to recruitment and radicalization could emerge, presenting a series of systemic and structural challenges for CVE practitioners.

Consequently, this research study stresses the importance of understanding the wider information ecosystem and that rather than seeking to counter al Shabaab messaging – or even providing alternative messages – the Kenyan state must build its own brand, framing itself as a viable solution to local grievances. As Freear argues, doing so should not entail an expensive media campaign.[94] Rather, action is required to address the grievances of local communities who feel that government promises are not supported by tangible progress. If the action accompanying government CVE communication is state violence, as it currently sometimes is, this only serves to weaken the resonance of the CVE message.

Given that al Shabaab's brand has been strengthened in part because the organization has proven its own capabilities in direct comparison to the Government of Kenya, the concept of brand building is perhaps most pertinent to the government. However, the principles of trust building and the need to support narratives with action are relevant to all CVE stakeholders, including CSOs and religious leaders.

LANGUAGE

To be successful, recruiters need to relate to their targets in order to build trust. Freear notes that al Shabaab media output during the 2017 elections in Kenya featured fighters speaking a range of local languages including Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Oromo, Bajuni, Digo, Sheng and Kiswahili. Local languages are used in this way by al Shabaab to relate to specific communities. *Human Cognition*, however, indicated that most al Qa'ida media content is produced in Arabic. As the language of the Qur'an, Arabic is used to establish a degree of credibility or superiority on scriptural matters.

Findings from the SNA surveys suggested that across the four study counties only 10.7% of participants assessed their ability to understand spoken Arabic as 'high' or 'very high'.[95] It is not surprising therefore that when asked about the role of Arabic, the overwhelming initial response from qualitative participants was that recruitment was conducted in Kiswahili or the relevant local language. Almost every participant indicated that Arabic was not used as it was so poorly understood in most parts of Kenya. While participants indicated that some people have

memorized parts of the Qur'an from their time at madrasa, and others may even be able to read Arabic, most do not understand it.[96]

Nevertheless, the RUSI study team found Arabic to be important in recruitment, not because it was used as a means to communicate, but rather because of its symbolic power and strategic use in brand building. Research participants acknowledged that recruiters used some Arabic terms. They indicated that a locally influential agent would emphasize a small selection of scripture to demonstrate theological knowledge and to gain a level of superiority over a potential target. In such a context, "the Arabic words are so fundamental; [...] they are powerful." The recruitment conversation would take place in local ethnic languages, such as Digo, Giriama, Duruma or Kiswahili, but Arabic words would be used as a "lure" or as a way to gain legitimacy amongst those targeted, especially at a later stage of the recruitment process. According to a group in Mombasa, poor understanding of the language means that Arabic can be used to "hide some things" because it takes longer to grasp than Kiswahili. Arabic words would be incorporated and translated verbally in order to feign theological superiority. This tactic was reportedly also used by an infamous recruiter in Nyeri known as 'Mwai'.

Analysis by *Human Cognition* in February 2021 only identified approximately 10 Kenyan mobile phone numbers in al Qa'ida WhatsApp groups. While this is a very small number, each was linked to multiple other WhatsApp groups. It is highly likely that these numbers are subsequently used to redistribute the material from these groups locally. With 99% of material circulating in the al Qa'ida ecosystem produced in Arabic, it is possible that those able to read and write in Arabic serve as gatekeepers for a wider local network.[97] These individuals would potentially translate extremist material and then share the messages within their local network, likely at *maskanis*.[98] A local CSO employee in Kwale noted that those who speak Arabic "download [video clips] in Arabic language, then later translate to the local language which young people will understand".

This suggests that al Shabaab must appear relatable to their audience. A madrasa teacher suggested that recruiters would initially speak whatever language the target was most comfortable with.[99] They would then thread Arabic into the narrative at a later stage as appropriate in order to stress Qur'anic knowledge and thus gain legitimacy.

In this study's SNA survey, participants who stated that they frequently or sometimes agree with the political perspectives and religious interpretations shared through al Shabaab content tended to be more confident in their Arabic language skills, generally rating their ability to read the Qur'an and Arabic media, understand spoken Arabic, and write in Arabic higher than those who reported never agreeing with perspectives in al Shabaab content. The fact that those who agree with al Shabaab messaging report understanding Arabic in no way implies that knowledge of Arabic has any influence on political views, but rather that those interested in al Shabaab messaging value the importance of learning the Arabic language. Social desirability bias may also have influenced findings here. With Arabic seen to enhance the legitimacy of religious knowledge, those who share al Shabaab messaging would likely be keen to frame themselves as legitimate subjects of Islam.

WHO IS CIRCULATING INFORMATION?

The explosion in the use of social media over the last decade has led to the democratization and decentralization of information flows. While key focal points were once able to control the content and distribution of pro-al Shabaab material across Kenya, there are now a multitude of actors and outlets (including both institutions and individuals) that are able to disseminate information. Where once extremists avoided using phones, now an entire abstract network is built on a framework of thousands of handsets across the region. This transition was well articulated by an elder in Kwale who mused "you only hear there is al Shabaab; [...] but you never know where their base is". Increasingly in conversation with Kenyan officials, al Shabaab has become as much the idea as it is the structured organization. The current information space is much more dynamic and thus much more challenging for the authorities to monitor and moderate. However, al Shabaab also has to navigate this quagmire of interconnected influencers in order to establish some semblance of clarity in their own messaging.

From around 2008 through 2013, Kenyan clerics openly antagonized non-Muslims, inciting violence and encouraging recruitment into al Shabaab. Participants in Nairobi, for example, suggested that several mosques across the Pumwani and Eastleigh neighborhoods were used to openly propagate extremist propaganda at this time. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, Aboud Rogo (in Mombasa) and Ahmad Iman Ali (in Nairobi) were two public figures who openly advocated that Kenyan Muslims travel to Somalia to take part in violent jihad. Freear explains that, as 'brand ambassadors' for al Shabaab, these individuals served to ensure that a relationship was built, not just a message delivered.[100] Figures like Rogo were able to speak to 'the higher purpose that characterizes powerful brands while also connecting through social identity'.[101]

With it no longer plausible to speak so openly in support of al Shabaab, no new superstar extremist personalities have emerged over the last decade. However, Aboud Rogo, almost ten years on from his death, was mentioned by research participants in all four counties. Largely based on hearsay, the research indicated that youth are still listening to recordings of Rogo's sermons and sharing them on WhatsApp. Rogo's 'martyrdom' – purportedly at the hands of the Kenyan state – effectively 'reinforce[d] the brand story', evoking the 'most powerful human emotions, fear, and anger.'[102] Ahmad Iman Ali is believed to have left Kenya in approximately 2009,[103] but his name also continually resurfaced during fieldwork in both Nairobi and Nyeri. A youth leader in Nyeri claimed that people in the community still listened to Iman Ali's videos and viewed him as a source of inspiration.

Clerics are still widely interpreted as important influencers, but their direct involvement in radicalization and recruitment is now less clear. A participant in Kwale pointed out that it was "the religious leaders [that] are the ones who misinterpret and misunderstand and misquote the verses of the Qur'an" and who also happened to be the most trusted local leaders. More directly, another individual in the same county spoke of his university student cousin who was persuaded to travel to Somalia by a well-known sheikh, and a group of youth in Mombasa suggested that "preachers" remain active as extremist messengers. It was suggested, for example, that they share information encouraging violence against the *kafir* on WhatsApp. The group argued that

al Shabaab was able to influence what preachers were saying in certain mosques through "street representatives".

However, despite these anecdotes and the suggestion that some mosques are increasingly being controlled by "radical Wahhabis", it seems unlikely that clerics propagate pro-al Shabaab messages from the pulpit in the way they once did. Religious authorities and sheikhs "lost relevance long ago" according to a CSO in Eastleigh. In terms of circulating extremist messaging, the role of clerics and imams – at least within mosques – appears to be minimal across most study locations. Religious leaders feel that they are under constant surveillance from government informers and would not risk their careers, whether or not they sympathize with the al Shabaab cause. Likely as a direct result of these changes, no new Kenyan figure heads for the jihadist movement were identified during the fieldwork.

Although they remain relevant, religious leaders like Rogo and Ali have been replaced over the last decade by peer pressure and 'peer-to-peer networks', especially on the Kenyan coast. This emerged during Search for Common Ground's 2017 study entitled 'Meet Me at the Maskani'.[104] Mombasa, Kwale and Nairobi were all included in the study, which concluded that friends and immediate peer associates were more important as sources of influence than family and religious figures.

Such findings were corroborated by this study. For example, CSO representatives in Mombasa insisted that "values come from... the influence of friends". In the SNA analysis, there also appears to be a high degree of homophily (information sharing between similar people) among those who indicated they had friends and family who shared extremist content in Mombasa. This emphasizes that networks sharing al Shabaab material are tight-knit and involve high levels of trust, often between friends. In addition, drawing on the qualitative research, parents and elders across the four counties expressed concern that they had less control over the younger generation than their parents had over them. It can be considered a reasonable assumption, inferred in part from understandings of how gangs in urban Mombasa circulate their ideas, that "youth are influencing fellow youth" through well-established networks. Although social media – 'chat applications' in particular – is playing an important role in facilitating networking between disenfranchised youth, participants often argued that propaganda is "passed by word of mouth".

It is worth distinguishing clearly here between radicalization and recruitment. The study did not suggest that youth are self-recruiting, but rather that radicalization may be happening organically through these peer networks. Ultimately, the researchers found little evidence that people are travelling to Somalia solely through connections made online. Physical recruitment and the process of travelling to Somalia still likely requires the presence of a facilitator (a "broker" or "agent" as described in Kwale) within a space frequented by the target population. A young man from Nairobi explained how – after watching extremist videos and listening to sermons online – he tried to join al Shabaab by travelling to Mombasa. However, "there was no one to receive" him and his associate on arrival at a Mombasa mosque. This failed attempt demonstrates that joining al Shabaab requires an assortment of enabling factors, regardless of the commitment of the individual. These enabling factors include facilitation of the practical movement to Somalia

(the presence of local 'agents' in the community), as well as factors which help shape the moral ecology in these communities (high levels of trust in local recruiters sharing the same peer-to-peer networks and/or the ability to circulate messages in private settings).

Recruitment in Nyeri appears to have been more detached from mainstream society than in other locales. The extremist network is much smaller, and the research suggests that it is based on some form of "referral system", but that the process remains peer-to-peer. A single individual, 'Mwai' (a Nyeri-based al Shabaab recruiter), would use material incentives and a distorted interpretation of the Qur'an to encourage young sportsmen to travel to Somalia. Those who left for al Shabaab were not drug abusers or petty criminals. Rather, they attended mosque and appeared to avoid violence.

SNA conducted in these communities provides some further clues as to how and why information is shared within these communities. Participants (identified as 'at-risk') were asked to recruit subsequent participants with whom they "most frequently discuss problems affecting [their] community and with whom [they] are likely to share media related to those problems either online or in-person".[105] In all four counties, the research uncovered that individuals are more likely to discuss community issues with those of the same gender.[106] It also appears that participants tend to discuss problems facing their communities with those of the same religion, however these findings were only 'statistically significant' in Nairobi and Mombasa, areas that are more religiously diverse.

Figure 3: Gender

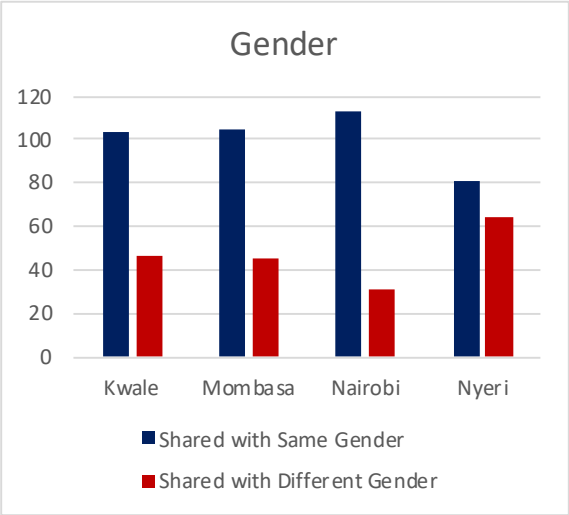
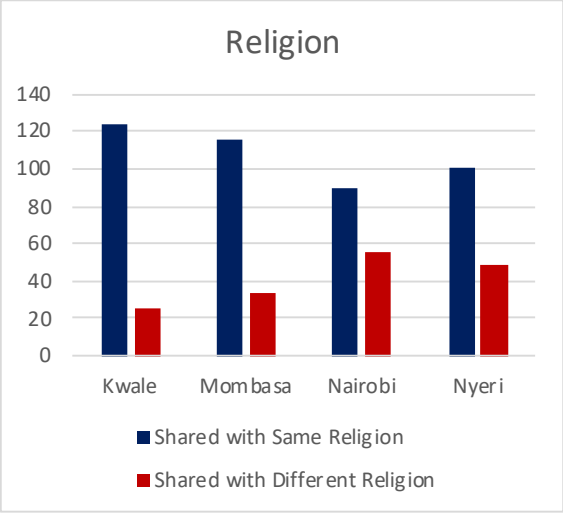


Figure 4: Religion



Frequency of (SNA snowballing) shares in each location, broken down by whether the share was from someone with the same attribute (religion / gender). The graphs demonstrate the extent to which people share information within their ingroup (both gender and religion) vs. any outgroup.[107]

Finally, it is worth discussing why individuals might choose to circulate extremist information. A striking finding in all counties was that those involved in sharing these messages often stated that they did not agree with the content. This suggests that sharing of information does not necessarily represent an endorsement of the content itself. Of participants who said they have shared al Shabaab media content with people close to them, only 43 percent stated that they frequently (8%) or sometimes (35%) agree with the political and religious perspectives therein.

Again, it is highly likely that both fear of self-incrimination and possibly shame played a part in making participants unwilling to admit they hold extremist views. However, there are a multitude of potential motivations for sharing information that one might not agree with: individuals may not be fully aware of the nature of the content of the message, they may forward content in an effort to appear well connected, or they may share it to trigger discussion.

Recent research into the sharing of misinformation in Kenya may help provide an additional explanation here. A BBC study explored motives for sharing 'fake news' in Kenya.[108] The study noted that sharing such information was used as a form of 'social currency'; that civic duty was perceived to be important and that there was an obligation to warn others; and that information sharing of any sort was an important part of a democracy. In a separate study of six sub-Saharan African countries, Kenyans were particularly willing to admit that they had shared political news stories that they believed may have been made up.[109] The study found that 'civic duty' was indeed an important motivator for sharing information 'just in case' it assisted others in understanding a threat. It is certainly conceivable that those sharing al Shabaab content in Kenya do so because they believe it might serve to assist others in understanding their lived experiences, regardless of whether they believe the information themselves.

It is worth breaking the findings down by county. Although participants in Mombasa and Kwale were not on the whole more likely to indicate that they shared al Shabaab information, those that said they did share this material in the two counties were more likely to say that they sometimes or frequently agree with it. On the other hand, in Nairobi 76% of participants who stated that they share al Shabaab content said that they never agree with it. This is not a surprising finding and provides affirmation that these ideas are perhaps more embedded on the Coast, at least amongst a small segment of the population. The qualitative data suggested that there is a greater awareness of the sensitivity of the information sharing space in the two Coast counties than elsewhere. Therefore, it is possible that those willing to take the perceived risk of sharing information (and admit to doing so) in these contexts are more likely to have a stronger conviction concerning the information they are sharing. Conversely, those who do not feel particularly strongly about the information are less likely to be willing to accept the perceived risk of sharing (or admitting to doing so).

WHERE IS INFORMATION CIRCULATING?

Notwithstanding some anecdotal but isolated evidence to the contrary, there has been a shift in focus away from mainstream mosques and clerics. Law enforcement operations (such as *Operation Usalama Watch* in 2014[110]), increased surveillance, and greater community awareness have made it difficult to discuss VE ideas in public spaces, forcing recruitment "underground" through more organic networks based on peer-to-peer relationships.

Regardless of these changes, both physical spaces and the internet remain essential parts of how extremist messaging is shared amongst communities in Kenya. This is supported by the results of the SNA survey. Both online news and 'in-person conversations' were considered top sources of information by large portions of participants. Asked how they obtained al Shabaab

content, a large number across the four counties noted Facebook (59.5%) and WhatsApp (62%) as occasional, frequent or very frequent avenues. Significantly, 48% said they viewed extremist content on other people's devices occasionally, frequently or very frequently.

However, there were significant differences between counties. In Kwale 53.5% of participants identified personal conversations as their main source of information. The figure was much lower in Mombasa, where just 17.5% described these interactions as their top source for information on community issues. In contrast, 66.5% opted for online news. The division was more even in Nairobi and Nyeri.

MODES OF COMMUNICATION

As noted above, parents and elders across all counties were very concerned about an apparent increase in the use of social media, with most claiming such platforms were used to facilitate direct recruitment. Those in Nyeri and Kwale also suggested that the internet may be able to guide youth on how to manufacture explosives.

Many of these concerns appeared to be generic and demonstrated a lack of understanding. Indeed, very few participants provided any firm evidence that recruiters were actually sharing information on these sites. The broad impact of technology on recruitment and radicalization should not, however, be dismissed. Online messages are able to move much faster and much further than those communicated in person. Youth have access to more information than they did just five years ago, and this access is rapidly becoming ever more affordable. Against this backdrop, al Shabaab no longer needs to rely on the long-term, physical presence of an extremist messenger. Instead, others, based in Somalia can, theoretically, communicate directly with potential recruits back in Kenya.

Across all counties, the SNA survey data indicated that WhatsApp and Facebook were the most popular social media platforms and the most common means of receiving information about VE groups. Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok were the most frequently mentioned platforms during interviews and focus groups. In particular, the status update feature on WhatsApp, which allows individuals to broadcast short messages to all their contacts, was regularly referenced. In contrast, participants suggested that Twitter was not important. Additionally, many participants, especially in Nyeri, did not know of Telegram, although residents in Nairobi and Mombasa recognized that the platform was used by youth to access extremist content as it was considered more secure than other applications. In the latter, members of a youth group claimed that Telegram and Signal were used so that no one could track their messages, and in Nairobi a participant described how recruiters use Telegram to link potential recruits with local agents and to facilitate travel and payment.

In addition to globally popular social media sites, a variety of more niche information exchange platforms were discussed by research participants. For example, physical hubs used for online video gaming or betting were said to be one way of avoiding the scrutiny of law enforcement. Youth in Eastleigh explained that betting site chat rooms were used by recruiters to communicate

with potential targets and to arrange meetings. Similarly, in Mombasa, potential recruits would access gaming sites to engage with recruiters. Others spoke about the use of dating applications and websites to share extremist ideas and outlined how those communicating through various media channels may use code words to disguise the true nature of their discussions.

Despite the many references to the role played by social media, most participants suggested that physical spaces remain essential to youth social structures. Conversations take place organically in locations where a level of privacy can be assured and where youth feel that they can discuss ideas freely. Referred to as *maskanis* on the Coast, these outdoor meeting places were previously identified as key spaces for the sharing of ideas in a 2017 Search for Common Ground study.[111] *Maskanis* (literally 'tent' or 'abode'; generally interpreted to mean a seated meeting place for youth) can take multiple forms, with different *maskanis* emerging for different purposes. They are rarely permanent and new ones can be established if others are raided by law enforcement. Youth congregate in a variety of locations (under a tree, in their home compounds etc.). These gathering points appeared to play an especially important role in Kwale, where youth look for a place to discuss issues away from the prying eyes of those connected to the mosque. Such locations were referred to as 'base' in Nairobi and 'jobless corner' in Nyeri.

Box 2: Meeting places used by youth, and potentially extremist actors, to share media and ideas. These might be referred to as *maskanis* at the coast, 'base' in Nairobi and 'jobless corner' in Nyeri.

- *Mogokaa* / miraa or drug dens, 'place ya jaba' (Kwale, Mombasa, Nyeri)
- Gardens or shambas (mainly Kwale)
- The beach (Kwale and Mombasa)
- Video halls, video game clubs
- Homes
- Football grounds
- Boda boda parking lots
- Market places
- Coffee shops

While *maskanis* can have a positive role as spaces to build social cohesion and were described by some research participants as evolving into "business places", many appeared to view them in an overtly negative light. A member of civil society in Mombasa claimed they are "places where youth are sitting staying idle; they don't have focus". Study participants suggested that when gathered in a group, youth are impressionable and easily swayed by incentives or peer influence, with one FGD participant warning "it will be easy to radicalize them". A religious leader in Mombasa complained that those at *maskanis* "don't talk about success" or how they may be able to "emulate" a successful individual; rather they "plot for crimes, attacking one another". Study participants indicated that 'idle' youth who "love eating *mogokaa*[112] and talking nonsense" spend their time at *maskanis*.

Although mosques are rarely used as focal points for the sharing of extremist messages, at least three participants argued that short, covert meetings were sometimes possible first thing in the morning. According to a youth leader in Nyeri's Majengo neighborhood, these meetings could alternatively happen late in the evening. A former recruit in Nairobi explained that they were woken for their extremist teaching at 4am while others were still asleep. On occasion, it is possible recruiters may also be able to gain a platform inside mosques through trickery. An imam in Kwale explained how he had been approached and asked by an individual for an opportunity to address the congregation about a subject such as Ramadan. If granted permission, the would-be guest could potentially switch off the microphone and speak about something unexpected, using the platform to promote "some hidden agenda".

Schools were also spaces research participants mentioned as potential locations for the circulation of extremist messages, reflecting historical cases of recruitment within certain institutions across parts of Kenya.[113] Fears were raised about a particular site in Pumwani, Nairobi, and government officials in Kwale and Nyeri also claimed that radical messages could reach large audiences if they were able to infiltrate a school setting. However, in most cases, participants, at best, relied on rumor and were unable to offer any specifics.

Speculation about madrasas was also common due to concerns over a lack of standardized curricula and reports of foreign funding. This particularly appeared to be an issue in Kwale but was raised in all four counties. A CEF member from Kwale mused that if an al Shabaab recruiter wanted to be successful, then they could easily sponsor a madrasa and design a syllabus. Additionally, in Nairobi, some participants suggested that madrasas had been historically exploited for al Shabaab recruitment.

Finally, the use of physical notes was discussed on occasion. Some groups (including Hizb ut-Tahrir) were said to have distributed leaflets outside mosques in Nairobi. A less conventional way of communicating was recorded in Kwale where previous RUSI research in Bongwe uncovered the use of warning letters ('*popho*') delivered to those propagating a line of messaging counter to that supported by local VE groups.[114] Such letters were received by several local leaders and clerics prior to their murders. During the current research study, a participant in the same area claimed that similar notes were purposefully dropped along roads to be picked up and delivered to law enforcement personnel or local leaders by civilians. This claim – an apparent effort to circulate information anonymously to the authorities – is difficult to verify and there is little indication that such practices are common, but anecdotal reports from other CVE programs have suggested analogous practices.

THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN ONLINE AND OFFLINE SPACES

Fundamentally, personal relationships remain important despite the growing role of the internet. Indeed, the two spaces work together. While social media might link like-minded individuals, these online relationships are cemented through in-person meetings. The interviews and focus groups – particularly in Kwale and Mombasa – provided several additional clues as to the connections between online and offline communication. Extremist videos (especially

containing sermons from Aboud Rogo) were circulated on chat platforms with trusted friends but individuals also watched these films when they met at *maskanis* or in private homes. *Human Cognition* analysis demonstrated that Kenyan mobile phone numbers were also present in a range of al Qa'ida groups used to disseminate official media. This material can then be shown to others in person even if it is not actually shared digitally due to concerns over surveillance.

This was further confirmed by several qualitative participants. An imam in Eastleigh said that it was the recruiters who accessed the material and then showed it to their targets or shared it with trusted associates. According to participants in both Mombasa and Kwale, videos might be watched together at a *maskani*, with a CSO representative likewise suggesting that if they are in Arabic one person will download it and then interpret it for the others, although it was suggested that fear of a violent police response had led to a decrease in group viewing across Kwale, at least in more public spaces. Even if people are not physically watching the videos at the *maskanis*, it was claimed young people were likely to discuss the content when they gather at these locations.

The snowball sample questionnaire and token exercise used in this study bridge online content sharing with in-person engagement and discussion. The RUSI research team learned that viewing content from others' devices was a common way for local residents to view VE content. While participants did not describe it as the most popular means for consuming such material, it is arguably a particularly intimate and important viewing experience because the device holder has likely contextualized the content within an ongoing discussion, rather than passively sharing it on Facebook or WhatsApp.

As SNA participants were required to physically pass tokens to those with whom they frequently discuss problems affecting their community, this research was able to chart how content viewed online might proliferate in real-world discussions: through homophilic gender relationships and homophilic religious relationships[115]. A young man who has viewed al Shabaab content online in Mombasa, for instance, is more likely to have in-person discussions about that content with other men in his immediate network of the same age, perhaps precluding diverse perspectives that female relatives or elders may offer.[116] With social media also encouraging 'echo-chamber' thinking and divisions with local elders, these individuals are likely to only receive information that reinforces their existing viewpoints. The challenge for civil society and those engaging in CVE is to balance working within these societal norms and conventions while also understanding when and if to challenge them, for example by encouraging outgroup thinking.

Though the concerns expressed by parents and elders regarding social media were likely exaggerated, some interviewees and focus group discussants (notably of all ages) insisted that these platforms were to blame for any given community's extremist recruitment problem. However, somewhat paradoxically, at the same time research participants also claimed recruitment focused on tailor-made face-to-face interactions, specifically targeting those "having problems" or experiencing particular vulnerabilities.[117] Perhaps these should not be considered mutually exclusive: in many cases social media may play a significant role in enabling the circulation of extremist material, but recruitment can still require the presence of an in-

person facilitator. As discussed above, the role of social media goes beyond direct recruitment. It is likely that the circulation of extremist content via such channels contributes to a moral ecology conducive to VE. Social media serves as both a radicalizing agent and enables recruiters to get in touch with potential targets. The logistics of recruitment would then take place through in-person interaction.

Although research participants expressed fear that law enforcement monitors online spaces, youth in Eastleigh claimed that some people reported being contacted over the phone by al Shabaab recruiters after they had used certain websites. The logistics of this relationship were somewhat unclear, but it may be that online resources provided tools to help recruiters target those who were already accessing extremist content. Similarly, the researchers identified sophisticated methods involving online video games or betting sites that allowed people to establish direct contact with recruiters or to arrange meetings.

Box 3: CDs, DVDs, flash disks and SD cards?

In the late 2000s, Rogo's sermons could be openly purchased from street vendors on CDs or audio tape. In 2016, respondents indicated that these CDs, encouraging travel to Somalia, remained 'readily available in marketplaces around Nairobi and Mombasa' (Villa-Vicencio et al 2016).

Our research indicated that the sermons of radical preachers continue to be viewed. Respondents in Likoni and in Kwale indicated that SD cards, flash drives and CDs are circulated. However, the open availability of CDs no longer seemed to be a major concern. It was suggested that videos are circulated covertly, likely shared via internet platforms and messaging applications.

The SNA snowballing survey confirmed these findings. In no county was the viewing of extremist content on DVD (read CD etc.) identified as a popular option. The medium was most popular in Nairobi where only 8.1% of respondents suggested they view violent extremist content on DVDs frequently or very frequently.

Finally, while DVDs and audio recordings were not the most popular means to share and view VE content in the SNA participant networks, they do bridge the gap between online and offline engagement, because they require the in-person transfer of a physical item.

The interrelationships between online and offline spaces are important for understanding if radicalization takes place before recruitment. Given the frequent emphasis research participants placed on financial incentives, it is conceivable that some individuals are not 'radicalized' at all. Individuals who are particularly desperate to make ends meet may travel to Somalia for work or to obtain monetary compensation and only receive ideological messages after reaching al Shabaab controlled territory. However, such unskilled recruits are not necessarily what al Shabaab needs. Across all locations, it seems likely that extremist messaging was received while in Kenya, and that those migrating to Somalia had already begun the 'radicalization process'

before starting physical travel. Across Kwale and Nairobi in particular, qualitative participants hypothesized that figures in Somalia would use social media to share extremist messages with potential recruits in Kenya, who would then be put in touch with a local agent to help facilitate travel. This agent might be a locally influential figure or just someone well-connected.

Box 4: Explaining Kwale and Nyeri

The qualitative findings and all existing literature suggest that, of the four counties included in the study, Kwale has been the most exposed to violent extremist recruitment. Nyeri, on the other hand, is considered a new area of concern. However, the SNA snowballing survey did not reflect this. There are several potential explanations for these unusual findings, and it is assessed that they may not accurately reflect the scale of VE information sharing in Nyeri compared to that in Kwale.

Unexpected results included the following:

- Kwale had the lowest portion of respondents who stated they occasionally, frequently or very frequently share al Shabaab content with others.
- The highest portion of respondents claiming to share al Shabaab content with others was found in Nyeri.
- In Kwale, more people claimed to never have seen al Shabaab content (32.5%) than in Nyeri (4.5%).
- More people in Kwale, where the MRC are believed to be strong, had heard of the group. However, of these the majority said they did not share MRC content (86%), compared to just 31% of those in Nyeri who knew of the group. Bizarrely – given that the group advocates for the rights of coastal people – the content was also said to resonate with those in Nyeri.
- Fewer people read Shahada News (occasionally or somewhat frequently) in Kwale (5%) than Nyeri (21%).

There are several potential explanations for these unsuspected findings:

- Fear: it was clear that respondents in Kwale were afraid to incriminate themselves. Some of those from the SNA sample that were referred to the qualitative researcher for interviews were evidently afraid to speak openly. Heavy-handed police action was reportedly much more of a problem in Kwale, perhaps exacerbating an unwillingness to open up.
- Education: respondents in Nyeri had generally achieved a higher level of education, perhaps indicating that they had more access to information than their counterparts in Kwale.
- Media sources: those in Kwale appeared to have less access to media, generally relying more on 'in-person' sources for their information. This may have limited their exposure to some of the groups mentioned.
- Sampling: selection of those who participated in the snowballing SNA survey was not random. It appears that the snowballing system did not generate as much trust in Kwale as elsewhere. Moreover, it is possible – though unlikely – that the snowballing sample in Kwale veered off course into an unintended subset of the population, that may have been less aware of violent extremism-related issues.

LOCAL ACTORS

GOVERNMENT AND SECURITY FORCES

ALONGSIDE ITS LIMITED delivery of direct CVE messaging, Kenyan 'officialdom' in all its iterations was rarely the primary or preferred choice for civilians to report VE activity or CVE-related issues. Both wider society and those demographics considered most 'at-risk' of radicalization and recruitment, generally viewed public institutions with suspicion, oftentimes as a source of frustration or fear. None were more maligned than local police departments, where regular staffing transfers continually disrupted efforts to build linkages with host communities. Research participants considered collaboration and communication with state agents to be unilateral and exploitative, akin to data harvesting rather than a mutually supportive or beneficial relationship. Even areas where government activity was proactive, namely CAP implementation, associated CEF delivery mechanisms, and chief-led *barazas*,[118] were perceived to be closed off, with members interacting with CSOs and CVE practitioners rather than communities 'at large' or key constituencies like 'youth'. As a result, the Kenyan state operated on the fringes of civilian social networks, at least in relation to CVE. It relied on CSOs to both disseminate CVE messaging and restore public confidence in elements of the state itself.

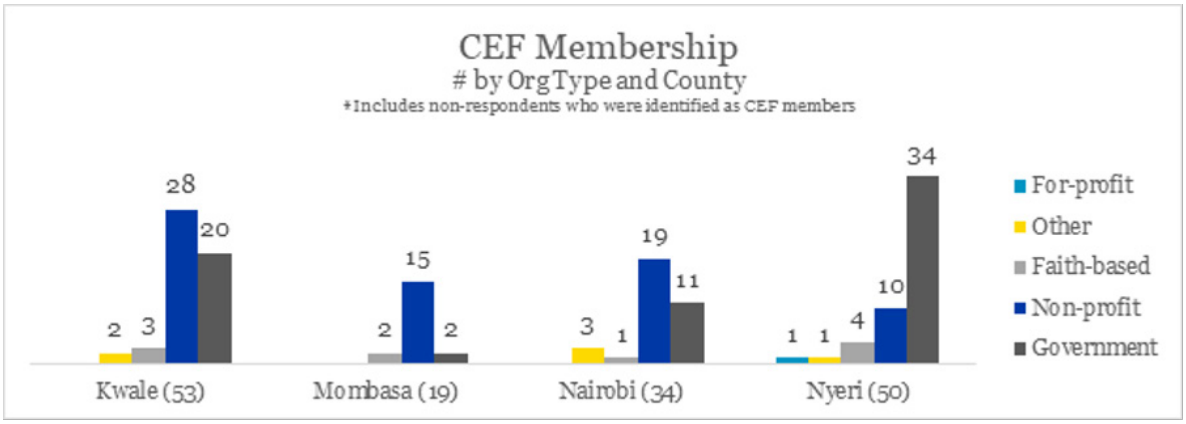
From the outset, it should be noted the Kenyan government broadcasts statements in the aftermath of security operations or attacks on Kenyan soil. If an IED is detonated in one of Kenya's border counties, for example, the relevant regional or county commissioner will often directly address national media outlets.[119] After large-scale complex attacks in major cities, senior officials – including the President – will also release statements.[120] The state's communication strategy in such scenarios has improved significantly: whereas the response to the Westgate Mall attack in 2013 was widely criticized – with different government branches issuing conflicting narratives and failing to reconcile messaging with information available on social media – a much more consistent chain of communication was evident during the attack at 14 Riverside in 2019.[121]

However, this does not necessarily apply to CVE messaging. Despite administrators describing a matrix of 'tentacles' used by the state to relay information,[122] research participants across the four counties identified little in the way of CVE public outreach. Instead, they often dismissed government channels as superficial or ineffective, leaving the relationship between Kenyan society and formal institutions strained and highly conditional. In much the same way that participants appeared to latch-on to certain elements of al Shabaab messaging and ignore others, it was clear that civilians accepted "good" or useful material and ignored anything they deemed bad or "unnecessary" when it came from government sources. Distrust of official narratives was close to ubiquitous,[123] with many participants turning to conspiracy theories and rumors that cast, for instance, COVID-19 as a pretext for political corruption. Against this backdrop it appears that the NCTC made a deliberate decision to avoid direct CVE messaging in recognition

of the deleterious impact state branding can have on such content, especially in the context of sensitive subjects like VE. Borne in part out of necessity, government bodies have therefore leant on CSOs to raise awareness and circulate counter-narratives, with the only evidence of direct public engagement coming from two key sources: CAPs/CEFs and chief-led *barazas*.

CAPs and accompanying CEF meetings offered a bespoke, decentralized and (nominally) inclusive platform for coordination, collective ownership, and information sharing between CSOs, (relevant) community representatives and government officials at the county and national level (via County Commissioners). However, the efficacy and influence of these arrangements were context-dependent and circumstantial, with the scope, standards, and structure of CAPs and RCAPs contingent on 'when and how the plan was developed'.[124] While some county governments organized consultative workshops and invested substantial resources to boost public engagement, others accelerated the process by publishing derivative or generic outputs that did not always speak to the granularities of specific community experiences and failed to incorporate the ideas of locally relevant stakeholders.

Figure 5: CEF Membership by OrgType and County *Includes non-respondents who were identified as CEF members



The make-up and functionality of CEFs was similarly diverse.[125] For a start, Mombasa, Nairobi and Kwale CEFs were largely composed of 'non-profit participants' (Kenyan CSOs), in contrast to Nyeri, which was dominated by state entities.[126] Both Kwale and Nyeri were also heavily reliant on state-sponsorship unlike the diverse cash flows characterizing Mombasa and (to a lesser extent) Nairobi, whose members referenced international non-governmental organization and bilateral foreign funding, and INGO, government, and private/philanthropic funds, respectively.

This study used SNA to examine Kenyan CVE information sharing networks. The researchers found that CEF stakeholders generally interpreted government as an information hub, meaning that on average it played a disproportionate role as either bridge or (potential) bottleneck in influencing how messages flowed through each CEF network. However, this does not mean these circuitries resembled a one-way announcement system, instead, there seemed to be a

concerted effort by CEF members to establish reciprocal relationships with each other, rather than passively consuming content from a central hub or placing responsibility for sharing material on specific actors. Simply put, CEF stakeholders were not waiting for state officials to disseminate information (as per a rigid hub-and-spoke structure or one-sided information transmission) but proactively developed linkages to exchange knowledge between one another. Although the level of network cohesion varied across counties (as detailed below), this collective norm driving the formation of mutually shared connections between member pairs was cross-cutting and consistent.

In contrast, the cohesion and efficiency of each CEF network differed considerably, reflecting the important variables that condition their performance and impact. For example, in areas characterized by a vibrant civic culture and legacy of activism like Mombasa, forums were framed in the qualitative data as a vehicle for expediting collaboration, local empowerment and streamlining information flows between authorities and CSOs who were "part and parcel of the process". Of course, limitations emerged – the MCAP's recent revamp has proved controversial, with stakeholders citing interference from national agencies and squabbling between non-governmental actors – but as a platform for coordination and dialogue it has helped offset or mitigate the inconsistencies and confusion that sometimes characterize state policy.

The relational survey appeared to corroborate this view (see table below), revealing that Mombasa's CEF network had the highest (comparative) density (i.e., the greatest proportion of information-sharing relationships that could exist) and arc reciprocity (i.e., the highest number of links mutually identified between members). Conversely, sites with relatively little CVE engagement (such as Nyeri) or incipient CEF bodies like Nairobi and Kwale displayed significantly lower levels of network density. It should also be noted that Kwale had the most pronounced levels of fragmentation (i.e., the proportion of pairs of nodes that cannot reach each other in the network). In practical terms, this lack of connectivity between members made exchanging messages directly or via proxy difficult as there were fewer pathways and established relationships to transmit information. Coinciding with observed problems in a recent CEF meeting - mistrust between participants, a dearth of capacity and expertise, confusion over roles, absenteeism, and fears over confidentiality and data security - these trends potentially show the difficulties of reproducing CVE architecture across different contexts if the necessary social, cultural, and normative foundations are not already available.

TABLE 1: INFORMATION SHARING COHESION

COUNTY	KWALE	MOMBASA	NAIROBI	NYERI
Average degree	7	8	5	7
Density	19%	60%	21%	16%
Fragmentation	26%	7%	7%	7%
Arc reciprocity	39%	70%	46%	47%

Figure 6: Nyeri Information-Sharing Network

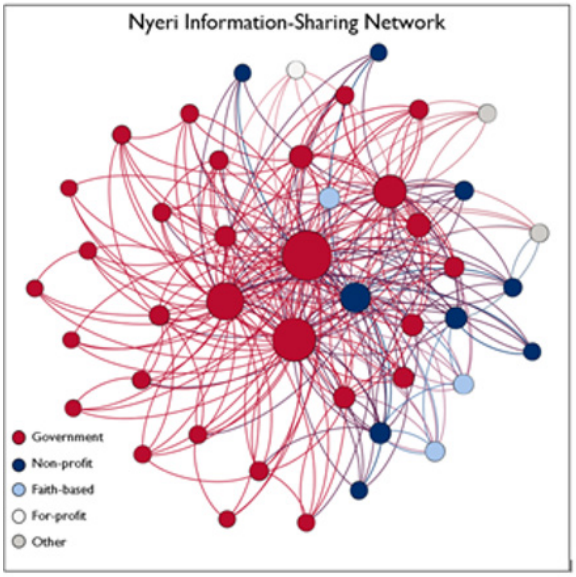
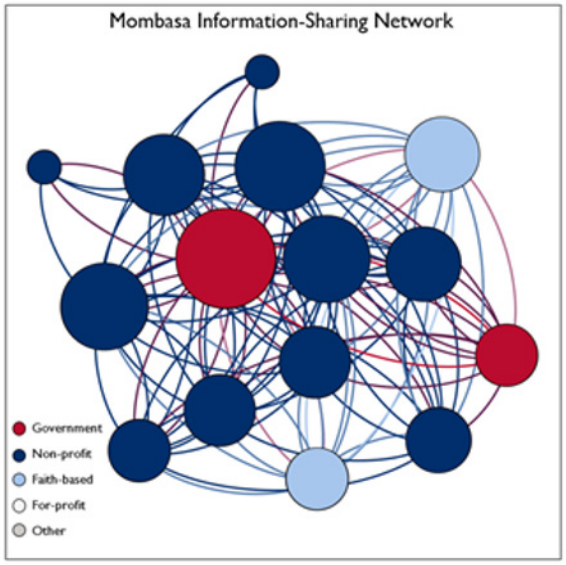


Figure 7: Mombasa Information-Sharing Network



Tellingly, most references to CEFs (and CAPs) across the four counties were made by forum members themselves,[127] suggesting these discussions existed somewhat peripherally to the social networks and day-to-day realities of wider communities. While research participants repeatedly described CSOs as key interlocutors and conduits for information, state-backed institutions and infrastructure built around official CVE approaches were not particularly well known, a symptom possibly attributable to their insularity and exclusivity. For instance, although Mombasa's CAP has become locally framed as a model for devolved ownership, a large proportion of the plan's target audience – young people – were not involved in its design or

management, leading a stakeholder to suggest subsequent messaging initiatives risked "dying on launch". Key organizations exercising "influence on the ground" were also absent from the composition of CEFs in places like Nairobi, undermining their impact as members did "not know what was going on in the field". Poor resourcing created additional problems: stakeholders in every network expressed frustration over incessant delays, a lack of funding, and an inability to translate discussion into tangible outputs, with one participant conceding, "it all ends at the hotel" (i.e., where the meeting is held). Despite ambitious intentions, delivery remained nascent across every county, constraining coverage, and feeding into the 'selective' (patchy) dissemination of information. In Kwale, a lack of political will was said to have limited the success of the CAP: there have been no efforts to pass legislation in the County Assembly and CVE was omitted from a recent County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP), which laid the groundwork for the county government's spending.[128]

Besides CEFs, a second avenue for sharing government CVE messages was through civic structures such as local *barazas* convened by state appointed chiefs, which were described by security personnel, community officials and several CSOs and residents as a valuable outlet for transmitting content. Rather than broadcasting explicit counter-messaging, the meetings could offer guidance on identifying 'signs of radicalization', encourage cooperation with the authorities, and raise general awareness around VE. However, their reach appeared limited. Despite a relatively high attendance rate for NGOs and women, younger community members often considered these formal institutions outdated and irrelevant, claiming they would rarely, if ever, show up. Much of this was blamed (by older participants) on the social fracturing of traditional sensibilities, ethics, and communal solidarities by a pervasive, youth-led 'consumer culture': "when you invite him [a young person] to these places, they ask: 'is there money?...If there isn't money then don't call me'". However, the influence of *barazas* was also attenuated by inter-generational tensions – they were usually sites monopolized and managed by conventional powerbrokers and therefore routinely ignored by youth.

Elsewhere, the audience was tightly regulated, composed largely of those "well-known to the chief or sub-chief". Complaints also emerged over coercive measures used to compel attendance at supposedly 'voluntary events', with the tenor of discussions becoming prescriptive and paternalistic, offering no real opportunity for participatory input or debate. For example, an observer of a Nyali *baraza* referenced authorities using the event to harvest rather than share information: those present were simply 'asked' to write down the names of individuals suspected of involvement in local crime.

Chiefs themselves frequently claimed that they play a critical role across Kenya's public sphere, acting as well-informed and influential brokers in the social circuitry and information networks that crosscut their districts. In reality, their influence tended to be idiosyncratic – based on the abilities and charisma of each administrator – rather than consistent. Some – especially in Nyeri – were evidently active and respected, partnering with CSOs, youth groups and communal authorities to address social and economic problems, and receiving intelligence from Nyumba Kumi.[129] However, in all counties, there were participants criticizing incumbent chiefs for their alleged corruption, cronyism and clientelism, with a CSO representative describing the role as

a "colonial legacy" and arguing "the community feels this is where things are being cooked". Others suggested local functionaries lacked the training to handle sensitive issues (like tip-offs regarding al Shabaab recruitment) or were scared to act on reports in case they were targeted by criminal gangs or al Shabaab.

In contrast to the context-specific dynamics of CAPs/CEFs and chief-led engagement, communities displayed widespread hostility towards security personnel – a relationship that overshadowed and (often) conditioned all other interactions between state and society. While most acute in Kwale – where participants claimed any reporting would leave them exposed to retaliation by extremist actors - the interview data reflected a deep-rooted fear of, and antipathy towards the police across the four counties, a finding consistent with past research[130] and critical in understanding why civilians were reluctant to voice any suspicions to the authorities. Extrajudicial killings through to prosaic, often daily experiences of harassment, grift, discrimination and humiliation, have fostered a relationship akin to "water and oil". Research participants regularly conflated law enforcement with criminal gangs and dismissed them as predatory and extortive, with anecdotal claims of officials referring to districts like Eastleigh as an "ATM". Much of the blame was directed at the national government for letting "the security sector get hungry". The extraneous complexion of local departments accentuated these problems, and distrust was pervasive, dampening or delaying civic engagement, as a stakeholder in Kwale summarized "nobody in the community loves the police". As a measure of this polarization, most participants across the four counties were unable to delineate between different strands of Kenya's security apparatus (the exception being the General Service Unit, a paramilitary wing of the National Police Service with an alleged reputation for "beating people" in Kwale). The Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU), national police, traffic officers, even the Kenya Wildlife Service were homogenized in the popular imagination as "someone wearing blue" or "security people", exposing the limited awareness and interaction that besets Kenyan policing: "[the community] will just say they are all the same".

In this context, numerous participants expressed little confidence in the capacity and inclination of security personnel to actually solve problems should they be reported, particularly those in the lower ranks – the "small police officers". Local authorities were not only criticized for unprofessionalism and leaking confidential data (a significant barrier to cooperation in Kwale and Mombasa) but dismissing would-be informants or treating them as suspects. As a CEF member in Mombasa explained, "guilt by association" remains rampant. While some of these issues were procedural given civilians disclosing concerns may have to be called as witnesses, revealing their identity, others were attributed to inadequate training. Subsequently, collaboration was sparse, with most people turning to CSOs to relay information and suspicions, a dynamic acknowledged by a village elder in Kwale: "people actually don't associate issues of violent extremism [reporting and CVE] with [the] police station".

Despite dialogue forums and sports tournaments identified in all four counties (through programs like NIWETU), young participants repeatedly insisted that there had been no improvement in their relationships with the security services.[131] They argued that although the scale of police violence may have decreased and the frequency of 'disappearances' had dropped (in Kwale for

example), levels of trust in law enforcement were as low as ever. Progress was hampered by personnel rotations and "random transfers". Given the lack of institutional memory, connections were often contingent on friendships and personal linkages, forming a makeshift network vulnerable to collapse once individual police focal points moved on. Sustainability therefore became a major issue, especially when replacements re-imported the same set of assumptions and prejudices that residents had just been tackling with their predecessors. It should also be noted that the inception and delivery of meetings appeared heavily dependent on leadership by CSOs rather than the police themselves, and it was unclear how far sensitive topics could be discussed. This left dialogue sessions 'at-risk' of becoming cosmetic or perfunctory exercises that did little to resolve underlying grievances. In Mombasa, a CSO practitioner involved in one such process admitted civilians still did not have a "direct link with the police".

Additionally, the Kenyan government's broader statements and harder counter-terrorism measures such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA, 2012) have led some to disparage officials, security forces and politicians for interpreting VE as a Muslim-only concern. In Mombasa, it was alleged that POTA had hindered the freedom of civil society, leading to NGOs being accused of supporting or sympathizing with extremists. Many in the Majengos of both Nairobi and Nyeri voiced their frustration over what they saw as systemic discrimination, a trend contributing to the pervasive levels of distrust that now constrain the state's ability to shape local understandings of VE. Although it should be acknowledged that NCTC partnered with Kenyan sheikhs and religious authorities to develop both the NSCVE and wider CVE programming, CSOs have consequently played an increasingly significant role in determining how such issues are perceived and understood by the Kenyan public.

These problems and limitations generate profound implications for the 'moral context' framing Kenyan communities, dynamics defined by 'moral norms and their rules of conduct and mechanisms for their formal (courts and police) and informal (social control by other citizens) enforcement'.[132] Flagrant violations of law and order by police officers and the limited influence of (some) chiefs have evidently impaired public belief in the state as a legitimate arbiter of moral authority, weakening the controls and governance structures imposed to suppress conditions conducive to extremism. CEFs and CAPs may gradually help ameliorate some of these problems, but they are ultimately tied to structural issues that extend far beyond the specific confines of CVE. Additionally, although CEF platforms have helped improve communication between a select group of local stakeholders and county officials, this has not necessarily been replicated across society 'at large', and their lack of funding and youth buy-in continue to compromise what could otherwise be encouraging devolutionary experiments. Crucially, they also lack any mandate to tackle issues around policing or security provision – functions that remain the preserve of national ministries.

Delegating greater space and responsibility to CSOs may therefore be a pragmatic response given the strategic decision to avoid government-affiliated counter-messaging, and the (at best) inconsistent coverage of chief-led *barazas*, but this is not sufficient in itself. The systemic issues that continue to frame certain public perceptions of the Kenyan state – extrajudicial abuses, corruption, apathy, and inefficiency – need to be confronted and resolved. In the absence of

wider reforms, civic groups – working with limited resources and short program cycles – will struggle to address the grievances and root problems driving violence and criminality in the first place. As Freear argues, government 'brand building' should therefore be based on delivering viable solutions to local grievances and substantiating its promises with action and tangible outputs, rather than narratives or messages.[133]

COMMUNAL LEADERS AND COMMUNITY POLICING

In theory, communal leaders and community police (including Nyumba Kumi) provide connective tissue between society and state, functioning as both conduit and broker. Consequently, these frameworks and authority structures should be at the forefront of preserving and enforcing moral norms, but, in reality, their efficacy was disputed and uneven. While participants referenced positive examples of both elders and Nyumba Kumi members working closely to share information with, and support, residents, the general trend was more measured. Perceptions of village leaders became contingent on the charisma, character, and connections of individual actors rather than the stature of their position, and public trust in each Nyumba Kumi cluster varied according to its track record. Although these findings are somewhat intuitive, they align with similar correlations identified by USAID research in Kilifi, Lamu, Mombasa and Tana River counties, exposing the hyperlocal disposition of informal institutions and the nuance needed to understand their reach and relevance across different communities. Crucially, they also determine whether distinctions between formal and informal governance roles are actually recognized by constituents, a decision that fundamentally impacts their credibility and efficacy.

The position and legitimacy of customary authorities were heavily defined by personal popularity, proclivities, and performance, leaving their influence inconsistent and village dependent. Specific figures drew criticism for alleged grift, patronage and nepotism, with one participant accusing elders of hoarding "government goodies" so they could be dispensed to, and benefit, family members rather than those "most in need". Others were deemed "unstable" or susceptible to bribes. In contrast, a Mombasa-based participant acknowledged elders' importance as a source of advice and authority, and another affirmed "people are more willing to share information with *mzee wa mtaa* [a local elder] instead of taking the information to the chief or police". Examples also emerged of youth leaders deliberately seeking out partnerships to help share and endorse their messages through *barazas* and public forums.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, elders interviewed for this project emphasized their centrality in community networks, receiving feedback and reports from their constituents and casting themselves as "first responders", with one underlining his close links to the Deputy County Commissioner (DCC) and senior police commanders. This self-ascribed importance aligns with findings from Search for Common Ground's previous SNA work in Kenya, where local leaders cast themselves as key influencers for those 'at-risk' of radicalization and recruitment, accounts later challenged in validation meetings.[134] While these claims should be examined further (as it is not clear how far they apply to 'at-risk' populations specifically), they are not necessarily specious. In some cases, the role of village authorities has translated into eclectic,

highly localized modes of governance and social interaction. For instance, in Nyeri, the 'Kiama Kia Ma' - a traditional social structure associated with the area's main ethnic group, the Kikuyu - was hailed as a way to preserve and institutionalize ethno-centric forms of mentorship, where a 'Council of Elders' brought together boys from the age of circumcision and provided them with guidance. The county's CVE action plan referenced this initiative as a potential resource for engagement and relationship building, suggesting that similar configurations – albeit framed by a culturally appropriate lens– could be considered in other areas.

Regardless of these contextual peculiarities, several cross-cutting trends should also be noted. There appeared to be an increasing (but not universal) skepticism about the clout of traditional institutions and stakeholders in county politics, with some describing elders as a marginal force unable to exercise genuine influence in discussions with government officials. Most importantly, inter-generational cleavages were widespread, with youth "[not living on] good terms with the leaders": if this did not manifest in direct tension then it lapsed into disinterest and a general lack of interaction, displaying a likely limit to the authority of village leaders.

Additionally, while they were well-versed in arbitrating local disputes and routine grievances, elders did not often receive the necessary training to handle sensitive information associated with VE or gang crime and had no real means of securing witness protection. This severely constrained the reach of communal intelligence networks and customary mechanisms as people became reluctant to report anything in case they faced retaliation for "snitching". Complicity with the state was generally viewed with suspicion: in Likoni, local elders were labelled "traitors" for passing information and concerns on to law enforcement. Elsewhere, leaders shared the same fears as their constituents, believing they would be killed, as one warned: "[we] are at a crossroad. Most of the people that are targeted are elders because they're seen as informers of the government". These concerns reflected a broader pattern evident in Kenyan communities, where a lack of civic trust has accelerated social fragmentation. In Nairobi, for example, participants accused young people of being paid informers for the police – dynamics mimicked by al Shabaab, who use local spies to threaten those engaged in CVE activities.

Finally, there are questions regarding gender-sensitivity: the role of elder is not exclusively male – several leaders in Nyeri were women – but these customs clearly derive from a patriarchal system, conditioned and shaped by specific ethno-cultural dynamics. Given the clear segregation between female- and male-focused information flows, as indicated in the SNA data, this raises the risk of reductive coverage, with elders unable to access or participate in various social networks that regulate the circulation and consumption of messages.

In terms of community policing, there were indications Nyumba Kumi ambassadors seemed to enjoy access and credibility across (certain) grassroot circles despite being managed by government appointees (chiefs), in part because they were mobilized from, and rooted in, local neighborhoods, and therefore capable of leveraging relationships and contextual knowledge. As a CEF member in Mombasa explained: "the Nyumba Kumi, they will get the first-hand information, these are the people you cannot avoid if you really work with the community", conclusions confirmed by an activist who claimed: "the Nyumba Kumi initiative has become

more powerful than the office of the chiefs". Research participants repeatedly framed them as a palatable alternative for citizens looking to report concerns without directly contacting the security services.

However, the efficacy and relevance of such ambassadors were almost entirely context dependent and self-reinforcing: where they had the necessary capacity and were already overtly contributing to communal security, they received praise, where resources were limited or their role remained unexplained, they were criticized. In Nyeri, for instance, the scheme either collapsed due to inadequate manpower, became side-lined "because their bosses were already corrupted", or worked in, and were confined to, villages rather than towns. Local participants also complained that confidential information relayed to the police was frequently leaked, undermining public confidence and disrupting intelligence gathering. Mombasa-based stakeholders, especially in Likoni, experienced harassment (like elders) for their government collaboration and were branded 'spies' or faced the risk of assassination if they passed information to their superiors. Others saw the scheme as redundant or unappealing given that the work was voluntary. There were also problems associated with poor training, leadership, and a lack of communication, exacerbating public misperceptions over the purpose of Nyumba Kumi and causing confusion amongst members themselves who reportedly "didn't know their roles". Across various parts of Kwale these shortcomings were actively exploited, with 'community policemen' allegedly replicating the predatory practices of their formal counterparts and engaging in coercion, extortion, and intimidation.

Finally, peace committees were referenced by a number of participants – particularly in Nairobi – as vehicles for transmitting and receiving information, but their reach was regularly constrained by funding problems. Grafted on to a pre-existing set of responsibilities, often without the necessary direction and capacity building, their mandate in relation to CVE was sometimes unclear. This could be partially attributed to a widespread duplication of local infrastructure and coordination mechanisms such as peace forums; peace and commission committees and their sub-county derivatives; Nyumba Kumi; and the "old community policing framework [in Nairobi], which has been there for many years and is still operational". Although supposedly complementary, these different outfits and initiatives often ended up "encroaching" on one another, becoming increasingly convoluted or superfluous: "even some District Commissioners (DCs) ask what our [role is], they don't know". Additionally, members displayed a distrust of state agencies and the police, exposing a fault-line given peace committees function under the authority of a County Peace Forum chaired by the County Commissioner. Instead, several stakeholders preferred to out-source responsibility to CSOs where possible.

In summary, informal authorities and customary mechanisms are theoretically well placed to supplement the government's regulation and enforcement of 'moral norms' but their efficacy was, at best, mixed. Compared to the idiosyncrasies of elder influence, which was heavily dependent on individual ability, Nyumba Kumi and peace committees were frequently held hostage to structural problems and exogenous variables outside their control, where ineffectiveness could be traced back to poor government communication, financial support, and organizational capacity. When there was public buy in to community policing – facilitated in part by social

outreach, transparency, resourcing, and cumulative local dividends – the scheme appeared able to tap into surrounding social networks and collect grassroots intelligence, although based on experiences in Nyeri it is unclear whether the success found in villages could be replicated in larger urban centers. Where these ingredients were lacking, Nyumba Kumi (and to a lesser extent peace committees) quickly became marginalized, ignored, or distrusted.

This is demonstrative of a wider trend: delineations between formal and informal governance structures are often subjective and circumstantial. Although the role of elders derives from organic, communally rooted traditions, and both Nyumba Kumi and peace committees are ultimately expressions of local empowerment, communities only distinguished these stakeholders from the state when there was a clear benefit. If their performance was considered inadequate or purpose not fully explained, their close proximity to officials meant communal authorities were easily painted as surrogates for, or extensions of, the police, rather than autonomous mediators between state and society – a conflation reproducing the same hostility as that directed towards the government.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society organizations were generally seen by research participants as central to CVE outreach and public engagement, generating messages, sharing guidance, and receiving reports from community members. Most informants opted to pass information directly to CSOs and/or share their suspicions before approaching state officials, Nyumba Kumi, or (as a last resort) the police. This potentially contradicts findings from previous social network analysis in Kenya, which framed civil society actors as exercising little influence over local communities. However, given the heterogeneity of CSOs in terms of their disposition, capacity, partnerships and networks, operational scope, and experience, this study identified discrepancies between organizations that conditioned the levels of trust and legitimacy they enjoyed, and the impact they were able to deliver. It also became clear that a large proportion of CSO activities was dedicated to awareness-raising, and there was considerable belief in the value of counter-narratives. Although a practical necessity – as previously mentioned, the Kenyan government is not well placed to directly engage in CVE messaging – the results are questionable and, in certain cases, reflect a propensity to lean on reductive or problematic assumptions. Maintaining credibility and increasing the influence of their outreach and communications, ultimately depends on civil society delivering clear, discernable benefits to communities, but local organizations do not necessarily have the capability or resources to adequately resolve deep-rooted grievances or structural problems, especially in isolation. This may leave CSO counter-messaging efforts looking increasingly superficial or incongruent with the day-to-day problems of recipient audiences, potentially sapping their legitimacy over the time and undermining the resonance, relevance, and 'marketability' of their 'brand'.

In stark contrast to the government, CSOs tended to enjoy greater access, trust, and credibility across target communities, in part because many drew on the authenticity, familiarity and public buy-in that comes with being embedded at street-level: "they are locals that people know". These organizations also benefited from their comparative transparency, inclusivity, and commitment,

impressing residents with their impartiality and follow-up (where possible) to ensure projects were completed. Speaking in a FGD of young leaders in Kisauni, one participant noted, "NGOs have their own way to get to the people more than the government", and another from a group of 'at risk' youth argued, "[CSOs] have played a very important role in helping young people and communities compared to [the] national government". They were frequently seen as "the ones who target real issues" and "are on the ground", as a focus group in Mombasa summarized:

> "all the community has faith in the CSOs, NGOs…because they really tried hard to counter such narratives and they still continue to empower the community, so you see it is easier for somebody in the community to trust NGO".

> "CSOs are so close to the community, and they feel safe rather than them going to the government; the other thing is CSOs safeguard the information rather than the police".

> "I think the community is more accepting on NGO because they perceive them as one of us".

While this is perhaps most prominent in Mombasa and Nairobi due to their established history of civic engagement, analogous patterns surfaced across Kwale, where CSOs were "trusted compared to [state] structures" and seen as both better understanding community needs and more likely to "tell the truth", incentivizing attendance of civil society-led meetings even as government gatherings were consciously avoided. These dynamics became more nuanced in Nyeri, where local youth leaders maintained significant sway. This would therefore seem to challenge claims in the wider literature that suggest CSOs are (often) confined to the fringes of local social networks. Only two percent of those contacted in a Search for Common Ground (2017) investigation cited these groups as an 'influencer',[135] and Young et al (2018) described the difficulties of accessing 'at-risk' populations who 'normally avoid interacting with CSOs or community leaders', with one participant noting, "CSOs come and go, but recruiters are always present".[136] However, it should be noted that the majority of participants in our qualitative research component were not considered 'vulnerable' to radicalization or recruitment, meaning the disparities in perceived CSO influence are not necessarily contradictory: they may simply reflect discrete dynamics and trends that co-exist across different segments of Kenyan society. Of the 'at-risk' individuals included in our sample, most emphasized the role of peers and online networks as their main sources of information, with fewer referencing civil society specifically.

Beneath the broad patterns framing CSOs as trusted interlocutors in local information systems, it was also clear that civil society displayed varying degrees of legitimacy, tempering the resonance and impact of their interventions. In Kwale, for instance, multiple organizations were criticized for cosmetic services that only "beat around the bush" without substantively addressing local grievances – a reluctance potentially attributable to the fear of al Shabaab, or government retaliation in cases of extrajudicial killings and state abuses. CSOs' predominantly urban-centric coverage likewise received push-back, with participants in rural villages complaining of neglect by CVE outfits that only worked "along the road-side" and failed to go where the problems were. Colloquially branded "Highway NGOs", these were usually translocal organizations with weak(er) grassroot networks – a profile resembling the 'elite CSOs' that so often dominate

Kenya's CVE market.[137] Across Kwale, residents distrusted several members of their CEF network on this basis, claiming they were coastal entities from Mombasa rather than 'local' operations, tensions that underline how 'domestic agency' is not always synonymous with authenticity or community ownership. Others were blamed for chronic factionalism, with competition over funds impeding opportunities for collaboration. Similar disputes emerged in Nyeri, where a CSO was described as allegedly profiteering from its involvement in the County's Action Plan and Engagement Forum.

Additionally, a subset of CSOs were dismissed as profligate or suspicious due to their (perceived and/or real) financial, discursive, or political affiliations with the state, as a participant in Mombasa summarized: "there are…[those] that eat with the government, which we don't trust". This remains a fundamental challenge across the CVE space. NCTC needs to be aware of ongoing programs to help coordinate, deconflict and safeguard, a role that to date has not been especially intrusive or prescriptive. However, any cooperation can quickly become misconstrued as co-optation, generating a paradox for CEF members and CAP stakeholders, among others. Delegating responsibility and (partial) ownership to local organizations can strengthen policy frameworks and CVE programming, but any partnership with government risks sapping the credibility of CSOs in the eyes of those vulnerable populations they are ultimately trying to engage. This therefore requires a practical balancing act between satisfying the need for state oversight while limiting government visibility in CVE activities.

On a practical level, resource constraints alongside contextual and operational problems also hampered both the efficacy and, by extension, influence of CSOs. Numerous groups were cash-strapped (an issue accentuated by COVID-19), forcing them to reduce the scale and scope of projects or abandon implementation altogether. As trust in civil society generally "peaked" during interventions, the suspension or collapse of programs carried significant implications: frustrating local expectations, damaging public confidence in CSOs, and diminishing the resonance of their messaging. Elsewhere, practitioners were forced to work from low baselines, expending time and capital explaining the purpose of CSOs to communities rather than delivering activities, and their technical knowledge, skills and experience differed considerably, as indicated by the mixed performance of CEFs. This was most acute in Nyeri, where local civic organizations displayed little recognition of CVE theory or praxis.

While civil society therefore enjoyed greater trust and access when compared to government institutions, the influence of individual organizations, and their ability to reshape the normative dynamics and social ecology of Kenyan communities, was neither axiomatic nor consistent. Instead, their reliability and effectiveness remained context dependent and actor-specific, requiring a granulated understanding of each stakeholder's capabilities, networks, and performance to gauge their impact and authority. It is also worth highlighting that participants conflated 'CSO' with 'NGO' but the term referenced specific sets of actors: community groups, local CSOs working within their home county, and national organizations operating across county lines. Although criticism of urban-based CVE practitioners coincided with those of international agencies, participants' perspectives were primarily shaped by their experiences with, and awareness of, domestic stakeholders rather than foreign NGOs. While perhaps unsurprising

given donors' emphasis on local partnerships, it is nevertheless notable that CVE practice was interpreted through a distinctly endogenous, 'Kenyan' lens, even though the concept itself was widely considered a Western import.

In terms of activities, CSOs were engaged in a mix of different intervention types with discrete objectives and mechanics, including youth clubs; face-to-face discussions with 'at-risk' individuals; peace ambassadors developing shared interpretations of local problems; sports events; youth outreach and empowerment; seed capital and vocational training; mentorship schemes; theatrical workshops; and psychosocial support. However, there was a particular emphasis on the value and utility of counter-messaging (although this did not always translate into widespread programmatic coverage) and a discernible preoccupation with 'awareness raising'. This latter point was enumerated in the services provided by CEF members from Nairobi, Mombasa and Kwale (where a majority of stakeholders self-identified as 'non-profit' – civil society – organizations), who listed 'awareness (raising)' as amongst the most common activities they were involved in. Given the circumstances already described in this report – an absence of direct discursive engagement by government agencies and widespread public confusion over what VE actually means – the prioritization is entirely rational, but it has generated questionable returns and exposed assumptions 'at-risk' undermining the impact of CSO engagement.

'Awareness raising' tends to be a staple feature of CVE programming across different contexts and reflects the centrality of Kenyan CSOs in efforts to improve local understandings of VE and strengthen communities' ability to identify 'signs' of radicalization and recruitment. At first glance, anecdotal accounts and tentative correlations from the qualitative data suggest they have made at least some headway. For instance, participants in sites saturated by CVE interventions (Nairobi, Mombasa and to a lesser extent Kwale) seemed to display a greater knowledge of VE compared to those in Nyeri, which received almost no programmatic coverage and whose participants more readily conflated VE with general insecurities.

Nevertheless, these trends should not be overstated: the level of comprehension remained low across all counties, with multiple participants recycling the same tropes, presumptions, and misconceptions that have been in circulation for the last several years. This is not an indictment of CSO efficacy so much as a reflection of societal realities in Kenya: given the impact of terrorism rarely features in their daily lives, it is not a major concern for most of the population, making it is difficult to develop a clear, self-contained definition and vocabulary for VE without the infusion of more immediate problems shared by recipient audiences. In response, certain civic organizations sought to contextualize their approaches and align their work with local sensitivities and interests where possible: avoiding CVE packaging, piggybacking off concurrent development and peacebuilding projects, or, in one case, framing the consolidation of early warning systems as parental support to prevent children's 'bad behavior'. This adaptability and commitment are likely contributing to positive outcomes in places like Mombasa, where recruitment rates have gradually declined over the last five years. Nevertheless, the lack of public understanding has proved disruptive, especially when the delivery and sustainability of projects is so contingent on local buy-in, presenting a serious challenge for practitioners. Awareness raising remains a necessary endeavor to both improve community resilience and

enhance the traction of CVE programming, but these efforts have exposed limits to how far CSOs can accelerate the process, especially when accounting for the time, resources, and social capital they have already expended.

The scope and clout of counter-messaging was similarly unclear, despite a widespread belief in its value by participants. Encouraging examples of proactive interventions were referenced in Mombasa, Nairobi and Kwale, including interfaith dialogues to help cascade peace-messages, and capacity building schemes to marshal input from young leaders in the design of short videos, memes, and digital material. Evaluation reports also indicate the scale of broad-based communication initiatives. For example, 54 CSOs received training and support from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, with 29 going on to develop their own discursive campaigns focused on tackling both VE and political conflict, culminating in a combined reach of 4.4 million users – over 10 percent of Kenyans online – during the 2017 presidential election.[138] However, it should be cautioned that output-level metrics do not necessarily demonstrate cognitive or behavioral change, and the composition of recipients appeared ambiguous (aside from age and gender), meaning it could not be presumed that those consuming CVE content were the populations most susceptible to radicalization or recruitment. The apparent breadth of coverage also seemed incongruous with findings captured in other studies. None of the focus or validation groups convened by PeaceTech Lab in Mombasa identified 'any ongoing, sustained peace messaging focused on countering violent extremism in their communities',[139] perhaps exposing the limited propensity of counter-narratives to penetrate or impact local information networks, despite a high viewership count.

Even big-budget efforts struggle to navigate this terrain. In the mid-term evaluation of USAID's 'Strengthening Community Resilience Against Extremism (SCORE), the efficacy of radio programming was contentious given stakeholders were not sure whether the 'specific target audience was listening (e.g., whether 'at-risk' youth listen to radio) and if they were, what impact the message was having on them'.[140] Social media activities produced a 'similar measurement challenge'.[141] Further KII and FGD feedback flagged youth clinics and peace clubs as effective conduits for spreading P/CVE content and raising public awareness, but highlighted the need for a 'mapping exercise' to better contextualize and sensitize messages to the cultural and social disposition of recipient populations.[142] Given the role of media and community outreach across P/CVE interventions, these shortcomings would suggest that an accurate appraisal of local configurations and social networks is paramount for understanding how information is broadcast and relayed across audiences (if at all); where relevant entry-points can be accessed; and who has the authority and social capital to ensure messages are persuasive. It should also be noted such knowledge is likely provisional as it derives from a complex, non-linear, and highly dynamic social system conditioned by numerous variables that fluctuate over time.

Such constraints may also stem from a suite of contested assumptions often baked into CVE communication activities. For example, exposure to messages is not always synonymous with persuasion. As political communications expert Archetti explains, information can often be 'read through the lens of an individual's interpretation of the world', a perspective filtered and reshaped by personal experience, context and socio-cultural norms.[143] Consequently,

the meaning and resonance of narratives become defined and re-conveyed through the social infrastructure surrounding each recipient, intersecting with an 'amorphous and tangled fabric' of relationships, interests, and understandings.[144] This partially explains why groups like Islamic State and al Shabaab have found traction as they routinely exploit affective bonds and friendships to amplify their propaganda.[145] As a result, CVE interventions cannot just rely on circulating discursive outputs; instead they must supplement outreach with networking, trust building and wider forms of social engagement, offering a package of benefits to compete with those marketed by VE recruiters.[146] By doing so, practitioners can substantiate the viability and veracity of their brand, building up credibility and, over time, buy-in.[147] Multiple Kenyan stakeholders nevertheless shared the belief that broadcasting counter-messages was a sufficient response in itself. A Kwale-based CBO representative, for instance, advocated publishing a "stop itikadi kali" slogan in whatever media was available: vegetable sellers' umbrellas, caps, and t-shirts; plays and theatre productions, poetry competitions; and school textbooks. A participant in Nyeri likewise insisted that if those recruited by a local, Shabaab-affiliated sheikh had been told extremist rhetoric was 'wrong' they would have not been radicalized, and others emphasized the need for new methods to target content at younger audiences. By focusing exclusively on the message rather than the dynamics that condition transmission and influence, well-meaning efforts may end up reductive and ineffective, neglecting the wider patterns of 'socialization, meaning-seeking, and identity formation' that precipitate and sustain behavioral and ideational shifts.[148]

Additionally, without confronting the variables that foster appetite for, and the appeal of, extremist material in the first place,[149] there is a risk that communications-based campaigns could become superficial, or even counter-productive, particularly if they create 'say-do' gaps[150] that undermine public confidence. Terrorist narratives occasionally find success precisely because they 'tap into and seemingly confirm existing beliefs or anxieties' in audiences predisposed to sympathize with their premise, reinforcing 'already made-up minds'.[151] In only countering the content of VE propaganda, CVE messages may inadvertently tackle the symptoms rather than root causes of individual vulnerability. The importance of holistic interventions to resolve the incentives, structural motivators, and enabling factors actually driving radicalization and recruitment therefore places a significant strain on CSOs already beset by short program cycles and a paucity of funding. While they are relatively effective conduits for disseminating information, many local organizations do not have capacity to deliver the follow-up programming needed to generate tangible dividends and 'real change' for host communities. This is concerning given the transactional relationship described in various contexts such as Kwale, where the comparative popularity and trust enjoyed by civil society was (partly) based on their tendency to compensate residents for participation in research and programming. These expectations derive from years of CSO projects producing few observable results, leaving people unwilling to wait for long-term, incremental improvements, and demanding immediate (financial) return.[152] It is therefore incumbent on practitioners to clearly explain the benefits (financial or otherwise) from the outset.

The traction of counter-messages was also usually a cumulative process, with CVE work feeding into, and benefiting from, a wider information ecosystem featuring rumors, independent peer-

to-peer networking, and stories shared by returnees that expose al Shabaab's false promises and the hardships of life in the bush. The need for sustained engagement and layering different approaches to build resilience has been well documented, as have the challenges of leveraging 'natural world content'.[153] Formal CVE communications generally remain susceptible to supply-side bottlenecks when trying to produce 'high quality, original' material,[154] and struggle to match the sheer volume of extremist material in circulation, as Neumann summarizes: 'even if we found the perfect message, the perfect messenger, even if we managed to produce the perfect video, it would still be a drop in the ocean'.[155] Efforts are subsequently being made to leverage the organic output of 'informal creators' – authentic micro-level work generated by 'citizens with no connection to government security policy or any wider community organization' – but progress is hampered by concerns around co-optation, securitization, reputational risk, and practical difficulties.[156]

In the case of Kenya, this can be both a deliberate and incidental outcome depending on the context and atmospherics. Despite several participants recognizing the promise of (certain) 'formers'[157] and returnees working as authentic interlocutors and local messengers to 'deglamorize' the realities of al Shabaab, complications over amnesty and defection procedures have made it difficult for CSOs to sustain any sort of partnership when producing counter-narratives and/or engaging in public outreach. Across Nairobi, youth explained that they were not afraid of returnees so much as the potential police reaction if they were caught liaising with such actors.[158] These dynamics not only raise opportunity costs but potentially diminish the efficiency of CVE messaging, as practitioners remain dependent on the volatile currents of an autonomous information system, which may or may not align with the arguments they are trying to make.

Finally, it is worth noting CSOs' selection of appropriate settings to broadcast CVE content appeared rather ad hoc, based on wherever youth converged: workplaces, primary schools, high schools, madrasas, and universities. Cyber-cafes, sportsgrounds, and *maskanis* were also prioritized on the assumption "if we also target the same areas [as VE recruiters] it becomes easy…to counter the ideology that is being implanted in their minds". The pattern was opportunistic, and the underlying logic one of expediency: "if we can just get an hour to talk to them maybe it might also impact them positively". Interestingly, this did not necessarily extend to online domains. Although the convenience and impact of social media was widely acknowledged by participants, there were surprisingly few concrete cases of virtual projects. One-to-one conversations with religious leaders were conducted via digital platforms to educate and inform; footage of sermons delivered in mosques were re-posted; vague references were made to online counter-narratives; and youth were trained to not only "pull down [report] violent extremist messages" circulating on Facebook and YouTube but generate their own content, short videos, and memes. However, a tranche of the examples cited by participants did not focus on CVE so much as fixing generic social problems, for instance developing virtual communities and local networks to address insecurity and crime in Mombasa; broadcasting interviews with former addicts or gang members; and developing a viral marketing campaign to improve Majengo's public image. While these dynamics may overlap with structural issues that broadly frame VE in Kenya, they do not always conform to CVE-specific objectives, nor

are they necessarily commensurate with the scale of online terrorist recruitment described by participants.[159]

To conclude, many CSOs are embedded in local social circuitries and can often function as important information brokers, but their conduct within those systems matters, determining their credibility, influence, and impact. Trust is cumulative and contingent on action, peaking with the implementation of interventions that are seen to benefit participants and the wider community. Conversely, it can be easily squandered, especially if civic groups are perceived as state affiliates, profit-oriented or opportunistic, and failure to deliver may quickly frustrate expectations or undermine the resonance of CVE outreach. Given the resource-shortages and operational constraints facing Kenyan civil society, the need to substantively tackle structural problems, deep-rooted grievances, and navigate the complex social dynamics associated with building and marketing an attractive 'brand' – as described by Freear (2019) – poses serious challenges. Nor should their normative sway be over-emphasized: stakeholders are usually a preferred outlet for reporting concerns related to VE but awareness raising has only achieved limited success. It was also unclear how far such organizations were able to consistently reach those individuals accessing extremist content. Practitioners' (often necessarily) ambiguous definitions of violent extremism, and community tendencies to homogenize the 'youth' (as described in previous sections), can make it difficult to target CVE interventions effectively. Likewise, the insistence by several 'at-risk' participants that they have been, and remain, marginalized, suggests a lack of benefit from CVE activities, either because they were not included in programmes or the schemes themselves did not satisfactorily address their grievances. While CSOs are therefore integral to both CVE and wider networking efforts, they cannot necessarily satisfy this role in isolation.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Community participants and CEF members repeatedly flagged theological authorities, madrasa teachers and religious organizations as important fixtures in the dissemination of CVE content and the reporting of VE concerns. Clerics, faith-based groups, and spiritual institutions generally appeared well-suited to rebutting appropriations of scripture by extremists, and (in some cases) enforcing moral norms such as tolerance and pacifism to help stabilize social cohesion. However, their social capital, relevance, and legitimacy differed significantly depending on contextual dynamics, the internal politics of congregational networks, and the proclivities, inclinations, and orientation of target audiences. There was also an evident reluctance by some stakeholders, particularly in Kwale, to explicitly engage in counter-messaging due to adverse security conditions and the threat of retaliatory violence by al Shabaab. These gaps in coverage extended across online spaces, where the reticence or inability of clerical authorities to engage on social media created opportunities for alternative, sometimes militant voices to cultivate a following.

Mosques and madrasas were heavily emphasized as sites for preventing and countering VE, especially as recruitment was previously centered around the pulpit, with al Shabaab sympathizers seizing control of mosque committees in districts like Eastleigh and broadcasting their polemic through "megaphones...no matter how radical the message was". However, the installation of

greater managerial oversight and regulatory mechanisms by local residents helped disrupt these dynamics, offering a space for ulema[160] to share "full interpretations of the verses from the Qur'an". Qualitative research participants also cited a diverse array of theological interventions, from regular public panels to the interrogation of extremist narratives during Friday sermons in Mombasa and Nairobi. This aligns with findings from previous research, where participants attributed the dilution of political violence across Mombasa City following elections in 2017 to the promotion of tolerance and social bonding by religious leaders who routinely hosted interfaith dialogues.[161]

While sometimes working through formal programs such as SCORE or BRAVE – with participants describing a "mutual understanding" between religious leaders and civil society - sheikhs often also seemed to engage on their own initiative: promoting peace and clarifying misappropriated or distorted quotes drawn from scripture.[162] Parallel trends surfaced in Kwale, where madrasa teachers became recognized for their role as moderators and redistributors of messages. Although participants warned any mentorship and educational benefits could not compensate for 'poor parenting', especially in a child's formative years, a FGD with teachers acknowledged madrasa schools had started to play a role in tackling recruitment and clerics felt more able to speak openly than they had previously. Consequently, political leaders were urged to see madrasas as positive spaces for molding behavior rather than presumed fronts for recruitment, with participants stressing the need to empower, collaborate and sufficiently pay staff members.

Additionally, several Nairobi-based participants emphasized how 'the mosque', and a cluster of unofficial support groups, can work holistically given they are enmeshed in the social fabric and economic systems of surrounding neighborhoods, supplying welfare services, financial aid, and food. By operating through satellite organizations and community outfits, religious figures in Eastleigh were therefore able to exert indirect influence alongside their preaching and individual outreach: transmitting and circulating CVE-related messaging while also working on a practical level to alleviate socioeconomic grievances and structural problems.

TABLE 2: IS P/CVE YOUR PRIMARY SERVICE OR PROGRAM? %P/CVE IS PRIMARY SERVICE BY COUNTY AND ORG TYPE

	KWALE	MOMBASA	NAIROBI	NYERI
Government	42%	100%	88%	43%
Non-profit	85%	73%	60%	89%
For-profit	0%	0%	0%	0%
Faith-based	100%	100%	100%	100%
Other	100%	0%	100%	0%

Perhaps as a result of these dynamics, residents in Nairobi expressed a preference for reporting suspicions to faith-based organizations and imams rather than state authorities, patterns reflected across both the SNA and relational survey. In the former, communication flows tended to be

defined along a religious axis, particularly in cities, with participants subscribing to faith-based identities and developing social groups on the back of sectarian networks. In the latter, FBOs received a consistently high indegree measure across each county (especially when accounting for their smaller number), meaning other members of their respective CEF networks considered them central hubs for generating and sharing information. Importantly, these stakeholders also saw themselves as CVE providers, with the highest ratio of participants describing their services as prevention focused.

However, like the influence of civil society groups, the authority and access of religious figures and organizations should be caveated given that most participants in the qualitative data collection process were not deemed 'at-risk'. Instead, previous SNA studies have revealed a potential disconnect between community members and faith actors due in part to (imagined) distance and hierarchy. The Kenyan public often viewed leaders as far removed from the daily struggles of 'ordinary' people, with individuals turning to more immediate sources of support from friends/peers out of convenience. Likewise, research suggests 'the influence of [religious] leaders might be overestimated within populations at high risk for mobilization, further underlining their marginalization from traditional channels of influence and guidance'.[163] Additionally, civil society participants – particularly in Mombasa – observed that clerics were not always involved in CVE programming from the outset. Rather, their advice was only sought when things went wrong. Effective engagement was also contingent on prevailing security conditions. For example, every participant in a Kwale-based FGD amongst imams cautioned that proactive, explicitly CVE-oriented approaches remained 'risky': "you need to be careful, very careful". Analogous concerns were raised by religious figures in Mombasa, who described the danger posed by al Shabaab and the ongoing trust deficit with Kenyan security forces. This can dampen enthusiasm to both engage in counter-messaging, such as debating the meaning of Jihad, and relaying information shared by communities.

In Nyeri, very little CVE work and almost no concerted CVE messaging (content that at least directly challenges named extremist groups) was observed. Although, the information space was considerably less tense than in a county like Kwale, actors described a fraught environment, with imams fearing retribution and preferring to avoid the subject altogether. However, participants emphasized the value of an informal network of clerics, clerks, and teachers in helping monitor local religious discourse and pedagogy. As one explained, "our madrasa teachers in Nyeri are regulated and they are known", and another confirmed:

> "...you find that we as imams have one network. We have a group of central imams and clerks and so if someone else comes in and starts to preach contrary to what we are preaching, we are able to know. It becomes very easy to detect that person and very difficult for such a person to join because we normally visit each other and have inter-visits."

It is therefore essential to contextualize perceptions and recognize that assumptions over credibility and relevance are not universal, but rather conditioned by personal experience and social geography. For instance, audiences in Kwale appeared particularly discerning in their consumption of information: public suspicion of the state tended to contaminate anyone with a

real or perceived affiliation to government, undermining the resonance and credibility of their message even in a 'mosque setting'. Similarly, while inter-generational divisions have been well-documented in the wider literature,[164] a degree of social polarity was also mapped during a discussion of online faith-based activism. Despite various capacity building efforts to improve their skills and digital literacy, older religious leaders often remained reluctant or openly resistant to change, as a CSO activist in Mombasa conceded: "some of the moderate preachers [in Mombasa], they don't believe in social media...They have phones that don't have internet." Participants warned of a subsequent vacuum in theological expertise, leaving online traffic to be largely shaped by extremist recruiters or 'Sheikh Google', a "shallow" and inadequate source that often "misleads people". In Nairobi, this disconnect assumed an ideological tinge as clerics and community groups (labelled 'Wahhabis' by other participants) sought to differentiate themselves from what they saw as the obsolete politics and practice of local elders, instead stressing their relevance as younger influencers: "things have changed; we have been able even to attract more youth...they understand me and I also understand them, we are in the same generation".

Clearly, religious leaders and faith-based organizations and institutions have a significant role in shaping the moral norms and social conventions of Kenyan communities, although the extent and depth of their influence fluctuated – determined in part by endogenous ideological, political, and social cleavages, and prevailing security conditions. To this end, strategic planning and synergy is often waylaid by sectarian and generational competition in counties like Nairobi, demonstrating the degree of intra-faith conflict that needs to be navigated (see section below). Given the insularity of faith-based social networks, especially in urban centers, these dynamics may also constrain the access and influence of various religious leaders over specific sub-groups, leaving their legitimacy and social capital context-dependent and conditional. Nevertheless, such stakeholders are perhaps best place to counter al Shabaab's discursive claims and appropriation of scripture, speaking with an authority that is otherwise hard to replicate. Additionally, the clout of neighborhood mosques across local socioeconomic and commercial infrastructure affords opportunities to engage practically and materially, helping to mitigate structural problems such as poverty and a lack of viable livelihoods.

THE EMERGENCE OF EXTREMISM-ENABLING MORAL ECOLOGIES

WHILST UNEVENLY DISTRIBUTED across these counties and within certain segments of society, extremist enabling moral ecologies and systems have emerged in each of the communities studied. This section discusses an array of factors assessed to reinforce these moral ecologies, in particular focusing on 'settings' and 'social ecologies.'

EXTREMISM-ENABLING 'SETTINGS'

Settings can be either physical or virtual. In this section, we discuss various general factors contributing to the establishment of extremist enabling settings in the study locations but focus in particular on the meeting places where individuals share extremist content. Bouhana argues that socializing 'affordances' help establish a moral system that serves to create spaces in which VE can flourish. She notes that settings conducive to extremism may promote certain 'cognitive states' such as fear, alienation and 'feelings of insignificance' which serve to undermine individual support for existing rule systems.[165] Also important in creating these settings are opportunities to discuss alternative moral systems and transcendental narratives, which emphasize simple black-and-white choices and prescribe action-oriented solutions.[166] Next, Bouhana emphasizes the significance of social relationships (or attachment) with those 'who already hold extremism-enabling moral beliefs'.[167] Finally, she suggests that 'settings that support extremist socialisation' usually lack effective 'law-relevant social control', and legal norms are not enforced.[168]

The research team identified clear examples of Bouhana's 'cognitive affordances.' Fear was all pervasive in Kwale, with communities, including religious leaders and youth, finding themselves stuck between a government they did not fully trust and a violent militant organization they were scared to upset.[169] There was a perception that the government's reach was all powerful, that the authorities could track social media conversations and would target anyone seen to support al Shabaab.[170] This fear generally resulted in silence: many participants found it safer to talk about social challenges or unemployment rather than to directly address violent extremism. The tension between communities and police was so extreme that in some cases the qualitative researcher chose to avoid the subject altogether, knowing that it would make the participants uncomfortable.

In Kwale, it was clear that fear had undermined trust and social cohesion. Participants explained to the researcher that they did not know who within the group, even amongst their friends, might pass on what they had said and as a result they were reluctant to associate themselves with any strong stance. Informers were said to hand out warnings to those who had displeased local

VE actors. Similarly, in Nairobi, religious leaders claimed to have previously been threatened by extremist actors for publicly criticizing al Shabaab. Aware that government informers may be used to monitor what they said, the research indicated that it was safest to maintain a neutral position in public. Pervasive fear and a systemic lack of trust leads to a loss of confidence in local rule systems (the law, traditional practices etc.). Perceived marginalization at the hands of the state and the actions of a violent police force have further weakened the moral legitimacy of state social control. Ultimately, individuals may seek out alternative rule systems.

The growth of the internet has also served to shape social settings, weakening longstanding social control mechanisms. The impact of the internet goes well beyond its purported use as a means of circulating extremist information. State law enforcement agencies are unable to control certain online spaces. Despite communities' frequent insistence that the government was able to monitor individuals' activity online, many virtual spaces 'are beyond the reach of state enforcement'.[171] The internet provides ungoverned spaces which can normalize 'extremism-supportive discourse'.[172] Social media is perceived to have divided society by undermining 'informal social control on the part of private citizens'.[173] As already discussed at length, increasing internet usage is perceived to be breaking down traditional moral norms fomented by family and society. Even if people are not being radicalized or recruited online, participants were concerned that social media has undermined traditional relationships. There is a perception that smartphone use has led to a decrease in real world social interaction and debate.[174] As people find new communities online, they become less tolerant of those who disagree with them.

By providing greater access to information about the challenges facing communities in other parts of the world, the internet has changed how people communicate, share ideas, and form their understandings of complex issues. On the one hand, the internet provides remote communities with access to alternative viewpoints, arguably encouraging empathy. On the other, social media algorithms mean that very often users' opinions are only reinforced. Through these echo chambers, individuals are able to connect more easily with like-minded people than they might ordinarily be able to. This can serve to validate an individual's views and entrench certain identities, theoretically creating social tensions with other identity groups at home. For example, the internet has provided some Kenyan Muslims with greater access to the global *ummah*[175], exposing them to the alleged injustices felt by Muslims in other parts of the world. This might reinforce Muslim identity but may undermine feelings of 'Kenyanness'.

The rapid 'Westernization' of youth was seen by older participants as cause for great concern in Nyeri. The research team identified similar sentiments in Kwale where the presence of large numbers of European and American tourists was also thought to play a part. It was suggested that youth were "abandoning their culture". Ultimately, the suggestion was that moral norms are shifting rapidly in all these communities as a result of the democratization of the information space and exposure to (new) influences online.

The research team found that young people across all four counties often congregate and share information at '*mogokaa* dens.' These spaces provide opportunities to share extremist

messages. Transcendental narratives might be discussed, emphasizing simple black-and-white choices, and suggesting prescriptive solutions.[176] In a social setting characterized by uncertainty and weak moral rule systems, the simplicity and 'action-oriented' messages may be attractive. Alcohol abuse in Nyeri and the apparently ubiquitous use of mild narcotics such as *mogokaa* and *bhang*[177] everywhere else are also relevant in that they encourage 'repeated exposure' to these settings.[178] Addictive substances such as *mogokaa* mean that individuals return to the 'base' or *maskani* on a regular basis, exposing themselves to settings which enable extremism.

Bouhana stresses that repeated exposure (both online and at *maskanis*) to alternative moral systems normalizes actions which may previously have been taboo. This normalization of alternative value systems (or at least a complete rejection of the system provided by the state) is certainly evident in parts of Kwale but was also observed to a degree in the other three counties.

Each of these factors (or affordances) – fear, the internet, action-oriented messaging, addictive substances, and spaces for discussion – reinforce the others in establishing extremism-enabling social settings. As traditional value systems – centered on family or community elders – are weakened, individuals may attach themselves to those who already hold extremist beliefs. They may well meet such actors at the *maskani* or via online platforms. These settings exist within broader systems which may promote the normalization of violence, as meted out by the police. They also interact with social ecological factors, as detailed below. What is critical here is that as settings become more conducive to VE, suggestions to become involved (through recruitment) are often perceived as much more logical, even rational, and morally normative.

EXTREMISM-ENABLING SOCIAL ECOLOGIES

Community-level features such as intergenerational or sectarian divisions can serve to 'support or suppress' the creation of an extremist enabling environment,[179] as they can impact social cohesion, i.e., relationship bonds and trust between community members.[180] The more divided a society is, the more opportunity there might be for an alternative 'system of moral rule-guidance' to flourish.[181] In the counties that the team studied, the community level features that most impact social cohesion, and thus information sharing and interpretation are: ethnicity and migration, intergenerational tensions and sectarian divisions. These various tensions and a search for alternative role models can lead individuals to attach themselves to recruiters, or those already holding extremism-enabling moral beliefs and claiming to provide answers to life's toughest questions.

Following Independence in 1963, Kenya's new government in Nairobi faced the gargantuan task of fostering a national identity which brought together 42 different ethno-linguistic groups. Both Kiswahili and English were made national languages but, for many people, neither of these are 'mother-tongues'. The people on Kenya's coast have long distinguished themselves from those living inland, basing their identity on complex interrelationships between race, religion, and ethnicity.[182] Despite the government's official secular position, a Christian elite came to dominate Kenya's 'national political and economic space', subscribing to a strain

of Pentecostalism overtly hostile to Islam.[183] This was often seen to translate into social inequities along a religious axis, with several residents - particularly those in Mombasa and Nyeri – recounting stories of quick ID card application processes for Christians but continuous delays and extraneous bureaucracy for those candidates with "Islamic-sounding" names, and contextualizing their grievances within a longer-running pattern of systemic prejudice. Yet, the frustrations expressed by Muslim participants (or those from ethnic minority groups) in interviews for this research primarily appeared to be 'anti-state' rather than 'anti-Christian', framed in political terms against exclusionary institutions, not Christian communities (although there were, of course, exceptions). This nuance is perhaps indicative of structural rather than social problems: it is not just a lack of familiarity or bonds between faith groups but a need for inclusive, equitable governance.

Writing about the emergence of radical Islamic preachers in Kenya, religious studies scholar Hassan Ndzovu proclaims that the national government's reintroduction of multi-party politics in the early 1990s 'contributed to the emergence of Islam as a political ideology in Kenya'.[184] There was uncertainty at this time over the extent to which Islam should recognize the modern nation-state of Kenya, with some Salafist figures, including Sheikh Abdulaziz Rimo in Kwale, considering such a move to be 'tantamount to disobeying Allah'.[185] Regardless, the government in Nairobi refused to recognize the Islamic Party of Kenya and an opportunity to incorporate political Islam into the Kenyan state was lost. Since that time, Muslim involvement in the country's secular system has been ad hoc, limiting representation for millions of Kenyans and arguably accentuating feelings of continued marginalization at the coast and in the north-east. Social profiling at the hands of the security forces during counter-terrorism operations in the early 2010s brought these sentiments back to the surface.[186]

First, the research team identified the politicization of ethnicity as a source of unease and division in all the communities studied. In Nairobi, the impact of migration was observed in participants' efforts to externalize the problem of violent extremism. Thus, "illegal immigrants" unknown to the community were said to be "an avenue for terror" and were treated with suspicion. Some directly blamed local recruitment issues on the immigrant Somali community, while others – discussing the spread of Wahhabi ideas in local mosques – said it was the Somalis that had made "this religion to be a very hard religion, […] a very radical religion". "Somali tycoons" were also accused of funding recruitment. 'Native' Eastleigh communities, often of Somali ethnicity themselves,[187] claimed that with the influx of Somalis and Oromos into the area, "spiritual nourishment" became a challenge "because the pulpit was for the Oromos or Somalis". The place-based implications were emphasized by those who referred to immigrants in the area as "aliens" taking advantage of government "loopholes." Somali immigrants were treated with suspicion in the other three counties as well, but the divisions were more pronounced in Nairobi, where civilian and government participants alike socially profiled ethnic Somalis using racial stereotypes, distinguishing between "hard" and "soft" hair. A societal fear of the 'other' was seen to result in challenges for the entire Somali community. Somali individuals claim that they struggle to secure Kenyan national identification documents and that they are fined (bribed) more heavily by law enforcement.

On the Kenyan coast, 'upcountry' people are the main scapegoat for societal woes around land and state repression. Using labels such as *Wabara* (Kiswahili) and 'Gerienge' (Mijikenda) to refer to non-locals, communities are seemingly unable – or unwilling – to differentiate between populous 'upcountry' Kenyan ethnic groups such as Kikuyu, Kamba, and Luo. These people are all said to be responsible for the theft of coastal land and criticized for not returning to where they supposedly came from. "The coast is not for other tribes – like the Nilotes." Coastal participants expressed frustration at being stereotyped as lazy and uneducated. Summing up their feelings, a Kisauni participant insisted that "upcountry" people are "not our friends" and a Mombasa CBO member explained that people believe those from "upcountry" have come to "take our jobs". These sentiments are also fueled by politicians during elections. Law enforcement officers were accused of coming "from upcountry" and arriving "with the mindset that Muslims are terrorists". When discussing local extremist messaging, upcountry Kenyans were said to be referred to as *kafir* and women were warned not to marry them. Government initiatives allegedly only benefit non-locals, with complaints about clearance operations at Mombasa port being moved inland, taking jobs away from the area, and opportunities at tourist hotels in Kwale only going to upcountry Kenyans. Locals struggle to get title deeds for their land, while *wabara* are able to move in and 'grab' what they want. Frequently, these grievances and the messages circulating around them were linked to the MRC and the 'Pwani si Kenya' (Kiswahili for 'the coast is not Kenya') motto.

Turning to Nyeri, ethnicity was also an undercurrent in all interviews conducted. Kikuyus with Christian and Kikuyu-identified names were said to be treated better by the authorities. Those with Muslim names, on the other hand, struggled to gain title deeds and identification documents. A local journalist explained that the extensive vetting process that a Kikuyu convert to Islam must go through – solely based on their Islamic name – makes it easy to understand how radicalization takes place. This institutional discrimination is supposedly systemic as evidenced through the apparent neglect of Muslim areas like Majengo and Ruring'u. There has reportedly been relative religious harmony over the last hundred years, as this small Muslim community lived alongside the majority Christian population of Central Kenya. However, state discrimination is said to have been present from the beginning, with Muslims allegedly restricted from permanent ownership of land. Only recently were some of these families provided with title deeds.

A lack of social cohesion and suspicion of the 'other' limit information sharing and fundamentally hampers efforts to establish stronger notions of nationalism within each of these communities. Almost 60 years after independence, these divisions continue to widen. With their legitimacy undermined, government actors struggle to communicate efficiently with citizens of these locations and extremist-enabling social ecologies are entrenched. Social divisions and personal experiences of racism or injustice based on social profiling can make people defensive of 'their own', widening gaps between 'us' and 'them', and creating vulnerabilities to recruitment narratives.

A second category of community divisions identified was intergenerational tensions. These have been explored at length in previous sections. There is clearly a gap in mutual understanding between young people and their parents or local community elders.[188] It was evident that government actors and older community members were disconnected from some of the daily

struggles faced by the country's bulging youth population. Rather than looking for solutions to grievances or providing a support network, many in government and civil society only provided criticism. A lack of intergenerational trust and inconsistent communication has undermined collaboration on CVE interventions – or indeed any development programming – and, in many cases, renders official *barazas* all but worthless for the purposes of CVE as youth rarely turn up. This division between young and old undermines information sharing and weakens the social norms regulating behavior. This breakdown leads people to identify alternative moral systems and attach themselves to alternative role models who hold extremist beliefs. It can also lead to feelings of helplessness and fear.

These same divisions also frame mosque management, with tussles for power reported between the old guard and often more dynamic, but arguably more radical, younger groups. On occasion, especially in Nairobi, these were cast as simple conflicts between Wahhabism or Salafism and pre-established Sufi structures. Older clerics expressed concern, for example, that young groups might try to take over complete control of local mosques. However, all participants were keen to emphasize that any Sufi-Salafist fissure could not be interpreted solely through an inter-generational lens.

That said, a related third category of community tensions found in all counties was that of sectarian divisions. A lack of communication between mosques associated with different Islamic schools of thought means that any CVE work was limited to certain denominations. As mentioned, religious cleavages tended to be intra- rather than interfaith conflicts.[189] In Nyeri, members of the Muslim community frequently named rival leaders, alleging that they may be withholding information or have access to funds from unidentified sources, perhaps from mosques in Nairobi. Similarly, a Mombasa-based participant described conflicts between madrasas pushing literalist and more liberal interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith, and an FGD of teachers also complained of clerics exploiting the pulpit to abuse rivals or pursue personal grudges.

Rifts were more pronounced in Nairobi, where various participants – including older religious figures – warned of 'Wahhabi' currents permeating Eastleigh and Majengo neighborhoods. Although 'not necessarily extremist', the 'radical' disposition of this 'foreign' doctrine was framed as a disruptive influence on Kenya's societal norms and cultural conventions, especially given the prominent role of mosques in the social networks and economic circuitry of neighboring communities and the ability of 'Wahhabi' organizations to mobilize younger audiences. For example, the supply of welfare services and financial aid to constituents was seen as a ploy to capture and consolidate control of local mosque committees in the run up to elections.[190] Additionally, rumors of Saudi sponsorship for sites like Riyadha Mosque in Pumwani remain pervasive, albeit contested. Certain (non-Wahhabi) participants argued any revenue streams were primarily local, fed by charitable contributions from within Nairobi. Nevertheless, the transnational genealogy of 'Wahhabi' ideas, discourse, and links between specific preachers and networks in Saudi Arabia and Sudan were repeatedly questioned, with some participants implying linkages or overlaps with more violent movements and others layering their ideological criticism with ethnocentric, anti-Somali overtones.

These narratives were rejected by Salafis (labelled Wahhabis by other participants) themselves, who not only cast their financial outreach as philanthropic and impartial but seemed to imply they were better placed to perform CVE given their comparative youth, suggesting they could use their religious knowledge in partnership with the "worldly knowledge" of CSOs. Participants also outlined strong regulatory mechanisms to monitor the content of sermons and emphasized their ongoing consultations with municipal authorities and the district commissioner to "earn government trust", measures they believed contributed to a decrease in local al Shabaab recruitment. Instead, one research participant blamed Mombasa's chapter of Hizb ut-Tahrir for mobilizing support online arguing: "their aim is like al Shabaab, but they use a different way; they say we want to protect you, Muslims to stand united so that they get their leadership. But behind all that, they are connected to al Shabaab" (in reality there is no clear evidence that Hizb ut-Tahrir have any relationship with al Shabaab).

While it is difficult to discern the sincerity and motivations of participant feedback, these divisions evidently derive, at least in part, from competition between different factions populating the Islamist scene in Nairobi. Mosque management offers both status and financial reward, introducing material and political benefits that potentially accentuate pre-existing ideological tensions. The securitized language around VE and counter-terrorism should consequently be understood and qualified within this context.

SOURCES OF RESILIENCE

QUESTIONS AROUND 'RESILIENCE' are salient in this context, as its dynamics appear to reflect and shape the social and moral ecologies in which information is curated, interpreted, and circulated.

From the outset, it should be noted this is a heavily contested term in the CVE literature,[191] with competing connotations that range from 'withstanding shocks' to an ability to 'bounce back' or adapt and 'evolve'. Although participants did not explicitly reference strategies to build 'resilience', most of their insights and prescriptions tended to focus on ways to withstand VE, with a significant (often nostalgic) emphasis on traditional practices providing a buffer against malign influences. The research team therefore adopted this notion of 'withstanding' or 'resisting' radicalization and recruitment as a working definition for this report.

Resilience capacities are cumulative, creating positive feedback loops that are not only 'mutually reinforcing'[192] but, using the language of Bouhana, also help to suppress the 'emergence, convergence and maintenance' of social affordances (cognitive, moral, attachment, and social control) that are conducive to radicalization and recruitment.[193] As the latter notes, these affordances characterize the 'settings' or 'places' where people socialize and act, and therefore frame moral norms, rules of conduct, and governing mechanisms, all of which heavily influence how ideas and discourse are understood and internalized i.e. whether polarization, competition and violence are explicitly considered unacceptable or increasingly normalized. Of course, such dynamics are not deterministic in isolation – VE is also conditioned by personal susceptibility and selection – nor are they static: collective and individual 'strains' continually 'shape the experiences of individuals embedded in particular situations and social ecologies'.[194] Nevertheless, social affordances, and the settings they shape, offer a framework for interpreting and responding to communication content and therefore need to be assessed not only in terms of their immediate impact on VE recruitment but also how they define individual and group perceptions of violence, extremism, and P/CVE. This latter component is rarely included as an overt focus area in the design or evaluation of interventions.

USAID has conducted numerous projects to strengthen social cohesion and collective resilience in Kenya: strengthening the peacebuilding and conflict management capacities of domestic actors; empowering marginal voices; facilitating inter-faith dialogues; bolstering community policing; offering seed funding and vocational training; sponsoring peace clubs, *barazas*, and P/CVE-related media broadcasts; encouraging social reconciliation and cross-border communication; and investing in psychological and psychosocial services.[195] Consequently, many of these activities amend the institutional fabric, norms and social relations of host communities, which as a corollary, may distort, transform or reinforce information flows. However, the impact on how content is consumed and interpreted is often overlooked, as is any change to the affordances (and by extension the moral ecologies) developed in target settings. USAID and other donors

regularly monitor populations' perceptions and attitudes to help assess program efficacy,[196] but there is little analysis or guidance on how CVE programs are themselves communicated to both participants and wider audiences.[197] While the EU, among others, has offered specific guidance on how such activities should be conveyed within the context of multi-agency interventions – strategies that integrate a plurality of stakeholders including local representatives – this is nevertheless a prospective gap worth exploring.

In terms of practical focus areas for building resilience, participants generally emphasized four main categories: 'religion' (integrating theological knowledge, intra-faith dialogue and language), role models, education, and socioeconomic opportunity. The research also raised questions over the impact and implication of 'negative resilience', which is tentatively explored in the analysis below.

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE, INTRA-FAITH DIALOGUE AND LANGUAGES

Resilience was often ascribed to theological literacy and education on the basis that greater religious knowledge reduced the possibility of being 'misled' by decontextualized or deleterious interpretations of scripture. Converts and those displaying a poor or incipient understanding of Islam were deemed most 'at-risk', with a mix of stakeholders including clerics, community representatives, and CSOs calling for greater faith-based messaging, outreach and awareness raising. In Mombasa, women were also considered particularly susceptible to radicalization and recruitment due to a lack of opportunities for religious study, leaving some individuals both vulnerable themselves and unable to identify warning signs "amongst their children". By building a robust understanding of religious scriptures, beneficiaries may be able to bolster resistance to malign narratives, improve social cohesion, and act as a 'force multiplier' for CVE. Strengthening local agency and enabling parents, family members and peers to better support one another is a critical component of this process.

These dynamics also applied to language, with participants from all four counties citing the exploitation of Arabic by recruiters to feign legitimacy and theological authority, appropriating Qur'anic quotes and manipulating translations to mislead target audiences. Tellingly, those joining al Shabaab were described as lacking any knowledge of Arabic. As a corollary, research participants noted that an improved understanding of Qur'anic Arabic could, in certain contexts, provide resilience, including by helping young Muslims develop the skillset to explore religious texts for themselves rather than having to rely on others. A CSO practitioner in Kwale suggested that the "Arabic language is important because if you know and understand it, you will not be easily misled in terms of the Qur'anic verses." This was caveated by several participants in the validation workshops, who recognized that there are significant differences between spoken Arabic and the Arabic of the Qur'an, implying that any Arabic language skills should be imparted as part of a broader religious education.

Nevertheless, it is important to test the ideology-centric suppositions grounding these conclusions, as an inordinate focus on religious discourse could neglect a range of other structural

motivations, individual incentives and enabling factors that contribute to VE. This parochialism may also overlook the social dynamics framing communication and the practical transmission of information: while a significant proportion of al Shabaab content is religiously oriented, its influence is at least partially conditioned by its messenger and mode of delivery. Recruiters routinely exploit friendships, social networks, and familial ties to share their messages and imbue them with meaning,[198] with research showing that a narrative's resonance is often determined by broader socialization processes.[199] While prioritizing a counter-ideological approach may therefore seem appropriate given the religious disposition of extremist narratives in Kenya, it risks becoming reductive if theological education and counter-messaging are implemented without sufficient appreciation for the (potentially non-ideological) dynamics that make militant propaganda appealing in the first place.

In this context, repairing social bonds and encouraging reconciliation within and between communal groups could improve the networks, norms, and societal infrastructure available to facilitate interventions. While civil society representatives in both Nairobi and Mombasa suggested that inter-faith dialogue had proved successful, leading to a decrease in Christian-Muslim tensions across two cosmopolitan cities, intra-faith divisions - both ideological and inter-generational – remained evident in all four counties. As such, it is surprising that very few participants discussed the need for intra-faith engagement. Tensions were said to rise in Mombasa over the moonsighting for Eid al Adha and at the time of Mawlid. In Eastleigh, Nairobi, sectarian cleavages were most visible during mosque committee elections, with allegations of local religious groups associated with Salafism (branded Wahhabism by participants) funding welfare services and financial aid through suspect (foreign) sources. Such rifts, grievances and distrust may be susceptible to leverage and manipulation by al Shabaab, implying that efforts to resolve social fragmentation should accompany more conventional efforts to bolster theological education and faith-based resilience. For instance, proactive outreach, discussion, and sensitization may reduce the insularity of sectarian networks, strengthen the legitimacy and reach of religious authorities, extend access across different sub-groups, and foster greater pluralism, familiarity and understanding to help both alleviate local frustrations and dismantle perceptions of 'otherness'.

ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

Although radicalization and recruitment cannot and should not be blamed wholly on parents, it was clear that 'poor parenting' and a breakdown in family structures were fundamental concerns for many of the older participants in each of the communities studied. Intergenerational tensions are discussed above, but participants explicitly referenced the lack of adequate role models for young people, with a Mombasa-based CSO lamenting that "successful people" tend to move away from local neighborhoods, leaving a dearth of inspirational personalities for youth to look up to. Several participants felt that VE actors filled this vacuum instead. For instance, Ahmad Iman Ali was considered a role model for certain residents in Eastleigh, Nairobi, and Aboud Rogo was admired by some along the coast. However, a more widespread suggestion was that role models included "anyone who has money", particularly affluent politicians who could offer opportunities for employment or socio-economic advancement. Youths across

each county were criticized for associating success with wealth alone, regardless of how it was obtained. Others felt that a lack of mentors or positive paragons among the older generation had provided the space for youth to form gangs and to influence one another.

In this setting, the various participant communities believed efforts to strengthen family ties and to create respectable role models for youth would increase resilience against VE and gang culture, helping provide direction, support, and verify the benefits of a 'non-violent' lifestyle. In this context, participants suggested that religious leaders, teachers, community health volunteers (CHVs) and sports coaches (particularly in Nyeri and Kwale) could step in to fill the gap left by absent or neglectful parents.[200] Across the counties, the findings revealed that such individuals could set examples for young people to follow.

Furthermore, participants argued that these individuals had a responsibility to actively serve as mentors. As discussed above, efforts are ongoing in Nyeri to revive a traditional Kikuyu mentorship system run by the Council of Elders. Elsewhere, mentorship schemes involving stakeholders from the same neighbourhoods or similar socioeconomic backgrounds as beneficiaries have found traction, particularly those who were seen to have 'made it'.

Ultimately, the credibility and efficacy of such role models and mentors will likely vary based on 'contextual particularities, cultural currents and social norms…and, at a basic level, personal preference'.[201] In some contexts, existing societal arrangements may be amenable to the integration of CVE sensitivities and considerations, although this will have to be established on a case by case basis, and it should be recognised that appetites and social dynamics can be transient, meaning those who exercise influence over prospective participants could change over time. Crucially, this engagement may also have to be substantiated by interventions to alleviate wider structural grievances, as outlined in more detail in the 'socioeconomic opportunities' section below.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

As participants frequently lumped VE together with gangs, delinquency, and wider social ills, it is perhaps unsurprising that employment and financial stability were cited as important sources of resilience across all four counties. However, a contradiction emerged between the emphasis they placed on socioeconomic problems (as a driving force for VE), and the almost complete absence of private sector participation or engagement in CEFs - entities framed as the central hub for subnational CVE work in Kenya. This exposes gaps in CVE coverage that, if plugged, could help bolster individual and community resilience, although their prospective impact should be qualified.

As previously outlined, many of the individual incentives seen by participants as motivating al Shabaab recruitment were perceived to be economic, including relative deprivation and a lack of job and livelihood opportunities. This raises important questions over whether and how socioeconomic and financial grievances can be addressed through a CVE lens. Such dynamics tend to be systemic in nature and extend far beyond the conventional confines of prevention

programming, leaving CVE unable to sufficiently address multi-dimensional, highly complex issues with the requisite scope.[202] CSOs and NGOs could potentially mitigate these tensions in the short-term by offering vocational training, micro-financing schemes and some semblance of welfare provision, but sustaining their investments, or offering salaried employment would be difficult given their limited funding and coverage. International good practice recommends nesting CVE within wider forms of intervention (like development and peacebuilding) to maximize complementarity and facilitate a more holistic, multi-vectored solution to structural problems (recognising synergy between different activity streams is often difficult to deliver in practice given they often have discrete, even contradictory mechanisms, objectives, and priorities).[203] USAID itself cites the benefits of this 'systems approach', calling for CVE work to be embedded in:

> '…broader, multi-sectoral development strategies to address political marginalization, weak governance, conflict, fragile social cohesion, threats to religious freedom, reduced economic and educational opportunities, and other structural conditions that lead to the spread of violent extremism'.[204]

In theory, greater linkages between CVE and other forms of programming, and the mainstreaming of CVE considerations and sensitivities across broader developmental interventions, could therefore produce significant dividends, offsetting the deficiencies so often attributed to prevention work. For example, evaluations of mentorship projects focusing on resilience and the development of personal support networks proved relatively effective, but positive outcomes were difficult to sustain due to a lack of socioeconomic opportunities for participants once they 'graduated', frustrating beneficiaries' expectations and leaving them to face the same challenges that contributed to their vulnerability in the first place.[205]

Yet in Kenya there appeared to be a clear disjuncture between the importance attributed to economic empowerment as part of any effort to counter VE, and the composition of CEFs. The *only* 'for profit' organization included in the membership of these forums (of those engaged in the relational survey) was in Nyeri, an outlier indicative of a wider push across the county to improve public-private partnerships under the Nyeri County Youth Employment Compact',[206] which transferred the responsibility of encouraging companies and commercial bodies to extend internships, work experience and apprenticeships to young people from K-YES (a USAID-funded project) to the County Government.[207] This trend would suggest that far from mainstreaming and integrating prevention programs, CVE remains insulated in the very areas considered a priority by domestic stakeholders (but it should be noted that 'youth development funds' have been involved in CEF activities elsewhere, including Nairobi). Nyeri's experience should therefore be closely monitored to see whether it can offer a viable model for other counties to adapt where appropriate.

It is also important to stress, conflation is not the same as complementarity. Kazi Mtaani was sometimes mentioned as a 'success story' in the context of CVE, especially across Mombasa, Nairobi, and Nyeri where the state-sponsored campaign received praise for providing jobs (e.g., street sweeping), a monthly income to otherwise disadvantaged youth (implemented with rough gender-parity), and (according to some sub-county officials) improvements in public security.

However, such empowerment schemes were not permanent, nor did they necessarily subscribe to a specific CVE logic: the Kazi Mtaani was a temporary fix to offset the impact of COVID-19 rather than a diversionary or prevention-based intervention. Despite bureaucratic corruption – it was alleged that various chiefs in Mombasa and Nyeri engaged in clientelism and nepotism - the program appeared to alleviate some of the structural drivers of VE in Kenya, but this was very much an externality rather than a deliberate or sustainable solution as it was not designed to accomplish CVE objectives.[208]

Although private-public partnerships and CVE mainstreaming seem to offer largely untapped potential to help diminish the resonance of Shabaab's marketing efforts – reducing the appeal of the group's financial incentives by offering viable alternatives – its impact should not be overstated. Much of the demand for socioeconomic programming by participants derived from the perceptions of 'youth' as materialistic and amoral; they described these failings largely in moral terms, side-lining the agency of young people by presuming that idleness inexorably leads to some form of criminality or devious behavior. Against this backdrop, vocational opportunities and job-creation were often seen as necessary prescriptions to encourage structure and civic responsibility. In reality, empirical evidence shows radicalization and recruitment processes are far more complex, especially as poverty and relative deprivation crosscut Kenyan society but only a small minority join al Shabaab. The underlying premise of this economic determinism – namely, that opportunities to sweep streets or collect garbage would be more attractive than the promises offered by militant groups – is also debatable given that several participants rejected programs like Kazi Mtaani as 'demoralizing' for youth who have the qualifications for more professional work (see below), or insufficient for those who need skills to enable them to seek longer term solutions. While resilience can be generated and strengthened via socioeconomic opportunity, it cannot be considered a 'silver bullet'.

EDUCATION

Analogous issues emerged in relation to education. While many participants insisted that learning of any sort (parochial, technical, secular, private, civic, etc.) was an important source of resilience,[209] several conceded it was not always the panacea it is often assumed to be. Instead, the CVE benefits afforded by education, media literacy, critical thinking, and vocational training were often contingent on accompanying opportunities and development efforts, highlighting the need to integrate these efforts within wider economic, institutional, and structural reforms.

Research participants repeatedly raised education as the solution to all social problems. These comments were often made in relation to concerns over poor attendance at school or low literacy rates, especially in Kwale.[210] Alongside religious leaders describing the value of madrasa curricula for understanding and contextualizing scripture – and identifying its distortion or misappropriation – various CSOs representatives discussed the need to improve general levels of awareness around VE, claiming poor schooling diminished the ability of individuals to 'discern

manipulation by violent extremist actors'.[211] In summary, education (in all its iterations) was therefore seen as playing two major CVE roles:

- Providing resilience to strengthen critical thinking, foster positive social values and facilitate 'self-development'.
- Developing the necessary skills to earn a livelihood and avoid the need/desire to seek additional income through criminal activity or al Shabaab. A CSO participant in Kwale stated that they encourage their beneficiaries "to study, go to secondary school, then go to university" to enable them to earn a living in the future.

Members of civil society suggested that civic education was also important in helping youth understand what opportunities might be available to them, how Kenya's democracy works and to promote patriotism. In Mombasa, CSOs felt that citizens needed to be educated to better understand the criminal justice system and the benefits of reporting to law enforcement. The issue of a lack of patriotism was also recognized in Nyeri and Mombasa, where it was felt that strengthening one's sense of national identity may make the lure of al Shabaab less appealing. In Nairobi, it was suggested that young people need to be engaged to help them understand their rights when unfairly confronted by police officers.

All these dynamics can, in theory, help reduce different vulnerabilities to radicalization and recruitment, such as building individual and collective capacity to identify and reject malign narratives (on and offline); cultivating marketable skills; laying the groundwork for future employment; and both shaping and inculcating positive social norms that encourage tolerance, civic responsibility and societal cohesion. Concerns over the perceived undervaluing of education by residents in counties like Kwale are consequently understandable given their legacies and long-term impact.

However, as noted in the wider literature, such benefits are not necessarily sufficient in themselves. Taking critical thinking as an example, recruitment may be a pragmatic reaction to desperate circumstances, with VE groups tapping into real and legitimate grievances that cast militancy as a 'rational choice' or offering the only avenue to much needed resources and opportunities.[212] Similarly, participants in urban hubs like Nairobi and Mombasa cited instances of graduates disillusioned by the struggle to find meaningful work and left increasingly susceptible to the promises of al Shabaab recruiters. While education can therefore enhance resilience it needs to be married to, and substantiated by, broader structural reforms, socioeconomic opportunities, and 'good governance' that preserve and reinforce the values and norms internalized through schooling.

QUESTIONS AROUND 'NEGATIVE RESILIENCE'

Finally, it is worth considering the impact and implications of dynamics dubbed as 'negative resilience'.[213] Generally speaking, peace expert Lauren Van Metre (2016) suggests sources of resilience should generate positive feedback loops, with vulnerabilities producing the opposite effect, namely, negative feedback loops. If one adopts the language of Bouhana, one might suggest

that these two dynamics could (respectively) help suppress or facilitate the emergence of social affordances conducive to radicalization and recruitment.

However, Van Metre's research also exposes possible anomalies that need to be considered. In her analysis of Kongowea in Mombasa, she notes how competition between senior politicians over market revenues seemingly led to the emergence of rival management committees for licensing local vendors; the marginalization or co-optation of state officials, elders and chiefs by 'predatory political machines'; references by survey participants to the apparent appropriation of community development funds; and the widespread inclusion of residents on the party payrolls of each faction.[214] The same study also described alleged connections between Kongowea's 'political class' and organzed crime, which, in theory, should have fed into a series of negative feedback loops, precipitating further conflict and 'moral extremism'. Yet the threat of VE remained comparatively latent as Van Metre writes:

> 'Like a Mafia town where the dons have a monopoly on violence and viciously protect their turf, no other perpetrators of violence, including violent extremists, have a foothold in Kongowea, where citizens openly discuss the threat and risk of violent extremism, noting that violent extremist activity is practically non-existent'.[215]

The associational ties of party membership crossed ethnic and religious lines, paradoxically inflating political tensions and cronyism while dampening alternative forms of violent mobilization. Simply put, competing conflict entrepreneurs were crowded out of settings already saturated with a very specific set of grievances, alliances, and interests. In essence there appeared to be no space for terrorist recruitment despite a 'recessive current' of VE messaging across the district.[216]

Unfortunately, there were no clear links or comparisons with the focus areas covered in this project: gangsterism, political conflict, and terrorism all seemingly occupied the same spaces (although did not necessarily involve the same actors), contributing to the increasing normalization of violence and 'moral extremism' without creating any clear monopoly. Nevertheless, it is important to reference Van Metre's assessment as it raises questions about how to navigate 'negative' forms of resilience, for instance, in addressing one form of insecurity (i.e., organised crime) do practitioners risk creating or accentuating another? While it is imperative that political violence, criminality and corruption be confronted, stakeholders must recognize how their interventions could reshape surrounding social and moral ecologies in ways that unleash new or suppressed forms of violence. They can then design interventions accordingly to mitigate or minimize negative externalities, including through the integration of CVE sensitivities (where relevant).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS FOR CVE PROGRAMMING

BASED ON THE findings, the research team has several recommendations relevant to the donor community, policy makers, practitioners, and government officials. The recommendations are structured around the preliminary steps and considerations for CVE practitioners; communication and delivery; and government-specific prescriptions.

PRELIMINARY STEPS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR CVE PRACTITIONERS

- **Assess local understandings of VE prior to engagement.** The P/CVE framework does not always recognize, let alone satisfy, the immediate, often quotidian concerns of recipient populations, creating a disconnect between policy language focusing on ideology and the systems of conflict, discrimination and deprivation that preoccupy daily life for 'vulnerable' segments of Kenyan society.[217] As a result, policymakers and practitioners need to start mapping local understandings and experiences of VE from the outset of their interventions to help navigate the label's politics and improve the efficacy, relevance and resonance of their programs. This will require continuous stakeholder mapping and contextual analysis, and ongoing dialogue with local partners. Ideally, this should build on surveys and existing interview data conducted at a granular level.
    - VE is a politicized term that is often manipulated and leveraged by different stakeholders to consolidate their respective power positions, be it CSOs claiming to understand the problem as a means of enticing funding; religious elites looking to preserve their authority; or criminal gangs targeting '*kafirs*' so they can frame their action as '*halal*'.[218] This widespread and diverse usage tends to blur conceptual boundaries between, for instance, violent crime and VE, creating confusion among 'would-be' CVE actors and host communities. Where possible, a mutually agreed definition of VE should therefore be sought prior to interventions.

- **Ensure buy-in from the target community by demonstrating the relevance of CVE.** A mutual understanding of the objectives of the intervention must be established before the start of a program. Practitioners might consider talking about how the community's most pressing problems could be alleviated in the long term by tackling the threat of VE. For example, in the context of Kwale and Mombasa, a reduction in recruitment and changing perceptions around security could lead to the revitalization of the tourism industry, more investment and new employment opportunities. Furthermore,

if the threat of al Shabaab can be reduced, the frequency and severity of police violence may decrease in parallel.

- In order to avoid controversy over definitions of VE and what/who should and should not be included under this label, programs might consider adopting broader objectives such as a reduction in the use of violence and acceptance of violence. This could help sidestep debates over whether government or law enforcement actors should be defined as extremists. Ultimately, the overall objectives of the intervention must remain clear to program management. Mission creep is only too common in CVE programming. It must still be recognized, for example, that some individuals' use of violence will be linked to political or religious views. This was evidenced by this research's SNA, which demonstrated that those who generally agree with al Shabaab content are also more likely to support the use of violence in defense of their values or community.
- It may be more productive to address tangible issues, including violence in whatever form, regardless of motivation. Issues relevant for the target population could also include:
  - The loss of loved ones;
  - The provision of jobs in the tourism sector (for instance, in Lamu, where the economy is heavily reliant on tourism and has been significantly impacted by travel advisories issued by Western countries);
  - Challenging violent crime, motivated in part by ideology.

- **Recognize and challenge implicit assumptions regarding radicalization and recruitment.** Anyone working on CVE has a perception, opinion or understanding about underlying causality. These often depend on personal experience and familiarity with the literature alongside (in some cases) institutional or organizational agendas. It is highly uncomfortable to recognize that the drivers of VE are diverse, local, and multifaceted, as it makes it harder to identify and resolve the problem. Consequently, there is often a reluctance from stakeholders, whether governmental, non-governmental or community members, to look introspectively at their potential complicity or culpability, or the harm generated by their own actions (whether deliberate or accidental). For instance, this research repeatedly found that communities seek to externalize VE as a foreign influence brainwashing vulnerable youth. Likewise, government statements in the aftermath of the Westgate attack framed terrorism as an exogenous problem imported from Somalia and the Middle East, rather than recognizing many Shabaab combatants are Kenyan nationals recruited in Kenya by neighbors speaking local languages. This logic is replicated down to the smallest units of society – the ward or estate level – with residents continuously claiming 'it is them not us' and expressing surprise that VE activity could impact their neighborhood.
  - In programmatic terms it is therefore important to adopt a 'systems perspective' rather than to attribute blame or 'finger point'. Empirical evidence clearly demonstrates radicalization and recruitment are non-linear and variegated processes conditioned by a constellation of individual, social, spatial, political,

economic, and historical factors that interact in different ways for different people in different places.

- **Stakeholders, including government personnel, should receive further training and capacity building to improve their understanding of deleterious assumptions e.g., "the issue is Islam".** VE (in Kenya and beyond) is often framed as a 'Muslim problem', which as a corollary tends to cast CVE as 'counter Islam' or 'anti-Muslim'. While these perceptions are being reshaped by better public education and the increasing prominence of right-wing violence in places like Europe and the US, they remain deep-rooted across Kenyan society. State institutions and national elites have not only been closely tied to Christian fraternities since independence but have also socioeconomically and politically marginalized Muslim-majority counties. In more recent years, systemic patterns of discrimination and violence have targeted local Muslims under the rubric of counter-terrorism in Kenya's cities and deprived peripheries, creating self-conscious 'suspect communities' with internalized grievances and strong distrust of government. Consequently, any engagement in this space must be sensitive to the politics of labelling, ensuring interventions do not further stigmatize or alienate recipient audiences. Crucially, policymakers and practitioners should also recognize the disjuncture between official narratives (subscribing to comprehensive, empirically backed definitions) and the interpretations, sensibilities and prejudices of individual state functionaries. As shown in this research, police officers, administrators and local bureaucrats often expressed a one-dimensional understanding of VE that evidently considered Islam to be the root problem.
    - CSO knowledge of CVE varied. While several organizations clearly understood the underlying concepts, others either regurgitated technical jargon or conflated the term with wider development and/or peacebuilding activities. This suggests that further capacity-building efforts are necessary, at least in certain cases, to strengthen the theoretical and practical capabilities of local CVE stakeholders.

- **Manage how you, and your prospective partners, are perceived amongst communities (including those most 'at-risk').** Although government (both local and national) buy-in is essential, communities – especially those in Kwale – made it clear that anyone associated with the state would not be trusted. This is a difficult balance to get right and will necessitate detailed analysis and mapping of the influence of local stakeholders prior to any intervention. Faith and trust in local leaders are idiosyncratic and dependent on individual personalities and their immediate connections.
    - While it is imperative that national government is aware of CVE programs in order to deconflict various initiatives and to ensure security, the visibility of state involvement (or indeed the involvement of any other stakeholder) should be considered carefully and based on a comprehensive analysis of trust levels amongst a community.
    - In most cases, chiefs – as the local representatives of government – were understandably viewed as an extension of the state and thus attracted the same levels of skepticism. This was especially the case in Kwale, but in no study

locations were the chief's *barazas* well attended by youth. A village elder in Kwale stated "if you come with the chief's order, you are going nowhere". Distrust of chiefs was less ubiquitous in Nyeri, emphasizing the importance of context specificity in defining partnerships.

- In some cases, community security entities such as Nyumba Kumi were genuinely seen as bottom-up initiatives, and officials were viewed as representatives of broader society. However, in other cases, it was clear that Nyumba Kumi personnel were considered to be nothing more than surrogates of the government and thus were mistrusted, especially by young people. Local officials explained that as soon as they were seen to be too closely tied to the state, they would lose legitimacy in the community. Practitioners should not assume that nominal distance between government and these community figures is sufficient to facilitate trust.
- Notwithstanding the idiosyncratic nature of community trust, the research suggests that most FBOs and CSOs are more widely respected by those in the target communities. This is encouraging for donors and international NGOs who often need to partner with local CSOs. However, these CSOs must be genuinely local. In Kwale, for example, it was noted that even Mombasa based organizations were treated with suspicion.
- These issues extended to faith-based actors and organizations. Religious authorities were enmeshed in specific contexts, social configurations and governance systems that defined and regulated their credibility across different audiences. For instance, while figures with a 'moderate' and/or Sufi orientation may be framed as conventional stakeholders in CVE interventions, they were often waylaid by inter-generational tensions and an inability to access or sway 'at-risk' populations. In contrast, younger religious actors claimed to exercise greater clout amongst their 'peers', but allegedly exacerbated ideological, societal, and political cleavages and were described as a disruptive influence by existing powerbrokers due to claims they were spreading 'foreign' and 'radical' ideas. In selecting domestic interlocutors, practitioners must therefore understand the trade-offs and implications of different partnerships, not only in relation to the resonance they have across target individuals/groups but the antagonism they can generate from other CVE actors.
- While CSOs may be more trusted by communities broadly, it is unclear whether this always extends to youth, especially those most 'at-risk'. Youth spoken to in the qualitative work often cited social media and their peers as their most important sources of information, with some referencing religion. This was also reflected in the SNA.
- Trusted partners do not necessarily make good messengers. Trust depends on audience, context and message. Practitioners should recognize that trust must be maintained continually and sharing certain messages may itself undermine a

CSOs relationship with the community, especially amongst those considered 'at-risk' for recruitment.

- **Recognize that individuals may share content that endorses VE, but that does not mean they agree with it.** It is important for policy makers and practitioners to acknowledge that communities and beneficiaries have agency and may choose to share messages without agreeing with their content. The act of sharing VE information, whether or not one agrees with it, can help create tolerance for or acceptance of these ideas within the community. For programming it will be important to consider ways of engaging with such content and perhaps discuss the risks associated with sharing it, despite not agreeing with it.
    - **Adopt a shame-sensitive approach to programming.** It is important that practitioners recognize that individuals may be ashamed to admit they have shared VE information. This may be because they are concerned about potential punishment under the POTA law. Regardless of the motive, criticizing individuals for their actions will hamper trust-building.

- **Consider gender-segregated communication initiatives, both online and in-person.** The SNA revealed that gender groups across the four study counties are insular when they interact and converse: women largely talk to women, men to men. Message-based interventions should consider these dynamics when designing public outreach, ensuring their content reflects the specific interests and appetites of their target audience and a granular understanding of how information is consumed, shared, and re-circulated by different networks.
    - CVE practitioners must consider when it is appropriate to work within these societal communications norms, and when to challenge them by encouraging outgroup thinking and debate between those with differing views.

- **Consider how religious identity influences communication networks.** The SNA indicated communication tends to flow along a religious axis, particularly in urban communities where participants often subscribe to faith-based identities and develop social groups through sectarian networks. Interventions must therefore navigate these dynamics, recognizing that people tend to engage in discussion within their own religious communities. Additionally, inter-communal and inter-faith dialogues will likely require active efforts by practitioners to convene otherwise segregated groups

CVE PROGRAMMING: COMMUNICATION AND DELIVERY

- **Resolve issues around the role of financial incentives and money in programming.**
    - The matter of financial incentives as a driver of participation in CVE programming must be addressed and resolved prior to program development. Many of those RUSI interviewed (and those that participate as beneficiaries in CVE programming)

would not be able to do so if they did not receive a modest allowance to support their travel (to and from meeting locations), lunch and a tea break.
    - Cash handouts: the financial benefits – both immediate and long-term – must be clear from the outset of any intervention. A difficulty for CSOs is accommodating the expectation of cash handouts particularly as 'trust' in CSOs was often transactional and dependent on financial compensation. This demand has resulted from years of CSO programming with little structural change observed: people are unwilling to wait for promised long-term change – they want immediate reward. Just to get someone to participate in an activity requires the pull of an expedient source of cash in pocket. To get these beneficiaries to actually psychologically commit to the objectives of a project is another challenge altogether.
        - Cash handouts are essential and ethical when asking someone to commit their time to an activity. That time could have otherwise been used to earn income;
        - The amount provided should be carefully considered. It should compensate for time but should not become the objective of the intervention;
        - Ensure absolute transparency in advance when communicating compensation for involvement in activities;
        - Do not renege on promises. This will result in a permanent loss of trust.

- **Focus on peer-to-peer networks, where possible working through these links when selecting a target audience.** Practitioners should acknowledge that recruitment does not necessarily take place as part of an institutional conspiracy driven by certain mosques or individual ideologues. Although Aboud Rogo at Mombasa's Musa Mosque and Iman Ali at Nairobi's Pumwani Riyadha may once have coordinated a broad nationwide network, it is clear that such a model is no longer the primary method for recruitment. Rather, individuals share information between small groups of friends and associates, often using messaging applications or watching extremist content together when they congregate at *maskanis*. This is not to say that recruitment does not take place at all through institutions like mosques and madrasas, but that these processes are now far more decentralized, localized, and dynamic than they were before.
    - Although religious leaders broadly appear to be trusted across the communities studied, practitioners should not assume that religious leaders necessarily hold significant sway amongst those 'at-risk' of recruitment. These peer-to-peer networks appear to function 'underground', away from the prying eyes of authority, be that religious or secular.

- **Identify emotive and current topics for discussion (either local or global).** Do not shy away from addressing local police violence. Exogenous conflicts, such as that between Palestine and Israel, may also provide an opportunity for CSOs in Nairobi to engage youth in discussions around the appropriate response from Muslims. Such dialogue may provide an entry point for debate around the concept of jihad. Some

participants in all counties were keen to dismiss events in Somalia as not warranting the label of 'jihad' unlike conflicts in other parts of the world.

- **Strengthen local use of Arabic terms when working with religious leaders.**[219] Knowledge of Arabic in all four counties remains very poor and this makes interpreting the Qur'an particularly challenging. It was largely seen as the responsibility of religious leaders to provide interpretation of original text. These individuals thus retain the authority and control over knowledge formation. Although most recruitment and extremist messaging circulates in the vernacular, Arabic phrases were often incorporated into messages by recruiters in an effort to feign scriptural superiority.
    - Minimal evidence was obtained from the field that faith-based organizations are using Arabic strategically in an effort to challenge extremist misinterpretations. Given that it was universally agreed amongst participants that Arabic provides greater legitimacy when discussing the Qur'an, practitioners working with religious leaders and on interventions involving religious education should consider using Arabic in order to obtain credibility amongst youth. For example, it is understood that NCTC works with clerics and imams that have been exposed to al Shabaab messaging. Arabic speakers will likely be essential in such programs in order to genuinely engage in debate around scripture.
    - For policy makers and practitioners wishing to reach and possibly influence or dialogue with youth 'at-risk', doing so in Arabic may increase interest and a sense of credibility in the message and messenger.

- **Active efforts should be made to encourage intra-faith dialogue**. Ideological and intergenerational tensions have created tension within religious communities. CSOs and FBOs are potentially well-positioned to mediate dialogue sessions but must play a non-judgmental role.

- **Integrate messages into holistic forms of intervention; they are not sufficient when used in isolation.** There was a shared perception among several CVE stakeholders that counter-messaging should be prioritized in the Kenyan context. However, this risks reproducing many of the reductive suppositions characteristic of prevention efforts elsewhere. Fundamentally, communication is a social process, where narratives are more akin to a 'social product'[220] with an ability to induce ideational or behavioral change that is intimately tied to, and dependent on, patterns of 'socialization, meaning-seeking and identity formation'.[221] Against this backdrop, militant outfits like Islamic State and al Shabaab have proved relatively successful by tapping into friendships and affective bonds to improve the resonance of their discourse and outreach. CVE efforts must therefore approach the problem more holistically; they could provide a wider package of activities, social infrastructure, and support networks to not only enhance the impact of messages,

but out-compete the benefits offered by VE recruiters. These are critical ingredients of what Freear (2019) refers to as 'brand building'.

- **Use synthesized approaches and hybrid programming to account for the integrated and mutually reinforcing nature of on- and offline communications.** Given the dynamic interplay between on and offline domains in the production, circulation and consumption of information, CVE interventions should look for opportunities to blend outreach across a range of media and create 'an immersive set of digital and physical connections.'[222] The coverage afforded by virtual engagement can potentially improve the reach of programs, and it is possible to replicate 'best practice' from offline mediation such as 'empathetic listening, multipolar discussions, identifying shared values and common ground, and appealing to emotion'.[223] However, trust building and the delivery of tangible outputs may be more feasible offline, and reflects how Kenyan youth often share and digest content. Marrying these approaches can therefore help maximize the impact and sustainability of communications and activities.

- **Mainstream CVE programming within development initiatives.** USAID's 2020 CVE Policy calls for CVE to be embedded in 'broader, multi-sectoral development strategies' that tackle a variety of 'structural conditions.'[224] More work is needed to understand how CVE sensitivities can be integrated within development initiatives, including health, education, and livelihoods programming. This is a complex debate and is much easier to propose than to actually implement. However, all indications from the fieldwork are that CVE considerations should be taken into account when any organizations operate in each of these areas, if only to ensure that the drivers of VE are not inadvertently exacerbated. 'Mainstreaming' might also involve expanding inclusion criteria for development initiatives so that 'at-risk' individuals or groups may also receive a share of the benefits.[225] Participants widely felt that the provision of economic opportunities for youth, for example, would go a long way towards decreasing the allure of al Shabaab.
    - Consider linking private employment providers and vocational training opportunities with mentorship schemes.
    - Program objectives must be clearly articulated to include boundaries over the extent to which interventions seek to pursue objectives outside of traditional CVE work. Consider whether it is necessary to operate entirely within social norms, including accepted communication networks, or seek to foster broader social change. For example, how far should a CVE project push women's empowerment within patriarchal contexts when discussing violent extremism? Inclusivity is essential but interventions also need to speak to local sensitivities if they are to elicit buy-in. Additionally, such efforts could end up securitising or undermining the promotion of women's rights if they are too closely tied to an explicit CVE agenda. Understanding and navigating these tensions are therefore key elements of program design.

- **Consider civic education and engagement within CVE programming.** In addition to building the capacity of law enforcement officers, civilians' understanding

of the criminal justice system must be strengthened in order to increase awareness of the benefits of reporting issues to law enforcement officers. This should focus on the concept of bail and the need for witnesses in order to secure a conviction.

  - Several participants, especially in Nyeri, complained that suspects who had been identified were quickly released after arrest. Police often insist that these suspects have been granted bail, but communities feel that the individuals were simply let go. Participants suggested there was no point in speaking to the police because they could not take meaningful action and the suspects were back amongst them soon after being identified. Furthermore (as explained above), what civilians saw as a lack of confidentiality on the part of officers was interpreted by officers as a need for witnesses to openly come forward.
  - Participants across Kwale and Mombasa also suggested that greater understanding about how Kenya's democracy works and greater knowledge of the opportunities the state could provide to them was needed. It was explicitly suggested that civic education on these issues may help to promote "patriotism" and increase the identification of youth with Kenya.

- **Consider mentorship as a potential solution to the perceived lack of role models available to youth.** Most participants were positive about past CVE mentorship programs. Communities feel that youth are being let down by their parents, and intergenerational tensions were recognized as an issue by all sections of society. There was concern that successful people leave the underprivileged areas in which the study was carried out. Social media was blamed for fomenting materialism and a desire for quick cash. It was suggested that VE actors have filled the vacuum. Efforts in Nyeri to revive a Kikuyu elder-led mentorship tradition might be considered as a model for future CVE interventions. Where such structures are not already in place or are considered peripheral, establish opportunities for intergenerational dialogue to help strengthen tolerance, develop shared understandings of grievances, and work towards mutually beneficial solutions. Such an approach should avoid targeting 'at-risk' youth alone and recognize the broader social dynamics that can enable VE.

- **Engage with the private sector to address socioeconomic and wider structural grievances**. While this report has queried the widespread conflation of CVE with vocational and livelihood opportunities, participants repeatedly blamed VE, at least in part, on unemployment, financial incentives, and relative deprivation. Recognizing that these structural factors likely contribute to more complex recruitment processes, the emphasis placed on socioeconomic grievance nevertheless appears incongruent with the dearth of commercial stakeholders and local businesses included in CEF networks. Although youth funds collaborated or participated with various CEFs, Nyeri was the only site to feature a single 'for profit' member in its forum (of those surveyed), which may reflect a wider pattern of public-private partnership across the county underpinned by the Nyeri County Youth Employment Compact. This framework should therefore be closely monitored to gauge whether it can offer a viable model for replication/adaption elsewhere as cash strapped CSOs do not have the resources, capacity, or bandwidth to

tackle these systemic problems in isolation, and any economic prescriptions will likely extend far beyond the programmatic and conceptual confines of CVE.

- **Conduct research to understand the plausibility, scope and/or implications of 'negative resilience'.** While this dynamic did not necessarily feature across the focus areas explored here, it remains an important gap in the literature given the potential implications for CVE policymakers and practitioners.

GOVERNMENT SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Focus on tangible results**. Government 'brand-building' should be based on delivering viable solutions to local grievances and backing up its promises with action, rather than just narratives or messaging.

- **Work with NCTC to harness the potential influence of returnees and defectors.** These individuals are seen as effective and credible interlocutors but cooperation with CVE practitioners is disrupted by inconsistencies in amnesty and defection protocols. Clarifying such procedures and harmonizing formal approaches across administrative departments and security agencies could facilitate opportunities for collaboration and boost the quality and quantity of CVE content.

- **Focus on law enforcement to address procedures that can support sustainability during personnel turnover and redeployments.** Despite evidence from both current and previous research suggesting incremental improvements within security forces, it remains all too clear that bad experiences with law enforcement and a pervasive lack of trust between communities and officers are fundamental drivers of VE recruitment. Participants noted that opportunities to engage with police officers were rare, but when they took place they had a positive impact on perceptions on both sides and served to humanize the grievances that each held (to a degree). This needs to be a long-term consideration, with practitioners and donors acknowledging that it will take several years for attitudes to change and genuine trust to be established.
    - Any initiatives must ensure long-term continuity. It was frequently suggested that officers were transferred away from the area soon after a semblance of trust had been established with the community.

- **Explore opportunities for police-community engagement, facilitated through sport or dialogue**. Such engagements have historically been appreciated by youth, serving to humanize the two sides and build trust. Police should be encouraged to take part in these activities in their civilian clothes. Where appropriate, these engagements should not be limited to senior commanders. Rather, junior officers should take part.

- **Sensitize frontline officers and encourage them to work more closely with youth.** High-ranking officials were generally regarded with greater confidence than their juniors. Several participants indicated that high-ranking officers might attend meetings

and say all the right things, but commitments would not be shared by those working under the commanders. Efforts to get county commissioner support are undoubtedly important but should not be sought at the expense of engagements with frontline officers "on the ground" working amongst the community. The potential impact of one incident of excessive force could be explained to such officers through case studies in an effort to build awareness.

    - Diversify security representatives over time so community linkages with police stations are not contingent on lone individuals who are susceptible to transfer. This is critical to developing institutional memory, structural reform, and internalizing (durable) normative change.

- **Understand that the deployment of law enforcement officers local to an area could improve community-police relations.** Villa-Vicencio et al. (2016) demonstrated that such an approach had worked well in Garissa. Countless participants in Kwale viewed police officers as upcountry aliens who arrived in the area with preconceived ideas of the Muslim youth. Moreover, participants suggested that local government officials were often unaware of plans made within the national security architecture. This is an institutional problem with security remaining a function of the national government in Nairobi and the county authorities having minimal influence. However, at the very least longer-term deployments should be considered.
    - A solution must be found to the issue of confidentiality. Police officers insisted that they needed witnesses to appear before the court. However, communities complained that if they reported suspicious activity to the police then they were immediately named and so became targets for those they had outed. The solution must involve more than witness protection. Offering information to law enforcement officers should not be seen as a death sentence.
    - Many of these proposals go beyond CVE programming and necessitate institutional changes in Kenya's security infrastructure. The transition from a 'police force' to a 'police service' is part of ongoing efforts to restructure law enforcement in Kenya. Initiatives such as the UK-funded REINVENT program seek to address the police response to VE as part of broader police reform efforts.[226] This is a great example of how CVE work can be mainstreamed into other forms of donor-led intervention.

METHODOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERALL DESIGN

- **Iterate between multiple methods (with appropriate expertise leading each component) to tackle complex questions.** The approach taken combined various methods with the aim of shedding light on different elements of the research objectives. The methods complemented each other well even if they provided for a complex data collection process and engagement with varied stakeholders. The findings of each approach could be used to explain and corroborate patterns identified by other

methods. Moreover, flexibility ensured that one method could inform adaptations in the others during fieldwork. The combination of the SNA research and qualitative interviews allowed for manual follow up with some of the identified participants, who were subsequently invited to the validation workshops.

- **Avoid written consent processes in sensitive communities and adapt consent to local circumstances.** The approach to consent taken in the SNA survey worked much better than the one taken in the qualitative study. The SNA survey involved the provision of an information sheet and careful briefing of participants about the study before oral consent was requested. The qualitative approach was more elaborate with a written consent form and a request for a signature. The process was more formal and was unhelpful in particular in those communities where trust was low and suspicion high. Participants who had previously had negative experiences with researchers were particularly unwilling to put pen to paper. In such a population oral consent should be the preferred option. It is also important that flexibility is maintained throughout the consent process and empathy shown.

QUALITATIVE

- **Use local researchers, not local 'fixers' or 'enumerators.' In particular, engage senior and junior researchers with extensive experience in qualitative data collection.** Data collection was managed by a combination of a senior and junior researcher in each location. Keeping the research teams small of course extends the time data collection takes, but also provides a strong sense of learning and engagement from the teams. The experience of the senior researchers was invaluable in designing approaches, adapting interview guides, and considering specific strategies, which were adjusted in real time. The junior researchers were excellent translators and helped with the transcription work, which was checked and validated by their seniors. This is a commendable approach for future qualitative research. The teams had to be adjusted a couple of times to ensure that exactly the right match of community access, experience and skills was identified.
- **Engage project management in the data collection process throughout to enable them to adapt interview questions as appropriate.** From a project management perspective, frequent communication with the field researchers throughout the data collection process allowed for real time learning as different methods were used during the various waves of data collection. Problems were addressed quickly, and adaptations made. While time consuming, the approach is commendable for other studies in the future in which one implementing partner is leading a large and complex data collection process across multiple locations at the same time.
- **Build rapport and make time for follow up interviews.** Working with highly experienced field researchers with subject-relevant expertise and experience enabled the study to utilize existing contacts. Access, rapport, and trust had already been established with a large number of the participants. With limited time available for data collection, a smaller sample would have enabled additional follow-up interviews. This would have facilitated more opportunities to validate findings and expand on points made in initial

interviews and conversations. That said, the researchers were able to interview a limited number of participants more than once when interest arose.

- **Meet the participant where they are comfortable.** It is important that the participant is comfortable in terms of the physical location, as well as with the interview technique. It is important to meet the participants where they are at ease in order to obtain the best possible information and to ensure flowing conversation. In a confidential environment, it is possible to ask more difficult questions and to delve deeper than it is if the participant is uneasy either with the physical place or the approach taken by the researcher.
- **Use semi or unstructured interviews, which solicit the best data on this topic.** For participants categorized as 'at-risk' or otherwise selected for studies relating to VE, allowing them to speak freely according to their own way of thinking and language enables better conversations. It can be difficult to keep track of the conversation as they may seek to avoid the most difficult topics, however respecting their position enables data collection that accurately reflects participants' genuine fears and feelings. Highly structured questions are likely to be interpreted as leading or rooted in preconceptions.
- **Ensure that the full transcripts of interviews are manually interpreted by researchers.** The subtleties of vocabulary and the context of conversation is lost when using automated coding systems of analysis, especially when participants are using multiple languages.

SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

- **Find creative ways of building rapport and trust.** Research teams using a similar approach with sensitive topics should consider spending more time building rapport with the seed group members before they arrive for data collection. Having seed group members participate in a series of interviews with progressively more sensitive questions beginning with a phone call questionnaire may result in higher initial comfort levels.
- **Future research should examine researcher-participant trust relationships on VE topics** (generally and in Kenya) to understand the drivers of fear to share openly on these topics. Additionally, future research should compare the survey data collected in this study with data obtained using traditional surveying methods to explore how the use of snowballing and tokens might facilitate greater trust.
- **Include trauma support in training.** Research teams using this approach for sensitive topics should spend time training on trauma-informed approaches to interviews so they can be well prepared. More importantly, enumerators should have a clear resource to offer participants after the interview is complete such as a phone number for an organization specialized in addressing trauma.
- **Practice snowballing token protocols extensively.** Research teams should spend ample time practicing the token protocols and consider doing a full walk through at the venue before data collection begins to ensure that survey results are recorded accurately and that there are no duplicate entries. Rehearsal will also ensure that adequate resources are allocated at each stage of the process.

- **Add enumerators for subsequent waves.** Enumerator teams should be structured to add additional enumerators during the subsequent waves, which exponentially add participants and workload. These of course must be trained together with the lead enumerators participating in initial as well as subsequent waves.
- **Develop timeslots for data collection to manage the process.** A more rigid timetable should be considered as a part of the token system to prevent large numbers of participants showing up at the same time. This could entail providing specific times to each respondent to complete their questionnaire.
- **Consider an incentive structure and bear in mind travel distances.** Researchers using this approach should consider budgeting for additional travel expenses in larger cities or where participants may be geographically dispersed.

RELATIONAL SURVEY

- **Begin the organization mapping phase of the work well in advance of survey administration.** Confirm the final list of organizations to be included in the survey. This cannot be adjusted once data collection begins.
- **Consider convening in-person meetings to explain the study and collect data.** Administer the survey during an in-person meeting in which most members of a network will be present to increase buy-in and response rates early on.

ANNEX A: BACKGROUND TO AL SHABAAB OPERATIONS IN KENYA

IN ITS CURRENT form al Shabaab has 'been present in Kenya since at least 2009'.[227] However, we need to go back to the early 1990s to find the first traces of al Qaeda in the country and the extremist network which grew to present such a threat to Kenya's stability.[228] Building on earlier work by Sahan and IGAD (2016), Bryden and Bahra (2019) explain that al Qaeda operatives had been in the region since Osama Bin Laden's time based in Sudan from 1992. The organization laid the foundations in terms of shell businesses and charities and the 1998 attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam took place two years after Bin Laden left Sudan. The network responsible became known as al Qaeda in East Africa (AQEA). With a base in Mogadishu and property in Kismayo and Kenya's Lamu County, this small group was also behind the 2002 attacks against Israeli interests on the Kenyan coast.[229] A vehicle-born improvised explosive device (VBIED) was used to attack Paradise Hotel, while surface-to-air missiles were fired at an Israeli charter jet taking off from Mombasa.[230]

In the aftermath of the attacks on the Kenyan coast, those responsible travelled to Somalia, where – together with remnants of the defunct Al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) and 'an emerging network of Islamic courts' – they established 'the foundation for al-Shabaab'.[231]

Meanwhile in Kenya, the resumption of multiparty politics in the 1990s allowed for 'the emergence of Islam as a political ideology'.[232] Individuals returning from studies in the Middle East brought with them more extreme interpretations of Islam, most notably Wahhabism from Saudi Arabia. Perhaps the most critical among the various Middle East trained scholars was one Sheikh Abdulaziz Rimo, who Hassan Ndzovu refers to as 'the forebearer of jihadi ideology in Kenya'.[233] Rimo encouraged his followers on the South Coast to reject the Kenyan state, but he did not directly advocate violence. Regardless, it was Rimo who inspired the likes of Aboud Rogo at Mombasa's Musa Mosque.

The Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) was set up in 1992 and for a short period played its part in providing a political voice for coastal Muslims, directly challenging the authority of the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM). Mombasa's Musa and Sakina mosques were both central to the propagation of Islamism on the Kenyan coast throughout this period, and these institutions would remain important for the next two decades.[234] Rogo and Abubukar Shariff Ahmed 'Makaburi' would inspire the young men who later formed the core of the Muslim Youth Centre (MYC).[235] Through the 2000s, 'the centre of gravity for Kenyan jihadism shifted from Mombasa to Nairobi'[236] and the Pumwani Riyadha Mosque. Here, the MYC was led by Ahmed Iman Ali, a Rogo acolyte. The MYC later became al Hijra, al Shabaab's Kenyan branch.

Al Shabaab grew rapidly in Somalia and by June 2016 had taken control of the capital Mogadishu.[237] Through the late 2000s, the group attracted recruits from the US and Europe.[238] Kenyans also started joining the group at this time.[239] In August 2011, AMISOM forces forced the militants out of Mogadishu with the support of forces from the 'Transitional Federal Government'.[240]

Kenyan forces entered Somalia in October 2011 as part of Operation Linda Nchi ('protect the country'), and the 'invasion' was subsequently cited by al Shabaab as justification for attacks on Kenyan soil.[241] Indeed, 'the scope, scale and audacity of Al-Shabaab attacks have worsened since the Operation Linda Nchi invasion in 2011'.[242] Attacks were initially conducted by al Hijra members who were responsible for 'crude and amateurish' operations involving grenades used against churches, public transport infrastructure and bars.[243] In the North East, 'local cells' were responsible for 'small-scale attacks against soft targets' between 2011 and 2015.[244] The attack at Westgate in 2013, however, was not entrusted to al Hijra. Rather, *Amniyat* operatives planned and executed the assault with al Hijra 'relegated to a supporting role'.[245]

From 2012, the Kenyan state began to target al Hijra members and operations only intensified after Westgate. Between 2014 and 2015, Human Rights Watch reported 43 'enforced disappearances' and 'extrajudicial killings' in Nairobi and the North East, allegedly linked to various law enforcement agencies, including the KDF and the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU).[246] Musa and Sakina mosques in Mombasa were raided in 2014 by armed law enforcement officers, infamous incidents that remain controversial to this day. *Operation Usalama Watch* was launched in April 2014 under the guise of efforts to remove illegal immigrants from the country.[247] The operation was widely criticized by human rights groups and the international community, with ethnic Somalis profiled and detained in police stations and at Kasarani Stadium while they were screened. Al Shabaab was provided 'with a steady diet of material for its propaganda machine'.[248] Subsequently, jihadi networks in Kenya 'atomized', sub-dividing, dispersing and reforming.[249] Many al Hijra members fled to Somalia; others settled in parts of Nairobi and Mombasa.[250]

Al Shabaab's regional ambitions were shaped by former Emir Abdi Godane. Godane is said to have been frustrated at the failures of al Hijra and, sometime in the year before his death in 2014, he reorganized the units responsible for operations in Kenya.[251] Three teams were set up under well-known commanders: 1) Adan Garar and his team in Gedo were put in charge of operations in Mandera; 2) Mohamed Mohamud Kunow 'Dulyadeyn' out of Middle Juba was to lead those responsible for Garissa and Wajir, 3) and a new unit largely made up of Kenyan nationals – Jaysh Ayman – would target Lamu and other coastal counties. Increasingly Kenyan fighters were heavily involved in attacks on Kenyan soil.[252] It was after this reorganization that attacks became more organized and, often, more lethal.[253] Attacks were carried out against Garissa University College (148 dead), against various quarries and buses in Mandera and, critically, in and around the town of Mpeketoni in Lamu County (approximately 100 dead).

Many Kenyan jihadists who had escaped security operations by crossing the border into Somalia were provided with training and by 2016 there were enough Kenyan al Shabaab fighters 'to conduct attacks inside Kenya' and 'to do so with a much greater degree of autonomy and

effectiveness'.[254] This new group of Kenyan al Shabaab members were responsible for the attack at 14 Riverside in January 2019.

Riverside was extraordinarily significant as 'the coming of age' of Kenyan jihadism.[255] Not only were the assailants primarily Kenyans, but they were also not all of Somali-origin. Amongst the individuals responsible for the operation was Ali Salim Gichunge (aka 'Farouk'). Son of a KDF officer, Gichunge was educated in Isiolo but also had family in Nyeri's Majengo slums.[256] It was arguably the image of Gichunge more than any other that surprised Kenyans. It was suddenly apparent that violent extremism not only affected coastal and North Eastern Kenyans.[257] The jihadist militant organization was now 'actively cultivating non-Somali recruits.'[258]

RECRUITMENT

Areas historically associated with recruitment into al Shabaab in Kenya include the coastal counties,[259] the North East and Nairobi. In particular, Kwale is often identified as a major source of al Shabaab recruits.[260] Estimates suggest that as many as 1,000 people may have left the county to join al Shabaab.[261] Another county frequently associated with al Shabaab recruitment is Isiolo from where at least 200 are said to have left.[262] Home to the infamous Musa and Sakina mosques, Mombasa's Majengo area has always been linked to extremism by law enforcement and the media.[263] Kisauni and Likoni have also been identified by law enforcement.[264] In Nairobi the Pumwani area has most commonly been associated with such activity.[265] Al Shabaab have also made use of an expansive network of informers and local sympathizers as well as opportunists who provide support in exchange for business. This is perhaps best evidenced by the UN Monitoring Group in their overview of the failed VBIED attack interdicted in Merti, Isiolo County, in February 2018. Several Kenyan nationals had assisted the attackers in obtaining fake Kenyan IDs.[266]

The 2016 IGAD-Sahan report claimed that al Shabaab and its affiliates were 'forced to evolve and adapt'.[267] It was suggested that increased counter terrorism efforts in certain area forced al Shabaab to turn to the Rift Valley (Nakuru, Naivasha and Eldoret) and Western, to target more women and girls, and to operate with the prison system.[268] Around the same times the Government of Kenya acknowledged that recruitment had been taking place within universities and secondary schools. Research by the International Crisis Group (ICG) suggests that it was an improvement in law enforcement 'community engagement and intelligence gathering' that forced al Shabaab to adapt. ICG claim that not only did al Shabaab recruit from new areas, but they also pursued efforts to convert youth to Islam.[269] Others moved into Tanzania.

RUSI research conducted under the REINVENT program identifies a series of isolated recruits from Eldoret, Kakamega, Marsabit and Nakuru.[270] However, the study found that al Shabaab's targeting of areas in Central, Rift Valley and Western is not necessarily so new.[271] Indeed, in as early as 2011 the UN Monitoring Group noted that 'since 2009'[…], the group has rapidly expanded its influence and membership to non-Somali Kenyan nationals.'[272] In 2011, Marchal had observed that 'over the last two decades conversions to Islam increased in the Kenyan

highlands and newly converted people may provide a fertile ground for those who proselytize radical Islam at a time of great economic and political frustration'.[273]

Chome (2021) identified potential vulnerabilities in several parts of Kenya and there is reason to believe that extremist networks have accessed areas previously unaffected by recruitment. He also found that in areas in which levels of community resilience was strong, extremist networks merely withdrew from mainstream society, existing in their own socio-ecological bubbles. However, little tangible evidence of extensive recruitment in new areas is available.

What little is known about al Shabaab recruitment networks in areas outside of Nairobi, the Coast and the North East comes from a few isolated case studies. One such example is the story of Nixon Kipkoech Rutto, a Muslim 'revert' from Uasin Gishu County who travelled to the coast to study before returning home to allegedly 'radicalize' other youth.[274] Another case is that of Elgiva Bwire Oliacha ('Mohammed Seif) who was imprisoned for life after conducting grenade attacks in 2011. Oliacha was brought up a Catholic in Busia.[275]

Broadly speaking, there is general agreement amongst researchers that rates of recruitment have decreased since around 2015.[276] ICG cite several potential reasons for a decrease in recruitment activity at the coast, including 'improved intelligence gathering and a reduction in extra-judicial killings' and the involvement of prominent clerics.

Bryden and Bahra propose that the strength of jihad in eastern Africa is founded on a 'triple helix' of internationalist support from al Qaeda, regional recruitment, and Somalia as a host. They argue that after 2008, the three networks (al Ittihad al-Islami, al Qaeda East Africa and al Hijra) have become entangled in the form of al Shabaab.[277] It is no longer so easy to separate "internal' and 'external' stresses.'[278]

The notion of al Hijra appears to have all but disappeared from reporting over the last few years. There is little indication of a locally organized al Shabaab affiliate. Most of the initial al Hijra ideologues have either been killed (Rogo, Makaburi, etc.) or have fled to Somalia (Ahmad Iman Ali). Al Shabaab continues its activities in Kenya with the majority of attacks recorded in the North East. However, much of the existing threat appears to be coordinated from Somalia or has become 'entwined with Kenya's deepening regional and ethnic divisions.'[279] This is perhaps best exemplified by the Mpeketoni attacks in 2014 when 'witnesses described the attackers as being a mix of Somalis, Arabs, English-peaking and local (Mijikienda) people'.

ANNEX B: JUSTIFICATION FOR COUNTY SELECTION

TABLE 3: JUSTIFICATION FOR COUNTY SELECTION

	Locations	Overview	Justification for Inclusion
Nairobi	Majengo, Eastleigh	A cosmopolitan capital city, with a population of approximately 4.4 million people (2019 census). Eastleigh and Majengo, to the north-east of the CBD, is home to a large ethnic-Somali community.	Urban – as the capital, Nairobi serves as a node for other networks. History of VE recruitment. History of CVE interventions. Past RUSI interventions and research.
Nyeri	Majengo, Ruring'u (Nyeri town)	A relatively affluent county in Central region. The county's population stands at approximately 750,000 (2019 census). Most of the population is ethnically Kikuyu. A small Muslim population in Nyeri town's Majengo neighborhood allege that they are marginalized against.	Emerging area of concern / recent recruitment activity. Links to 14 Riverside (Ali Salim Gichunge). Minimal understanding of VE Minority (or enclave) Muslim community. 2020 RUSI CVE needs assessment suggested better understanding was needed.
Mombasa	Kisauni, Majengo, Likoni	Kenya's second city and the capital of former Coast Region, Mombasa's population stands at approximately 1.34 million (*macrotrends*). Majority Muslim, the settlement was founded in approximately 900AD and has a long history as an important trading center.	Urban Nexus with organized crime Known links to 14 Riverside attacks. Well-established CAP and CVE infrastructure. Vibrant civil society. Home to Masjid Musa and associated late clerics Existing RUSI and Search networks.

Kwale	Ukunda, Msambweni	A historically underdeveloped area on Kenya's south coast, largely dependent on its once successful tourism industry. The county administration is headquartered in the inland town of Kwale. The much larger town of Ukunda is located closer to the tourist beach hub of Diani. Cited as the county to produce more al Shabaab recruits than any other.[280]	Long-term association with al Shabaab recruitment and local extremist movements. Concerns over 'returnees'. RUSI and Search existing networks. Cross-border links with Tanzania. History of CVE interventions. One of the country's first CAPs (2017).

ANNEX C: METHODS

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH was led by senior researchers and supported by research assistants, who served as translators and note takers, subsequently transcribing all the data under the supervision of the lead researcher. The qualitative research teams were deployed to each of the study locations between April and June 2021.

The RUSI team supported the process closely and held real time briefings with the field teams. The approach and the field guides were adapted on a continual basis as needed. This was resource-intensive but ensured that the core team maintained an understanding of the challenges faced on the ground. Changes could be made as and when new findings emerged. Newly generated knowledge could also be shared with the client as well as those working on other components of the study in real time.

The objective of the qualitative research component was to obtain a more nuanced and in-depth localized understanding of how VE and CVE was perceived within each of these communities. The research team designed questions that sought to encourage participants to discuss the communications networks in the target communities and how social norms were established. The qualitative component included the use of key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with a range of actors including community members, county government actors and CVE practitioners. Either individually or in small groups, members of the county engagement forums in each county, local civil society practitioners, law enforcement officers, religious leaders, community elders, women's support groups and 'at-risk' youth were interviewed. The FGDs brought together individuals from similar demographics. The lead qualitative researchers and their assistants were based in and/or experienced in the study locations and were thus able to select participants based on their existing networks and recommendations made during the fieldwork.

In addition to the KIIs and FGDs, where possible, the researchers attended ongoing CVE activities or community meetings in order to obtain a greater sense of how CVE messages were disseminated and received by community members. COVID-19 restrictions, unfortunately, limited opportunities for participant observation of ongoing activities. In some locations no activities took place (such as Nyeri). Participant observation was, however, conducted at a *baraza* in Nyali, Mombasa, and researchers attended a CEF meeting in Kwale. In addition, observation notes were collected by the qualitative researchers throughout their time in the field, as they visited government and civil society offices. Critically, detailed participant observation notes were taken during validation workshops held in all four counties.

Both the FGDs and interviews were semi-structured. Thus, the research followed the natural flow of thinking and discussion of the groups and did not adhere to a strict guide. The research team anticipated that such an approach would solicit more nuanced and reflective data on the topic of VE. Researchers encouraged participants to speak in the language(s) that they felt most comfortable using. The number of participants in each focus group ranged from five to eight. Mixed gender groups were conducted when appropriate, but in many groups all participants were of the same gender.

WHAT WORKED WELL

The qualitative approach allowed the team to collect data that could not have been gleaned from any of the other methods, including the social network analysis and survey approaches. The interviews and FGDs provided the freedom for participants to explain their views on the topic of VE and social networks in their own words.

The interview guides were developed as a collaborative effort between the core RUSI team, the lead field researchers, and their assistants, allowing for discussion and adjustments before deploying to the field. This considered process enhanced familiarity with the concepts and objectives of the research, allowing for more in-depth discussions during the field work.

It was assessed that the most comprehensive approach to use during the analysis phase was a manual and systematic reading of the transcripts and a thematic grouping of the content. The nuances of the messages circulating could only be understood through a manual analysis of the anonymized transcripts. A more automated approach, such as a formal coding system using artificial intelligence, would have missed the subtle differences in the language used, as well as the tone of conversation:

- Conversations with participants often took place in multiple languages, switching seamlessly between English, Kiswahili, and other vernacular languages.
- Local dialects and slang (e.g., sheng in Nairobi) were frequently used by participants in answering the researchers' questions.
- The unstructured nature of interviews meant that conversations often digressed into seemingly unrelated topics. In itself, this was important as researchers were able to appreciate the issues that mattered most to the communities in question. However, an automated system may not have recognized these segments of the conversation.
- Pseudonyms were frequently used to refer to al Shabaab (e.g. *Mhalifu wa Usiku* or night offenders) and other sensitive topics.
- The context of the conversations could easily have been lost without a full reading of the transcripts.
- Technical language was often misused by participants who were seen to mirror the researchers' vocabulary. An automated system may have misinterpreted these segments of conversation.

From a quality assurance perspective, **frequent communication between the field team and the study management team worked well**, ensuring that the research remained on track and did not deviate significantly from the overall objectives. The approach allowed the RUSI team to keep track of findings and support the field research teams to make adjustments as needed. The volume of interviews was significant and learning in real time eased the burden on the review and analysis of the transcripts.

The experiences of the qualitative researchers served the study well, with significant faith placed in certain individuals, their approach, their contacts and ultimately their personalities. Many of the participants were reached via links known to the researchers. This enabled trust building, which was essential for work of this nature in the communities in question. The researchers then identified neutral interview locations with the support of a local mobilizer. These included public recreation grounds, CSO organization offices and social halls. This effort was meant to contribute to participants' sense of safety and comfort level during the interview sessions. When logistical challenges meant that coffee shops or more public places were proposed, it was evident that the participants were uncomfortable, and they often requested to reschedule or asked that alternative locations be selected for the conversations.

Adopting a truly discursive approach – rather than a question-answer or 'group interview' format – for the FGDs worked well. The approach enabled participants to answer questions of their choice. The research team found that the most granular data came through when the groups were left to their own discussions, rather than being asked to respond to specific questions. It was in these organic conversations that the community members' own perspectives and terminology became apparent to the researchers.

With regard to the key informant interviews, **follow-up meetings sometimes took place**. These second interviews occurred when the individual evidently had more to say or was interested in meeting again and talking further. Follow-ups were also conducted on the phone when appropriate. During repeat interviews, participants often felt more comfortable and were able to offer deeper insights on the topic.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK WELL

In the qualitative study, the researchers adopted an extensive consent process. The RUSI research team provided key informants with an information sheet and required that they sign a consent form. Where consent was obtained, interviews were recorded. If participants were uncomfortable, as they often were, then detailed written notes were taken instead. The response to this process varied from location to location but in Kwale, where government surveillance is said to be extensive and intrusive due to the area's history of al Shabaab recruitment, many participants were uneasy with the elaborate consent process. It was also time consuming for the researchers. On occasion, only verbal consent could be obtained. Future research with similarly sensitive populations should ensure that the consent process is context specific and trauma sensitive. Written consent should be avoided if possible when working with communities where distrust and suspicion are common. If absolutely essential, the

consent form and information sheet should be kept short and easy to interpret to avoid adding to the anxiety of the participant. For example, technical questions, such as those concerning 'data security' may not be appropriate. These documents should not require the participant to provide personally identifiable information.

Some questions were difficult to facilitate in locations with participants that had been through negative experiences with researchers in the past and were subsequently suspicious. In this scenario, the researchers were encouraged to remain flexible, adopting various approaches to the topic. For example, researchers sometimes asked about other local organizations or found roundabout ways of broaching the topic of VE with the participants. Social desirability bias, a desire to answer in a way that others might approve of, is common in CVE research and some participants appeared to provide answers that they perceived were what the researchers wanted to hear.

In some FGDs participants were not comfortable with the others present in the group. Despite having been identified through the same network or known to be working for the same organizations in the same area, they were not always as familiar as the researchers assumed. One participant stated, "we don't know who is who in this group" and it was clear that a lack of trust permeated even amongst groups of friends. This prevented them from speaking freely and comfortably. Reassurances that the study would be anonymous would not placate the concerns that their peers might report their comments to others who could wish them harm. However, the researchers encouraged participants to only talk about issues they were comfortable discussing and only addressed the most sensitive issues if the group was comfortable. Regardless, on occasion and especially in Kwale, suspicion and fear were so pronounced that the interview ended prematurely.

In some interviews the participants were observed to be nervous and uncomfortable, fearing that the police would show up and interrupt the interview. Some participants required constant reassurance that they were safe to participate and that their data would be kept strictly anonymous. The researcher also reminded participants that all views were considered valuable and would be respected in the process. It is imperative that a non-interrogative style is taken in such settings and that participants are allowed to discuss matters that are of importance to them. This necessitates flexibility and empathy on the part of the facilitator.

Finally, as might be expected, in some locations participants were not available during the time allocated for the field research, leaving gaps in the desired participants list.

SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a tool for investigating social structures through the use of network analysis and graph theory. SNA examines relational data (data that have inter-related observations), which can be collected in a number of ways. This study incorporated two approaches to collecting relational data and applying SNA. A snowball sampling process, accompanied by a questionnaire, was used to survey a sample of individuals in 'at-risk' areas

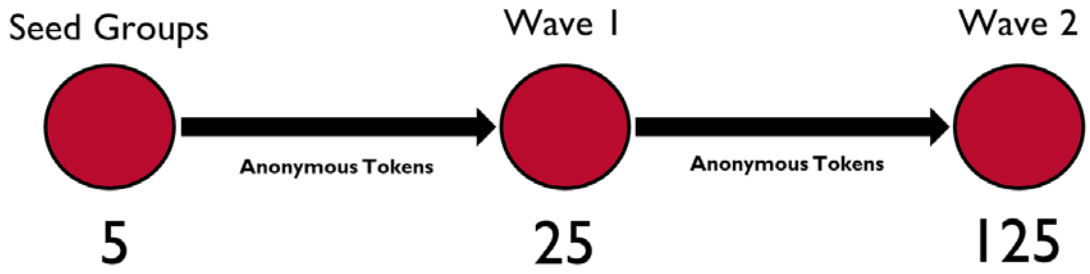
of the target communities. A relational survey was used to record information-sharing and collaborative relationships between members of the county engagement forums (CEFs) in each of the four target counties. The relational survey focused on CVE actors.

SNOWBALL SAMPLING

To investigate the aspects of the study that inquire about the relational aspect of information spread and the social networks that enable dissemination of VE media content, the research team relied on a snowball sampling strategy that asked an initial group of participants (seed groups) to recruit subsequent participants with whom they "most frequently discuss problems affecting [their] community and with whom [they] are likely to share media (videos, articles, etc.) related to those problems either online or in-person." Participants were given anonymous tokens to physically give to those being recruited into the study. The tokens acted as an invitation to participate in the study and established an anonymous link between participants.

The process identified a subset of the population who were more likely to consume VE content and to examine their information sharing practices. The survey thus sought to establish a better understanding of those potentially receiving VE content. The initial group of participants were recruited based on a pre-set list of non-mutually exclusive primary and secondary criteria rooted in past research regarding VE in Kenya.[281] Through community entry facilitators in the target communities, the research team identified five seed group members for each county. Of the 20 seed group members, several had been recruited by al Shabaab and made plans to go to Somalia but later withdrew, others were relatives of al Shabaab recruits who had returned from Somalia, some had relatives who were still in Somalia with al Shabaab, and others (specifically in Nairobi) had ties to criminal gangs and/or were recent converts to Islam. Each seed group contained two women and three men.

Figure 8: Seed groups



Each of the five seed group members recruited five additional participants, who in-turn recruited an additional five participants, each based on the recruitment prompt to recruit the five people with whom they most frequently discussed problems affecting their community.[282] The process resulted in the following sample breakdown:

TABLE 4: SNOWBALLING SAMPLE OF 'At-risk' AREAS

COUNTY	#FEMALE	#MALE	TOTAL
Kwale	43	112	155
Mombasa	59	96	155
Nairobi	59	100	159
Nyeri	79	76	155
Total	240	384	624

The research team devised an incentive structure that offered each participant an initial monetary incentive to participate and an additional incentive for each downstream participant who subsequently participated.

In aggregate, participants tended to be Muslim men below the age of 35. Most participants (98%) had at least completed primary school. Thirty-two percent of participants had received some type of religious education. Many participants were unemployed (46%).

The resulting data sets were subsequently analyzed using dedicated social network analysis software[283] through which a number of SNA methods[284] were applied, namely tests for homophily/heterophily across attributes. Homophily is the extent to which actors in a network are more likely to share relationships based on a shared attribute, with heterophily being the conceptual opposite. Summary statistics of the attributes were produced using MS Excel.

WHAT WORKED WELL

Conducting research on sensitive topics such as VE can create trust barriers between participants and researchers. **The snowball sampling approach offered a way to recruit research participants who may have been unlikely to participate otherwise by cultivating**

and leveraging trust between prospective participants and the enumerator teams. These participants may have been inaccessible to the researchers or reluctant to speak to the enumerators but could be recruited indirectly by their peers.

In terms of the participant selection, **the community entry facilitators (members of the research team from the study locations) were able to locate and recruit seed group individuals** who matched the predetermined, primary selection criteria and many of the secondary criteria.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK WELL

The team underestimated the extent to which the brief questionnaire would induce trauma responses among participants. When this happened, the enumerators sought to empathize with those affected, ending the interview if appropriate or simply allowing the participant to share what they wanted. The participants were then referred to the facilitator who provided reassurances as necessary. The research team recommends that future studies of a similar nature have a referral support function if the enumerators are not able to handle some of the conversations and emotions that could come up during the interviews. Alternatively, guidance from an experienced practitioner on how to incorporate a trauma-informed approach to data collection would be of value.

In Kenya, and in economically deprived communities, determining incentives can be a challenge and source of concern. For this study, the incentive structure used had mixed results. While enumerators report that the incentive was not a key driver of participation, it did generate other complications, curiosity, and expectations from participants/communities.[285]

RELATIONAL SURVEY

The purpose of the relational survey in the research plan is to understand connections between members of the CEF and to consider how information was shared between respective members of the CEF. This approach allowed the research team to understand and compare the information structures among CVE actors in the target locations.

The relational survey process began with a mapping exercise in which the research team identified current CEF membership with support from the county commissioners, email lists and meeting rosters. The team used these contact lists to construct the survey with two closed-ended, multi-select relational questions[286], asking each participant to identify the others with whom they/their organization directly shared information and with whom they had directly partnered in the past, along with questions to ascertain some characteristics about the respondent organization. In each county, at least 75% of CEF members responded to the survey:

TABLE 5: RESPONSE RATES FROM CEF MEMBERS			
COUNTY	CEF MEMBERS IDENTIFIED	CEF MEMBERS RESPONDED	PARTICIPATION
Kwale	53	40	75%
Mombasa	19	15	79%
Nairobi	34	27	79%
Nyeri	50	44	88%
Total	156	126	81%

In reality, some of those who failed to respond to the survey were uncontactable or had left their role associated with the CEF. It was found that the official CEF lists were often outdated. Where appropriate, the analysis controlled non-responses by removing individuals (or organizations) who failed to complete the survey from the network. Overall, 126 organizations/individuals completed the relational survey questionnaire.

The questionnaire was administered using Google Forms sent via digital link through email and WhatsApp. In some cases, the research team administered the survey over the phone. The research team modeled these responses as networks and applied SNA methods to examine the information-sharing and partnership patterns among each of the four CEFs respectively.

WHAT WORKED WELL / NOT SO WELL

It became apparent in the process that the organization mapping and contact information discovery phase of the process was critical to high response rates. The CEFs were not equally well established in all sample locations and therefore the strength of network amongst the members varied greatly. CEFs are also a political platform and a place for difficult conversations relating to funding and priorities, therefore not all participants hold the CEFs in equally high regard. Getting buy-in from all participants in this network for the mentioned reasons was a significant challenge.

Those responsible for facilitating CEFs should consider creating an up-to-date contact list with its memberships along with data on the organization's attributes and programs specific to CVE.

Future studies should continue to employ the relational survey approach to examine these CEF relationships longitudinally. This will provide donors and the Government of Kenya with a look at how future interventions or re-organization can influence these networks overtime.

ANNEX D: COUNTY SUMMARIES

TABLE 7: COUNTY SUMMARIES

	NAIROBI	MOMBASA	KWALE	NYERI
Understandings of VE	Conflation with criminal gangs, especially Gaza, Mungiki and Smarter.	Conflation of VE with local criminal groups – "juvenile gangs" such as Wakali Kwanza and Wakali Wao. Misconceptions / misinterpretations of scripture. Injustice of VE always being associated with Islam. Police and Govt as VE actors.	Misconceptions / misinterpretations of scripture (imani potofu or msimamo potofu). Inclusion of MRC and local 'juvenile gangs. Police and Govt sometimes seen as VE actors. Political actors. Injustice of VE always being associated with Islam. Intolerance – being forced to do something.	Conflation with crime, especially Mungiki. Discussion of daily concerns – employment, alcohol, political violence. Regurgitation of language heard at CAP workshops.
Recruitment Dynamics	Deceit, with offers of employment, education abroad, individuals connected to local agents using social media.	Desire to make quick money.	Unfulfilled promises of employment. Money. Arabic language sometimes is used to gain theological credibility and legitimacy amongst the targeted.	Controlled by a few connected individuals, based on a 'referral system'. Peer pressure. 'Brainwashing'. Suggestions of Al Shabaab recruitment from among Mungiki members.

Drivers	Law enforcement abuses. Discrimination of Muslim community – ID card delays. Divisions between 'native' Somali community and immigrants from Somalia. Land grabbing especially in Pumwani and Kibra. Lack of employment opportunities. Poverty / financial incentives. Broken families and community's value system. Lack of role models and peer pressure.	Police brutality. Marginalization of the "coastal people". Socioeconomic disenfranchisement / job opportunities skewed in favor of "upcountry people" (ID card challenges). Poverty / financial incentives. Lack of role models (successful people leave). Drugs and substance abuse. Idleness / illiteracy / lack of ambition. Peer pressure and "peer-to-peer" networks. Lack of employment opportunities, regardless of education. Lack of religious education available for women. Radical interpretation of Islamic teachings (ideology as important at a later stage in recruitment).	Poverty / financial incentives. Police brutality. Land grabbing. Marginalization of the "coastal people". Difficulty in obtaining personal documentations - birth certificates, ID cards, passport, title deeds. Poverty / financial incentives. Broken families, rebellion against family and community values/ norms – broken value system. Idleness/illiteracy/ lack of ambition in life. Drugs and substance abuse. Peer pressure and "peer-to-peer" networks. Radical interpretation of Islamic teachings.	Poverty / financial incentives (youth become trapped in Somalia). Police brutality. Marginalization of Muslim community in Majengo and Ruring'u. ID card delay. Struggles to obtain rights to land. Promises of better life. Lack of role models. Drugs and substance abuse.
Influences /s sources of information	In-person conversation and online news considered as main source of information at 43% and 30% respectively.	66.5% recognize online news as their main source. Peers.	53.5% recognize 'in-person conversation' as their main source (higher than any other county).	Considerable proportion (45.2%) rely on local news media for information; 30% recognize in-person conversations.

Spaces for circulation of VE ideas	Social media platforms, residential homes and business premises, football grounds, mosques, schools (primary and secondary). 'Base', betting / gambling site chat rooms, video game joints.	Social media, *maskanis* (especially the beach and 'gardens'), madrasas, residential homes, football grounds, boda boda parking lots, dilapidated or unfinished building, mosques, schools (primary and secondary).	Social media, *maskanis* sometimes called "bases" or "dens" (especially the beach, 'gardens'/ shambas, *mogokaa*/ miraa dens), madrasas, residential homes, football grounds, boda boda parking lots, marketplaces, coffee shops, Ukunda showground.	Football pitches, gym, madrasas, schools, social media 'jobless corner'.
VE networks	Recruitment likely to be undertaken in secrecy. Recruiters are considered sophisticated and spend time building trust before exploiting vulnerabilities.	Peer-to-peer. More covert, recruitment process considered to have gone "underground".	Mainly local recruiters who act as brokers/agents for al Shabaab.	Small and discrete, linked to one or two individuals. These individuals in-turn said to be linked to Aboud Rogo's network. More deliberate and targeted recruitment, particularly targeting young sportsmen, especially at the football field and at a gym.

Existing CVE	Minimal government-initiated CVE messaging/ interventions. Nascent CEF Limited implementation of CAP pillars Conflation of CVE with socio-economic activities, especially Kazi Mtaani	Strong civil society. Considerable CVE interventions and messaging, prominent CAP and comparatively advanced CEF. Exclusion of youth from design and/ or management of CAPs. Constrained funding for CAP especially on pillars focusing on structural issues, such as the land. Political interference in design and implementation of MCAPs. Limited information sharing, lack of confidentiality within the CEF framework. CEFs lack institutional memory. Conflation of CVE with socio-economic activities, especially Kazi Mtaani.	Considerable CVE messaging, an established CEF but with limited prominence and reach. Constrained funding for CAP especially on pillars focusing on structural issues, such as the land. Limited information sharing, lack of confidentiality, mistrust amongst CEF participants. CEF's lack institutional memory. No CVE in County Integrated Development Plan (not considered a priority of the county assembly)	Minimal government CVE messaging – largely limited to awareness raising Considerable institutional knowledge on the importance of CAPs, but minimal implementation of pillars due to resources and political commitment. Inadequate inclusion of youth in CVE interventions. Mistrust amongst CEF participants. Conflation of CVE with socio-economic activities, especially Kazi Mtaani.

Government relations	Police corruption and extortion. Mistrust between government/police and citizenry. Heavy-handed police action specifically against youth and some sections of Muslim communities. Lack of institutional memory and systematic communication due to transfers and personnel rotations.	Mistrust between government/police and citizenry. Police/government ineptitude. Law enforcement conflated with criminal gangs. Police breach of confidentiality and secrecy of information. Sparse collaboration and reporting. Lack of institutional memory and systematic communication due to transfers and personnel rotations. Relevance of community policing initiatives – Nyumba Kumi relevant for information sharing.	Pervasive lack of trust and skepticism between police and community. Considerable animosity between police and community, especially the youth. Alleged police/ government ineptitude. Law enforcement conflated with criminal gangs. Police breach of confidentiality and secrecy of information. Sparse collaboration and reporting. Lack of institutional memory and systematic communication due to transfers and personnel rotations.	Alleged government/ police inaction in response to VE activities/incidents. Police/government ineptitude. Law enforcement conflated with criminal gangs. Police breach of confidentiality and secrecy of information. Police corruption and bribery. Lack of institutional memory and systematic communication due to transfers and personnel rotations.

Community relations	Externalization of VE problem - linked to "illegal immigrants". Suspects Somali community as abettors of VE. Rivalries between religious clerics.	Suspicion and uncomfortable relations between the "coastal" and "upcountry" or "*wabara*" people, mainly because of land and state repression. Stereotypes coastal people as "lazy", "uneducated". Marginalization / discrimination of coastal people from economic and livelihood opportunities.	Suspicion and uncomfortable relations between the "coastal" and "upcountry" or "*wabara*" people, mainly because of land and state repression. Widespread derogatory narratives and stereotypes of the coastal people as "lazy", "uneducated". Marginalization / discrimination of coastal people from economic opportunities.	Intergenerational tensions.

ANNEX E: FURTHER DISCUSSION ON PARTICIPANT UNDERSTANDINGS OF VE

SOME PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED with the complexity of the term. A village official in Kwale suggested that VE was the "exaggeration" of information, while a group of imams felt that what was classified as VE was subjective. Similarly in Mombasa, a participant argued that "preachers who don't understand the religious context" could be classified as VE actors. These nuanced differences in definition somehow divert responsibility, suggesting that the issue is purely one of ideological understanding, an understanding that can be taught by external actors.

In some contexts, particularly in Kwale, VE was interpreted as an action one was forced to take by another individual. For example, a civil society actor stated that VE is "having a belief" in perpetrating an act that is "not out of your will"; rather "it is something that you're being pushed to do". Another Kwale CEF member declared that anything "you believe in, and you force someone to do" can be categorized as extremism, while youth suggested that VE was "being forced to do something beyond your imagination". Similarly, participants in Mombasa and Nyeri suggested that youth were "brainwashed".

Others, including county officials and imams in Nyeri, acknowledged that intolerance is a key feature of VE. Moreover, a county official in Kwale recognized that definitions of VE were dependent on community expectations. However, most explanations were more one-dimensional with some naming al Shabaab but unable to explain what made the group a VE organization.

In Kwale, community participants frequently suggested that the government was the VE actor. Such an argument was made as part of an assertion that it was not only Muslims that should be associated with VE. A group of imams, for example, stated that "VE is carried out by the government too." On other occasions, it was more organic. Across Kwale, most participants immediately discussed police violence when asked about VE. In literal terms, the most 'extreme' actors were seen to be state law enforcement agencies.

Land grabbing by politicians was also cited as an example of VE by participants, but more common were allegations made against the police. If participants did not assert that the police were themselves VE actors, some claimed that the police were driving VE recruitment through

extrajudicial killings and excessive force. A specific police operation against a suspect was referred to by a local CVE practitioner and CEF member as a "terrorist attack".

Some chose to define VE by the methods used. Many saw VE as 'extreme' violence of any sort. This attitude in itself naturally led most to discuss the activities of criminal gangs in the context of VE. This finding was most acute in Nyeri where crime was a much more constant concern that the threat of al Shabaab, but it was also observed in the other three counties. A CSO worker in Nairobi explained:

> "I'm sorry to say even the Mungiki are extremists. If you can see two young boys stealing using guns; they walk around, they terrorize people; that is still terrorism."

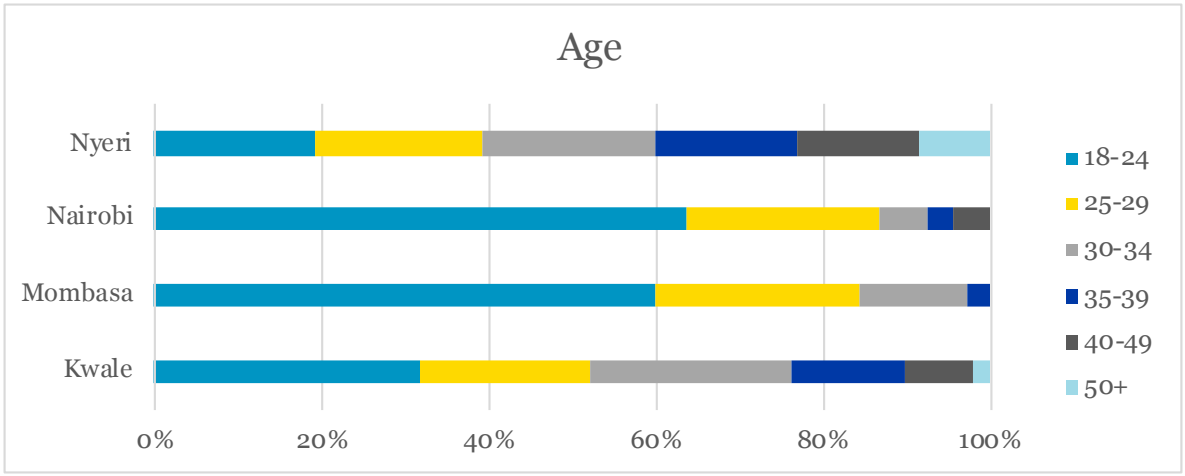
ANNEX F: SNA – TABLE OF AL SHABAAB CONTENT RESONANCE AND POLITICAL PERCEPTIONS / ATTITUDES

TABLE 8: SNA – TABLE OF AL SHABAAB CONTENT RESONANCE AND POLITICAL PERCEPTIONS / ATTITUDES					
*Table read as row total					
Statement: Kenya's border with Somalia is accurate and is where it should be.					
	Strongly agrees with statement	Agrees with statement	Neutral about statement	Disagrees with statement	Strongly disagrees with statement
Frequently agrees with AS content	25%	32%	14%	18%	11%
Sometimes agrees with AS content	13%	43%	22%	16%	7%
Never agrees with AS content	29%	29%	23%	14%	4%
Statement: I recognize Kenya's authority over Madera, Wajir and Garissa					
	Strongly agrees with statement	Agrees with statement	Neutral about statement	Disagrees with statement	Strongly disagrees with statement
Frequently agrees with AS content	18%	50%	18%	7%	7%
Sometimes agrees with AS content	18%	47%	17%	13%	5%
Never agrees with AS content	40%	40%	8%	7%	4%
Statement: Kenya's border with Somalia is Artificial					
	Strongly agrees with statement	Agrees with statement	Neutral about statement	Disagrees with statement	Strongly disagrees with statement
Frequently agrees with AS content	18%	25%	32%	11%	14%
Sometimes agrees with AS content	5%	16%	48%	26%	5%
Never agrees with AS content	6%	14%	38%	19%	23%
Statement: Al Shabab has legitimate authority in Mandera, Wajir and Garissa					

	Strongly agrees with statement	Agrees with statement	Neutral about statement	Disagrees with statement	Strongly disagrees with statement
Frequently agrees with AS content	29%	18%	7%	29%	18%
Sometimes agrees with AS content	5%	17%	28%	37%	13%
Never agrees with AS content	11%	15%	12%	26%	36%
Statement: The next two years will be more peaceful in Kenya					
	Strongly agrees with statement	Agrees with statement	Neutral about statement	Disagrees with statement	Strongly disagrees with statement
Frequently agrees with AS content	11%	43%	18%	14%	14%
Sometimes agrees with AS content	8%	22%	25%	31%	14%
Never agrees with AS content	26%	26%	19%	16%	13%
Statement: I am likely to vote in the next election					
	Strongly agrees with statement	Agrees with statement	Neutral about statement	Disagrees with statement	Strongly disagrees with statement
Frequently agrees with AS content	18%	36%	18%	7%	21%
Sometimes agrees with AS content	20%	33%	19%	16%	12%
Never agrees with AS content	50%	23%	8%	9%	11%
Statement: I am excited about opportunities that the future holds					
	Strongly agrees with statement	Agrees with statement	Neutral about statement	Disagrees with statement	Strongly disagrees with statement
Frequently agrees with AS content	21%	39%	21%	11%	7%
Sometimes agrees with AS content	13%	30%	27%	22%	8%
Never agrees with AS content	29%	27%	23%	12%	10%

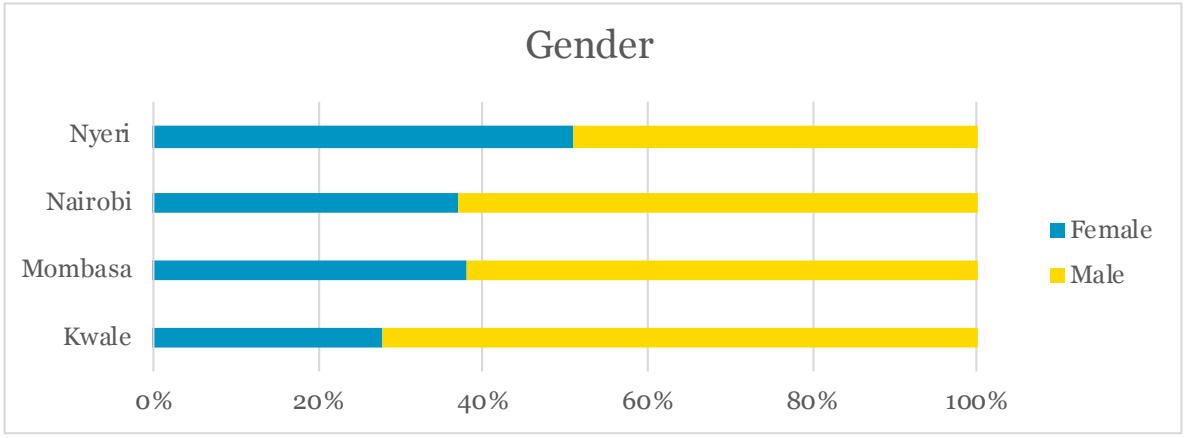
ANNEX G: SNA SNOWBALLING SURVEY PARTICIPANT ATTRIBUTE SUMMARIES

Figure 9: Age



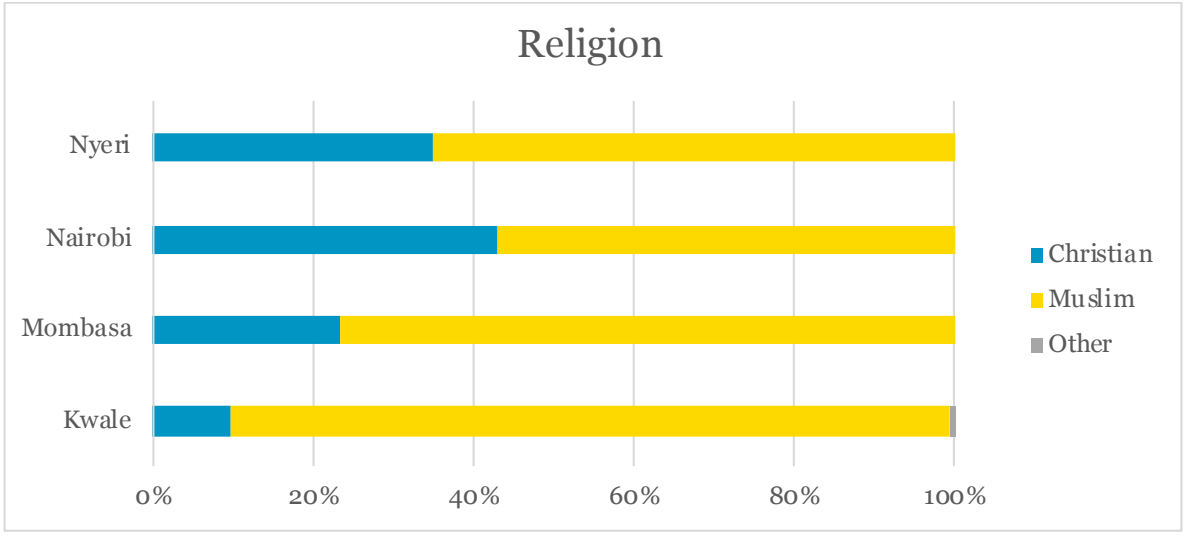
Samples from Mombasa and Nairobi tended to be younger. Nyeri is more evenly distributed than one might expect.

Figure 10: Gender



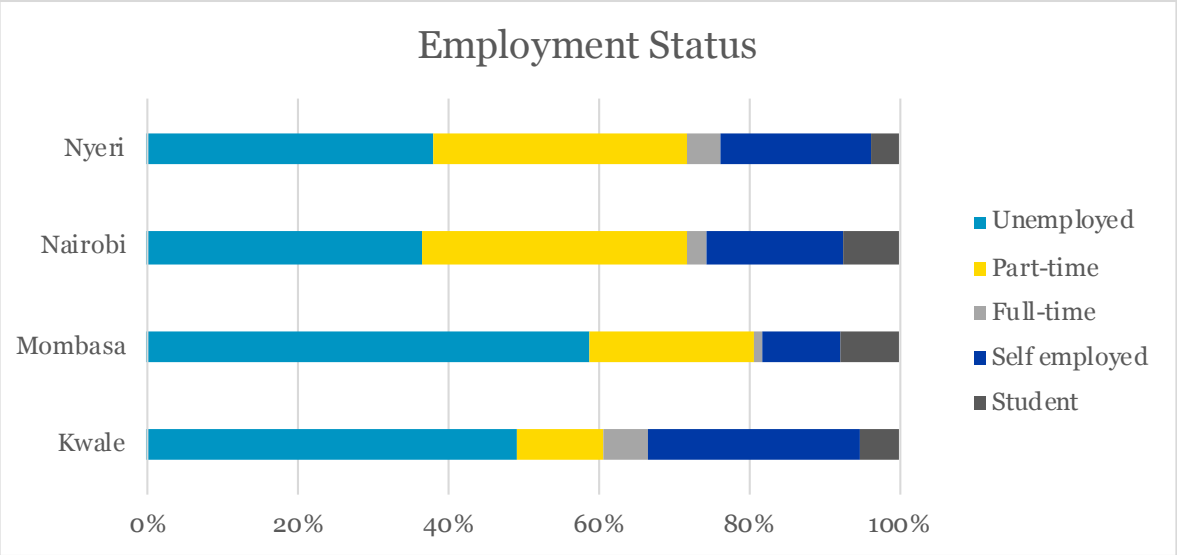
Males make up most of the sample in each county. Nyeri has the most equally distributed sample.

Figure 11: Religion



Most participants in each county identify as Muslim. Nairobi had the most religiously diverse / balanced sample.

Figure 12: Employment Status



Very few participants in each county were fully employed.

Figure 13: Highest levels of education

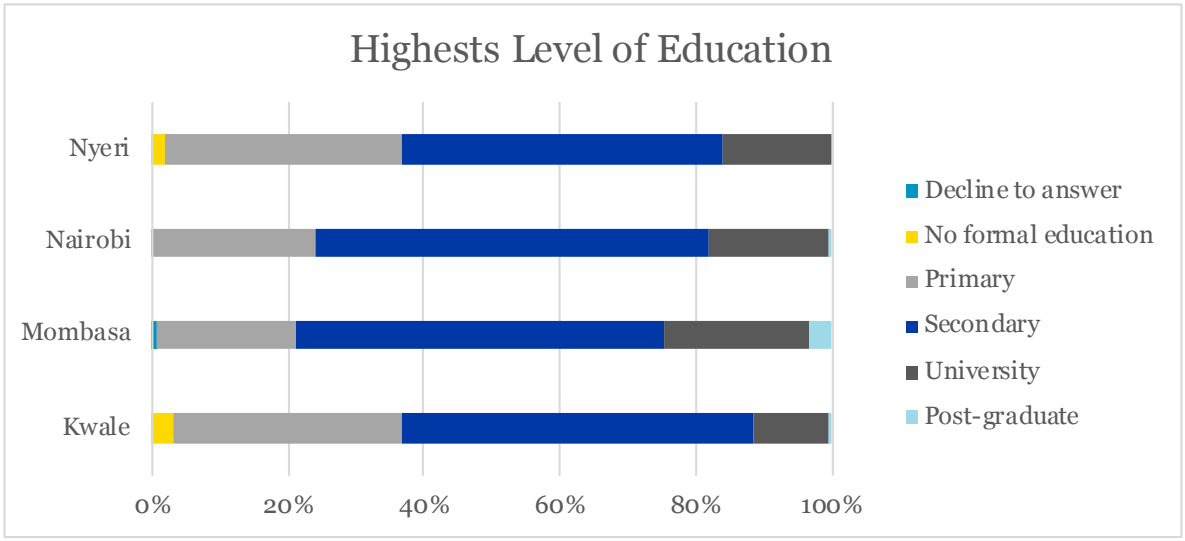
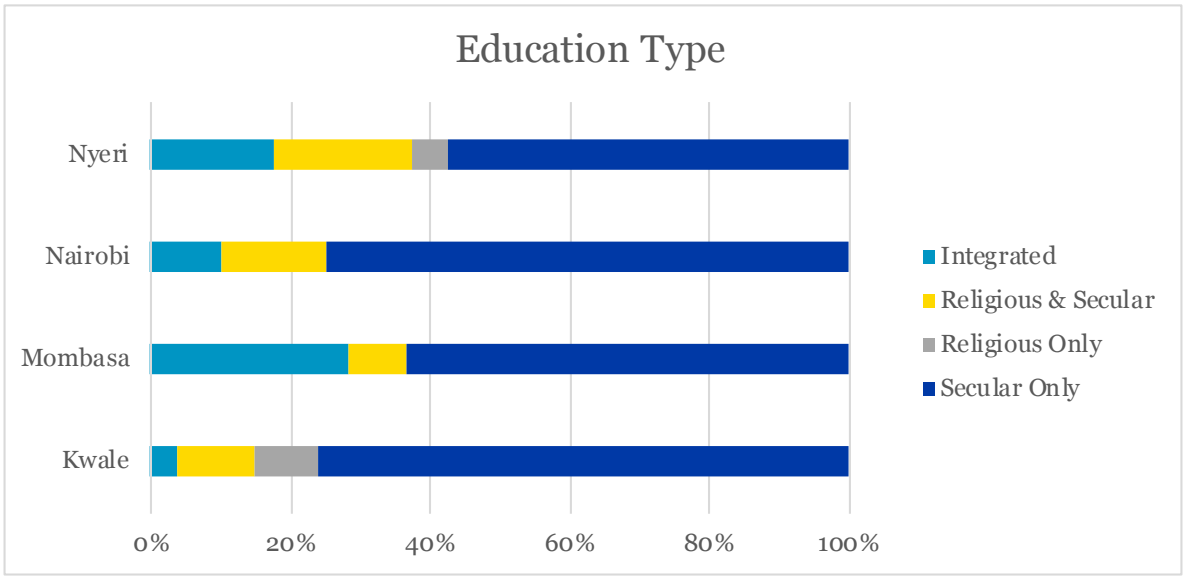
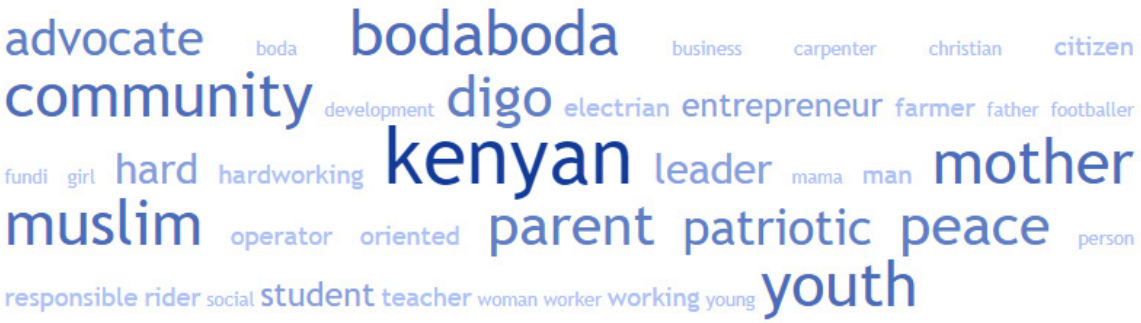


Figure 14: Education type



"How do you describe your identity?"

Figure 15: Kwale word frequency

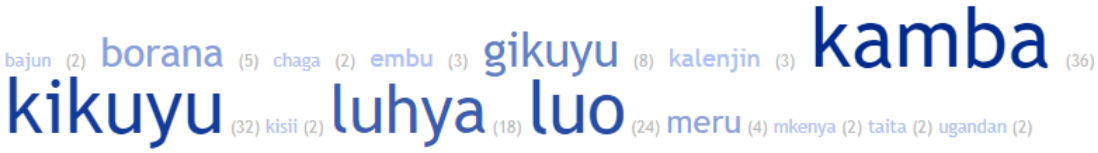


Participants in Kwale cited their national identify ("Kenyan" 21 times), a personal/familial role ("mother/parent" 17 times), a religious affiliation ("Muslim" 10 times), or an occupational identity ("Bodaboda", "entrepreneur", etc.).

Figure 16: Mombasa word frequency

Participants in Mombasa most frequently identified with their national identity ("Kenyan" 29 times) which was closely followed by participants who cited their religious identity "Muslim" 27 times / "God-fearing"), Youth (23) and various occupational descriptions.

Figure 17: Nairobi word frequency



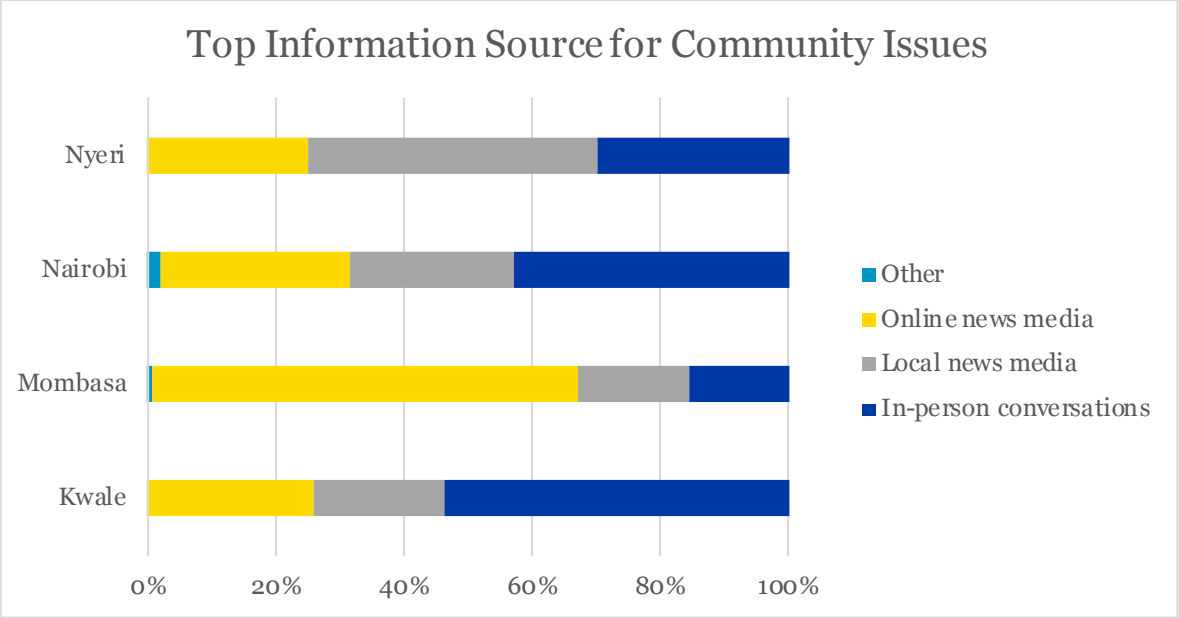
Almost entirely focused on tribal / ethnic affiliation. This is likely attributed to how the enumerators explained the question.

Figure 18: Nyeri word frequency

Almost entirely focused on tribal / ethnic affiliation. This is likely attributed to how the enumerators explained the question.

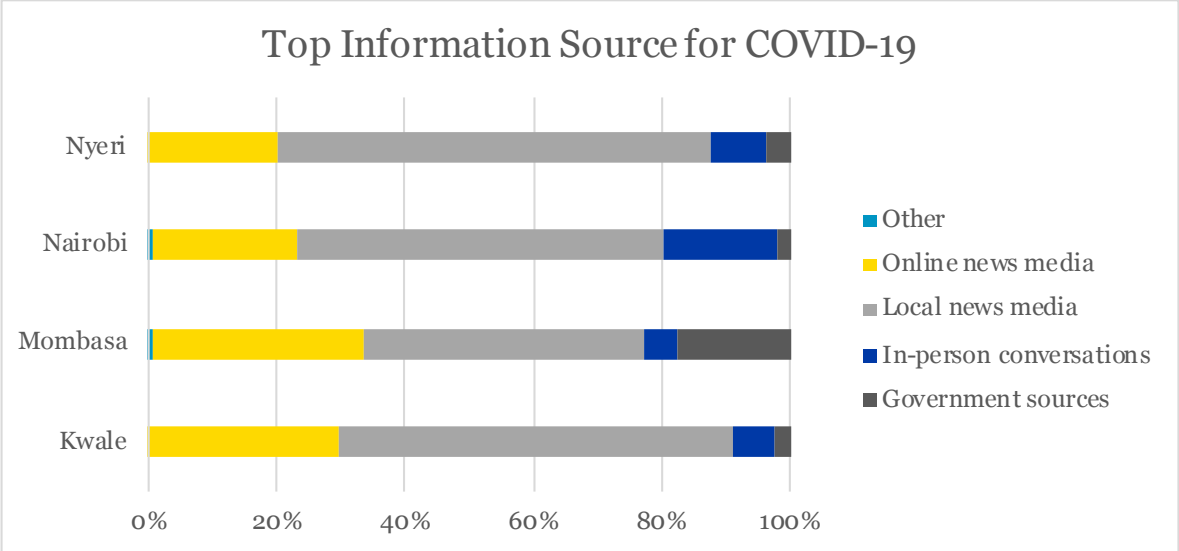
ANNEX H: SNA SNOWBALLING SURVEY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SOURCES SUMMARIES

Figure 19: Top information source for community issues



Online news media was most frequent among participants in Mombasa. A substantial portion of the Kwale participants rely on in-person conversation for news about their community. The Nyeri sample had the largest portion of participants who rely on local news media for information on issues in the community.

Figure 20: Top information source for COVID-19



Local news media was the most popular source for news about COVID-19 among participants in all counties.

Figure 21: Chatting with friends about COVID-19

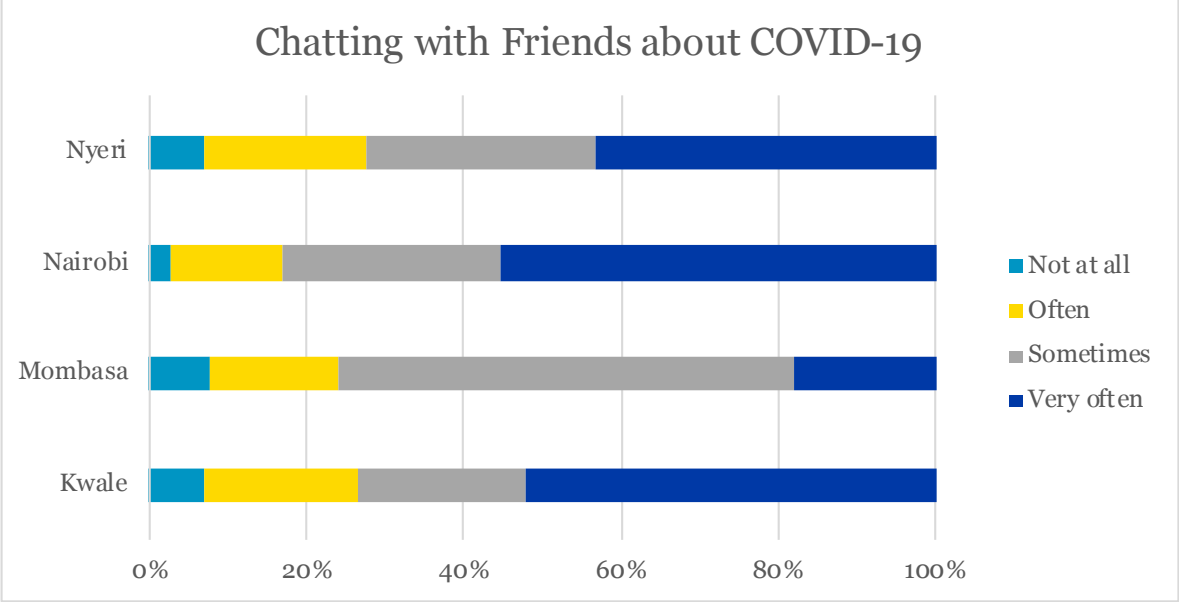


Figure 22: Have you heard of Hizb ut-Thahrir

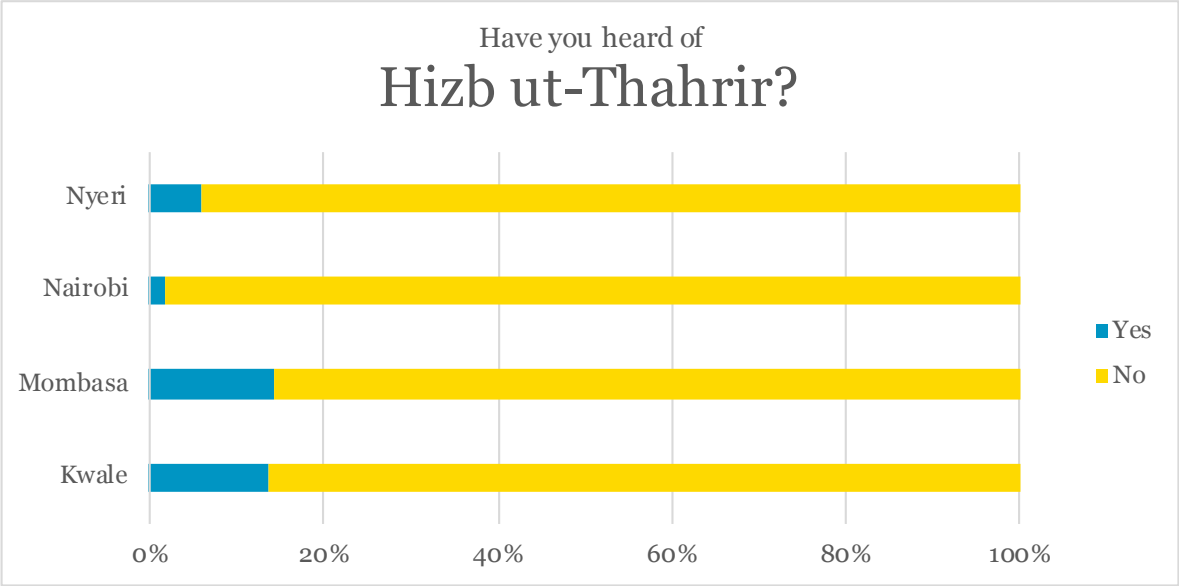


Figure 23: How frequently do people close to you share Hizb ut-Thahrir content?

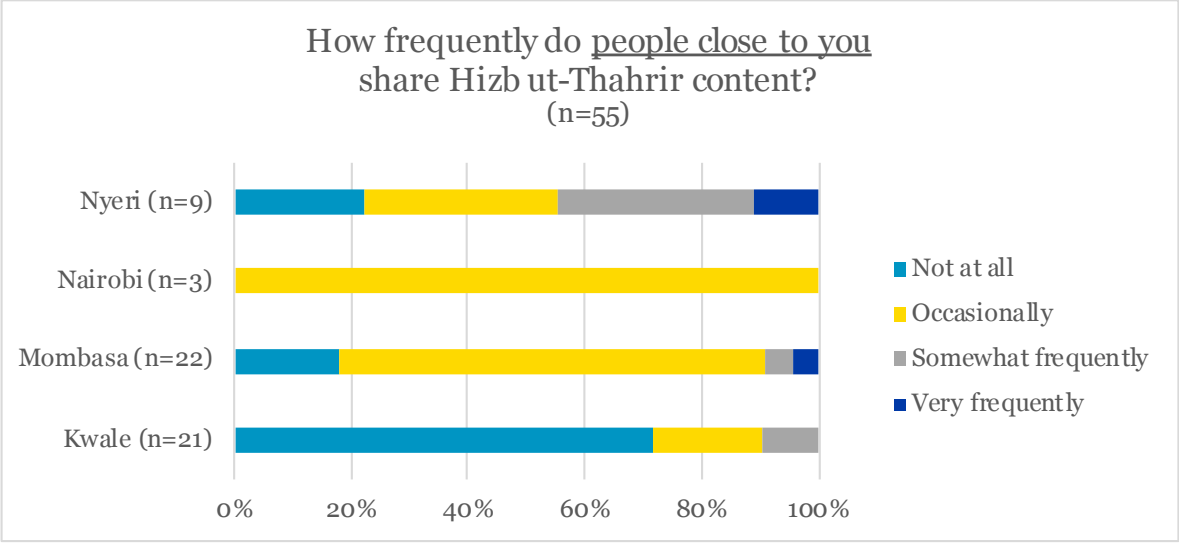


Figure 24: How frequently do you share Hizb ut-Thahrir content?

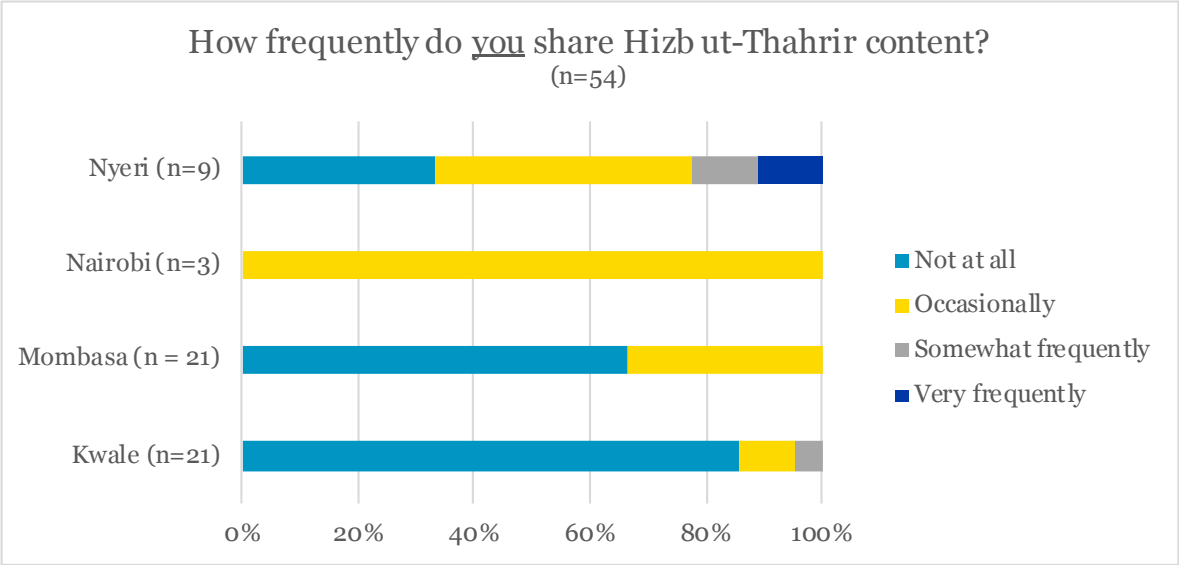


Figure 25: How does Hizb ut-Thahrir content resonate with you?

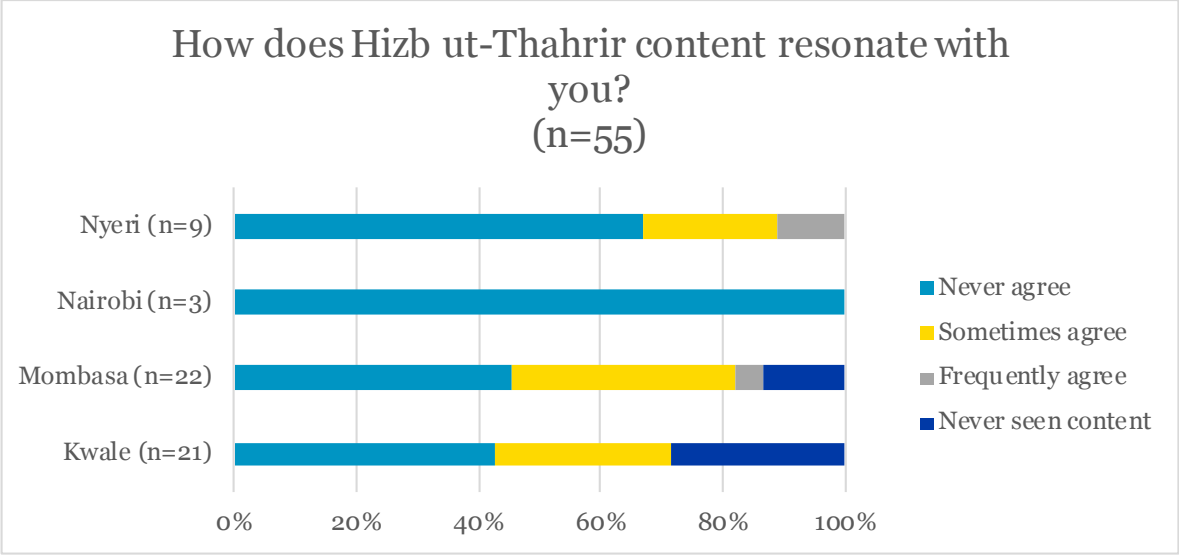


Figure 26: Have people close to you acted to address issues raised by Hizb ut-Thahrir content?

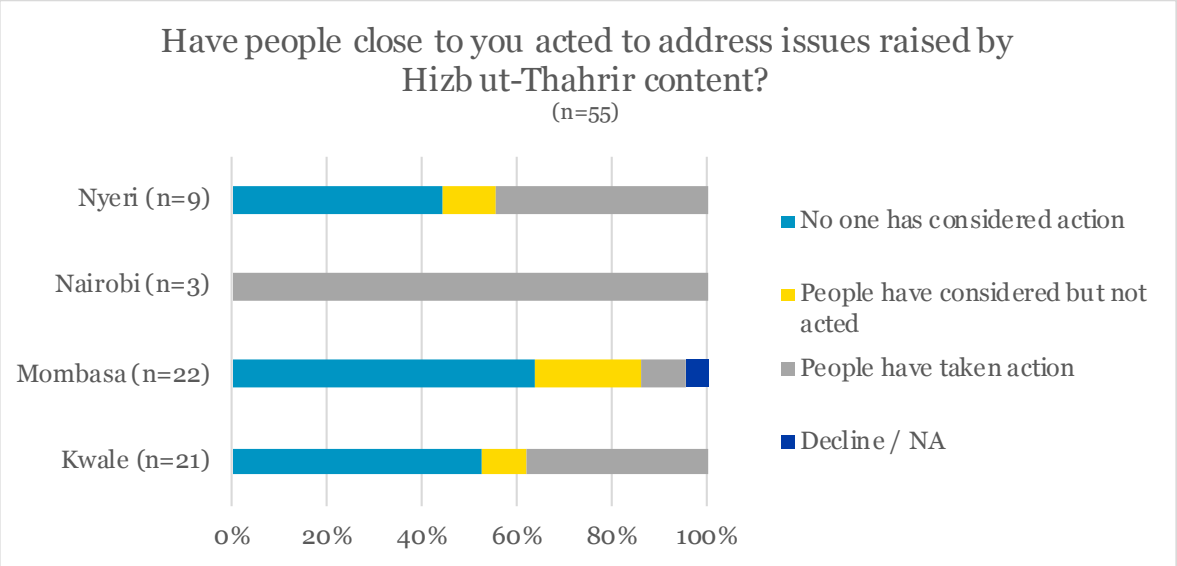


Figure 27: Have you acted to address issues raised by Hizb ut-Thahrir content?

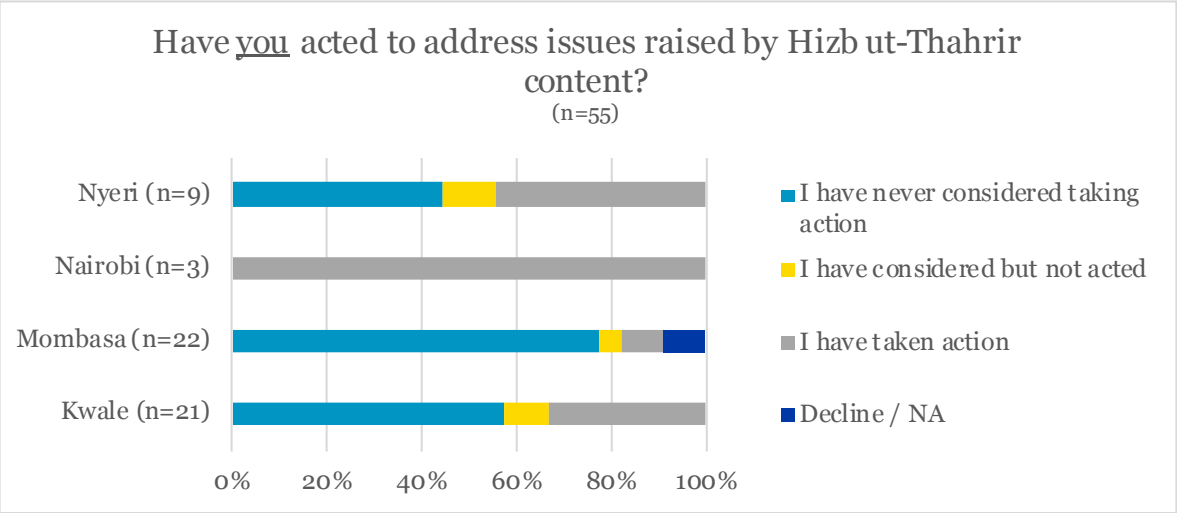


Figure 28: Have you heard of Al Shabab?

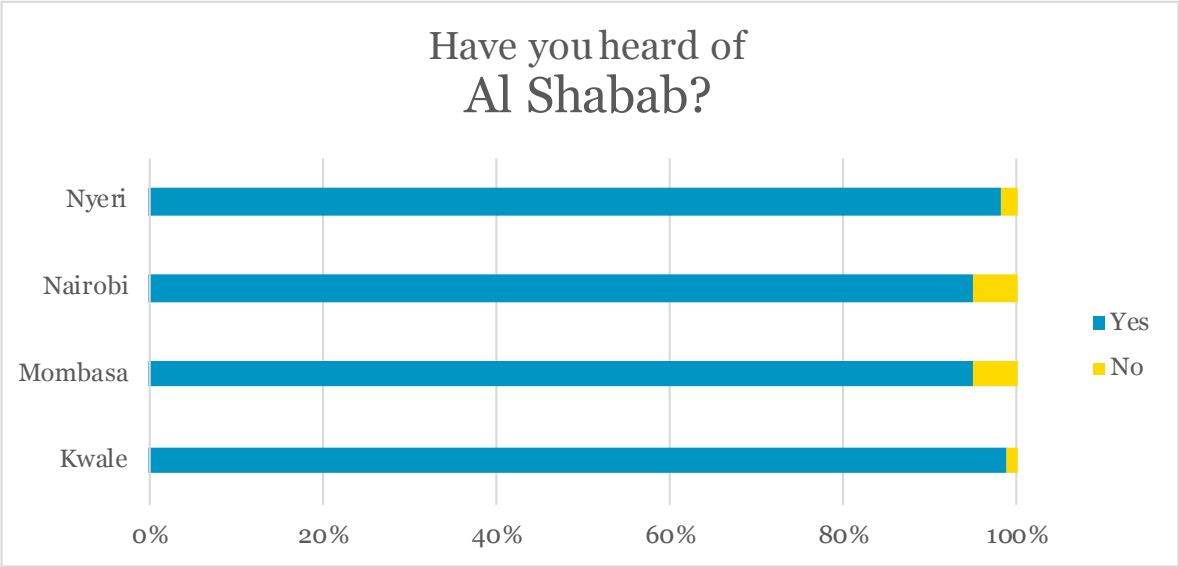


Figure 29: How frequently do people close to you share Al Shabab content?

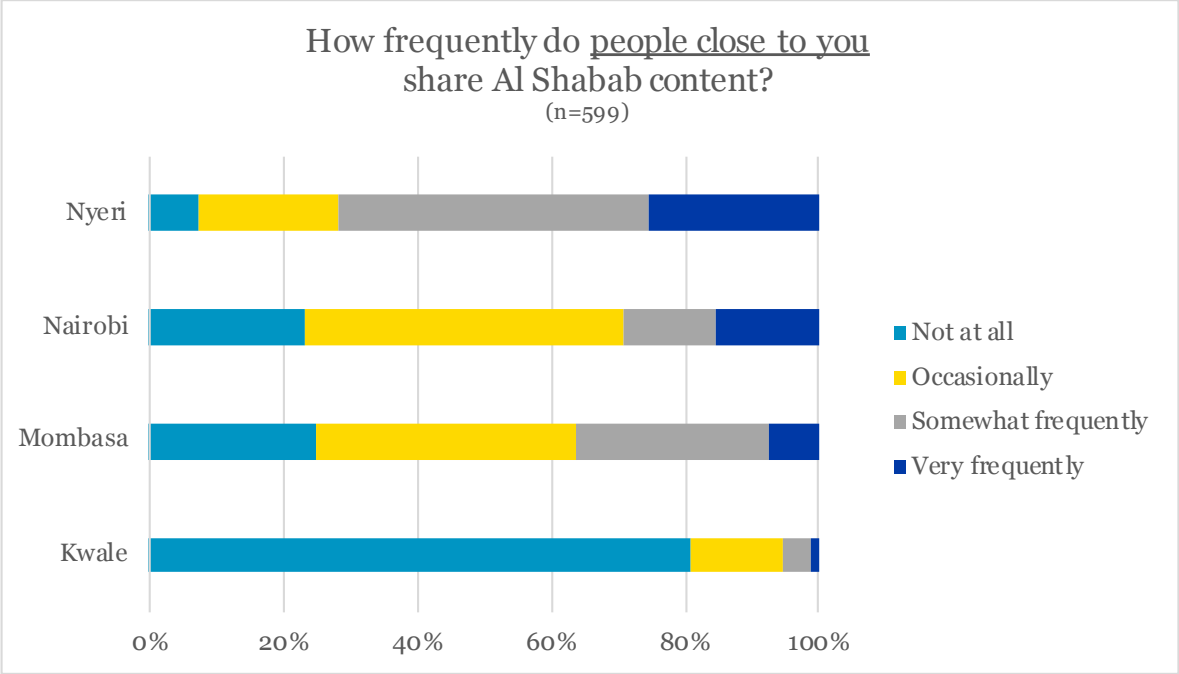


Figure 30: How frequently do you share Al Shabab content?

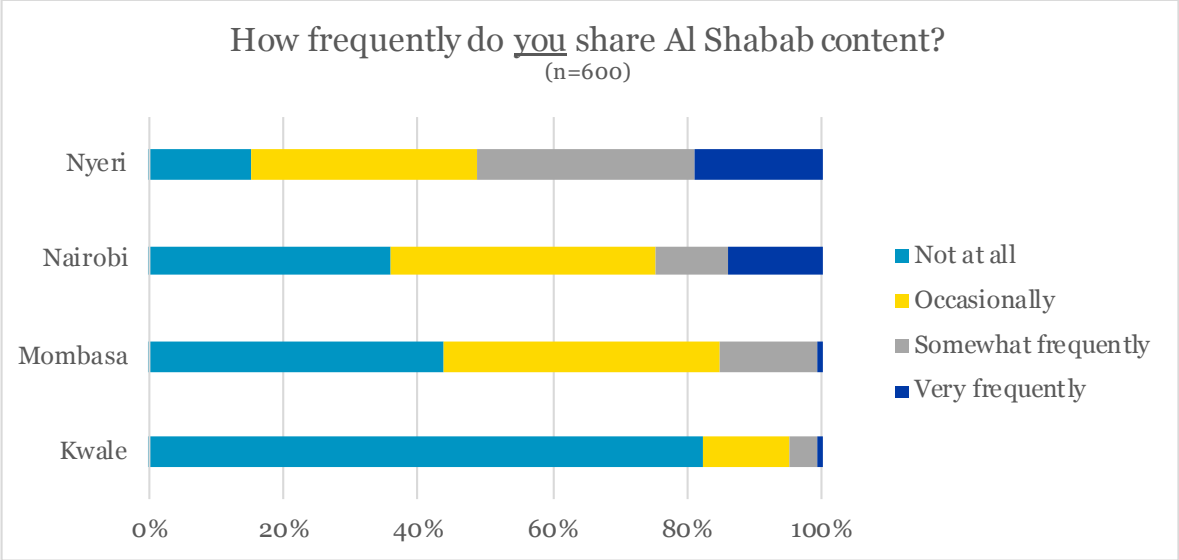


Figure 31: How does Al Shabab content resonate with you?

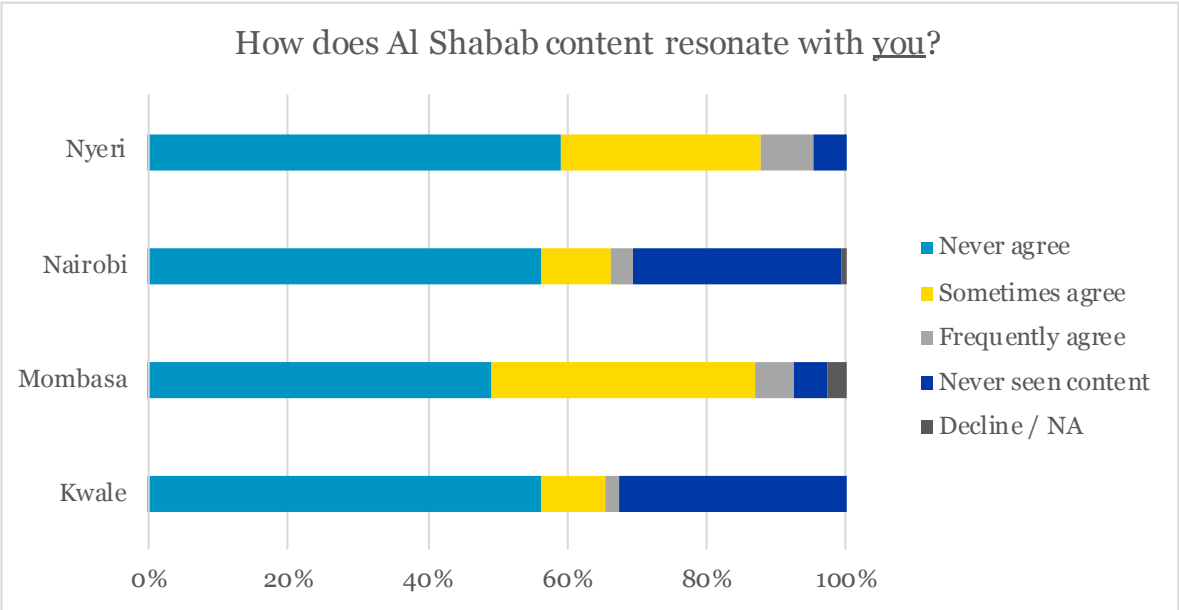


Figure 32: Have people close to you taken action to address issues raised by Al Shabab content?

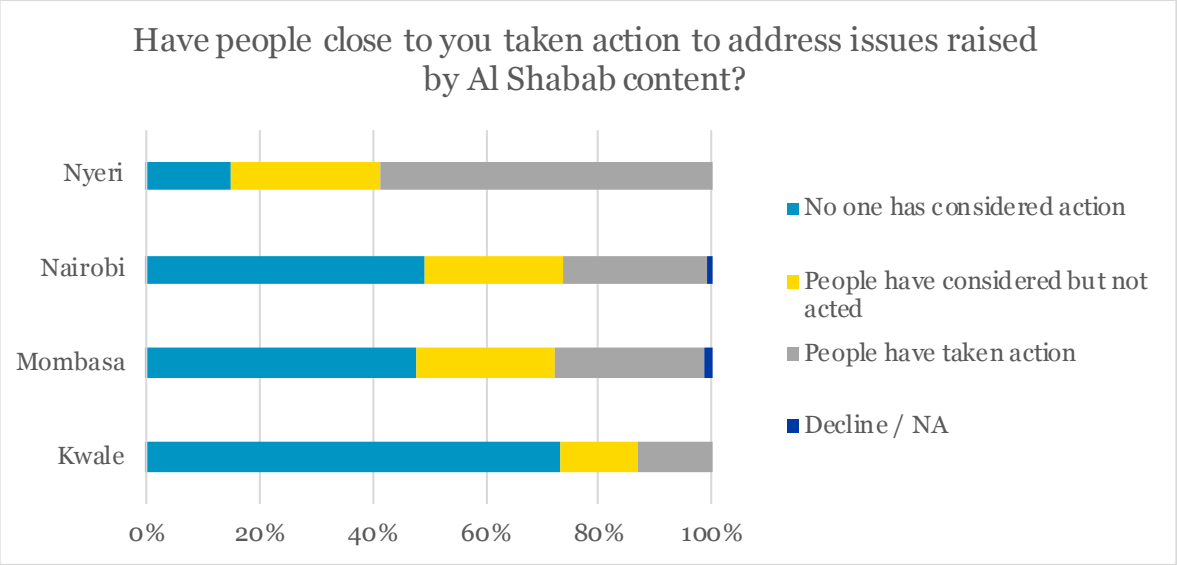


Figure 33: Have you taken action to address issues raised by Al Shabab content?

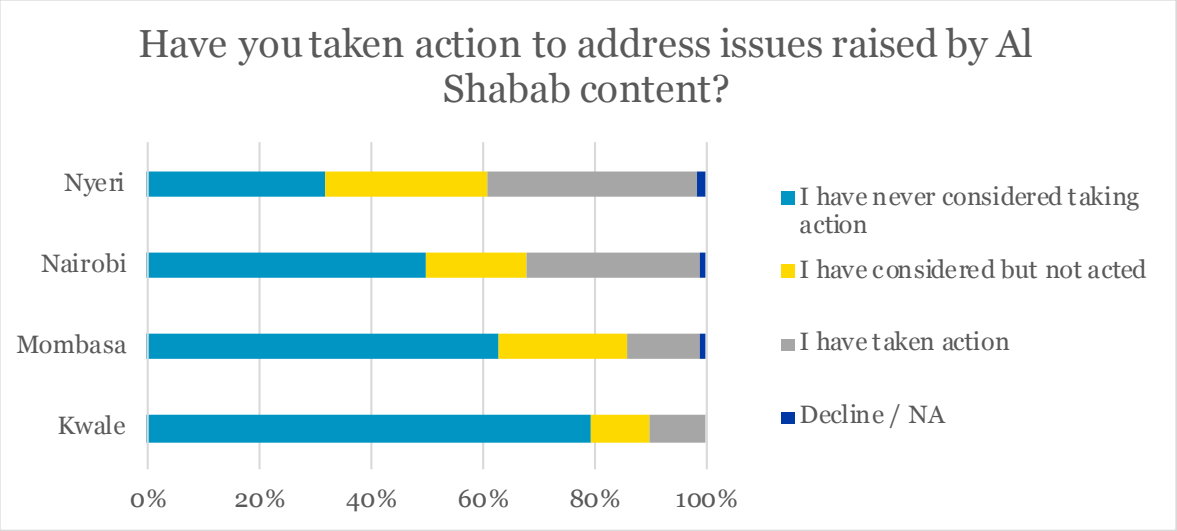


Figure 34: Have you heard of the Islamic State (IS/ISIS)

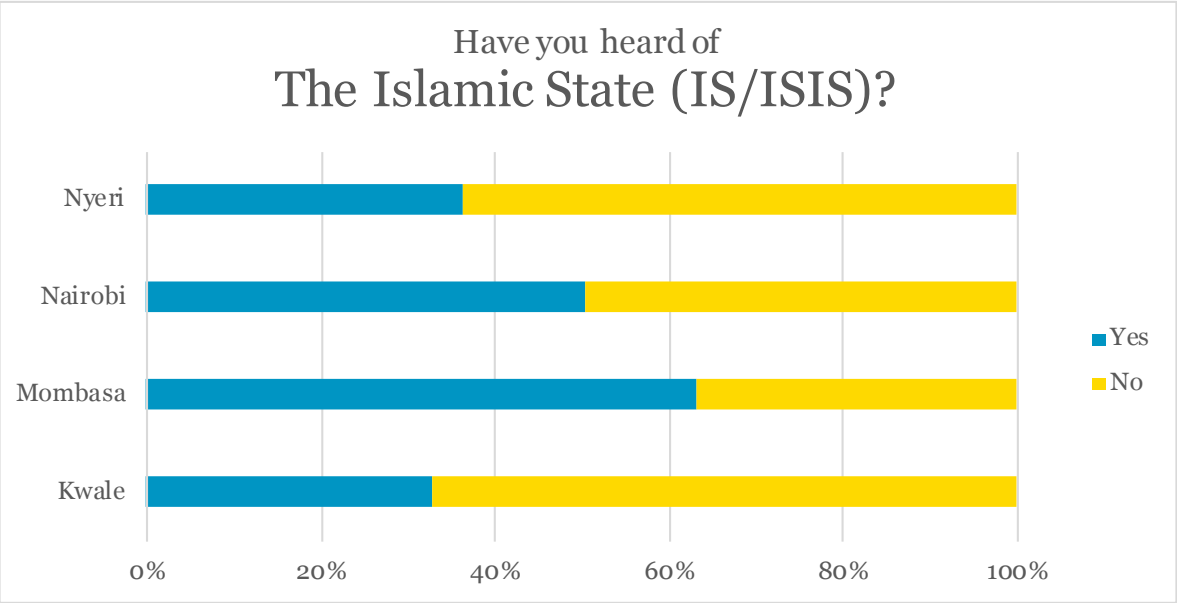


Figure 35: How frequently do people close to you share IS/ISIS content?

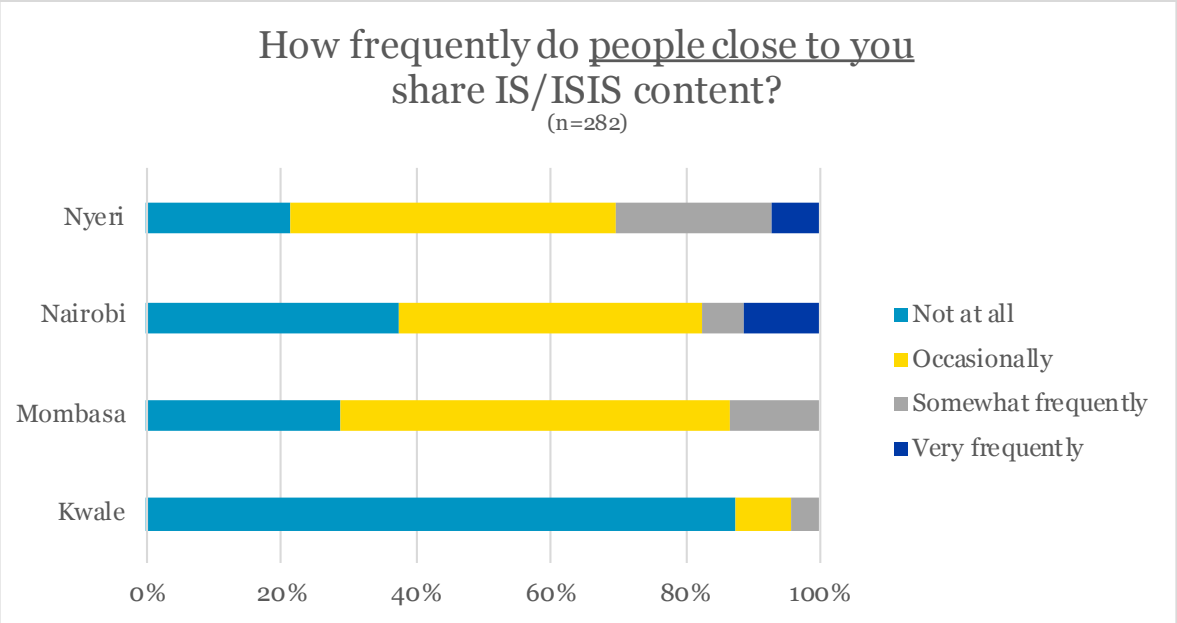


Figure 36: How frequently do you share IS/ISIS content?

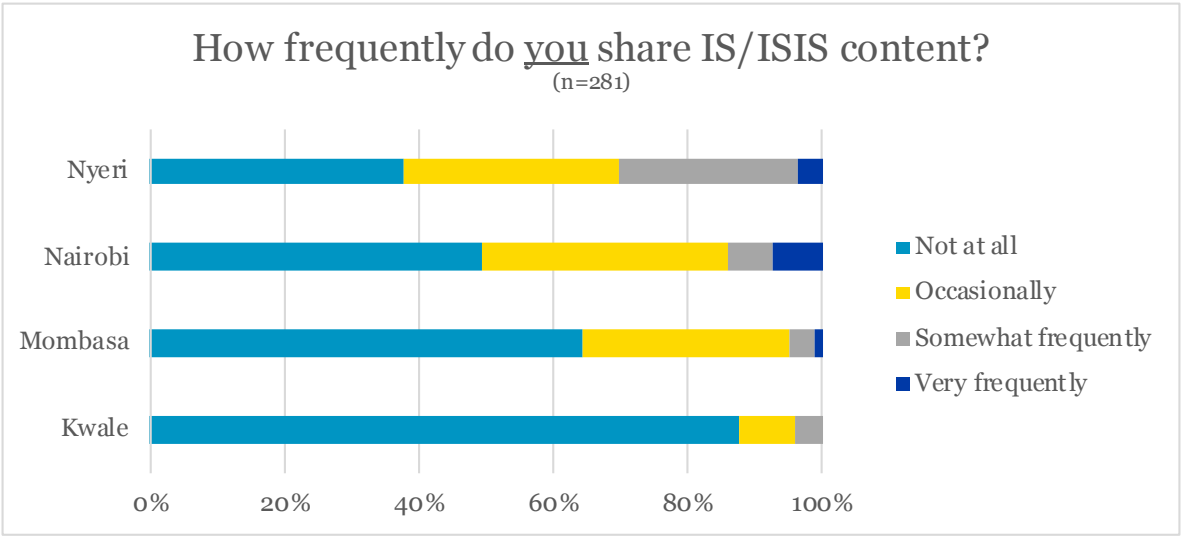


Figure 37: How does IS/ISIS content resonate with you?

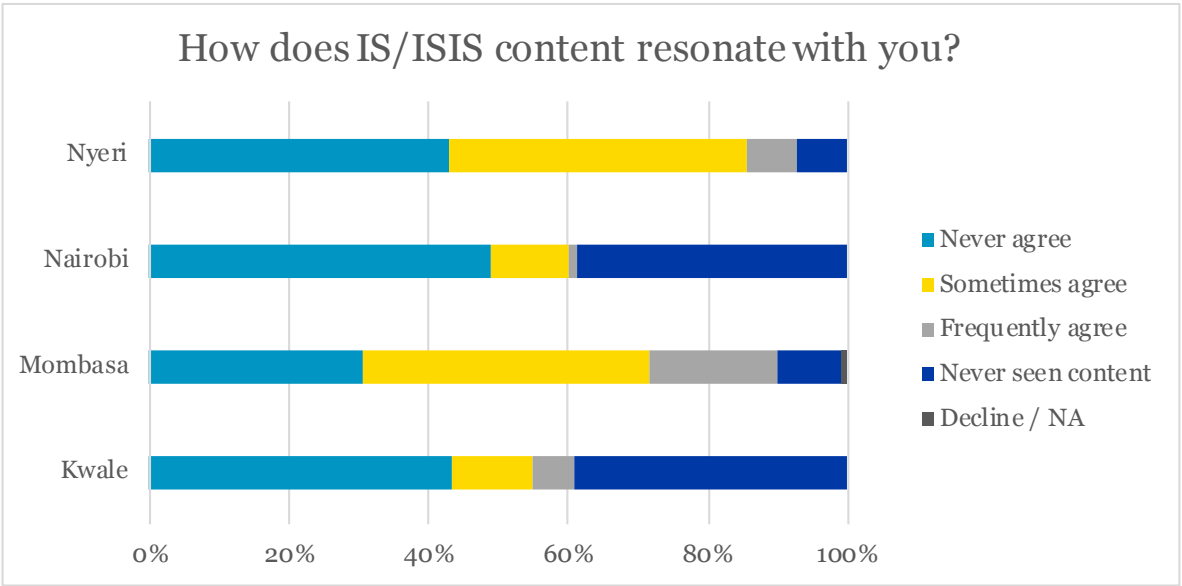


Figure 38: Have people close to you taken action to address issues raised by IS/ISIS content?

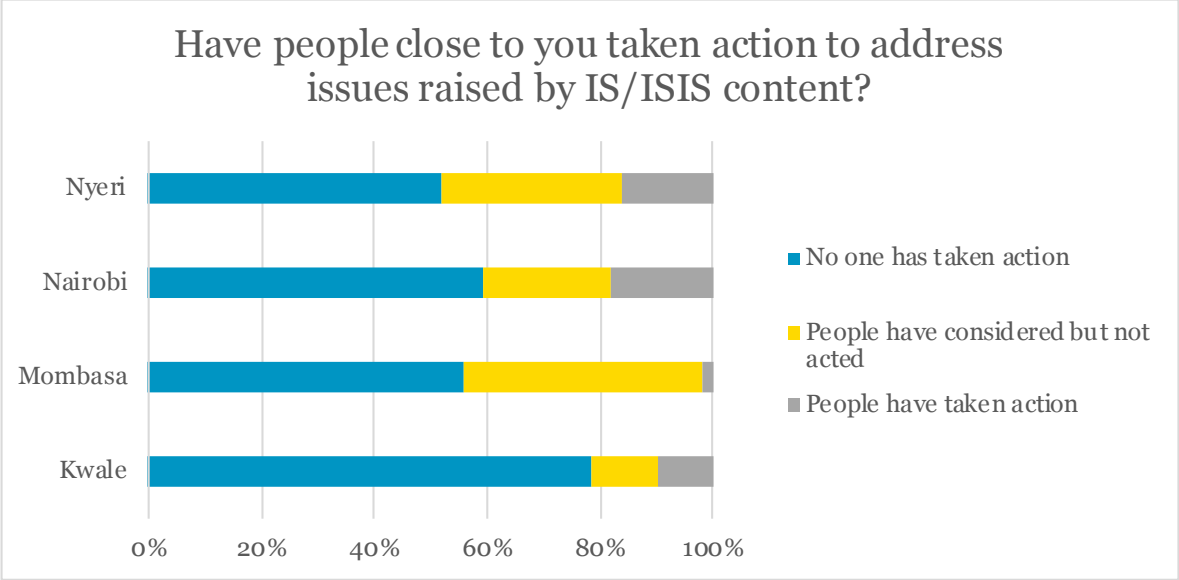


Figure 39: Have you taken action to address issues raised by IS/ISIS content?

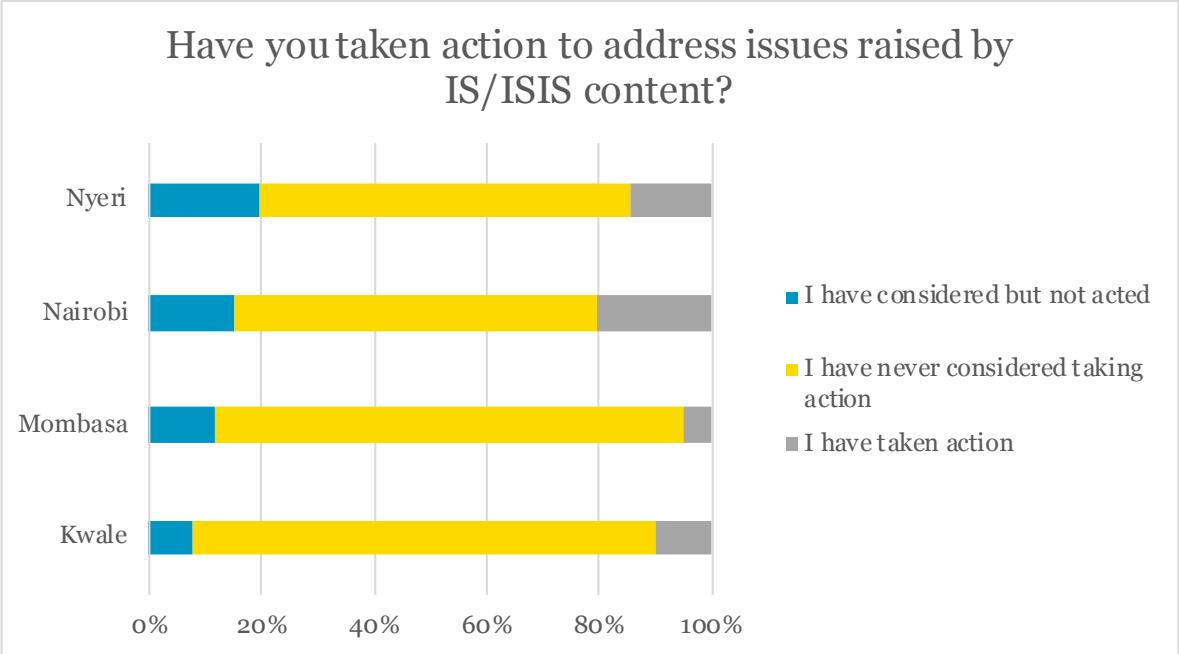


Figure 40: Have you heard of Mombasa Republican Council (MRC)?

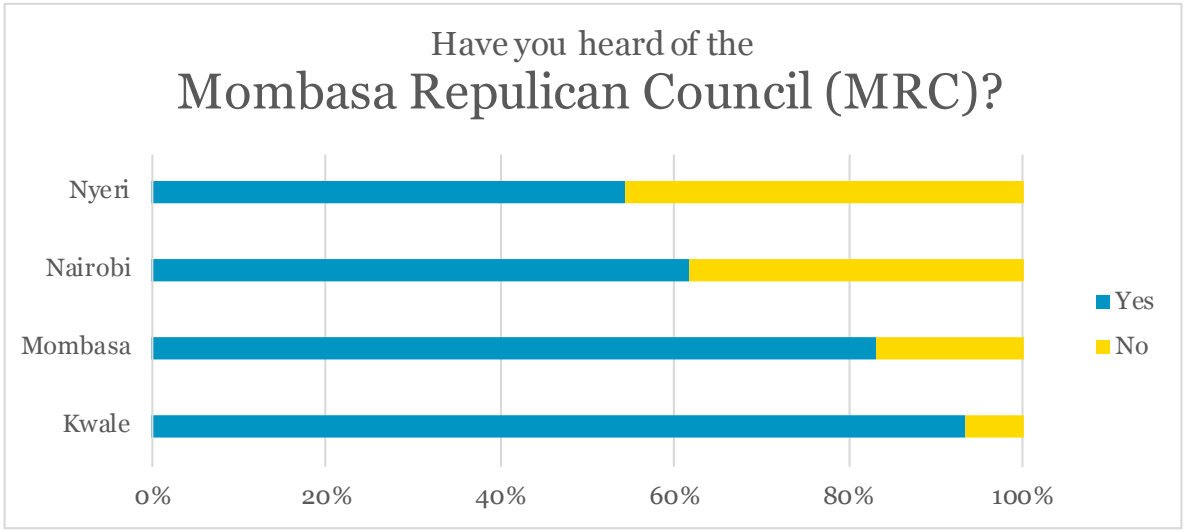


Figure 41: How frequently do people close to you share MRC content?

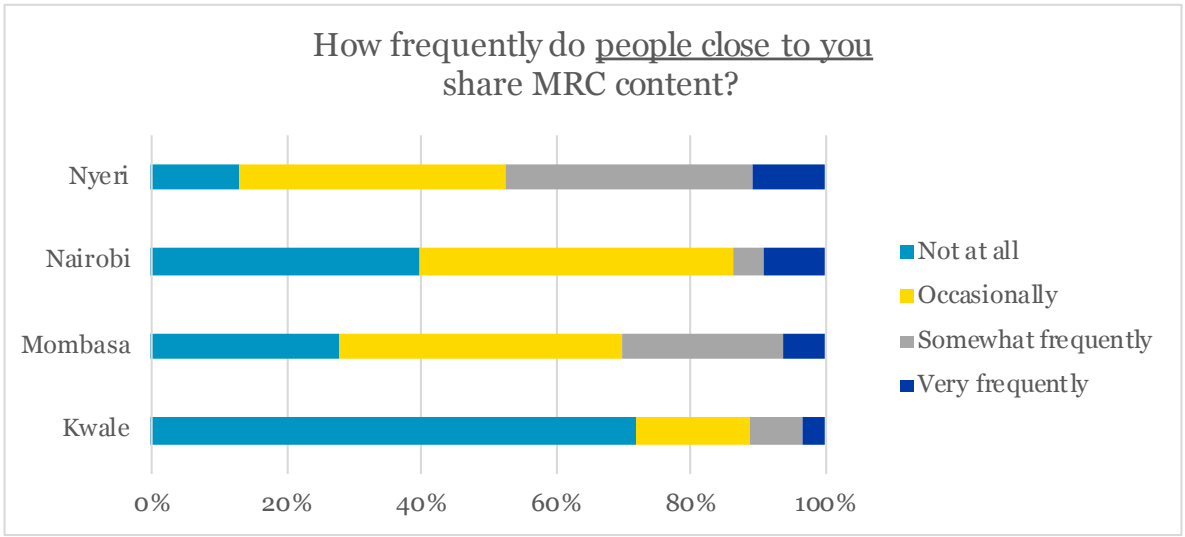


Figure 42: How frequently do you share MRC content?

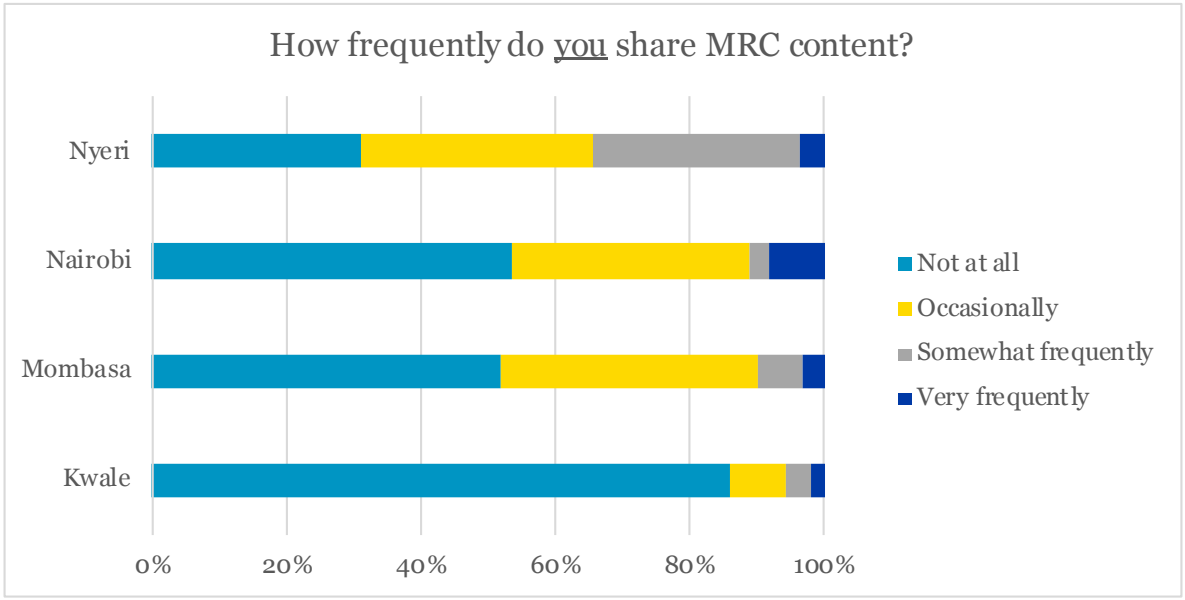


Figure 43: How does MRC content resonate with you?

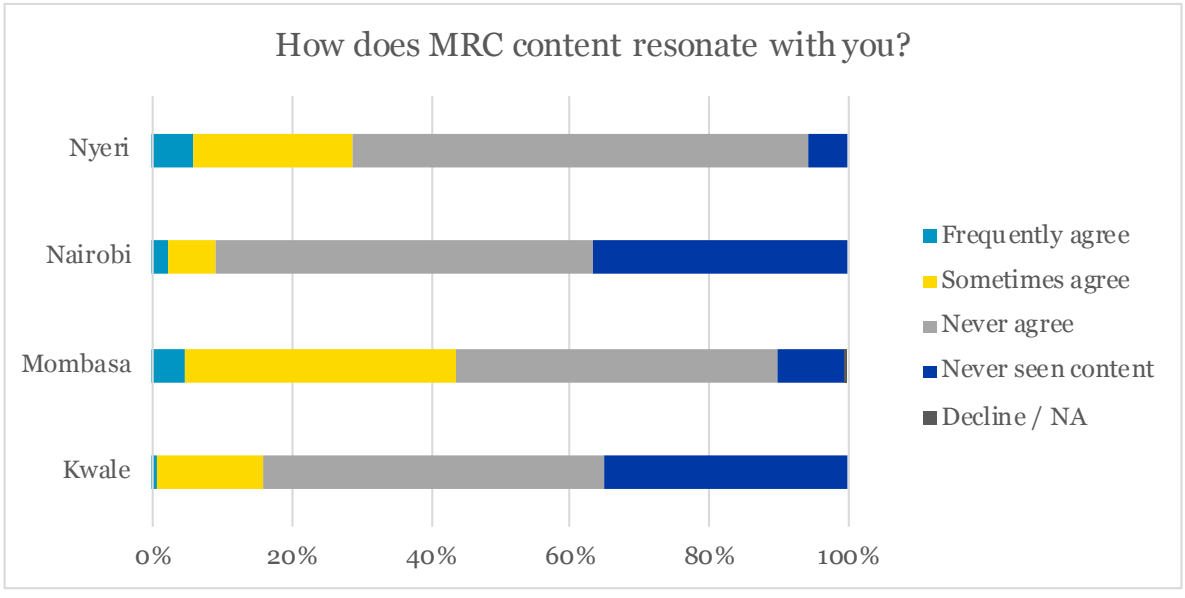


Figure 44: Have people close to you taken action to address issues raised by MRC content?

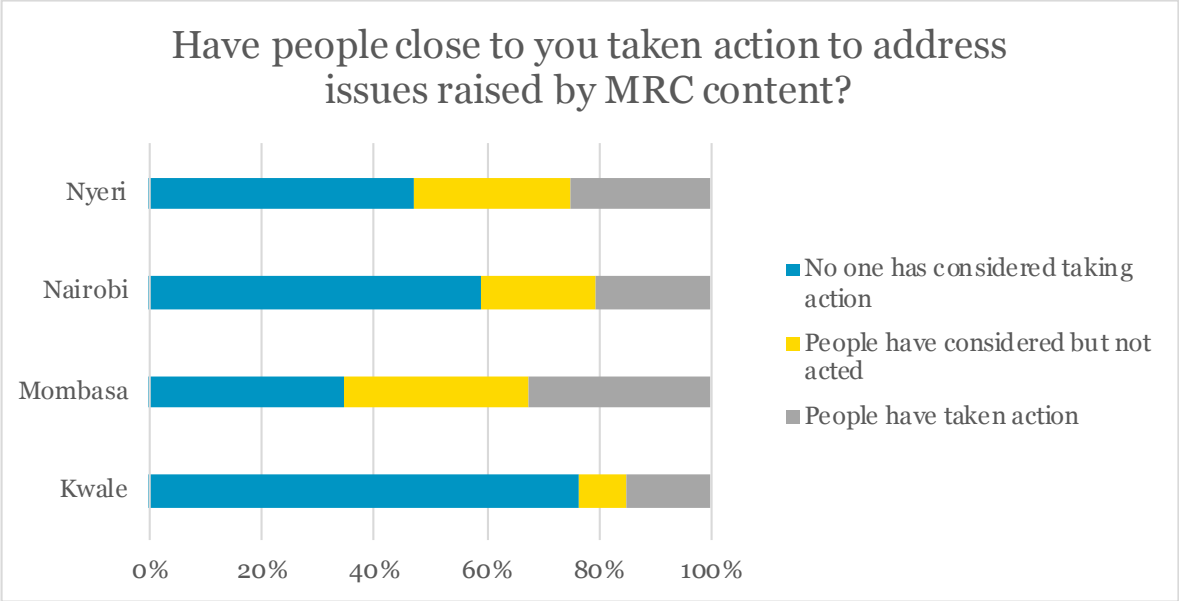


Figure 45: Have you taken action to address issues raised by MRC content?

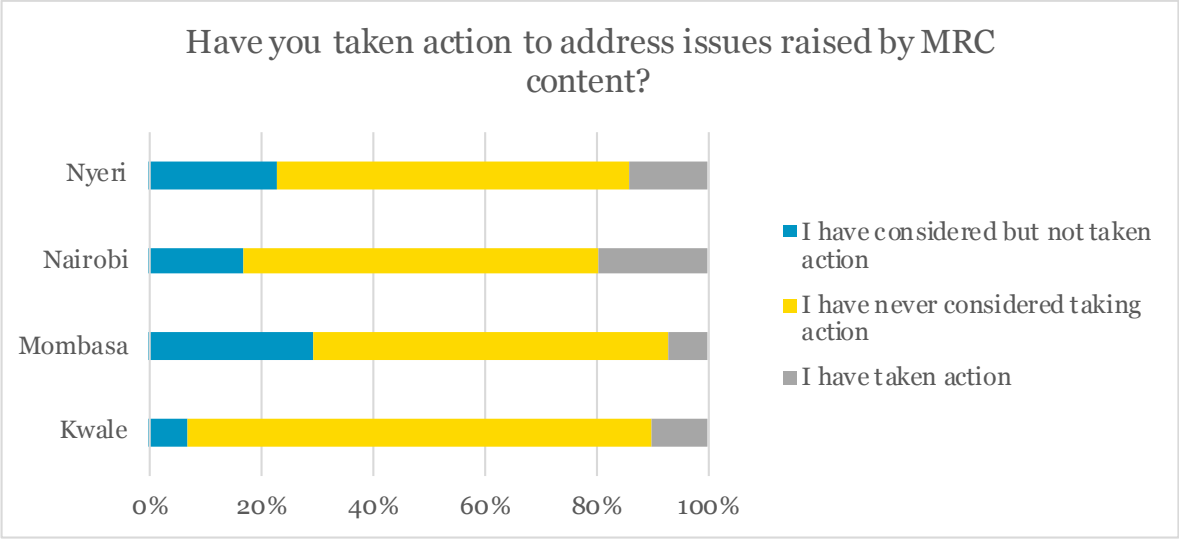


Figure 46: How frequently do you read news from 'Shahada'?

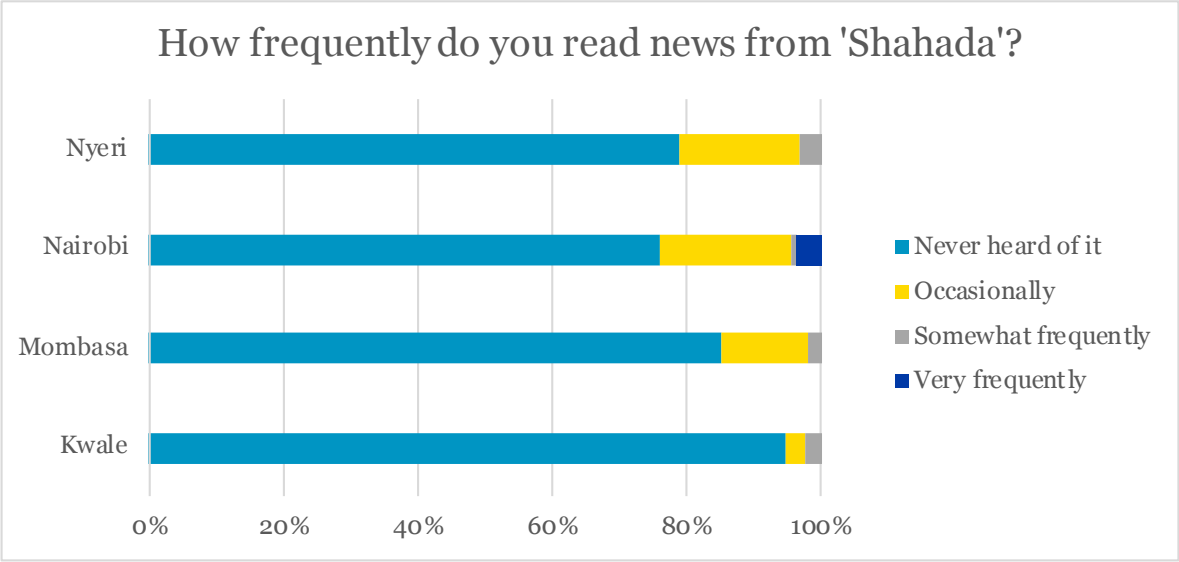
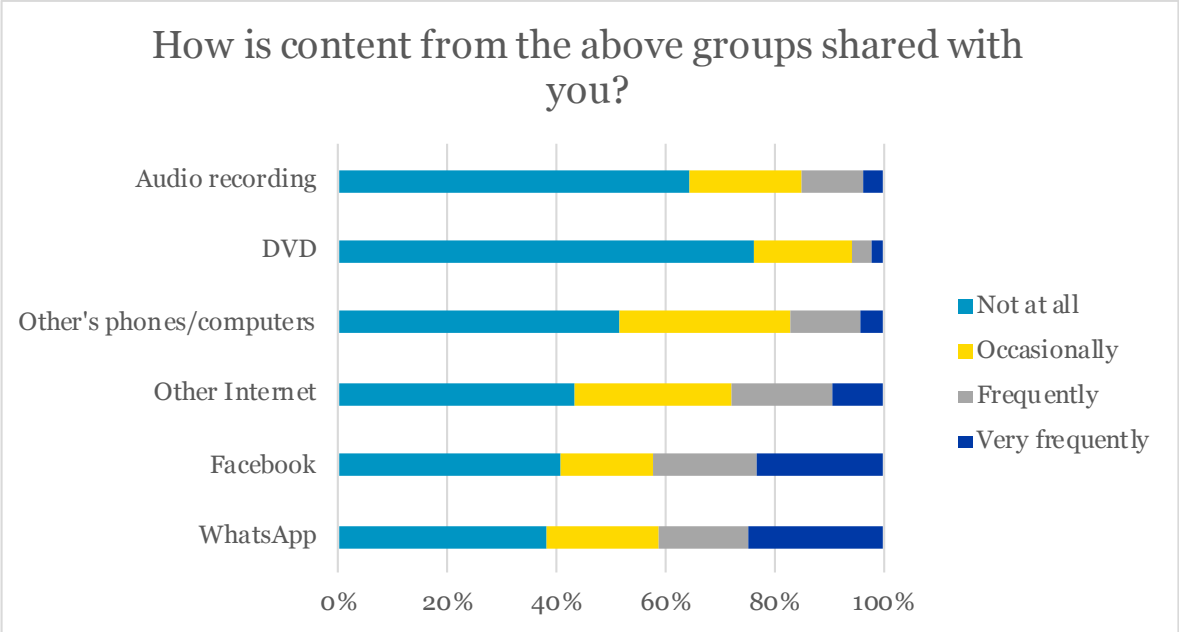


Figure 47: How is content from the above groups shared with you?



ANNEX I: SNA SNOWBALLING SURVEY PARTICIPANT NORMS AND ATTITUDES

Figure 48: Rate your ability to...

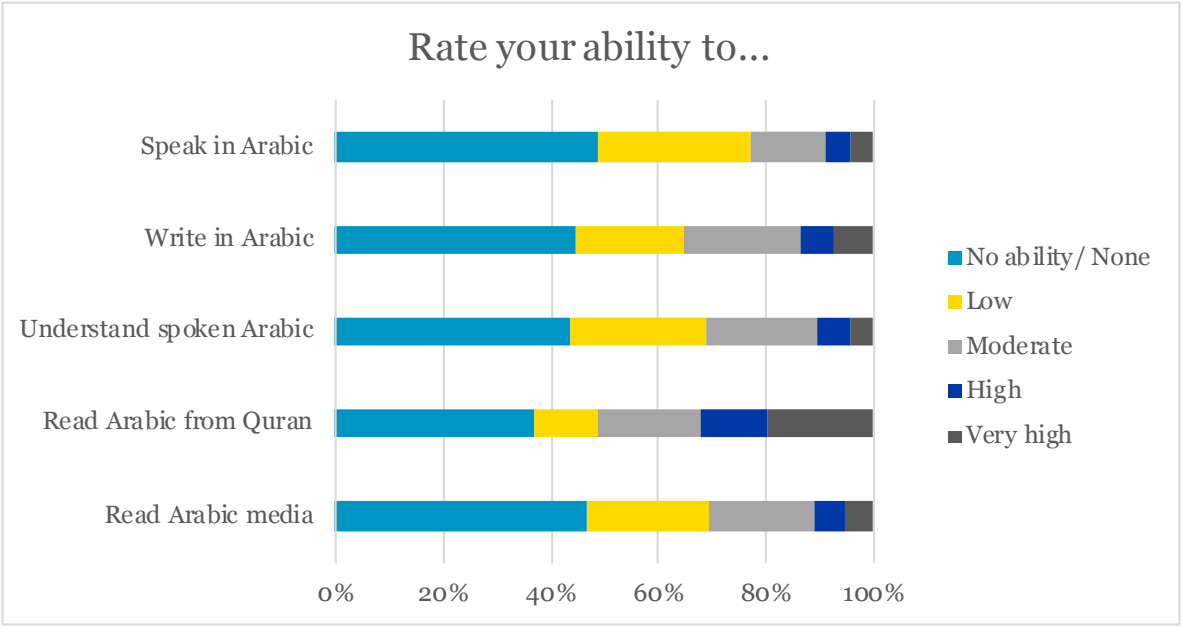


Figure 49: The use of violence is...

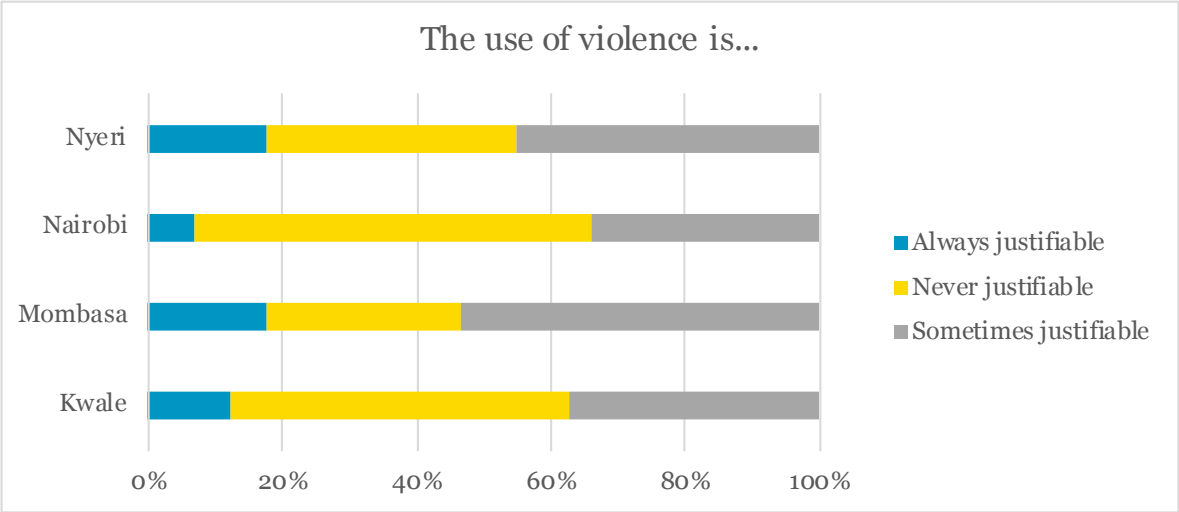


Figure 50: "Kenya-Somali border is accurate and where it should be"

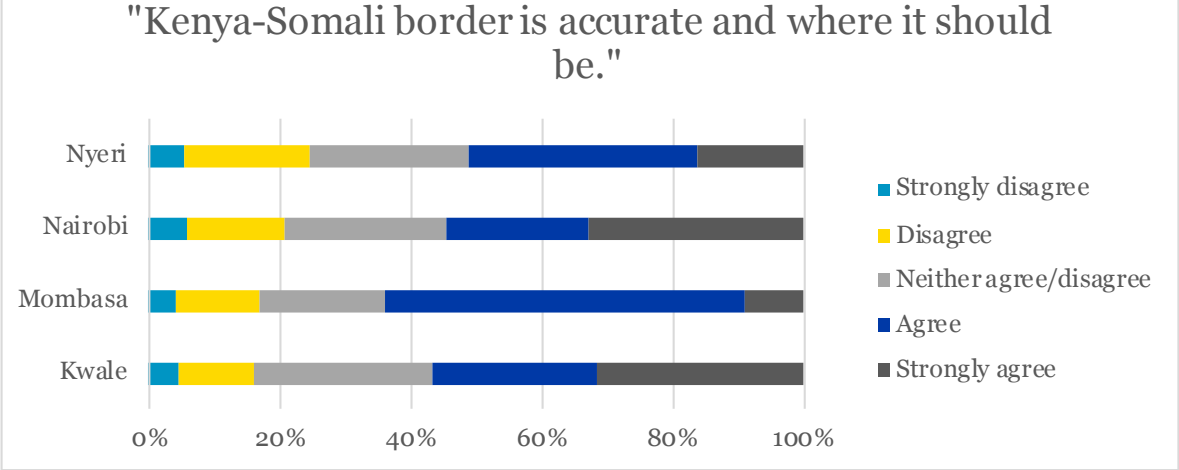


Figure 51: "I recognise Kenya's authority over Mandera, Wajir and Garissa"

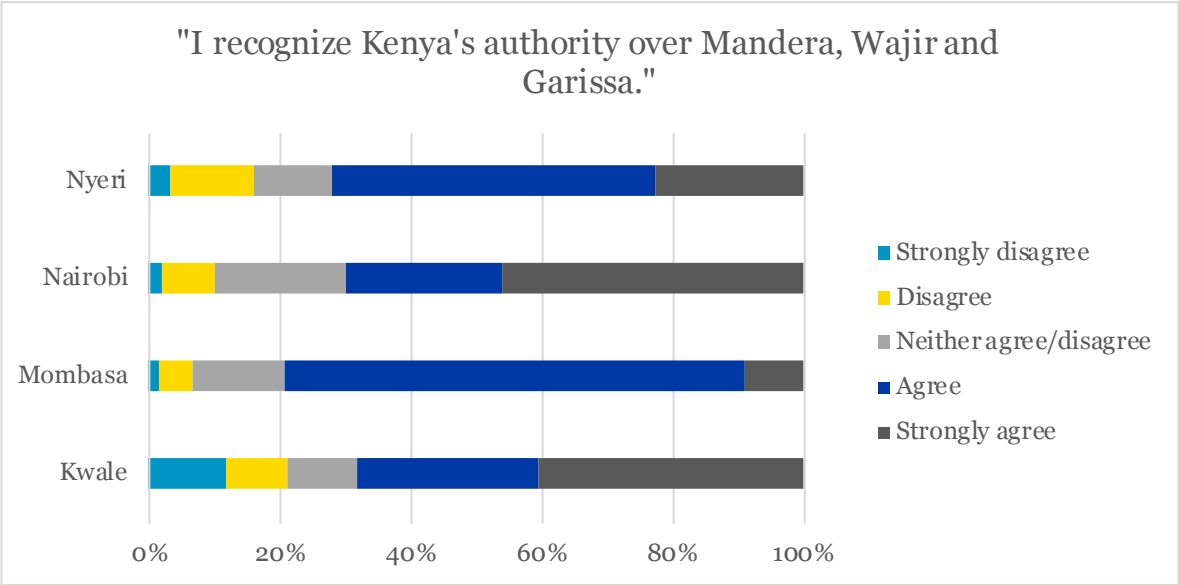


Figure 52: "The next two years will be more peaceful in Kenya"

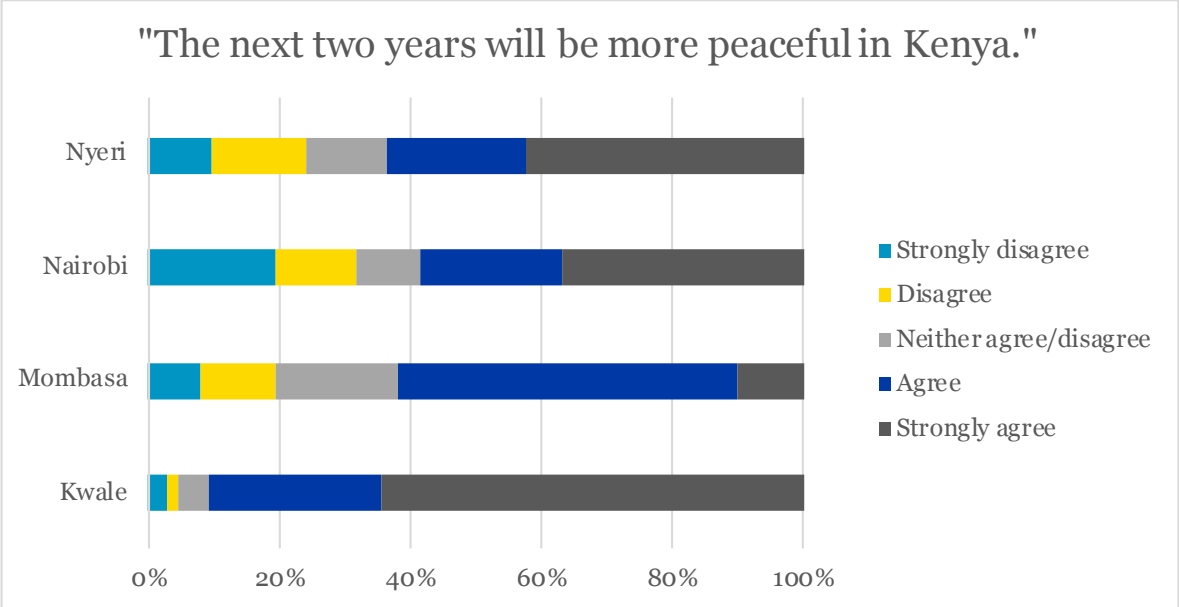


Figure 53: "I am likely to vote in the next election"

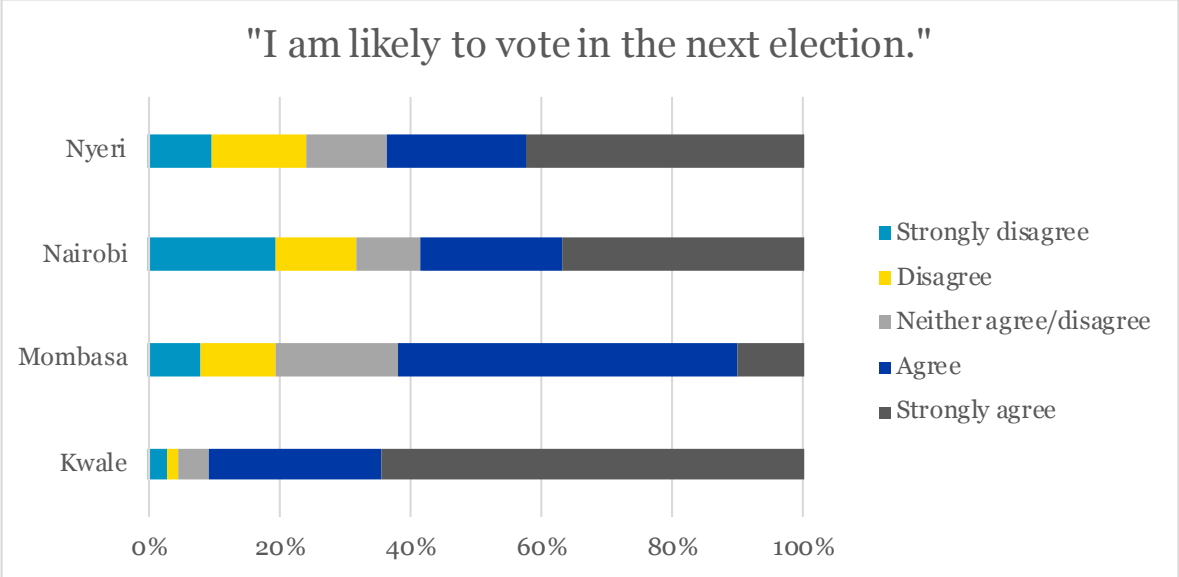


Figure 54: "I am excited about opportunities that the future holds"

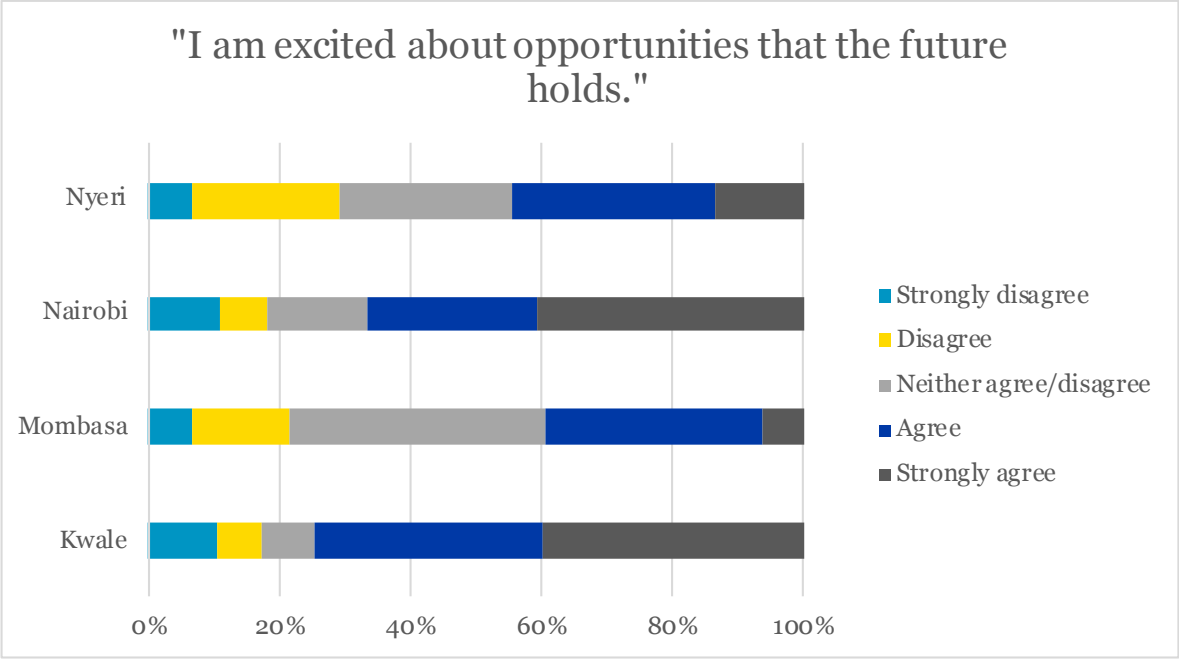
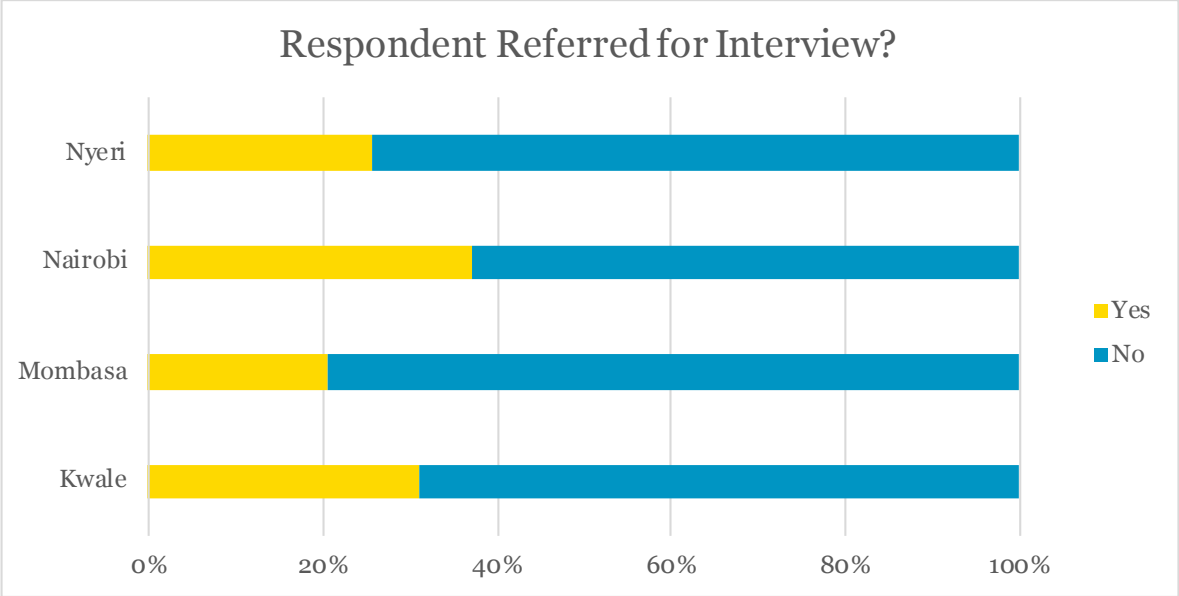


Figure 55: Respondent reffered for interview?



ENDNOTES

1 Winterbotham and Jones (2020); Rosand et al. (2018); Borum (2011).
2 USAID (April 2020).
3 Ibid.
4 *International Crisis Group* (2018); Lind et al. (2015).
5 *Human Rights Watch* (2016); Bryden and Bahra (2019); *IGAD* and *Sahan* (2016).
6 Jones (2020b).
7 Shetret et al. (2013).
8 Villa-Vicencio et al. (2016); Nyagah et al. (2019).
9 Villa-Vicencio et al. (2016).
10 USAID (April 2020).
11 In their 2018 study into CVE on the Kenyan coast, social scientists Badurdeen and Goldsmith argue that '…partnerships with county governments and local community actors, particularly in those counties most affected, are required to increase the local legitimacy of CVE interventions taking into account the local framing and historization of the context of violent extremism and the genealogy of evolving violent extremist ideologies'.
12 Badurdeen and Goldsmith (2018).
13 All separate reports and data can be accessed upon request.
14 Crisman et al. 2020.
15 Jones (2020b).
16 Ibid.
17 Crisman et al. (2020).
18 USAID Kenya (2019); *The Star* (2019b).
19 Crisman et al. (2020).
20 Bouhana (2019), p.23.
21 Bouhana (2019), p.21.
22 Bouhana (2019), p.10.
23 Bouhana (2019), p.6.
24 In Annex C, methods are first described, before a review of what worked well and where future adjustments could be made. Recommendations for future studies are also proposed.
25 The initial group of participants were recruited based on a pre-set list of non-mutually exclusive primary and secondary criteria rooted in past research concerning VE in Kenya.
26 Bouhana (2019).
27 USAID defines VE as 'advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated violence to further social, economic, political, or religious objectives' (USAID April 2020)
28 Mombasa County Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (2017-2022); Isiolo County Action Plan on Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism (2018-2022); Kwale County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism (February 2017)
29 Breidlid (2021) criticizes that the Government of Kenya's understanding of violent extremism as based in religion and ideology, arguing that this perspective only serves to reinforce the stigmatization of Islam.
30 The Shetret et al. (2013) and Villa-Vicencio et al. (2016) studies both made the same finding.

31 Strongest in the 1990s and 2000s, Mungiki was once an ideologically driven movement which rejected technology and Western civilization, especially religion. It was proscribed in 2002 and has subsequently been associated with organized gang activity. The name frequently reemerges across Central Kenya in association with political violence and the running of protection rackets.

32 Villa-Vicencio et al. identified the same issues with conflation in their 2016 study.

33 This understanding assumes that the individual responsible for the act of violence has no individual agency. It facilitates a transfer of blame to the recruiter or the non-local actor. Such an attitude is perhaps a protective mechanism in that it distances oneself and one's personal space from the problem. It is also arguably motivated by a sense of denial, in which one would rather not accept that such attitudes exist in their own neighborhood.

34 Criminal groups mentioned when talking about VE included Wakali Kwanza, Wakali Wao, Chafu, Wajukuu wa Bibi, 74 Battalion, Wakware Babes, The Smart Stubborns, Akili za Usiku, Vampires, Watalia, Kuzacha, and Waiyoo. Some of these same groups were identified by respondents in a 2016 Villa-Vicencio et al. study; Analogous findings were enumerated in a 2013 perception study conducted by the *Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation (CGCC)* (Shetret et al. 2013). It was often unclear whether such groups were used as some sort of code for al Shabaab or whether participants actually considered these groups to be VE actors in their own right.

35 Manipulating a highly debatable reading of history, the MRC seeks the secession of the Coast region from the rest of Kenya. While the government has often linked the group to violent acts (The Star (2019a); Pulse Live (2019)), the MRC's leadership has publicly rejected the use of violence (Willis and Mwakimako 2014). Moreover, its membership is believed to include both Christians and Muslims. Its credentials as a VE organization are limited, but when discussing VE participants repeatedly mentioned the MRC's rallying cry "Pwani si Kenya" (Coast is not Kenya). In Kwale, one participant declared that "here if you speak of MRC and al Shabaab it's like the same thing." Others disagreed, recognizing the different objectives of the two entities, but acknowledging that both groups proclaim to offer solutions to the same grievances of marginalization and underdevelopment.

36 Ansar al Sunna is a reclusive collection of conservative Muslims inspired by the late Abdulaziz Rimo. The Ansar can be seen as Salafists, a branch of Sunni Islam advocating that Islam should only be practiced as it was by the Prophet Muhammad and the immediate generations that followed, the *salaf*. These ideas were first brought to the Kenyan coast by Rimo, a Saudi-educated scholar who advocated a rejection of the Kenyan state and practices associated with the syncretic beliefs of Sufism (Ndzovu 2018). Rimo's ideas were considered by some to be anathema to traditional Digo society and some of his followers retreated into isolated communities. There is no indication, however, that they are directly involved in violence. Nevertheless, participants in Kwale claim that Ansar members are linked to al Shabaab recruitment: "Most of the people who were suspects of al Shabaab are the Ansaris" and "Most of the Ansaris are the ones who have been killed because they went to Somalia." It should be stated that no definitive links between the Ansar and al Shabaab were identified during the research. It is likely that these previous assertions were the result of a fear of the unknown. Ansar's secrecy combined with their strict Salafist adherence meant that the distinction between al Shabaab and the group was blurred in the eyes of some community members.

37 For example, a group of Mombasa youth trained in counter-messaging discussed how ideology was used by VE organizations.

38 Shetret et al. 2013: 28.
39 Ibid.
40 Sahgal and Zeuthen (2020).
41 *The Standard* (2019).
42 Nivette et al. (2017).
43 Hasisi et al. (2019).
44 Basra et al. (2016).
45 Rivinius (2018).
46 UN Panel of Experts on Somalia 2019 report; Villa-Vicencio et al. (2016).
47 Khalil et al. (2019).
48 Bouhana (2019)
49 Hassan (2012); Anderson and McKnight (2014); Botha (2014); Atta-Asamoah (2015); Lind et al. (2015); Romaniuk et al. (2018); Rink and Sharma (2018); van Metre (2018); Mkutu and Opondo (2019); Nyagah et al. (2019); Speckhard and Shajkovci (2019).
50 This was similarly recognized by Villa-Vicencio et al. in their 2016 study across Nairobi, Mombasa, and Garissa.
51 Shetret et al. (2013); *International Crisis Group* (2014; 2018); Anderson and McKnight (2014); Botha (2014); Lind et al. (2015); Rink and Sharma (2018); Goldsmith (2018); Speckhard and Shajkovci (2019)
52 Villa-Vicencio et al. (2016).
53 The Government's response to the onset of the pandemic was widely criticized by human rights groups with several deaths reported as police officers enforced a curfew and movement restrictions (*Human Rights Watch* 2020); some participants suggested the government had used the pandemic to obtain international funds.
54 Bouhana (2019).
55 See 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, Volume IV: Distribution of Population by Socio-Economic Characteristics, December 2019: http://housingfinanceafrica.org/app/uploads/VOLUME-IV-KPHC-2019.pdf
56 Willis and Mwakimako (2014).
57 Prestholdt (2014), pp.251-2.
58 Prestholdt (2014).
59 Botha (2013; 2014); *International Crisis Group* (2014); Lind et al. (2017); Ndzovu (2017); Botha and Abdile (2020); Mykkänen (2020).
60 Botha (2014); Lind et al. (2015); Romaniuk et al. (2018); Speckhard and Shajkovci (2019).
61 Anderson and McKnight (2015); Freear (2019).
62 Amongst participants in the social network analysis component of the study, unemployment rates were higher in Mombasa (59%) and Kwale (49%) that they were in Nyeri (38%) and Nairobi (36%).
63 An exception was participants in Nairobi's Eastleigh neighborhood, who discussed graduates who, despite having money, described being left disillusioned by a lack of employment opportunities and their perception that Muslims were marginalized.
64 Participants in most areas suggested that the low prices of data bundles meant that most youth could afford to access social media sites.
65 For the purposes of this report, social media is characterized as internet-based websites and applications allowing for text and video to be viewed, shared and discussed on the same or across

platforms to include but not exclusive to: YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, TikTok, Twitter, Signal, and Instagram.

66 Young people, especially in Nairobi where access to social media is more widespread, countered that their parents are also very active on social media.

67 Rarely was 'youth' defined by interview participants and the pronoun 'they' was frequently used to refer to anyone that the individual assumed to fall into this demographic. This ubiquitous homogenization of the youth and a failure to differentiate between individuals was perhaps most overt in discussions of social media. Only CSO actors occasionally expressed hope in the potential that existed in young people.

68 Khalil et al. (2019).

69 Whether or not to celebrate Maulid is a common debate within and between Sunni groups. Some traditional Sufi Muslims on the coast, including many Swahili communities, follow Maulid but others – especially those adhering to a 'Wahhabi' doctrine – do not. Both practices coexist amidst this ongoing conversation.

70 Dawson (2017b).

71 Shetret et al. (2013).

72 *Institute for Security Studies* (2019).

73 The north-east of Kenya is made up almost entirely of ethnic Somalis. During the Colonial period, this region fell under British control as the Northern Frontier District. In the build-up to Kenya's Independence, Somali leaders called for a referendum to determine whether the region would become part of the already Independent Somalia or the future Kenya (Burbidge 2018). Following two 'commissions of enquiry', the British authorities all but ignored the demands of the region and Somalia fell within the Republic of Kenya (Burbidge 2018). A separatist movement emerged in the north-east of the country in the early days of independence, which led to the protracted 'Shifta Wars' (1964-1967). With these attempts at autonomy violently quashed by the government based in Nairobi, Somali communities have since existed as 'ambiguous citizens' of Kenya, struggling to obtain ID cards and often ostracized from political power (Scharrer 2018).

74 Freear (2019).

75 Freear (2019), p.1.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Freear (2019), p.3.

79 It has been suggested that the films are edited outside of Somalia, with Canada and parts of Scandinavia mentioned (Kriel 2018)

80 Freear (2019); Papale (2020).

81 Freear (2019)

82 93.5% of Kwale participants were aware of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), more than in any other county (Mombasa- 83%, Nairobi- 61.5%, Nyeri- 54%).

83 54.5% of participants across the four counties said they had never heard of the Islamic State.

84 The vast majority of participants (91%) had not even heard of Hizb ut-Tahrir, compared to just 3.5% who claimed not to know of al Shabaab.

85 Papale (2020).

86 US State Department funded research conducted by the *Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)* observed a spike in the number of people viewing al Kataib between March and May 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis in Kenya.
87 Journalist Robyn Kriel discusses al Shabaab's strategic communications (2018); Christopher Anzalone, a religious studies expert, the group's 'PSYOPS' (2020).
88 2010 Constitution of Kenya
89 *Human Rights Watch* (2019); Wamunyu (2021); Goldsmith (2018).
90 Muindi (2020).
91 Breidlid (2021) (Goldsmith 2018)
92 This has previously been recognized, for example by Harper (2018) and in the Kenyan context by Villa-Vicencio et al. (2016).
93 Bouhana (2019).
94 Freear (2019).
95 Notably, ability to read Arabic from the Qur'an was assessed to be much higher at 32%.
96 This was reflected in the SNA survey findings.
97 Human Cognition's recognition that most al Qa'ida and al Shabaab content is produced in Arabic led the research team to incorporate questions around the comprehension of and fluency in Arabic in both the subsequent qualitative and SNA studies.
98 '*Maskani'* is a Kiswahili word meaning 'tent' or 'abode'; generally interpreted to mean a seated, outdoor meeting place for youth.
99 Digo is used in Kwale, it was suggested by a village elder. In Mombasa Kiswahili is more likely; Sheng is used in Nairobi, while Giriama might be appropriate in Kilifi.
100 Freear (2019).
101 Ibid, p.3
102 Ibid, pp.3-4.
103 Nzes (2014).
104 Russell (2017).
105 Participants were required to physically provide the tokens to those they recruited.
106 Statistically significant E-I scores were identified for gender across all counties.
107 A similar pattern was identified using the E-I Index, however, the E-I Index procedure compares what we see here to about 5,000 simulated networks and assesses the likelihood that we would get the same result from creating a random network. In each location we can say with confidence that gender is a factor in how these ties were formed. While it's clear that religion is influencing how things were shared in all locations, we can only say with confidence in Mombasa that the results are very unlikely to be found in any randomly generated network.
108 Chakrabarti et al. (2018).
109 Madrid-Morales et al. (2021).
110 Lind et al. (2017).
111 Russell (2017).
112 *Mogokaa* is a plant related to khat. Chewing the stem and leaves induces a mild stimulant effect.
113 Yusuf (2015).
114 Mwakimako and Hockey (2020).

115 Participants across all four counties tended to discuss problems facing their communities with those of the same religion. However, the findings were only 'statistically significant' in Nairobi and Mombasa.

116 That radicalization is experienced differently by men and women has long been recognized. In a study of Islamic State recruits across Europe and North America, Winterbotham and Pearson (2017) observe that the spaces used to radicalize and recruit are different for men and women.

117 Harper (2018) and Villa-Vicencio et al (2016) both note that al Shabaab use 'bespoke' or 'context-specific' communication strategies to target recruits.

118 A public meeting, usually led by the chief and used to communicate official messaging.

119 *The Standard* (2021); *The Star* (2021).

120 Muindi (2020)

121 Ibid.

122 In theory, official communication channels stretch from the national government down through the Regional Commissioner, then the County Commissioner, Assistant County Commissioner, and Sub-County Commissioner to the other National Government Administration Officers, (area chiefs and their assistants), (non-salaried) village elders, Nyumba Kumi leaders and their subordinates.

123 An exception was found in Nyeri where, despite a prevailing distrust of county and national government, chiefs were respected and seen as positive influences with whom community issues could be discussed.

124 Crisman et al. (2020).

125 The relational survey offered a list of options: 'For Profit' (e.g., businesses), 'Government', 'Non-Profit' (e.g., CSO), 'Faith-Based' and 'Other'. Although there is possible conceptual overlap between categories (such as faith-based and 'not for profit' entities) participants were asked to choose one answer that best reflected their organizational identity.

126 It is important to note a structural difference of the Nyeri CEF. While the Kwale, Mombasa and Nairobi CEF networks are comprised of organizations represented by individuals, the situation is different in Nyeri. There are many individuals who represent organizations meaning there are multiple representatives of a particular organization. The unit of analysis (nodes) for the Nyeri network are individuals not organizations, so it was surveyed as such.

127 At the validation workshops, it was clear that only those on the CEF were aware of the CAP.

128 Kwale County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP), 2018-2022.

129 Nyumba Kumi is a neighborhood watch scheme based on 10-household clusters that facilitate community leadership in security provision.

130 For example, see Shetret, L. et al. (2013); *CHRIPS* and *APCOF* (2014); Gilchrist and Eisen (2019); Schwartz and Yalbir (2019). Invoking the Public Order Act in March 2020 to enforce lockdown measures across major cities and impose a dawn-to-dusk curfew in response to COVID-19 has exacerbated tensions – see Nyabola (2020).

131 Relationships often vary from neighborhood to neighborhood. For example, youth suggested that the police were much more willing to use violence and harass residents in Eastleigh than they were in Majengo. Those in Eastleigh were perceived to be wealthier.

132 Bouhana (2019).

133 Freear (2019).

134 Russell (2017).

135 Ibid.

136 Young, E, et al. (2018).
137 Badurdeen and Goldsmith (2018).
138 Amanullah and Harrasy (2017).
139 Van Metre (2018).
140 Kollomorgen, et al. (2019), p.24.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
143 Archetti (2015).
144 Ferguson (2016).
145 Day and Kleinmann (2017). Also see Jones (2020c).
146 Jones (2020a).
147 Freear 2019.
148 Freear and Glazzard (2020).
149 Ferguson (2016).
150 A contradiction between the words and actions of messengers.
151 Ferguson (2016).
152 Youth especially were said to only be interested in interventions of any sort when they got an immediate financial reward, or at least a tangible product that they could "eat". In Kwale, an elder explained that youth had expressed frustration when they were not invited to receive cash handouts from the government related to COVID-19. When the same people returned to hand out mosquito nets, the youth exclaimed "we don't eat nets; go away".
153 Silverman et al. (2016).
154 Ibid.
155 Neumann (2016).
156 Lee (2019).
157 I.e. defectors and former members of al Shabaab.
158 Youth in Nairobi explained that returnees sometimes "make deals" with the government and then serve as informants for the authorities. The veracity of this claim cannot be confirmed.
159 As previously mentioned in this report, the scale of online radicalisation and recruitment often appeared exaggerated and/or misunderstood.
160 Islamic scholars.
161 See Jones (2020b).
162 Greater detail is provided in Badurdeen and Goldsmith (2018).
163 Russell (2017).
164 For example, see *Royal United Services Institute* (2017); Jones (2020b).
165 Bouhana (2019).
166 Ibid.
167 Bouhana (2019), p.17.
168 Ibid.
169 Fear of police action was observed in all counties but was significantly more pronounced in Kwale where the frequency of extrajudicial killings has been much higher than elsewhere (*The Star* 2020).
170 A CEF member in Bongwe stated that "wherever you communicate, the government knows" and participants in several counties suggested that the government might be tracking phones. Youth and civil society tended to exaggerate the reach and power of the state. It is unclear what drove

this perception of an all-seeing, all-hearing government, but this understanding has almost certainly contributed to a reduction in the sharing of VE information.

171 Bouhana (2019), p.17.

172 Ibid.

173 Ibid.

174 A 2020 *USIU* study suggested that 'most Kenyans aged between 21-35 years spend more than 3 hours on social media daily'. This might suggest that opportunities for real world interaction have indeed decreased.

175 Muslim community.

176 Bouhana (2019).

177 *Bhang* is a preparation of cannabis. It is illegal to possess or consume *bhang* in Kenya.

178 Bouhana (2019).

179 Ibid.

180 Ibid.

181 Ibid.

182 Willis and Mwakimako (2014).

183 Mwakimako and Hockey (2020).

184 Ndzovu (2018).

185 Ndzovu (2018), p.364.

186 Lind et al. (2017).

187 In Eastleigh, a divide was identified between Somalis considered 'native' to the area and those who have moved into the area more recently. Each attends different mosques. The immigrant population from Somalia is perceived to be wealthier, controls business and is well-connected in Government. 'Native' Somalis complained that police now demanded larger bribes in Eastleigh on the presumption that all Somalis have money.

188 Few young people complained about perceptions of the 'youth'. However, some suggested that parents had failed in their moral duties to their offspring.

189 For additional analysis of intra-faith dynamics and conflict across other counties see Badurdeen (2021) and Wario (2021).

190 Some suggested that welfare distribution is discriminatory with certain individuals in control of funds and deciding who to assist. 'Native' Somali communities claim that they always miss out. In this way, the welfare function of mosques is not always positive for social cohesion.

191 In her analysis of Kenya's social arrangements, for instance, Van Metre (2016) focuses on the transformative dimension of resilience, examining the capability of 'a community, people, state, or region to adopt new processes, norms, and strategies for conducting their lives and new societal relationships in response to a violent shock…in order to prevent, mitigate or recover from violence'. Others have dismissed such concepts as 'normatively loaded' and 'value-laden', with a propensity to displace 'responsibility for community security from national government to local actors' and offer little insight into local agency by failing to capture 'the multiple layers of violence, structures of oppression and complex inequalities experienced by men and women in local communities' (Aroussim et al, 2020). Alternative frameworks of 'everyday resistance', a derivation of James Scott's (1985) famed 'Weapons of the Weak' thesis, were instead proposed by Aroussim et al. (2020) as they can track 'oppositional acts performed by individuals or collectives who are situated in a position of subordination and live with the experience of domination.'

192 Van Metre (2016).
193 Bouhana (2019).
194 Ibid.
195 For examples see Grossman-Vermaas and Reisman (2013); Khalil and Zeuthen (2014); Mitchell et al. (2019); Kollmorgen et al. (2019).
196 For example, see *Management Systems International* 2013.
197 For one of the few examples publicly available, see *RAN* 2019.
198 Day and Kleinmann (2017).
199 Freear and Glazzard (2020).
200 Participants in Nairobi and Nyeri recognized that sports coaches had themselves previously been linked to recruitment. It was said that communities needed to work together to monitor the activities of such individuals.
201 Jones, Wallner and Winterbotham, 2021
202 The practicalities of tackling structural factors are outlined in an independent evaluation of USAID's KTI initiative, which argues 'efforts to bring about significant reductions in such alleged root causes as high unemployment, pervasive poverty, systematic political exclusion, endemic corruption and a lack of political and economic opportunities (to name a few) will require large scale investments, carried out through hard to implement and expensive programs sustained over long periods of time'. Cited in USAID (2009) 'Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism', p.11.
203 Jones et al. (2021); There are examples that have tried to combine these strands where possible, for instance elements of STRIVE II in Kenya, or radio programming in the Sahel that has been blended with longer term development activities (see Aldrich 2012; 2014). While this remains difficult to achieve in practice, stakeholders are increasingly aware of the need for integrated interventions, particularly in the context of wider challenges like COVID-19 (See Parsons and Hockey (2020))
204 USAID (2020).
205 Examples cited in Jones (2020b).
206 Hockey (2020).
207 Ibid.
208 The government's Kazi Mtaani scheme provides a useful case study of both the benefits and challenges of employment initiatives targeting youth. Participants frequently praised the program for its role in keeping youth from slum areas busy and away from criminal activity or VE recruitment. However, at least three associated risks were identified and some young participants in Mombasa and Nyeri were particularly angry about the scheme's failings, arguing that the government should be offering more sustainable solutions. Firstly, many complained that not everyone was included. Secondly, some suggested that the scheme had been characterized by corruption and nepotism. Thirdly, concerns emerged over the program's longevity as it was initiated as part of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and is therefore unlikely to be maintained indefinitely. Due to these challenges, there is a risk Kazi Mtaani will exacerbate frustration and disillusionment in the longer-term. If CVE had been a consideration from the start, efforts could have been made to target the program at those considered most "at-risk" of recruitment. These challenges are not unique to state-run initiatives and such allegations are frequently faced by development programs.

209 Education is one of the pillars of the national and counter strategies to counter VE. Of course, research conducted in Kenya – and globally – has found that highly-educated individuals can also be susceptible to recruitment. Indeed Iman Ali, who many participants referenced, was a university graduate.

210 A Government study conducted between 2015 and 2016 stated that 73% of the population in Kwale has no more than a primary-level education. Over half the population was said to have no formal qualifications at all. (*Kenya National Bureau of Statistic (KNBS)* 2018). Amongst the snowballing SNA survey participants, Kwale similarly had the poorest education rates, with 57% having not attended formal education beyond primary level.

211 Van Metre (2016).

212 For instance, see Wallner (2020).

213 Drawing on the work of Van Metre (2016) p.22.

214 Van Metre (2016).

215 Ibid, p.36.

216 Van Metre (2018).

217 For example, in their 2016 study, Villa-Vicencio et al. observed 'considerable discrepancies between dominant narratives around violent extremism present in policy and academic arenas, and the lived experiences of those in communities affected by violent extremism', noting VE was only one of many sources of insecurity (in Garissa, Mombasa's Majengo, and Nairobi's Eastleigh and Majengo). Consequently, CVE programs risk becoming irrelevant or counter-productive if they work to achieve a set of objectives that frustrate, overlook, or misinterpret the expectations of their audience.

218 The latter case reflects a long running phenomenon documented by criminologists, who have observed that violent groups (of various flavors) inspire one another and exploit others' successes and experiences to their own advantage.

219 Interventions that improve local knowledge of Qur'anic Arabic should be considered. While in Nairobi some suggested that 'youthful sheikhs' were trying to reinterpret passages and guide youth in challenging what they had been told by other questionable sources and a Mombasa participant suggested that good Kiswahili translations were needed, no programs were identified in which Arabic was being taught to youth to improve their ability to explicate the texts for themselves.

220 Lawler (2002) cited in Freear and Glazzard (2020)

221 Freear and Glazzard (2020)"

222 Bilazarian (2019), p.17.

223 Davey, Tuck and Amarasingam (2019).

224 USAID (April 2020).

225 Engaging the most vulnerable individuals and the broader population should not necessarily be considered mutually exclusive propositions. Adopting an approach that addresses the wider social ecosystem may therefore prove beneficial. CVE programming cannot be successful if governance gaps, extrajudicial violence and societal underdevelopment (or perceptions of 'marginalization') are not also addressed.

226 https://www.reinvent-kenya.com/

227 *International Crisis Group* (2014).

228 Bryden and Bahra (2019).

229 *The New York Times* (2002).

230 Bryden and Bahra (2019).
231 Ibid.
232 Ndzovu (2018).
233 Ibid.
234 Bryden and Bahra (2019).
235 Ibid.
236 Ibid.
237 *Council on Foreign Relations*
238 Speckhard and Shajkovci (2019).
239 Ibid.
240 *Council on Foreign Relations*
241 *International Crisis Group* (2018).
242 Lind et al. (2015).
243 Bryden and Bahra (2019).
244 *International Crisis Group* (2018) note that these groups operating in the North East likely identified as al Shabaab rather than al Hijra, but they operated relatively autonomously.
245 Bryden and Bahra (2019).
246 *Human Rights Watch* (2016).
247 Lind et al. (2017).
248 Bryden and Bahra (2019).
249 *IGAD* and *Sahan* (2016).
250 Ibid.
251 Chome (2016); IGAD and Sahan (2016); *International Crisis Group* (2018).
252 *IGAD* and *Sahan* (2016); Bryden and Bahra (2019).
253 Chome (2016).
254 Bryden and Bahra (2019).
255 Ibid.
256 *The Star* (2019); Kelley (2019).
257 Miriri (2019).
258 Lind et al. (2015).
259 *International Crisis Group* (2018).
260 Mkutu and Opondo (2019).
261 Sources suggest anything between a few hundred and 1,000 people: KTN News (2019); Wesangula (2019); Mkutu and Opondo (2019).
262 *Citizen TV* (2019); *KTN News* (2019); the Isiolo CAP, quoting USAID NIWETU research, suggests that around 200 youth from Isiolo have joined al Shabaab since 2013.
263 Jumbe (2014); Igunza (2014); *The New Humanitarian* (2014).
264 *International Alert* (2016).
265 Ibid.
266 2018 report of the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea
267 *IGAD* and *Sahan* (2016).
268 *IGAD* and *Sahan* (2016); Sahgal and Zeuthen (2020) found limited evidence of violent extremist recruitment in prisons in Kenya.
269 *International Crisis Group* (2018).

270 Chome (2021)
271 Ibid.
272 2011 report of the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea
273 Marchal (2011).
274 *IGAD* and *Sahan* (2016).
275 Botha (2014).
276 *International Crisis Group* (2018).
277 Bryden and Bahra (2019).
278 Lind et al. (2015).
279 Ibid.
280 International Crisis Group (2018); Mkutu and Opondo (2019).
281 Primary criteria included: having a close friend or relative who had been recruited into a VE group or engaged in VE related activities; holding extremist views / ideological tendencies; associating with holders of extremist views; links to criminal gangs. Secondary criteria included: abuse of drugs and/or other substances; recent conversion to Islam; had a difficult home life growing up; former convictions; impacted by extrajudicial killings.
282 The primary data entry was conducted at the point of collection using Google Forms. Enumerators managed ticket numbers through a backend dashboard fed through the Google Forms results to indicate which tickets had been submitted.
283 UCINet (Version 6)
284 This analysis included an examination of network densities and the structural roles of organizations in each CEF network.
285 It was noted that the extent to which the incentives served as a driver of participation varied by location (in some cases, participants even had to be reminded to collect their incentive). However, issues observed included individuals on at least one occasion returning with copies of tokens, presumably in an attempt to collect a second payment. In Mombasa and Nyeri, random community members turned up asking to participate. A concern was raised that in some cases, participants explained that the incentive amount was less than their cost of travel (on one occasion, a participant travelled from Kilifi to Mombasa to take part). These challenges had been anticipated during training and appropriate procedures were followed in response. Moreover, whilst they represent valuable lessons, the issues were not seen to have compromised data quality.
286 Each CEF member was asked to select all the other members with whom they a) shared information with and b) partnered with.

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