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## Research Article

# KENYA'S FIGHT AGAINST GLOBAL TERRORISM IN THE CONTEXT OF CRITICAL THEORY: THE CASE OF AL-SHABAAB

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## Abstract

Kenya's counter-terrorism strategies have progressively depended on securitization and militarism, prompting apprehensions regarding their efficacy and implications for governance, human rights, and societal cohesion. This study utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Critical Theory, and Securitization Theory to investigate how counter-terrorism discourse legitimizes oppressive security measures while sidelining alternative, community-based methods. The study, through the analysis of policy papers, official reports, and human rights evaluations, reveals that Kenya's securitized strategy disproportionately affects Muslim communities and Somali refugees, thereby consolidating state authority and exacerbating societal tensions. Notwithstanding governmental assertions of success, military-led counter-terrorism initiatives have not eradicated Al Shabaab's violent acts, and in several instances, have intensified radicalization. The findings enhance existing literature by emphasizing the importance of rhetoric in legitimizing counter-terrorism strategies and perpetuating systemic disparities. The research indicates that Kenya's counter-terrorism framework necessitates a transition to human rights-oriented policies, socio-economic initiatives, and community involvement to attain enduring security.

**Keywords:** *Kenya, Counter-terrorism, Securitization, Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Theory, Al-Shabaab, Human Rights*

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## ELEŞTİREL TEORİ BAĞLAMINDA KENYA'NIN KÜRESEL TERÖRLE MÜCADELESİ: EŞ-ŞEBAB ÖRNEĞİ

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### Özet

Kenya'nın terörle mücadele stratejileri büyük oranda güvenlikleştirme ve militarizme dayanmış, bu da stratejilerin etkinliği ve yönetim, insan hakları ve toplumsal uyum üzerindeki etkileri konusunda endişelere neden olmuştur. Bu çalışmada Eleştirel Söylem Analizi (CDA), Eleştirel Teori ve Güvenlikleştirme Teorisi kullanılarak terörle mücadele söyleminin baskıcı güvenlik önlemlerini meşrulaştırırken alternatif, toplum temelli yöntemleri nasıl bir kenara ittiği araştırılmaktadır. Çalışma, politika belgeleri, resmi raporlar ve insan hakları değerlendirmelerinin analizi yoluyla, Kenya'nın güvenlikleştirme stratejisinin Müslüman toplulukları ve Somalili mültecileri orantısız bir şekilde etkilediğini, böylece devlet otoritesini pekiştirdiğini ve toplumsal gerilimleri şiddetlendirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Hükümetin başarı iddialarına rağmen, ordu öncülüğündeki terörle mücadele girişimleri El-Şebab'ın neden olduğu tehdidi ortadan kaldırmamış ve bazı durumlarda radikalleşmeyi yoğunlaştırmıştır. Bulgular, terörle mücadele stratejilerinin meşrulaştırılmasında ve sistematik eşitsizliklerin sürdürülmesinde retorikğin önemini vurgulayarak mevcut literatüre katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma, Kenya'nın terörle mücadele çerçevesinin, kalıcı güvenliğe ulaşmak için insan hakları odaklı politikalara, sosyo-ekonomik girişimlere ve toplum destekli politikalara ihtiyaç duyduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Kenya, Terörle Mücadele, Güvenlikleştirme, Eleştirel Söylem Analizi, Eleştirel Teori, El-Şebab, İnsan Hakları*

## Introduction: Securitization and the Counter-Terrorism Landscape in Kenya

Kenya has emerged as a key actor in the struggle against terror, particularly in the areas where Al-Shabaab dominates like East Africa. Kenya initiated Operation Linda Nchi in Somalia in 2011, and after this event, the counter-terrorism efforts of Kenya have been characterized by extensive military operations and domestic security measures. These strategies aim to neutralize the Al-Shabaab threat and protect Kenyan citizens (Klobucista, Masters, & Sergie, 2022). However, the long-term effectiveness of these measures remains highly contested, particularly concerning human rights violations (Torbjörnsson & Jons-son, 2016). The impact and results of Kenya's counter-terrorism strategies are questionable considering assaults such as the 2013 Westgate Mall, the 2015 invasion in Garissa University, and transborder raids (ISS Africa, 2023).

Most of the literature focuses mainly on the operational and policy facets of counterterrorism strategies, including armed operations, laws, and international collaboration. However, there is a conspicuous lack of analysis regarding the broader socioeconomic implications of Kenya's involvement in anti-terror programs. Numerous studies particularly analyze the contribution of Kenya's role in the ongoing fight against terrorism around the world, as well as its US alliance and its leading role in regional security. Nevertheless, the social and political implications are still not well understood, especially the effects on underprivileged communities and the securitization of identity. This study aims to provide insights into the mentioned underexplored areas by using the Critical Security Studies (CSS) methodology. In this way, the counter-terrorism methods of Kenya, which includes prioritizing state authority, alienate specific populations and perpetuate cycles of violence instead of fostering long-term security (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2020), will be analyzed.

This study uses Critical Theory and Securitization Theory as its theoretical framework. These viewpoints are crucial for comprehending how Kenya's counter-terrorism narrative sustains authoritarian policies and curtails human freedoms. This research is directed by the subsequent hypotheses:

*H1: Kenya's counter-terrorism measures are predominantly influenced by securitization discourse, resulting in an over dependence on military and law enforcement methods instead of community-oriented strategies.*

*H2: The securitization of counter-terrorism in Kenya has led to systemic discrimination against Muslim communities and Somali refugees, intensifying social tensions and promoting radicalization.*

*H3: Notwithstanding government assertions of success, the ongoing occurrence of terrorist acts, intelligence shortcomings, and community distrust indicate that Kenya's counter-terrorism policies are inadequate for attaining long-term security.*

The hypotheses are developed to rigorously analyze the discrepancies between official discourse and policy execution, the civil liberties ramifications considering Kenya's security strategies, as well as the degree to which these strategies correspond with global count-

er-terrorism trends. This study aims to elucidate the social and political ramifications of Kenya's policies by underscoring the necessity for inclusive, rights-based approaches to counter-terrorism. Instead of undermining prevailing narratives that depict counter-terrorism solely as a security-focused initiative, this study highlights the intricate relationship among security, governance, and human rights, promoting a more equitable and community-oriented strategy for countering terrorism. The research also employs Critical Security Studies and Securitization Theory to deliver a comprehensive analysis of Kenya's counter-terrorism efforts, proposing alternative policy suggestions that emphasize human rights, societal cohesion, and sustainable security.

The structure of this article is as follows: Initially, it contextualizes Kenya's military operations within a larger framework concerning East African geopolitics along with the broader international fight against terrorism. Second, it examines certain policies and initiatives the Kenyan government is using, assessing their execution and effects. Third, it uses Securitization Theory and Critical Theory to examine the ideological roots and power relations that influence Kenya's security discourse. Ultimately, it presents policy alternatives emphasizing sustainable counter-terrorism strategies, community engagement, and the upholding of human rights. This paper aims to offer theoretically robust and practically relevant insights to the broader discourse on counter-terrorism, governance, and security studies.

## **Reviewing the Literature: Counter-Terrorism, Securitization, and Human Rights in Kenya**

Despite comprehensive research on Kenya's counter-terrorism strategies and actions against Al-Shabaab, significant gaps remain. Current literature generally emphasizes the efficacy of military strategies exemplified by Operation Usalama Watch, alongside the enforcement of laws designed to combat terrorism; nevertheless, it frequently neglects a thorough examination of their wider implications for human rights. The impact of militaristic techniques on vulnerable populations, including Kenyan Muslims and Somali refugees, is generally overlooked. Moreover, while radicalization is frequently analyzed, there is a lack of research investigating the socio-economic and political marginalization that facilitates recruitment into extremist organizations. This results in a substantial deficiency in understanding how state measures may unintentionally promote radicalization.

### *Background on Al-Shabaab*

Somalia is home to the militant organization known as al-Shabaab, or "the Youth" (Klobucista, Masters, & Sergie, 2022). Adhering to al-Qa'ida's worldwide anti-Western ideology and encouraging sectarian violence against anyone who disagrees with its radical Islamic interpretation, the group is an officially recognized affiliate of al-Qa'ida. Al Shabaab became the most well-known military organization inside the Council of Islamic Courts' militant branch in 2006 (Australian National Security, 2024). In December 2006, The Council of Islamic Courts, a consortium related to Somalia's Sharia courts which had formed an alternative governance structure, was overthrown by Ethiopian troops and the Somali Transitional Federal Government. After this, Al Shabaab became an opposition government and insurgency that fought to impose Sharia rule in Somalia and topple the Somali Transitional Federal Government. Between 2009 and 2011, Al Shabaab controlled a large portion of So-

malia. Reinforced military operations by Ethiopian and Kenyan soldiers drove Al Shabaab out of Mogadishu and a significant portion of the center and south parts of Somalia in the same year, as a result of fresh military action by Ethiopian and Kenyan forces (Australian National Security, 2024).

Members of Al Shabaab include individuals who embrace al-Qa'ida's worldwide jihadist doctrine as well as those who are concentrated on the Somali war at home. There are between 5,000 and 14,000 members of al Shabaab, and the majority are ethnic Somalis from Kenya and Somalia (Australian National Security, 2024). A tiny percentage of members, nevertheless, are foreign-born, including those from Western countries. Al-Shabaab operates on a global scale as a violent non-state actor, similar to other such organizations. Furthermore, the group primarily uses Radio al Andalus to disseminate its message and recruit a large number of Somali citizens (Australian National Security, 2024). Al Shabaab also uses propaganda operations, sometimes in the form of videos, to recruit people from the Somali diaspora abroad. Through its al-Kata'ib media network, the organization has uploaded more complex movies on the internet, most of which include English subtitles (Australian National Security, 2024). The importance of financial contributions in supporting Al-Shabaab's operations is highlighted by the organization's receipt of financial assistance from Somalis living abroad, especially in the countries of the Gulf. This highlights the necessity for stricter regulation of the hawala system, an informal means of transferring funds (Abdullahi, Ichani, & Mulu, 2023).

### *Kenya's Fight Against Terrorism*

The country prioritized enhancing its anti-terror regulations and procedures, considering the increasing extent and severity of terror attacks. The Global Terrorism Database (2016) reports that from October 16, 2011, to November 29, 2015, Kenya experienced 500 terrorist acts, leading to 800 fatalities and 1,300 injuries. Al-Shabaab organized various large-scale attacks. For instance, the siege of Westgate Mall in 2013 resulted in the death of 72 people, 60 people died during the assault of Mpeketoni, and the attack on Garissa University in 2015 cost the lives of 152 people. The organization attributed the escalation and intensification of its assaults in Kenya to the government's intervention in Somalia. Moreover, multiple terrorist attacks throughout Kenya can be traced back to a multitude of underlying factors. Notable ones are Kenya's geographical closeness to Somalia, its involvement in the US-led initiated worldwide campaign against terror, and the interests of both Israel and the USA within the country. The paramount development is the deployment of the military of Kenya in Somalia in order to counter the Al-Shabaab menace (Mwangi, 2017).

Kenya's counterterrorism efforts are heavily reliant on international support. The US is a big player through initiatives like the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism (PREACT) which seeks to improve military, law enforcement and collaboration among civilians regarding the fight against terrorism. The initiative aims to increase operational capability, border security, disrupt terrorist financing, and reduce radicalization (Mwangi, 2017). When it comes to the Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program run by the US Department of State, Kenya ranks among the top grantees worldwide. Officials in partner nations' public safety and security agencies receive training in counterterrorism procedures through the ATA program. Most ATA grantees are developing nations with weak economies that cannot afford to maintain a robust anti-terrorism infrastructure and workforce

(Mwangi, 2017). Another tactic used to counter Al Shabaab is the exchange of intelligence. To prevent terrorist strikes, Kenya has joined intelligence-sharing initiatives in East Africa. Global collaboration, especially with the US, facilitated the sharing of critical information regarding potential threats (National Counter Terrorism Centre, 2025).

Kenya predominantly depended on law enforcement to counter terrorists. This does not express the process of security, which is a system of checks that subjects suspected and confirmed members of terrorist organizations to identification, removal, or extermination. Linda Nchi, which means "protect the country," was Kenya's first security mission, launched in October 2011, aimed at addressing the Al-Shabaab extremist threat in neighboring Somalia (Mule, 2020). Joint air and ground strikes were conducted on insurgent targets in Somalia with the participation of approximately 1500 Kenyan soldiers (Mule, 2020). The mission was designed to fortify Kenya's borders while reducing the risk of attacks from terrorist groups operating in Somalia (D.O. Opon, P.G. Okoth, & K. Onkware, 2015).

After Operation Linda Nchi, Kenya's military involvement in Somalia underwent a significant shift in February 2012 with the integration of Kenya's military into the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2036 provided the legal foundation for the integration of Kenyan forces into the mission. This resolution enabled AMISOM to expand its mission by deploying Kenyan personnel to combat Al-Shabaab and contribute to the stabilization of Somalia (AMISOM, 2022). Kenya contributed to patrols and combat against Al-Shabaab insurgents and protection of key towns and supply routes in several missions integrated into AMISOM. They also supported the operations of the Somali National Army (SNA). Although Al-Shabaab remained a major threat, Kenyan military defeats allowed the group to capture a substantial amount of territory. However, the military mission encountered obstacles due to the organization's asymmetric warfare (UN Security Council, 2012).

The Kenyan participation in AMISOM's mission under the African Union and United Nations mandate transformed its border response into a transnational counter-terrorism operation. Kenya joins the Eastern Africa Fusion and Liaison Unit (EA-FLU) as part of its regional intelligence-sharing frameworks which receive support from INTERPOL and other international actors to track and stop terrorist networks. The frameworks place Kenya within a global surveillance system which exceeds national control boundaries (Chandra, 2019). Local counter-terrorism policies in Kenya receive direction from and generate content for the macro-securitization of Islamist extremism through its cooperation with AFRICOM and its intelligence exchanges with Western agencies like the CIA and MI6. The macro-frame allows Kenya to defend its special internal security measures, including Muslim community surveillance and refugee camp securitization through global counter-terrorism efforts.

One of the biggest beneficiaries of US security aid in sub-Saharan Africa is Kenya. In 2015–17, they got US\$100 million in aid for counterterrorism operations, training, and the acquisition of advanced equipment (Chandra, 2019). The US Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) program supported the establishment of the National Security Intelligence and "General Service Unit," a paramilitary reserve unit primarily assigned to address civil unrest, and the Anti-Terror Police Unit (ATPU), a specialized police unit tasked with counter-terror responses. (Chandra, 2019). Furthermore, Kenya utilized the Terrorist

Interdiction Program (TIP), a program supplying technologies for screening travelers at airports and border crossings (Chandra, 2019).

Kenya receives financial and technological assistance from the UK, and the Kenya Defense Forces frequently participate in joint military training with British forces (Chandra, 2019). The European Union's Horn of Africa project, a four-year regional counterterrorism law enforcement initiative, is the most significant among other international collaborations on national security. Capacity-building seminars on counter-terror finance and counterterrorism case management have been recently conducted in Kenya as part of this initiative. Participants hailed from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda have been employed in police, law enforcement, and prosecutorial agencies (Chandra, 2019).

Operation Linda Boni, located in the Kenya-Somalia border area, functions as more than a domestic security measure because it connects to the worldwide "war on terror" discourse. Kenyan officials have labeled the Boni Forest as Al-Shabaab's strategic base, which poses a threat to both regional peace and global security, thus establishing a link between domestic insurgency and international security. Kenya implements security measures and narratives to both address and reinforce the global security framework of terrorism. The process allows exceptional security measures to become normalized through global security cooperation frameworks, which include transnational military deployment, Muslim community surveillance, and refugee camp closures (Mule, 2020). These practices need evaluation through Buzan's (2009) macro-securitization framework, which explains how global security narratives, including the "War on Terror," merge national and regional responses under a unified system-wide threat logic. The Kenyan participation in AMISOM under UN authority, together with its EA-FLU membership and extensive intelligence ties with AFRICOM, CIA, and MI6 contribute to a broader security logic that constructs Islamist extremism as a universal, existential threat. This macro-securitized narrative not only informs Kenya's internal policies but also shapes the logic behind international security assistance from the US and UK, as well as its deployment of specialized units like the ATPU and its implementation of refugee securitization measures. Briefly, Kenya participates in constructing and legitimizing macro-securitization through its threat portrayals of Al-Shabaab as enemies who threaten both regional peace and global security. The regional counter-terrorism engagements of Kenya function as dual expressions of worldwide threat narratives while establishing normalized exceptional measures.

Kenya has passed several laws in response to terrorism, namely The National Police Service Act of 2014, the Prevention of Organized Crime Act of 2012, the National Service Intelligence Act of 2012, the Proceeds of Crime and Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2009, the Finance Act of 2014 as well as the Anti-Terrorism Act aimed at enabling prosecution for terrorism related offences. This also covers financial rules meant to restrict support for terrorist organizations (Mwangi, 2017). Besides, the government of Kenya founded the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) in 2004 (Jirásek, 2023), and this project involves several agencies and functions as a base for negotiations with international collaborators while efficiently coordinating counter-terrorism efforts. The NCTC includes one chairman selected by the National Security Council (NSC) and representatives from the National Intelligence Service (NIS), the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF), the National Police Service, and several relevant branches of government, following legislative amendments in 2014

(Jirásek, 2023). Besides contributing to the counter-terrorism strategy, it devises strategies to promote deradicalization (National Counter Terrorism Centre, 2023). For instance, the center employs soft power to maintain its position in support of the scheme to grant amnesty for immigrants returning home from radicalized youth who joined Al-Shabaab abroad but subsequently returned to Kenya (Jirásek, 2023).

## **Theoretical Framework: Critical Security Approaches to Counter-Terrorism**

### *Critical Theory*

Research on terrorism often delves into intricate political and social processes that go beyond violent crimes. By focusing on the ideologies, power dynamics, and social circumstances that fuel both terrorism and state responses, critical theory provides a convincing framework for comprehending these interactions. Using Kenya's counter-Shabaab strategies as an example, this section explores the potential applications of critical theory within the realm of terrorism research.

Although there is no widely recognized description, terrorism can be generally characterized in the following way: It occurs when small groups or covert organizations use violence for political ends and attack any citizen of a civilian or militant state (Sinai, 2008). Terrorism involves the use of violence or coercion to exert control over civilian targets. Terrorist organizations cannot frequently topple the governments they oppose, in contrast to guerrilla armies. Attacks that target certain groups or randomly choose targets are more successful at pressuring governments to alter their policies (Sinai, 2008).

Similar to security, people's perceptions of politics have a big impact on how they handle terrorism. Critical Terrorism Research suggests that terrorism is primarily a societal reality, compared to a solitary violent occurrence (Mwangi & Mwangi, 2024). The core of the matter lies in its reliance on environment, conditions, motive, and, more importantly, the societal, cultural, lawful, and political structure that shape understanding, classification, and labeling, rather than being inherently tied to the aggression itself (R. Jackson, 2009). The relationship between political activity and violent extremism, as well as the role of dispute within political frameworks, warrants comprehensive examination. Countries categorize agencies under specific titles in order to justify particular regulations. Examples of this include perceptions that suggest religiously motivated terrorism is more violent and dangerous. Hamas is given as an example to illustrate how to deal with religious terrorism in this context (Toros & Gunning, 2009). Because religious groups are viewed as extremely hazardous and Hamas is only classified as a religious organization, Israel and Western powers depict the movement as dangerous, illogical, and seeking a new global order. Thus, as a part of the struggle against terrorism, they seek to use violence to suppress Hamas rather than engage in discussion. As a result, the organization's various facets are disregarded, and its calls for liberty and rights are not regarded as valid.

Traditional social theories that often ignored how ideology and power shape human experiences gave rise to critical theory. Critical Theory, which has its roots in the Frankfurt School's writings, places a strong emphasis on social justice, historical context, and the

questioning of conventional wisdom. It is not only for understanding social realities but also for dismantling and altering repressive systems (Heath-Kelly, 2019).

Power dynamics, ideological criticism, and the idea of liberation are all important components of Critical Theory that are relevant to the study of terrorism. To analyze the dynamics of terrorism and governmental response, one needs to understand how power is allocated and used in society (Richard Jackson 2007). From Critical Theory perspective, power is embedded in social structures, cultural norms, and economic systems as well as being held by the government (Toros and Mavelli, 2014). This view helps scholars examine how counterterrorism measures can affect underprivileged populations, alienate and radicalize them to the point of becoming terrorists (Horkheimer, Adorno, & Noeri, 2002).

Critical Theory also promotes an ideological criticism of how prevailing ideologies shape public opinion and how people perceive terrorism. Through analyzing these narratives, academics may be able to reveal the assumptions being made about some groups as inherently violent or radical, and about their behavior with no reference to political and socio-economic roots (Toros, 2016; Lindahl, 2018). Critical Theory also approaches the study of terrorism through the idea of emancipation. It supports the laws that ensure human rights and community engagement by not solely following the security approaches and requiring social change to address structural injustice and inequality. Critical Theory's concept of emancipation is aimed towards improving equity in society by eradicating the root causes of violence, which in turn will result in better and more equitable counterterrorism measures (Toros, 2016).

### *Securitization Theory*

Research on the function of discourse regarding security analysis, known as social constructivism, was influenced by the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School (Buzan & Wæver, 2009; Mwangi & Mwangi, 2024). Securitization is a concept within Critical Theory that involves the construction of individuals or groups as existential threats in order to justify extraordinary measures (Bredlid, 2024).

Securitization is based on the understanding of a referent object – an entity that is considered valuable and in need of protection, classifying certain problems or hazards as existential threats to that object (B. G. Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). This method makes the enactment of practices that might not be readily allowable within routine political discourse possible (B. Buzan & Wæver 2009). Another significant component of this theory is macro-securitization, which involves the extension of securitization efforts beyond national borders to address broader issues such as terrorism that affect multiple states (Buzan & Wæver, 2009). Macro securitization helps understanding security threats; however, it results in simplified stories that present complex social issues in black and white. The dichotomous framing of this may lead to prioritizing security above human rights initiatives, while neglecting the socio-political and economic fundamental causes of radicalization. (Ploch, 2010). Furthermore, the focus on the overarching narratives of terrorism can result in the misallocation of resources; military responses are emphasized over the primary issues of poverty, unemployment, and political disenfranchisement. This may continue cycles of violence rather than contributing to lasting stability (Whitaker, 2010).

Studying securitization theory helps to understand the approach of Kenya to foreign policy in the context of counterterrorism. The realization of stable macro-securitizations that encompass numerous lower-level initiatives often concentrates on military approaches at the expense of social and economic root causes that give rise to radicalization (B. Buzan & Wæver, 2009). This may result in policies that exacerbate the tensions within the communities rather than reducing them. Furthermore, studying the enunciation and rationalization of threats through the political discourse enriches the understanding of their implications for human rights and social cohesion in the country. This analysis stresses the need for more innovative strategies that focus on the participation of communities and combat the source of violence as opposed to relying on military approaches.

## **Research Design: A Discourse Analytic Study of Kenya's Security Discourses**

This paper examines Kenya's counter-terrorism strategies through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing on both Critical Theory and Securitization Theory in the process. Since the research demands an in-depth examination regarding the ideological and structural facets of Kenya's counter-terrorism policies, the recommended methodology is qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Al-Shabaab, an important actor in the security environment of Kenya, is transnational in nature and has been met by varied responses from the Kenyan government and other international actors (D. M. Anderson and McKnight, 2015). Hence, Al-Shabaab is chosen as the case study. The group's presence in Somalia and its history of conducting major attacks in Kenya have impacted Kenya's domestic and international policies while also highlighting the difficulties in combating terrorism in a borderless region with ethnic diversities and historical hostilities (Abdullahi, Ichani, & Mulu, 2023). Al-Shabaab can be used as a way of entry to understand the dynamics of counterterrorism efforts from the local, regional, and global levels. To understand the impacts of security narratives on vulnerable populations, this study analyzes policy papers, official reports, scholarly articles, and human rights assessments.

All the research for the study was conducted on primary and mostly secondary data sources; these include government documents such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012) and Kenya's National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NCTC, 2016), as well as international and regional reports from the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). These sources offer a view of the legal and institutional counter-terrorism framework in Kenya. Peer-reviewed journal articles and books reviewing Kenya's counter-terrorism policies, the securitization of Muslim identities, and the overall impacts of security policies are also incorporated to ensure that the discourse is well covered (Mogire & Mkutu Agade, 2011; Kamau, 2021). Human rights reports from organizations like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) are used to analyze human rights abuses linked to counter-terrorism measures ("Kenya," 2014). To analyze how terrorism is framed in public discourse, government speeches, news articles, and public statements from security agencies are analyzed.

The following article applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology to explore how language, power, and ideology construct Kenya's counter-terrorism policies (Fair-

clough, 2017). The analysis is based on securitization speech acts by government officials and security agencies to explore how terrorism threats are framed, articulated, and justified. Additionally, policy discourse is analyzed to explore the assumptions made in Kenya's counter-terrorism laws and policies.

## Analyzing Kenya's Counter-Terrorism Policies

### *Securitization and Militarization of Counter-Terrorism*

Terrorism has been declared the top safety concern in Kenya, leading to the adoption of stringent anti-terrorism policies. The Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012) and other pieces of legislation have provided the necessary legal framework that allows security forces to take preventative measures against potential threats. Because risk is prioritized over danger, Kenyan actors are paying particular attention to people who may be at risk of radicalization. Determining who is in danger of radicalization or is suspected of being radicalized has become a highly politicized issue that fits with Kenya's prevailing rhetoric, which is essentially focused on maintaining political power (Breidlid, 2024). According to the Act's provision 12D (*The Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2012*):

“A person who adopts or promotes an extreme belief system to facilitate ideologically based violence to advance political, religious or social change commits an offence and is liable on conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding thirty years.”

One of the primary concerns with this regulation is its nebulous and confusing phrasing. The phrase "extreme belief system" lacks a precise definition, potentially resulting in arbitrary enforcement. The absence of clarity permits law enforcement agents to interpret the legislation expansively, possibly targeting individuals based on their political, religious, or social convictions rather than any genuine intent to perpetrate violence. This uncertainty may lead to the prosecution of political dissidents, activists, or persons voicing unpopular beliefs, therefore violating their rights to freedom of expression and belief. For instance, according to several residents of the Northeastern region of Kenya, people are scared of the Kenyan armed forces, which are seen as more terrifying than Al-Shabaab. This is because whenever Al-Shabaab conducts a terrorist operation in Kenya, the Kenyan forces retaliate by targeting innocent civilians. (Shire, 2023).

Official reports demonstrate similar securitizing language usage. The National Assembly's Joint Committee on Security revealed in its 2013 Westgate Mall attack investigation that "Al-Shabaab operatives were able to exploit porous borders and refugee camps, where recruitment and planning occur under the guise of humanitarian protection" (Republic of Kenya, 2013). The expression "under the guise of humanitarian protection" makes an implicit accusation against international aid systems for enabling terrorism, which strengthens securitized responses and externalizes responsibility.

After the 2015 Garissa University College attack President Uhuru Kenyatta declared to the nation that "We will do everything to defend our way of life" while stating that Kenya would not allow Al-Shabaab to create "an Islamic caliphate in Kenya" (BBC News, 2015).

The rhetoric demonstrates a traditional securitizing approach that presents terrorism as an existential danger which threatens both physical security and cultural and ideological independence. Through his use of “our way of life” Kenyatta’s speech transforms the threat into a civilizational issue to justify forceful counter-terrorism actions that could bypass typical legal boundaries.

Human Rights Watch conducted research in Kenya between November 2013 and June 2014, and this revealed a worrying trend, having documented more than 10 cases of killings, 10 cases of unlawful disappearances and 11 cases of violence or abuse of innocent civilians with terrorism suspects. This proof clearly points to the role of the counterterrorism unit, especially in Nairobi since 2011 (“Kenya,” 2014). After interviewing 22 residents of Nairobi’s Majengo district, Human Rights Watch researchers discovered that terrorism suspects were subjected to a number of serious abuses, such as being targeted in public, kidnapped from cars and courtrooms, abused when being arrested, and kept in segregation without communication with their families or attorneys (“Kenya,” 2014).

Likewise, The National Police Service (NPS) discourse constructs the way of thinking of Al-Shabaab attacks in the northeastern and coastal areas of Kenya by portraying these incidents as a threat to the existence of the country and the people living in the affected areas. The NPS uses some linguistic features in order to make terrorism an existential threat to justify the measures that they will take in fighting terrorism (Mwangi & Mwangi, 2024). For instance, words such as “infiltrate,” “terror attacks,” and “extra vigilance” are used to generate panic over perceived threats, especially in the northeastern and coastal counties (NPS Kenya, 2016). This framing is used to enhance the authority of the NPS as the chief protector against such threats. The NPS classifies Al-Shabaab attacks as a major threat to physical and human security. For instance, attacks are referred to using emotional language, such as calling them heinous and describing who is attacked, and what part of society is affected (NPS Kenya, 2023; Mwangi & Mwangi, 2024). This is done to create a narrative where these areas are constantly under attack, which in turn makes the public feel vulnerable. The discourse also uses securitization theory wherein the northeast and coastal areas of Kenya are socially constructed as ‘spaces of terrorism’. The NPS categorizes these areas as not only regions that have had attacks but as hotbeds of terrorism, thus giving a justification for the punitive counterterrorism policies. Furthermore, the discourse admits that the perceptions of the public are in concordance with the stories told by the NPS. An interesting point is that while the local people in most cases dislike the state-led repressive counterterrorism measures, the general population of Kenya supports these measures because of the negative perception of the Northeastern and coastal regions (Mwangi & Mwangi, 2024). This shows that the framing of the NPS is a key factor in shaping public opinion and acceptance of counterterrorism policies.

The NPS also claims that the attacks occur due to the socio-economic and political challenges that are faced in the regions such as poverty and marginalization which make the areas to be prone to terrorism. This is because it helps illustrating the reasons of the NPS’s counter terrorism efforts thereby making them seem necessary (NPS Kenya, 2023). In general, the NPS uses, among other things, emotional language, frame analysis, and public narrative to create an image of Al-Shabaab attacks that are aimed at emphasizing the present security threats and explaining the necessity of the strict counterterrorism measures in the affected areas.

To increase the participation of the public in avoiding crime related to terrorism, Kenya also initiated community policing strategies in 2003. It comes from Tanzania's Ujamaa Policy, which is founded on the African Ubuntu philosophy. Members are responsible for monitoring neighborhood conflicts and, more precisely, helping to lower the number of criminal cases (Mule, 2020). The Nyumba Kumi initiative, meaning "ten houses," promotes the formation of groups comprising ten neighboring households to oversee local activities and report any disturbance (Ndono, Muthama, & Muigua, 2019). This strategy utilizes community engagement principles to empower local populations in sustaining security. The Nyumba Kumi Initiative, although guided by principles of equitable representation, primarily involves elderly residents. Young people neither engage in its events nor are involved in concerns of misconduct and security (Ndono et al., 2019). This has led to considerable conflict and frustration among young people and seniors throughout the years. Substantial ambiguity surrounds involvement in Nyumba Kumi owing to the lack of laws and restrictions. Criteria are crucial for assessing persons and facilitating taking actions (Savage & Lumbasi, 2016).

#### *Criminalization of Muslim Communities and Somali Refugees*

Somali immigrants and Muslim communities in Kenya have been criminalized as a result of anti-terrorist actions, which are characterized by extensive stereotyping, discrimination, and violations of human rights. The Arabs were persecuted after the 1998 attack on the US embassy in Nairobi, and many Muslim organizations were closed by the government (UNHCR, 2018). Extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary arrests, which affect mainly Somali refugees and Muslims, are an example of how securitization leads to militarization and therefore demands extraordinary security measures, as the research concludes (UNHCR, 2018). The Kenyan government, after 9/11 introduced new security measures on Muslims, whose population included a number of Arabs and Asians. In Mombasa, it became almost impossible for one to apply for a birth certificate or a passport without presenting the identity documents of their grandparents. The Law Society of Kenya complained that the anti-terrorism measures adopted by the United States and the United Kingdom were making the Muslims in Kenya near refugees in their own country (UNHCR, 2018).

Two of the most common and mostly negative consequences of Kenya's counterterrorism policies are surveillance and harsh policing of ethnic Somalis and Muslims. The retaliatory attacks by al-Shabaab have increased countrywide to the level that the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) launched an operation against the group in 2011. In response, the Kenyan government has launched a crackdown on terrorism that has seen ethnic Somalis suffer from increased surveillance and all forms of human rights abuses, including extortion, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary arrests (Muibu & Cubukcu, 2023).

Counter-terrorism efforts have resulted in the collective stigmatization of entire Muslim and Somali populations, branding them as intrinsically "suspect" due to Islamophobic prejudices (Breidliid, 2024). The notion of "suspect communities" can yield catastrophic repercussions (Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009). Individuals are labeled as terrorists solely for their affiliation with these groups, irrespective of their conduct. This official strategy, which disproportionately emphasizes religion, social networks, and Somali ethnicity as catalysts of radicalization, neglects other explanations and promotes a climate of fear and distrust

(Breidlid, 2024). This policy has ultimately demonstrated ineffectiveness in confronting significant threats to Kenyan society.

Adapted from Kenya's comprehensive plan to fight Al Shabaab, other measures include identifying and deporting foreigners in the country as well as continuing with the ethnic security mapping and profiling (Mule, 2020). However, the government has gone further to cast the blame on the Somali community for the activities of criminals and terror suspects within the community. In 2011, the government required all Somalis to have their properties and assets audited, claiming that Somali businesspeople were investing in Kenyan real estate using money from terrorism and piracy along the Somali coast (World Bank, 2020). In 2014, the police and the KDF conducted operation Usalama Watch in Mombasa and Nairobi, specifically in areas occupied by ethnic Somalis and Muslims, without a search warrant. It created the impression of an operation based on ethnicity and religion (Mule, 2020).

IPOA has pointed out that the operation was illegal under the provisions of equality and non-discrimination, even as it explained that the suspect was home grown, and the operation had to be countrywide (IPOA, 2017). IPOA (2017) established that the police officers failed to follow the human rights provisions and demanded money from the detainees, between 1,000 and 20,000 KSh. Victims stated that they were taken advantage of by the military and the police, who used the lack of identity cards as an excuse. No one was allowed a court appearance, and people were illegally held in custody for more than 24 hours. The people arrested in the operation were put in different cells and were without food or a lawyer for several days (IPOA, 2017).

The Ministry of Interior declared plans to shut down the Dadaab refugee complex in 2016, which led to the increased securitization of refugee spaces. The Ministry declared that the camp had "lost its humanitarian character" and "a haven for terrorists and a base for launching attacks against Kenya" (Rivett-Carnac, 2016). The language transforms the refugee camp from its original protective function into a dangerous location. The term "haven for terrorists" functions as a securitizing move (Buzan et al., 1998) which creates fear while portraying refugees particularly Somali populations as internal security threats. Through this rhetorical shift of refugees into security threats the Kenyan government can support extreme actions including forced repatriation and border restrictions and reduced humanitarian assistance.

The official language of Kenya's National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) demonstrates further securitizing discourse. The NCTC defines the national threat landscape through this declaration: "Kenya is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural constitutional democracy in a region in which violent extremism, particularly exploiting religious texts and identity, threatens national and human security." (NCTC, 2025). The statement presents violent extremism as a dual security threat which simultaneously attacks Kenya's pluralistic nature. The mention of "religious texts and identity" presents terrorism as a religious faith corruption which separates authentic religious followers from extremist groups. The CDA framework shows how this framing enables the state to validate preventive measures such as community outreach and surveillance and civic education programs as necessary protections for democratic unity. Through its focus on national unity and human security the discourse establishes extremism as a threat which operates both domestically and internationally thus expanding security concerns into cultural and social areas.

State actors use these speech acts to build a discourse which merges “refugee”, “Muslim” and “terrorist” categories into a single political framework that justifies both urgent and necessary exceptional measures. The discursive strategies follow Buzan et al.’s (1998) securitization model which allows political issues to become existential threats thus enabling the suspension of normal political processes. The situation demonstrates the concept of the “state of exception” (Agamben, 2005) because emergency measures replace legal norms. Kenyan authorities use their language to advance an ideological project which unites state power with racialized and politicized security frameworks.

Somali and Muslim populations in Kenya experience discrimination that affects both people and groups in concrete ways, going beyond simple social stigma. According to different counterterrorism programs, collective punishment results from the development of a collective identity based on suspicion, which views entire populations as possible threats. In order to safeguard state interests, policies designed to counter terrorism have led to the marginalization or outright silence of civil society organizations and people (Breidlid, 2024). Furthermore, a culture of mistrust and fear is maintained by the notion that Muslims might be viewed as terrorists just because of their ties to the community. The Kenyan government has also instituted programs in schools to track indicators of radicalization among youth. Educators are directed to observe indicators like behavioral changes and religious conversions, thereby heightening the possibility that Muslim students may experience discrimination in educational environments designed to be secure and supportive (Breidlid, 2024).

Because of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), it is difficult for faith-based and community organizations to help young Muslims who are targeted by security authorities and suffer harassment and discrimination. This law creates a climate of distrust between the government and Muslim civil society by making it easier for the state to arrest people who are thought to be ‘terrorists’, by criminalizing giving ‘material support’ to ‘suspected terrorists’ (Breidlid, 2024). The latter harms these organizations’ operational capacities by fostering enmity rather than collaboration.

National media presents Somalis and Muslims as terrorists and their supporters, linking them to Al-Shabaab. This ‘othering’ of Muslims is also evident in Kenya, particularly along the coast, where they are seen as evil, backward, and in need of direction from the government (Breidlid, 2024). This orientalist view, which is evident in media reports and the opinions of the public, helps to justify the abuses of Muslims by Kenyan security forces. For example, The Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), a Muslim legal advocacy organization that is non-violent and works to address historical grievances of the Muslim community, has been portrayed by the Kenyan media and government as a violent gang linked to Al-Shabaab. This has led to the cessation of funding to the organization, which in turn in a way stigmatizes a non-violent institution that could have helped in preventing extremism among Muslim youths (Breidlid, 2024).

The counter-terrorism measures in Kenya are gradually eroding the functions of civil society organizations, thereby reducing the space for civic engagement. This is evident in various ways, for instance, through the suppression of civil rights such as freedom of expression, association, and assembly, which are signs of a healthy civil society. For instance, in April 2015, the government suspended the licenses of the human rights organizations

MUHURI and Haki Africa on accusations of having links with terrorism. Other groups argued that this was a crackdown on the groups because they had been critical of the government's discrimination against Muslims. Although a court decision directed that their bank accounts should be unlocked, the initial actions had a chilling effect (UHNCR, 2018).

The 2012 Prevention of Terrorism Act defines terrorism broadly, enhances the powers of the police, and permits the state to create lists of people and groups it considers terrorists without due process. Financial constraints present a considerable challenge, as civil society organizations encounter restricted access to banking services and stringent administrative requirements (Freedom House, 2018). New financial reporting regulations may impose administrative burdens, requiring organizations to evaluate their staff, partners, and aid recipients. The delegitimization of civil society organizations (CSOs) through governmental smear campaigns is particularly troubling (Mwangi, 2021). These campaigns are frequently amplified by state-controlled media, which tend to loosely associate CSOs with terrorism and depict them as threats to national security. The resulting "chilling effect" inhibits targeted organizations and deters others from participating in essential activities (Mwangi, 2021).

The National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) has been identified as the approving and reporting institution for civil society organizations (CSOs) in the prevention and countering of violent extremism, which otherwise interferes with their functions (NCTC, 2024). These measures eventually diminish the vital role of civil society as a watchdog of the public and thus undermines the work of human rights defenders and especially target marginalized populations. According to Freedom House (2018), citizens believe that civil society organizations are there to ensure that the government's counter-terrorism efforts are proper. The laws meant to make the nation safe are, in fact, shutting the voices and efforts of people who are trying to make society a better place.

The Kenyan government has been forcibly relocating people and refugees who are thought to be participating in terrorist operations (Brankamp & Glück, 2022; Breidlid, 2024). At least 90 individuals, including Kenyans, Somali nationals, and Ethiopians, were detained in the then-Northeastern province in 2007 on suspicion of engaging in terrorist operations and sent to Somalia and Ethiopia (Mule, 2020). In 2014, Kenya effected the expulsion of 359 Somalis to Somalia, which also involved at least three registered refugees (Mule, 2020). Furthermore, 28 Ethiopians were deported, and six Ugandan asylum seekers were arrested and repatriated to Uganda. In total, 412 refugees were relocated to the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps. The people who were expelled had foreign identity documents, which some of them said were seized or destroyed after they were arrested by the police, who demanded money to affect their release (Mule, 2020). Expelling refugees is against the non-refoulement policy of the international relations system and goes against article 2 (3) of the 1969 OAU Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (OAU, 1969). The UNHCR (2015) has stated that the Kenyan authorities limited their access to detainees both in the cell and at the airport, which hindered them from recognizing registered refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, the criteria employed by authorities to determine whom to charge and whom to deport without charges remain ambiguous (UNHCR, 2015). While international law obligates Kenya to accommodate refugees, considerations of national security should take precedence in the deliberations regarding their repatriation or continued residence.

The Muslims of Kenya have been viewed by the government as a security risk, resulting in increased crackdowns on ethnic Somalis in areas like Eastleigh in Nairobi and the effort to forcibly deport Somali refugees from the Dadaab camp. It was reported that Kenya Police violated the rights of asylum seekers and refugees and searched their houses after the 2006–2010 Somalia refugee crisis (Mule, 2020). Asylum seekers were reported to be held in not-so-hospitable police cells due to overcrowding, abuse, and other aspects of substandard living conditions (Amnesty International, 2014). The refugees are usually detained for an unspecified period of time without being arraigned in court or bailed out. Although Somalia was insecure and the returnees risked being persecuted and imprisoned, between 2008 and 2009, hundreds or even thousands of people were repatriated to Somalia (Amnesty International, 2014).

### *The Effectiveness of Counterterrorism Rhetoric*

In government discourse, counterterrorism efforts are depicted as effective, required, and capable of eradicating terrorist risks in policy statements, political addresses, security analyses, and media coverage. However, when analyzed critically, with the help of a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of these narratives, it becomes apparent that language employed by officials is not always consistent with the reality on the ground, which casts doubts on the effectiveness of Kenya's counterterrorism policies in real life. The linguistic analysis of the data collected for this study shows that the state and the media employ the securitization discourse to construct terrorism as an imminently threatening phenomenon that requires extraordinary security measures.

Policy statements and governmental announcements including presidential addresses and statements from the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) usually focus on the government's success in fighting Al-Shabaab and its resolve to protect the nation. For instance, after the 2013 Westgate Mall attack, President Uhuru Kenyatta said that 'We will not be frightened by these cowardly terrorists' and that Kenya's counter-terrorism response was 'decisive and firm' (Los Angeles Times, 2013). This discourse supported the argument for military solutions by showing terrorism as an aggression on the sovereign power of the nation.

Detentions, foiled attempts, and neutralized terrorism networks are often portrayed as proof of effectiveness in official accounts and counter-terrorism strategies (NCTC, 2016). The Kenyan government is positioned as proactive and effective by this rhetorical framing, which reassures the populace and supports more military operations, policing, and surveillance. But CDA shows how this discourse deliberately minimizes the enduring nature of terrorist attacks, human rights abuses, and operational inefficiencies, constructing a narrative that puts political legitimacy ahead of actual security results (Anderson & McKnight, 2015).

Despite the robust securitization discourse, Kenya persists in facing frequent terrorist attacks, especially in areas such as Lamu, Mandera, Garissa, and Nairobi. Al-Shabaab continues to demonstrate operational capacity through bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations, undermining the official narrative of counter-terrorism success (Breidlid, 2024). The government of Kenya has a tendency to exaggerate successes and minimize failures, especially regarding intelligence shortcomings and the failure to avert significant attacks (Anderson & McKnight, 2015).

Likewise, after the assault on Garissa University in 2015 that claimed 148 lives, the government promised a more severe fight on terrorism, including more military operations in Somalia and monitoring inside Kenya (BBC, 2015). Still, the frequency of strikes points to the fact that these tactics have not significantly reduced Al-Shabaab's operational capability. The 2013 Westgate Mall attack, the 2015 Garissa University attack and the 2019 DusitD2 Hotel attack exposed deep-seated security weaknesses, contrary to the government's claim of improved intelligence and readiness. Each attack was followed by a shift in the rhetorical stance; representatives stressed the growth of sensitization, improved security measures and stronger counter-terrorism measures, yet similar attacks kept on occurring (Mule, 2020; Yigzaw & Mengisteab, 2024; Mwangi & Mwangi, 2024; Breidlid, 2024). This, therefore, means that although counter-terrorism rhetoric gives the impression that the state is powerful and capable, the effectiveness of these policies is still a question mark.

The absence of transparency in counter-terrorism operations fosters mistrust and skepticism. The securitization narrative presents terrorism as an existential danger, therefore justifying forceful security policies disproportionately affecting underprivileged populations. According to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the counter-terrorism discourse of the state often presents whole communities as security concerns, therefore aggravating suspicion and alienating the impacted groups even more. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) have reported cases of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and have focused on Somali and Muslim communities, among others (KNCHR, 2015). The government argues that these measures are necessary for security, but as CDA suggests, they perpetuate systemic oppression, social alienation, and community resentment, thus working against the security goals they are intended to achieve (Mogire & Mkutu Agade 2011).

## Limitations of the Study and Further Research

The study has certain contributions. Initially, the study seeks to offer a more comprehensive assessment of Kenya's counter-terrorism policies, offering a more nuanced view of how securitization rhetoric marginalizes community-driven approaches while being used to justify repressive security measures. Besides, using Critical Theory and Securitization Theory, this study might go beyond the conventional state-centric security analyses to reveal the wider socio-political consequences of counter-terrorism policies concerning Muslim communities, Somali refugees, and others. It might contribute to the securitization research in the Global South as it demonstrates how Kenya's counter-terrorism strategies are both connected with and different from the global counter-terrorism trends as well. The study adds to policy debates by advocating for a counter-terrorism strategy based on human rights, which addresses security concerns through inclusive governance and socio-economic development.

On the other hand, the research is mostly based on secondary data, which means that the researcher was not able to get direct data from the policymakers, security forces, and those affected. The lack of primary data in the form of interviews or surveys limits the depth of analysis and prevents a thorough understanding of how counterterrorism policies work in real life. Besides, while CDA effectively reveals the existence of power relations in counterterrorism discourse, it fails to provide a clear assessment of the effectiveness of security policies in combating terrorism. Furthermore, because of the dynamics in Kenya's security situation, it may be necessary to re-examine the results later.

To bridge these gaps, subsequent studies should employ a mixed-methods research design, which involves collecting data through both qualitative interviews with security experts, civil society actors, and people affected by counterterrorism measures. It is possible to learn a lot about the effects of counterterrorism policies on the region by comparing East African countries. Longitudinal research would enable monitoring of variations in counterterrorism discourse and practice as they occur over time. A more detailed analysis of the socio-economic factors that lead to radicalization, combined with a legal analysis of the counterterrorism laws, may help to improve the current approaches and design better and respectful security policies.

## **Conclusion: Rethinking Kenya's Counter-Terrorism Strategies**

The article supports Critical Theory's emancipation mission by demonstrating that sustainable security in Kenya requires eliminating securitized practices which discriminate against Muslim communities and refugees. The framework defines emancipation as the process of dismantling discursive and institutional structures which portray these groups as threats while promoting policies that protect human dignity, legal equality, and political inclusion (Toros, 2016). An emancipatory counter-terrorism framework would redirect security efforts from military monitoring toward rights-focused engagement through transparent practices, accountable community involvement, and inclusive dialogue. The alternative paradigm would manifest through independent oversight of the Anti-Terror Police Unit (ATPU) and legal protections for refugees against collective punishment and participatory approaches to counter-radicalization. These reforms would tackle security roots while making Kenya's security practices compliant with democratic principles and social justice standards. The concept of emancipation functions as a practical normative objective which opposes the global counter-terror regime's exceptionalism to create opportunities for fair and compassionate policy solutions. This paper has also established that preventing radicalization at the local level depends on the involvement of religious leaders, teachers, and other community leaders whose participation is essential to the kind of inclusive, emancipatory framework proposed in the article.

A better counter-terrorism plan for Kenya must shift to a more human rights focused strategy that is consistent with international standards in order to prevent prejudice against certain groups, extrajudicial killings and illegal detention. The need to ensure that security agencies remain accountable and prevent abuse of power means increasing the independence of monitoring bodies. First, to help decrease the extreme recruitment, to address the root causes of radicalization that include unemployment, political disenfranchisement, and limited educational opportunities through focused socio-economic development strategies. The government should finance job creation, vocational training, and community development in the disadvantaged areas. It is also important to enhance community engagement as security services can establish trust and improve cooperation and information sharing with local communities with the help of civil society partnerships, dialogue forums, and community policing. Furthermore, counter-terrorism laws including the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012) should be reviewed to eliminate provisions that discriminate against certain groups while more stringent legal safeguards to protect fundamental rights are put in place. The use of technology, the improvement of cooperation with the neighboring countries, and the fight against corruption in security organs would help to enhance the intelligence

gathering and preventive measures to reduce risks before they become realities. Lastly, the counterterrorism discourse should move beyond the securitization discourse and include other narratives that challenge the extreme views and promote the unity of society.

In this paper, Critical Theory and Securitization Theory were used to examine the discrepancy between official language, policy execution, and security results. This study emphasizes the frequently neglected sociopolitical consequences of securitization, in contrast to the predominant focus of existing studies on the operational and policy aspects of counterterrorism, including international security cooperation, legislative frameworks, and military interventions (Bachmann & Hönke, 2010; Botha, 2014). However, while these initiatives are ongoing, the longevity of military policies cannot be assured when terrorist threats such as Al-Shabaab are still present. The securitization of counter-terrorism has also helped to criminalize Muslim communities and Somali refugees by repeating discriminatory practices, arbitrary arrests, and human rights abuses. This exclusive strategy has intensified people's distrust of security forces and, therefore, made the situation worse rather than better by reducing radicalization. However, the counter-terrorism discourse is also accompanied by official narratives that may well focus on operational successes while downplaying failures in such a way as to gain public support for limited security policies. In applying Critical Theory and the theory of securitization to the analysis of the gap between the discourse and practice of security, this paper aims to contribute to the understanding of Kenya's counter-terrorism policy and practice. The analysis also reveals that Kenya's counter-terrorism policy is militarized and exceptionally securitized; terrorism is portrayed as an existential threat in the official discourse to justify the aggressive security measures.

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