

Assessing the Impact of Government Security Policies on the Frequency and Severity of Al-Shabaab Attacks in Mandera County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the impact of government security policies and programs on the frequency and severity of Al-Shabaab attacks in Mandera County, Kenya, from 2014 to 2024. Researchers collected quantitative and qualitative data by carrying out structured questionnaires among 250 respondents and interviews with key informants. According to the results, only 21.6% of people are aware of counterterrorism policies put in place by the government. Most participants thought that attacks from Al-Shabaab were very severe (65%), but part of them expressed uncertainty about the effectiveness of those actions (24.8%) and part of them felt the measures were not enough (46.4%). Results from regression analysis showed that a bigger military presence ($\beta = 0.358$) and stronger border patrols ($\beta = 0.283$) strongly reduced the number of terrorist activities, but surveillance technologies influenced them to a moderate degree only ($\beta = 0.276$). Research suggests that government support and community-based activities had only a small impact which might result from poor decisions about using resources and making policies. Improving security outcomes was found to rely on stronger collaboration and the exchange of information between the police and the community. Based on the findings, sustaining effective counterterrorism work in Mandera County requires having military, community and inter-agency strengths, plus programs to educate the public.

Keywords: Government security policies, Al-Shabaab attacks, Mandera County, military presence, community engagement

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism continues to persist as a major and protracted challenge to global peace and security. While all nations face inherent risks, regions characterized by instability, porous borders, and governance challenges are disproportionately impacted. The Global Terrorism Index (2023) identifies East Africa as a significant hotspot for violent extremism, with Kenya ranking among the most severely affected nations within the region. Al-Shabaab, an Al-Qaeda-affiliated Somali Islamist group, has conducted sustained operations in northeastern Kenya, primarily targeting the Northern region and Lamu county as well as Mandera County which is the focus of this study. It employs raids, suicide bombings, improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, and targeted assassinations etc, that has resulted in substantial loss of life, population displacement, and severe disruption to local economic activity (Ombati, 2021; Ndungu & Otieno, 2022). Mandera's strategic location bordering Somalia and Ethiopia, compounded by endemic poverty and inter-communal conflict, renders the county acutely vulnerable to extremist access and operations (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2024).

Confronted by this escalating threat, the Kenyan government has dedicated significant resources to developing comprehensive counterterrorism (CT) strategies. These encompass a multi-faceted approach: augmenting military and police deployments, enhancing intelligence collection capabilities, deploying advanced surveillance technologies, fostering regional security cooperation and promoting community resilience initiatives designed to foster early warning mechanisms (Charo, 2020; Ministry of Interior, 2023). Notable operations conducted include "Operation Linda Nchi" and the establishment of joint security task forces within Mandera County (Kenya Defence Forces, 2022). Furthermore, policy emphasis has been placed on institutionalizing community

policing frameworks that integrate local elders and youth with security officials, aimed at improving intelligence sharing and counter the demands of radical groups (Waswa & Muna, 2023). Despite significant annual investment in counter-terrorism (CT) measures exceeding KES 40 billion, the extent to which these efforts have demonstrably reduced the frequency and severity of attacks in Mandera remains a critical question.

Persistent Al-Shabaab attacks within Mandera County, however, indicate that the core challenge remains inadequately addressed. While kinetic operations involving troop surges and targeted raids have yielded some tactical gains in reducing incident numbers, they have proven insufficient in mitigating the broader socio-political and economic consequences of terrorism. Paramashanti (2023) notes a 15% decline in Al-Shabaab related incidents between 2016 and 2021 attributable to intensified military action, yet observes that casualty figures remained static and economic disruption largely unabated. Similarly, Greitens et al. (2019) argue that while security forces can disrupt terrorist networks, it often fails to address the underlying drivers of radicalization, such as historical political marginalization and exclusion. In Mandera, the Counter Terrorism challenge is further complicated by poverty, with a majority of residents living below the poverty line (KNBS, 2024) and deep-rooted clan rivalries exploited by Al-Shabaab for recruitment and operational cover (Ndungu & Otieno, 2022). Consequently, an over-reliance on kinetic solutions primarily addresses symptoms rather than the root causes of terrorism.

Compounding these challenges are significant environmental and structural constraints within Mandera County. The county's vast, open terrain, spanning approximately 25,000 square kilometers, presents formidable obstacles to effective border surveillance and interdiction of militant movement (Mandera County Development Office, 2024). The inherent porosity of the Kenya-Somalia border facilitates the undetected infiltration, exfiltration, and operational freedom of Al-Shabaab elements (Abdullahi et al., 2023). Furthermore, ethnic tensions and a profound deficit of trust between local communities and security actors critically hinder intelligence gathering, discouraging the voluntary sharing of vital information (Geburu, 2024). Community-based counterterrorism initiatives, intended to bridge this gap, frequently suffer from inadequate resourcing, poor coordination, and politicization, undermining their potential to foster sustainable partnerships (Roba Dido et al., 2022). This persistent disjuncture between strategic policy design and operational implementation allows Al-Shabaab to sustain its campaign. Addressing these governance and security service delivery gaps in Mandera County is therefore an operational imperative. It is against this complex backdrop that the current study empirically investigates the impact of government security policies on the frequency and severity of Al-Shabaab attacks in Mandera County.

Theoretical Framework

This section helps to explain the working principles of counterterrorism efforts as supported by the main ideas in security studies. The analysis and interpretation of government security efforts related to terrorism greatly depend on theories, especially in regions such as Mandera County, Kenya, where Al-Shabaab is regularly present. By consciously applying these theoretical frameworks enables an analysis of their specific efficacy and operational mechanisms within the context of the present study.

Security Dilemma Theory

Security Dilemma Theory began with John Herz's work in 1950 and it was later expanded by Robert Jervis and Charles Glaser. The theory describes how an increase in a state's security—through military upgrades, for example—is often viewed as a threat by the other nations which leads them to improve their own security. The reaction and response to actions like these often lead to distrust and make both sides more likely to act competitively or even aggressively. Herz, (1950) argued that the security efforts of one country might accidentally lead others to feel less safe, prompting them to build up their military and making the situation tense between nations. With time, this situation leads state leaders to feel their security is decreasing even with all the security steps they have taken. This shows that a lot of what governments do can have more effects than expected and helps us understand conflicts today where security measures taken by a country can actually cause tensions to rise.

Security Dilemma Theory shows that actions taken against terrorism in Mandera County may have surprising

results. The government's actions aimed at protecting against Al-Shabaab may prompt the group to use more violent and frequent attacks, just as such moves often mirror in foreign relations. This theory points out that even more security does not guarantee less violence; it could bring about more conflict because an adversary feels threatened by it. Although the theory explains a lot, it usually ignores the role of diplomacy and what cooperation might do to ease fears and it is mostly about how countries respond (Jervis, 1978). In any case, it is still important for policymakers because it highlights that perceptions and psychology play a role in conflict and that community involvement and taking steps to stop conflict in advance are as vital in counterterrorism as using military power.

Public Policy Impact Theory

Public Policy Impact Theory is part of public policy studies and was shaped by scholars Harold D. Lasswell and Thomas R. Dye by examining the result of policies on society and its economy. According to this theory, the rules created and carried out through policies play a major role in influencing how people behave, especially in terms of crime and public safety. When it comes to security, the theory points out that the actions of the government can discourage crime or lead to it, depending on how its security policies are put into practice (Dye, 1976). The policy highlights the need to have clear goals, implement those policies, evaluate the results they bring to society and realize that effectively setting aside crime and terrorism is one way to stabilize a community. By using this theory, policymakers can see the full process of developing policies, from idea to result and therefore focus on improving the areas that need it and keep improving policies based on feedback and evidence.

At the same time, Public Policy Impact Theory may not consider all outside factors that could play a role in crime and security such as economic changes, political turmoil or global events (Lasswell, 1951). It may not always consider the changes and effects that happen outside the policy design, leading to easy conclusions that are not accurate. Nevertheless, the theory continues to assist in observing how security handles Al-Shabaab in Mandera County. Researchers can observe the effects of government actions like adding patrols and reaching out to communities by checking attack statistics before and after the policies were put in place. The theory shows that being proactive in policy is valuable due to the need to adapt to changes in threats, helping to achieve Dye's (1976) point that effective policies enhance both security and social order.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivist Theory, introduced by Alexander Wendt and Nicholas Onuf, believes that the way states behave and what happens to their security depends greatly on social structures, identities and norms. Constructivism claims that state-centric interests or power do not always shape what states seek; it is instead determined by their interactions and the meanings those interactions have to them (Wendt, 1999). According to this argument, security threats arise from how states see themselves and how they view other nations. Law and Society Theory shows how the stories people share, communication between groups and group identity affect political and foreign policy decisions. Constructivism in terrorism studies mentions that having a sense of belonging and not being represented play a part in radicalization; for this reason, counterterrorism efforts should focus on social aspects, not only on using force (Jung, 2019; Mwaniki, 2019).

The use of Constructivist Theory helps explain the connections between government antiterrorism measures and the people in Mandera County. This theory proposes that to be effective, security strategies need to address public opinion, increase community cohesion and talk to and include those influenced by extremist ideas. Although Constructivist theory values military security, it believes that real and lasting safety comes from changing social attitudes and solving the main problems behind terrorism, like loneliness and attraction to extremist ideologies. Critics point out that the wide scope of the theory may slow the implementation of new strategies by the military in cases where quick action is required (Brush, 2021). Nevertheless, making holistic counterterrorism approaches in Mandera means using hard steps, connecting with the community and addressing ideological issues to help achieve lasting peace.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, a mixed-methods approach was used to assess if government security actions successfully tackled Al-Shabaab in Mandera County. The design was selected to highlight both the stats showing security policy

results and the feelings and thoughts of key individuals involved in the county. Questionnaires were given to 400 people sampled from all six sub-counties of Mandera, so the sample represented the population proportionately. The surveys contained questions about how well respondents knew government policies, their opinion on increasing security and experiences with Al-Shabaab terrorists. Along with this, the researcher collected qualitative data by doing semi-structured interviews with 56 key respondents such as religious figures, elderly persons, youth being part of counter-radicalization initiatives and officials. By conducting these interviews, the researcher gained knowledge of the real-world obstacles, progress and ways programs supply security.

Every person involved was treated in accordance with ethics such as being asked for consent and offered confidentiality. Before applying the research instruments, they were piloted to check if they work properly and are clear and any necessary adjustments were made to ensure the data is clear. Quantitative data were coded in SPSS and analyzed, with descriptive statistics used to describe significant variables and inferential statistics used to study the relationship between government security activity and terrorist behavior. The review of the transcripts by thematic content analysis allowed us to notice recurring themes related to community engagement, what works and does not in policy and the problems faced by the community center. Using both methods made it possible to cross-check findings which improved the accuracy and richness of the research findings. The mixed method approach gave reliable findings about the many aspects of counterterrorism in Mandera County and offered useful advice to enhance security and help with policy reform.

FINDINGS

Government Security Policies and Programs on the Frequency and Severity of Al-Shabaab Attacks

The objective of this study was to assess the impact of government security policies and programs on the frequency and severity of Al-Shabaab attacks in Mandera County. To achieve the objective, questions were planned and the findings are described in the following sub-sections.

Aware of Government Security Policies to Combat Al-Shabaab Activities

This section explores how knowledgeable respondents are about government actions meant to deal with Al-Shabaab in Mandera County. Measuring how much the local population understands these initiatives helps us assess the government's excitement about security and the public's engagement in them. The information collected lets us know the extent to which the public is aware of different safety procedures and can spot areas where knowledge is lacking.

Table 1: Aware of Government Security Policies to Combat Al-Shabaab Activities

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	54	21.6%
No	196	78.4%
Total	250	100.0%

(Source: Researcher, 2025)

The numbers in Table 1 indicate that only 21.6% of respondents are confident about security policies meant to resist Al-Shabaab, while 78.4% do not know about them. Such low awareness among the public could make it harder for the government's action against terrorism to work, because informed communities are more willing to assist and support these measures. This situation matches what was found in previous studies, for instance by Besenyő and Sinkó, (2024) which pointed out the challenges in explaining security actions to local people affected by conflict. Despite government efforts, the underestimation of security risks in the local community could make it hard for these solutions to work. Community engagement and help for counterterrorism can raise if public education and awareness are improved.

Awareness of Specific Policies

This section looks into the awareness of people regarding anti-Al-Shabaab policies developed by the government. Checking the security policies popular in the community helps understand how effectively information gets shared and how much influence these strategies have.

Table 2: Awareness of Specific Policies

	Frequency	Percent
Strategies Coordination Framework	58	23.2%
Deployment of Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) in Somalia	38	15.2%
Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012)	31	12.4%
National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC)	23	9.2%
Public Awareness and Community Policing (e.g., Nyumba Kumi Initiative)	47	18.8%
Cybersecurity Measures Against Online Radicalization	53	21.2%
Total	250	100.0%

(Source: Researcher, 2025)

According to Table 2, the government security policy that stands out most to respondents is the Strategies Coordination Framework, with 23.2% showing awareness. The government focuses on cybersecurity for preventing radicalization found on the internet (21.2%), as well as the Nyumba Kumi Initiative (18.8%). One in seven people surveyed knows that KDF is present in Somalia, compared to smaller percentages who know about the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012) and the National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC).

Several people are unaware of policies such as the NCTC and Prevention of Terrorism Act and this may affect how well these actions work. Brush (2021) points out that counterterrorism improvements are influenced by security efforts and by how aware and active the public is. Lacking complete knowledge makes it hard for the community to take advantage of social policies.

People in the interviews showed different levels of knowledge about these plans. One participant noted:

“I know about Nyumba Kumi and the army in Somalia, but I haven’t heard of the National Counter-Terrorism Centre; it’s not something we talk about here” (Interview, 2025).

In line with Calvin, (2022), this message points out that local security policies were not always well explained to the people, making them less effective. Since many do not know about the Prevention of Terrorism Act and NCTC, it is necessary to communicate these initiatives better, since most people may not support them if they are not made aware. This finding demonstrates that while initiatives like Nyumba Kumi are familiar to many since they are community-based, other initiatives that rely more on technical work or government input are not as well known. Counterterrorism strategies need to focus both on using them and on informing others about how they influence different policies during risk reduction.

Effective of Government Security Policies

This section assesses respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of government security policies in reducing Al-Shabaab activities, providing insights into community support and areas for improvement.

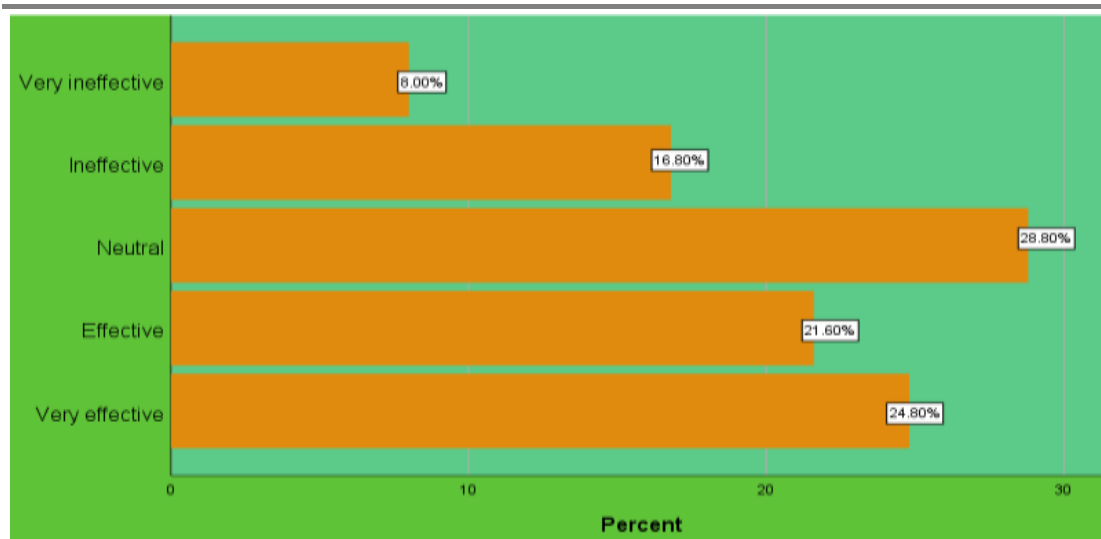


Figure 1 : Effective of Government Security Policies

(Source: Researcher, 2025)

Based on the data presented in Figure 1, the views are as follows: 24.8% assume the security policies are very effective and 21.6% consider them effective. More than a quarter of the respondents, 28.8%, admitted they did not have a clear opinion about these policies. Conversely, 16.8% think the policies do not work well and another 8% feel they are very ineffective. The findings show that people are divided about government security policies and there are many who regard them negatively. The fact that a large number of people are unsure about the effectiveness of the measures demonstrates a need to improve public confidence in them. Similar results have been found in past studies, for example Calvin (2022), where it was often unclear if counterterrorism actions were put into practice or explained properly. One participant shared:

“The government is doing something, but it doesn’t feel like it’s enough. We still see attacks happening, so I’m not sure if these policies are truly effective” (Interview, 2025).

This suggests that creating clearer outcomes and involving more communities could raise support and improve how security policies are seen and understood.

Severity of Al-Shabaab Attacks in Mandera County from 2014 to 2025

This section evaluates respondents' perceptions of the severity of Al-Shabaab attacks in Mandera County over the past decade. By looking at these views, one can evaluate security policies and the continuous results of Al-Shabaab’s activities on communities.

Table 3: Severity of Al-Shabaab Attacks in Mandera County from 2014 to 2025

	Frequency	Percent
Very severe	92	36.8%
Severe	71	28.4%
Moderate	28	11.2%
Mild	30	12.0%
Not severe	29	11.6%
Total	250	100.0%

(Source: Researcher, 2025)

According to Table 3, 36.8% of respondent's regard attacks by Al-Shabaab in Mandera County as very severe and 28.4% see them as severe. A total of 11.2% say the attacks qualify as moderate and another 12% think they are mild. Additionally, 11.6% of the participants view the problems as not very serious. Based on the findings, most respondents (nearly 65%) believe Al-Shabaab attacks are very severe or severe threats. This demonstrates that many people within the community are continuing to be worried about their security challenges. A likely explanation for fewer individuals viewing attacks as mild or not severe is that they have not experienced much crime or that their view is influenced by their region or social group. The public's concerns regarding terrorism suggest that efforts in counterterrorism should be stepped up even further.

Effective Government Policy or Program in Combating Al-Shabaab Activities

This section explores which specific government policies or programs respondents believe have been most effective in combating Al-Shabaab activities in Mandera County. Once these measures are identified, a researcher can see how the public rates them and how their impact corresponds to the actual effects on policies.

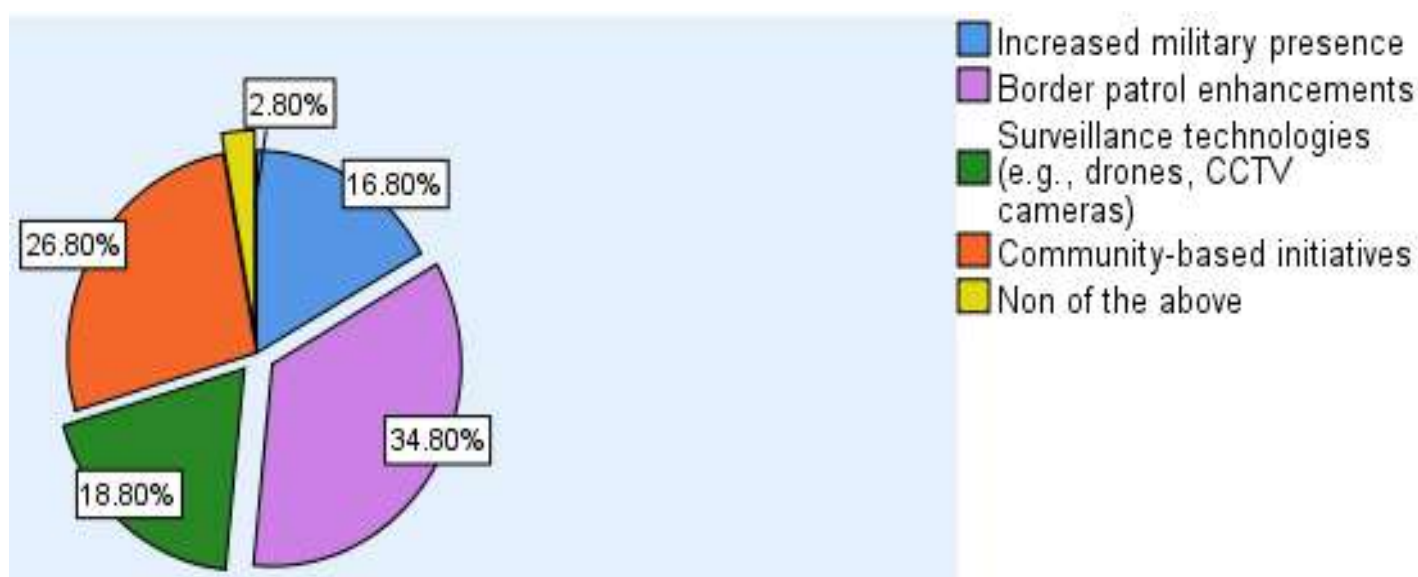


Figure 2: Effective Government Policy or Program in Combating Al-Shabaab Activities

(Source: Researcher, 2025)

Figure 2 indicates that the policy that matters most to reducing Al-Shabaab activities is border security improvement, chosen by 34.8% of the respondents. At 26.8%, society witness activities organized by communities, at 18.8% there are upgraded surveillance technologies and increased numbers of soldiers reveal itself at 16.8%. A small group, representing 2.8% of the population, think that these policies haven't had any effect on crime. This research indicates that improvements to border screenings and involvement of residents are considered the most effective in defeating Al-Shabaab, showing that improving local participation and security along borders is valued by people. Chepkenen, (2020) is supported here, since security approaches that rely on community involvement tend to function better in conflict regions. One respondent noted:

“The community programs have helped us feel safer, and the improved border patrol makes a difference in stopping attacks before they happen” (Interview, 2025).

According to the quote, both steps worth focusing on—locally, through community policing and in border areas—are understood to hinder Al-Shabaab. Nevertheless, less than complete backing for the military presence suggests that people think military actions are required but are not the top choice for future security. This discovery indicates that both technical methods and community-focused efforts should be included with the military's actions.

Impact of Government Security Measure on Reducing the Frequency of Al-Shabaab Attacks

This section evaluates respondents' perceptions of how effectively government security measures have reduced the frequency of Al-Shabaab attacks in Mandera County. Understand the impact to review how well policies work and how they impact community safety.

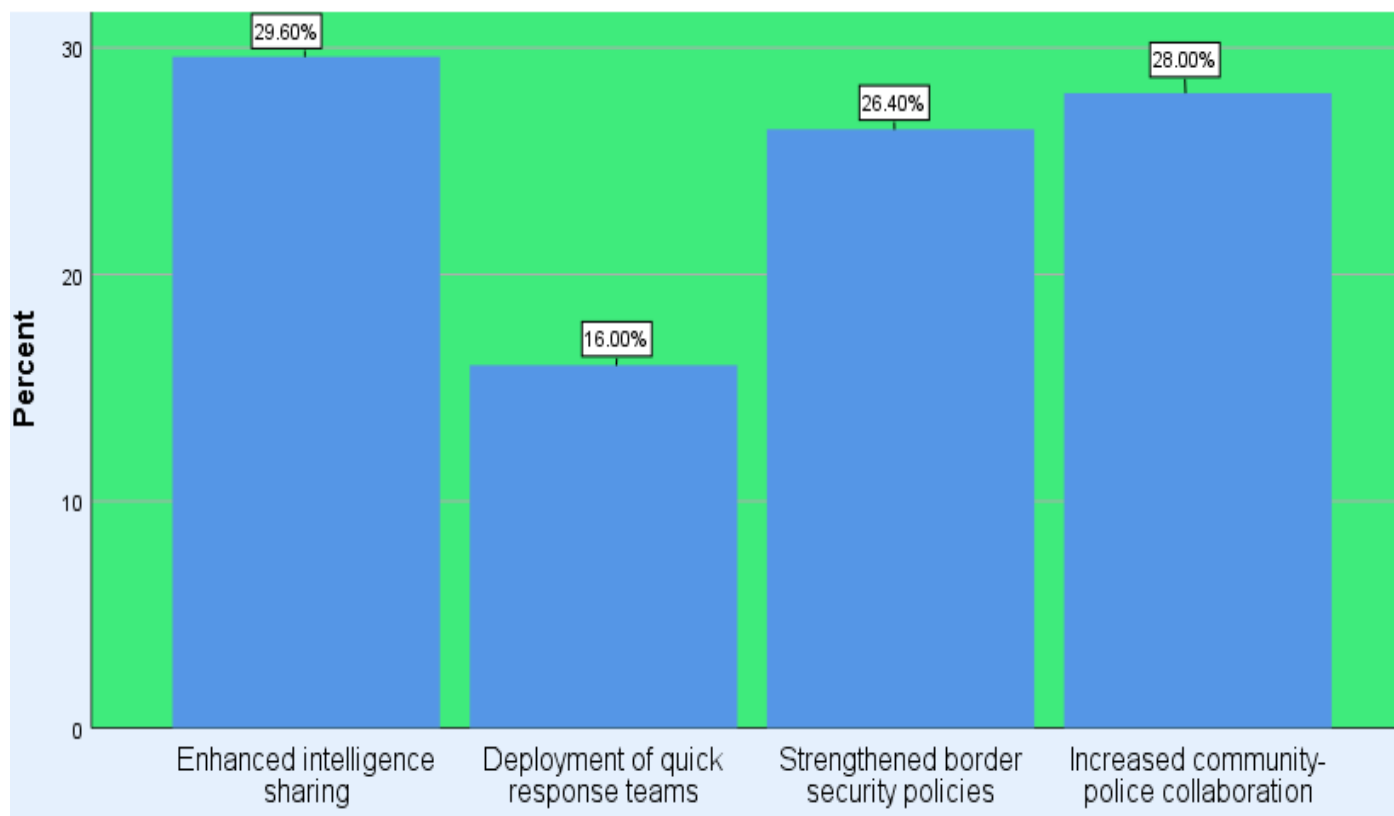


Figure 3: Government Security Measure and Frequency of Al-Shabaab Attacks

(Source: Researcher, 2025)

Figure 3 demonstrates that bringing intelligence organizations together to share data is seen by 29.6% of people as the best way to slow down Al-Shabaab attacks. Community-police joint efforts ranked second with 28%, followed by tougher border security rules at 26.4% and setup of quick response teams with 16%. The findings suggest that people believe strong cooperation and sharing information help make a difference in fighting Al-Shabaab attacks. The fact that community-police collaboration is ranked so high is consistent with what David, (2024) reported about the importance of community engagement for counterterrorism. One interview participant commented:

“When the police work closely with the community, we get more timely information, and it feels like we have a say in our own security” (Interview, 2025).

The findings shed light on how community cooperation helps keep people safe and lowers the chance of attacks. The emphasis on preventing and gathering information and less on immediate team’s points to a belief that they rank lower than those other methods. Therefore, it is important to use a security strategy that brings together intelligence, active community participation and stronger border measures.

Most Effective Government Counter-Terrorism Initiative in Improving Community Safety

This section explores which specific government counter-terrorism initiatives respondents believe have most contributed to improving safety in their communities. Recognizing what works best for everyone can help us check how effectively these measures are securing people and decreasing Al-Shabaab activities.

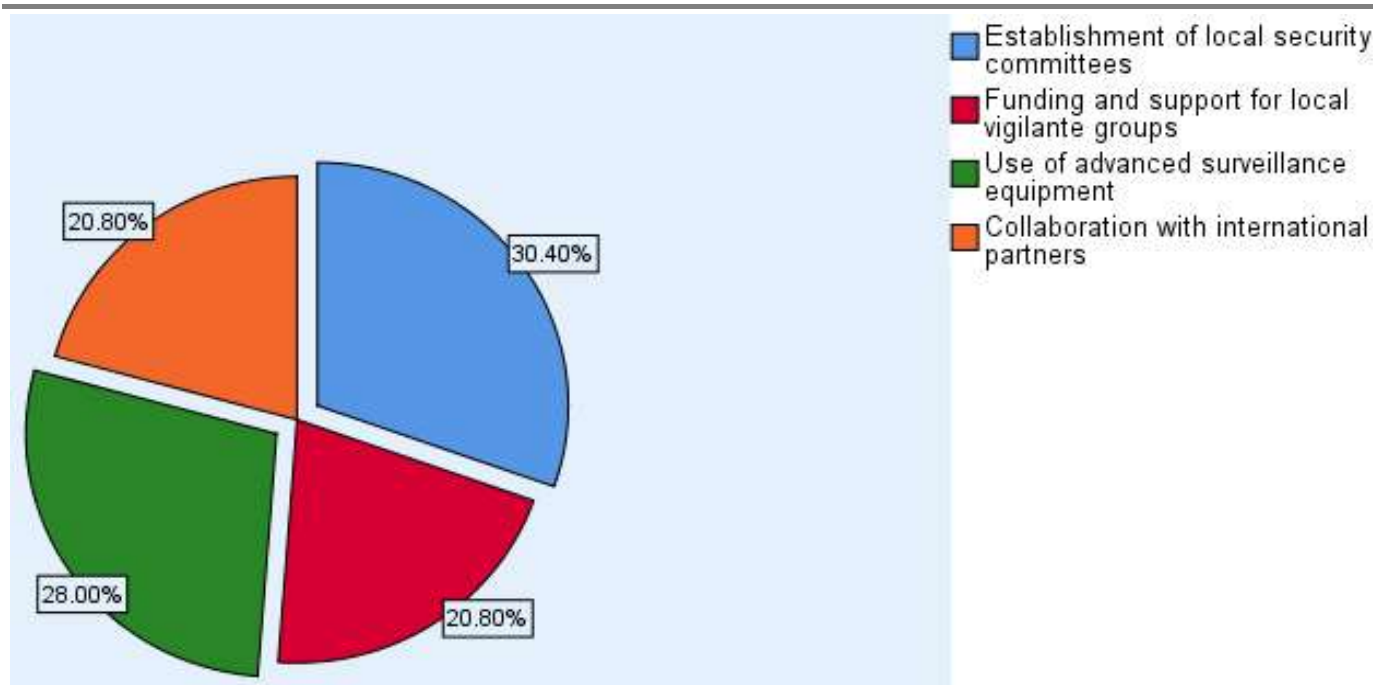


Figure 4: Effective Government Counter-Terrorism Initiative in Improving Community Safety

(Source: Researcher, 2025)

In Figure 4, forming local security committees is seen as the primary way the government protects communities, as 30.4% of people selected it as the most helpful. At this point, the plan includes advanced monitoring devices at 28%, while funding and working with local groups and outside partners are both valued at 20.8%. According to the research, local security teams appear to offer the most effective means for improving community safety. Similarly, Noor, (2024) points out that involving the local community is very important to boost security. One respondent noted:

“The contributions of our local security committees are very important in our area. The fact that we join forces with police and the neighborhood makes us more confident.” (Interview, 2025).

This feedback shows that people understand how crucial local people are in fighting terrorism. The use of sophisticated equipment seems to be popular, yet people believe that relying on neighbors for safety is more effective. Since the amount is much the same for vigilante groups and international partnerships, it means the local community and partnerships are both considered important and valued.

Aspects of Government Security Programs Needing Improvement to Effectively Combat Al-Shabaab

This section examines the aspects of government security programs that respondents believe require the most improvement to effectively counter Al-Shabaab threats. When the researcher identifies areas that need improvement, it becomes easier to recognize the challenges in current security and suggest possible answers.

Table 4: Aspects of Government Security Programs Needing Improvement to Effectively Combat Al-Shabaab

	Frequency	Percent
Training and equipping security forces	91	36.4%
Border control and monitoring	82	32.8%
Engagement with local communities	43	17.2%

Resource allocation and funding	34	13.6%
Total	250	100.0%

(Source: Researcher, 2025)

Table 5 reflects that 36.4% feel that security forces need to be better trained and equipped to fight Al-Shabaab effectively. When it comes to fighting Al-Shabaab, 32.8% respondents want stronger border control and screening of visitors, 17.2% encourage alliance with local communities and 13.6% think the distribution of funds should be improved. The main issue highlighted is that strengthening security forces and strengthening border security are essential for managing Al-Shabaab. Although community engagement and resource allocation are considered necessary, respondents feel that putting more effort into security infrastructure and preparing employees is more crucial at this stage. One interview participant stated:

“Teaching and equipping the police and army more efficiently helps them stop attacks. The border area should be better secured, because most attacks come from there.” (Interview, 2025).

It points out that providing training and securing borders is vital for boosting the general success of government security programs. Stronger skills in handling security forces and defending borders are seen as crucial, as they are considered the main defense against Al-Shabaab, the data reveals.

Inferential Statistics

This section of the study it examined how government security policies and programs play a role in influencing the rate and seriousness of Al-Shabaab attacks in Mandera County. The analysis is meant to assess how much the changes in security systems have lessened threats from Al-Shabaab.

Table 5: Regression Analysis for the Impact of Government Security Policies on Al-Shabaab Activities

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-value
Intercept	0.230	0.312	0.74	0.457
Increased Military Presence	0.358	0.134	2.67	0.008*
Border Patrol Enhancements	0.283	0.142	1.99	0.047*
Surveillance Technologies	0.276	0.145	1.90	0.059
Government Funding for Counter-Terrorism	0.185	0.135	1.37	0.173
Community-based Initiatives	0.168	0.141	1.19	0.236
Coordination Among Security Agencies	0.251	0.138	1.82	0.071
R-squared	0.541			
Adjusted R-squared	0.523			
F-statistic	29.35			0.000*
Number of Observations (N)	250			

(Source: Researcher, 2025)

Al-Shabaab activities at the baseline are not significantly different from zero which is evident from the intercept of 0.230 and p-value of 0.457. The result suggests that security policies have a minor effect on Al-Shabaab activities and that the intercept itself is not important for explaining the differences in the dependent variable. However, the overall model is shown to be significant by the F-statistic of 29.35 and a p-value of 0.000. It demonstrates that implementing many security measures greatly reduces the number and intensity of Al-Shabaab

attacks. As mentioned by Howard *et al.*, (2019), solid and aligned security policies can greatly lessen the risk of terrorist actions in conflict areas.

A military presence increase of 0.358 gives a p-value of 0.008 which is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This means that the presence of the military greatly helps to reduce activities by Al-Shabaab in the area. Military activities, according to Jung, (2019), can act as effective deterrents against terrorism. Although the presence of the military can deter some threats, alone it may not resolve what causes extremism, according to Kellar, (2024). One interviewee mentioned:

“The military is present, but I don’t feel completely safe. The attacks still happen, and sometimes we don’t see them acting fast enough” (Interview, 2025).

People agree that having a military is necessary, but hope that adding other solutions like smarter intelligence and greater community involvement can make it even more effective. Border patrol gains were significantly related to less activity by Al-Shabaab, according to the data, with a coefficient of 0.283 and a p-value of 0.047. It shows that improving border security leads to less frequent attacks by Al-Shabaab. The results are consistent with what Keller, (2024) highlighted about protecting porous regions facing cross-border attacks. As one respondent noted:

“The border patrol is better, but there are still gaps. Sometimes the attacks come through areas we don’t expect” (Interview, 2025).

Border improvements are recognized as effective, but there are still other security-related areas where more work may be necessary. Surveillance using drones and CCTV was shown to have a modest effect, reflected by a coefficient of 0.276 and a p-value of 0.059. While surveillance technologies are beneficial, they do not have a strong effect as other prevention methods do, based on the results. Kellar, (2024) argued that the success of technology in anti-terrorism relies on the way it works with human intelligence and how operations are carried out using these technologies. One participant emphasized:

“The drones and cameras have helped a lot. We see fewer attacks because they can track movement in real-time” (Interview, 2025).

This means security technology is valuable, but it could perform better when used together with various security programs. With a government funding coefficient of 0.185, the p-value of 0.173 suggests that it does not statistically reduce the activities of Al-Shabaab. Therefore, funding is important, but how and where it is allocated should be checked, as it affects how much is achieved. The researchers point out that this issue is also noted by Kanu *et al.*, (2019), who say counter-terrorism money can be mismanaged or kept hidden by local authorities. As one interview participant stated:

“Police and security are being funded by the government, but we do not experience improvement in local safety or better assistance for the police.” (Interview, 2025).

This connection issue demonstrates that resources may be at odds with actual security progress, putting greater emphasis on how resources are allocated. The coefficient for community-based initiatives is not significant, as shown by the p-value of 0.236. Therefore, it seems that initiatives like these are having some impact, although not enough to stop what Al-Shabaab does. Community activities are vital for tackling radicalization according to Keller, (2024) although such efforts may not be effective if they are not fully supported and connected to other security actions. One participant noted:

“We hear about the community programs, but they haven’t made a noticeable difference in preventing radicalization” (Interview, 2025).

According to the quote, strong and well-backed community actions are required to fix the causes of extremism. Considering the result, coordination among security agencies was statistically significant only at the 0.10 level.

From this finding (0.071), it seems clear that coordination matters, although additional progress can still be achieved. Kanu *et al.*, (2019) believe that effective counterterrorism relies greatly on agencies collaborating with each other. One respondent commented:

“Sometimes it feels like different agencies don’t share information quickly enough, and this affects the response time” (Interview, 2025).

This suggests that quick and effective communication between security agencies might greatly boost the success of efforts to fight terrorism.

The regression analysis uncovers that greater military presence and tighter border patrol efforts make the biggest difference in controlling Al-Shabaab operations in Mandera County. Combining surveillance tools and coordinating security bodies helps, but they still need to be improved to work even better. Government financial support and local efforts had limited effect, suggesting that resources should be used more wisely and that stronger community involvement is needed. These results make it clear that Al-Shabaab can be tackled more effectively when military, technology and local support are integrated.

DISCUSSIONS

This study demonstrates significant findings regarding the efficacy of governmental security interventions in mitigating Al-Shabaab threats in Mandera County. A critical concern is that fewer than 25% of surveyed residents comprehend the government’s counterterrorism (CT) strategy. These results align with prior research by Besenyő and Sinkó (2024), which identified deficient community communication and awareness initiatives as impediments to security enhancement. Knowledge gaps constrain community participation, thereby diminishing intelligence gathering, early threat detection, and trust-building between security forces and civilians. Consequently, transparent and proactive dissemination of CT protocols is imperative to mobilize resident cooperation.

While approximately half of respondents perceived security measures as effective, a substantial proportion expressed skepticism or negative assessments. Interview data indicate persistent attack frequency despite ongoing interventions, eroding public confidence in security institutions. This divergence underscores the inherent complexity of CT operations: kinetic approaches alone cannot address root causes of extremism (Jung, 2019; Mwaniki, 2019). Community-centric frameworks, evidenced by high efficacy ratings of programs like Nyumba Kumi, remain indispensable—validating Chepkenen’s (2020) assertion that local engagement fortifies legitimacy and adaptability in conflict-prone environments.

Regression analysis corroborated that enhanced military deployment and border fortification reduced the incidence and severity of Al-Shabaab incursions. Quantitative evidence confirms robust physical deterrence and access denial disrupt militant mobility (Keller, 2024). However, budgetary constraints and community-resource misalignment suggest suboptimal resource utilization, necessitating tighter integration of grassroots initiatives with national security frameworks. Further, interagency coordination deficits (Kanu *et al.*, 2019) highlight opportunities to synergize intelligence and operational functions. Given equivocal perceptions of military efficacy, hard power measures must be complemented by counter-ideological and socio-economic initiatives

CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of governmental security programs and policies on the frequency and intensity of Al-Shabaab attacks in Mandera County. Empirical analysis confirms that primary counterterrorism initiatives, characterized by enhanced military operations, strengthened border security protocols, and technological integration, demonstrate variable efficacy according to local community perceptions. Critically, limited community awareness and comprehension of these security measures have undermined public participation in counterterrorism efforts. The persistent incidence of Al-Shabaab attacks despite sustained governmental intervention underscores the complex, multifaceted nature of terrorism, necessitating diversified strategic approaches.

Regression analysis reveals statistically significant correlations indicating the effectiveness of military and border security strategies in mitigating attack frequency. However, it concurrently highlights systemic deficiencies in resource allocation efficiency and the insufficient integration of community-driven initiatives within broader policy frameworks. The findings robustly indicate that a comprehensive, multidimensional approach, synthesizing kinetic operations, community resilience building, interagency coordination, and transparent communication channels, is paramount for fostering public trust and cooperative engagement. Addressing both the tangible security manifestations and underlying socio-economic drivers of terrorism is imperative for achieving sustainable security in Mandera County. This demands institutional collaboration, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and an adaptive policy architecture responsive to dynamic threat landscapes.

These evidence-based conclusions provide critical insights for policymakers and security practitioners to refine counterterrorism strategies, enhance program efficacy, and develop transferable models for regions confronting analogous asymmetric threats

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To significantly enhance the effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts in Mandera County, a multi-faceted and strategic approach is essential.

First, implementing an Integrated Community Resilience and Public Engagement Strategy is paramount. This requires establishing a formal framework for sustained community-police dialogue forums that actively integrate traditional leadership structures and civil society organizations. Concurrently, culturally sensitive public information campaigns must be developed and deployed across multiple channels, including radio, mobile platforms, and community meetings, to counter extremist narratives, promote secure reporting mechanisms, and actively build social cohesion. This proactive engagement fosters essential trust between communities and security forces, enhances intelligence gathering from local sources, and builds foundational societal resilience against radicalization, thereby addressing both immediate security concerns and underlying socio-political drivers of conflict.

Second, enhancing institutional capacity through optimized resource allocation and robust cross-border security cooperation is fundamental. This necessitates mandating specialized, ongoing training programs for all security personnel operating within Mandera County, focusing on critical areas such as counter-insurgency tactics, strict human rights compliance, intelligence-led operations, and advanced threat detection. Furthermore, investment must be prioritized in upgrading physical and technological border security infrastructure, including surveillance systems and biometric screening capabilities. Crucially, establishing a formal Joint Border Management Unit with neighboring counties and countries, particularly Somalia and Ethiopia, equipped with standardized intelligence-sharing protocols and mechanisms for coordinated patrols, is vital for securing the porous borders. Building professional security force capacity and achieving effective border control through regional cooperation are indispensable for disrupting terrorist movement, logistics networks, and attack planning, ensuring the efficient and effective use of security resources.

Third, adopting a unified Multi-Dimensional Counterterrorism (CT) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Framework is critical for sustainable security. This involves creating a unified Mandera County CT/CVE Command Centre to integrate all relevant security agencies, such as the National Police Service, Administration Police, Kenya Defence Forces (KDF), and National Intelligence Service (NIS), underpinned by shared databases, joint operational planning procedures, and clear deconfliction mechanisms. Alongside necessary kinetic operations, a complementary, well-resourced CVE strategy must be developed and implemented. This strategy should incorporate targeted socio-economic development initiatives (e.g., youth employment programs, improved education access), structured conflict mediation efforts, and viable rehabilitation and reintegration pathways for disengaged combatants. This synchronized approach ensures that immediate security responses (military action and technology) are effectively coupled with long-term societal interventions designed to address the root causes of terrorism, such as marginalization, ideological drivers, and lack of economic opportunity, leading to more durable security outcomes.

Finally, instituting a robust Policy Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) System is non-negotiable for accountability and adaptive management. This requires establishing clear, measurable performance indicators for all CT/CVE initiatives, encompassing metrics like attack frequency and severity, community trust levels, successful border interdictions, and program participation rates. Mandating independent, periodic evaluations of policy effectiveness, resource utilization efficiency, and adherence to human rights standards is essential, with evaluation findings being transparently reported to relevant legislative and executive oversight bodies. These findings must then directly inform timely and evidence-based revisions to policies and programs. Continuous evidence-based assessment through this MEL system ensures accountability to citizens and stakeholders, identifies and disseminates best practices, enables agile responses to evolving terrorist threats and tactics, and guarantees that security measures remain effective, efficient, transparent, and aligned with legal and ethical standards

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