CHRIPS

Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies

Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, January – December 2020

Rahma Ramadhan and Lynda Ouma

About this report

This report draws from the Terror Attacks and Arrests Observatory of the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory). It presents the latest data collected, disaggregated and analysed from 1 January – 31 December 2020. CHRIPS uses verified traditional and new media reports and information from local partners, as useful indicators, to generate a comprehensive database on terror-related occurrences in Kenya.

Key highlights

- Attacks increased to 69 from 34 reported in 2019

- Four counties affected: 29 attacks in Mandera; 23 in Garissa; nine in Lamu; and eight in Wajir

- 122 people were killed in 2020 terror attacks compared to 83 in 2019

- 42 people injured: 19 civilians; 18 security officials; and five *al Shabaab* militants

- There were no attacks reported in August

- 25 people kidnapped: 24 civilians and one government official

- 71 people arrested for terror-related offences

- 56: the highest number of suspects arrested, which was recorded in Nairobi

- Nationalities of those arrested: 45 Kenyans; six foreign nationals; and 20 undisclosed
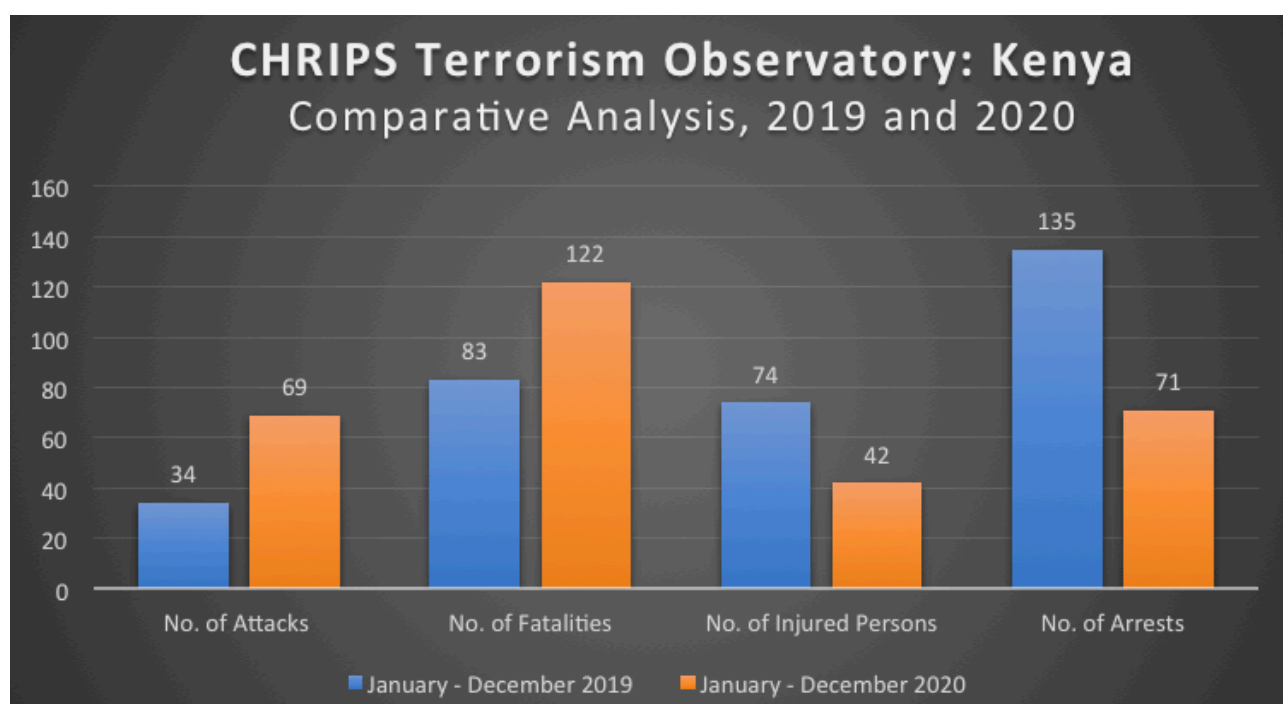

Figure 1: Comparative analysis, 2019 and 2020

Terror Attacks

CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory, Kenya
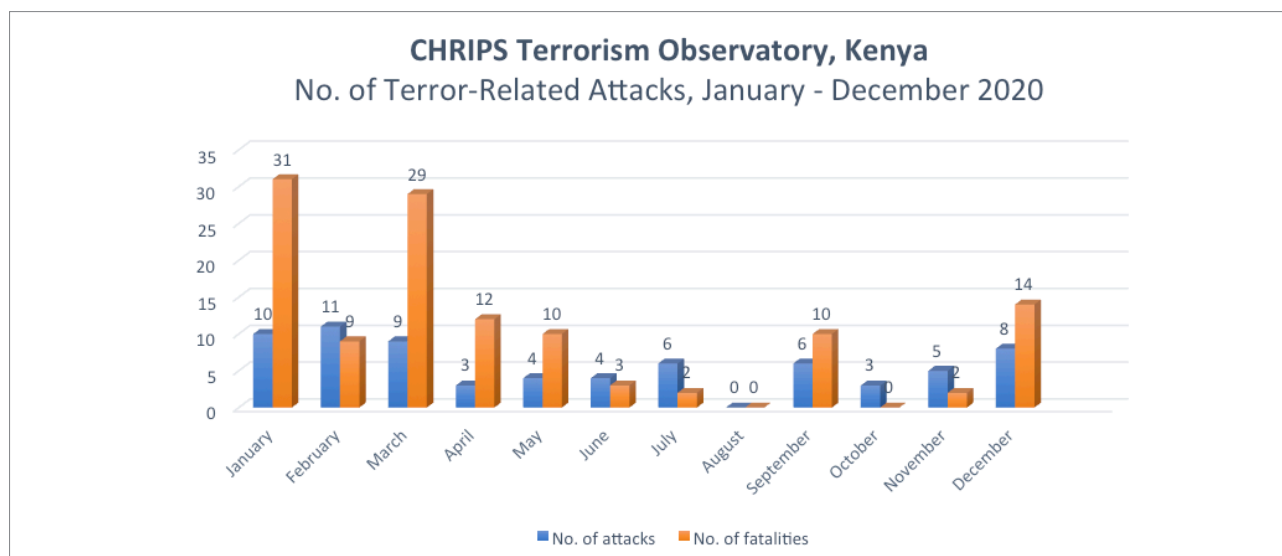**No. of Terror-Related Attacks, January - December 2020**

Figure 2: Number of terror-related attacks, January – December 2020

In 2020, 69 attacks were reported. This is a 49% increase as compared to 34 attacks recorded in 2019. As illustrated in figure two above, attacks intensified at the beginning of the year, decreasing from April to August and later increased in September and December. February, January and December recorded the highest number of terror-related occurrences with eleven, ten and eight attacks. April and October had the least number of attacks and no attacks recorded in August.

During the *al Shabaab* raid on the United States (U.S.) military camp in Manda Bay, Lamu County, at least nine people were killed including five *al Shabaab* militants and suicide bombers, three Americans and one Kenyan security official. Despite not having claimed responsibility for most of the attacks in the period under review, *al Shabaab* claimed responsibility for the Lamu base attack.[1]
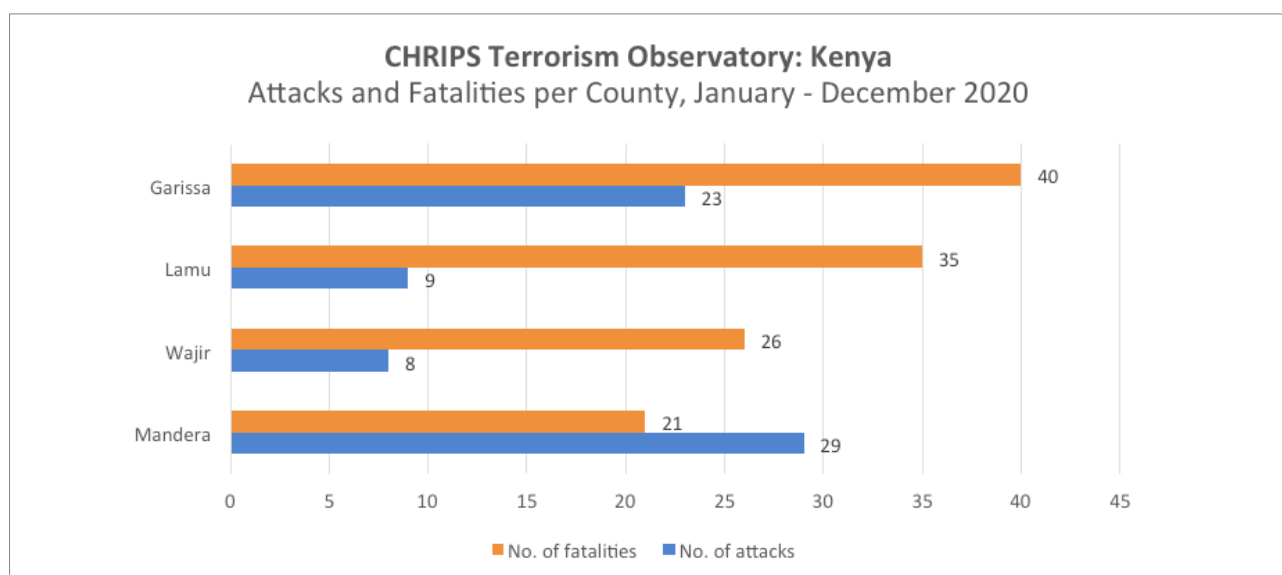
Location of attacks

CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory: Kenya
Attacks and Fatalities per County, January - December 2020

Figure 3: Attacks and fatalities per County, January – December 2020

---

[1] Ahmed, M & Kazungu, K (2020) "Kenya: How *al Shabaab* militants plotted raid on Manda Naval Base" Daily Nation, 6 January, https://allafrica.com/stories/202001060135.html

A majority of the attacks in 2020 occurred in the northeastern region in towns and villages neighbouring the Kenya-Somali border. Attacks in Mandera include a raid on a village in Fino by suspected *al Shabaab* militants where five civilians were abducted but reports later indicated that four civilians were released.[2] Whereabouts of the remaining abductee are unknown. As seen in figure three, Wajir county recorded the least number of attacks.

Garissa county recorded the highest number of fatalities in the period under review. In contrast, the least number of deaths were reported in Mandera County. Alleged *al Shabaab* militants targeted a police station in Dadaab in January, and six people were killed. These included four civilians, one teacher, three pupils, and two *al Shabaab* members. The militants who

escaped the crossfire attacked a communication mast. Some reports also indicated that the rise in attacks in the northern part of Kenya resulted from the sale of contraband goods. Smugglers use militants to fight security officials so that they allow passage of goods like cooking oil, sugar, milk and rice.[3] Proceeds from these sales are allegedly used to fund terror activities. This led to President Uhuru Kenyatta ordering a crackdown on smuggling and the sale of contraband goods, which posed a challenge to the fight against terror in North Eastern.[4] According to local partners, this increase in *al Shabaab* activity could be attributed to the illegal trade of contraband goods along the Kenya-Somali border, especially in Wajir, where alleged *al Shabaab* militants reportedly also collect taxes to allow passage of goods into Kenya.
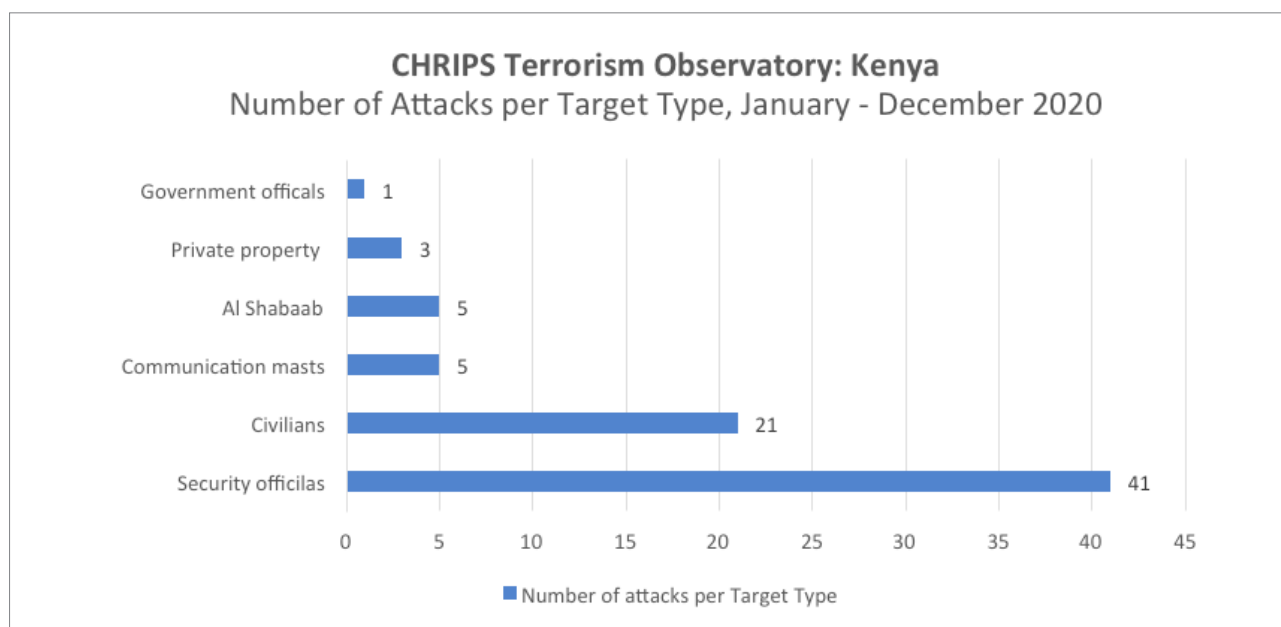
Targets

Figure 4: Number of attacks per target type, January – December 2020

In Mandera, *al Shabaab* militants attacked a Kenyan police reserve unit base and destroyed a Safaricom communication mast.[5] A similar attack was reported in Wajir county where the *al Shabaab* launched an

attack against a Kenya police force base in Khorof Harar village.[6]

Twenty-one attacks were targeted at civilians during the period under review. In January, reports indicate

---

[2] ACLED Data, 25 December 2020.

[3] Ombati, C (2020) "Two Al-Shabaab attackers shot dead after killing four people in Dadaab" *Standard Media,* 7 January, https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/kenya/article/2001355568/two-al-shabaab-attackers-shot-dead-after-killing-four-in-dadaab

[4] Hajir, A & Ombati, C (2020) "CS orders crackdown on contraband funding terror" *Standard Media, 28 January,* https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/north-eastern/article/2001358179/cs-orders-crackdown-on-contraband-feeding-terror/

[5] ACLED Data, 30 December 2020

[6] ACLED Data, 30 December 2020

that *al Shabaab* fighters ambushed a convoy of buses including Simba coach, Mombasa Rahma & TSS headed to Lamu from Mombasa at Nyongoro near Witu town. Two civilians were injured from the ordeal.[7]

In Garissa, civilians were under attack and killed in the crossfire between suspected militants and Kenyan security officials. Children from a nearby school sustained injuries from stray bullets in the shootout.

This occurred when Kenyan officials foiled an attempt by *al Shabaab* to raid a police station in Garissa. Two attackers were shot dead in the process.[8]

Reports show three attacks targeting private property. One such attack took place in Lamu county, where suspected *al Shabaab* militants burnt two construction vehicles in an attack near H Young & Co's camp at Milihoi.[9]
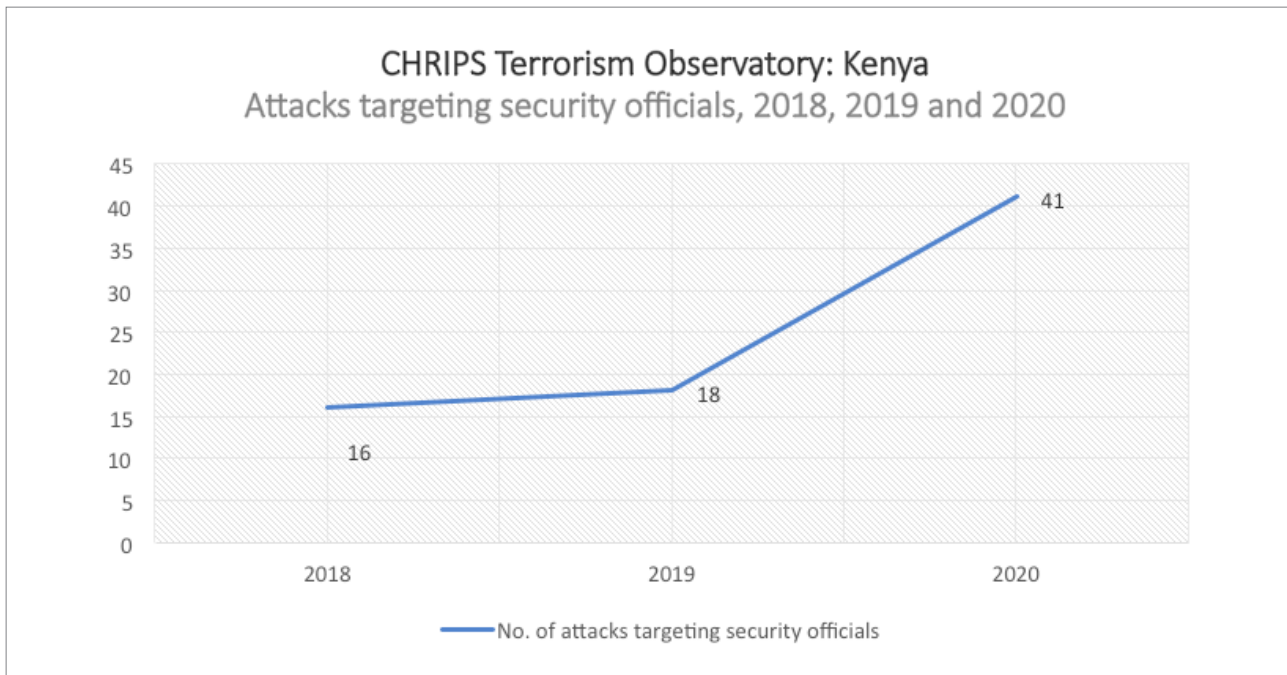

CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory: Kenya
Attacks targeting security officials, 2018, 2019 and 2020

No. of attacks targeting security officials

Figure 5: Number of attacks targeting security officials, 2018, 2019 and 2020

As shown in Figure 5, the number of attacks targeting security officials has steadily increased in the last three years

---

[7] Orinde, H. (2020) "Suspected Al-Shabaab gunmen hijacked Lamu bus" *Standard Media,* 2 January, https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/coast/article/2001355130/suspected-al-shabaab-gunmen-hijack-lamu-bus

[8] Ombati, C. (2020) "Two *Al Shabaab* attackers shot dead after killing four people in Dadaab" *Standard Media, 7 January* https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/kenya/article/2001355568/two-al-shabaab-attackers-shot-dead-after-killing-four-in-dadaab

[9] Nation Africa https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/lamu/Al-Shabaab-burn-vehicles-Lamu-H-Young-attack/3444912-5449814-48w91tz/index.html
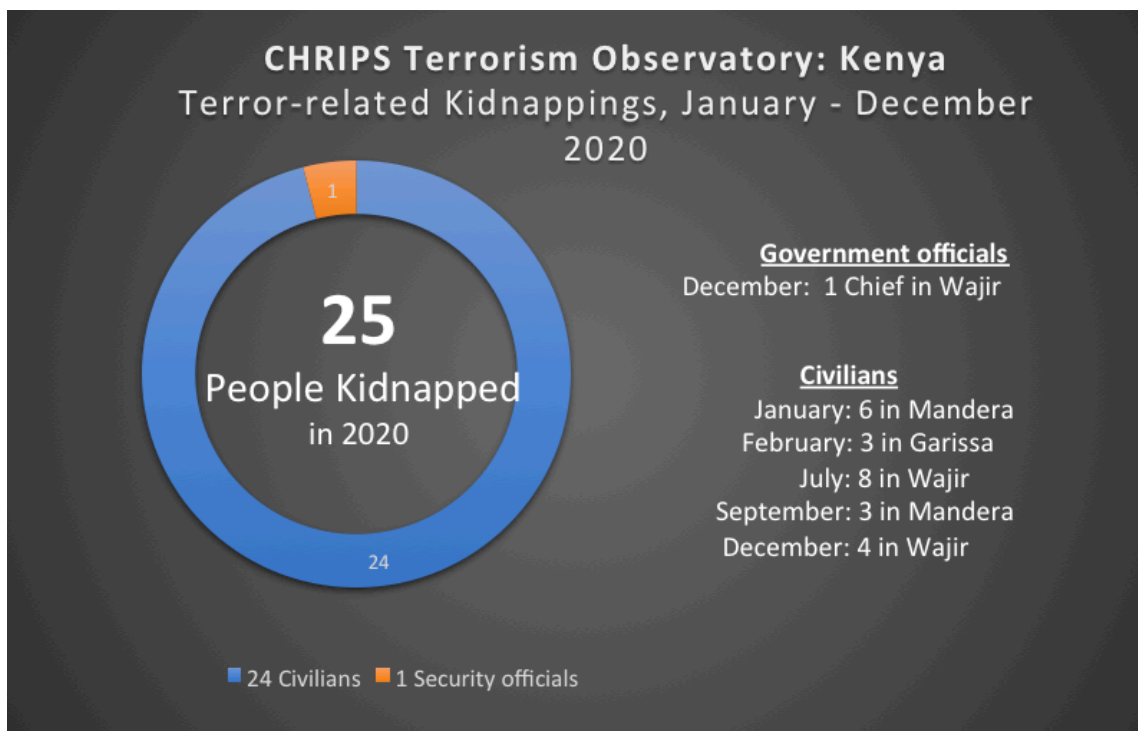
Figure 6: Terror-related kidnappings, January – December 2020

Civilians and government officials have been victims of kidnapping during the period under review. A chief and four civilians were abducted in Wajir in January by a group of jihadists who raided a village in Gurmey sub-county. They ordered residents to switch off their phones before proceeding to lecture them. Further reports revealed that the chief's decapitated body was found between Koton and Khorof Harar town a few days after.[10]
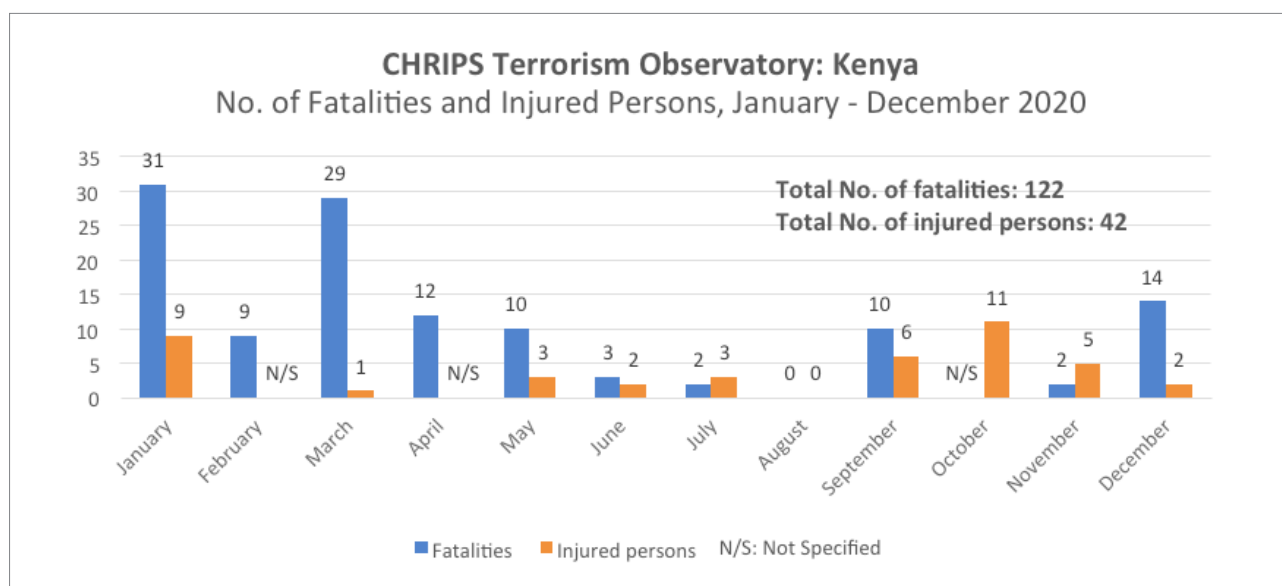
Fatalities and injured persons

Figure 7: Number of fatalities and injured persons, January – December 2020

---

[10] AFP. (2020) "*Al Shabaab* claims beheading of local chief in Kenya" *The Defense Post,* 23 December, https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/12/23/al-shabaab-beheads-local-chief-kenya/

There were 122 deaths resulting from terror attacks in 2020 and 42 injuries. January and March recorded the highest numbers with no death or injury reported in August. July and November had the least number of fatalities, with two people killed in each of the months. Only one injury was recorded in March.
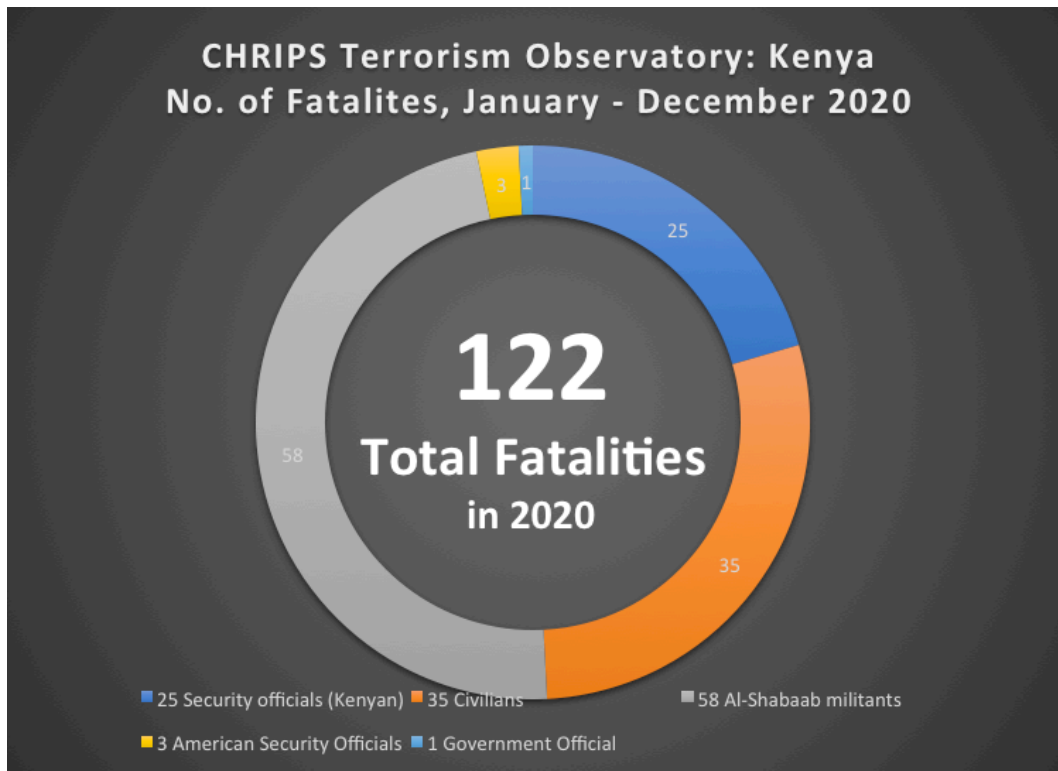

Figure 8: Number of fatalities, January – December 2020

Of the fatalities recorded in 2020, the majority were *al Shabaab* with fifty-eight militants reported dead. Other casualties were 35 civilians, 28 security officials and one government official.
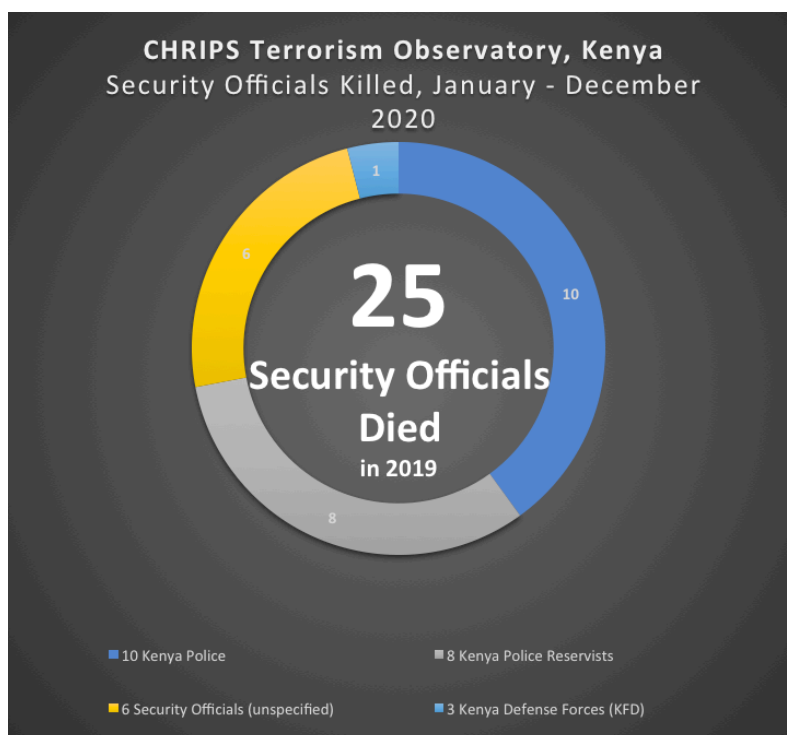

Figure 9: Security Officials killed, January – December 2020

A total of 25 security officials were killed across the four counties including 10 Kenya Police officers; eight Kenyan Police Reservists; three from the Kenya Defense Forces as well as six unspecified security officials. This is a marked decrease from 2019, where Kenya lost 42 security personnel to terror related attacks.[11]

Weapons used

CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory, Kenya
Weapons Used, January - December 2020

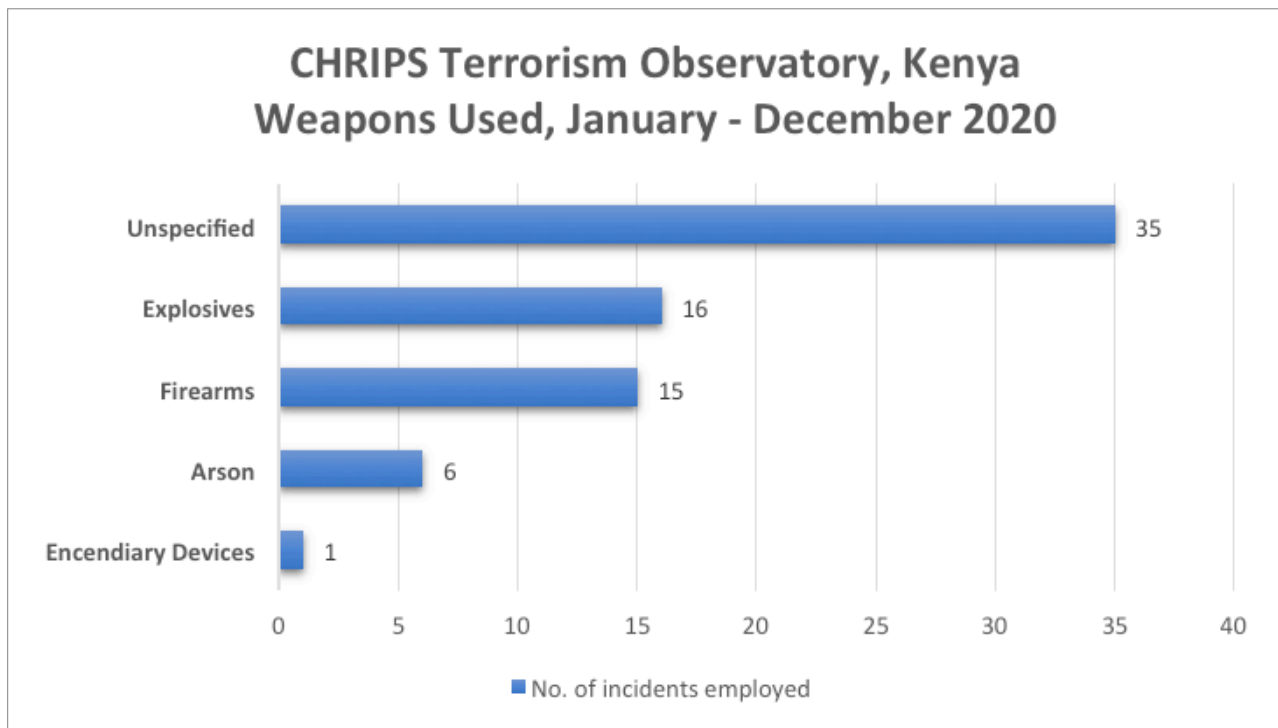| Weapon	No. of incidents employed
Unspecified	35
Explosives	16
Firearms	15
Arson	6
Encendiary Devices	1

■ No. of incidents employed

Figure 10: Weapons used, January – December 2020

Explosive devices and firearms were employed in 16 and 15 separate incidents, respectively. In a May attack targeting security officers in Wajir, *al Shabaab* militants raided Khrof Arar police camp using firearms and grenades. Kenyan police managed to kill three militants in the incident. In a separate incident in September, Kenya Defense Forces troops killed five Shabaab attackers after they ambushed a military convoy in Lafey, Mandera County near the Kenya-Somalia border.

During the year under review, firearms were used in attacks targeting civilians. In a 12th March incident, 30 armed men ambushed a bus travelling to Mandera from Nairobi. Two civilians died and a mechanic from Maderna town travelling in the same bus was taken hostage. The armed men attacked two other vehicles on the same road, one belonging to the county government and the other ferrying khat. The driver of the vehicle ferrying khat escaped without injuries.

---

[11] Orinde, H (2020). "Half of those killed in terror attacks are security officers-report" *Standard Media, February 5*, https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/kenya/article/2001359332/half-of-those-killed-in-terror-attacks-are-security-officers-report/
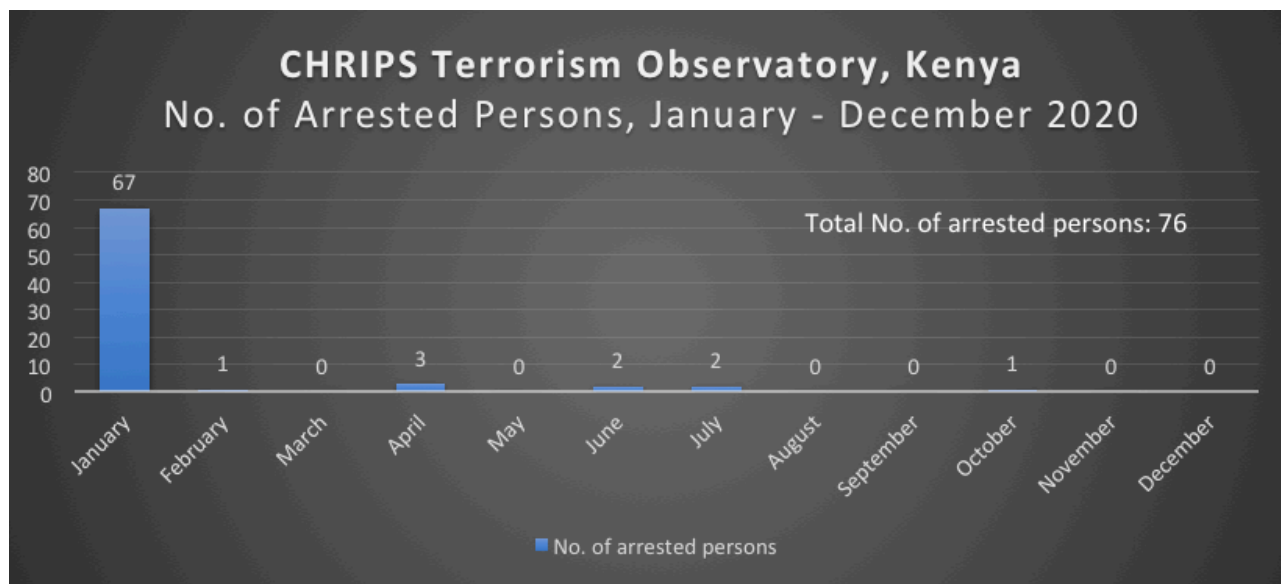
Terror-related Arrests

Figure 11: Number of arrested persons, January – December 2020

Seventy-six people were arrested during the period under review. This is a decrease from 2019, where 135 people were arrested. January had the highest number owing to mass arrests of at least 43 people who were arraigned in court on suspicion that they were linked to *al Shabaab* and were planning to conduct a terror attack in Nairobi. Among those arrested were 38 students.[12]
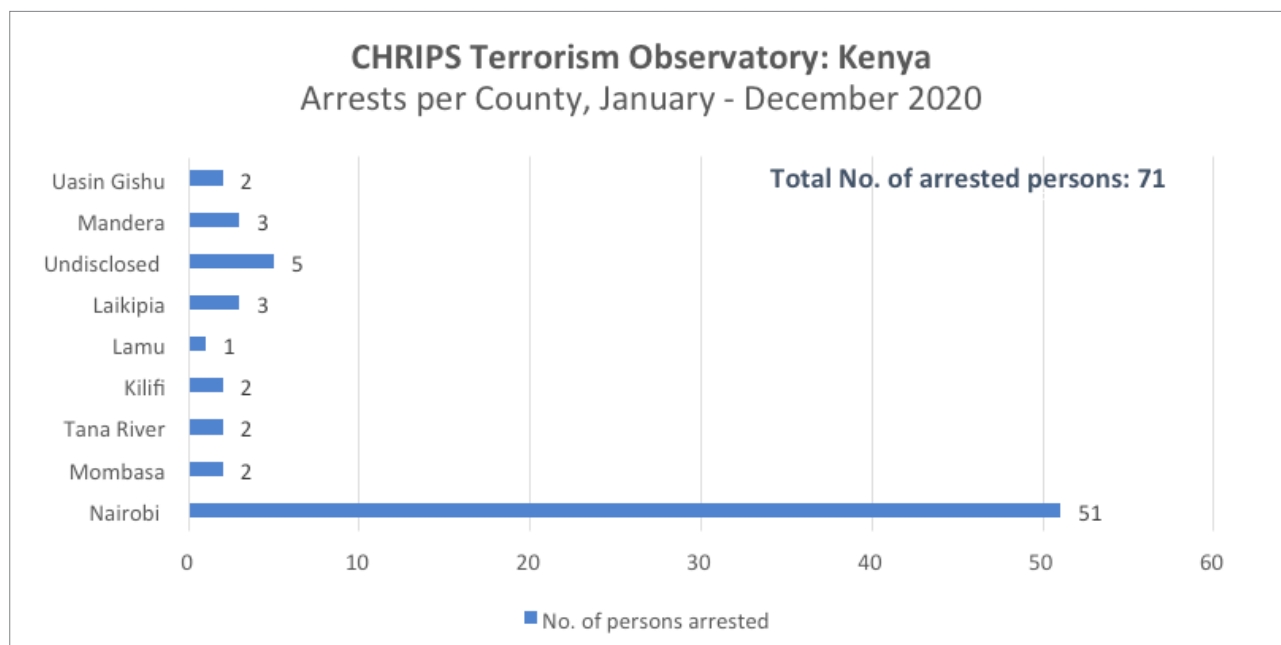

Figure 12: Arrests per county, January – December 2020

---

[12] Crisis Group (2020), Crisis Watch January 2020 Alerts, https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/february-alerts-and-january-trends-2020

Nairobi county recorded the highest number of arrests in 2020 totaling to 51. Lamu had the least number where one person was arrested during the period under review. 2020 saw three counties with no previous cases of terror-related arrests in 2019: Laikipia, Tana River and Kilifi. Three people were arrested in Laikipia as they unsuccessfully attempted to force their way into a British army training unit in Batuk camp in Nanyuki. While their names remain undisclosed, reports indicate that the men, who were in their early twenties, were said to be from Nyandarua, Rumuruti and Machakos area. The unarmed suspects were booked at Nanyuki Police Station and later handed over to the regional Anti-Terror Police Unit in Isiolo for further interrogation. *Al Shabaab* claimed responsibility for the attack.[13] Two identified men were arrested in Tana River county in January on suspicion that they could be linked to terrorist groups. A laptop with codes and locations of various foreign communication installations were recovered during the arrest.[14] Additionally, two people were arrested in Kilifi county in two separate incidents recorded in January and April. In January, the man arrested was an *al Shabaab* returnee who confessed and surrendered himself in a Kilifi church.[15]

Arrests by gender

CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory, Kenya
Arrests by Gender, January - December 2020

Female, 3%
Male, 18%
Undisclosed, 79%

Numbers
Men: 13
women: 2
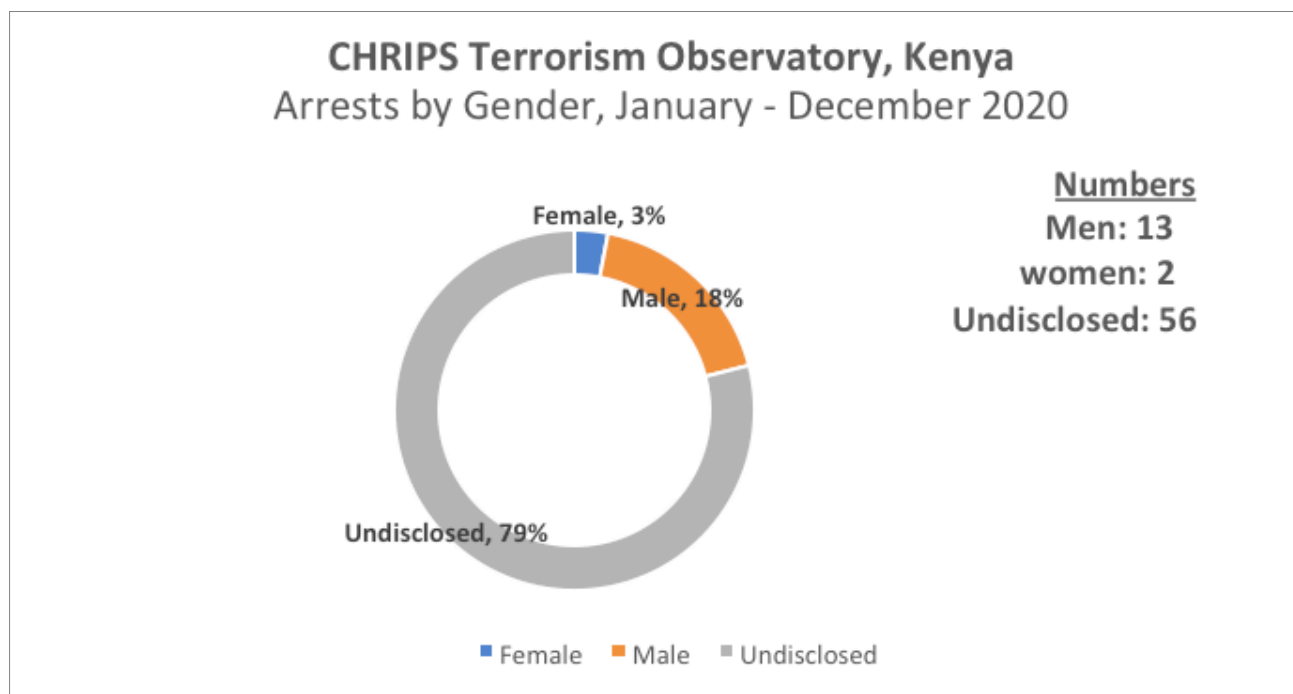Undisclosed: 56

■ Female ■ Male ■ Undisclosed

Figure 13: Arrests by gender, January – December 2020

Two women and 13 men were arrested during the period under review. Terror-related reports did not disclose nor specify the gender of the remaining 56 people arrested. Similar to 2019, the number of women detained was significantly lower than the number of men arrested. The two women arrested were reportedly conducting surveillance along Kiambu road with three men.[16]

---

[13] Mutura, J & Kahenda, M (2020) "Suspected terrorists arrested in Nyanyuki" *Standard media,* 7 January, https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001355544/suspected-terrorists-arrested-in-nanyuki

[14] Nation Africa (2020) "Lamu suspected Shabaab militants arrested in Tana River" 23 January, https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/lamu/Suspected-Shabaab-militants-arrested-Tana-River/3444912-5429256-fkarbpz/index.html

[15] Ahmed, M. (2020) 12 "Shabaab Resurgence Timeline" Daily Nation Newspaper, 14 January

[16] Yusuf, M. (2020) "Five terror suspects including American await trial in Kenya" 21 January, *VOA News,* https://www.voanews.com/africa/five-terror-suspects-including-american-await-trial-kenya

Arrests by gender

CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory, Kenya
Arrests by Nationality, January - December 2020

- 20 Undisclosed
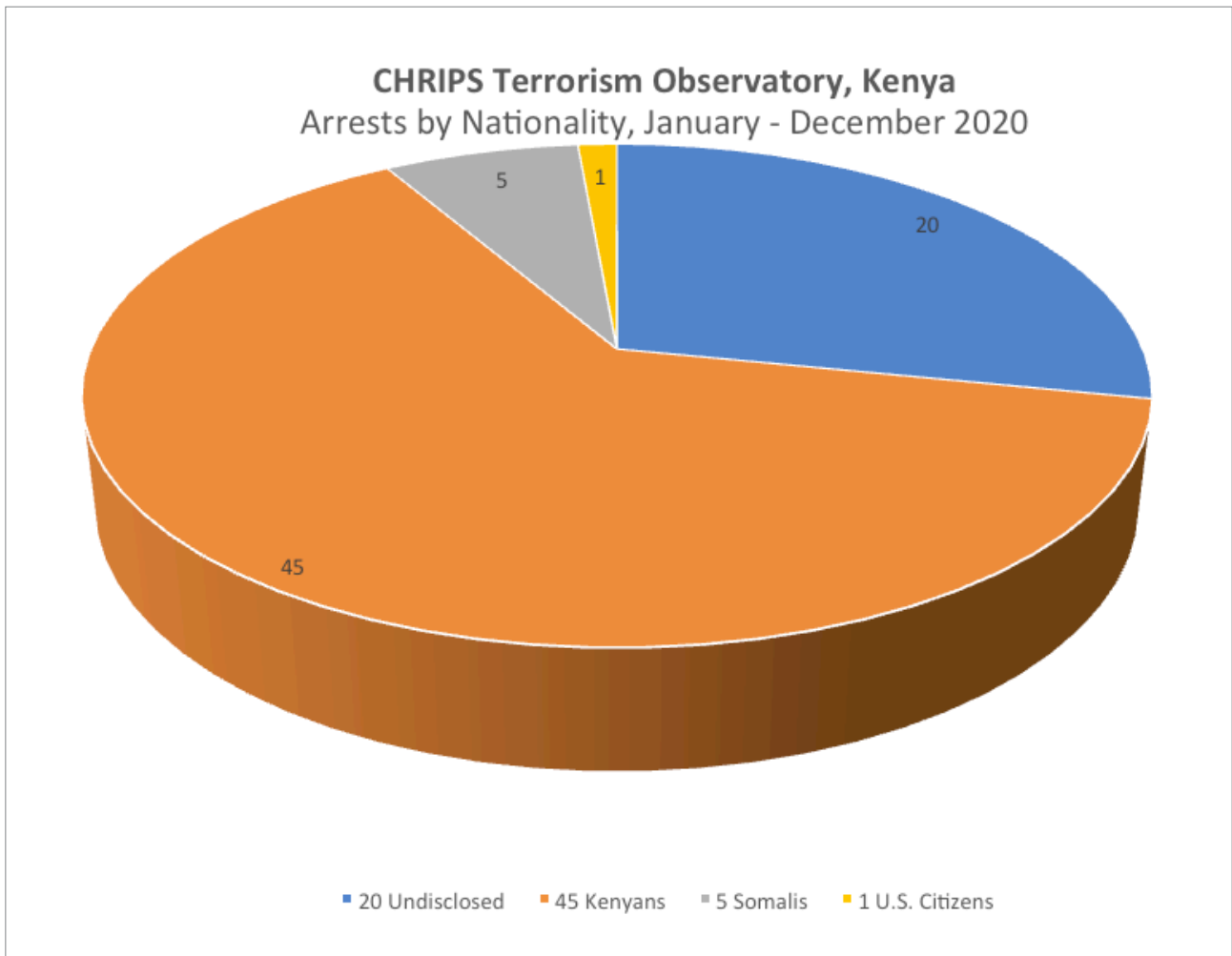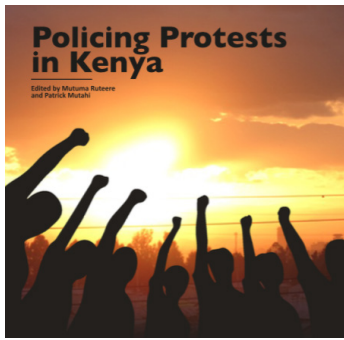- 45 Kenyans
- 5 Somalis
- 1 U.S. Citizens

Figure 14: Arrests by nationality, January – December 2020

Forty-five Kenyans, five Somali citizens and one American citizen were arrested in Kenya for terror-related offences in 2020. An additional 20 people were reportedly arrested but their nationalities not reported by the media.
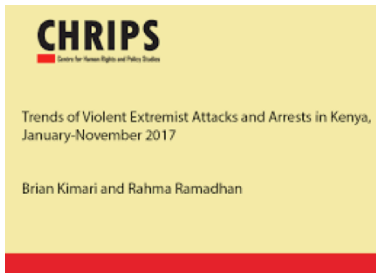
Acknowledgement

PUBLICATIONS

Policing Protests in Kenya
The papers in this volume grapple with the questions of laws and institutions as well as attitudes and culture in policing and are aimed at contributing to the policy and scholarly discourse on policing of public gatherings and protests in Kenya.

Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, January 2019 – December 2019
This report draws from the Terror Attacks and Arrests Observatory of the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory). It presents the latest data collected and analysed from 1 January – 31 December 2019. CHRIPS uses verified traditional and new media reports as well as information from local partners to generate the most comprehensive database on terror-related occurrences in Kenya.

Comments on the Proposed Public Order Amendment Bill 2019
This case digest draws from the decisions of the High Court, Court of Appeal, and the Supreme Court to provide summaries of various judgements from the year 2015 to 2019. Each case lays precedent on a particular question, that is, the central point of the matter before the court. This digest categorises these as follows: standard of proof in terror offences; admissibility of evidence; appropriate charges under the prevention of terrorism Act, and fair trial and sentencing.

Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, January-November 2017
The data and analysis in this report draws from the terror attacks and Arrests Observatory of the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS). It presents and analyses the latest data, collected from media reports, on terror attacks and arrests between January 1, 2017 and November 30, 2017. Data on terror-related attacks will be regularly updated on the observatory and reports published periodically.
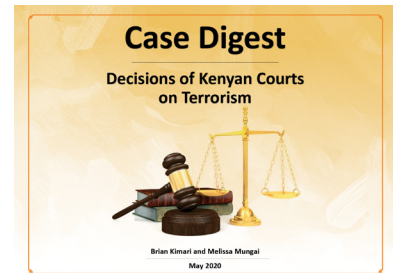

Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, December 2017 – December 2018
The data and analysis in this report draws from the Terror Attacks and Arrests Observatory of the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS). It presents the latest data collected and analysed from media reports on terror attacks between 1 December 2017 and 31 December 2018.

Confronting Violent Extremism in Kenya: Debates, Ideas and Challenges (CHRIPS, 2018)
This pioneering collection brings together critical analyses on a range of issues touching on violent extremism by a multidisciplinary team of scholars and scholar-practitioners with an intimate and long-standing interest on the subject in Kenya, the region and globally. They cover the breadth as well as depth of the complex problem of violent extremism in a manner and language that speaks to both scholars and policy makers.

About CHRIPS

The Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS) is a leading international African research centre based in Kenya that conducts high quality policy relevant research on human rights, security, terrorism and counter-terrorism, violence, crime and policing. CHRIPS actively engages academics, policy makers and other key stakeholders in the generation and dissemination of new knowledge that facilitates the development of innovative and effective policy solutions to the pertinent security challenges in Africa.