



## **Enhance approaches to address the evolving nature of Violent Extremist Attacks and threats**

**By Maureen Nyarangi**

Kenya has been actively involved in countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts, particularly in response to threats posed by groups like Al-Shabaab, which has conducted numerous attacks in the country, especially in border regions and coastal areas. The government has intensified security operations, including increased military presence in border areas, enhanced border security, and cooperation with regional partners like the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to combat extremist groups. The National Counter Terrorism Centre has engaged in community outreach programmes to prevent radicalisation and recruitment by extremist groups. This includes initiatives focused on youth empowerment, education, and religious tolerance. However, terrorism continues evolving, calling for more whole of government and society joint approaches to address the threats.

According to the [Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies \(CHRIPS\) observatory report](#), the majority of attacks in 2023 occurred in the North Eastern and Coastal regions of Kenya. Mandera, Garissa, and Lamu have been the epicenter of violent extremism with hundreds of fatalities recorded. Mandera and Lamu in particular, have witnessed an alarming increase in attacks, over the past five years. These numbers are emblematic of the rate of vulnerability to extremism and underscore the need for targeted countermeasures that address the root causes of radicalization.

Kenyan security officials, specifically the Kenya Police Service, have borne the brunt of terrorism with [nearly half of all attacks in 2023](#) aimed at them. This deliberate strategy by violent extremist groups seeks to cripple Kenya's counter-terrorism capacity.

Civilian casualties remain a major concern. A single attack can have a devastating impact on lives and communities. In 2023, [30 civilians lost their lives](#) to extremist violence. Strengthening intelligence gathering and public outreach programs is imperative to protect civilians.

On the bright side, Kenya has undertaken a broad range of counterterrorism measures, such as the prosecution of terror suspects under the Prevention of Terrorism Act in an effort to disrupt extremist plots and dismantle their networks. For instance, three Al Shabaab suspects were found guilty of planning to bomb Supreme Court, Parliament and other key targets. The suspects were arrested on February 2018 in



Merti, Isiolo County, in a vehicle loaded with explosives en route to Nairobi and were sentenced to 25 years in prison in February 2024 - a major win for the war on terror. The [CHRIPS data](#) for 2023 shows that the majority of those arrested on terror-related charges were men, with a smaller number of women also apprehended. A significant number of those arrested were from neighbouring countries such as Tanzania, Somalia, and Uganda. This cross-border dimension emphasises the need for greater regional cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts.

The emergence of [extreme religious interpretations](#) further complicates the fight against extremism. The case of Pastor Paul Mackenzie in Kilifi County, where 429 bodies were exhumed from Shakahola forest linked to his church, the Good News International, raised serious concerns about their practices. While the case is ongoing, this incident highlights the dangers posed by extremist religious ideologies that can lead to devastating consequences. It underscores the need for a nuanced and wider approach to counter-terrorism based on religious beliefs.

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