

## TERRITORIALITY AS A METHOD FOR UNDERSTANDING ARMED GROUPS IN KENYA AND STRENGTHENING POLICY RESPONSES

CLIFFORD COLLINS OMONDI OKWANY

LEARNING FROM LOCAL PEACEBUILDING APPROACHES

*“Understanding territoriality and how the VEOs and CBAGs take advantage of its fluidity should be a crucial asset in informing preventive CVE policy and research.”*

### FAST FACTS

- Conceptualizing the operation of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) and community based armed groups (CBAGs) in Kenya requires an understanding of territoriality, or the psychological or physical control of space by an individual or a group.
- The fluid nature of territoriality is a key element that enables the survival of VEOs and CBAGs.
- Kenya’s government policies are based on traditional strategies of power centralization. Such kinetic national and county action plans on CVE are rooted in high securitization and lack an understanding of the dynamic operations of extremist groups.

### Abstract

This policy note explores the characteristics of community-based armed groups (CBAGs) unique to the Kenyan context through a comparison of local CBAGs with other nonstate armed groups, particularly violent extremist organizations (VEOs). In doing so, it introduces the concept of *territoriality*—the degree to which government and security agents are able to monopolize political, social, and security control of spaces. Both CBAGs and VEOs are most likely to thrive in Kenya under conditions of *semi-territoriality*, where state authority sometimes shifts fluidly from strong to weak depending on capacity or interest. To combat the rise of VEOs community-oriented policing and strengthening relations between civil society and the police through the Police Reforms Working Group Kenya (PRWGK) to monitor and evaluate the police service are recommended. Community-oriented strategies to map CBAGs and VEOs through clan structures is also recommended.

# Context

Since the 1960s and 1980s battles with secessionists in the country's northeast, Kenya has been a "conflict grey zone."<sup>1</sup> There have been periodic outbreaks of cross-national violence, typically emerging from electoral politics, as well as subnational conflict perpetrated by ethnic and identity-based armed groups competing over political and natural resources, especially land rights. The end of the Cold War enabled the emergence of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) such as al-Qaeda,<sup>2</sup> al-Shabaab,<sup>3</sup> and al-Hijra,<sup>4</sup> tied to elements of Islamic ideology. This led to violent conflict in the Horn of Africa between jihadists and international militaries. At the same time, community-based armed groups (CBAGs) have been a source of ongoing internal insecurity, taking advantage of both ungoverned and governed territories to build their power bases.<sup>5</sup> The spaces in which these groups operate often lack a consistent strong government presence that would monopolize the use of violence, a condition this policy note describes as *territoriality*. Instead, conditions often shift between efforts to exert territoriality and long stretches in which state authorities ignore these spaces due to limited security resources or lack of interest, and CBAGs and VEOs use this power vacuum to their advantage. This limited security capacity will be described going forward as *semi-territoriality*.

Community-based armed groups are those operating within a particular territory, such as a tribal region or a political jurisdiction. A CBAG can be a formal armed group supported by the political class or, in some cases, a regional wing of a VEO.<sup>6</sup> CBAGs are distinct from other nonstate armed groups because they are not always independent from the state, but often localized subunits within the state, sometimes working with political leaders. However, as the name suggests, CBAGs operate at the local level; they do not focus on broad political goals but instead work towards the objectives of key stakeholders within their community.<sup>7</sup> In Kenya, they are often ethnic-based, not motivated to overthrow the government but working within the political system. The ethnic orientation of the groups demonstrates how semi-territoriality works to the advantage of CBAGs. However, the fluidity of territories can explain why these groups are sometimes part of strong government control—territoriality.

---

1 "An environment of adversarial competition with a military dimension, but short of armed conflict," see Mutuma Ruteere and Patrick Mutahi, *Confronting Violent Extremism in Kenya: Debates, Ideas and Challenges* (Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, 2018), 13.

2 A multinational VEO affiliating with Sunni Islamist ideology and enjoying its networks from the Salafists jihadists. See Alexander De Waal, *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

3 A Somalia-based VEO, and al-Qaeda affiliate, currently concentrating its attacks in the Horn of Africa. See, Okwany 2016.

4 An al-Shabaab affiliate operating in the East Africa Swahili coasts and Nairobi. See, Stig Jarle Hansen, *Horn, Sahel, and Rift: Fault-Lines of the African Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

5 David M. Anderson, "Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Kenya," *African Affairs* 101, no. 405 (2002): 531–55; Mkutu Agade, "'Ungoverned Space' and the Oil Find in Turkana, Kenya," *The Round Table* 103, no. 5 (2014): 497–515.

6 See for example, Schubert's 2015 definition of CBAGs and nonstate Armed Groups (NSAGs) in Moritz Schubert, "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups: Towards a Conceptualization of Militias, Gangs, and Vigilantes," *Contemporary Security Policy* 36, no. 2 (2015): 296–320.

7 Lauren Van Metre, *From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019).

The categorization of formal and informal armed groups is blurred.<sup>8</sup> Operating with political goals, some CBAGs are motivated by political and ethnic divisions. However, other CBAGs, like VEOs, may commit violent attacks —especially in election years, enabled by political actors—to spark fear for their political goals.

Categorization of CBAGs and VEOs can be challenging because their characteristics overlap. The definition of VEOs centers on their international nature and violence.<sup>9</sup> However, CBAGs can cause extreme violence, and some operate internationally. VEOs engage in clandestine attacks, while some CBAGs help government security agents such as the police. VEOs often attract international attention, and while CBAGs can operate internationally, they rarely attract international attention. Therefore, VEOs and CBAGs differ conceptually in the Kenyan context, and most analysis applies a “hard power” lens—explaining the nature of these groups through their strength and control. However, this policy note demonstrates the fluidity of territoriality in explaining how VEOs and CBAGs operate in Kenya.

## Relevance to Policy and Practice

### *Territoriality and regional coordination*

Conceptualizing the operation of VEOs and CBAGs requires an understanding of *territoriality*. Territoriality is the monopolization or control of space by an individual or a group. Considering organized violence—state monopoly of use of force or groups legitimizing the use of force in a particular space—can help explain the concept. It is the basis of power, the area controlled by a specific actor, government, CBAGs, or VEOs. On a deeper level, territoriality can be political, an actor occupying physical space,<sup>10</sup> or sociocultural, a social unit or actor such as an ethnic group controlling a particular area. Apart from the control or monopolizing of physical space, territoriality can be psychological and involve winning the hearts and minds of a specific group or community. Thus, territoriality can be symbolized both physically and ideologically. Linking the two, this policy note refers to human territoriality linked by political geography: the control of people in a particular area, physically or ideologically.<sup>11</sup> In sum, territoriality is a conscious act of asserting control of a space, physically or psychologically. The absence of territoriality explains the resilience of both VEOs and CBAGs across the Kenyan and Ugandan borders. For example, the Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF) operates in Kenya and Uganda along the Mount Elgon region.<sup>12</sup> The strong government control, limited security capacity, little attention given to the region, and marginalization of the Sabaot ethnic groups led to the creation of the SLDF. Although

---

8 Schubert, “The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups,” 2015.

9 Olivier J. Walther and William F. S. Miles, *African Border Disorders: Addressing Transnational Extremist Organizations* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2018).

10 Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History*, Vol. 7: CUP Archive, 1986.

11 Sack, *Human Territoriality*.

12 This information is based on the author’s field work experience in February 2017, January 2018 and November 2019 under the ICT4COP project, an EU Horizon 2020 research project. See, ICT4COP details at <https://www.communitypolicing.eu/about-the-project/researchers/clifford-okwany/>.

they cross borders, the SLDF is a CBAG because they are embedded in specific ethnic communities arbitrarily divided when boundaries were drawn during decolonization. The British colonial government marginalized the Saboot tribe while working with and supporting the Bukusu tribe, establishing the latter as the “first-class” tribe in the region, and the precolonial government did the same. Therefore, the government’s weakness, limited security capacity, and marginalization of the community pushed the SLDF to harness ethnic support and cross border territories.

Strengthening government institutions can help weaken the influence of CBAGs; however, the link between ungoverned territories and armed groups complicates security policy interventions.<sup>13</sup> The fluid nature of territoriality is a key element that enables the survival of VEOs and CBAGs. Poorly defined as undeveloped, unexplored spaces characterized by boundary conflict, frontiers are regions where territoriality is uncertain and contested.<sup>14</sup> They are vulnerable spaces that play an important role for CBAGs and VEOs.<sup>15</sup> Such spaces experience *semi-territoriality*—or the government’s limited security capacity within or lack of attention to these spaces. CBAGs and VEOs survive in the Horn of Africa due to limited or nonexistent regional governmental coordination, ties to political elites, and their cross-border operations. The historical conflict in the Ilemi triangle<sup>16</sup> on the border of Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan is an example of where CBAGs move across borders and benefit from political support. CBAGs have semi-territoriality in this region—there is a government presence, but limited resources to maintain security and corruption lead to porous borders.<sup>17</sup> The VEOs and CBAGs in Kenya gain strength through their cross-border activities. Thus, regional cooperation is limited when it comes to fighting VEOs such as al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa.

Because semi-territoriality describes areas where there is a strong presence of government security, but the state is limited due to security capacity or limited attention, the government and its allies can defeat the CBAGs and VEOs in open combat. The government in northern and northeastern Kenya maintains sporadic control of the region, sometimes showing a heavy presence but mostly leaving the local community at the mercy of the CBAGs or VEOs.<sup>18</sup> Thus, these regions are characterized by semi-territoriality. CBAGs—such as Jie warriors led by their leader Ekeno—take advantage of this semi-territoriality, crossing borders between Karamoja, Uganda and West Pokot, Kenya, particularly, along the Alale region. There are approximately 350 to 400 Jie warriors, and in early 2022, Uganda People’s Defense Forces (UPDF) raided the group, after which the Jie crossed the border to settle in the Lotkum subregion in Alale, West Pokot.<sup>19</sup> The SLDF also finds safe haven in Uganda after Kenyan police raids. Such porous borders lead to

---

13 Angel Rabasa, Steven Boraz, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, and Theodore W Karasik, *Ungoverned Territories: Understanding and Reducing Terrorism Risks* (Rand Corporation, 2007).

14 Jason Cons, *Sensitive Space: Fragmented Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).

15 Graham Robb, *The Debatable Land: The Lost World between Scotland and England* (London: Picador, 2018).

16 The map of Ilemi triangle is available at <https://riftvalley.net/events/ilemi-triangle>.

17 Philip Winter, “A Border Too Far: The Ilemi Triangle Yesterday and Today,” (University of Durham working paper, 2019).

18 Linnéa Gelot and Stig Jarle Hansen, “They are from Within Us: CVE Brokerage in South-Central Somalia,” *Conflict, Security Development* 19, no. 6 (2019): 563–82.

19 Interview with a SIKOM Peace Network in Alale, West Pokot, March 2022.

transportation and trade of illegal small arms and light weapons,<sup>20</sup> despite the joint working plan between Kenya and Uganda on cross-border security.<sup>21</sup> The East African Protocol on Peace and Security emphasizes the need for cross-border collaboration in countering VEOs and CBAGs.<sup>22</sup> However, semi-territoriality limits such cooperation due to the nature of CBAGs' blurred and informal legitimacy, in addition to corruption.

Kenya's cooperative efforts to counter al-Shabaab began when Kenyan forces joined the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in February 2012, following challenges from their first intervention in Somalia, Operation *Linda Nchi*.<sup>23</sup> Collaborative efforts in the Horn of Africa have improved, e.g., through the East African Protocol on Peace and Security and AMISOM, but they face challenges arising from competition between states. For instance, the fight for a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council between Djibouti and Kenya in 2020 caused tension in regional relations. The limited intelligence provision by AMISOM in Gedo, Somalia, led to an al-Shabaab attack on the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) camp in El-Adde<sup>24</sup> and on May 4, 2020, Ethiopian forces mistakenly shot down a Kenyan plane transporting humanitarian and medical supplies.<sup>25</sup> The incident highlighted issues in communication (the Ethiopian soldiers believed the plane was on a suicide mission).<sup>26</sup> Miscommunications such as this can limit diplomatic and collaborative efforts. These limits and strong government control in some areas provide opportunities for VEOs and CBAGs to move across borders as well as for the trafficking of illicit goods and arms.<sup>27</sup>

Given the strength of al-Shabaab, there is a need for robust, non-kinetic counter-insurgency ap-

---

20 This information is based on the author's research in Mt. Elgon, Trans-Nzoia county from 2015 to 2020.

21 Joint Ministerial Briefing, 2019.

22 Emmanuel Kisiangani, "The East African Community and Threats to Peace: Tensions between Common Purpose and Collective Responses," *The Horn Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (2018).

23 On October 14, 2011, under the counterterrorism (CT) banner of Operation Linda Nchi—a policy to build a buffer zone between the Somalia-Kenyan border to block al-Shabaab's extremist acts in northeastern Kenya. Furthermore, the buffer zone later changed to military intervention in Somalia. Linda Nchi was launched to protect the country from al-Shabaab terror, and Kenya committed to unilateral military action despite the skepticism of allies such as the US and the United Kingdom. The operation faced heavy casualty rates in its initial stages before the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) successfully captured the town of Kismayo in Somalia. Operation Linda Nchi demonstrated the strength of the KDF but weakened internal security in the Horn of Africa, since al-Shabaab applied a shift of territoriality from Kismayo to a semi-territoriality in northeastern Kenya, Majengo, in Nairobi and the Kenyan coast. The hard-power tactics continued in April 2014 when President Uhuru Kenyatta's administration incriminated the Somali community in a counter-terror operation. The security forces locked and cracked down Eastleigh under Operation Usalama Watch. The action exposed police torture and corruption. The security forces treated the Somali population brutally, some of whom were turned into human automated teller machines (ATMs) by paying for their freedom. Later in the year, the government amended the security laws in 2014 to prosecute VE suspects without trial and with proposals to increase the capacity of prison facilities. See, Okwany, 2016.

24 Williams, "Battle at El Adde."

25 Abdi Latif Dahir, "Ethiopian Troops May Have Shot Down Aid Plane in Somalia," *New York Times*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/10/world/africa/coronavirus-aid-plane-crash-somalia.html>.

26 Interviews with AMISOM leadership in Mogadishu and Kismayo, November 21-25, 2022.

27 Interviews with security government officers in North Horr, and the author's experience in the porous border in Sabarei, Turbi and Sololo in Marsabit, county, Kenyan-Ethiopian borders, April 2021. Additionally, the Ethiopian conflict between President Abiy's supporters fighting the TPLF and the withdrawal of African Union missions will be an advantage to VEOs and CBAGs.

proaches and community-oriented policing initiatives.<sup>28</sup> Since its initial intervention to counter al-Shabaab, AMISOM successfully pushed al-Shabaab from Mogadishu and Kismayo in Somalia and dismantled the militia's leadership.<sup>29</sup> And while AMISOM's mission was slated to end in 2021, uncertainties on the ground led to the decision to transition and reconfigure AMISOM into the African Union (AU) Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), which became operational in April 2022 with a mandate to provide operational continuity while transitioning security responsibilities to the Somali government by the end of 2024.<sup>30</sup> Still, countering al-Shabaab's secret network remains difficult and the group's sporadic attacks continue to be a threat in the region. A full withdrawal of the AU Mission may result in al-Shabaab gaining more territory in southern Somalia, increasing violence, and contributing to a potential refugee crisis in the Horn of Africa.<sup>31</sup> Kenya may be particularly vulnerable because of its long-shared border with Somalia.

## *Kenya's counter violent extremism policy*

Kenya has made progress in constitutional reforms on security, and the counties have adapted to territoriality challenges by creating Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) action plans at the sub-national administrative level.<sup>32</sup> However, the Kenyan government's counter-terrorism (CT) and CVE policies rest on hard-power strategies—controlling and monopolizing authority through policy formulation and conduct (territoriality), and the executive arm of government manipulating security laws to fit their political interests. The policing strategy is adopted from the colonial administration applying territoriality—a monopoly of control to govern. The Kenyan police institution is meant to police the community through hard-power strategies of obtaining intelligence from the community, in contrast to policing *with* the community through building trust between the police and community.<sup>33</sup> The police have a reputation for extrajudicial killings—a hard power tactic. Such territoriality pushes the VEOs and CBAGs from strong government territoriality to semi-territoriality<sup>34</sup> and often leads to a military confrontation between security forces and VEOs or CBAGs.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, policing strategies rest on the physical understanding of territorial-

---

28 The author's experience in training the AMISOM police is on community-policing philosophy and strategies at the EASF in Embakasi, Nairobi, March 2020.

29 C. C. O. Okwany, *Kenya's Foreign Policy towards Somalia: A Contribution to Insecurity* (Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, 2016).

30 For the full communique, see: <https://atmis-au.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/communique-for-the-1068th-meeting-on-atmis-mandate-8-march-2022.pdf>.

31 Also noted as a concern previously (with reference to the withdrawal of AMISOM) in interviews with AMISOM police at the East Africa Standing Force (EASF) at Humanitarian Peace Support School (HPSS), Embakasi, Kenya, March 2020.

32 The author's field work experience in Kwale, Mombasa, Kilifi, Lamu, Garissa and Madera, interviewing various government official on security, February 2018, November 2019. See also, H.I. Boga, "Launch of Action Plan for CVE Kilifi County," (2017).

33 Ibid.

34 Clifford Collins Omondi Okwany, "Countering Violent Extremism in the Horn of Africa: How International Interventions Influence the Security of Civilians," *Africa Amani Journal* (2020).

35 President Mwai Kibaki's administration retaliated in 2012, strengthening physical security in these regions, leading to extrajudicial killings, including the killings of allegedly extremist Muslim clerics in coastal Kenya. From 2013, President Uhuru Kenyatta's administration followed the same militarization measures, see for example, Ndozu, H. J. 2018. These aggressive CT actions activated the home-grown jihadist group, al-Hijra. Al-Shabaab recruited fighters from al-Hijra both in Majengo slums in Nairobi and Mombasa, including Lamu, Tana River, Kilifi, Kwale, and Northeastern Kenya, see for example, Okwany, 2020. The VEOs takes advantage of the narratives projected by various groups within the society. For example, as shown above,

ity while ignoring the psychological and sociological aspect.

Moreover, mistrust of the police and corruption impede the CVE operationalization progress. Corruption erodes trust. Relatively low police wages or nonpayment encourage corruption within the institution and hinder police efforts in CVE work. Due to personnel limitations, the government has a history of recruiting supplementary tribal or clan police to solve immediate security problems. However, such recruitment can lead to sponsoring CBAGs because of the dysfunction within the security sector and the influence of politicians or political elites.<sup>36</sup> For example, the government recruits Kenya Police Reservists (KPRs) and locals to help police with security issues. This is an effort by the Kenyan government to increase its territoriality in opposition to CBAGs and VEOs. However, groups of volunteers recruited to operate within their locality may end up joining or supporting CBAGs or VEOs because of low or no remuneration. Sometimes, KPRs are supporters of local politicians or local security providers.<sup>37</sup>

Groups such as SLDF and al-Shabaab enjoy relative freedom due to community- or clan-based support, and they can apply their authority, becoming *de facto* security providers.<sup>38</sup> The Kenyan government can strategically invade these areas to crack down on VEOs and CBAGs on semi-territoriality bases.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, these semi-territoriality regions are advantageous to CBAGs, such as the SLDF in the Mount Elgon region and VEOs such as al-Shabaab in Northeastern Kenya, despite the heavy military and police presence.<sup>40</sup> For instance, Kenyan security forces have the resources to fight al-Shabaab but when pushed out of areas by military troops, al-Shabaab survives through guerrilla and clandestine tactics, shifting territories from places they fully control to areas they do not fully control, exhibiting semi-territoriality, as on the Northeastern Kenyan borders. Clan-based networks make it possible for al-Shabaab to operate across territories. In areas

---

al-Shabaab took advantage of the al-Hijra. Furthermore, such narratives include land grievances in the coastal region, political manipulation of the youth, and government corruption projected by CBAGs such as Tia Nazi and Mombasa Republican Council (MRC). See, KNCHR 2014. Al-Shabaab further retaliated by launching several clandestine sporadic attacks. (There have been various al-Shabaab attacks since the Kenyan military intervention in Somalia. Such are the of September 21, 2013, Westgate shopping mall attack in Nairobi, June 15 and 17, 2014, Mpeketoni town attacks, and the November 22, 2014, Mandera bus attacks).

36 An example of such recruitment is the Kenya Police Reservists (KPRs), who are volunteers recruited to operate within their locality. These KPRs are essential when it comes to countering extremism in the local area because they understand the community and territory which is important in fighting VEOs and CBADs. The security forces who are not local have challenges with the territory, the culture, language and beliefs which are essential to not only hard power but also community-based security. The challenging issue is that these KPRs are not paid within the police salary structures, and in most circumstances, they are not paid at all. Essentially, it should be noted that some of these KPRs' lack of salary and clan-based support leads them to either work for local politicians' interests or join CBAGs, including joining VEOs in the case of Northeastern Kenya. Despite the willingness to fight al-Shabaab, the KPR families are targeted by the militia and some are lured to join the militia groups. Thus, they fight the government instead of the insecurity gap they are intended to fix.

37 The author's research field work conducting interviews in Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Isiolo, Tana River, and Lamu counties in Kenya from 2018 to 2019, particularly, interviewing KPRs as key informants.

38 Okwany, *Kenya's Foreign Policy towards Somalia*. Also see, Mktu Agade, "'Ungoverned Space' and the Oil Find in Turkana, Kenya."

39 Irene Ndung'u, Uyo Salifu and Romi Sigsworth, "Violent Extremism in Kenya-Why Women Are a Priority," Institute for Security Studies Monographs no. 197 (2017): 1–124.

40 The author's research work mapping stakeholders and power dynamics in CVE work in Garissa, Tana River and Lamu in 2019.

with strong clan-based relations, external motivation to join VEOs or CBAGs can be significant.<sup>41</sup> The government's presence is unstable in these areas, the community's culture and beliefs are more influential, and the government is seen as detached from security realities on the ground.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations demonstrate how the Kenyan government can initiate policies to better counter CBAGs and VEOs that benefit from semi-territoriality. Territoriality offers a lens to address complex multilayered challenges of CBAG and VEO fluidity, gaps in local legitimacy, and buy-in for CT/CVE policies and programs and means to address localized drivers of anti-state grievance and radicalization.<sup>42</sup> CBAGs and VEOs shift their operations from areas with strong government control to regions with weak government presence or where the government has limited resources to exert control. Hard-power or militarization strategies such as CT and CVE approaches, which are police-centered and not community-oriented, fuel insecurity and work to the advantage of CBAGs and VEOs.<sup>43</sup> Instead, the government of Kenya should consider community efforts and soft approaches to addressing insecurity.<sup>44</sup>

### *Develop locally-informed and contextually-specific community-oriented policing programs and involve civil society in reform agendas*

Post-election violence of 2007–2008 and the Kenyan constitution of 2010 marked an important stage of the security-policy reform agenda. The former exposed the weakness of the Kenyan police force; the latter paved the way for a new blueprint to fight armed groups and extremists through regionalized security strategies, engaging the police and the community at the county level.<sup>45</sup> These reforms are vital to an understanding of VEO networks and how CBAGs operate in the context of semi-territoriality. Somali ethnic communities at the Kenya-Somalia border and Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa counties can provide contextual knowledge on clan politics, clandestine militia networks, and porous borders that challenge security, promoting the sociological aspect of territoriality. This is similar to Alale, Ilemi triangle, and the Mount Elgon region.<sup>46</sup> In addition, county and national governments using government structures,<sup>47</sup> such as police stations

---

41 The author's research field work conducting interviews in Garissa, Isiolo, Tana River, and Lamu counties in Kenya, June, July, and August 2019; A CVE mapping research consultancy done for the NGO Search for Common Ground (S4CG).

42 Hansen et al., "Countering Violent Extremism in Somalia and Kenya."

43 Stian Lid and Clifford Collins Omondi Okwany, "Protecting the Citizenry—or an Instrument for Surveillance? The Development of Community-Oriented Policing in Kenya," *Journal of Human Security* 16, no. 2 (2020): 44–54.

44 Okwany, "Countering Violent Extremism in the Horn of Africa."

45 See, article 244 (e) of the Kenyan constitution 2010, article 41, and 96 of the National Police Service Act of 2011, and Chapter 8 (10), 12, 20 of the National Police Standing Orders 2017.

46 The author's mapping of actor's field work interviews from security forces and communities in Garissa, Mandera, Wajir Tana River, and Lamu for an NGO, S4CG robustly demonstrates al-Shabaab clandestine operations and the Kenya-Somalia porous borders in June and July 2019. See also, the author's research work for the ICT4COP in Trans Nzoia, Isiolo, Turkana, and West Pokot Counties, demonstrate the same in Mount Elgon, and Alale region; February 2017, January 2018, and November 2019.

47 County Policing Authority (CPA) stipulated in article 41 and 97 of the National Police Service Act of 2011.



partnering with county leaders and schools to facilitate dialogue, will promote trust between police and communities, a psychological aspect of territoriality. However, the introduction of the centralized policing initiative in 2013 stalled the reform processes and the ongoing concerns with community-focused policing initiatives remain.<sup>48</sup>

The protection of human rights is crucial in promoting CVE work, countering CBAGs, and evaluating the police. Civil society and human rights organizations should suggest policy and/or legal police reforms, and they can facilitate local contact between the police and the community and improve the image of the soft power of the police.<sup>49</sup> They can also facilitate dialogue between communities and police, countering the psychological aspect of semi-territoriality, developing police–citizenry trust and expanding understandings of human rights.<sup>50</sup> In Kenya, some organizations provide legal and health services to victims of torture by rogue police, and these organizations also offer CVE training. The progressive spirit of the Kenyan constitution enabled the Police Reforms Working Group Kenya (PRWG-K).<sup>51</sup> The working group consists of the senior police leadership, the judiciary, and twenty-seven civil society organizations. It seeks to implement police reforms and spread awareness of the progress.<sup>52</sup> The continuous partnership and collaboration between the police and civil society will enhance the monitoring and evaluation of the police and the understanding of the nuanced nature of CVE in communities.<sup>53</sup>

## *Map VEOs and CBAGs through community-oriented strategies*

Violent extremism is deeply rooted in social dynamics—countering it requires action and engagement from all social segments, such as family units, clans, and the government, with a particular focus on gender norms and roles.<sup>54</sup> Women in Kenya face physical, emotional, and psychological torture from the government security forces, CBAGs, and VEOs. They are also essential to surveillance and recruitment, and fight for the government, VEOs, and CBAGs. For example, women have been recruited to join in al-Shabaab’s recruitment efforts as fighters and as wives

---

48 See, for example, the Nyumba Kumi Initiative, which was a responsive policy incorporated into the national community policing structure in 2013 immediately after the Westgate Al-Shabaab attack; the policy was an intelligence gathering initiative to police communities at the local level. For more, see: Lid and Okwany, “Designing Community Policing Models”; Lid and Okwany, “Protecting the Citizenry —or an Instrument for Surveillance?”

49 Ingrid LP Nyborg, “Emerging Perspectives on Post-Conflict Police-Community Relations,” *Journal of Human Security* 16, no. 2 (2019); Hansen et al., “Countering Violent Extremism in Somalia and Kenya”; and Lid and Okwany, “Protecting the Citizenry-or an Instrument for Surveillance?”

50 The author’s interviews with the civil societies involved in the PRWG-K and communities in Mathare, Eastleigh suburbs, and Magengo, Pumwani in Nairobi, November 2019.

51 James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, “Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation” (London: RUSI, 2016).

52 The author’s interviews with the civil societies such as IMLU, PBI, and IJM involved in the PRWG-K, November 2019.

53 The author’s field work experience evaluating the Norwegian Embassy’s CVE work in Kenya and Somalia from November 2015 to February 2016. Including the author’s field work experience in February 2017, January 2018 and November 2019 under the ICT4COP project, an EU Horizon 2020 research project. See, ICT4COP details at <https://www.communitypolicing.eu/about-the-project/researchers/clifford-okwany/>.

54 Ndung’u et al., “Violent Extremism in Kenya-Why Women Are a Priority.”

for fighters<sup>55</sup> and members of CBAGs get psychological support from women in their clans, before and after raids and attacks.<sup>56</sup> Mapping these dynamics would help governments strengthen territoriality and counter semi-territoriality with nuance.

Some communities, such as the pastoralists in northeastern Kenya, strongly believe in clan structures, in contrast to the formal state governance structure.<sup>57</sup> Involvement of different stakeholders from the community is necessary to convince the population to work against CBAGs and VEOs. Thus, for successful policy implementation, local actors and national and county governments must acknowledge the impact and the role of pastoralist clans and family systems in the fight against VEOs and CBAGs. In addition, the defection of the Kenyan Police Reservists to criminal networks must be mapped and monitored through collaboration between the government, research institutions, communities, and civil society. The involvement of clan and tribal networks, not to mention proper remuneration, is critical for the recruitment and retainment of KPRs loyal to the government. Because KPRs are recruited from local areas, communities should be engaged as watchdogs through local mechanisms such as community-oriented policing and security committees.<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusion

Understanding territoriality and how VEOs and CBAGs take advantage of its fluidity should be a crucial asset in informing preventive CVE policy and research. Territoriality provides an understanding of the local situation, which helps develop more contextual, practical, and evidence-based policy. Evidence from case studies comparing VEOs and CBAGs can lead to better policy.

Kenya's government policies are based on traditional strategies of power centralization. Such kinetic national and county action plans on CVE are rooted in high securitization and lack an understanding of the dynamic operations of extremist groups. Furthermore, more robust regional cooperation could boost CVE efforts. Countries in the Horn of Africa have developed regional security partnerships, but national interests and international developments endanger further collaborative action.

Community-policing initiatives can increase citizen involvement in CVE but there must be robust collaborative efforts among citizens, civil society, and the police. Focusing on the local, community-based understanding of challenges—such as porous borders, clan politics, and extremist networks—is vital when it comes to sociological and psychological territoriality—winning hearts and minds—as opposed to solely physical security.

---

55 Donnelly, *Wedded to Warfare*.

56 For example, members receive motivational songs from traditional gatherings and successful fighters are given advantages such as polygyny. Observation based on the author's fieldwork and interviews with CBAGs in Amaiya, Pura, Longewan, Suguta Valley and Marti in Samburu County, April, 2022 to February 2023.

57 The author's research field work conducting interviews in Trans Nzoia, West Pokot, Isiolo, Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Tana River, Kwale and Lamu counties in Kenya from November 2015 to February 2016. Also the author's ICT4COP work in February 2017, January 2018 and November 2019.

58 Ibid.

# Suggested Further Reading

## Counter Violent Extremism

Boga, H. *Launch of Action Plan for CVE Kilifi County*. 2017.

Hansen, S. J., S. Lid, and C. C. O. Okwany, *Countering Violent Extremism in Somalia and Kenya: Actors*. USAID, 2019.

Khalil, J. and M. Zeuthen. *Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction*. London: RUSI, 2016.

Matthews, Earl G, and Paul Rexton Kan. "Cutting Off the Spigot: A New Strategy for Combating Al-Shabaab." Student Research Project, Army War College, 2016.

Ndung'u, I., U. Salifu, and R. Sigsworth. *Violent Extremism in Kenya-Why Women Are a Priority*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2017.

Okwany, O. "Countering Violent Extremism in the Horn of Africa: How international interventions influence the Security of Civilians." *Africa Amani Journal* 3, no. 1 (2020).

Ruteere, M. and P. Mutahi. *Confronting Violent Extremism in Kenya Debates, Ideas, and Challenges*. Nairobi: Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, 2018.

## Radicalization and Deradicalization

De Waal, A. *Islamism and its Enemies in the Horn of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Hansen, S. J. *Horn, Sahel, and Rift: Fault-lines of the African Jihad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Koehler, Daniel. *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools, and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism*. Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2016.

Ndzovu, H. J. Kenya's Jihadi Clerics: Formulation of a "Liberation Theology" and the Challenge to Secular Power. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 38 (2018): 360–371.

Okwany, C. C. O. *Kenya's Foreign Policy towards Somalia: A Contribution to Insecurity*. Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, 2016.

## The Nature of CBAGs and Effect of Security strategies in the Horn of Africa

Anderson, D. M. "Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Kenya." *African Affairs* 101 (2002): 531–555.

Bryden, Matt. *The Decline and Fall of Al Shabaab, Think Again*. Kenya: Sahan, 2015.

Donnelly, P. G. *Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups*. Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Tufts University, 2019.

Kagwanja, Peter Mwangi. "Facing Mount Kenya or Facing Mecca? The Mungiki, Ethnic Violence and the Politics of the Moi Succession in Kenya, 1987–2002." *African Affairs* 102 no. 406 (2003): 25–49.

Knchr. *Are We Under Siege? The State Of Security In Kenya. An occupational Report*. Kenya: Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, 2014.

Mwakimako, Hassan, and Justin Willis. "Islam, Politics and Violence on the Kenyan Coast." *Observatoire des Enjeux Politiques et Sécuritaires dans la Corne de l'Afrique* 27, 2014.

Ndzovu, Hassan. *Muslims in Kenyan Politics*. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2014.

Schuberth, Moritz. The Challenge of Community-based Armed Groups: Towards a Conceptualization of Militias, Gangs, and Vigilantes. *Contemporary Security Policy* 36, (2015): 296–320.

Schuberth, Moritz. "Hybrid Security Governance, Post-election Violence and the Legitimacy of Community-based Armed Groups in Urban Kenya." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 12, no. 2 (2018): 386–404.

Van Stapele, N. "'We Are Not Kenyans': Extra-judicial Killings, Manhood, and Citizenship in Mathare, a Nairobi Ghetto." *Conflict, Security & Development* 16, no. 4 (2016): 301–325.

## Community Policing

Brodgen, Mike, and Preeti Nijhar. *Community Policing: National and International Models and Approaches*: Willan Pub. 2005.

Hansen, Stig Jarle. "One Size Fits All? Adjusting Policing to Local Circumstances." Norwegian University of Life Sciences Department of International Environment and Development Studies, 2019. <https://ict4copmagazine.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/7.-one-size-fits-all-policy-brief-3.pdf>.

Lid, S., and C. C. O. Okwany. *Designing Community Policing Models: The Relevance of Political and Security Factors*. 2019. <https://communitypolicing.eu/2019/11/11/designing-community-policing-models-the-relevance-of-political-and-security-factors/>.

Lid, S., and C. C. O. Okwany. "Protecting the Citizenry—or an Instrument for Surveillance? The Development of Community-oriented Policing in Kenya." *Journal of Human Security* 16, no. 2 (2020): 44–54.

Nyborg, Ingrid LP. "Emerging Perspectives on Post-Conflict Police-Community Relations." *Journal of Human Security* 15, no. 2 (2019).

Okwany, Clifford Collins Omondi. "Community-Policing in Kenya; A Strategy for Counter Violent Extremism." In 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference, 2020.

## Territoriality

Sack, R. D. *Human Territoriality: Its theory and History*, CUP Archive, 1986.

Hansen, S. J. One Size Fits All? Adjusting policing to local circumstances [Online]. Aas: Norwegian University of Life Sciences Department of International Environment and Development Studies, 2019. <https://ict4copmagazine.files.wordpress.com/2020/02/7.-one-size-fits-all-policy-brief-3.pdf>.

Okwany, Clifford Collins Omondi, and Bilhah Awino Akoko. "The Effect of Kenya's Ontological (in) security in the Context of the Horn of Africa." In 13<sup>th</sup> International Conference, 2020.

## Bibliography

Anderson, David M. "Vigilantes, Violence and the Politics of Public Order in Kenya." *African Affairs* 101, no. 405 (2002): 531–55.

Boga, HI. "Launch of Action Plan for CVE Kilifi County." (2017).

Cons, Jason. *Sensitive Space: Fragmented Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016.

Dahir, Abdi Latif. "Ethiopian Troops May Have Shot Down Aid Plane in Somalia." *New York Times*, May 20, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/10/world/africa/coronavirus-aid-plane-crash-somalia.html>.

De Waal, Alexander. *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Donnelly, Phoebe Grace. *Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups*. Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, 2019.

Gelot, Linnéa, and Stig Jarle Hansen. "They Are from within Us: CVE Brokerage in South-Central Somalia." *Conflict, Security Development* 19, no. 6 (2019): 563–82.

Hansen, Stig Jarle. *Horn, Sahel, and Rift: Fault-Lines of the African Jihad*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

- Hansen, Stig Jarle, Stian Lid, and Clifford Collins Omondi Okwany. "Countering Violent Extremism in Somalia and Kenya: Actors and Approaches." Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, Oslo Metropolitan University, 2019.
- Joint Ministerial Briefing. The Kenya Uganda (Turkana/West Pokot – Karamoja) Cross-Border Programme for Sustainable Peace and Development; Implementation Roadmap. Entebbe: Government of Uganda, 2019.
- Khalil, James, and Martine Zeuthen. "Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation." London: RUSI, 2016.
- Kisiangani, Emmanuel. "The East African Community and Threats to Peace: Tensions between Common Purpose and Collective Responses." *The Horn Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (2018).
- KNCHR. "Are We under Siege? The State of Security in Kenya." Kenya: Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, 2014.
- Lid, Stian, and Clifford Collins Omondi Okwany. "Protecting the Citizenry-or an Instrument for Surveillance? The Development of Community-Oriented Policing in Kenya." *Journal of Human Security* 16, no. 2 (2020): 44–54.
- Mkutu Agade, Kennedy "'Ungoverned Space' and the Oil Find in Turkana, Kenya." *The Round Table* 103, no. 5 (2014): 497–515.
- Ndung'u, Irene, Uyo Salifu, and Romi Sigsworth. "Violent Extremism in Kenya-Why Women Are a Priority." Institute for Security Studies Monographs no. 197 (2017): 1–124.
- Ndzovu, Hassan Juma "Kenya's Jihadi Clerics: Formulation of a 'Liberation Theology' and the Challenge to Secular Power." 38, no. 3 (2018): 360–71.
- Nyborg, Ingrid L. P. "Emerging Perspectives on Post-Conflict Police-Community Relations." *Journal of Human Security* 16, no. 2 (2019).
- Okwany, Clifford Collins Omondi. *Kenya's Foreign Policy towards Somalia: A Contribution to Insecurity*. Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, 2016.
- . "Countering Violent Extremism in the Horn of Africa: How International Interventions Influence the Security of Civilians." (2020).
- . *Kenya's Foreign Policy Towards Somalia: A Contribution to Insecurity*. Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, 2016.
- Rabasa, Angel, Steven Boraz, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, and Theodore W. Karasik. *Ungoverned Territories: Understanding and Reducing Terrorism Risks*. Rand Corporation, 2007.
- Robb, Graham. *The Debatable Land: The Lost World between Scotland and England*. London: Picador, 2018.
- Ruteere, Mutuma, and Patrick Mutahi. *Confronting Violent Extremism in Kenya: Debates, Ideas and Challenges*. Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, 2018.
- Sack, Robert David. *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History*. Vol. 7: CUP Archive, 1986.
- Schuberth, Moritz. "The Challenge of Community-Based Armed Groups: Towards a Conceptualization of Militias, Gangs, and Vigilantes." *Contemporary Security Policy* 36, no. 2 (2015): 296–320.
- Walther, Olivier J., and William F. S. Miles. *African Border Disorders: Addressing Transnational Extremist Organizations*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2018.
- Williams, Paul D. "Battle at El Adde: The Kenya Defence Forces, Al-Shabaab, and Unanswered Questions." International Peace Institute, 2016.
- Winter, Philip. "A Border Too Far: The Ilemi Triangle Yesterday and Today." University of Durham, 2019.
- Van Metre, Lauren. "From Self-Defense to Vigilantism: A Typology Framework of Community-Based Armed Groups." Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2019.

## About the Note

Author: Clifford Collins Omondi Okwany

**Clifford Collins Omondi Okwany**, a political scientist trained in Kenya and Norway, is currently a research fellow at the University of Nairobi. He is a security expert on Kenya's security with a broader focus on the Horn of Africa and an expert in international security and foreign policy, focusing on ontological security, territoriality, organized violence, and frontier studies. He conducts research on counter-terrorism, countering violent extremism, radicalization, de-radicalization, community-based armed groups (CBAGs), and nonstate armed groups.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the RESOLVE Network, the U.S. Institute of Peace, or any entity of the U.S. government.

## RESOLVE NETWORK

better research • informed practice • improved policy on violent extremism •

[www.resolvenet.org](http://www.resolvenet.org)



RESOLVE is housed at the U.S. Institute of Peace, building upon the Institute's decades-long legacy of deep engagement in conflict affected communities.



UNITED STATES  
INSTITUTE OF PEACE  
Making Peace Possible

RESOLVE would like to thank the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for its generous support for this report and RESOLVE's Learning from Local Peacebuilding Approaches initiative.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE