



BRILL

THE AFRICAN REVIEW 47 (2020) 41–66

 **TARE**  
THE AFRICAN REVIEW

brill.com/tare

# Perception of Peace Actors on the Nexus between Criminal Gangs and Violent Extremism in the Coast of Kenya

*Halimu Suleiman Shauri*

Professor, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Pwani University,  
Kilifi, Kenya  
*hshauri@yahoo.com*

*Hassan Mohamed Mutubwa*

Independent Researcher, Mombasa, Kenya  
*hassanmutubwa@gmail.com*

*Timothy Mwaka Musa*

Postgraduate Student, Department of Social Sciences, Pwani University,  
Kilifi, Kenya  
*timothymusa8@gmail.com*

## Abstract

A growing body of scholarly literature suggests convergence or linkage between Criminal Gangs (CGs) and Violent Extremism (VE) in various parts of the world (Hubschle, 2011). However, the connection between CG and VE remains unclear and contrast substantially, based on area, context and perspective of criminal gangs and VE groups. While studies have been done in other parts of the world, no such studies have been done in the Coastal Region of Kenya to link CGs and VE groups. This is despite the widespread operation of VE groups such as the Somali based Al-Shabaab and many criminal gangs in the region to mention a few the *Kapenguria six*, *Wajukuu wa Babu*, *Wakali Wao*, *Wakali Kwanza*, *Wajukuu wa Bibi*, *Wajukuu wa Mtume* among others. Accordingly, this study provides the perception of peace actors, community, government and civil society personnel, on the Coast of Kenya on the nexus between criminal gangs and VE. The findings are based on a survey study involving sixty (60) peace actors who responded to a questionnaire study that was distributed in May and June 2019 in Mombasa, Kenya.

## Keywords

perceptions – criminal gangs – violent extremism – nexus between criminal gangs and violent extremism – coast of Kenya

### 1 Introduction

This article presents findings of a study on the perception of peace actors on the nexus between Criminal Gangs (CGs) and Violent Extremism (VE) groups. It provides an overview of VE globally and in the region before providing the local context on the phenomenon. Further, it sheds light on the nexus between criminal gangs and VE with theoretical and field evidence in support and against the conceived relation among scholars and culminates in a presentation of the results of the survey in the coast of Kenya, which provides a conclusion based on the findings of the study concerning the conceived relation in the Kenyan coast.

### 2 Global Overview of Criminal Gangs and Violent Extremism

Globally, research on gangs has been concentrated in a small number of identifiable bodies of work {apart from the United States (US), most notably in Central America, Brazil} and South Africa, as postulated by Rodgers and Jones (2009), emerging gang or organized violence issues elsewhere. According to TLAVA (2009), each of these has made a particular contribution to the literature. In general terms, this contemporary “global” research has considerably enriched understanding of gangs by bringing to light their relational and organizational aspects: gangs ought not to be viewed in isolation but, rather, in terms of their relationship with the state and society; nor should they be understood as “aberrations” but, rather, as coherent, logical and functional groups immersed in local institutional landscapes and responding to structural disadvantage at different scales (*ibid*).

While the levels of violence in Europe may pale in comparison to those in the US, there is a noticeable presence of gangs across European countries. The research findings produced by members of the Euro Gang Network have identified gangs in 50 European cities and 16 European countries (Klein et al., 2006). Nevertheless, many researchers in Europe have approached gang research with scepticism, tending to study subcultures, networks, and troublesome youths rather than ‘gangs’ because of the potential stigma, racism, and

oppression associated with the term (Aldridge et al., 2008). The entrenchment of a violent culture of organized criminality tends to drive the emergence of new illicit practices, such as protection rackets, the capture of public sector resources, seizures of property and land, and eventual entry into the licit private sector.

Although the levels of violence practised by the classic hierarchical mafia – as in Italy and Russia – have begun to decline, the shift from transnational trafficking towards local protection and state co-option seems to have accentuated levels of violence in a number of cases, such as in Mexico, Guatemala and Jamaica (Olson, 2012). At the same time, tolerance of ever-higher rates of violence, support for extra-legal responses by the authorities or vigilantes, and dependence on private security are common public responses (Adams, 2011). The emergence of such violent criminal environments has prompted some commentators to express concern over the possible rise of cartels and gangs seeking more systematic control over political bodies and territorial enclaves (Bunker and Sullivan, 2011).

On the other hand, Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) have a profound impact on many countries around the world. Transnational crime encompasses illegal activities that are carried out across national borders, which include the planning or execution of unlawful activities. Over the last several decades, TCOs have presented an increasing threat to societies all over the world (Markovic, 2013) in terms of drug trafficking and other kinds of crime (Markovic, 2014). Globalization has quickly facilitated the spread of these criminal activities. There are many TCOs operating worldwide, including outlaw motorcycle gangs, or biker gangs. The Hells Angels Motorcycle Gang (HAMG) themselves are present in nearly 60 countries worldwide and pose a serious threat globally.

### 3 Regional and Local Manifestation of the CGs and VE Linkage

Recent developments in West Africa suggest that increased drug trafficking throughout the region has led to the criminalization or capture of state institutions by sophisticated Drug-Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) with financial capacities that outshine those of entire countries. The most prominent example in this regard is Guinea-Bissau, which has been called “Africa’s first ‘narco-state’” (O’Regan, 2012). Gang involvement negatively influences the lives of many young men living in Cape Town, South Africa. Approximately 130 gangs are operating in Cape Town with a membership estimated at around 100,000 individuals (Kinnes et al., 2011). Gangs have been portrayed as an

anti-social way of life demanding loyalty from members before loyalty to institutions of civil society such as family, school, the justice system and religion (Dos Reis, 2014).

In Kenya, numerous studies have revealed how politicians use non-state armed groups to perpetuate violence against political rivals, particularly in the context of the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence (Klopp and Kamungi, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2008; de Smedt, 2009; Okombo and Sana 2010; Jacobs, 2011; Ndung'u and Wepundi, 2012). In fact, informal security providers such as the *Mungiki* militia group (Ruteere, 2008) have been studied in depth. One critical impact of criminal gang activities is heightened insecurity. The latter has had a negative impact on the socio-economic stability of the country. While the effect is directly visible apparent on the economy, this in itself begets more crimes as poor economic performance then generates more criminal activities, including criminal gangs.

One of the key economic sectors of the coast region of Kenya affected by insecurity is the tourism industry that accounts for the largest sector of its economy. In fact, the tourism industry in Kenya, which has been the leading foreign exchange earner, has experienced the severe negative impact of insecurity. It the pride of any country to showcase its rich diversity of cultures and biodiversity by parading its culture, national parks and wildlife respectively to attract tourists. In fact, Kenya has unique wildlife asset and boasts of hosting the big five of nature. However, this biodiversity is under increasing threat due to the activities of international crime syndicates in the illegal wildlife trade. According to the Kenya Wildlife Society (KWS), the illicit trade "involves networks of organized dealers, financiers, suppliers, brokers and merchants" (Gastrow, 2011). Ivory is the most sought-after item. A relatively new factor in ivory smuggling is the widespread involvement of East Asian nationals within Kenya. Crime syndicates made up of Kenyans and foreigners have established commercial reptile parks disguised as conservation or tourist-attraction centres. It is mentioned that international criminal networks operating along the Kenya-Somali border, and at Kismayu port in Somalia, have diversified and now smuggle lion cubs to Europe, where they are ordered as pets (International Peace Institute, 2010).

Apparently, Kenya belongs to the category of "weak but functioning States", the environments in which DTOs prefer to carry out their operations (Patrick, 2011). This might explain why Kenya is reportedly playing an ever more critical role as both destination and transit country for cocaine trafficked by West African drug networks (UNODC, 2013). Indeed, a unique combination of favourable factors makes Kenya particularly attractive for drug traffickers: staggering levels of corruption within the political and criminal justice systems;

insufficient law enforcement capacities; efficient financial services; a robust communications infrastructure; and relatively reliable transportation facilities (Gastrow, 2011). Because of these characteristics, Kenya has been a point of entry for Afghan heroin destined for Europe and South Africa for more than three decades (UNODC, 2013c). Sharply increased heroin seizures off of the coast of Mombasa since 2010, however, suggest that domestic consumption and the importance of the region as a transit hub have both increased (UNODC, 2013; Shauri, 2015).

In Mombasa County and the larger Coastal Region, the contradictions arising out of the post-independence dichotomy gave rise to the irredentist Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) in 2008, which was hitherto considered as a criminal gang before a court of law resolved their status and gave them an opportunity for its legitimization. The MRC traces the “*Coast is not Kenya*” problem to the 1895 and 1963 agreements transferring the ten-mile strip of land along the coast to the Government of Kenya from the Sultanate of Zanzibar. Some critics characterize the British agreements as a form of bribery designed to facilitate colonization of the interior; the creation of native reserves, which sowed the seed of negative ethnicity (Mghanga, 2010). The MRC contests these agreements as invalid because they say was enacted without the consent of coastal stakeholders, and says the Kenya state has failed to honour provisions designed to protect the coastal population in the agreement.

#### 4 Reflections on the Genesis and Impact of VE in the Local Context

The 2017 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) report highlights a turning point in the fight against radical Islamist extremism. The main positive finding shows a global decline in the number of deaths from terrorist attacks to 25,673 people, which is a 22 per cent improvement from the peak in 2014 (17,958 people were killed in terrorist attacks in 2014). Violent extremism has fallen significantly in the epicentres of Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nigeria, which are four of the five countries most affected by the vice. The ten countries with the most substantial improvements experienced 7,348 fewer deaths, while the 10 states with the largest deteriorations experienced only 1,389 deaths. This highlights the strength of the positive trend with the number of people killed decreasing for the second successive year (*ibid*).

The term “violent extremism”, which was previously seen as the exclusive purview of the security sector, has now found its way into the development dialogue. Indeed, the issue has become an essential topic in development forums. Several agencies have been created to address the issue and coordinate

interventions globally. The United Nations (UN) has held a number of high-level meetings on the topic. The UN agencies, including the World Bank (WB), have also started prioritizing discussions on prevention of VE as part of their policy dialogue with affected countries (De Silva, 2017).

The formation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928 made it one of the first extremist organizations in the twenty-first century Africa (Emerson and Solomon, 2018). It advocated for the institutionalization of strict Sharia law and the ultimate formation of a Caliphate (Ibrahim, 2013). This group joined in the fight for independence in Liberia but got sidelined after independence by the National Liberation Front (*ibid*). Following the ban in Egypt, the group dispersed across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In the Arabian Peninsula, it established its influence through the Sahwa group in Saudi Arabia, Hadas movement in Kuwait, Islah movement in Yemen, Minbar Party in Bahrain, Iraqi Islamic Party in Iraq, Fada 'iyen-e Islam in Iran, Islamic Action Front in Jordan, Hamas in the Palestine Authorities' territories, National Islamic Front in Sudan, and works with al-Nahda in Tunisia and led the Hama uprising against the Ba'ath Party in Syria in 1982 (Peter and Shadi, 2018). It also gained influence in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar around the same period, primarily through Al-Jazeera. It, however, got banned in Libya by law 71 of 1972 (*ibid*).

In Kenya, the factors influencing the emergence and spread of VE are exceedingly diverse, and they vary by community and location and are continually evolving. The ability of VE groups to gain recruits depends on the alignment of various structural, socio-cultural and individual 'push' and 'pull' factors, suggesting that joining a violent extremist group such as Al-Shabaab is a complex psychosocial process. Structural 'push' factors can be broadly considered as the structural and socio-political conditions which favour the rise and spread of armed extremist groups, and those sometimes used by these groups to create propaganda narratives. 'Pull' factors have a more direct influence on the individual. They are associated with the personal rewards an individual may gain through membership in an extremist group, including among others, social status, financial gain, personal empowerment or a sense of glory (USAID, 2011).

There are very few empirical studies on VE in Kenya, as observed by Anneli Botha (2014) in her research on radicalization in Kenya. Yet Kenya and other East African countries increasingly face a growing threat of radicalization, recruitment and VE that needs to be studied and properly understood. The bombing of the Norfolk Hotel in 1980, the US Embassy in Nairobi in 1998, Paradise Hotel in Kikambala (2002), the siege of the Westgate Mall (September 21, 2013) in Nairobi, the Massacres in Mandera, 2018, Mpeketoni, 2014 and Garissa

University College attack (April 2, 2015) and the Dusit attack (2019) points to a growing threat that has been shown to have a local dimension.

There have also been many other smaller bombings of churches, buses and bus stations and night clubs around Nairobi and Mombasa and killing of moderate Sheikhs, village elders and security personnel in the coastal counties which point to a resilient problem embedded in the communities, especially in the coastal provinces and in North Eastern, Kenya. This became even more apparent when radical youth took over Musa and Sakina mosques and drove away moderate Imams. After the killing of Sheikh Aboud Rogo, youth who took over Musa mosque renamed it Masjid Shuhadaa (*the Mosque of the Martyrs*). In this backdrop, many youths have continued to be radicalized and recruited into Somalia based Al-Shabaab terror gang. Some details of what motivated youth to be recruited to Al-Shabaab are contained in the study by Botha (*ibid*).

## 5 Reflections on the Nexus between Criminal Gangs and VE Groups

There is now a growing interest and attention on the place of youth in criminal gang membership, radicalization and recruitment into Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) in Kenya, especially in the coastal hotspots (KCCVEAP, 2017; LCCVEAP, 2017; MCCVEAP, 2017). While research has been conducted on the general phenomenon, especially on the push and pull factors (Shauri, 2018), previous pieces of research have targeted Al-Shabaab returnees (Botha, 2014), women victims (*op cit*), the irredentist Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), while little effort has been directed to the at-risk youth in hotspots areas of the region, especially their vulnerability to recruitment into criminal gangs and VEOs. Accordingly, there is a gap in the literature in understanding insecurity and youth vulnerability to recruitment into criminal organizations and the possible link into such members joining violent extremist groups.

Apparently, in the last two decades, a growing body of literature has explored whether there are links between organized crime and VE. The term 'narco-terrorism' for example emerged in the 1980s about narcotics traffickers who used violence or the threat of violence aimed at communities and government officials for politically motivated objectives (Gregory, 2009). More specifically, certain designated terrorist groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia who have used drug trafficking (as well as extortion, kidnapping, money laundering and other forms of economic crime to finance operations) have been labelled as narco-terrorists (*ibid*). Thus, the perceived intersection of terrorist

and criminal organizations has led some analysts to conflate these two types of entities into one. Theorists are split between sceptics and supporters of confluence and convergence theories concerning this relation. The former sees ever-closer links between the two phenomena, while the latter goes one step further by suggesting a transformation from one to the other.

Schmid (2011) explores the nature of links between terrorism and trafficking in illicit narcotic drugs. It discusses some of the empirical evidence on the simultaneous presence of armed conflicts, including the terrorist variety, and the cultivation, processing and trafficking of narcotic drugs. While some authors postulate close links and even convergence between terrorist groups and organized crime groups, authors of this article are more sceptical about the nature and extent of this connection. They point out both similarities and differences between these two types of organizations and also explore the possible reasons which might tempt and restrain groups of one type to establishing connections with groups of a significantly different mind-sets. Schmid (*ibid*) finds that the “in-house” development of organized crime activities by terrorist organizations is a more imminent problem than a close alliance or convergence of organized crime and terrorist organizations.

Consequently, he recommends that the Palermo Convention against Transnational Organized Crime be used to prevent terrorist organizations from acquiring the financial resources needed to launch and maintain terrorist campaigns. At the same time, he is sceptical about the use of the concept of “narco-terrorism”. Its implication, the fusing of the “war on drugs” and the “war on terror,” might do a disservice to both.

According to Makarenko (2004), since the end of the Cold War and the subsequent decline of state sponsorship for terrorism, organized crime activities had become a significant revenue source for terrorist groupings around the world. Thus, the ‘crime-terror’ nexus was consolidated during the 1990s with the rise of transnational organized crime and the changing nature of terrorism when the formerly distinct phenomena began to show operational and organizational similarities. According to Makarenko (2004), organized crime and terrorist groups are learning from one another by examining each other’s successes and failures. The final point of the crime-terror nexus is convergence when both groups amalgamate into the same or similar organizations with a confluence of beliefs. Few other theorists support the idea that criminal and terrorist groupings converge into one entity with similar ideologies and motives. However, tactical cooperation between the two appears to be based on consistent temporary interests. The realities of opposing aims and ideological beliefs make it difficult for the two entities to maintain long-term cooperation or merge into one.



In this regard, actors primarily associated with conflict or criminality may smoothly transit to associate with the other; the incentives drawing individuals into both often overlapping fields have much in common. However, experts at a recent seminar cautioned against over-simplistic assumptions that there is always a connection between crime and conflict. Relationships among these actors “are sometimes cooperative, sometimes conflictual, and sometimes have nothing to do with each other” (Vienna Seminar, 2013). However, in terms of empirical data, in 2009, the United Nations Office for Drug and Crime (UNODC) carried out a threat assessment on transnational trafficking in West Africa. It looked at some illicit commercial flows including stolen oil, undocumented migrant labourers or sex workers, toxic waste, firearms, counterfeit medicines and drugs. The report found that West Africa had become afflicted with organized crime, and in the case of each illicit flow at least one component of the supply chain was outside West Africa. While the authors argue that “West Africa is caught in a morass from which it cannot reasonably be expected to extract itself,” no links were drawn between terrorist and transnational organized crime groups.

In another threat assessment, in 2010 the regional anti-money laundering group Inter-Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) found that Hezbollah and, to a lesser extent, Afwâj al-Muqâwama al-Lubnâniyya (AMAL) were “embedded within the growing Shi’a community in West Africa, and may engage in a variety of fund-raising activities which straddle the continuum between legitimate charitable donations, criminality (author’s emphasis), and the financing of terrorism.” According Nordic Africa Institute (2016), respondents in Eastleigh described widespread *gangsterism*, robberies, and petty crime, and outlined a relationship between these criminal acts, police corruption and violent extremism in their community. They explained, for example, that Al-Shabaab targets individuals who are members of local gangs for recruitment, stating that this occurs for two reasons: First, gang members are generally already alienated from their communities and have proven they are willing to commit crime for money; Second, Al-Shabaab is alleged to have existing links with street gangs in Eastleigh, which may help to facilitate recruitment.

Field data indicated some subtle distinction between the gang groups and violent extremist groups at the coast according to a Baseline Evaluation, 2017 by Search for Common Ground (SFCG), which is a baseline evaluation for the two-year project “Inuka!”: Community-Led Security Approaches to Violent Extremism in Coastal Kenya. Respondents interviewed thought that the gang groups focused on theft and were uncoordinated, while terrorists or violent extremists are highly coordinated with an ideology that is internationalized.

Contrary, in Kwale County, qualitative data revealed a link between the two because, usually, the youth engaged in gangs have the same vulnerabilities that expose them to violent extremism, and gang groups (spaces) may act as training grounds before youth transition into violent extremist groups.

## 6 Justification of the Study Locale

Kenya has, in the recent past, experienced an increase in the prevalence of criminal and VE activities within its borders (Shauri and Obeka, 2017; Shauri, 2018). This situation has often been associated, albeit with no scientific evidence, with the connection between criminal gangs and VE. However, the literature demonstrates that the movement from criminal gangs into joining radicalizing groups is a dynamic process where individuals are initiated then passed over to VE groups (Botha, 2014). Moreover, minimal effort has been put in understanding the perception of peace actors on the connection between CGs and VE. This article is based on survey research with a prime focus on this emergent topic in Mombasa County in the Coastal Region of Kenya. More precisely, the article is about the why and how of peace actors as they perceive the nexus between CGs and VE groups, which has remained unexplored in the region.

Important to note is that from the literature reviewed, it is evident that there exists a gap in understanding the relationship between CGs and VE in the country and region, with limited research undertaken in Eastleigh, underscoring the need for the study. In this regard, understanding the perception of the peace actor about this linkage between criminal gangs and VE groups may be vital for in-depth studies in the future on the phenomenon. Such understanding is envisioned to have value in mitigating the transition of youth from CGs into joining VE groups, especially now that the region is experiencing an upshot of criminal gangs and still coming to terms with VE activities, especially Al-Shabaab defectors or returnees.

## 7 Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study:

- (i) To assess peace actors level of awareness on CGs and VE groups in Mombasa County, Kenya
- (ii) To evaluate peace actors level of knowledge on CGs and VE groups in Mombasa County, Kenya.

- (iii) Explore the perception of the peace actors on the nexus between CGs and VE in Mombasa County.
- (iv) To provide possible mitigation measures to curb the transition of youth from CGs into joining VEOs.

## 8 Theoretical Framework

The concept of CGs and its dialectics with VE can be explained using group dynamics and socialization theories. Group dynamics conceptualizes groups as social systems, with members who actively interact with one another. The distinct forces of interaction are fertile grounds for socialization (important for behaviour acquisition) and are what constitute the dynamics in theory. These dynamics are influenced by the feelings, thoughts, and relations between members of the group. To understand the dynamics of a group, one must conceptualize the entirety of its members' interactions, with the latter serving as the foundation for the socialization process. These interactions should be examined both at inter and intra-group levels (Hennigan and Spanovic, 2012).

Understanding the organization of gangs is crucial to understanding their involvement (if any) in VE. Indeed, the structure of CGs may influence behaviour both at the individual and the group level through the socialization process. Study findings have shown what individuals can do in gangs, and what they would not do in isolation (Decker and Pyoorz, 2012). This phenomena, known as group processes, is inherent in gangs and is a tremendous motivating factor behind individual participation in VE, and other kinds of criminal behaviour (*ibid*). This is the case, especially in gangs with radicalized belief systems. It is also essential to understand that while processes within the gang group shape the behaviour of its members, the interaction between the gang and other out-groups may contribute to extreme believes and views. This is consistent with a study done by Klein and Crawford (1967), which revealed that radicalization, more often than not, culminates into VE directed towards rival gangs and or general society (*ibid*). This happens when gang members are incited into defending their group and their interests, what ensures therefore in a conflict borne out of in-group and out-group rivalry based on some disagreement.

Accordingly, it is therefore fundamental to understand group dynamics theory, to comprehend the social processes at the inter-group and intra-group levels, and how these processes influence the transition of gang members into VE. However, an understanding of group dynamics also calls for knowledge in the socialization process that takes place within criminal gangs. We learn our

way of life through interaction with other members, and our behaviours are reinforced by continued socialization and resocialization in the groups that we engage with regularly. The relationship between CGs and VE can be well articulated by combining the group dynamic theory to show the movement process and socialization process to indicate how members of CGs are initiated through the learning of the norms and also understanding of the required values to be upheld to maintain membership into such groups.

## 9 The Methodology of the Study

Security studies are sensitive topics and in most cases treated as individual projects. Due to the unique nature of the study; therefore, the approach towards the study employed tact, skills and experience in understanding the relation between CGs and VE groups. In the sampling process, the site of the survey, Mombasa County, in coastal Kenya was selected purposively on the virtue of experience, skill and professional judgment of the scientists with relevancy in heightened insecurity cases and information on both CGs and VE activities in the region. Further, a mixed-methods approach was used to conduct the survey that included interviews with sixty (60) peace actors, who were selected using random, purposive and convenient sampling strategies. The diversity of sampling strategies was to ensure representation.

## 10 Study Findings

### 10.1 *Reflections on the Background Information of the Peace Actors*

Demographic information is critical in understanding the patterns and trends of peace actors. Where sampling was representative, demographics can approximate the characteristics of the population upon which the sample was extracted. Demographics of peace actors are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 reveals that more than three fifths (63%) of peace actors were males, with more than one third (37%) being female. The gender representation was adequate in research and met the Kenyan Constitution (2010) threshold where not more than two thirds should be of one gender.

However, with regard to marital status, more than half (51%) of the peace actors were single, over two fifths (46%) were married, while only 1% and were either engaged or divorced respectively. The over half (51) being in a marital union is a positive finding bearing in mind that these are peace actors who need some experience in conflict resolution and management and also some

TABLE 1 Demographic factors of peace actors

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	22	37%
	Male	38	63%
Marital Status	Single	31	51%
	Married	26	46%
	Divorced	2	2%
	Engaged	1	1%
Age	20–24 years	12	18.6%
	25–29 years	16	27.1%
	30–34 years	19	32.2%
	35 years and above	13	22%
Religion	Christian	26	43%
	Muslim	34	57%
Level of eEducation	Primary	7	10.9%
	Secondary	23	38.2%
	Vocation	13	21.8%
	Tertiary	17	29.1%

SOURCE: FIELD DATA (2019)

trust in their work borne out of the integrity and respect they enjoy being in marital unions.

Results in Table 1 reveal exciting findings concerning the age of peace actors in the study site with over three quarters (78%) being below 35 years, which qualify as a youth in the Kenyan context. While this was a surprise finding, youthful peace actors may be relevant in mitigating youth involvement in criminal and VE groups bearing in mind that it's the youth who are more at risk of recruitment. The youthfulness of peace actors may be an asset in facilitating peer-peer interventions aimed at preventing the transition from CGs into VE groups in the region.

Further, Table 1 shows that over half (57%) of the peace actors were Muslims, with Christians making up the rest (43%). The high (57%) number of Muslim peace actors is not a surprise to this study as the coast region residents are predominantly Muslims. However, since most of the young people involved in CGs and VE groups are Muslims, the high (57%) number of Muslim peace actors is critical in intra-faith dialogues to minimize youth transition from CGs into VEOS.

Finally, in Table 1 are statistics showing that over four-fifths (89.1%) of the peace actors had attained either secondary or above level of education. In contrast, slightly more than one-tenth (10.9%) had only a primary level of education. The majority (89.1%) with a secondary and above level of education presents an opportunity for peer-peer interventions by ensuring capacity building on the peace actors to engage with their peers in CGs and prevent them from transiting into VEOs.

## 11 Analysis of Employment Status and Level of Income of Peace Actors

The variable employment is important because it determines an individual's status in the community and income, which are critical components in ensuring success in peacebuilding. From the study findings, it is clear that more than three fifths (63%) of the peace actors were running small businesses, with more than one-tenth (18%) and (11%) who said they were community mobilizers or in seasonal jobs respectively. The rest, less than one-tenth (3%) and (5%) were either in formal employment or unemployed respectively. The income levels of the peace actors from the diverse livelihood strategies are as shown in Fig. 1.

It is evident in Fig. 1 that a half (50%) of the peace actors indicated to earn Kshs. 6,000 and below monthly, while over one quarter (29.5%) said they earned between Kshs. 6,001–15,000. The rest (6.8%) and (13.6%) earned Kshs. 15,001–25,000 and Kshs 25,000 and above respectively. Overall, three quarters (75%) of the peace actors reported having monthly earnings of Kshs. 15,000

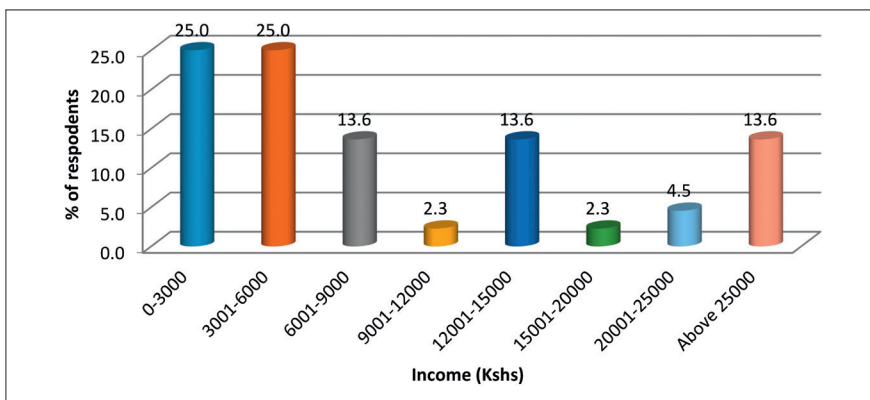


FIGURE 1 Level of income of peace actors  
SOURCE: FIELD DATA (2019)

and below. The low ( $\leq 15,000$  Kshs) income reported by peace actors may have implication for their status in the community with regard to the level of influence they may have for behaviour change among the youth. This is because high income is associated with an enhanced social status, making such earners role models and influential figures in the community.

**12 Awareness and Knowledge on the CGs and VE Groups among Peace Actors' in Mombasa County**

A study on the promotion of peace should begin with an assessment of the level of awareness of insecurity situation and involved groups in the community. Such knowledge and awareness on the state of insecurity can provide opportunities for understanding the why and how of insecurity. To achieve this, peace actors were asked questions on the level of awareness and knowledge they have regarding the significant threats to insecurity in the county. Findings of the survey are illustrated in Fig. 2.

Figure 2 shows clearly that over four-fifths (89.8%) of the sampled peace actors were aware of the existence of CGs, with way less than two fifths (15%) saying that they were not aware of CGs. The high (89.8%) percentage of awareness on the existence of CGs in the county is a clear testimony of the state of insecurity in the county. To gain more insights into the testament of awareness

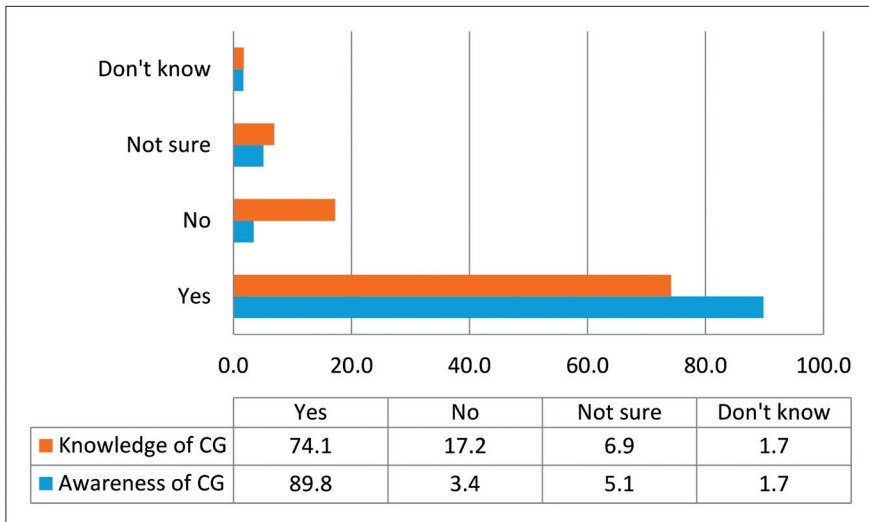


FIGURE 2 Awareness and knowledge of peace actors on CGs and VE groups  
SOURCE: FIELD DATA (2019)

of the peace actors on CGs, participants were probed to mention names of the groups they knew.

Results of the study show that almost three quarters (74.4%) of the peace actors identified CGs operating in their areas. The most commonly cited CGs included: *Wakali Kwanza*, *Wakali Wao*, *Wanjukuu wa Bibi*, *Watalia*, *Wajukuu wa Mtume*, *Kapenguria Six*, *Wajukuu wa Babu*, and *Funga File*. It was also revealed by the participants that some CGs were merging. The CGs mergers, it was observed has created panic to the community for fear of enhanced complexity and heightened insecurity in the county. An interesting observation of how fearless CGs are was made by one of the participants:

CGs are actually training on how to fight other groups and execute their criminal activities.... They have gone further to fix machete matches between rival gangs, which are fought on chosen open community grounds.

Interview with Peace actors' Leader 17.6.2019, Mombasa, Kenya

This study documented this observation by following up on the peace actors concerning the *training* and *machete fighting match-fixing* for rival gangs. Results in Figures 3 and 4 are precise in both aspects. In Fig. 3, it is revealed that over one third (36%) of the peace actors were affirmative that CG members undergo training on the group norms, physical and techniques of machete fights. In contrast, less than one fifth (19%) said CG members don't get any exercise. The rest, over one third (45%) reporting having no idea on any pieces of training given to CG members.

In Fig. 4, it is apparent that over three fifths (72%) of the peace actors were of the view that CGs fight with each other, confirming an earlier finding of the study that rival gangs clash. Through probing, it was established that CGs fight:

... for power and supremacy over jurisdiction of certain social spaces in the community. Others reasons were cited as interference from rival gangs of their operations and revenge missions when one of their own has a grudge with a member of another gang.

Interview with Peace actors' Leader 17.6.2019, Mombasa, Kenya

Moreover, this study was interested in the nexus between CGs and VE in Mombasa County. It is within this framework of understanding that we sought to find out also whether peace actors were aware and had knowledge of VE. Findings of the study in Fig. 5 reveal that over four-fifths (84.5%) of the peace actors were mindful of VE Groups, with way less than two fifths (16%)



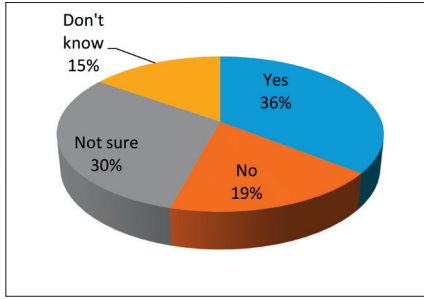


FIGURE 3 Training among the CG members  
SOURCE: FIELD DATA (2019)

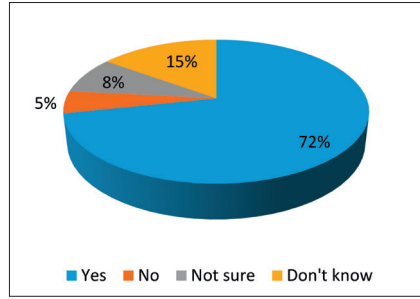


FIGURE 4 Fighting between CGs

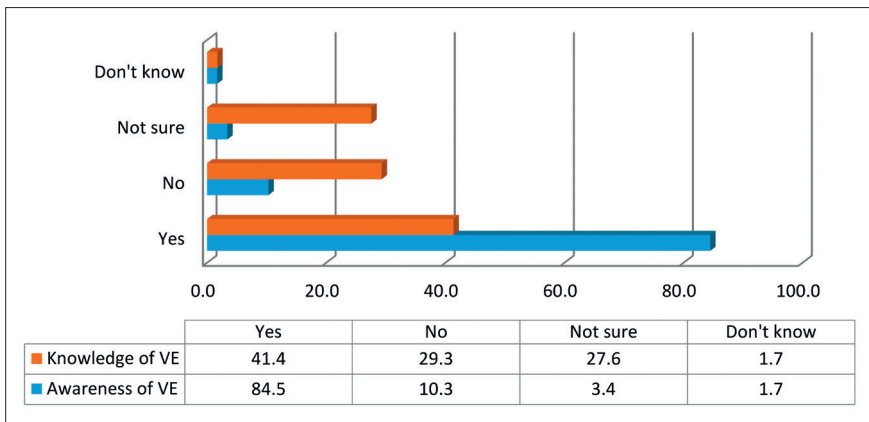


FIGURE 5 Awareness and knowledge of VE groups  
SOURCE: FIELD DATA (2019)

saying they were not aware. The finding on high (84.5%) awareness level among peace actors on VE is a reflection of how widespread the problem is in the county. This can be attributed to the high incidents of VE, which includes the killings of moderate sheikhs, disappearance and abductions of youth, events around youth takeover and closure of Masjid Musa, CG attacks among others.

However, when the peace actors were probed to at least reveal by name the VE groups they knew, it emerged that over two fifths (41.4%) knew specific VE groups and their operational spaces in the study area, while over half (58.6%) said they did not know. Those peace actors who said they knew VE groups mentioned the violent CGs such as *Wakali Kwanza*, *Wakali Wao*, *Wanjukuu wa Bibi*, *Watalia* and the dreaded Somali based VE group, the Al-Shabaab.

### 13 Perception of the Peace Actors on Level of CGs and VE in Mombasa County

It was within the confines of the study also to establish the level of CGs and VE in the study area. Understanding the levels was conceived to shade more light on not only the nexus but also the seriousness of the problem. Results of the study in Figs 6 and 7, show the perceived levels of CGs and VE in the area.

Figure 6 reveals that over three fifths (72.4%) of the peace actors indicated that the level of CGs was either high (41.4%) or very high (31.0%), while only slightly over one quarter (25.9%) were of the contrary opinion. The more significant (72.4%) percentage of the peace actors saying the level of CGs is high can be explained by the mushrooming gangs and the many incidents of robbery and killings, which have been attributed to these gangs in the county. The earlier observation of CGs training and mergers also attest to this observation of the high level of CGs in the county.

Similarly, results in Fig. 7 reveal almost three fifths (59.6%) of the peace actors indicating that the level of VE in the county was either high (42.1%) or very high (17.5%), while only over one third (36.8%) were of the contrary opinion. The nearly three fifths (59.6%) of the peace actors saying the level of VE is high may be associated with increased incidents of CGs and terrorism-related attacks in the area. Terror-related attacks were mentioned as a nascent social phenomenon to the peace actors, with many observed to have little or no knowledge about it. The lack of knowledge may be associated with the fear people have in engaging on matters of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) or Counter Terror (CT), with the latter being a preserve of only a specialized unit of the police force in Kenya.

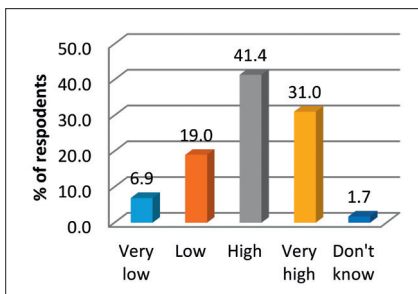


FIGURE 6 Perceived level of CGs  
SOURCE: FIELD DATA (2019)

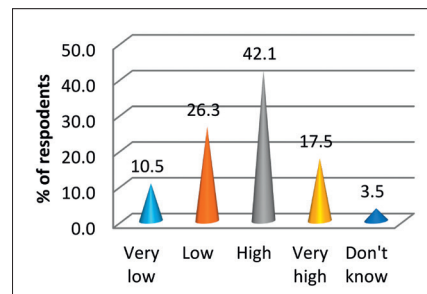


FIGURE 7 Perceived level of VE

**14 Reflections of the Results on the Nexus between CGs and VE in the Coast of Kenya**

The main objective of the study was to explore the connection between CGs and VE groups on the coast of Kenya, with a particular focus on the recruitment of members of CGs into VE groups. Because this could not be determined in real terms, a perceptive study was mooted to shed light on this hypothesized dynamics in VE work. From the findings of the survey over two fifths (43.1%) of the peace, actors knew someone who was a member of CG but has since left the groups. Conversely, over two fifths (48.3%) said that they knew someone in CGs and those they knew have not left the groups. The over two fifths (43.1%) of the peace actors who knew someone in CG groups who had since left the group raise the concern of where do those who leave CGs go? This study tried to find out what happens to those who leave CGs through the perception of peace actors. Results of the survey show that over three quarters (76%) of the peace actors mentioned that the CGs members they knew had not left their groups to join other groups including those engaged in VE activities. Only slightly more than one-tenth (14%) indicated that they knew those who had left CGs and joined VE groups in the area, while one-tenth (10%) were not sure.

The observed low (14%) percentage saying that they knew CGs members who joined VE groups, prompted the research team to ask a direct question to the peace actors on their perception of the connection between CGs and VE groups. Findings on the understanding of peace actors concerning the association between CGs and VE groups are carried in Fig. 8.

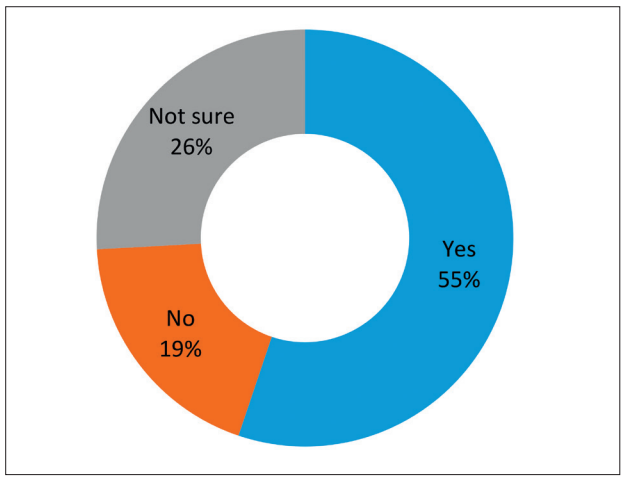


FIGURE 8  
 Connection between CGs and VE groups  
 SOURCE: FIELD DATA (2019)

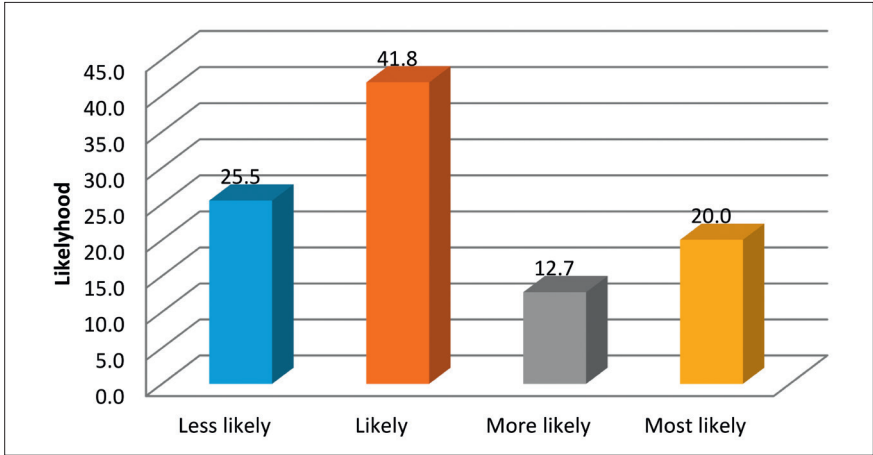


FIGURE 9 Graduation of CG members into VE groups  
SOURCE: FIELD DATA (2019)

Results in Fig. 8 show that over half (55%) of the peace actors are of the view that there is a link between CGs and VE groups, while less than one fifth (19%) reported to the contrary. The rest, over one quarter (26%) indicated that they were not sure of the connection. The higher (55%) percentage reporting a perceived relationship between CGs and VE groups implies a need for a closer investigation of this nascent dynamics. This is probably important because of the ease with which VE groups can be able to mobilize and recruit already violent individuals from CGs, compounding VE dynamics in the region and country.

The study pursued this further by asking peace actors of their perception with regard to the graduation of CG members into VE groups. It is revealed in Fig. 9 that nearly three quarters (74.5%) of the peace actors (41.8% likely, 12.7% more like and 20% most likely) were of the view that CG members were likely to be recruited into VE groups, while slightly over one quarter (25.5%) indicated that CG members were less likely to be recruited into VE groups. The higher (74.5%) percentage of peace actors saying it is expected for CG members to be recruited into VE groups may be explained by the susceptibility and vulnerability of CGs members who are subjected to similar push-pull factors to radicalization and recruitment into VE groups in the region. In any case, they have high propensity to be recruited owing to their exposure and involvement in violent activities in CGs.

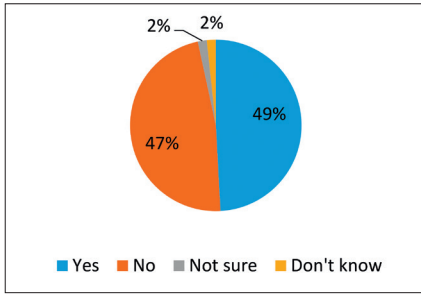


FIGURE 10 Trouble by CG and VE groups  
SOURCE: FIELD DATA (2019)

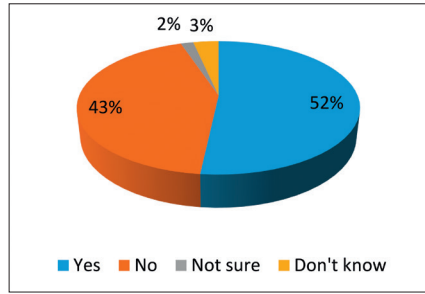


FIGURE 11 Arrests of CG and VE members

### 15 Reflections on the Government Efforts to Mitigate CGs and VE Groups

Understanding CGs and VE dynamics require insights into the role of the government, which is charged with the security of the people, in mitigating crime and VE. Indeed, government security machinery operates in social spaces to provide a conducive environment for human engagement and development. Accordingly, it was prudent for this study to assess government efforts towards mitigating CGs and VE at the coast. The reflections of the peace actors about various facets of CGs and VE and the role of the government in mitigation are shown in Figs 10 and 11.

Findings in Fig. 10 show that over two fifths (49%) of the peace actors conceived CGs and VE groups to be causing trouble to the community, while another over two fifths (47%) said they were not causing any trouble. The latter may have given their perception based on fear of being targeted. It was, in fact, observed that community members were living in fear of CGs and VE group members, especially of being targets of violent attacks. A participant reported that there:

... are cases of robbery with violence and innocent people being killed using machetes and others stabbed with knives and bicycle spokes in different areas of the town.

Interview with Peace actors' Leader 17.6.2019, Mombasa, Kenya

However, in mitigation Fig. 11 shows that over half (52%) of the peace actors indicated that members of the CGs were being arrested in large numbers in the

year predate the study, while over two fifths (43%) were of the contrary view. However, field observation is clear that most of them get released by the police. Two explanations clarify this observation, one from a security agent and the other from a community influencer. The voice from the security officer attests that:

... most of the arrested youth are either too young to face the Criminal Justice System (CJS) ... or there is not sufficient evidence to sustain successful prosecution.

Interview with Peace actors' Leader 17.6.2019, Mombasa, Kenya

Indeed, during fieldwork authors came to the reality that some of the CGs members were as young as 12 years, with many of them being below 18 years of age. This points probably to failed parenthood; the family is the first agent of socialization of children.

Another voice from a male community member showed an interesting pattern, where women, especially mothers were being blamed for the state of affairs. More precisely, it was stated that:

... police sometimes conduct swoops, ... usually on Friday nights, to net youth in social spaces and arrest them ... they are arrested because they don't have proper identification documents or rooming without definite reasons ... this sometimes nets the bad guys ... but by Monday morning most of them have been released ... mothers camp at the arresting police station to ensure their sons are released at all costs, whether they are mistakenly in police cells or are actual bad gang members.

Interview with Peace actors' Leader 17.6.2019, Mombasa, Kenya

From the preceding, peace actors were asked to give their evaluation on whether the government, which has security as its principal mandate is doing enough to mitigate CGs and VE groups in the county. Findings of the survey show that over half (52%) of the peace actors were of the view that the government was not doing enough to mitigate CGs and VE groups in the county. The rest, over one quarter (27%), less than one fifths (19%) and 2% said the security agencies are following various procedures to minimize insecurity, not sure and don't know respectively. The more than one half (52%) of the peace actors with the view that the government is not doing enough is a mirror of the national perception on government efforts to mitigate CGs and VE groups in the country and across the Kenyan borders.

## 16 Conclusion

The study set out to establish whether there is a nexus between CGs and VE groups on the coast of Kenya. Results showed that over half (55%) of the peace actors were of the view that there is a link between CGs and VE groups. It also emerged that nearly three quarters (74.5%) of the interviewed peace actors, in the following proportions (41.8% likely, 12.7% more like and 20% most likely), were of the view that CG members were likely to graduate or be recruited into VE groups. These findings of the nexus and graduation from CGs into VE groups imply increased insecurity in the region. More so, the implication for an urgent need into a closer investigation of this perceived nascent dynamics. The sense of urgency is critical because of the changing dynamics of violent extremism in the coast region. This is especially the case probably in the ease with which VE groups can now be able to mobilize and recruit already passionate individuals from CGs, compounding VE dynamics in the region and country. Finally, the revelation by peace actors that CGs are training and *fixing machete fighting matches* with their rivals in the full glare of the community is a new dynamic deserving urgent intervention by stakeholders before it gets out of control.

## References

- Adams, T.M. 2011. *Chronic Violence and its Reproduction: Perverse Trends in Social Relations, Citizenship and Democracy in Latin America*, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- Aldridge, J., J. Medina and R. Ralphs. 2008. "Dangers and problems of doing 'gang' research in the UK", in van Gemert, F., Peterson, D. and Lien, I.-L., eds. *Street Gangs, Migration and Ethnicity*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing.
- Berkovic, N. 2014. "High Court rejects challenge to controversial nsw bikie laws", *The Australian*.
- Boga, H. 2016. Working with the Counties and National Government to address violent Extremism in the Coast Region of Kenya: Bricks Project Proposal.
- Botha, A. 2013. "Assessing the Vulnerability of Kenyan Youths to Radicalisation and Extremism", *Institute for Security Studies Papers*, 245: 28–28.
- Botha, A. 2014. "Radicalisation in Kenya. Recruitment to al-Shabaab and the Mombasa Republican Council", *Institute for Security Studies Papers*, 265: 28–28.
- Broussard, G. 2016. "The evolving role of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in fighting wildlife and forest crimes", in Elliott, L. and Schaedla, W.H. eds. *Handbook of Transnational Environmental Crime*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

- Bunker, R.J. and J.P. Sullivan. 2011. "Integrating Feral Cities and Third Phase Cartels/ Third Generation Gangs Research: The Rise of Criminal (Narco) City Networks and BlackFor", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 22 (5): 764–786.
- Cachalia, R.C., U. Salifu and I. Ndung'u. 2016. "The Dynamics of Youth Radicalisation in Africa: Reviewing the Current Evidence", *Institute for Security Studies Papers*, 296: 1–32.
- De Poot, C.J., A. Sonnenschein, M.R.J. Soudijn, J.G. Bijen, J. G. and M.W. Verkuylen. 2011. *Jihadi Terrorism in The Netherlands*. Meppel: Boom Juridische uitgevers.
- De Silva, S. 2017. *Role of Education in the Prevention of Violent*. Worldbank Documents.
- De Smedt, J. 2009. "No Raila, No Peace! Big Man Politics and Election Violence at the Kibera Grassroots", *African Affairs*, 108 (433): 581–598.
- Dos Reis, K.M. 2007. "The Influence of Gangsterism on the Morale of Educators on the Cape Flats, Western Cape" Doctoral Dissertation: Cape Peninsula University of Technology.
- Dur, R. and J. Van Der Weele. 2013. "Status-Seeking in Criminal Subcultures and the Double Dividend of Zero-Tolerance", *Journal of Public Economic Theory*, 15 (1): 77–93.
- Gastrow, P. 2011. *Termites at Work: Transnational Organized Crime and State Erosion in Kenya*. New York: International Peace Institute.
- Gottschalk, P. and V. Markovic. 2014. "Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs): The Case of Combating Criminal Biker Gangs", *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*, 11 (1): 30–44.
- Hübschle, A. 2011. "From Theory to Practice: Exploring the Organised Crime-Terror Nexus in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 5 (3/4): 81–95.
- Ibrahim, A. 2015. "Politics, Controversy and Design in Post 9/11 American Mosques: The Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center, Roxbury, Massachusetts", Ph.D. Dissertation: State University of New York at Binghamton.
- Jacobs, A. 2011. "Nairobi Burning: Kenya's post-election violence from the perspective of the urban poor", PRIF-Report No. 110. DEU.
- Khamis, N. 2008. *Kenya: Ballots to Bullets – Organized Political Violence and Kenya's Crisis of Governance*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
- Kinnes, I. 2000. *From Urban Street Gangs to Criminal Empires: The Changing Face of Gangs in the Western Cape*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.
- Klein, M.W. and C.L. Maxson. 2010. *Street Gang Patterns and Policies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klopp, J. and P. Kamungi. 2008. "Violence and Elections: Will Kenya Collapse?", *World Policy Journal*, 24 (4), 11–18.
- Makarenko, T. 2004. "The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism", *Global Crime*, 6 (1), 129–145.



- Mandaville, P. and S. Hamid. 2018. *Islam as Statecraft: How Governments Use Religion in Foreign Policy*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- Markovic, V. 2013. The Contemporary Face of Transnational Criminal Organizations and the Threat they Pose to US National Interest: A Global Perspective. "The contemporary face of transnational criminal organizations and the threat they pose to U.S. national interest: A global perspective", in Riley, B. and Kiernan, K., eds. *The "New" Face of Transnational Crime Organizations (TCOs): A Geopolitical Perspective and Implications to U.S. National Security*. Kiernan Group Holdings.
- Mghanga, M. (2010). *Usipoziba ufa utajenga ukuta: Land, Elections, and Conflicts in Kenya's Coast Province*. Nairobi: Heinrich Böll Stiftung.
- Miraglia, P., R. Ochoa and I. Briscoe. 2012. *Transnational Organised Crime and Fragile States*. OECD.
- Napoleoni, L. 2004. "The New Economy of Terror: How Terrorism Is Financed", *Forum on Crime and Society*, 4 (1): 31–48.
- Ndungu, I. and U. Salifu. 2017. *The Role of Women in Violent Extremism in Kenya*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.
- Ndung'u, J. and M. Wepundi. 2012. *Transition and Reform: People's Peacemaking Perspectives on Kenya's Post-2008 Political Crisis and Lessons for the Future*. Saferworld.
- O'Regan, D. 2012. "Narco-States: Africa's Next Menace", *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/13/opinion/narco-states-africas-next-menace.html>.
- Okoth-Okombo, D. and O. Sana. 2010. *Balaa Mitaani: The Challenge of Mending Ethnic Relations in the Nairobi Slums*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Olson, E.L. 2012. *Considering New Strategies for Confronting Organized Crime in Mexico*. Mexico Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- Patrick, S. 2011. *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Read, S., S. Santatzoglou and A. Wrigley. 2018. *Loss, Dying and Bereavement in the Criminal Justice System*. Routledge.
- Rodgers, D., R. Muggah and C. Stevenson. 2009. *Gangs of Central America: Causes, Costs, and Interventions*. Geneva: Small Arms Survey.
- Ruteere, M. (2009). "Dilemmas of Crime, Human Rights and the Politics of Mungiki Violence in Kenya". doi:10.2139/ssrn.1462685.
- Scambary, J. (2009). *Groups, Gangs, and Armed Violence in Timor-Leste*. TLAVA.
- Sewing, P., T. Weiss and F. Sarrica. 2009. *Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa: A Threat Assessment*. Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
- Shauri, H. 2015. *Heroin Abuse: Addiction, Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration*. LAP Lambert Academic.

- Shauri, H.S. and B. Obeka. 2018. "Towards Strengthening Crime Reporting and Mitigation of Challenges of Insecurity in Kilifi County, Kenya", *International Journal of Innovative Studies in Sociology and Humanities*, 3 (8).
- Shauri, H.S. 2018. "Impact of Violent Extremism and Recruitment of Spouses on Widows in the Coastal Region of Kenya", *The African Review*, 45 (1), 96–116.
- Sinai, J. 2018. *Global Terrorism Index 2017: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism*. Institute for Economics and Peace.
- Treverton, G. F. 2009. *Film Piracy, Organized Crime, and Terrorism*. Rand Corporation.
- United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime. 2010. *World Drug Report 2010*. United Nations Publications.