

Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, January – December 2023

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About this report

This report draws from the Terror Attacks and Arrests Observatory of the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRICS Terrorism Observatory). It presents data collected, disaggregated, and analysed from January 1 to December 31 2023. CHRICS uses verified traditional and new media reports and information from our CVE research hub partners to generate a database on terror-related occurrences in Kenya. Learn about the CVE research hub [here](#).

CHRICS, through the Terrorism Observatory, generates a database on terror-related occurrences in Kenya using verified traditional and new media reports and information from our CVE research hub partners. Due to limitations of getting data, the information provided is not comprehensive and is based solely on what CHRICS could verify.

Key Highlights

- Reports have pointed to numerous foiled terror attacks by security officials. Attacks decreased by 6.5% from 77 in 2022 to 72 reported in 2023
- June recorded the highest number of attacks at 19, with at least 58 fatalities and 58 people injured
- Four counties were affected: 25 attacks in Mandera; 21 in Lamu; 23 in Garissa; and 3 in Wajir;
- 178 people were killed in the 2023 terror attacks compared to 116 in 2022.
- Fatalities included 75 security officials, 68 Al-Shabaab militants, 30 civilians, 1 government official, and 4 unspecified cases.
- 151 people were injured: security officials at 93, civilians at 45, Al-Shabaab militants at 10, and 3 unspecified.
- Three people were kidnapped: 2 in Lamu and 1 in Garissa.
- 59 people were arrested for terror-related offences: 46 men, 8 women, and 5 individuals whose gender was not specified.
- The nationalities of those arrested were 16 Kenyans, 10 Tanzanians, 3 Somali citizens, 1 Ugandan, and 29 undisclosed.

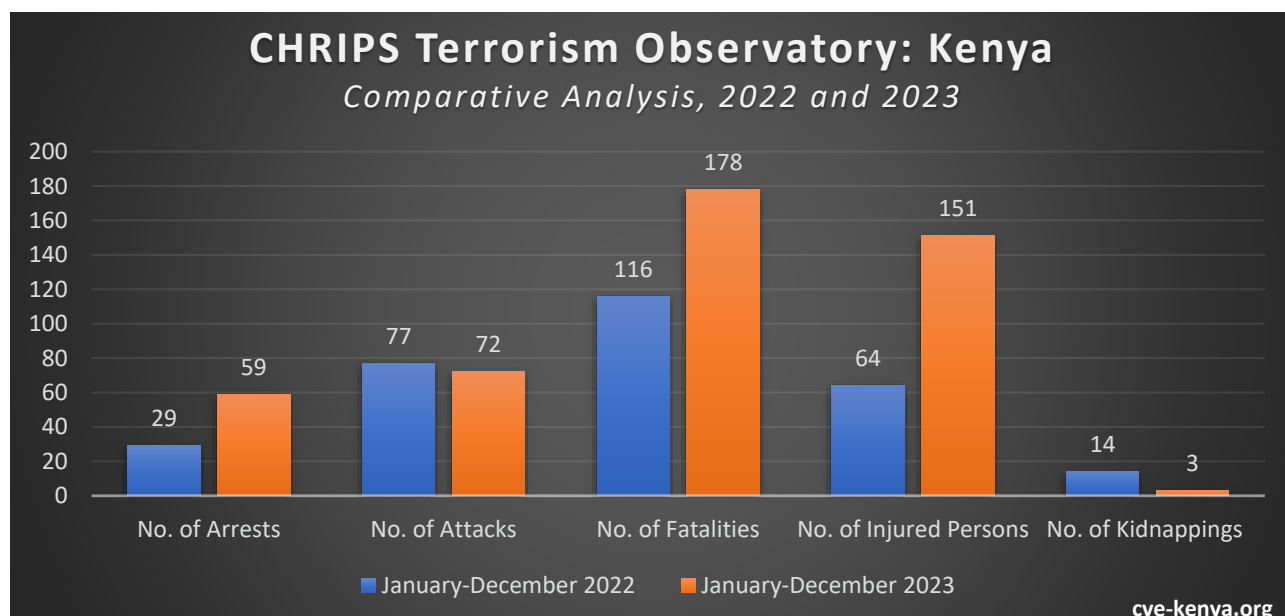


Figure 1: Comparative Analysis, 2022 and 2023

Terror Attacks

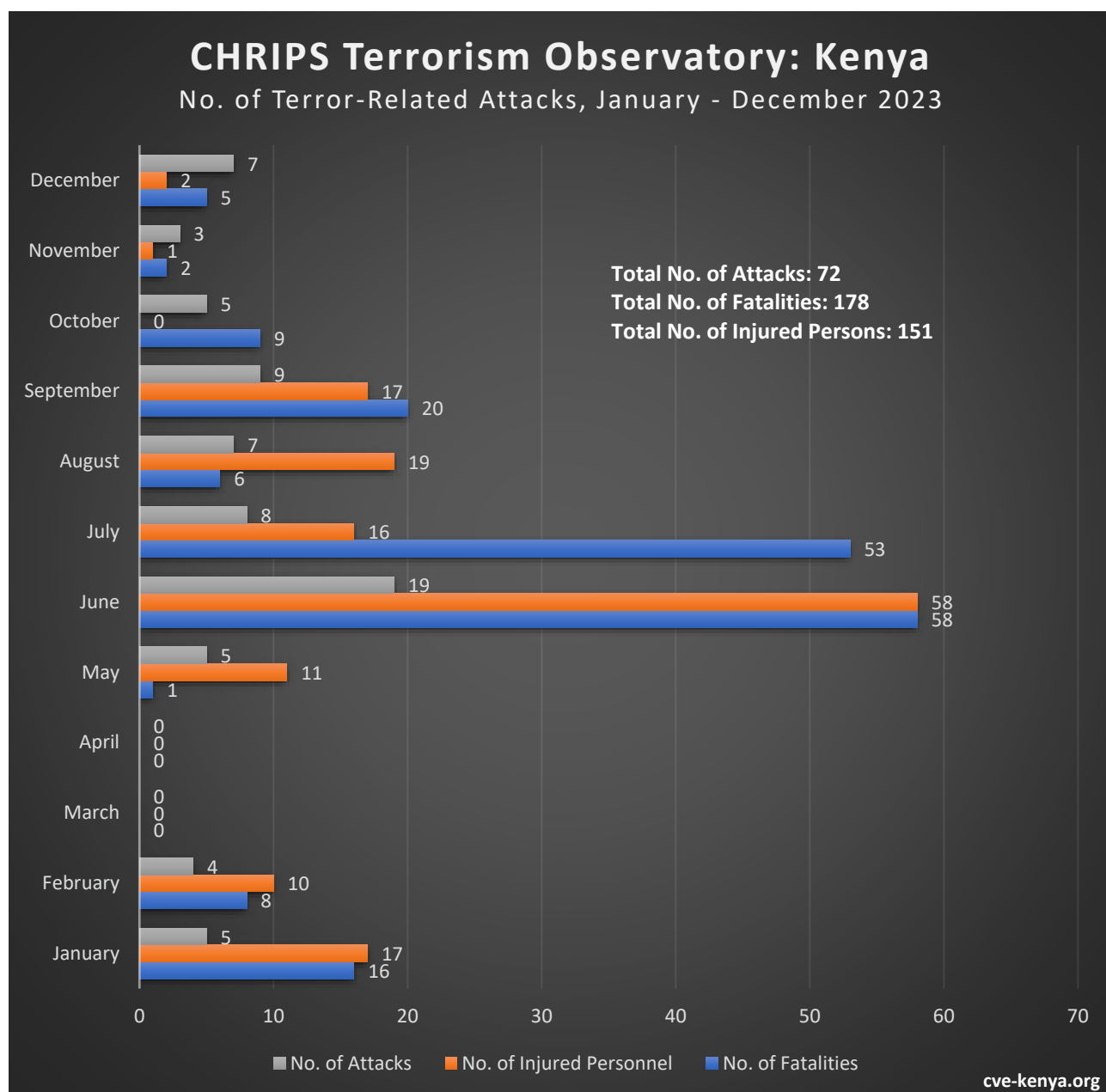


Figure 2: Number of terror-related attacks, January - December 2023

CHRIPS observatory recorded Seventy-two terror-related attacks in 2023, a 5.2% decrease compared to 77 in 2022. As illustrated in Figure 2 above, nine attacks were in the first two months of the year, with 16 deaths in January and 8 in February, and 27 people were injured. There were no attacks, fatalities, or injuries in March and April. Five attacks were recorded in May, followed by an uptick in June, which saw the highest number of attacks (19), fatalities (58), and injured people (58) in the year. On June 13, five attacks, one in Mandera and Lamu and three in Garissa, yielding

the death of 32 security officials. Similarly, on June 21, three attacks were recorded in Mandera, resulting in five security officials being injured after their vehicle ran over an improvised explosive device (IED), and another targeted a civilian bus, killing four civilians and wounding six others. July accounted for the second-highest number of fatalities, with 53 deaths and more than 16 people injured. For instance, on July 5, Al-Shabaab militants attacked security officials at their camp in Ogorwen village, Mandera County.

A battle resulted in the deaths of 20 suspected Al-Shabaab militants and eight security officers injured¹. On July 7, a similar attack was recorded in Orgene

village, Mandera County, resulting in the deaths of 23 Al-Shabaab militants, 6 Kenya Special Forces officers and 8 other security officials injured².

Location of Attacks

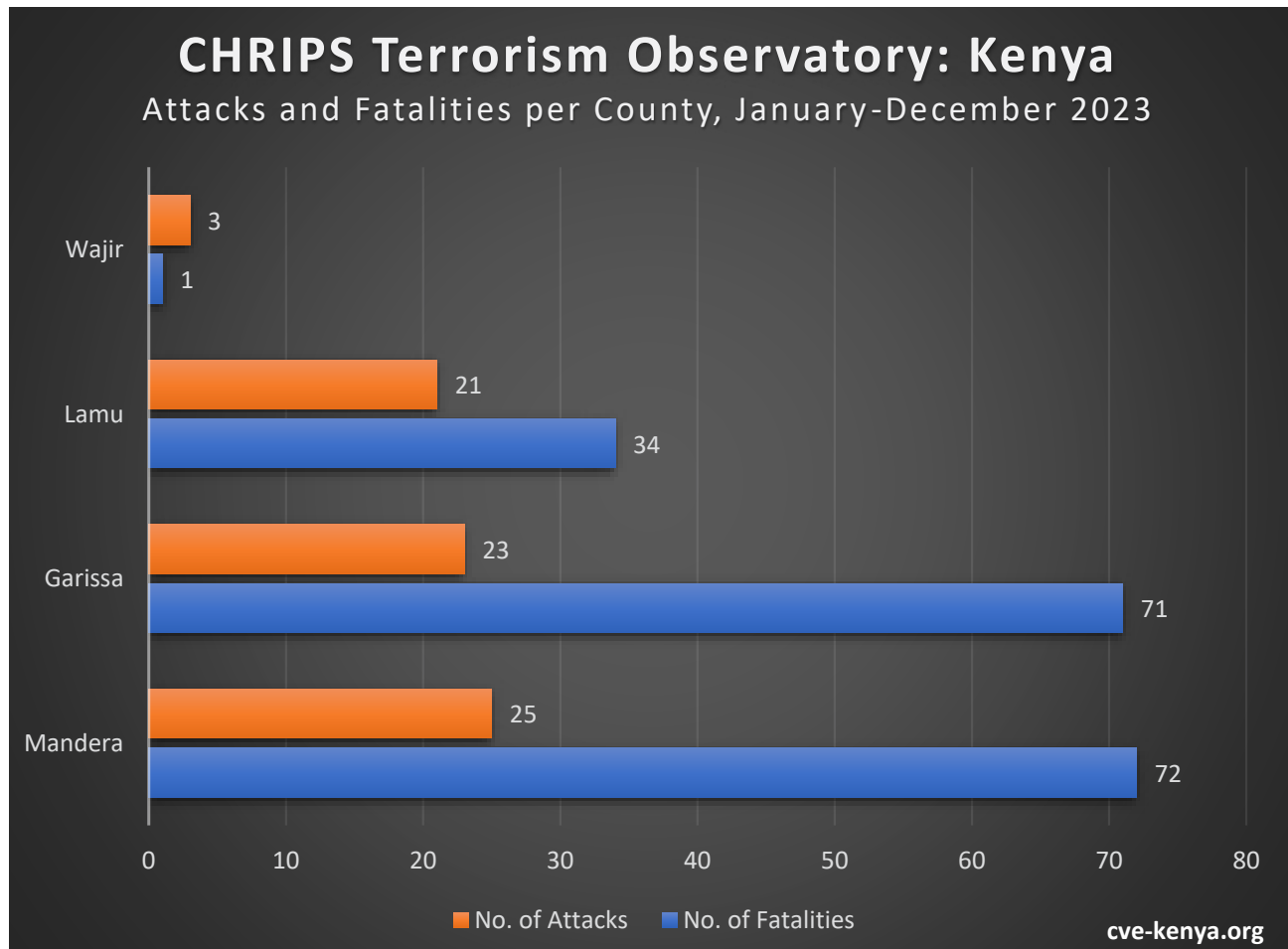


Figure 3: Attacks and Fatalities per County, January – December 2023

In the period under review, attacks were reported in four counties in the North Eastern and coastal regions of Kenya. Most of the attacks were in Mandera, where 25 terror-related attacks and 72 fatalities were

reported in different incidents. The second-highest number of attacks, 23, was recorded in Garissa, which also had the second-highest number of deaths at 71.

1 NTV Kenya. (2023) "NTV Kenya: 20 suspected Al Shabaab militants killed in Mandera ambush," NTV Kenya, July, <https://ntvkenya.co.ke/news/20-al-shabaab-militants-fatally-injured-in-mandera-ambush/> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

2 Ahmed H. (2023) "Kenya Special Forces kill 23 Al-Shabab militants," Voice of America, July 7, <https://www.voanews.com/a/kenya-special-forces-kill-23-al-shabab-militants-/7171526.html> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

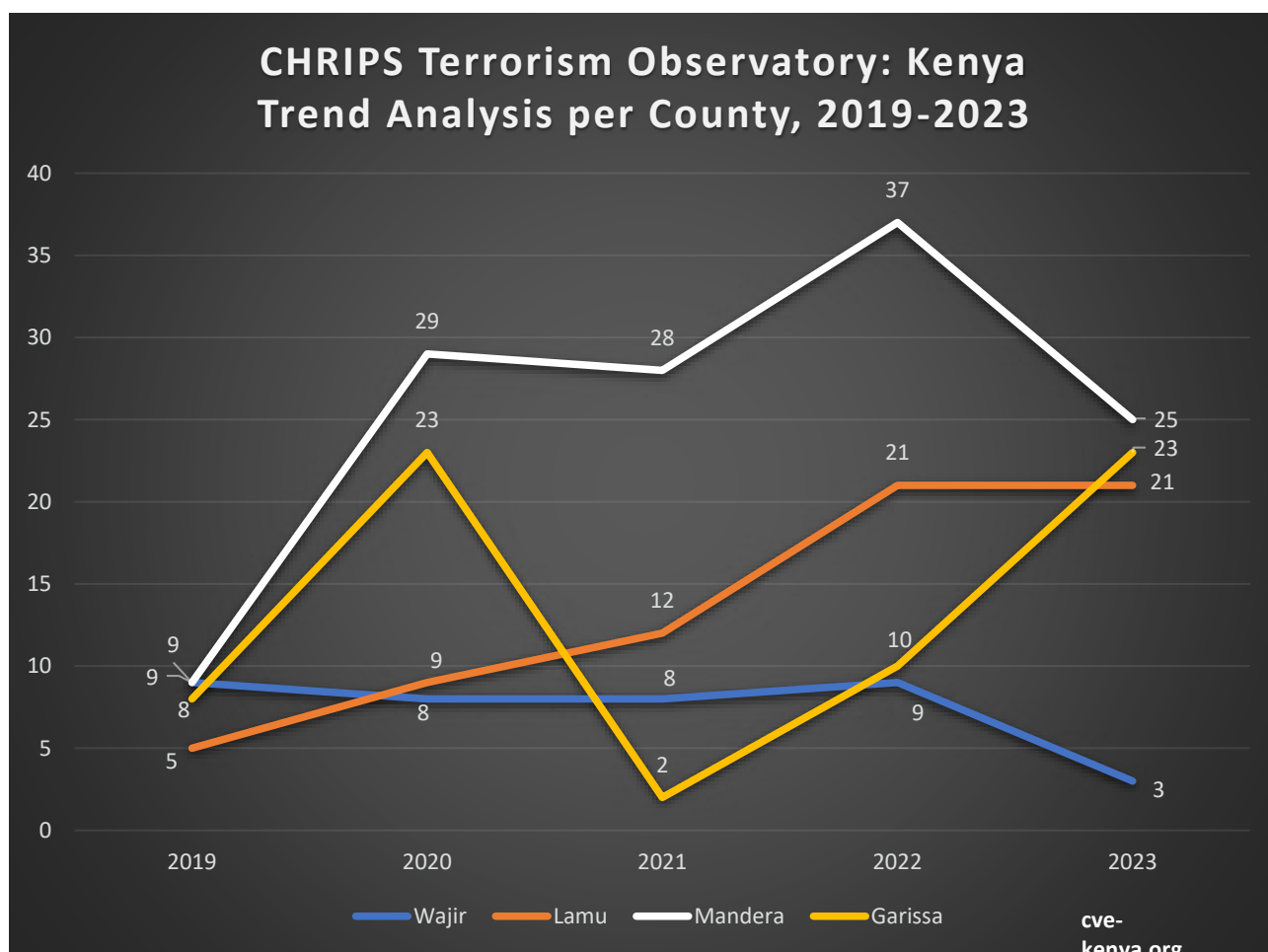


Figure 4: Trend Analysis per County 2019 - 2023

Mandera County has consistently recorded the highest number of attacks in Kenya in the last five years. Attacks increased from 9 in 2019 to 29 in 2020, from 28 in 2021 to 37 in 2022 but decreased to 25 in 2023. Recorded attacks in Garissa went from 8 in 2019 to 23 in 2020

but sharply reduced with 21 fewer attacks in 2021, jumping to 10 in 2022 and 23 in 2023. Lamu has also seen a steady rise in attacks, while CHRIPS has recorded a decrease in Wajir over the last five years.

Targets

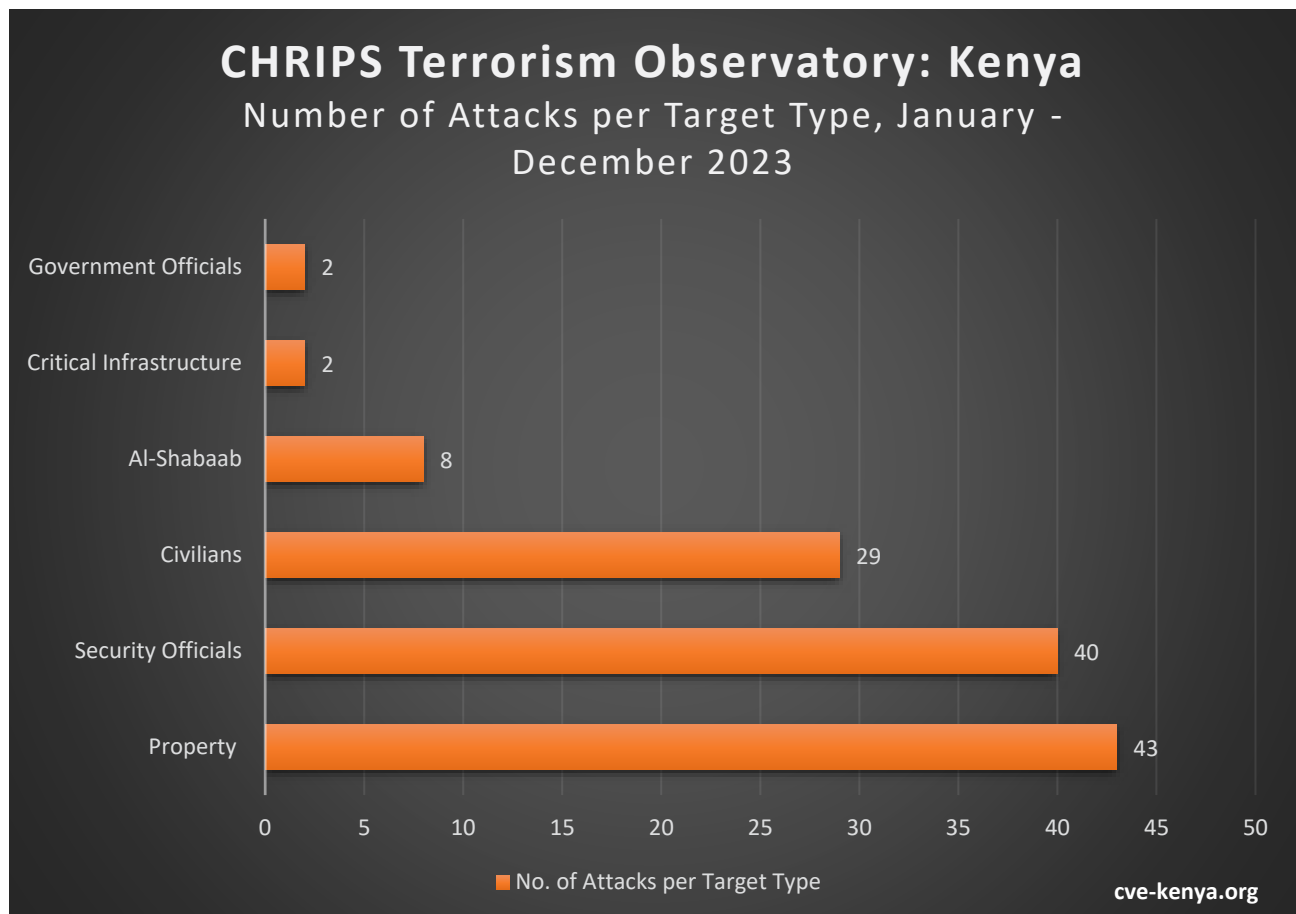


Figure 5: Number of attacks per target type, January - December 2023.

Out of 72 attacks reported during the period under review, close to 50% were targeted at security officials (Figure 8). For example, on May 13, suspected Al-Shabaab attackers ambushed and opened fire on a truck in Rhamu, Mandera County, ferrying 25 GSU Units headed to Mandera from Nairobi. The vehicles (a lorry and a land cruiser) were sprayed with bullets, but only two officers were injured, while the rest jumped off the moving cars and escaped unhurt³. Suspected Al-Shabaab militants reportedly attacked police posts and stations to target security officials in Garissa. On December 2, suspected Al-Shabaab militants reportedly shot at five police posts in Garissa

simultaneously, resulting in no fatalities, one injured police officer, and damaged property within the police posts⁴. As recorded in 2020 and 2021, critical infrastructure remains a target in terror-related attacks. In 2023, Al Shabaab militants destroyed three communication masts with explosives in three different attacks, all in Mandera. Other damaged properties included one chopper in Boni Forest, Lamu County, a church⁵ in Salama Village, Lamu County, several houses, and a security official's home. Civilians also were frequent targets of terror-related attacks by suspected violent extremist groups, as well as passenger buses and villages⁶.

3 Ombati, C. "Two GSU Staff Injured in Terror Related Gun Attack in Rhamu, Mandera," The Star, May 2023. <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2023-05-14-two-gsu-staff-injured-in-terror-related-gun-attack-in-rhamu-mandera/> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

4 Ombati, C. "Police Repulse Twin Attacks on Their Bases in Garissa," The Star, December 2023, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/realtime/2023-12-02-police-repulse-twin-attacks-on-their-bases-in-garissa/> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

5 Kazungu, K. (2023) "15 Terrorist attacks, 37 dead: Lamu's deadliest year," Nation, December 2023, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/15-terrorist-attacks-37-dead-lamu-s-deadliest-year--4472702> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

6 Ombati, C. "Police Kill 2 al Shabaab Doctors in Garissa Raid," The Star, October 2023, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2023-10-30-police-kill-2-al-shabaab-doctors-in-garissa-raid/> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

For instance, at least 44 houses were burnt down in Lamu and Mandera Counties, and livestock and foodstuff were stolen⁷. In addition, three civilians were abducted by suspected Al-Shabaab militants: 2 in Lamu and 1 in Garissa. In one case in Lamu, a Form

3 student was among five civilians killed in Salama and Juhudi villages, Lamu County⁸. One government official was attacked in a single incident recorded during the period under review in Lamu⁹.

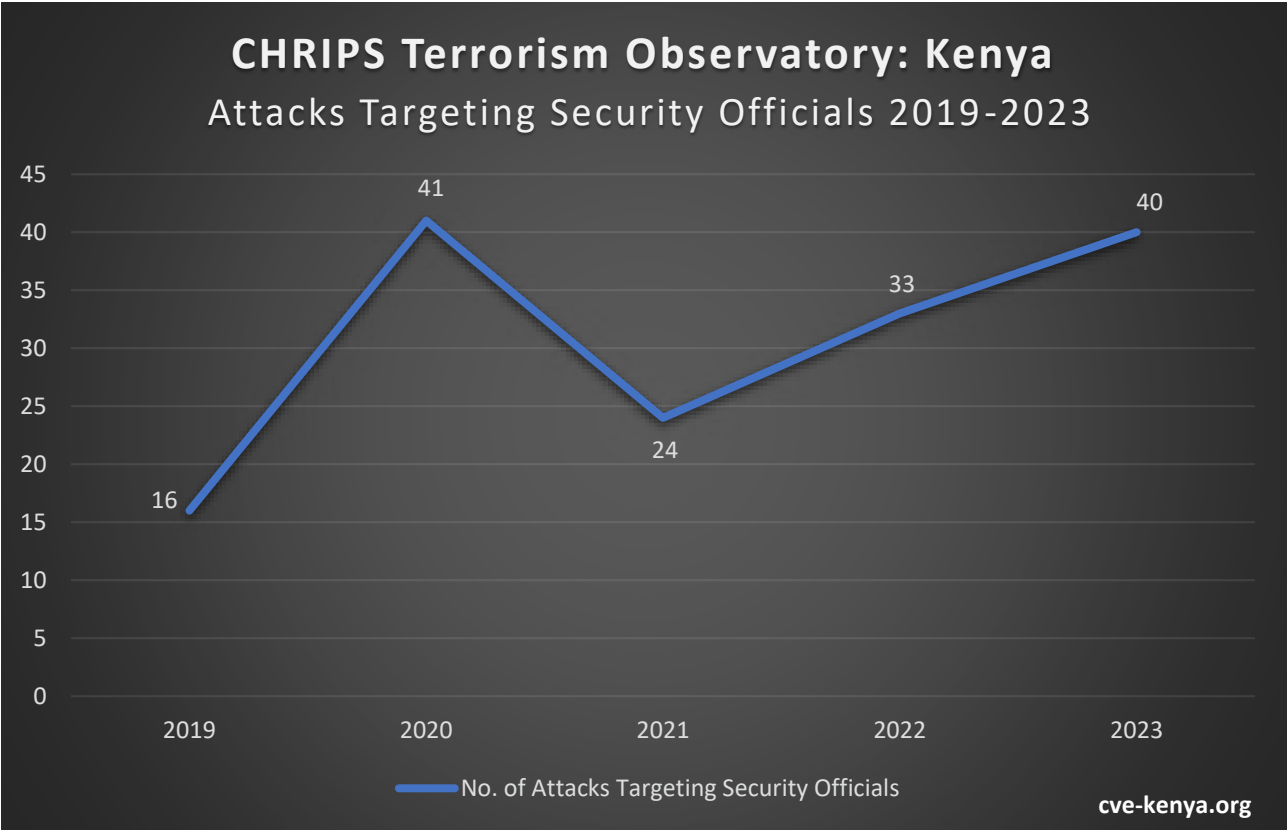


Figure 6: Number of attacks targeting security officials from 2019 - 2023

As seen in Figure 6, the number of attacks targeting security officials increased by 21.2% during the review period compared to 2022. Security officials were targeted 40 times in 2023, with the highest number

in Mandera at 18 times, 14 attacks in Garissa, 7 in Lamu, and one in Wajir. Most attacks targeting security officials were by suspected Al-Shabaab militants, mainly using explosive devices.

7 Ombati, C. "Police Kill 2 al Shabaab Doctors in Garissa Raid," The Star, October 2023, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2023-10-30-police-kill-2-al-shabaab-doctors-in-garissa-raid/> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

8 Praxides, C. "Residents Decry Persistent Attacks in Lamu despite KDF Presence," The Star, August 2023, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/coast/2023-08-16-residents-decry-persistent-attacks-in-lamu-despite-kdf-presence/> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

9 Kazungu.

Fatalities and Injured Persons

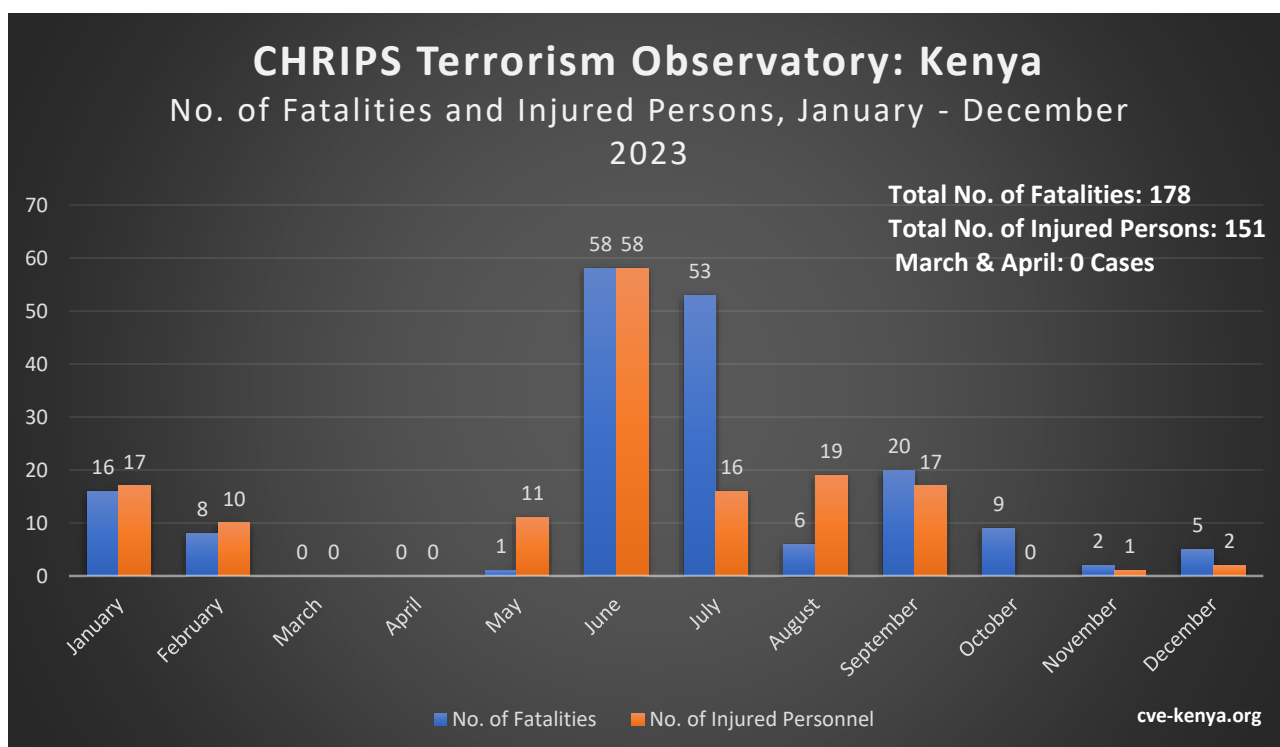


Figure 7: Fatalities and Injured Persons, January - December 2023

An estimated 178 people died and 151 injured due to terror-related incidents in 2023. The highest fatalities were reported in January, June, July, and September. No deaths or injuries were recorded in March and April. No injured persons were reported in October. The highest number of injuries was recorded in June, resulting from 19 attacks.

For instance, on June 13, suspected terror group militants targeted security officials in the Sangailu

area, Garissa County, where they allegedly planted improvised explosive devices (IED) that resulted in 10 fatalities from security officials. When the responding team of National Police Reservists arrived, they met resistance that resulted in 6 more fatalities¹⁰.

On June 18, 10 GSU and 8 KDF officers were injured in Lamu when the armoured personnel carrier (APC) they were travelling in ran over an Improvised Explosive Device (IED)¹¹.

¹⁰ Ombati C. (2023) "Panic as al Shabaab stops bus with 55 passengers in search of non-locals in Wajir," The Star, June, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/realtime/2023-06-16-panic-as-al-shabaab-stops-bus-with-55-passengers-in-search-of-non-locals-in-wajir/> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

¹¹ Ombati C. (2023) "2 KDF officers killed, 20 injured in Lamu al Shabaab attack," The Star, June, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2023-06-18-2-kdf-officers-killed-20-injured-in-lamu-al-shabaab-attack/> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

CHRIPS Terrorism Observatory: Kenya

No. of Fatalities, January - December 2023

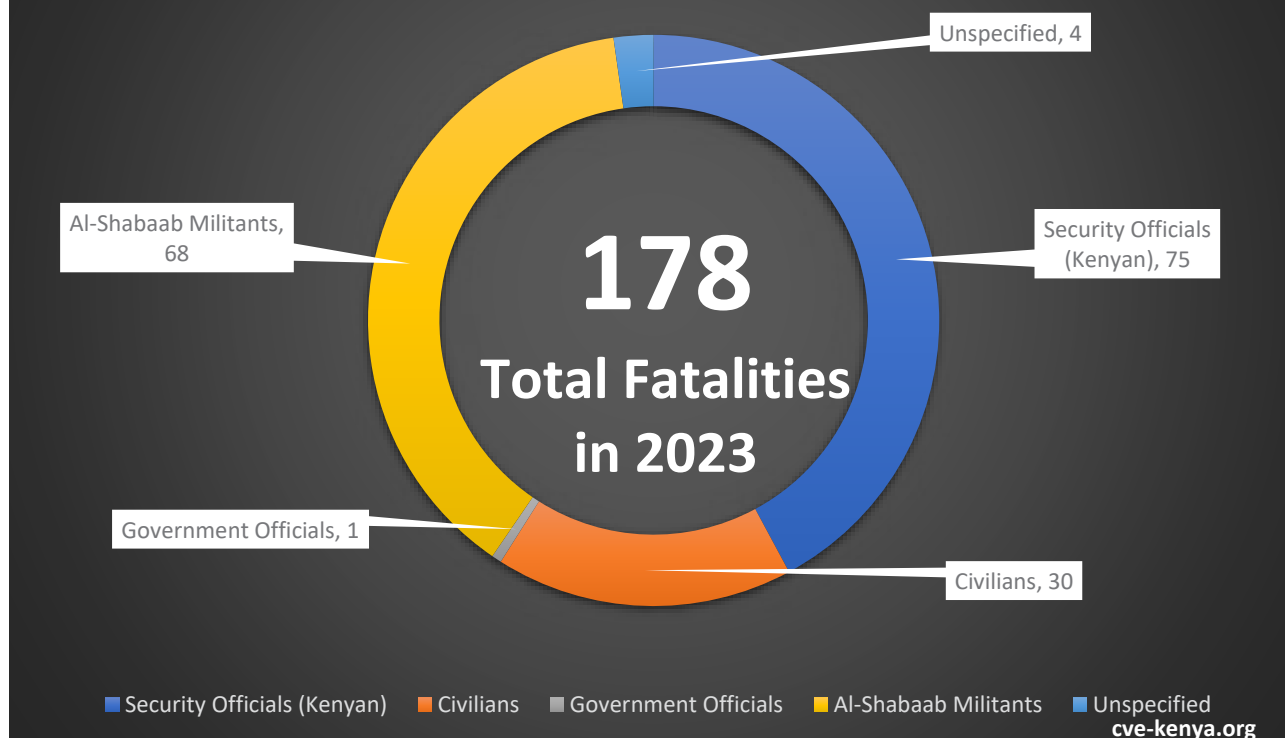


Figure 8: Number of Fatalities, January - December 2023

The highest number of fatalities recorded were among security officials (75). However, the number of suspected Al-Shabaab militants killed in 2023 rose by 79% compared to 2022. In 2023, at least five police posts and camps were attacked, resulting in the

deaths of both security officials and militants. One government staff was killed in Mandera on June 21¹², while on August 1, a Hindi Ward Representative's wife was killed in Lamu¹³.

12 Owenga E. (2023) "Two officers, government staff killed in Mandera IED attack," Citizen Digital, June 21, <https://www.citizen.digital/news/two-officers-government-staff-killed-in-mandera-ied-attack-n322134> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

13 Kazungu.

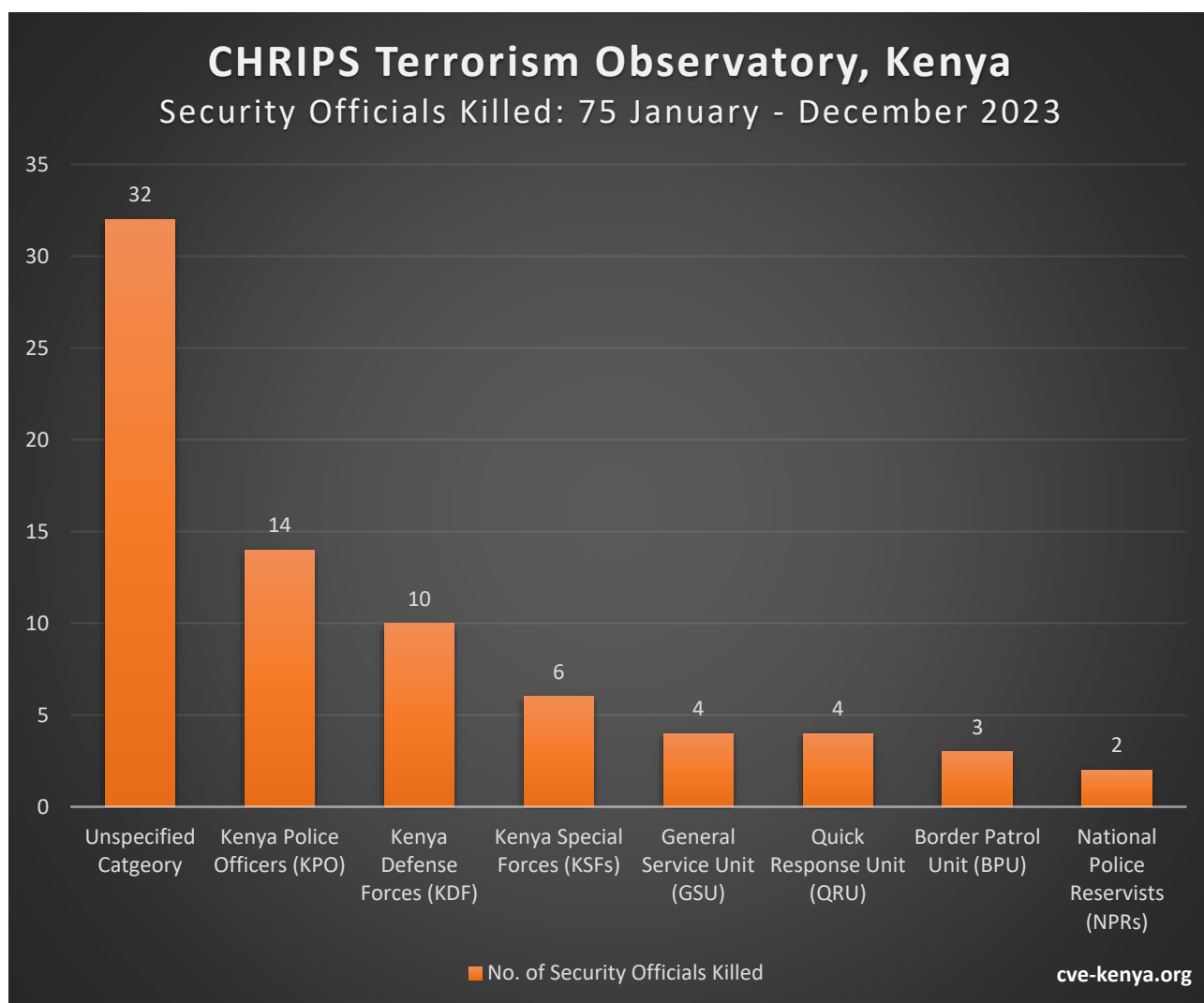


Figure 9: Security Officials Killed, January - December 2023

In 2023, 75 security officials from diverse categories were killed, an increase of 42 from 2022, which had 33 security officials killed. During the period under review, most security officials have been directly targeted in

transit, during patrol, and in police stations. Garissa recorded the highest number of fatalities among security officials, at 41; Mandera had 21, and Lamu had 12 deaths.

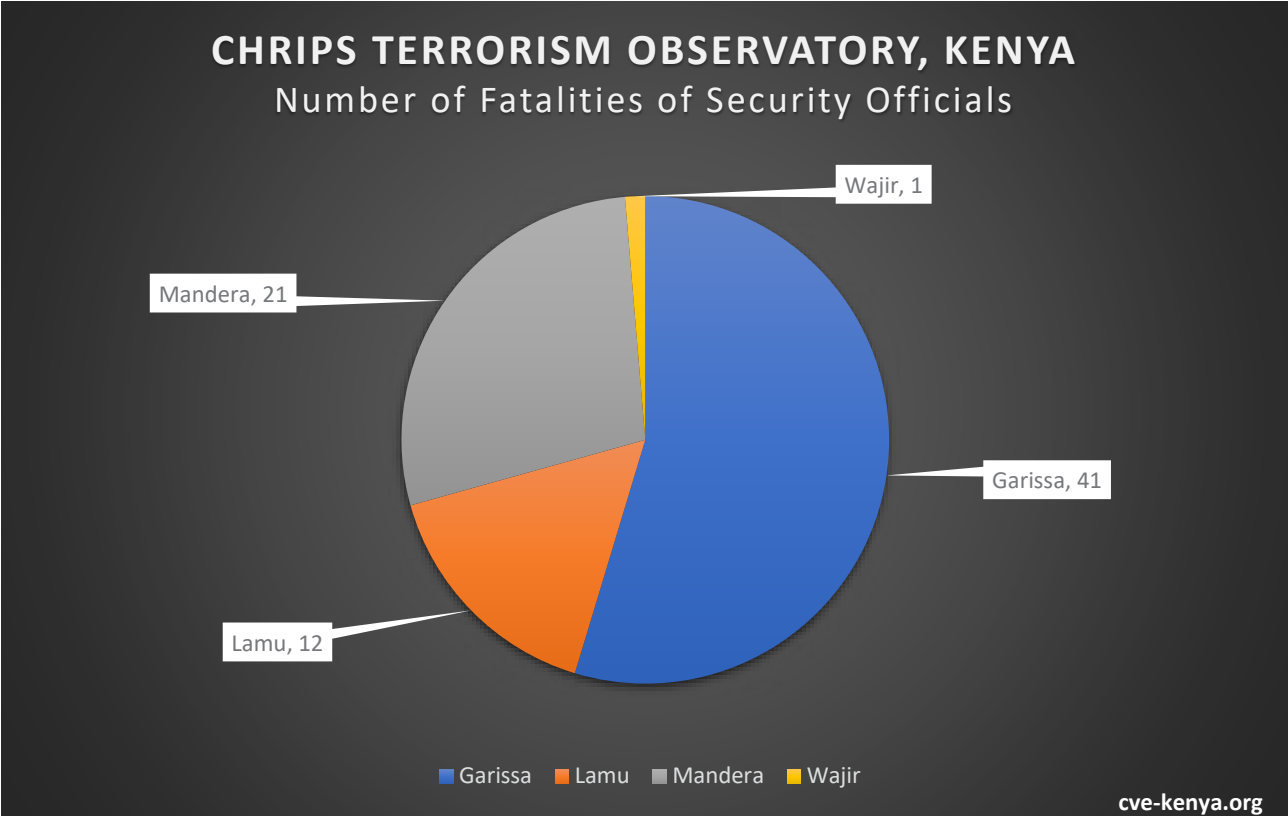


Figure 10: Number of Fatalities of Security Officials, January - December 2023

Weapons Used

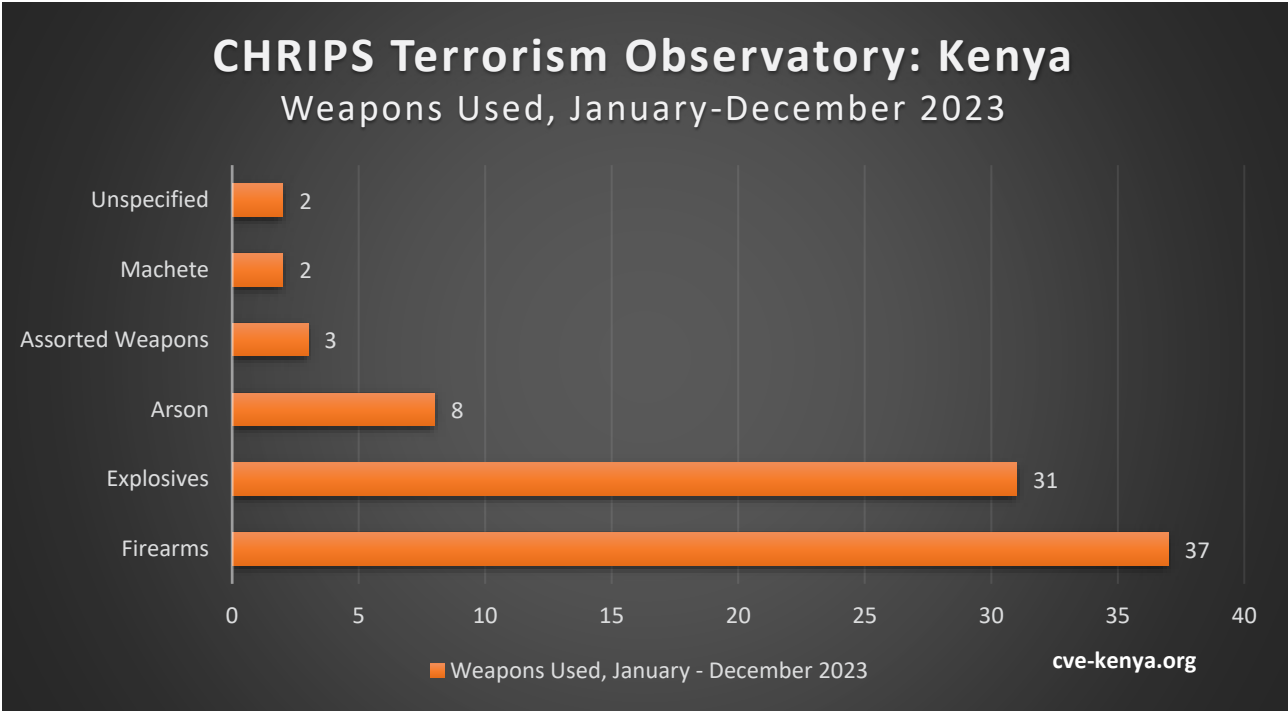


Figure 11: Weapons used, January - December 2023

Firearms were the most utilised weapons of attack during the period under review, having been employed in 37 terror-related incidents, closely followed by explosives, which were used in 30 terror incidents.

Explosives, including rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), bombs, landmines, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), were the second most used weapons by terrorists during the period under review. IEDs have become the most prevalently used weapons due to their easy portability capabilities, easier assembling, and more devastating impact¹⁴. IEDs have mainly been

placed along major roads and highways in Garissa, Mandera, and Lamu Counties. Arson was also used in attacks to target property and villages in Lamu County. On August 21, suspected terrorists burnt down eight houses (some belonging to security officials) and a church in Salama Village, Lamu County¹⁵.

Suspected Al Shabaab militants used machetes to behead civilians on June 24 in Juhudi and Salama villages¹⁶. A similar incident was recorded at Lango la Simba on August 22 and in Widho-Mashambani on September 20, all in Lamu County¹⁷.

Terror-Related Arrests

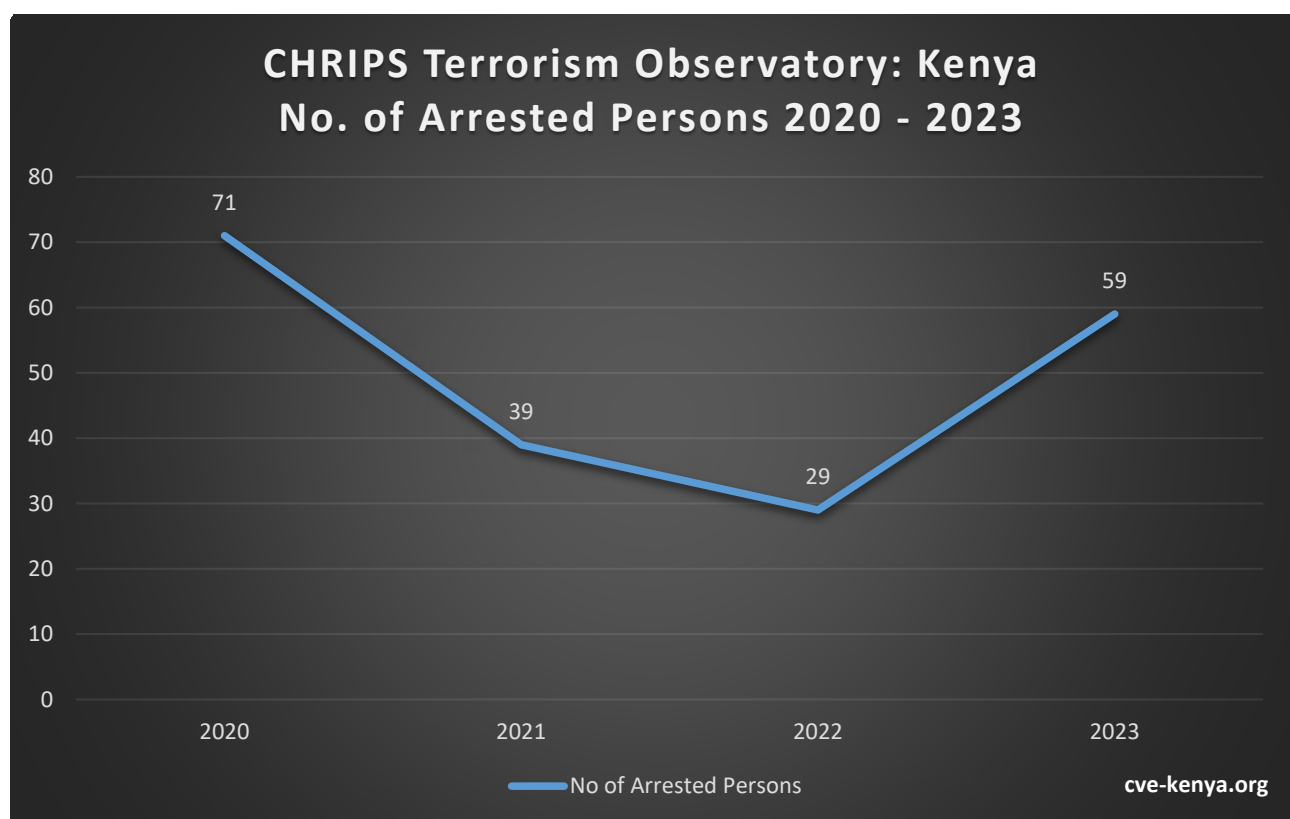


Figure 12: Number of Arrested Persons 2020 - 2023

14 Kipkemoi F. (2023) "Officer injured in Garissa al Shabab attack," The Star, November, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/realtime/2023-11-29-officer-injured-in-garissa-al-shabab-attack/> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

15 Kazungu.

16 Kazungu.

17 Kazungu.

In 2023, collected media reports revealed that 59 people had been arrested on different counts of terrorism or being involved in terror-related activity. This is an increase from 29 people arrested in 2022 and an increase from 39 people arrested in 2021. In 2020, CHRIPS recorded 71 arrests.

Those arrested were charged and accused of being agents and members of terror groups, such as Al-Shabaab or from the Islamic State of Syria (ISIS); facilitating and aiding activities of a terror group, including transporting suspected terror members

across borders, spreading related propaganda, shipping weaponry, medical supplies; possessing illegal firearms; links to terror activities; and two occasions on religious-related terror activities.

As an indication of the transnational nature of violent extremism, Tanzanian authorities arrested two Kenyans and handed them over to the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU) in Kenya¹⁸. The Kenyan suspects arrested in Tanzania attempted to cross into other countries, including Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Zambia¹⁹.

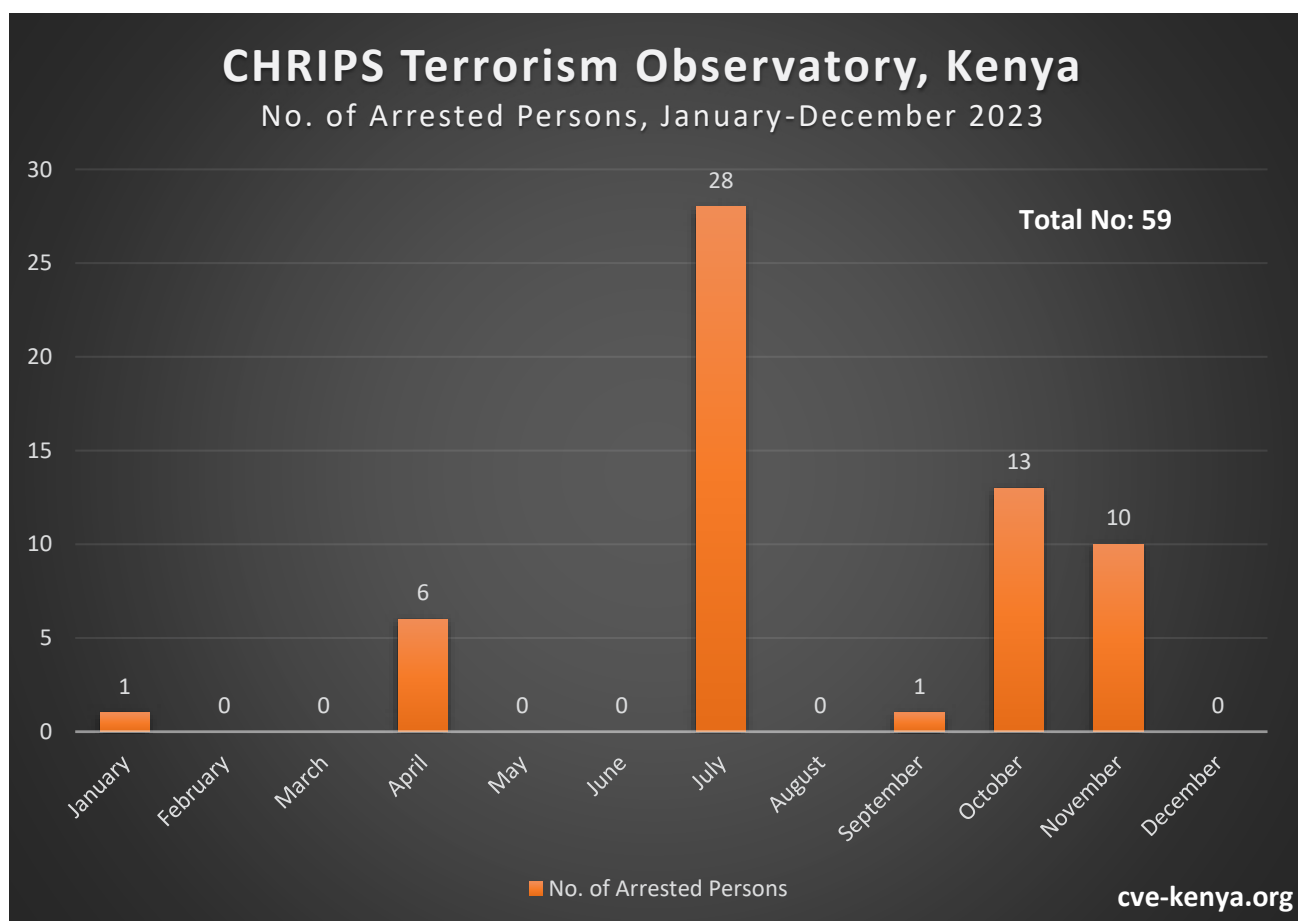


Figure 13: Terror-related Arrests, January-December 2023

Twenty-eight people were arrested in July, accounting for the highest record of arrests in the period under review. These were in 4 different incidents, wherein 11 arrests were made in Marsabit, 11 in Garissa, 5 in Wajir, and 1 in Nairobi.

October had the second-highest recording of the year, totalling 13 arrests, followed by November (10). In October 2023, 11 parents were arrested and charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act in relation to the death of two children in Kilifi County²⁰.

18 Kagonye, F. "Terror Suspect Arrested in Tanzania to Be Charged," The Standard, May 2023, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/health/national/article/2001471306/terror-suspect-arrested-in-tanzania-to-be-charged> (Accessed on March 2024).

19 Kagonye.

20 Ongala M. (2023) "Kilifi parents to be charged with terrorism after children deaths," Daily Nation, October, <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/kilifi/-kilifi-parents-terrorism-after-children-death--4388226>. (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

The reports indicate that the parents, members of *Kanisa la Ukweli, Neno la Mungu* Church, were charged after they refused to take their children to a hospital who later died. They were initially arrested on September 17 and charged with manslaughter²¹. The case against them was dismissed, but police immediately re-arrested the 11 and requested more time to investigate them for terror offences²². The Chief Magistrate in Malindi dismissed the terror charges and released the 11 suspects.

Similarly, in April 2023, the police arrested Pastor Paul Thenge Mackenzie of the Good News International Ministries and his followers after up to 429 bodies were exhumed from the Shakahola Forest²³.

In January 2024, Pastor Mackenzie and 94 others were charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act with murder, manslaughter and assault, engaging in organised criminal activity, radicalisation, facilitating the commission of a terrorist act, subjecting children to torture, and contravening their right to education²⁴.

In November 2023, 8 suspects were arrested in Siaya County in different incidences in connection with the killing of a police officer²⁵.

In the same month, a police constable in Tana River County was arrested and accused of being a member and recruiter for the Al-Shabaab terror group, inciting violence, and possessing narcotics²⁶.

21 Ongala, M. "Police seek to detain suspected cult members after two children die in mysterious circumstances," Nation, 19 September, <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/kilifi/police-seek-to-detain-suspected-cult-members-after-two-children-die-in-mysterious-circumstances-4374002> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

22 Ongala M. (2023) "Court rejects DCI plea to keep cult suspects in custody," Nation, October 5, <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/kilifi/court-rejects-dci-plea-to-keep-cult-suspects-in-custody-4390392> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

23 Kinyanjui, M. "Kindiki Declares Mackenzie's Church Criminal Organized Group," The Star, January 31, 2024, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2024-01-31-kindiki-declares-mackenzies-church-criminal-organized-group/> (Accessed on March 2024).

24 Ocharo B. and Ongala M. (2024) "Paul Mackenzie to face murder, terrorism charges: DPP," Nation, January 16, <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/kilifi/dpp-approves-10-charges-against-shakahola-suspects-4493544> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

25 Gwengi, I. "Police Arrest Seven Terror Suspects in Siaya- FarmKenya Initiative," The Standard, November 27, 2023, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/farmkenya/article/2001486203/police-arrest-seven-terror-suspects-in-siaya> (Accessed on March 2024).

26 Citizen Digital, "Court detains police officer accused of recruiting youth to Al Shabaab in Tana River," Citizen Digital, November 24, <https://www.citizen.digital/news/court-detains-police-officer-accused-of-recruiting-youth-to-al-shabaab-in-tana-river-n331931> (Accessed on 11 March 2024).

27 Muthoni, K. "Kenya Faces New Paths of Terror in Fight against Radicalisation," The Standard, August 2023, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/national/article/2001479713/kenya-faces-new-paths-of-terror-in-fight-against-radicalisation> (Accessed on March 2024).

Arrests by Counties

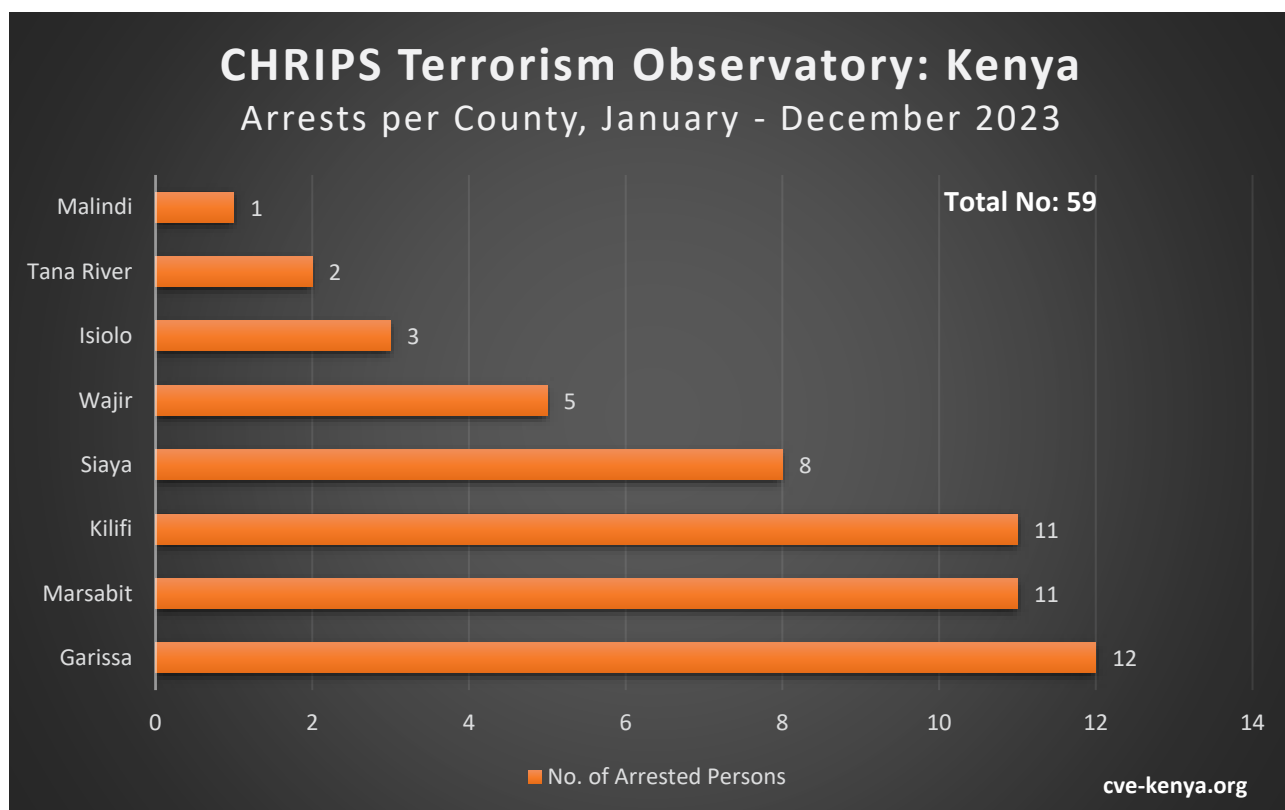


Figure 14: Arrests per County, January-December 2023

Garissa County recorded the highest number of arrests during the period under review. 9 of the 12 arrested in Garissa were allegedly travelling to join Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS). The remaining three were linked to their involvement in terror attacks.

Kilifi and Marsabit counties recorded the second-highest number of arrests during the period under review. Police arrested 11 people in Marsabit for

suspicion of wanting to travel to Somalia to join ISIS²⁷.

Siaya County had eight arrest cases, with studies also pointing to a covert infrastructure for VE recruitment and fundraising in Siaya²⁸. The CHRIPS observatory data has demonstrated that terror groups are continuously evolving, expanding and establishing networks in newer, non-conventional areas.²⁹

28 Chome, N. (2021) "Kenya's New Violent Extremism Hotspots: An Assessment of Risk and Vulnerability in Marsabit, the Rift Valley and Western Kenya." RUSI, June 2021. <https://www.reinvent-kenya.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Kenyas-New-Violent-Extremism-Hotspots.pdf>

29 In 2022 for instance, terror-related arrests were made in Laikipia Nyeri, and Narok counties. See <https://www.cve-kenya.org/observatory/attacks>

Arrests by Gender

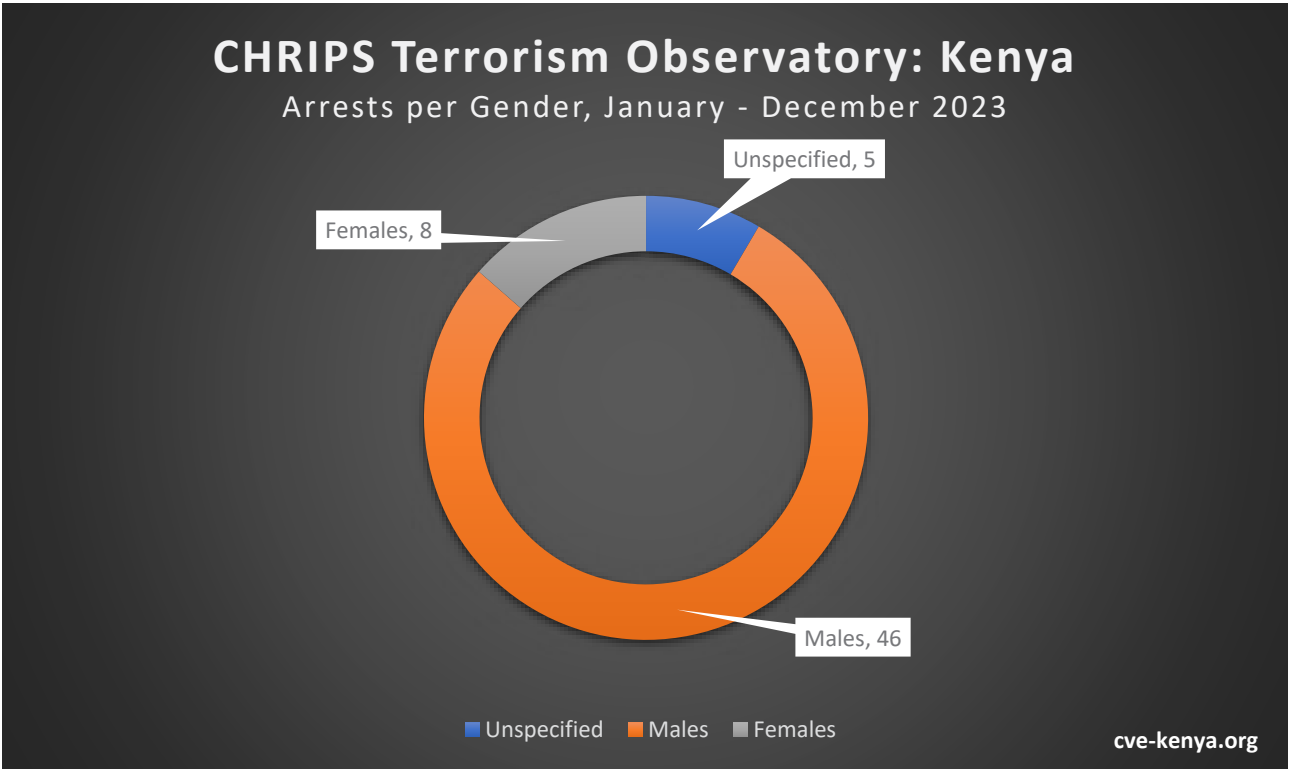


Figure 15: Arrests by Gender, January-December 2023

The largest number of the arrested suspects were men, accounting for 46, while eight women were also apprehended. In 5 accounts, the media reports did not indicate the gender of the arrested individuals.

Arrest by Nationality

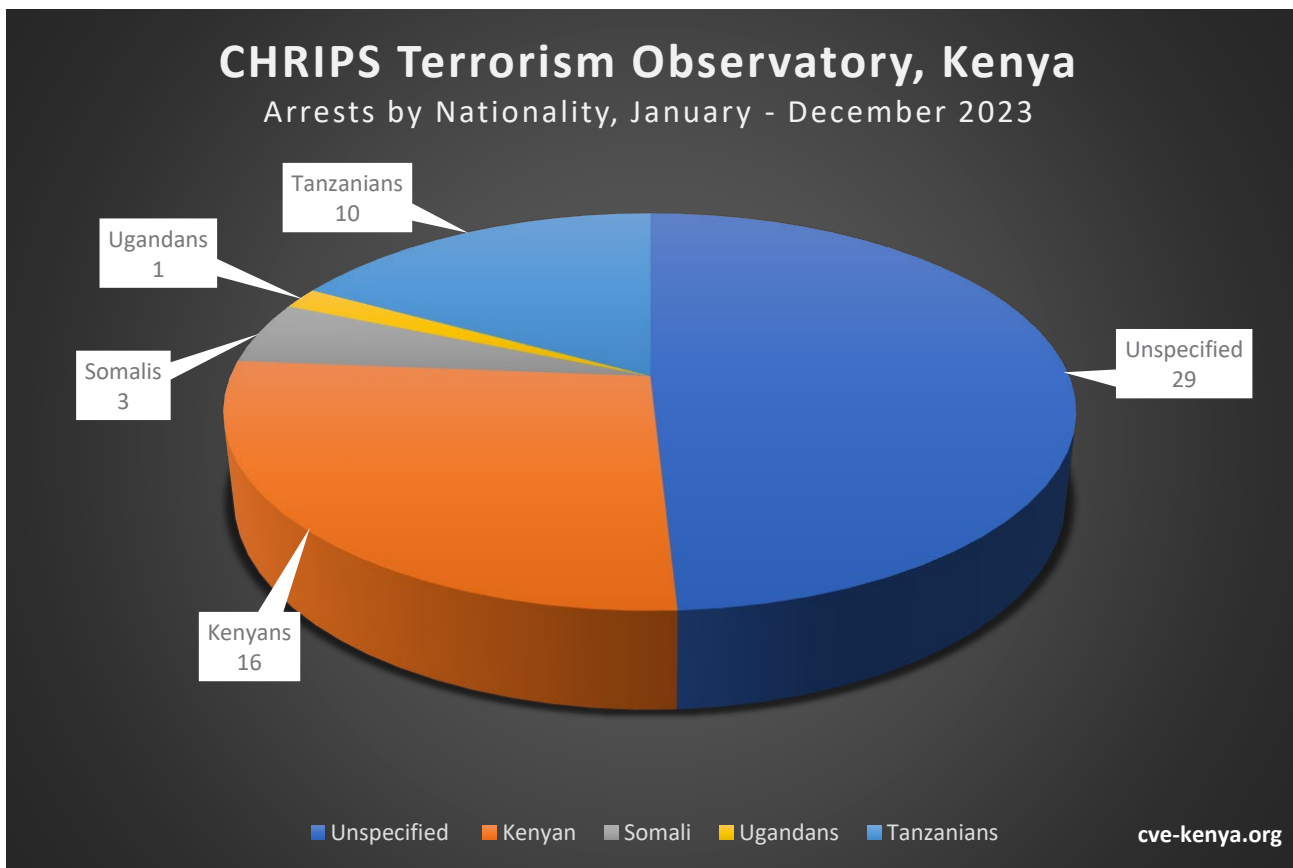


Figure 16: Arrests by Nationality, January - December 2023

Sixteen Kenyans, 10 Tanzanians, 3 Somalis, and 1 Ugandan were arrested during the period under review. Additionally, the nationalities of 29 people arrested in 2023 were unspecified by the media reports.

Acknowledgment

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