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

Rahma Ramadhan and Lynda Ouma

About this report

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

Key highlights

- Attacks increased to 69 from 34 reported in 2019
- Four counties affected: 29 attacks in Mandera; 23 in Garissa; nine in Lamu; and eight in Wajir
- 122 people were killed in 2020 terror attacks compared to 83 in 2019
- 42 people injured: 19 civilians; 18 security officials; and five al Shabaab militants
- There were no attacks reported in August
- 25 people kidnapped: 24 civilians and one government official
- 71 people arrested for terror-related offences
- 56: the highest number of suspects arrested, which was recorded in Nairobi
- Nationalities of those arrested: 45 Kenyans; six foreign nationals; and 20 undisclosed
Terror Attacks

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

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

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

Location of attacks

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

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

Garissa county recorded the highest number of fatalities in the period under review. In contrast, the least number of deaths were reported in Mandera County. Alleged al Shabaab militants targeted a police station in Dadaab in January, and six people were killed. These included four civilians, one teacher, three pupils, and two al Shabaab members. The militants who escaped the crossfire attacked a communication mast. Some reports also indicated that the rise in attacks in the northern part of Kenya resulted from the sale of contraband goods. Smugglers use militants to fight security officials so that they allow passage of goods like cooking oil, sugar, milk and rice.³ Proceeds from these sales are allegedly used to fund terror activities. This led to President Uhuru Kenyatta ordering a crackdown on smuggling and the sale of contraband goods, which posed a challenge to the fight against terror in North Eastern.⁴ According to local partners, this increase in al Shabaab activity could be attributed to the illegal trade of contraband goods along the Kenya-Somali border, especially in Wajir, where alleged al Shabaab militants reportedly also collect taxes to allow passage of goods into Kenya.

**Targets**

![CHrips Terrorism Observatory: Kenya Number of Attacks per Target Type, January - December 2020](#)

In Mandera, al Shabaab militants attacked a Kenyan police reserve unit base and destroyed a Safaricom communication mast.⁵ A similar attack was reported in Wajir county where the al Shabaab launched an attack against a Kenya police force base in Khorof Harar village.⁶ Twenty-one attacks were targeted at civilians during the period under review. In January, reports indicate

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⁵ ACLED Data, 30 December 2020
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that *al Shabaab* fighters ambushed a convoy of buses including Simba coach, Mombasa Rahma & TSS headed to Lamu from Mombasa at Nyongoro near Witu town. Two civilians were injured from the ordeal.\(^7\)

In Garissa, civilians were under attack and killed in the crossfire between suspected militants and Kenyan security officials. Children from a nearby school sustained injuries from stray bullets in the shootout. This occurred when Kenyan officials foiled an attempt by *al Shabaab* to raid a police station in Garissa. Two attackers were shot dead in the process.\(^8\)

Reports show three attacks targeting private property. One such attack took place in Lamu county, where suspected *al Shabaab* militants burnt two construction vehicles in an attack near H Young & Co’s camp at Miliholi.\(^9\)


Figure 6: Terror-related kidnappings, January – December 2020

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

Fatalities and injured persons

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

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

**Figure 8: Number of fatalities, January – December 2020**

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

**Figure 9: Security Officials killed, January – December 2020**
A total of 25 security officials were killed across the four counties including 10 Kenya Police officers; eight Kenyan Police Reservists; three from the Kenya Defense Forces as well as six unspecified security officials. This is a marked decrease from 2019, where Kenya lost 42 security personnel to terror related attacks.11

**Weapons used**

![Bar chart showing weapons used, January - December 2020](chart.png)

**Figure 10: Weapons used, January – December 2020**

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

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

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Terror-related Arrests

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

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

Arrests by gender

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

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Arrests by gender

Figure 14: Arrests by nationality, January – December 2020

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

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