Vulnerable
Offline /Online

*Narrative Formation and Contextualization
for Violent Extremism and Terrorism*

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Muliru Yoni is the Director of Scofield Associates; which is the Horn of Africa Research Partner. He is also a PhD student at the University of Nairobi, Institute of Diplomacy and Internation Studies.

Email: muliru@scofieldassociates.co.ke

Dr. Halkano Wario is a Senior Lecturer in the Philosophy, History and Religion Department, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Egerton University. He is a researcher on Development Issues including Violent Extremism and Terrorism.

Dr. Fathima Azmiya a Lecturer at the Department of Social Sciences, Technical University of Mombasa. She is also a researcher with interests on the link between Gender and Violent Extremism.

Dr. Peterlinus Odote is a Lecturer at the Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies Department, University of Nairobi. He is a senior researcher in the Horn of Africa.
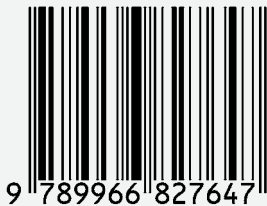
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Abbreviations

AS - Al-Shabaab

CVE - Countering Violent Extremism

ICU - Islamic Courts Union

ISIL - Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

ISIS - Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria

KAKCAP - Kakamega County Action Plan

KDF - Kenya Defence Forces

KISCAP - Kisumu County Action Plan

MYC - Muslim Youth Centre

NCTC - National Counter Terrorism Centre

SNA - Social Network Analysis

VE - Violent Extremism

VEOs - Violent Extremist Organisations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Narratives shape and stabilize social power structures.

As social beings, humans are naturally born story tellers, who use narratives to lend meaning to everything around them, as an invaluable means for the persuasion process. Narratives are highly interconnected and utilize different spaces to influence violent extremism. Such spaces include Offline and Online environments, where they shape and stabilize social power structures.

They have powerful mental models that affect various dimensions and levels of human interaction. Additionally, narratives depend on context, as they have a dual role of culture organizing and sense-making. They serve as instruments, that are consciously or unconsciously, used to produce a social order, within the context of violent extremism and terrorism.

Over the years, practitioners and academia have persistently anchored narratives that influence violent extremism, on religious ideology. This endeavor has subconsciously overlooked the role of religious interpretation, which is used as a conveyor belt to seamlessly pass information, providing linkage of local issues to global discourses on violent extremism (VE).

From an interpretive perspective, violent extremists have used religion as a self-contained system that provides an easy explanation to social, economic, and political processes within the society. They have targeted specific texts, ensured subtle ultimatum on the use of violence as a right, given context to specific discourses, and provided the obligation to action. By extension, such interpretations have also offered a separation of roles, the determination of actors, and a justification for the actions.

While local spaces provide the context and content for fact accumulation, religious interpretation therefore supply the linkage and association to the global discourses. As will be shown in the desktop review of the study, the global discourses in the Neglected Duty pamphlet, justified Jihad in its violent interpretation, as an obligation to the Muslims. The texts, which the report names as

the genesis of violent-extremist narrative framing process, ensured that conversations and actions governing the "Muslim" community, aligned to specific requirements.

The Internet has remained as a medium in the spread of the narratives. It has often been mistaken as a driver of violent extremism rather than the medium that it is. The ease of access to social media spaces, has made it to be widely used in the Horn of Africa.

Unfortunately, social media has not only been used to bring people closer, to share thoughts and opinions, but also to spread false information. Additionally, the application of privacy rules, has made it easier for closing the niche and advancing the targeting of vulnerable individuals. These privacy rules through welcomed, have made the process of analysis for prevention; challenging.

It should be noted that the increased use of the medium maybe because of other un-intended resolution from the private sector to advance their penetration to specific demographics through offering free service and other benefits tagged on privacy. The social platforms have become widely accessible, easy to use and free (in some instances). When a user's account is deactivated or banned, the user can move their content to other platforms or accounts in a short period at limited to no expense. The COVID-19 crisis has further amplified the problem of malicious use of social media

This report documents an analysis on the process of radicalization and recruitment through the narrative review lens. It focuses on the modeling, interpretation, and the spread of narratives in: Mombasa, Kwale, Lamu, Tana River, Garissa, Isiolo, Nakuru, Kisumu, Kakamega and Nairobi counties. While these counties have diverse realities and are all susceptible to VE, there are commonalities in narrative development, use, and propagation.

The study was purely qualitative, using a purposive sample and a snowballing technique, to target respondents that included individuals from Maskanis, Returnees, those directly affected, mothers of those that traveled to Somalia, university students and those incarcerated over VE related incidences.

A total of 224 participants were interviewed with 70% being male and 30% being female. Additionally, 67% of the total sample were Muslim, 32% Christian and 1% being denoted in the category other, across the 10 counties. The study also borrows a lot from a desktop review of existing research materials on narrative development and spread from the global space to the local communities in Kenya.

The Online component of the study focused on the data collected from Twitter over the six-month research period. A total of five million tweets were collected. These tweets included keywords and hashtags focusing on violent extremism and terrorism. While the study anticipated data collection from Facebook and Telegram, the restrictions on their APIs ensured that this process would not be completed. Analysis for the data collected from Twitter followed a second level random sampling that ensured an average of 1800 tweets were selected for the Social Network Analysis (100 random tweets per analysis for three days a week in the six months), Word-Cloud, and Sentiment Analysis.

The findings show that narrative formation depends on three major attributes; having a believable story, actionable plans for those who encounter it, and the need for a religious cover. The third characteristic provides support to the persuasion process and adds to the global whole. The persuasion process plays out very well with an Online platform or audience.

Contextual factors from the community make the stories believable and relatable. Each narrative requires a call to action and actors who are either branded as an enemy or an ally. The religious interpretation then supplies the cover that links the provider to the recipient, depending on the context.

Second, narrative sharing is goal-oriented and organized around sets of hierarchically ordered preferences. The findings from this study confirm that all narratives are imbued with intentions and objectives, whose persuasion level increases depending on the targeted vulnerable individual, and their level of socialization.

In the ten counties, four goals were presented including: Narratives for recruitment that focus on the benefits of joining the fold using the economic gains; Narratives targeting sympathizers—preying on the empathy and pain to the Muslim Ummah;

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Morale building Narratives that utilize audio-visual medium to show heroism; and finally, Narratives on Jihad and Hijra that focus more on individuals who are already in the fold and are willing to act.

Third, the idea that narratives can be categorized further for a targeted response was explored in the analysis. The findings have included four more categorizations based on the rewards to the vulnerable individuals. These include: Takfiri modeling of a new self; justification of engagement based on the challenges of retribution and marginalization; and finally, the call to establish the Islamic State.

Forth, narratives of jihad have limited linkages and networks Online showing the possibility of having such conversations in persons and with higher up level of socialization. Additionally, the narratives from Al-Shabaab, on Al-Shabaab and by Al-Shabaab, have a lot of networks in general proving that the level of influence is not only linked to a single node sharing but multiple links and nodes passing the information to numerous individuals.

Based on the twitter analysis, other VEO mention in the region attract linkages at a single node meaning that they don't gather interests like what Al-Shabaab has at present. In total, the narratives linked to terrorism have very limited linkages. This can be attributed to the non-agreement of specific actions to be linked to terrorism or not.

Overall, the sets of responses from Garissa and Isiolo reveal that, narratives fall broadly into the following three categories including, Narratives of retribution (and repression); Narratives of reward; and Narrative of self-determination. For the counties where the conversation and the socialization process have "matured," the type of messaging focused more on the interpreted religious duty; the justification for setting up the caliphate; and the need for violent engaged.

This was evident in Mombasa Lamu, Kwale and Nairobi. The counties of Kakamega and Kisumu, included limited narratives from the respondents. Part of this was because most respondents were Christians. Nakuru stood as an isolated county from violent extremist attacks and only featuring, in the discourse, as a transit point for violent extremism and terrorism. While the level of vulnerability to violent extremism in this county seems lower, the political pressures may improve the linkage to socio-economic gain narratives.

The study developed a vulnerability targeting framework upon which the recommendations are based.

Vulnerability Targeting Framework for Violent Extremist Narratives.

Lessons from Ten Counties in Kenya

Narratives focus more on learning and recruitment into the group. The demands at this level of the spectrum also demand for low level actions from the vulnerable individuals.

Lower Socialization

Higher Socialization

Narratives focus more on building and maintaining the ingroup bond for those already in the fold. As part of fitting in, these narratives demand higher level actions from the vulnerable individuals including killing for the cause.

Regional and Community Messenger

Higher religious cover for the narratives shared as it provides the linkage beyond the local issues.

In most instances the narratives use a medium for ease of authenticity and spread. Referal to social media sites or charismatic leadership for engagement is utilized at this level. Often considered the top level socialization.

Low level of ressonance factors as the contextual issues may not be relatable and specific enough to draw interest from the vulnerable individuals.

★ ★ ★ ★
LAM KWA MSA NBO

Group and Peer to peer Messenger

Narratives include increased ressonance factors (contextual issues) as these makes it easy to relate common "challenges."

Information sharing still uses social media to gain credibility and in some instances, other medium including flashdisks, CDs, and other violent extremist matriability is utilized. Often considered the mid level socialization.

Religious cover is reduced and narratives that offer reference to religious text is based on reffered messages either from a previous teaching or information.

★ ★ ★
GSA ISO TANA

Individual Messenger

High level of ressonance factors as the vulnerable individuals relates more to the contextual issues making them a target.

★ ★ ★
KSM NKR KAK

Minimal violent extremism materiability as the vulnerable individuals seek to learn from recruiters. Social media engagement and other information sharing is minimal. Often considered the low level socialization.

Lower level of religious cover as the vulnerable individuals are learning and expressing the need to fit into the new setup. More guidance through hand holding and individual linkages.

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The report recommends a violent extremism identification and response framework by making the case that:

01

All the narratives developed have a vulnerability targeting that often begins at a higher level within different contexts. At this level, there is an increased use of religious interpretation to supply the linkages to the global discourses. Online platforms are often used for this process and therefore remain critical.

02

As the targeting moves from the region (high level) towards to the individual (lower level) the lesser the religious cover is required and the more the contextual "facts" are required. This report calls these the resonance factors, as they make it easy for the vulnerable individuals to resonate with the issues as presented.

03

Across the spectrum (horizontally), each narrative presentation is fed to the vulnerable individuals in a socialization process that ensures growth. In individuals with lower socialization (just learning about the new call to action), the narratives focus on lower tasks to prove loyalty and interest in engagement. As the process moves across the horizontal spectrum, and with the growth through socialization (higher socialization), the narratives focus more on violent action to prove your place in the fold.

04

While the messenger remains important in the response process, alternative narratives require a clear understanding of the formation, goals, and categorization of the narratives.

05 On medium use, the higher the religious cover, the more the social media use, the lower the lower the cover the lesser the social media use and the increase in in-person outreach to the vulnerable individuals. However, it should be noted that are the vulnerable individual also advances in the socialization process, the in-person outreach can be in groups on a social media page or space. It also shows that more resonance factor led messaging is disseminated lesser on social medial and more religious cover messaging is shared on social spaces, depending on the level of socialization to the vulnerable individual.

06 Finally, the development of alternative narratives requires a story with facts from the context (depending on the level of targeting—high or low), pointers of action, and actors that the target population can relate to, when interacting with the message presented. A message that lacks these attributes remains functionless and ultimately fails to achieve the intended objective.

SA Team at the validation meeting.

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INTRODUCTION

The distant visualization of the world has provided linkages for local narratives to the global justification linking Hijra to Jihad.

Research exploring radicalization pathways by exploring why people become involved in terrorism, has expanded since the 9/11 attacks. However, studies on how they sustain their engagements in terrorism remain minimal. The same can be said about studies on narratives that influence their involvement in violent extremism and terrorism.

Radicalization into violent extremism is a process that encourages individuals to adopt a socially influenced stand different from what is considered a norm within the community.

Over time, practitioners, and academia have viewed this process to be loaded with social constructs, dependent on the environment and the context. They argue that radicalization only takes place in an ideal environment, one with risks, vulnerabilities and with interesting push and pull factors. While this is true, the placement of narratives is often overshadowed.

While defining narratives, the Routledge handbook states that there are three indicators that determine narratives (Gee & Handford, 2012). As a start, the editors define them as having a temporal order that includes a beginning, a middle and an end.

Second, they contend that narratives are in the form of stories and have a "teller" (Ewick & Silbey, 1995: 200), who is often referred to as the mediators of the story. In the context of violent extremism and terrorism, the teller is the messenger. Finally, narratives consist of a sundry of interconnected episodes or sequences (White, 1973), that tie up the process.

All these components have a symbiotic relationship that is contextually sound and anchored to the realities in the local communities. Narratives have typically been secluded and pushed the periphery, yet the discourses they create, shape the presentation of the drivers to violent extremism. Additionally, when conversing on narratives driving individuals into violent extremism, practitioners frequently risk bungling them up into "ideology"; specifically religious ideology — forgetting that religion, in this case (and as will be shown from the findings), serves as a conveyor and a connector to the greater whole.

The processing of narratives is a fundamental human ability. Humans are natural-born storytellers who use narratives to lend meaning to life (Bruner, 1991,1987), and to construct personal, collective, and cultural identities (Loseke, 2007). Narratives therefore remain a valuable tool for persuasion (Braddock and Dillard, 2016; van Laer et al. 2013).

The process of narrative formation, meaning, placement and sharing incorporates the push and pull factors to a level of sense-making and influence leading to identity-seeking and group interest for vulnerable individuals (Loseke, 2007). Narratives therefore take the form of verbatim, audio-visual, and in this context both positive and negative action.

While the actions as presented in this report may be far from the dictionary meaning of the term, narratives form perceptions, create influence, and serve expectations that requires a directed response.

As Jennifer Jefferis (2014), correctly states in her paper: "*In a world where power is often interpreted as the ability to exert kinetic influence over one's enemies, it is important not to ignore a very different source of battle space: the fight over perceptions and the struggle of ideas*."

Her paper further states that the narratives can be as powerful as physical force. Narratives reduce stereotypes (Vezzali, et al., 2015), foster empathy with evaluated groups (Oliver, et al., 2012) and increase intentions to engage deeply and share them Online (Frischlich, et al., 2017). This has resulted in the changing role that visuality plays in social engagements, noting that social engagements also involve a transformation of vision, an absenting from contexts and interests (Szerszynski and Urry, 2006).

This process of shaping that involves, modelling and presentation of the local realities, become targeted when accessing certain actions and responses from individuals and communities. Additionally, it awards meaning to activities that take place within the community. Within the context of violent extremism and terrorism, the violent extremist organizations have perfected the art of creating and shaping perceptions through a visual socialization process that is either propagated using videos, pictures, acts of kindness or heroism.

It is also important to note that the distant visualization of the world has provided linkages for local narratives to the global justification linking Hijra to Jihad as Osama bin Laden put it (Brad, 2009). In either case, the message packaged in the narratives assures that a lack of proximity to a conflict is no excuse for failing to engage in the quest for its resolution (Jefferis, 2014). Osama bin Laden strengthened the justification by stating that:

الهجرة والجهاد في سبيل الله مرتبطان ببعضهما البعض لترسيخ الحقيقة والقضاء على الباطل
- Osama bin Laden

Translation: "*Hijra and Jihad in the cause of Allah are mutually linked to each other for establishing the truth and eradicating falsehood.*"

While the fieldwork is from Kenya, the history of narrative formation and Jihad is linked to Al-Jihad (the Egyptian brotherhood). After the assassination of Anwar Sadat, the mastermind, and a member of the brotherhood —Muhammad abd-al-Salam Faraj, who was arrested and further executed on the 15th of April 1982. He led the Cairo branch of the Islamist group al-Jihad (also Tanzim al-Jihad) and made a significant contribution in elevating the role of Jihad in radical Islam with his pamphlet (The Neglected Obligation).

The ideas written by Muhammad abd-al-Salam Faraj in the 1979 pamphlet; The Neglected Obligation, guided Egyptian Islamist extremist groups throughout the 1980s and 90s. Ayman al-Zawahiri; Faraj's friend, would later meet with the financier, Osama bin Laden – to carry on the ideas as proposed

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in the pamphlet.

It is while they were building their activities in Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia that other extremist (including those in the Horn of Africa), linked up with Bin Laden and his ilk for training and capacity building (US Congress Print, 2010). Later, the conversations by radical Imams in Kenya would mirror the wording in the pamphlet on Jihad. The pamphlet aligned their thoughts on narrative development and supplied links to religious texts as pushed forward by the Islamic ideologically motivated violent extremist organizations, including Al-Shabaab.

Within the Kenyan counties, cosmopolitanism is slowly emerging as a culture, one that is refracted into different forms; among different social groups seeking legitimacy, including violent extremist organizations. The emerging trend is made available through politics, the media and popular culture.

In this space, the relationship between visuality, mobility and action, ensures movement of ideas across counties, with an engagement that starts at the community (Maskani), to the international space (Russel, 2017). There are multiple forms of mobility that expand people's awareness of the wider world and their capacity to compare various places to their local realities. Narratives -whether positive or negative, shape the discourses and paint a picture of perceived reality depending on the audience, intention, messenger, context, and the vulnerability.

This report covers part of research funded by the Netherlands Embassy in Kenya to understand the vulnerabilities that push youth to engage and link up with violent extremist organizations through narrative creation, meaning assigning, and spread of the information offline. The findings are an outcome of fieldwork in ten counties including: Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Garissa, Isiolo, Kisumu, Kakamega, Kwale, Lamu and Tana River.

It covers the type of narratives at the local level, their formation, linkage, medium of spread and the messengers. It also covers the spaces where such narratives are shared and developed easily. The report also includes the search terms that have been pushed to the second level of the study that involves an Online review of the spaces where violent extremism lives.

SA Researcher presenting during the stakeholder validation session.

NARRATIVE FORMATION HISTORY: THE NEGLECTED DUTY

Religious emigration ensures a refrain from something that God has forbidden (S60)

A 2010 report to the US senate committee shows the progression and expansion of Al-Qaeda to other regions, using propaganda and narratives. Al-Qaeda had transformed into a diffuse global network and a philosophical movement composed of dispersed nodes with varying degrees of independence (US Congress Print, 2010).

The report documented a linkage to other operatives in the Horn of Africa, and ties to the reference material for narrative formation, cementing the idea of hijra and global Jihad. Al-Qaeda's involvement in Somalia remained limited yet constant throughout the second half of the 1990s and the first years of the 2000s.

With the pressure from the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and other international partners, Al-Shabaab framed the Somali conflict in line with that of Al-Qaeda and its affiliated organizations. Rather than a local

struggle, it portrayed itself as part of a global pattern in which the closer enemies in the region colluded with international partners to attack Islam (Lorenzo Vidino et al., 2014). This form of narrative formation and shaping also served as an allegiance pledge to Al-Qaeda, and an adoption of the statements included in the 1979 neglected duty pamphlet.

The definition of leaders, justification of Jihad, and an absolute follower-ship of the imams on the call to action to save Islam, are some of the attributes of Al-Shabaab's' disciplining process. The pamphlet provided the grounding of Al-Shabaab narratives, justification of the message, selection of the messenger, and their spread to the Horn of Africa region. A link analysis with interpretations from the Holy Quran shows the genesis of the process. The pamphlet shows that:

1. The Muslims who "pretend" by professing outwardly only glorifies Genghis Khan but also fight the Muslims. He disagrees with what orders them and equates them to a rebellion against the imam (s33). Engaging benevolent and participating in societies that are subject to the State while performing prayers and paying zakat tax, is contrary to the commands of Allah because such acts do not establish the Islamic State (S48). This paragraph pushes the Muslims against engaging the State as such engagements avoids the establishment of the Islamic State. It serves as the first point of departure that sets the institutions of governance as the enemy and commencement of blame placement in the narrative formation process.

2. Non-violent propaganda is unsuccessful because all the media is under the control of the pagan and wicked (State) and under the control of those who are at war with God's religion. The liberation process should be through convincing victory as shown in the Quran on providence of divine support (Q110:1-2):

عندما يأتي نصر الله والغزو
وترى الناس يدخلون في دين الله في الجموع،

— Saheeh International

[1] When the victory of Allah has come and the conquest, [2] And you see the people entering the religion of Allah in multitudes.

The defiance of non-violent propaganda that voids tolerance and peaceful engagements, is encouraged. In fact, the findings from the research will show that there are narratives that specifically mention authority over non-Muslims; referred to as infidels. In most cases, "enlightened Muslims" (referring to violently radical extremists in the report) are instructed to kill non-Muslims (infidels), and not to apologize when they wrong the infidels in their communities.

3. An application of Islamic law to all the communities for both the Muslims and the non-Muslims. Accordingly, "*religion is well applicable, in all times and all places, and is capable of arranging (the affairs) of Muslims and infidels, of sinners and the righteous, of scholars and fools*" (S58). Faraj argues that people have been living in disbelief, and therefore the application of Islam is just, and it should be wholesome. He only allows for non-violent propaganda if it calls people into Islam but cautions that the process should not only expand the broad base that often assumes or hinder true Jihad (S59). His arguments justify the responsibility to accept Jihad (with specific interpretations), and other pillars as part of the process of being a true Muslim.

4. He contextualizes the establishment of the Islamic state using Hijra. According to him, religious emigration ensures a refrain from something that God has forbidden (S60). The use of violence even during emigration is for the realization of God's will in Islam, as documented in the Quran (Q2:216):

المعركة قد تم أمر قد عليك، في حين أنه كره لك. ولكن ربما تكن أكره شيئا، وأنه جيد بالنسبة لك؛
وربما تحب شيئا، وهذا سيء بالنسبة لك. والله وحده يعلم، بينما أنت لا تعرف.

— Saheeh International

[216] Battle has been enjoined upon you, while it is hateful to you. But perhaps you hate a thing, and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing, and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not.

5. To the new converts, the priority is to understand their role in Jihad and any other responsibility, including the quest for knowledge, should come later. Specifically, "*the quest for knowledge is a farida (obligation), but Muslims shall not heed the neglect of a religious command or one of the duties of Islam for knowledge, and certainly not the duty of Jihad*" (S63). His justification puts the quest for knowledge to the level of the collective, and that of Jihad at a personal level, duty bound, and a priority in the Islamic faith. He anchors his arguments on a verse from the Quran above.

6. He makes the case for a global Muslim Ummah by providing the narration that; "these rulers will take advantage of the nationalist ideas of these Muslims to realize their un-Islamic aims (S69). Fighting must be done only under the banner of Islam and under Islamic leadership. There is no doubt that the first battlefield for Jihad is the extermination of infidel leaders and to replace them by a complete Islamic order (S70)." The two sentences in the pamphlet support the removal of non-Islamic leadership and a replacement with a new order. He supports his narrative with a verse from the Quran (9:5)

ان من الكميين. لكن إذا تابوا، وأقاموا الصلاة، وإوطاعء الزكاة، دعهم [يذهبون] في طريقهم. إن الله، واقع، في
مساح ورحيم.

— Saheeh International

[5]And when the inviolable months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakāh, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.

7. His narrative resonates with Sheikh Aboud Rogo's[1] teachings of revolting against governance seen to be unjust to the Muslim Ummah and the killing of infidels. It also resonates with narratives for the slaughter of the non-believers as evident from the data in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Isiolo. He uses another verse from the Quran to to justify this call (Q 47:4):

لذلك تلقتمدنا تقتلي الذيك [في المعركة] ، تضرب رقاباهم حتى، عندما تقوم بالذبح
عليهم ثم تؤمن رواطبهم، وإما [تمنح] معروف بعد ذلك أو فدية [لهم] حتى تضع الحرب أعباءها.3 اذه [وه
الأمر].ولو شاء الله، لكان قد رأى منهم [بنفس]، لكن [أمر بالكفاح المسلح] لاختبار بعضكم عن
طريق الآخرين. وأولئك الذين يقتلون في سبيل الله - لن يضيع أفعالهم أبدا.

— Saheeh International

[4]So when you meet those who disbelieve [in battle], strike [their] necks until, when you have inflicted slaughter upon them, then secure [their] bonds, and either [confer] favour afterwards or ransom [them] until the war lays down its burdens. That [is the command]. And if Allah had willed, He could have taken vengeance upon them [Himself], but [He ordered armed struggle] to test some of you by means of others. And those who are killed in the cause of Allah – never will He waste their deeds.

8. At paragraph S80, Faraj mentions that the Quran makes fighting obligatory, adding that though the writings were at a different time, it does not mean that Jihad has ended; it remains a duty for every Muslim (emphasis added), as the world remains, until the day of resurrection.

9. Faraj makes the case that Muslims should "*know that when Jihad is an individual duty, there is no need to ask permission of your parents to leave to wage Jihad…*(S87)*.*" This narrative also shapes the behaviour of the enlightened youth ensuring that the responsibility is pushed to the individual and away from the parents or relatives. The close relatives of those "*enlightened youth*" complained that the youth left home without notification to their parents on where they were going or seeking permission from them. They only heard from them later that they were either in Somalia or okay with what they were doing.

10. He argues that the lack of a caliph (State) or Amir (Leader) is not an impediment to waging Jihad. Those who claim it is an impediment to Jihad are the ones who hinder the formation of a leadership for Jihad. He pushes the authority to next Amir at the local level or imam to provide guidance on how and when to engage. This elevation also justifies the call for Jihad to drive infidels from lands rightfully owned by Muslims, and finally as a call from the Imam to fight (Q 9: 38 – 39):

اي من آمنوا، ما هي [المسألة] معكم أن، عندما يطلب منكم أن تذهبوا في سبيل الله، تلتزمون بشدة
بالأرض؟1 هل أنتم راضون عن حياة هذه العالم بدل من الآخرة؟ولكن ما هو متعة الحياة الدنيوية باستثناء الآخرة القليل [جد].
إذا لم تذهب إلى الأمام، سوف يعاقبك بعقوبة مؤلمة ويستبدلك بشعب آخر، ولن تؤذيه على الإطلاق.
والله على كل شيء المختصة.

— Saheeh International

[38] O you who have believed, what is [the matter] with you that, when you are told to go forth in the cause of Allah, you adhere heavily to the earth? Are you satisfied with the life of this world rather than the Hereafter? But what is the enjoyment of worldly life compared to the Hereafter, except a [very] little. [39] If you do not go forth, He will punish you with a painful punishment and will replace you with another people, and you will not harm Him at all. And Allah is over all things, competent.

11. These texts have ensured that the violent extremist organizations, including Al-Shabaab, legitimize their behaviour. It has also provided a relationship to the broader narrative about the global war between the faithful (them) and the infidel powers (others), who persecuted them. This study uses the linkages created from these texts to explore the narratives shared, the "religious justification" as an ideological cover, and explain their influence on vulnerable individuals in the community.

1. He was a radical Kenyan Muslim Cleric who was gunned down by unsuspected individuals on the 27th of August 2021. He was alleged to have been an Islamist extremist and was accused of arranging funding for the al-Shabaab militia in Somalia.

SA Researcher presenting during the stakeholder validation session.

METHODOLOGY

30%
Female

70%
of the respondents
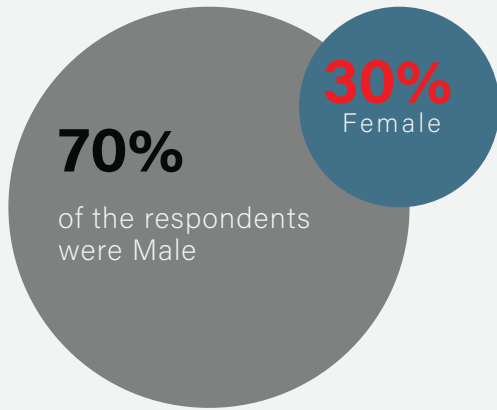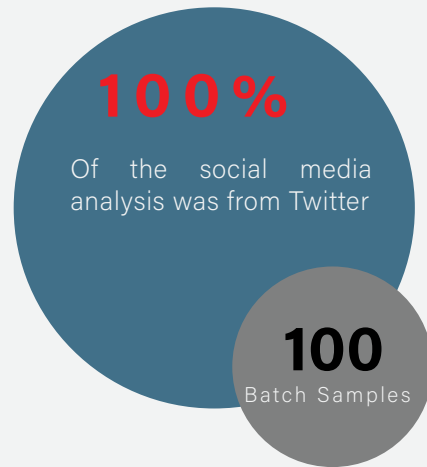were Male

157

A total of 157 respondents out of the 224 interviewed were male.

Only messages from Twitter were analyzed for the Online component of the study.

100%
Of the social media analysis was from Twitter

100
Batch Samples

01   SAMPLING.

Conversations in communities provide the context for understanding the formation, application of meaning and the spread of narratives. Such discussions only take place in secure environments and with trusted respondents, who can share their experiences in detail, and through stories.

This study adopted a qualitative research method that included data collection from a purposively sampled group of community members (Mugenda, 1999). The sample included categories of individuals from the "Maskanis," returnees, individuals directly affected by terrorism, the mothers of those who left, university students, incarcerated individuals, and others with a direct link to the narratives that push the youth into violent extremism.

The fieldwork engaged local researchers with grassroots affiliations, who supported the tool development, interview set up and data collection. Other than fulfilling the ethical requirements on consent, the data recording ensured anonymity through a coding process. A snowballing technique assisted the researchers to reach a specific target population frame. The respondent selection was also as representative as possible, with conscious efforts to include gender and diversity considerations.

The counties of Mombasa, Nairobi, Kakamega, Kisumu, Garissa, Isiolo, Nakuru, Kwale, Lamu and Tana River, represented the study sites. Altogether, the fieldwork had 224 participants. These included 157 males and sixty-seven female respondents across the ten counties. Additionally, 144 represented Muslims, while the rest of the respondents were Christians.

Due to COVID-19, regulation in Kenya the use of key informant interviews for data collection was adequate, with the saturation levels[2] for collected data reached at the 20th -to- 24th interview, depending on the county (Patton, 1990). The research team gathered information on vulnerabilities and the use of the Internet for extremism from cohorts of youth-at-risk to violent extremism groups. The fieldwork across the ten counties was between September-October 2021. The guiding questions for the research included the following:

1. What are the messages available in the counties, and how are these messages assessed?
2. How are the vulnerable individuals targeted or involved, and what influences them at an individual or even county level?
3. What and how are they linked to Online platforms if any?
4. What influences a decision to continue as an engagement or to cease the engagement?

Nairobi county is a preferred site for execution of violent extremist attacks. It has seen a series of small scale as well high-end terror attacks targeting key infrastructure. Prominent among these attacks were 08 August 1998 US embassy bombing, 21 September 2013 Westgate Mall attack, and the 15 January 2019 Dusit D2 Complex attack. The upsurge of violent extremist attacks in Nairobi began after the Kenya's interventions in Somalia in 2011 (Otieno, 2015). The government asserted that Kenyans who had been radicalized and recruited to VEO, notably by Al-Shabaab, carried out most of the attacks (NCTC, 2016).

According to the Kisumu County Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (Kisumu-CAP, 2019), there are elements of intolerance to opposing views in Kisumu that lead to acts of terror in different forms. Kisumu has a culture of political violence, especially in the major urban areas. The considerable number of idle and unemployed youth in gangs make it easy for politicians to try to obtain leverage through violent means by funding and deploying these gangs. Factors underlying violent extremism in Kisumu include the unresolved political issues that serves a vulnerability to lure youth into the violent extremist organization fold.

Kakamega is a large county with a more diverse religious and ethnic make-up. The report by the Regional CVE Research Unit asserts that until recently, the interior of Kenya, including the larger Western Province, was considered immune to the threat of extremist radicalization and recruitment, but this is changing (Muliru, 2017. Pg. 22). According to the Kakamega County Action Plan for Preventing

and Countering Violent extremism (Kakamega-CAP, 2019), there is growing appreciation in Kakamega County that VE is an eminent threat.

This threat is because of ethnicized politics and resource-based conflicts that have become persistent in the County. In 2014, the Institute of Security Studies published a report based on interviews with ninety-five recruits which claimed that several young people from Western parts of Kenya had been recruited into the extremist group Al-Shabaab as well as the Mombasa Republican Council (Botha, 2014; ISS, 2014).

In the coastal region, Mombasa is in the east of the country, bordered on one side by the Indian Ocean. Mombasa has a diverse ethnic and religious population. Tensions typically erupt when newcomers from the outside are buying up property in the coast, displacing Mombasa's Indigenous families (Rakodi, Gatabaki-Kamau and Devas, 2000). The county marks its security challenges in gang related violence, drug abuse, radicalization, and recruitment for extremist networks such as Al-Shabaab and, ISIS (Njambi, 2017; Chitembwe, et al. 2021; Botha, 2014; ISS, 2014).

Macro-level grievances tied to land rights and unresolved historical settlements during the post-colonial periods fuel these security challenges. Studies have highlighted the Online aspects in radicalization and recruitment in Mombasa with the existence of extremist propaganda, hate speech and social networking Online (Badurdeen, 2018; Chitembwe, et al. 2021; Odhiambo, et al. 2013; Van Metre, 2018).

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Vulnerable Offline

2. Using grounded theory that allows for the adjustment of the sample size depending on the amount of information being collected from the fieldwork. In this case, saturation levels mean that at interview twenty, no added information was being collected from the respondents, and therefore it did not make sense to continue interviewing more individuals for the same data.

Bordering Mombasa County, Kwale County. Like the rest of Kenya, Kwale faces security, social and political challenges related to violent extremism (VE). Various kinds of violent extremism exist in Kwale County such as secession, as put forward by the Mombasa Republican Council or Jihadism as misused by Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda and ISIS (Botha, 2012). The convergence of extremist religious ideology, political marginalization, unemployment, and poverty have served as catalysts for recruitment into violent extremist groups like Al-Shabaab and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria (ISIS) (Kwale, CVE County Action Plan 2016).

In a study to understand the complexity of radicalization and recruitment in Kwale County, relative deprivation leading to alienation and dissatisfaction can be exploited by recruiters (Mkutu and Opondo, 2021). Matanga, et al. (2021) highlights the aspect of police brutality on suspected youth in the region, as an aggravating factor on pre-existing grievances of discrimination among the youth by the state agencies. Accordingly, this can further lead to radicalization of the youth into extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab.

Lamu County is not spared from attacks by violent extremist actors. Kidnappings in 2011 marked one of the main triggers for the KDF to intervene in Somalia (Nyagah, Mwangi and Attree, 2018; Lind, Mutahi and Oostrom, 2015). In 2014, the dreadful Mpeketoni attack, a town in the mainland of Lamu, killing forty-seven people in one night. A group of armed men suspected to be Al-Shabaab launched the attack, targeting male non-Muslims. Most non-Muslims and specifically the Kikuyu tribe lost their lives. Narrative by the Al-Shabaab media revealed that the attacks were a revenge for the Kenyan government's action in Somalia (Nyagah, Mwangi and Attree, 2018). The messages also included ethnic and religious undertones, as the motivation for their actions (McGregor, 2017).

Tana River County faces the challenge of violent extremism. A host of attacks in the coastal region, such as in Lamu, has trickled to the Tana River County (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Fewer incidents have raised concerns on the militant group Al-Shabaab in Tana River County. The county's proximity to Garissa, Lamu, and Kilifi has made the region a hotspot for recruitment, aiding the planning of attacks as well as a base for violent extremist networks. The CVE County Action plan for Tana River identified the following areas as hotspots: Nyangoro, Kipao, Kipini, Boji, Bula, Bura, Chewani ward, Chisiri, Gafuru, Galole, Gamba, Garsen, Kalkacha, Kilelengwani, Lango la Simba, Laza, Madogo, Makere, Malindi ya Ngwena, Matengeni, Mikinduni, Moa, Nago, Ozi, Riketa, Wayu ward, Wema and Witu.

Garissa County is one of the most affected counties in Kenya by violent extremism attacks. The County hosts two refugee camps that host thousands of Somalis who found haven for over three decades since the break-up of Siad Barre regime in 1991. Most of the attacks are low-keyed and conducted in areas close to the border. The most horrific attack was the 2015 Garissa University college massacre, in which 147 students lost their lives in a siege by Al-Shabaab. Other VE preferred targets include police stations, national government administration officers' homes and offices, communication masts, quarry sites, churches, hospital and dispensaries, schools, and water points. Al-Shabaab also specifically targets non-locals who work as teachers, nurses, national government officials, traders, and civil society workers in a bid to make them leave the county by force and to ignite interethnic/interreligious animosity.

Bordering Garissa County, Isiolo County is the gateway to the northern Kenya. There has been no reported incident of violent extremist attack in the county. However, local youths have joined violent extremist organizations, with a bulk of them transitioning into Al-Shabaab in Somalia, from school. As an example, Salim Gichunge grew up in Isiolo and was radicalized and recruited through Online networks while still residing in Isiolo. Gichunge was one of the masterminds of the Dusit D2 Complex terror attack.

Cholo Abdi Abdullahi another youth from Isiolo was arrested in the Philippines in July 2019 on charges of enrolling for pilot training course with the aim of conducting September 11 kind of attack on behalf of a VEO. Though the county has not had a terror attack so far, there is heightened VE related activities and with structural and personal factors that pushes and pulls youth into VEOs. The county also has long-standing historical grievances against the government due to injustices committed during the irredentist periods in the 1960s and 70s.

Nakuru sits squarely on the main highways leading to western, Nyanza, and northern Rift Valley regions and to border towns on Kenya-Uganda and Kenya-Tanzania. As a transit county, such mobility may be a conduit for VE messaging to establish networks for radicalization and recruitment of at-risk youth in vulnerable communities. While there has been no pronounced VE phenomenon, the county has an intractable crime gang problem. The phenomenon of urban gangs is caused by among other factors high youth unemployment, substance abuse and delinquency. The gangs in Nakuru do not appear to front any ideological justification for their violent cause unlike VE affiliated groups. However, more studies need to be conducted to understand the level of violent extremism in this county.

SA Researcher presenting during
the stakeholder validation session.

STUDY FINDINGS

While the component facts are important on thier own, thier impact icrease when explained in a well formulated narrative.

The general persuasiveness of narratives is well established (Braddock and Dillard, 2016; van Laer etal., 2014). However, narrative persuasion is not examined in the context of extremist videos, audio, or text. Extremists heavily rely on the narratives in their propaganda campaigns. Minimal studies have documented information on narrative formation, meaning assignment, and their spread at the local level (Jefferis, 2014). Practitioners also provide guidelines for the identification of narratives through a grouping process that allows for the development of responses (Zeiger, 2018). While the study of the narrative influence is important, their creation, meaning placement and sharing processes remains critical. This study provides insights in four areas including:

01 NARRATIVE CREATION:

Creation depends on three major attributes; having a believable story, actionable plans for those who encounter it (Jefferis, 2014), and the need for a religious cover. The third characteristic provides support to the persuasion process and adds to the global whole.

A believable Story:

Narratives use different story types to feature personal attributes, official accounts or events or cultural issues within the specific context (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007). As Glazzard (2017) argue, such attributes blend to form extremist propaganda.

Most narratives are not a series of facts that stand alone, but stories that explains how those facts came to be. The narratives then link up with the local realities in communities through socialization and provide meaning to the process.

The authors discuss extremism by focussing on certain consistent drivers using a cause-and-result rather than a cause-and-effect mechanism. The former shows outcomes in the community are warrant blame to a specific party with no control and requiring an external intervention, as shown below:

Cause-and-result progression of narrative formation: *The constant action of injustice to the Muslim community is one that has gone on for long. It is Haram for law enforcement officers to harass and torture our sisters and mothers, as we saw during the Usalama watch. Are you going to stand and let this injustice continue? Change can only come through the deliverance of Islam from the infidels, this process can be done* *through Jihad. Your action as a true Muslim to fight for the injustices whenever you encounter them.* (Call for a violent resolve)

If the same story would be shared from a cause-and-effect view, it would show that most of the issues blamed to a specific party can be managed if addressed differently.

Cause-and-effect progression of narrative formation: *The Muslims in this community have faced injustice from a long time. The handling of our sisters and mothers during the Usalama watch raid was not acceptable and Haram. How would this be done differently to ensure that this injustice does not continue? As a Muslim, what are the opportunities for engagement, how can we ensure this does not happen again?* (Call for a balanced and peaceful resolve).

While both messages have a call to action, the first message has a call that requires an alternative response to the norm. The second, that takes the effect-to-cause progression, opens an opportunity for engagement, an attribute that the first message avoids completely. As shown above, narrative creation aligns to local contexts and points fingers to specific parties. The facts may not be consistent in their build up, they remain brief and easy to digest for action by the targeted vulnerable individual.

While the component facts are important on their own, their impact increase when explained in a narrative. Well formulated narratives explain a series of events and occurrences but intentionally avoids information that would require the listener to doubt or ask more questions on how the results came to be. In Nairobi, the respondents concluded that given the level of information they have now in comparison to the past, they were less likely to be attracted to VE narratives.

For those who were duped by the VE propaganda, they recount hypocrisy and falsehood as narrated about life in Somalia, to be Al-Shabaab's agenda. In Nakuru, the narratives aligned to political conflict and gang related violence. This is not to imply that violent extremism unknown in the county. In Isiolo, most narratives use the political rhetoric as an anchor for social exclusion and marginalization and provide the level of legitimacy.

Great narratives examine a political, social, economic, or cultural phenomenon and explain its roots using a new violent – worldview. In doing so, the story created has a cast of characters which fall on either side of the spectrum. On the recipients' side, interest in the type of story (Slater & Rouner, 2002), familiarity with the topic (Green & Brock, 2000), and need for affection (Appel & Richter, 2010), influence the narrative persuasion process.

While alternative narratives (as an example), seek solutions to problems in the community, they fail to provide the cast or characters for the community to engage, in their stories. In most cases, the lack of coordination and a cast in alternative narrative offering, results in contradiction and impair narrative persuasion (Igartua & Frutos, 2017).

The offline engagement and Online platforms are connected and targeted. The targeting of the narratives provides for an impersonal reaction to the call to action and an easy linkage for link minded individuals in the narrative campaigns.

Across the counties, such targeting is granular to include geographic areas, local institutions, community grievances, then to local grievances. The respondents in Isiolo stated that messaging starts offline with a youth's exposure to informal talks, watching of video clips with others in social spaces such as miraa bases, football fields, markets, and video dens.

Thereafter, such a youth starts with sharing or receiving basic clips on WhatsApp or other platforms with their peers. The process advances to more detailed and dipper clips as they progress in the socialization process (Fludernik, 1996; Prince, 2004).

Later a VE agent is also provided for added access to more materials Online once their loyalty and trust is gained. At each level of targeting, the narratives require a resonator, which can often be the religious cover, or the grievance used. From the fieldwork, the resonators were varied and included:

- Poverty and unemployment for the case of narratives on economic gains, Frustration, and self-withdrawal with narratives on self-meaning religious purpose.
- Knowledge and selflessness with narratives on religious awakening including the push for hijra and Jihad.
- Power through governance and leadership with narratives on establishment of a just State that is anchored on religious teachings.

The respondents in Isiolo also stated that one is likely to meet VE agents at the mosques or at social activities where football is shown, or PlayStation game spaces. Additionally, the youth who are from poor backgrounds, frustrated by bureaucracy of identity document acquisition, low religious literacy, limited employment options, actions from the military and other land related grievances also serve as vulnerabilities to the youth in Nairobi, Lamu and Kwale, respectively.

The narrative dissemination process also includes sending messengers who are at the same age group to the vulnerable individuals. They mostly target the youths who do not have basic literacy to enable them to counter the narratives. In Kwale, they are often between the ages of 14 to 30.

2 3

Vulnerable Offline

"A 12-year-old son was taken to Darul Irshad in Nguluni and came back to Majengo then disappeared to Somalia and died as a suicide bomber. Individuals who are 30 years to 40 years are the key radicalisers. Due to fear of information leakage, they radicalize youths of 20 to 30 years so that they can now reach out to even younger youths for easy communication and language and its mostly youth to youth talk. Best example is the case of makaburini/ Samir Khan who was tortured, killed, and thrown into a national park. They were in their 30's, 40's and 50's and were feeding Ahmad Iman with radical teachings who was in his 30's to come and reach out to us."

- *Formerly incacerated respondent

Actionable plan to those who encounter it:

When narratives lack an identification of a response plan to a cause or grievance, it is functionally useless. The receivers of narratives require an actionable plan to redress their grievances. The decision for specific actions included in good narratives is determined by the level of socialization in the narrative feeding process (Fludernik, 1996; Prince, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, not all narratives are good narratives (Kinnebrock & Bilandzic, 2006), and understanding their persuasiveness requires considering their level of narrativity, which is the narrative feeding process. The beauty of this progression process, allows for the role allocation to various categories of individuals in the community, thereby ensuring that they participate in the call at their convenience and level of action.

Good narratives have a delightful story and a call to action (Jefferis, 2014), that require targeting to guarantee relationship with specific groups of people. Additionally, the targeting process allows for a separation of roles, the determination of actors and the justification of actions. Scholars with expertise on the categorization group the actors as follows (Jefferis, 2014):
a) Violent extremists
b) Those opposed
c) Those who are neutral
d) Those who are yet undecided.

A plan ensures that the listener inserts themselves in the problem and offers them power for response. This insertion process is a socialization that involves a reorganization of power through an individual's allocation of space for engagement in a grievance. In most instances, the listener of such messaging seeks an alternative way of exercising their power and will in the community. Using the first narrative example, it not only calls the listeners to action but provides a road map on how the action should look like:

Cause-and-result progression of narrative formation: *The constant action of injustice to the Muslim community is one that has gone on for long. It is Haram for law enforcement officers to harass and torture our sisters and mothers, as we saw during the Usalama watch. Are you going to stand and let this injustice continue? Change can only come through the deliverance of Islam from the infidels, this process can be done through Jihad. Your action as a true Muslim to fight for the injustices whenever you encounter them.*

The road map developed by narratives plays to the personal feelings of the vulnerable; an aspect that the violent extremist organizations tend to focus on. The second message also offers a roadmap for response, but one that is not clear, as it depends on other unknown

Vulnerable Offline

factors and assumes tolerance in its administration.

Cause-and-effect progression of narrative formation: *The Muslims in this community have faced injustice from a long time. The handling of our sisters and mothers during the Usalama watch raid was not acceptable and Haram. How would this be done differently to ensure that this injustice does not continue? As a Muslim, what are the opportunities for engagement, how can we ensure this does not happen again?*

The method of narrative sharing and the level of call to action determines the categorization of the actors and the activities they are likely to take. The grouping in the progression chain as shown above expresses their susceptibility to violence, with the violent extremist (high up), being more likely to absorb narratives as they represent a higher socialization process that focuses more on the call to action rather than the story. Those low on the actor scale require more of the story to provide a persuasion for their actions.

An analysis of the responses shows common narratives supporting their interests in VE messaging and radicalization. The desire to die as a martyr in Somalia was one of the influencing narratives high up the socialization process. Some were influenced by deceased Jihadi spouses, peers, recruiters, and radical family members. Recruits (those who are undecided), felt the need to do something for Islam after watching many videos of Sheikh Aboud Rogo but remained hesitant on the push to hijra or the call for Jihad.

Other narratives included pushing the youth to wake up and act to protect Islam (respondents from Mombasa), that Islam is under attack by the Kafirs (non-believers) and the need to stand up and defend it (respondents in Lamu and Kwale), or how change will not come peaceful but through Jihad (respondents in Kisumu and Nairobi respectively). This messaging was majorly presented more of the youth who are in category one (Violent Extremists).

The respondents were attracted to the VE narratives by their conservative prescriptions on modesty (the neutral category). For instance, the female respondents mentioned being attracted by the instructions to wear Jilbab and other conservative dressings not common in Majengo.

This messaging also denoted a growing Wahabi influence (responses from Nairobi). However, financial gain plays a significant role too. Such gains can be in form of cash transfers, payment of foods, fees, medical bills, clothes, promise of high salaries as VE operatives. The respondents in Garissa and Isiolo had messaging focus on marginalization that provided a persuasion for actions locally in Kenya and across the border in Somalia.

*"Kisumu kumekua kazi kwa vijana pesa kwa wazee. Mabadi-
liko yatapatikana kwa dini na sio kwa makafiri walio na unafi-
ki wa kunyanasa vijana."*
- * Youth respondent

*"In Somalia, recruits exposed to texts that glorified violence
such as Ibn Kathir's al Bidaya wal Nihaya, those that con-
demn Sufi practices, entrenched Wahhabism, books found on
websites and in Al-Shabaab."*
- *Returnee respondent

*"They also lured the community to support them by providing bursary
for school going needy students, medical health care for the elderly and
women, supporting widows whose husbands went, women whose sons
went and youths. They also used to get soft loans to start businesses,
and this attracted them to join the Al-Shabaab and agree to migrate
to Somalia (Hijra). They won the community that kind of philanthro-
pist they continued to install the ideologies in people's brains, and it
worked, and reversing is extremely hard up to now. People still believe
Al-Shabaab is their advocate for justice. This made them win over the
people's hearts and minds, and they proceeded to take over the Pum-
wani Riyadha Mosque committee which has enough resources for them
to continue breeding terrorism and attack other Kenyans in the name of
fighting Jihad."*
- * A mother to a former Al-Shabaab operative

*"We also used to talk to our brothers in Al-Shabaab via phone
calls or WhatsApp, and they used to give us pictures of how
they eat, how they enjoy swimming and occasionally, how
they dress (military clothes). I do not even know how to swim,
and the swimming got me overly excited."*
- * University student

*"Everyone thought that Al-Shabaab or the Muslim Youth Centre
were truly fighting on our behalf as Muslim youths but, they were
fighting for their interest not Islam. So, at that time I was part of
them, but now I say a BIG NO because I have the knowledge."*
- * University student

A religious cover for linkage and spiritual justification:

According to Sayyid, Islam is a self-contained system of ideas and practice that can be grafted easily with organic nationalism (Sabaseviciute, 2018). As a way of life, it provides an easy explanation to the social, economic, and political processes in the society. It can be understood as a culturally authentic, programmatic ideology at odds with the various political world orders.

It is a comprehensive ideological system (nizam) covering politics, society, and the economy, which finds its form as an Islamic State (Sabaseviciute, 2018). It is on this basis that the religion in narrative formation and use, serve as a cover and a link to the global cause. An interpreted use of religion provides all the three attributes by offering a subtle ultimatum on the use of violence as right, given the context of the story, and an obligation (Faraj, 1979).

Wahabi sect is entrenched with strict adherence to public morality and outward display of religiosity. They fuel Takfiri discourses[3] in the different counties where the data was collected. Respondents in Nairobi attribute VE messaging to followers of an ultraconservative Muslim Wahabi sect who engage as in otherization of Muslims.

The process ensures a delegitimization through Takfiri discourses that foster in-group solidarity. In mosques and madrasas affiliated to the sect, teachings on Jihadi ideologies and hatred to other faiths is provided to children. They also identify and pray for 'mujahideen' across the global Jihadi theatres. The messaging is often associated with a branding that allows for a separation even within the Muslim communities.

In Isiolo, the narratives pushing for violent Jihad shows the religious interpretation and the links to Shaheed (martyrdom) and about Hijra (relocation to at least a Muslim country). It is easy to convince individuals new to their mosques, those who have just reverted or those who are governed by Tabligh Jamaat.[4]

They speak of the beauty of Islam and the luck they own as Muslims. The narratives in Isiolo also contain messages around Qisas (revenge). The first encounter is physical, and they were gradually introduced to videos of Aboud Rogo and other videos which allegedly shows how Muslims were tortured and that we must protect/defend Muslims and Islam.

The religious interpretation as served, provides the linkage between earthly activities and the divine expectations. The narratives reiterate that receipt of Allah's pleasure here on earth and in eternal bliss (Jannah)[5] is predicated on the Muslim's commitment to helping others.

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The key emphasis is that it is a 'sin' if an individual refuses to help the Muslim Ummah. This cover provides the justification that ensures the participants are segregated based on infidel vs real Muslim who understands the new interpretation of the Quran.

The religious interpretation also provides the anchorage to the narratives. Specifically, the interpretation of Sur al-Anfal structures the cover for the narratives. The overview at the introductory section of this report (Faraj, 1979), also shows that the contextual conversations get a framing from the verses in the Quran. An example (Q8:12)

[ركذت] امدنع مهل أمبر كئالملا ،ةكئالملا كبر مهل أمبر امدنع [ركذت] يقوي اذل ،كعم انأ كئلوأ بولق يف بعرلا يقلأس .اونمآ نيذلا كئلوأ لك مهنم برضأو مهباقر ىلع مهبرضأف ،اورفك نيذلا "ع.صبإ فرط".

— Saheeh International

[12] [Remember] when your Lord inspired to the angels, "I am with you, so strengthen those who have believed. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieved, so strike [them] upon the necks and strike from them every fingertip."

A translation through messaging from the Quranic text above includes the following: Quote * university student: — *"Angels on horses emerging from the Indian Ocean to assist the militia in the war in Somalia."*

3. It is a term denoting a Muslim which excommunicates one of his/her by accusing another Muslim of being an apostate.

4. Tablighi Jamaat is a transnational Sunni Islamic missionary movement that focuses on exhorting Muslims and encouraging fellow members to return to practising their religion as per the Islamic prophet Muhammad, only in matters of ritual, dress, and personal behaviour.

5. Jannah is an Arabic word which means a place of final abode for the righteous and pious individuals.

"...messaging is done secretly and incredibly early in the mosque (Pumwani Riyadha, Kiambiu and Hadija Mosques), after subhi (morning) prayers. Sometime prayers for protection are also made for mujahideen across the globe. As people leave the mosque, the targeted people remain. These are usually youths from around 12 years old and above. They talk secretly about violent extremism related issues. Usalama watch pushed most of the young Muslims who used to live in Majengo to Kiambiu. They have started the same issues of Jihad in Kiambiu. The call non-Muslims Kafir and talk about things and activities as being Haram. This was which was not happening before."

- *formerly incacerated respondent

"most of them would come and collect the youth for cramming of the Quran, and therefore we could not say no. However, we realized that most of those included in the process would refer to individuals as either infidels or mentioning that some activities are Haram."
- *Returnee Mother

Scholars have often understood Islamism's efficacy as a channel for discontent. In the application of narratives, such a process holds that most, if not all, forms of human activity are purposeful and organized around sets of hierarchically ordered preferences (Euben, 1999). Islamists consciously manipulate religion for political ends, and others, consumed with envy, are inspired to humiliate, and destroy.

Hedayah and ICCT (International Centre for Counterterrorism) in 2014, documented the types of narrative goals present. Their summary identified, positive/alternative narratives, strategic counter narratives, ethical counter narratives, ideological and religious counter narratives, tactical counter narratives and humour & sarcasm, as the baseline of counter narratives (Meeting Note, 2014). Such identification serves as a starting point for any program intending to develop a counter/alternative narrative strategy. The findings from this study confirm that all narratives are imbued with intentions and objectives, whose persuasion level increases depending on the targeted vulnerable individual, and their level of socialization. The narratives pose the following intentions or objectives:

Recruitment Narratives:

These narratives focus on the recruitment process, and the messages have rewards that are socio-economic in nature. They offer an opportunity to enjoy, and a feeling of belonging.

Additionally, such narratives encourage learning and being one with the Muslim faith before acting. There are intended to bring individuals to the fold. Most narratives with this goal feature prominently with the call from Ahmed Iman, who was specifically using individual names to call would-be recruits to Somalia. Examples include:

a) (Hafidh) Quran memorizer will get ten chances for his family members to enter paradise without being judged by God, but a Shaheed will get seventy chances.

b) "Jamaa karibuni huku kuna neema kubwa. (Welcome fellow Muslims our group has greater grace).

c) This country Kenya is not your country because if it is yours, you could not be suffering to get ID cards. This country does not want Muslims, and Muslims should stand up and go to Palestine, Syria, and Somalia to defend our brothers and sisters.

d) Kijana utaozwa bikra wa kisomali ukifika huko. (A youth who goes to Somalia will be wedded to virgin Somali girls).

Sympathy Seeking Narratives:

These narratives call to action the in a form of support that includes monetary, linkage, protection etc. Such narratives paint the suffering of Muslims as the result of the inaction of fellow Muslims and calls for a wholistic Muslim Ummah type of support, to respond to those issues.

Such narratives are best expressed through actions, videos requesting funds, and community engagement processes. Targeting for these messages fall on the sympathizers who would like to act indirectly by offering donations. The example in the quote below expresses how such narratives results in individuals looking the other way when there are issues:

Quote * a religious leader, VE victim: — "*I also reported Ahmad Iman to Shaurimoyo police station in 2008 when he and his group assaulted me when I tried to intervene in the community by carrying out an anti Jihad khutbahs in my mosque. They really assaulted me, and I realized that the OCS at that time was bribed handsomely by the sect and any case that was taken to him, he was very biased and took their side. To date, I have the Occurrence Book (OB) number of my case with Ahmad. The group that he attacked me with is now an active part of Al-Shabaab in Somalia.*"

Sample narratives:

a) Muslims in Somalia, Syria, and Palestine are suffering and there is a need for them to go and support them.

b) Do not just sit there and chew miraa, stand up and do something about your religion. Your brothers and sisters are being killed daily by the Kafir. Let us go and defend them.

c) Even if we are in small numbers, if we believe in Allah, we will destroy the enemy.

d) Those who will liberate Islamic faith will come from Africa.

Morale Building Narratives:

An involvement with the group, encourages practical training and political or ideological education or exposure. This process, which is referred to as socialization in the report, ensures that the 'enlightened youth' can understand their violence or actions on behalf of the movement within organizational norms (Taylor and Horgan, 2006).

Such socialization processes ensure multiple outcomes that include ascribing meaning, providing direction, and strengthening their resolve in the fold. It also leads to a deep institutionalization within the group and a merging of their personal and group identity.

Quote * a returnee: — "*In Somalia, recruits exposed to texts that glorified violence such as Ibn Kathir's al Bidaya wal Nihaya, those that condemn Sufi practices, entrenched Wahhabism, books found on websites and in Al-Shabaab*."

Sample narratives:

a. Tusikubali kutawaliwa na makafiri (We should not agree to be ruled by the non-believers).

b. The Mujahideen want the East African community to be an Islamic state and the rest to follow.

c. The UN peacekeepers are not in Somalia to restore peace but are there not to allow sharia law to be established, they are anti-Christ.

d. If we manage to establish Khalifa and shariah law in Somalia the rest of the East African community will follow.

Morale Building Narratives:

The immersion in a threatened compliant like-minded group, can push members toward ever-riskier courses of action. The terror groups use isolation, devotion, and in group pressures to create a moral disengagement from the mainstream.

These foster a moral engagement with the ideology and the norms of the extremist group, in the face of external threat. As supported by Moghaddam (2005), this remains to be a tactic to keep individuals in the fold. Even so, Jihad and Hijra narratives ensure the process work.

Such narratives focus on influencing empathy and a feeling of purity and a cause greater than once self, have a larger religious interpretation cover that ensures the listeners align to a higher purpose and calling. Such messages often include a roadmap for action that incorporates the use of violence as the solution. Sample narratives include:

a. Piganeni na makafiri na wanafiki (fight the non-believers and hypocrites)

b. Kukaa kwa nchi ya makafiri na kutoa kodi kwa makafiri hairuhusiwi (living in a non-believer's country and paying them tax is not allowed in Islam).

c. Should Kafir mistreat you, you just slaughter him.

d. If you violate the right of a non-believer, it is not sinful in fact the non-believer has no rights over a Muslim.

Discussions after the validation meeting.

03 NARRATIVE GROUPING:

Closely related to goal setting, is the idea that narrative can be categorized further for a targeted response. The findings from the fieldwork align to the narrative categorization as shown in the guide from Hedaya that includes Political and Military Narratives; Social and Personal Narratives; Ethnic and Clan-Based Narratives; Religious and Ideological Narratives; and Economic Narratives (Zeiger, 2018). The presentation of findings in this section does not separate the Religious and Ideological Narratives. The religious interpretation is used as a cover, a conveyor, and a link in different contexts and in groups. Therefore, the cover is included in all the narrative formations. For this study, the analysis provides four categories:

Rewards: Financial, Material, Religious, or Other

Narratives under this category focus on ensuring that the target gets to understand the benefits of engagement on earth and in paradise. According to the socialization level mentioned earlier in the report, such narratives target newer individuals who are weighing the benefits of engaging vs those of non-engagement.

These narratives were shared across the ten counties with most of the focus in Nakuru, Kisumu, Kakamega and Nairobi counties.

Takfiri:

These narratives focus on the formulation of a model Muslim. These formulations may focus on the type of engagement with other Muslims, the actions against the Muslim persecutors or the avoidance to engage with non-Muslims.

Such Narratives were provided in the three northern counties, Nairobi, and the coastal counties where the fieldwork was conducted. For the other counties, the focus was on getting them to emigrate to areas where they would find a community that models them into the expected model Muslims.

Retribution and Marginalization:

These narratives focus on justifications for action against the unjust communities. Actions can include the targeting of all the infidels and their enemy due to the harm caused to the Muslim Ummah and Islam as a whole.

Establishment of the Islamic State:

These narratives provide the reasoning behind the application of divine laws (Sharia) and the action against unjust governance. These narratives were not mentioned in Nakuru, Kakamega and Kisumu.

Narratives from Nairobi county covered all the groups identified. While the annex shows more messages from Nairobi County, it should be noted that most of these messages have also been shared in the other counties with little revisions to fit the local contexts; especially when focusing on the reward categories.

In Garissa, the respondents reveal that, the narratives fall broadly into the following three categories including, Narratives of retribution (and repression), Narratives of reward and Narrative of self-determination. The bulk of messaging about Jihadism do come from Jihadists themselves or their agents, accomplices, returnees, unintentional social circles of respondents, herders, at water points, through their Online and offline media.

For the counties where the conversation and the socialization processes have "matured," the type of messaging is not focusing on the rewards but on the religious duty, the justification for setting up the caliphate and the need to be engaged.

The narratives from Mombasa Lamu and Kwale as an example focus more on the religious duty, the need to work with the "brothers" in arms and the need to travel to Somalia. This is contrary to other counties that have not matured in the socialization process, allowing for a mix of messaging that include material benefits and religious justifications, like Isiolo.

Additionally, the conversation of land feature across the counties. This comes out in two forms:

1. The question of occupation and the need to fight back to take ownership of the stolen land; (featured prominently in the narratives after the Mpeketoni attack in Lamu and in the conversations in Kwale with "Pwani si Kenya").

2. The question on governance with the push to have the setup of the Islamic State. While this has come out clearly in the coastal counties, the same has also been featured in the narratives from Nairobi.

The counties of Kakamega and Kisumu, included limited narratives from the respondents. Part of this was because most of the respondents were Christians. Additionally, the counties are politically charged, and this may have influenced the responses. However, it should be noted that narratives had limited mention of religious obligation and more of a response to link up with like-minded "Muslim Brothers" who will work together to resolve the governance issues that these counties face. The narratives featured more of the benefits of engagement in the group. These benefits included, financial, material and even religious benefits (mostly in paradise).

As a trend, for Kisumu and Kakamega, the narratives pointed more to the socio-economic issues and the call for Hijra (in coastal and north-eastern counties) to join others with purpose. While the call for Hijra pushed for the importance of travel, this kind of travel did not warrant the engagement in Somalia, but a stop in another county before progression into Somalia. The narratives from these two counties also focused on the importance of governance. Though anecdotal, it is possible that the messengers in these counties engage better on political discourses that have a religious cover.

As shown with the narratives shared, the resonators for these two counties are those that relate to political vulnerability and issues to do with lack of governance in the region. The narratives from these two counties also avoid mentioning that the political engagement is one of infidels, but indirectly indicates the failures from the said political engagement.

Nakuru stood as a county on its own. As a county, it has been isolated from violent extremist attacks and only featuring, in the discourse, as a transit point for violent extremism and terrorism. The respondents mentioned that their first engagement with violent extremism and terrorism was through the media and conversations on attacks from other counties. Additionally, the narratives that resonated with the locals pointed to a general mistreatment of the Muslims, and the enforced disappearances that targeted the Muslim communities.

While there were only three or so narratives from this county, the findings show more influence on messages that touch on the well-being of the Muslim community and not the call for Jihad as a religious duty. While the level of vulnerability to violent extremism in this county seems lower, the political pressures may improve the linkage to narratives that exploit the socio-economic gains.

SA Staff at the stakeholder validation meeting.

SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS:

The medium used and the production quality, intensifies narrative processing. Stories written by well-known authors generate higher levels of narrative processing than material produced by non-experts (Green & Brock, 2000). At the community level, the charismatic leadership, or actions by specific Sheikhs serve the purpose of well-known authors and contribute to the absorption of certain violent extremist narratives (Kinnebrock & Bilandzic, 2006). In Nairobi, Ahmed Iman served as a well-known author and orator. Additionally, medium credibility provides ample evidence that the more appealing the content is the more persuasive it becomes (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007; Metzger, et al., 2003).

Verbal sharing and the use of audio-visual mechanisms (in compact disks and flash disks) ease the spreading of messages in closed spaces across the counties. However, in the advent of Covid-19 lockdown, narrative circulation gained prominence on social media. Specific spaces where these narratives circulated included Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, YouTube, and Imo. The respondents mentioned that the accounts used for spreading the narratives had a shared password, with up to ten users being able to access the accounts to spread the narratives. This process allowed for faster access, and undetected transfer of information and VE instructions in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kwale, Lamu and Isiolo counties.

In Nairobi, the chief radicaliser, and transmitters of VE messaging was Ahmed Iman, who used multiple social media accounts with numerous aliases. Ahmed Iman had an elaborate VE messaging distribution network through Al-Ahli media website. In Isiolo, the social media services such as WhatsApp and Telegram were the most convenient and commonly used. TikTok was also gaining prominence with pages such as @mujahidina6, mujahidina9, and @ayubgibbs. The use of Telegram and WhatsApp was due to their encryption mechanisms and minimal risks of exposure to unintended persons/individuals.

In the other counties, Facebook and Twitter remain extensively utilized for gathering global narratives from the violent extremist organizations. However, WhatsApp has gained prominence due to encryption with ease of access. As the respondents mentioned, most of the service providers have offered free WhatsApp internet access, making it easy to share messages even with limited data resources. On the other hand, respondents from Kwale and Nairobi mentioned that Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp makes it easy to accept calls from Somalia. Using Social Network Analysis (SNA), twitter data collected throughout the period of the study was analysed to determine the networks based on specific keywords.

Keyword 'Jihad' Network

Vulnerable Online
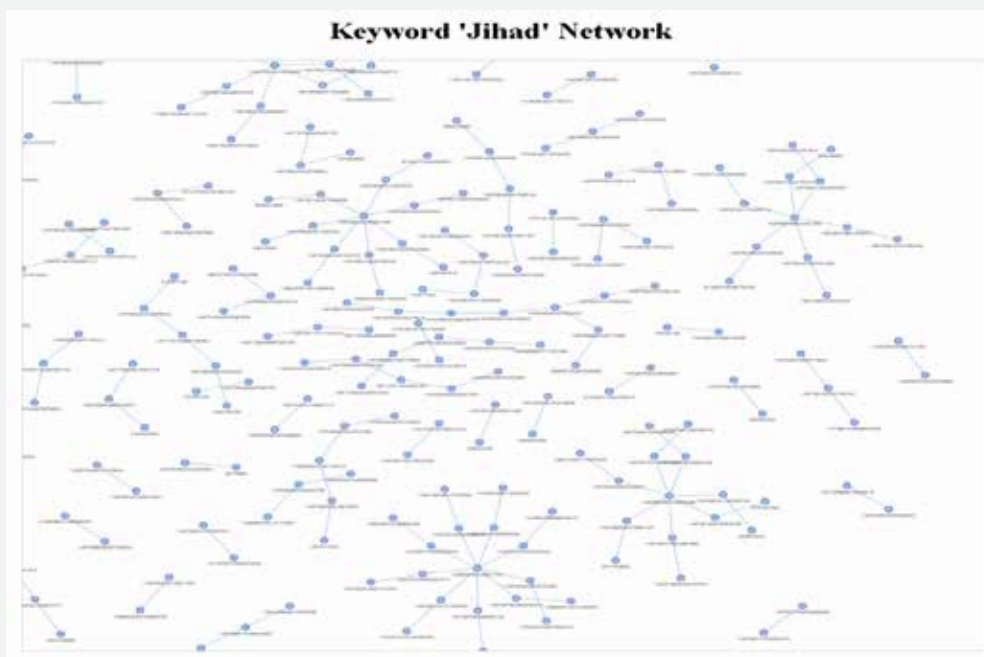
As a start, narratives with the keyword jihad have limited linkages and networks Online showing the possibility of having such conversations in persons and with higher up level of socialization. Based on the SNA available networks are scattered with limited linkages showing that the message has diverse meaning and use across the region. This may be both positive and negative depending on the use case. On one side, the non-connected nature of narratives thereby means that there maybe various interpretations of the term and therefore use by both violent extremist organisations and Muslim communities. On the negative side, it also provides a vulnerability as one term has different meanings and therefore, it can be misinterpreted for harm.

Keyword 'Al-Shabab' Network

Additionally, the narratives from Al-Shabaab, on Al-Shabaab and by Al-Shabaab, have a lot of networks in general proving that the level of influence is not only linked to a single node sharing but multiple links and nodes passing the information to numerous individuals as shown in the Al-Shabaab SNA.

Keyword 'Al-Qaeda' Network
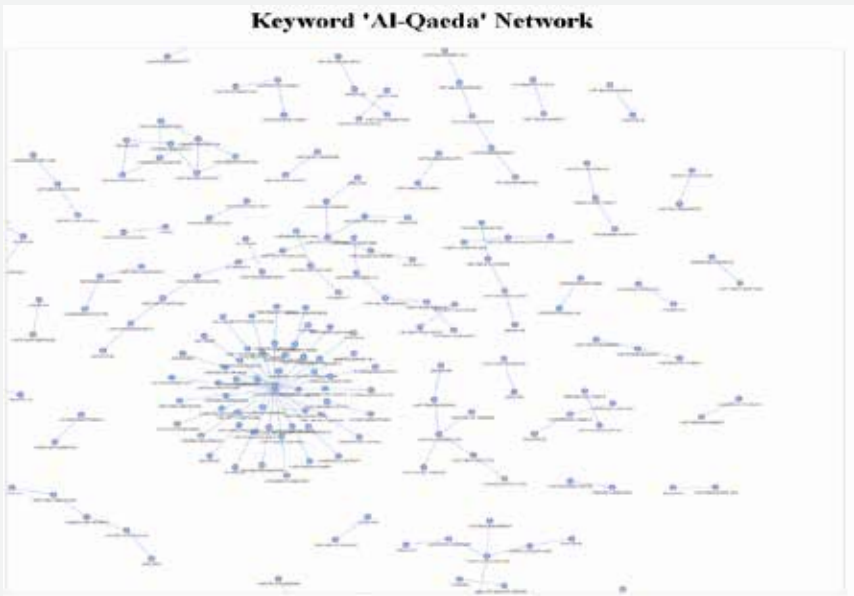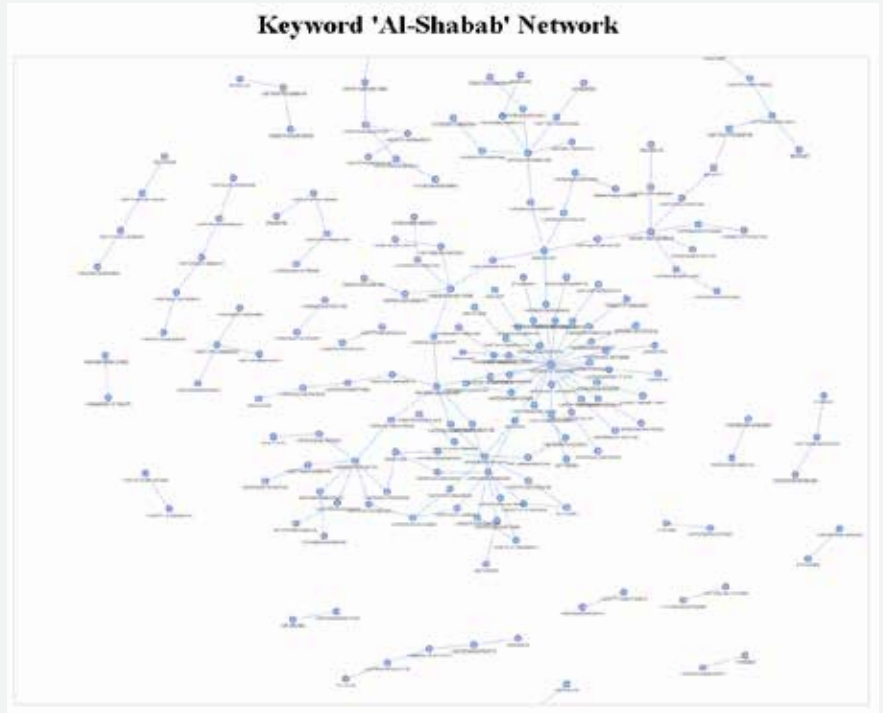
This is also visible for the Keyword Al-Qaeda which gathered multimode linkages as shown in the SNA. The SNA for both keywords show that both VEO's still remain the most prominent in the region. This comes at a time with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Somalia continues to operate in the country's northeast, particularly from its based in the East of the Gollis mountains. These multi-nodes also show the level of interest for these two violent extremist organisations in the region.

Based on the twitter analysis, other VEO mention in the region attract linkages at a single node meaning that they don't gather interests like what Al-Shabaab has at present.

Vulnerable Offline

Vulnerable Online

In total, the narratives linked to terrorism have very limited linkages. This can be attributed to the nonagreement of specific actions to be linked to terrorism or not. The respondents observed that due to heightened censorship and Online moderation, VE operatives cannot post on YouTube because they know the videos will be removed by the government and the tech company.

They have opted for the short messaging options that Twitter, TikTok, Telegram, and WhatsApp offer. There are also Online books that glorified Jihadism, e.g., al bidaya wal nihaya[6] available on Jihadi affiliated websites. On Facebook, for instance, respondents observed that a VE related content will come to one's page or when one searches within the platform, but such VE contents will inaccessible except by admission into such a page by its administrator. This has thus far served as a challenge for data scrapping on such Online spaces.


Keyword 'Terror Attack' Network
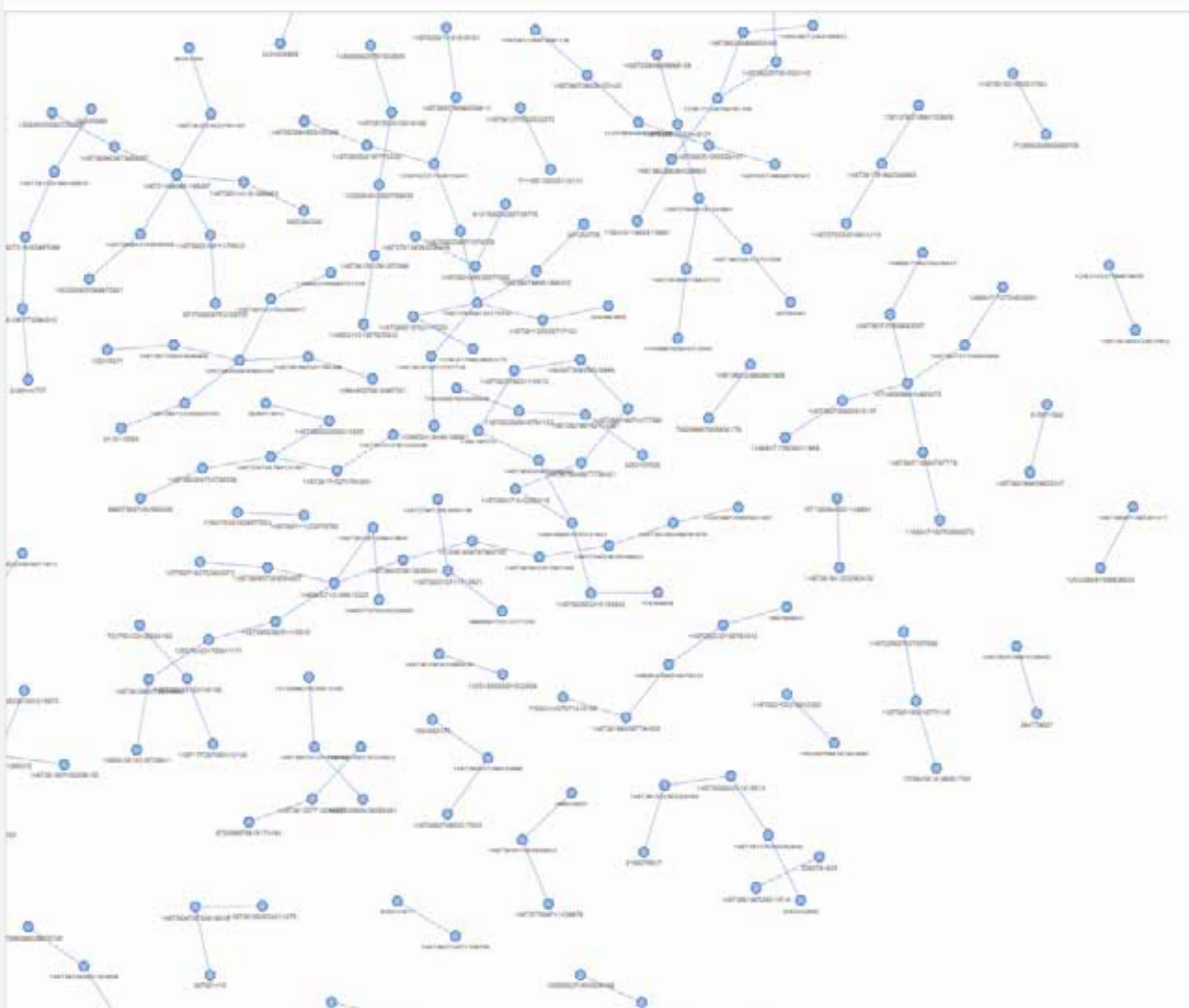
6. Al-Bidaya wa'l-Nihaya fi al-Ta'rikh is a famous sunni literature by Ibn Kathir. Find more information here: https://archive.org/details/BookOfTheEnd_ibnkathir

CONCLUSION:

This report serves as a commencement to the process of identification, meaning placement and grouping of narratives. While the study covered only ten counties out of the forty-seven counties in Kenya, the responses show a framework of how narratives can be used to identify some vulnerable counties and how to plan responses.

Stakholders at the validation meeting.
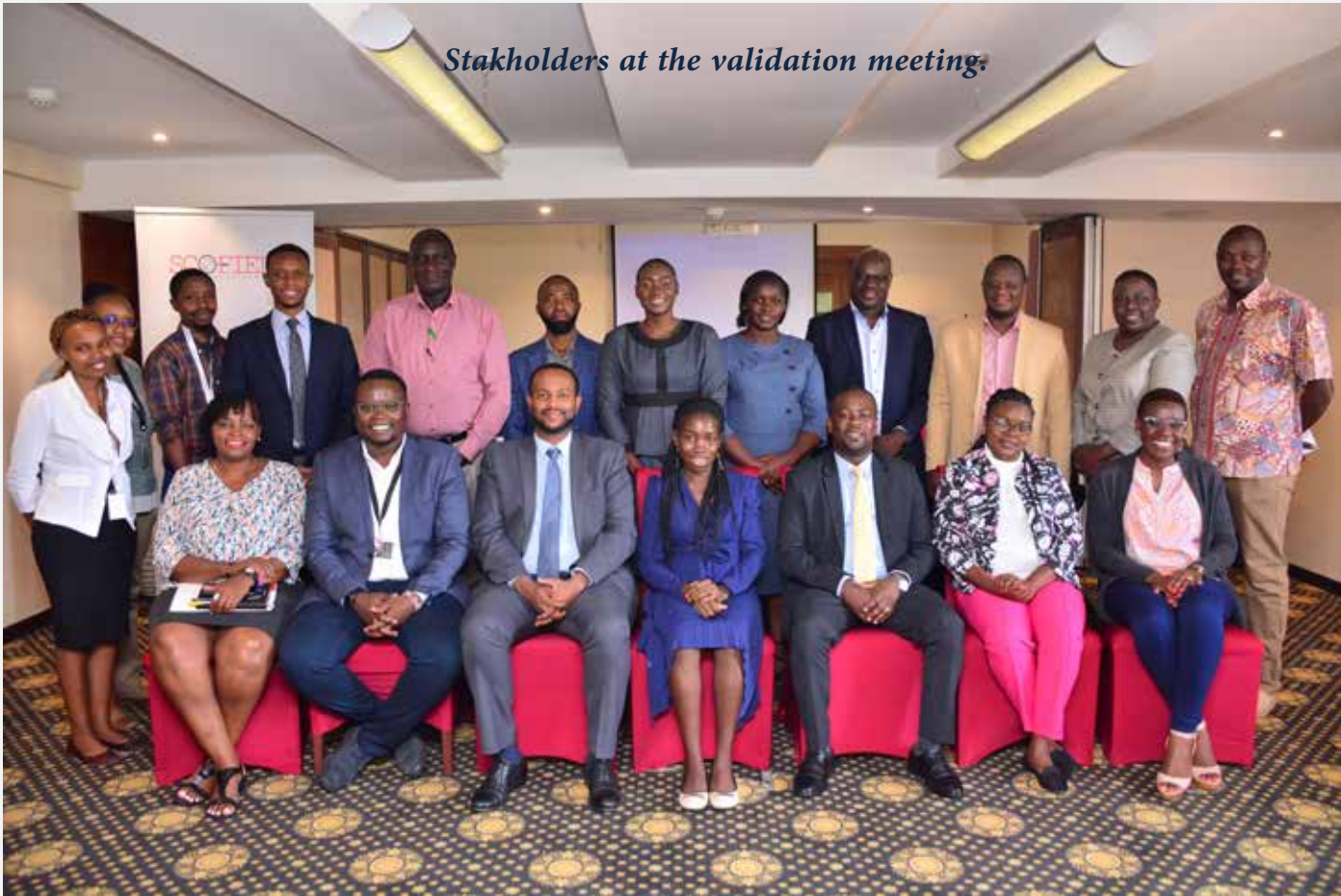
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