

AL SHABAAB AND THE 2022 ELECTIONS IN KENYA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Elections provide an opportunity for those opposed to democracy to undermine their adversaries and promote their own agenda. With Kenya's 2022 elections as a case study, this paper explores how and why al Shabaab might try to influence democratic processes.

Evidence from the Kenyan elections in 2013 and 2017 suggested al Shabaab were acutely aware of the significance of Kenya's democratic process for their own ability to continue operating. In 2017, in particular, the group produced a series of propaganda communications directed at the Kenyan public, urging them to boycott the polls or to vote for candidates that would withdraw Kenyan troops from Somalia. They also attacked candidates in the North-eastern region and stole an electronic voter kit.

Thus, the UK-funded REINVENT programme set out to explore al Shabaab's interests in and capabilities of influencing Kenya's 2022 general elections. Additional support from UN Women allowed the research team to conduct a survey of attitudes amongst the electorate in the four counties bordering Somalia. This research considers perceptions of al-Shabaab's influence through a gendered lens and uses a gendered analysis to assess whether these perceptions impacted how people voted.

The research was directed by two main questions:

1. How did al Shabaab respond to the 2022 election process in terms of propaganda output and terrorist activity?
2. Was the group able to influence the outcome and / or level of participation either at national or local levels?

To address these questions, a mixed-methods approach was taken to data collection and a gender-sensitive analytical framework was applied. Key sources of primary data included collection of security monitoring data of al Shabaab attacks in Kenya and propaganda throughout 2022, as well as an exploration of how al Shabaab activity evolved alongside the political context in Kenya. Additionally, a gender-sensitive, perception study was conducted through a large-scale survey across Kenya's four border counties with Somalia and key interviews with a selection of academics, NGO staff, pastoralists and small business owners. This study provided gender-sensitive data on voting preferences and perceptions of local security dynamics and influences on voting-related decisions.

Al Shabaab and Kenya's 2022 Elections

This study identified three key areas to assess in order to understand how al Shabaab tried to disrupt, boycott or influence Kenyan elections. In terms of specific messages that were distributed in advance of the polls, these were broadly in line with previous election cycles. There was, as has been long been the case, a focus on calls for withdrawal from Somalia, claims that the Kenyan military have failed to make any progress in Somalia and demands for Kenyan Muslims to boycott the election. However, in comparison to 2017, the group was relatively quiet in 2022 – only making a few direct references to the elections themselves.

From late 2021 to early 2022, there was a significant recruitment drive targeting Swahili speakers. Such messaging almost always targets men directly, with references to women made very rarely. This reflects the patriarchal structure of the local socio-cultural context, as well as the gender role expectations of al Shabaab itself. After the election on 27 August, al Shabaab specifically addressed the new Kenyan administration, renewing demands for the government to withdraw defence personnel from Somalia.

Significantly more attacks were recorded in Kenya in 2022 than in recent years. There was an increase in activity between June and August, in the build-up to the elections. It is possible that attacks in August were designed to cause civilian displacement and to prevent the electorate from turning out to vote, but no evidence was obtained to confirm this. There is some evidence that al Shabaab were more careful in their targeting around the elections, seeking to impact state law enforcement and avoid civilian casualties. However, the study found that it does not appear that the group launched any coordinated effort to disrupt the elections through the use of either violence or propaganda.

Violent incidents were sporadic and uncoordinated. Due to attacks largely targeting law enforcement, and the majority of these roles being held by men in the Kenyan context, the evidence showed that the majority of al Shabaab's attack casualties were men. However, it is important to note that there is victimisation beyond direct casualties of these attacks and that these impacts are often significantly gendered. For example, women often disproportionately face the economic effects of attacks, especially if the male casualties were the financial provider for the family.

Attacks were relatively small in scale and appeared opportunistic, rather than well-planned. Although more al Shabaab attacks were recorded in Kenya in 2022 than in previous years, there are numerous factors in addition to it being an election year that could have contributed to this. Ultimately, al Shabaab activity during the elections had minimal impact on proceedings.

Kenya law enforcement agencies were broadly praised for their activity during the elections. Additional officers were sent to areas along the border to provide security during the elections and almost all key informants explained that voting had been secure and that they did not feel intimidated during voting.



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Perceptions of Voting and Al Shabaab's Impact

91% of the 550 survey respondents said that they were registered voters, with a higher proportion (95%) of female respondents registered than males (88%). This sample reflects a politically active population, expressing a desire to exercise their democratic rights. More than a third said they would consider standing as a candidate in future elections.

A higher proportion of male (42%) than female (30%) respondents said that they would consider running. This reflects local socio-cultural power dynamics where the so-called 'negotiated democracy' in the North-eastern counties largely excludes women from candidacy decision-making processes. The all-male community leadership in these counties hold the power to cycle leadership positions to their male offspring. However, when looking across the whole of Kenya there is improving equality in representation, where in 2022 women held 201 of the 1882 elective seats in Kenya. This represents 10.6% of elected leaders, which is up from 172 (9.1%) seats in 2017 and 145 (7.7%) seats in 2013.

Of respondents that said they would consider political office, 45% would seek a Member of County Assembly seat, a ward level position. Far fewer would run for Member of Parliament (25%), Governor (11%) or Senator (8%). Of female respondents 25% expressed that they would consider the position of Women's Representative, which is a lower percentage than when asked if they would consider running for elections (30%). This suggests that they would seek positions with impact beyond just those issues that would fall under the purview of the Women's Representative. However, women were less likely than men to seek more senior positions. This again could reflect the local patriarchal structure and power dynamics, suggesting that women felt less confident with seniority or less supported to achieve these positions. Likewise, it could suggest that women deferred the central government positions, as they were more interested in engaging politically at the community level.

Of registered voters in the sample, the vast majority (93%) said that they exercised their democratic right on election day. 47% voted for their preferred candidate because of promises of employment, 37% because of campaign messaging and 35% with clan/community alliances. No respondents said that they voted for a candidate because they were coerced or threatened.

A greater proportion of females (59%, compared to only 38% of males) said they voted for their chosen candidate because of promises of employment, potentially indicating a desire of women to expand beyond domestic roles into the workforce. In addition, 46% of females voted for their preferred candidate because of campaign messaging, as compared to 29% of males, potentially reflecting their responsiveness to the issues versus allegiance to male-dominated community/clan power structures. Interviewees overwhelmingly stated that they felt secure at the polling centres. However, most acknowledged generally the fear created by al Shabaab. When asked about their own security during the elections, 47% said they had been 'concerned' or 'very much concerned'. Only 16% said they were 'not concerned at all'. Al Shabaab was most frequently identified as the greatest concern in Mandera and Lamu, the counties worst affected by al Shabaab violence in 2022.



REASONS FOR VOTING

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In the survey, 16% of respondents said they thought candidates in their area had faced security threats. The majority of these cited rival politicians (53%), but 19% identified al Shabaab. Although political violence was most frequently identified as the greatest concern (37%), a significant proportion (28%) said they were 'most' concerned about al Shabaab. However, despite recognising the threat presented by al Shabaab, the perception study indicates that voting decisions were not influenced by the group

Conclusions and recommendations

Evidence shows that al Shabaab was less coordinated in their approach to the 2022 elections than they had been in 2017. Fewer propaganda messages were released relating to the elections in comparison to 2013 and 2017 and, though there was some evidence of targeting, attacks were not conducted at an intensity capable of disrupting the polling process. It appears that law enforcement officials successfully limited the capabilities and freedom of movement of al Shabaab during the elections in 2022. A measured approach from security forces during these elections served to build trust and stability.

The perception study results demonstrated that factors other than insecurity drive voting preferences of the electorate along the border and that these factors are highly gendered. Despite the findings that al Shabaab failed to exert any meaningful direct influence on the elections, the group's activities

undoubtedly impact social norms. It is conceivable that al Shabaab has a more subtle or insidious influence on Kenyan politics and socio-cultural norms, including gender role expectations, conceivably through asserting influence on male-dominated clan leadership.

The paper identified several recommendations:

Government of Kenya

- The government should continue to strengthen democracy in the North-eastern counties and Lamu, building on the apparent desire amongst the electorate to be involved in politics.
- The government must carefully consider how it communicates with populations in Kenya's peripheries, especially those areas regularly affected by violent extremism.
- The government should bolster opportunities for political participation and the empowerment of women and other marginalised communities.
- The proposed reopening of the Kenya-Somalia border must be managed carefully to minimise the impact on local populations, in particular vulnerable groups.

Law enforcement

- Law enforcement actors must recognise that trust can only be built with communities in Kenya's peripheries through the impartial provision of security.
- The government should consider options for increasing the representation of women in security agencies, both in the counties along the border with Somalia and nationwide.
- Reporting of security incidents should be disaggregated by gender.

Civil society / non-governmental organisations

- Recognising the strong commitment to the state, development actors working in the border counties should consider integrating civic education into existing programmes with an intersectional and gendered lens. This perspective will enhance understanding how gender and other inequalities are impacting voting and motivation for political participation and help to effectively increase the political participation of women and other marginalised groups.
- Women should be encouraged and supported to run for all offices, not only the Women's Representative position.
- Civil society should collaborate with government on the opening of the border, offering access to research, raising awareness and conducting needs-assessments of security concerns across different groups, ensuring attention to the inclusion of women, girls and other marginalised groups.

Research

- A larger gender-disaggregated quantitative survey sample size would have been more enlightening and should be attempted in relation to future elections.
- Security incident data should be collected consistently over several years and be gender-sensitive and gender-disaggregated.
- A deeper dive is needed of the indirect influence al Shabaab may have on communities along the border (e.g., through efforts to change how religion is taught, or potentially through the manipulation of clan divisions or gender norms).
- A future study should carefully assess the gendered perceptions of security and insecurity, especially looking to understand gendered difference in perceptions of al Shabaab as a security threat.
- Though not all directly relevant to the main research questions of this paper, the survey produced some interesting data on the factors driving decision making during elections in Kenya. These variables deserve further exploration.

1. INTRODUCTION

General elections represent the foundation of any inclusive democracy. Thus, for groups that are fundamentally opposed to democracy, elections are an opportunity to undermine their adversaries and to promote their own agenda. This is true for insurgent organisations operating within nation-states led by a working government, but it is arguably also true for groups whose primary base may be outside of the functioning nation-state's borders, especially if they reject the legitimacy of those borders. With Kenya's 2022 elections as a case study, this paper explores how and why an Islamist jihadist organisation might try to influence democratic processes in a neighbouring state.

Evidence from the Kenyan elections in 2013 and 2017 suggested al Shabaab were acutely aware of the significance of Kenya's democratic process for their own ability to continue operating. In 2013, then emir Mukhtar Abu al-Zubeir ('Abdi Godane') told Muslims in Kenya to boycott the polls altogether.¹ In the build up to the 2017 polls, al Shabaab's media outlets released a series of videos directly addressing the Kenyan public.² The group also attacked candidates³ and were purportedly able to steal an 'electronic voter kit'⁴, in what amounted to a 'multi-part influence operations campaign'.⁵

In 2017, the group seemingly had a vested interest in the outcome of the vote at both national and local levels. It has been suggested that al Shabaab actively campaigned against incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta, recognising that he was more likely to maintain the presence of Kenyan troops in Somalia.⁶ Indeed, much

of the material released by al Shabaab at this time argued that Kenya's military incursion into Somalia had failed and was only serving to benefit Kenyan elites.⁷

Recognising al Shabaab's inherent interest in Kenya's elections, the UK-funded REINVENT programme set out to explore the organisation's intent and capability during the 2022 general elections. The polls also presented a chance to better understand community willingness to engage in state-building and attitudes towards national identity.⁸ Additional support from UN Women allowed the research team to conduct a gendered survey of attitudes amongst the electorate in the four counties bordering Somalia. Therefore, this study focuses on teasing out perceptions of al-Shabaab's influence on the election process and uses a gendered analysis to assess whether this impacted the ways in which people voted.

In the literature, there is a significant volume of work focusing on al Shabaab propaganda⁹ and some analysis which directly addresses the Kenyan context in this regard.¹⁰ However, the current research looks at al Shabaab activity throughout an electioneering period and goes beyond a review of media output to include a survey of community perceptions. This approach allows the researchers to examine changes in al Shabaab's activity in response to the evolving political context in Kenya and the varied impacts across different demographics of the population, especially focusing on gender disaggregated perceptions and dynamics of influence. The study builds on existing research conducted on

¹ Anderson and McKnight 2015; Reuters 2013

² Freear 2019

³ AfricaNews 2017; The Standard 2017a

⁴ West 2017

⁵ Anzalone 2020

⁶ Anzalone 2020; Kenyatta's opponent in the polls, Raila Odinga, had

historically argued for Kenya's withdrawal (Nation Africa 2014)

⁷ Anzalone 2020

⁸ UNDP 2023

⁹ Chonka 2016; Harper 2018; Kriel 2018; Anzalone 2020

¹⁰ Freear 2019; Papale 2020



Electoral officials (left) wait to hand over election results in Nairobi. Photo: Boniface Muthoni/via Getty Images

the previous two elections, establishing how al Shabaab's approach has evolved and continued to adapt up to the most recent election in 2022.

The report initially outlines the methodology, laying out the study's primary research questions and explaining the mixed methods approach used to explore the key issues, including the gendered analysis framework. Key limitations are also identified. The following section builds a conceptual framework for the paper through existing theoretical work on the relationship between terrorist groups and elections. The third section offers a background to the local context by examining al Shabaab's objectives in Kenya.

With this context in place, the fourth section offers primary data analysis of the events of 2022 in Kenya, looking particularly at al Shabaab messaging and attacks. The fifth section reviews the results of a survey conducted amongst the electorate to better understand the impact of al Shabaab's activity on voter preferences. Finally, the conclusions provide answers to the key research questions and examine the factors that influence insurgent and terrorist group activity during an election period. This is followed by targeted recommendations for civil society, researchers, and government agencies, including law enforcement, for dealing with a violent extremism (VE) threat during a democratic election process.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Questions

This study sought to understand whether al Shabaab tried to influence the 2022 elections in any way and whether the group succeeded. In order to do this it asked two principal research questions:

1. How did al Shabaab respond to the 2022 elections in terms of propaganda output and terrorist activity?
2. Was the group able to influence the outcome and / or level of participation either

at national or local levels? (or did al Shabaab pay a relatively peripheral role in comparison to other forms of violence?)

To address these questions, there were several components to this study and a mixed methods approach was taken to data collection and analysis. All efforts were made to ensure that the various approaches provided robust, triangulated data.

2.2 Data Collection Methods

First, an extensive literature review was conducted. This looked at reporting on al Shabaab's previous activities in relation to electoral processes in Kenya and Somalia, exploring the militant organisation's propaganda and the nature of its attacks during the 2013 and 2017 election periods, as well as broader efforts to theorise militant group relationships with democracy.

Then, al Shabaab activity throughout the 2022 election year was carefully monitored with monthly reports on attacks and associated propaganda messaging. Incident data was provided by a private risk management provider and supplemented by a review of al Shabaab claims of responsibility. This initial security analysis facilitated an understanding of the actions taken, if any, by the militant organisation in response to political developments in Kenya. This work enabled the researchers to analyse how al Shabaab activity and propaganda evolved alongside the Kenyan political context. It is notable, however, that this data is not gender disaggregated, thus gender analysis of this portion of the research is limited.

Finally, to capture how this messaging and the group's ongoing attacks were interpreted by the local electorate, a perceptions study was

conducted amongst communities living in areas along the border – those arguably most exposed to al Shabaab and worst affected by the group's use of violence. Two approaches were used: key informant interviews (KIIs) and a quantitative survey of community perceptions. A gender lens was adopted during this portion of the research, capturing gendered disaggregated data during collection and including gendered analysis of perceptions and comparison across men's and women's responses.

2.2.1 Key informant interviews

KIIs targeted individuals with particular knowledge of al Shabaab activities (Annex 1). Amongst those spoken to were academics, NGO staff, pastoralists and small business owners. In total, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted in September 2022, with six respondents located in Kenya's North-eastern counties, one in Nairobi and another within Beled Hawo on the Somali side of the border. Four initial respondents were selected from amongst the researchers' existing networks, with four others identified through snowballing. Both men and women were included, but the availability of funds limited the number of qualitative KIIs that could be conducted. Due to security concerns, KIIs were conducted over the phone.

2.2.2 Quantitative Survey

A quantitative survey was conducted in December 2022 in the four counties along Kenya's border with Somalia, those with the highest levels of al Shabaab violence (Annex 2). A total of 552 individuals were surveyed. The sample size and the length of the survey were largely determined by the available funds but the researchers ensured that the survey was statistically significant at the county level. The safety of enumerators and respondents was of paramount importance throughout the survey. An assessment of the security risk meant that potentially important sub-counties – including Fafi in Garissa County, Tarbaj in Wajir County and Lafey in Mandera County – had to be excluded.

Other areas directly impacted by al Shabaab violence were included, but the omission of these areas should be noted as a potential limitation.

The survey provided data on perceptions amongst both male and female respondents of voting age (Annexes 2 and 3). The short list of mainly close-ended questions focused on how people made their decisions on whether to vote in the 2022 general election and whom to vote for. Questions were also included regarding whether respondents had seen al Shabaab messages. The survey questions sought to assess, through a gendered perspective, the extent to which al Shabaab influenced voter preferences during the 2022 elections.

2.3 Research challenges

This is a sensitive topic, and those living in areas worst affected by al Shabaab violence are understandably often unwilling to speak openly about the activities of the militants. Both the qualitative KIs and the largely quantitative survey provided participants with the opportunity to decline to take part. However, even when they did agree to be involved, it is impossible to ascertain whether they were able to be completely open. Concerns over social desirability bias – respondents providing answers that they think the enumerator or interviewer wants to hear – are always a concern in studies of this nature.

However, the impact of this on the results was mitigated by guaranteeing respondents' anonymity. Survey enumerators also worked in pairs to ensure that respondents were comfortable and able to speak to an enumerator of the same gender if they so wished. The project was funded by more than one international donor and involved the cooperation of several different research partners. This collaboration meant that multiple perspectives were taken on board, however, it also meant that the researchers had to balance different agendas and objectives. While there were no direct contradictions, priorities were not always aligned.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 The relationship between terrorism and democracy

Part terrorist organization, part insurgent group, part shadow government, and part Mafia', al Shabaab can be difficult to define.¹¹ The organisation operates as an insurgency within Somalia, ultimately seeking to overthrow the internationally recognised government in Mogadishu.¹² In Kenya, where al Shabaab does not govern any territory,¹³ the group is largely confined to the use of terrorist methods to achieve their objectives. In this report, insurgency and terrorism will be used interchangeably in the context of al Shabaab.

To provide a framework to this study and guide the analysis of data gathered, it will help to better understand the relationship between terrorism and democracy. Discussing the potential for terrorist attacks in different political systems, theorists broadly fit into three camps and the debate will guide us in understanding how al Shabaab interacts with the governments in Kenya and Somalia.

In the first camp are those that argue that the inherent freedoms guaranteed in liberal democratic states provides insurgent groups the ability to plan, carry out and publicise their violence with relative ease in comparison to authoritarian states, thereby making democracies more likely to suffer terrorist attacks by insurgent groups.¹⁴ Others supporting this position suggest that democratic societies are also more at risk of attacks because 'their publics have low thresholds of cost tolerance and high ability to affect state policy'.¹⁵ Furthermore, it is stressed that political competition is a primary factor underlying the relationship between democracy

and terrorism, due to democracies having multiple interest groups competing for influence and space which can lead groups with limited political influence to resort to violence in order to achieve their objectives.¹⁶

These arguments fail to address the ability and propensity of established democracies to effectively respond to terrorist violence, as arguably the legitimacy of liberal democracy is founded upon its ability to protect the freedom and rights of its citizens and their property.¹⁷ Thus, in the second camp are those academics and researchers who assert that there is a negative correlation between democracy and terrorism. This position is primarily based on the logic that democratic governments are better able to address the grievances of interest groups through participation in democratic processes and institutions, thus precluding the perceived need for violence. Scholars in this group hypothesised that countries with higher political permissiveness, i.e. ones that may allow more radical groups to politically participate, may have a lower rate of VE.¹⁸ This would be because a group sees political participation as a more effective method of achieving their goals than violence. The suggestion that democratic states are better placed to prevent violent extremist attacks has been supported by empirical research, which found that democracy reduced terrorism but increased the difficulty in tackling it.¹⁹

However, the statistics are not conclusive. While one study focusing on the period between 1975 and 1997 purported to find a higher

¹¹ Bacon 2022

¹² Klobucista et al. 2022

¹³ Militants established a semi-permanent presence in the Boni Forest in 2012 (The East African 2017a), but do not offer any social services in the same way that they do in much of South-Central Somalia.

¹⁴ Eyerman 1998

¹⁵ Pape, 2003: 349-350

¹⁶ Chenoweth 2010

¹⁷ Doyle and Freedman 1997

¹⁸ Aksoy 2014

¹⁹ Li 2005

frequency of terrorism in democracies than in non-democracies;²⁰ another looking at a similar period (1969-1997) suggested a clear negative correlation between democracy and terrorism.²¹ These stark differences are likely explained by different definitions of terrorism or different criteria for what classifies as a democracy.

A third position suggests one should not distinguish in absolute terms between democracies and authoritarian regimes. Rather, the inverted 'U-shaped' model for understanding the relationship between regime types and terrorism proposes that terrorist activity occurs less frequently within both fully liberal democracies and fully draconian autocracies.²² Updated research, looking at data for the period between 1997 and 2010, finds that terrorism has increased in 'anocracies' or 'weak' states.²³ The argument suggests that within wholly liberal democracies there is usually an absence of significant grievances due to political access and opportunity, and within extreme autocracies there is insufficient strategic opportunity for insurgent groups to plan and execute attacks. Regimes that are most conducive and vulnerable to terrorist attacks are those that fall in between the two. This is due to the associated limited political access resulting in the perceived need for violence to resolve grievances, and the lack of full authoritarianism providing 'greater strategic avenues to engage in terrorism'.²⁴

Al Shabaab efforts to operate in Kenya should be analysed in the context of this debate. Some might argue that Kenya fits into the category of 'anocracy'. In advance of the 2022 polls, the country's political system had been classified as a 'hybrid regime' by the Economist Intelligence Unit, which means that 'elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from being free and fair'.²⁵ Indeed, there are many young Kenyans who have historically felt that their right to vote does not count for very much.²⁶ If this

is the case, then the threat Kenya faces from terrorism would support the U-shaped model, with Kenya representing a country that does not implement the draconian measures that an autocracy would use to suppress terrorist activities but fails to satisfy the needs of the entire population as would be expected in a fully democratic system.

However, in understanding al Shabaab activity in Kenya, it is important to consider several other factors. Firstly, al Shabaab is firmly based in Somalia and the majority of the group's activity in Kenya is conducted during short term incursions. As such, the state of democracy in Somalia, rather than Kenya, is arguably more important in understanding their capabilities. Elections based on universal suffrage ('one-person-one vote') have not been held in Somalia for more than 50 years.²⁷ Secondly, Islamist extremist groups, such as al Shabaab, can be considered distinct from other insurgences in that their ambitions and strategies are closely tied up with their ideology-based opposition to democracy. Al Shabaab ban participation in democratic processes, seeing them as representative of 'apostasy' and 'infidelity', and an attempt to elevate 'the rule of human beings above that of God'.²⁸ In this sense, al Shabaab fits into the category of 'anti-system groups' and thus may be active across political contexts regardless of the state of democracy.²⁹ It is impossible for democracies to address the grievances of Islamic fundamentalist interest groups due to the totality and uncompromising nature of their ideology in seeking a global caliphate antithetical to democracy within a nation-state system. Furthermore, a secular nation building process cannot and should not accommodate groups that exclude women (and promote associated misogynistic messages).

This is not to say that Islamist militant organisations are incomparable to non-Islamic insurgencies. Indeed, research conducted

Al Shabaab ban participation in democratic processes, seeing them as representative of 'apostasy' and 'infidelity', and an attempt to elevate 'the rule of human beings above that of God'.

²⁰ Chenoweth 2010

²¹ Shahrouri 2010

²² Gaibullov et al. 2017

²³ Chenoweth 2012

²⁴ Gaibullov et al. 2017: 497

²⁵ McDonald 2018; The Star 2021; Economist Intelligence Unit Democ-

racy Index 2021

²⁶ Essa 2022

²⁷ DW News 2019

²⁸ International Crisis Group 2020

²⁹ Aksoy and Carter 2014: 203

on the differences between 'Islamic' / 'new terrorism' and 'traditional terrorism', has found 'several similarities' rather than 'rigid distinctions'. Framing Islamic insurgent groups as incomparable to other more explicitly political insurgent groups implicitly denies the underlying political motivations of these groups and their

ability to ideologically and strategically evolve due to a perceived fixed religious ideology.³¹ In this paper, we will recognise both al Shabaab's ideological opposition to democracy and the group's critical political and strategic ambitions in Kenya.

In the last two elections al Shabaab has released statements calling for Kenyan Muslims to boycott the polls and has carried out attacks aimed at causing general disruption.

3.2 To disrupt, to boycott or to influence?

What might Islamist insurgent groups seek to achieve during a democratic election? For those ideologically opposed to democracy, attempting to undermine or disrupt democratic processes and systems is the most logical ambition. Groups such as ISIS,³² the Taliban³³ and Boko Haram³⁴ have sought to disrupt elections in an effort to demonstrate weakness within the democratic system, expose the failures of the state to protect its citizens and undermine the processes essential to government legitimacy.

However, groups professing anti-democratic Islamic fundamentalist ideologies can also aim to influence election outcomes to benefit their political cause. For example, the 2014 Afghanistan election saw the Taliban attempt to disrupt the elections to support the election of Ashraf Ghani.³⁵ Insurgent groups may view certain candidates or parties as more amenable to negotiation, or as more likely to adopt favourable policies that align with the group's aims. During the 2015 elections in Nigeria, researchers noted that non-state groups like Boko Haram could 'intimidate voters in order to vote (or not vote) in a specific pattern' that favours them.³⁶ They could also 'target electoral institutions or the candidates of certain political parties' to achieve this aim.

It is wholly conceivable that – due to the heterogeneity and factionalism associated with large movements – they will concurrently seek to

disrupt electoral processes and influence election outcomes. In the last two elections al Shabaab has released statements calling for Kenyan Muslims to boycott the polls and has carried out attacks aimed at causing general disruption. But, at the same time, the group seems to have had a vested interest in the outcome of the democratic process, urging Kenyans in 2013 to vote for a government that would end the country's military presence in Somalia,³⁷ and seemingly campaigning against the incumbent in 2017 on the same grounds.³⁸

More recent literature has argued that al Shabaab's actions are more consistent with a provocation strategy: instead of attempting to get hostile governments to yield, the approach is designed to provoke them. The technique is intended to cause the government to retaliate indiscriminately against the militant group's intended constituency (for example, co-ethnics or co-religionists). The state's overreaction can help militant groups achieve their organisational goals, such as increased recruitment or local support. Instead of explicitly obtaining concessions, this aids groups in achieving process goals that maintain the group and potentially strengthen its capacity to launch future attacks.³⁹

3.2.1 The means available to terrorist groups

Groups seeking to impact democratic elections have three means at their disposal –

³⁰ Gofas 2012: 17; see also Crenshaw 2008

³¹ Jackson 2007

³² Hassan 2016

³³ Nojumi 2002

³⁴ Thurston 2016

³⁵ Giustozzi 2016

³⁶ Ewi 2013: 210

³⁷ A week before the election, al Shabaab stressed to Kenyans that

they had the 'opportunity to rethink and reassess the choices imposed upon you by your outgoing government' and urged them to 'choose the path of peace'. Godane's message on 3 March 2013 told Kenyans that 'the type of leaders that you choose and the political decisions they adopt will determine your future and the security of your country'.

³⁸ Anzalone 2020

³⁹ Shire 2021



Boko Haram in Nigeria. Photo: Courtesy

indiscriminate violence, discriminate violence and propaganda, or a combination thereof – to achieve their objectives during an election. The use of indiscriminate violence is most likely in cases where insurgents are looking to merely disrupt the process. ISIS’s disruption of the 2014 Iraq elections⁴⁰ and Boko Haram’s violence during the 2014 Nigeria elections⁴¹ are examples of this. Discriminate violence, including targeted killings, is more likely to be employed when the insurgent group seeks to influence the election in favour of a specific outcome or to deter unfavourable voters. In 2014, the Taliban selectively used violence against villages and towns that supported candidates other than Ashraf Ghani.⁴² Discriminate violence can also be used to disrupt elections but may seek to minimise civilian casualties in order to preserve political support.⁴³

Propaganda and disinformation are used effectively by groups globally to support or denounce certain candidates, to present their ideological grievances with electoral process and to promote their own capabilities. The Taliban again provide a good example. In 2014, to promote the election of Ashraf Ghani, the

Peshawar Shura Taliban accurately presented Ghani as a candidate that did not participate in the 1990s civil war, however, they also falsely presented him as unaligned with the US and uncommitted to the government camp.⁴⁴ Propaganda campaigns have also been used to deter voters from participating, or election employees from working, in an effort to undermine the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and demonstrate purported weaknesses of the government. ISIS arguably adopted this strategy in Iraq in 2018, with its media arm publishing content promoting their threats and attacks against election employees and facilities in the weeks prior to the Iraqi parliamentary elections.⁴⁵

The local context is presented in the next section, exploring al Shabaab activity over the last decade. Then, the following section analyses militant activity and propaganda during the Kenya 2022 elections. The survey findings are subsequently discussed, identifying whether the violence or threat of violence used by al Shabaab influenced the way in which people voted in the Kenyan 2022 elections.

⁴⁰ Ali 2014

⁴¹ Blanchard 2015

⁴² Giustozzi 2016

⁴³ Condra et al. 2018

⁴⁴ Giustozzi 2016

⁴⁵ Munoz 2018



Al Shabaab Militans in Somalia. Photo: Courtesy

4. BACKGROUND TO AL SHABAAB

4.1 Al Shabaab ambitions in Kenya

First emerging in 2006⁴⁶ and ‘present in Kenya since at least 2009’,⁴⁷ al Shabaab grew increasingly active in the country following the Government’s decision to send troops across the border in 2011 ostensibly in response to security concerns after the targeting of tourists on Kenya’s north-coast.⁴⁸ Operation Linda Nchi (‘protect the country’) immediately made Kenya a critical adversary for al Shabaab. Although the groups has a variety of interests in Kenya, al Shabaab have repeatedly used the incursion to justify attacks on Kenyan soil over the last decade.⁴⁹ At this time, a Jihadist network had already begun to emerge in Kenya, many following the teachings of Abdul Aziz Rimo based in Kwale and the infamous Aboud Rogo and Abubakar Shariff Ahmed ‘Makaburi’ in central Mombasa.⁵⁰ This group coalesced under the banner of the Muslim Youth Movement, later to become known as al Shabaab’s Kenya affiliate, al-Hijra.⁵¹

In 2012, Kenyan troops in Somalia joined the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), a regional peacekeeping force also made up of soldiers from Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti, and Ethiopia. Collaborating with the militia group Ras Kamboni led by Ahmed Madobe, the Kenyan forces liberated Kismayo in September 2012⁵² and have remained militarily present in the country ever since.

Whereas early operations in Kenya – mostly conducted by al Hijra – had been ‘crude and amateurish’, the group’s intelligence and special operations unit, the Amniyat, became increasingly involved from around 2013, after Kenyan law enforcement began to step-up counter terrorism operations.⁵³ Since that time, the group has conducted multiple complex attacks in Kenya’s

capital Nairobi and continues to target security forces closer to the border with both small arms and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The response from state law enforcement has historically been heavily criticised for unfairly profiling ethnic-Somalis and using excessive force, which the violent extremist organisation has manipulated to cause division and to establish a more permanent presence in some parts of Kenya’s periphery.⁵⁴

Al Shabaab regularly uses its propaganda outlets to stress that Kenya will not be safe until its troops leave Somalia, but there are other reasons for its interests in Kenya. An important part of the group’s purpose is the unification of ‘Greater Somalia’⁵⁵ – a geographic area encompassing the lands inhabited by ethnic Somalis which, in addition to Somalia (and Somaliland), includes Djibouti, Ethiopia and North-eastern Kenya. Moreover, al Shabaab accuses Kenya of occupying and marginalising ‘Muslim lands’ – including both along the Coast and in the North-eastern counties – and argues that Muslims must be liberated to allow them to submit to divine authority. Ideologically, the group sees those who support the Kenyan ‘crusader’ state as apostates.⁵⁶ Finally, Kenya is a potential source of recruits, both men and women.⁵⁷ Some estimates suggest that as many as 1,000 Kenyans have joined al Shabaab, though this figure is impossible to verify.⁵⁸ In addition, other more pragmatic reasons for al Shabaab activity in Kenya should be mentioned including proximity, the country’s geopolitical role and relationship with the West (UK, US and Israel in particular), the presence of internationals, and opportunities provided by corruption.⁵⁹



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though the
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verify.

⁴⁶ Klobucista et al. 2022

⁴⁷ International Crisis Group 2014

⁴⁸ ACCORD 2012

⁴⁹ International Crisis Group 2018; Lind et al. note that the ‘scope, scale and audacity of al Shabaab attacks [in Kenya] worsened’ after the launch of Operation Linda Nchi (2015: 17).

⁵⁰ Bryden and Bahra 2019

⁵¹ Bryden and Bahra 2019

⁵² Miyandazi 2012

⁵³ Bryden and Bahra 2019

⁵⁴ Lind et al. 2015; Anderson and McKnight 2014

⁵⁵ International Crisis Group 2022a

⁵⁶ SITE Intelligence Group 2020

⁵⁷ Sources suggest anything between a few hundred and 1,000 people

(KTN News 2019; Wesangula 2019; Mkutu and Opondo 2019)

⁵⁸ Cannon and Pkalya 2019

⁵⁹ International Crisis Group 2020-

4.2 Al Shabaab and the electoral process in Somalia

While the focus of this study is Kenya, it would be remiss not to briefly explore al Shabaab's response to the fledgling democracy supported by the international community in Mogadishu. Evidence from past electoral processes in Somalia suggests that al Shabaab have been more interested in disrupting proceedings than manipulating the results. The group has released substantial propaganda campaigns directly related to the voting process in Mogadishu, branding those who participate as 'disbelievers'. During the 2021-2022 political impasse, the group produced a 12-part documentary series entitled 'The Evil of Whatever They Rule'. The series highlighted what the group referred to as 'the disbelief and evil inherent in the constitution of the apostate government in Somalia'.⁶⁰ In 2017, al Shabaab spokesperson spoke to the international media, saying that Islam did not permit women to take up leadership positions and criticising women who sought political office.⁶¹

The organisation has used selective violence in Somalia during election periods. The assassination of electoral delegates, clan elders and government officials demonstrate an attempt to instil fear and to weaken faith in the government, while simultaneously asserting its own strength. Clan elders are intimately involved in Somalia's limited electoral process, and the assassination of elders also reflects al Shabaab's 'complex' strategy toward clan dynamics, which principally aims to 'weaken any alternative social

authority to al Shabaab'.⁶² It is important to note here the patriarchal structure in which this social authority is grounded, and how intimidation tactics are focused on the male clan leadership. In the run up to the 2016 parliamentary elections and 2017 presidential elections, two electoral delegates and six clan elders involved in the selection process were assassinated.⁶³ At this time, al Shabaab also demonstrated a willingness to engage in indiscriminate violence. Less than two months before the presidential election, a vehicle exploded in Mogadishu's port killing dozens of civilians.⁶⁴ Two weeks before the election, a vehicle-borne IED (VBIED) killed 28 at a hotel in the capital, with al Shabaab claiming responsibility.⁶⁵

In 2022, al Shabaab again targeted locations and individuals associated with the protracted electoral process, often employing person-borne IED (PBIEDs) and VBIED attacks. In March, a female parliamentarian, Amin Mohamed Abdi, was targeted and killed as she campaigned,⁶⁶ and a further 50 people were killed and over 100 injured when the group attacked the presidential palace in Beledweyne.⁶⁷ In the two months leading up to the attack, a total of five parliamentary candidates were killed. Suicide bombers were used to target officials' vehicles.⁶⁸ Then, in May, as the selection process for the presidency got underway, the group launched a mortar attack on the airport compound, thought to be targeting a hangar being used to conduct the vote.⁶⁹

4.3 Al Shabaab and the 2013 and 2017 Kenyan elections

Given al Shabaab's motivations and capabilities, elections in Kenya provide opportunities for the group to assert their position and demonstrate their capability to influence events beyond

Somalia. This concern informed the current study. In this section, we look in greater detail at the two elections in Kenya which preceded that in 2022.

Evidence from past electoral processes in Somalia suggests that al Shabaab have been more interested in disrupting proceedings than manipulating the results.

⁶⁰ SITE Intelligence Group 2021

⁶¹ Marchal 2019: 313

⁶² UK Government: Home Office 2017

⁶³ UK Government: Home Office 2017

⁶⁴ VoA 2022

⁶⁵ The New York Times 2022

⁶⁶ Somali Guardian 2022

⁶⁷ West 2017

⁶⁸ WS Insight incident data

⁶⁹ Zakat Foundation of America

Although the incident data available for 2013 and 2017 was not of comparable quality to that for the 2022 elections,⁷⁰ it is necessary to review al Shabaab actions during previous election periods in Kenya to provide a baseline for comparison with 2022. We will examine both the propaganda released by the group and their kinetic activity in Kenya over these two periods, focusing in particular on efforts to directly impact the democratic process.

The 2013 polls were the first to take place following the promulgation of Kenya's new 2010 constitution that devolved several powers to 47 county governments. In the lead up to the elections in March of that year, al Shabaab released a limited number of video, audio and print propaganda statements.⁷¹ Demands were made for Kenyan forces to withdraw from Somalia, stressing the limited progress that the KDF had made and alleging that the Government of Kenya was placing 'foreign interests above its national interests and the security of Western nations above the security of its citizens'. The group said Kenyans would not be safe while the KDF remained in Somalia. In one video, a Kenyan soldier who was held captive by al Shabaab stressed that his predicament would only be resolved by Kenya's withdrawal. The videos were produced by the Al Kataib Media Foundation, the official media arm of al Shabaab, seemingly in collaboration with the Muslim Youth Centre (MYC), then al Shabaab's Kenya affiliate and later referred to as al Hijra. Perhaps the most significant propaganda release at the time came in early March, a few days before voting was to commence. The then Emir Abdi Godane directly addressed 'Muslims of Kenya', reiterating demands that they boycott the elections and instead attack the Kenyan military.⁷² Godane – who was killed in a U.S. airstrike in September 2014⁷³ – also told his intended audience that 'your areas are the least developed and have the

fewest facilities' and he accused presidential candidate of misleading them. Researchers argued that the propaganda produced at this time was primarily aimed at recruitment,⁷⁴ and most messaging was not directly related to the elections.

Alongside this propaganda, al Shabaab carried out a series of relatively small-scale crude attacks, often involving grenades and IEDs. Data provided by WS Insight, a risk management firm, suggest that the attacks increased in the election month itself, particularly targeting law enforcement. While most attacks were recorded along the border, particularly within Mandera town, on election day itself a grenade was detonated in Nairobi's Eastleigh injuring one person. It was also reported that Kenyan security agencies prevented an attack on the National Assembly a few months before the polls⁷⁵ and an explosive device was detonated at a voter registration centre in the Dadaab refugee complex injuring one person in December 2012. While much of the available incident data is not gender-disaggregated, the vast majority of Kenyan law enforcement officers are male, and it is safe to assume that the overwhelming majority of the victims of attacks targeting law enforcement are male.

Al Kataib was much more active in the run up to the 2017 elections, with seven films produced amounting to almost three hours of material.⁷⁶ In these productions, al Shabaab urged voters to boycott the polls, stating in one production that 'war is already destabilising your country, disrupting your livelihoods, debilitating your economy and, most crucial of all, undermining your own personal security'.⁷⁷ Another video released on the eve of the 2017 election shows a masked fighter sitting on a stolen campaign car owned by a candidate from Kenya's governing party, stating "my dear brothers, you can see for

⁷⁰ Hiraal Institute 2020

⁷¹ The research team had carefully monitored al Shabaab activity throughout 2022, but such granular information was not collected during the previous elections. Where possible, secondary data was used to fill this gap, but comparisons between the different years cannot be made with a high degree of accuracy.

⁷² All propaganda sourced from SITE Intelligence

⁷³ Anderson and McKnight 2015

⁷⁴ Anzalone 2012

⁷⁵ Council on Foreign Relations 2013

⁷⁶ Council on Foreign Relations 2013

⁷⁷ Freear 2019

⁷⁷ Freear 2019: 3

yourselves that the Kuffar have become weak”.⁷⁸ In the weeks prior to the election, al Shabaab also produced a sophisticated ‘documentary-style’ film in English, copying materials from renowned international organisations such as Transparency International, which focused on the alleged economic and civilian cost of Kenya’s war in Somalia and claimed a cabal of politicians and military personnel was benefiting from the war at the expense of the majority of Kenyans.⁷⁹ Al Shabaab demonstrated its ability to use both religious and rational justifications for electoral boycotts within sophisticated propaganda methods to appeal to a wide sector of the Kenyan and regional public.

Propaganda during 2017 made use of eastern African fighters speaking in Swahili, but also in a variety of other indigenous Kenyan languages such as Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Digo, Bajuni and even Sheng.⁸⁰ The group included messages from well-known Kenyan jihadist Ahmed Iman Ali in an interview style format. In another video, al Shabaab again made use of a prisoner of war, with a Kenyan soldier stating that he was ‘dying because of President Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta and his government’ and accusing the Government of Kenya of lying to its citizens.

By continuing to appeal to the interests of Kenyan Muslims, in terms of religious and social issues, al Shabaab was able to brand itself as the ‘solution’.⁸¹ The messages delivered in propaganda relating to both the 2013 and 2017 elections were broadly consistent, demanding that Kenya leaves Somalia and calling on Muslim Kenyans to boycott the polls. At least three key motivations for al Shabaab can be identified in their election-related propaganda:

- **Religious:** exploiting a sense of religious obligation to liberate Muslims by assisting al Shabaab in waging their understanding of jihad.

- **Political and social:** highlighting the perceived oppression of Muslims within Kenya to garner support.
- **Retaliatory:** condemnation of the KDF incursion into Somali and the framing of Kenya as an aggressor.

By the time of the 2017 polls, al Shabaab had conducted a series of high-profile attacks in Kenya, though none of these were explicitly connected to elections. These included complex attacks against Westgate Mall (2013, 68 dead)⁸² and Garissa University College (2015, 148 dead)⁸³, as well as a series of attacks in and around Mpeketoni, Lamu County (2014, at least 87 dead).⁸⁴ Elections were held in August 2017 and al Shabaab launched numerous attacks against security personnel throughout July and August, mainly in the North-eastern counties.⁸⁵ IEDs were used consistently against the military, government personnel and infrastructure targets. Unlike in 2013, incidents were also reported which directly targeted Kenyan politicians and electoral infrastructure. In July 2017, a campaign vehicle belonging to the incumbent Jubilee Party was hijacked,⁸⁶ and the convoys of Mandera’s Governor Roba were targeted on several occasions.⁸⁷ In the months before the elections, militants executed a local administrator in Mandera and attempted to abduct a female Principal Secretary from the Ministry of Public Works in Lamu.⁸⁸ A total of 18 attacks were recorded by WS Insight in the election month alone. While most targeted law enforcement, incidents were also recorded against civilian targets especially within Lamu County where politics, land and indigeneity appeared to have become increasingly intertwined with VE.⁸⁹

Al Shabaab activity, both in terms of attacks related to the elections and propaganda releases, increased substantially between 2013 and 2017. With this in mind, the report now turns to the elections in 2022.

Al Shabaab demonstrated its ability to use both religious and rational justifications for electoral boycotts within sophisticated propaganda methods to appeal to a wide sector of the Kenyan and regional public.

⁷⁸ Freear 2019: 3

⁷⁹ Anzalone 2020

⁸⁰ Freear 2019

⁸¹ Botha 2014

⁸² Al Jazeera 2021

⁸³ BBC 2019

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch 2015

⁸⁵ WS Insight incident data

⁸⁶ The East African 2017b

⁸⁷ AfricaNews 2017

⁸⁸ The target later died in hospital (The Standard 2017b); Reporting of incidents in 2017 does not allow for gender-disaggregated data on the victims of al Shabaab attacks.

⁸⁹ Key Informant Interview – LAM1; Nyagah et al. 2019

5. AL SHABAAB ACTIVITY DURING KENYA'S 2022 ELECTIONS

This study set out to closely monitor al Shabaab activity in Kenya in 2022 to establish whether the group had made any efforts to influence or disrupt proceedings. This section considers the options available to al Shabaab, based in part on the group's past activities and the opportunities a national election potentially provides. It then examines what actually transpired, reviewing al Shabaab's messaging and attacks during the election period, before analysing law enforcement activity, particularly relating to counterterrorism operations. Finally, it assesses the group's approach and strategy.

With law enforcement preoccupied with securing polling stations, al Shabaab could have used possible security vacuums to increase the frequency of attacks in counties bordering Somalia. Large-scale complex attacks in urban centres may have disrupted the entire process, particularly if they targeted polling stations, exploiting the attention of international media on Kenyan politics to obtain heightened coverage. On a smaller scale, a campaign of harassment and intimidation targeting voters in counties along the border with Somalia could have instilled fear and influenced the vote at a local level. If physical attacks were to be combined with propaganda and messaging highlighting the Government of Kenya's perceived failings in securing the election, al Shabaab may have sought to increase public opposition to the presence of Kenyan troops in Somalia.⁹⁰ Likewise, they could have leveraged the elections to increase recruitment by targeting those left disgruntled by the democratic process and disenfranchised from the Kenyan state more generally. All these options would have required considerable resources and any coordinated response would necessitate attention from the al Shabaab leadership.

Recognising the alleged links between violence in Lamu West and local politics,⁹¹ it is also conceivable that violent extremist violence (linked with al Shabaab to varying degrees) could be used to displace populations to impact the ethnic make-up of certain constituencies and thus the likelihood of victory for certain candidates. Uncorroborated rumours also suggest that local actors in the North-east have historically used violence – loosely connected to al Shabaab – to achieve their own political objectives.

But violence does not need to be carried out for al Shabaab to have an impact. The threat alone can be sufficient. Harassment and intimidation by militants in Kenya's North-eastern region are rarely reported, though anecdotal evidence suggests that threat is implied when militants interact with those they encounter. Moreover, pastoralists and villagers on the Kenya side of the border have reported in the past that they have been extorted by al Shabaab for 'zakat' payments.⁹² One of the five pillars of Islam, Zakat is charitable payment made by all Muslims, both men and women, whose wealth exceeds a certain threshold each year 'to the poor, vulnerable and deserving'.⁹³ Al Shabaab have manipulated this obligation to demand taxes from individuals and businesses across Somalia.⁹⁴ Within Kenya, anecdotal reports from communities suggest that al Shabaab are able to demand Zakat from those they come across in more remote areas.⁹⁵

Voting was held on 9 August 2022, though political campaigning had been ongoing for well over a year before this. In addition to the positions of president and members of parliament, the electorate chose new governors, senators, women's representatives and assembly members at the county level.⁹⁶ Although there

⁹⁰ West 2017

⁹¹ Nyagah et al. 2019

⁹² WS Insight incident data

⁹³ Zakat Foundation of America

⁹⁴ Hiraal Institute 2020

⁹⁵ Key informants confirmed this.

were four candidates for the Presidency, only two were considered to have a realistic chance of winning.⁹⁷ Ultimately, the incumbent Deputy President, William Ruto, defeated erstwhile opposition leader Raila Odinga in a close contest.⁹⁸ Mr Odinga appealed against the declaration that Mr Ruto had won, but the results were upheld by the Supreme Court.⁹⁹ Although isolated incidents of violence were reported, including in Eldas (Wajir) and Dadaab (Garissa),¹⁰⁰ the elections were largely conducted peacefully and were regarded as a sign of Kenya's maturing democracy.¹⁰¹

5.1 Propaganda

The messages distributed by al Shabaab in advance of the 2022 elections were broadly in line with those during the previous two election cycles. The focus was on calls for Kenya's withdrawal from Somalia, claims that the Kenyan military had failed to make any progress in Somalia and demands for Kenyan Muslims to boycott the election. However, in comparison to 2017, the group was relatively quiet, only making a few direct references to the elections themselves.

In late 2021 and early 2022, Al-Kataib produced multiple short videos directly addressing potential Kiswahili-speaking recruits. Between 10 December 2021 and 16 February 2022, Al-Kata'ib released 14 episodes as part of its 'Inspire the Believers' series.¹⁰² Most of these showed male Swahili-speaking fighters from Kenya and Tanzania discussing the virtues of joining the organisation (Figure 1). All followed a similar structure, starting with a Nasheed (Islamic vocal music) before a monologue from the selected fighter, and ending with a song or poem and extract from a sermon. After several years in

which recruitment from outside of Somalia appeared to be of little concern to al Shabaab, these videos suggested a renewed interest in obtaining regional support. Such al Shabaab messaging almost always targets men directly, with references to women made very rarely.

By far the most significant statement directly related to the elections came after voting had taken place. On 27 August, shortly before the Supreme Court's ruling, al Shabaab addressed the new Kenyan administration, renewing demands for the government to withdraw defence personnel from Somalia.¹⁰³

“Know that we will continue to defend our lands and our people from the aggressive Kenyan invasion. We will continue to concentrate our attacks on Kenyan towns and cities as long as Kenyan forces continue to occupy our Muslim lands.”

The full statement demonstrated that the group had been closely following political developments in Kenya:

“Throughout their election campaigns, the presidential candidates deliberately avoided addressing Kenya's deteriorating security situation as well as their military invasion of Somalia”.

Al Shabaab urged the new government to adopt a different approach in Somalia and stated that the country was “at a crossroads”.

⁹⁶ Hockey 2022

⁹⁷ Hockey 2022

⁹⁸ Financial Times 2022

⁹⁹ AlJazeera 2022

¹⁰⁰ Capital News 2022b.

¹⁰¹ International Crisis Group 2022b

¹⁰² SITE Intelligence Group

¹⁰³ SITE Intelligence Group 2022c

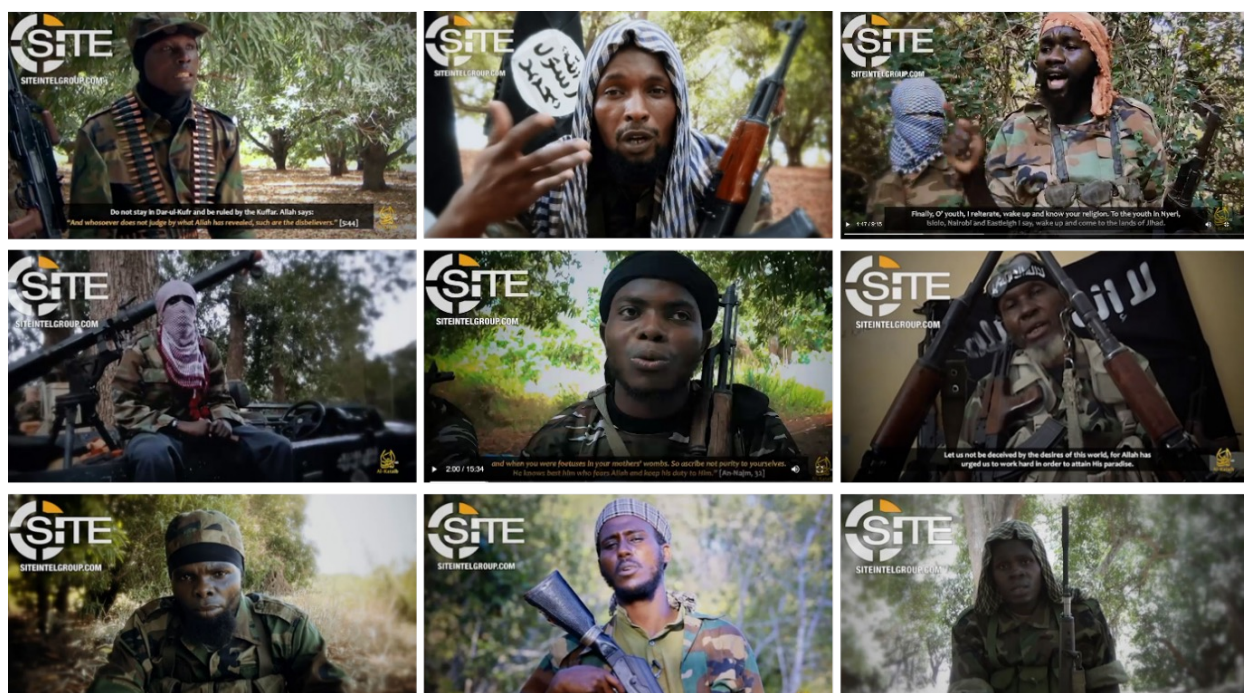


Figure 1: Screen shots from Al-Kataib's 'Inspire the Believers' series. All taken from videos released between December 2021 and February 2022

5.2 Attacks

Al Shabaab kinetic activity was tracked and mapped throughout 2022 (Figures 2-4). Efforts have been made in this report to corroborate incident reports with multiple sources. Al Shabaab claims were also reviewed and included, though the group's purported death tolls were not added as these are usually inflated or unclear.¹⁰⁵

At the outset, it must be acknowledged that terrorist attacks impact both men and women, and their impact is often gendered. While the data for 2022 does not identify women as targets of al Shabaab violence (the only casualties whose gender was identified were men), this can potentially be explained by limitations in incident reporting. In reality, the impact of insecurity caused by the group affects both genders, with women often disproportionately facing the economic effects (especially if the male is the

financial provider of the family) in addition to the loss of loved ones.¹⁰⁶ This report reviews violent extremist activity explicitly; it does not review broader election-related violence against women and girls on and offline.

Significantly more attacks were recorded in Kenya in 2022 (146) than in previous years. There were 83 in 2021 and 107 in 2020. It should be noted that incident collection efforts were increased in 2022 and the threat was monitored much more closely. Regardless, the increase in activity in 2022 is striking and deserves further exploration.

The year started with heightened violent extremist activity. Twenty-five incidents were recorded in January alone, a continuation of an increase that had started in December 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Most of the data included in the database is collected by a private risk management firm, WS Insight. This data was then supplemented by open-source reporting and ACLED to ensure no incidents were missing. It should be noted that available incident data is skewed in favour of successful attacks, with those prevented by law enforce-

ment often unreported. Incidents of harassment or intimidation are also usually unreported.

¹⁰⁵ Single al Shabaab statements relating to purported attacks against multiple law enforcement camps were recorded as single incidents.

¹⁰⁶ Ndung'u et al. 2017

Attacks in January left 29 people, including 21 civilians, dead. Incidents included the attempted abduction of former local government officials in Wajir and the ambush of a government convoy. Much of the activity recorded in January took place in Lamu County (17 incidents). Civilians in Lamu West in particular were targeted in a series of crude attacks, involving the use of blade weapons and firearms. The activity was reminiscent of violence in mid-2014 in and around the Mpeketoni area.¹⁰⁷ It was highly like

that grievances associated with land and local politics were linked to this activity in Lamu. While al Shabaab – and their local ‘Jaysh Ayman’ affiliate¹⁰⁸ – may well have been involved, the violence is unlikely to have been coordinated by more senior al Shabaab leaders in Somalia. Indeed, local leaders at the time alleged that the violence in Lamu West was representative of an attempt to displace voters not perceived to be local to the area.¹⁰⁹

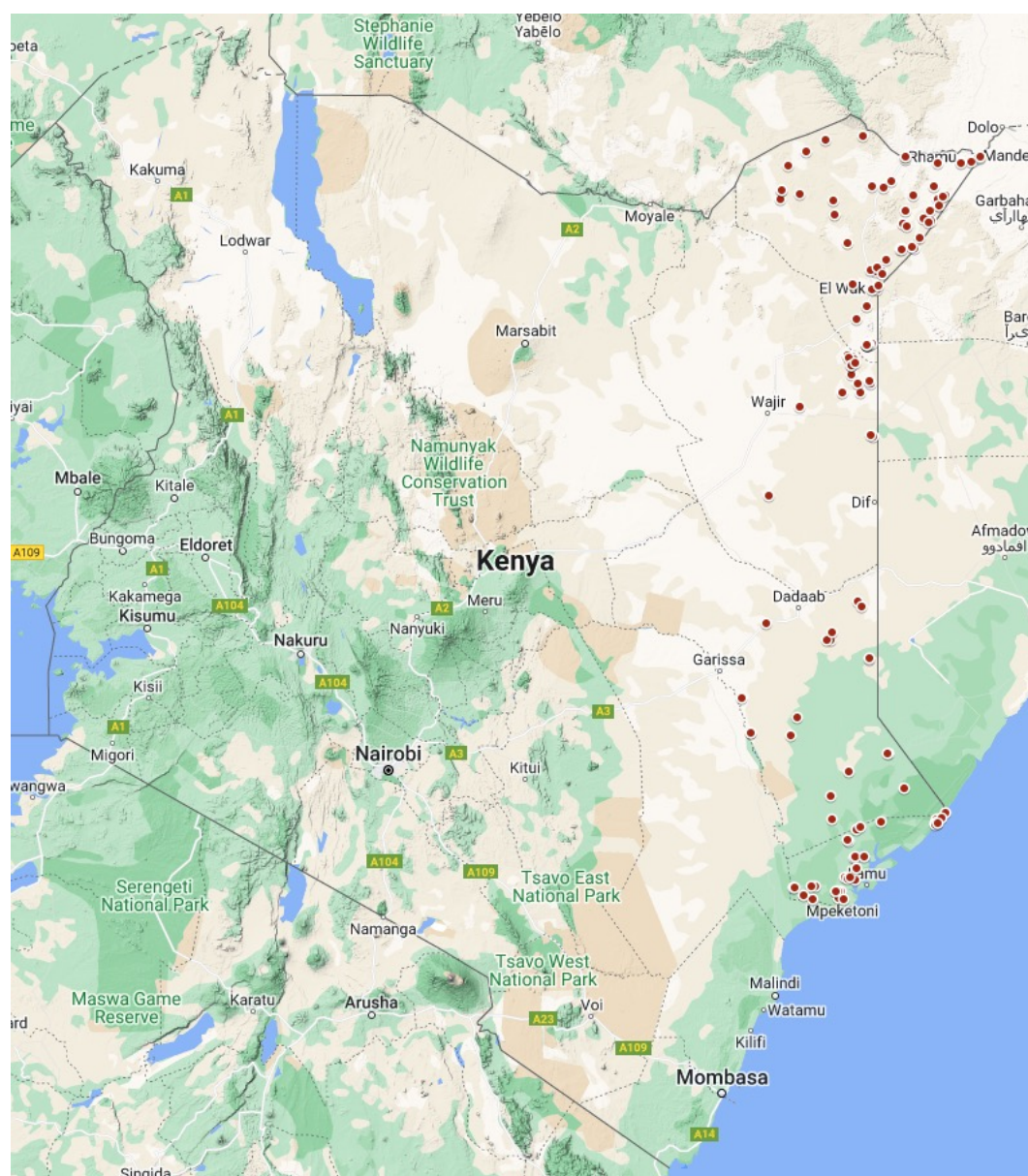


Figure 2: Map showing VE incidents in Kenya, 2022

¹⁰⁷ Anderson and McKnight 2015

¹⁰⁸ Chome 2016

¹⁰⁹ Capital News 2022a

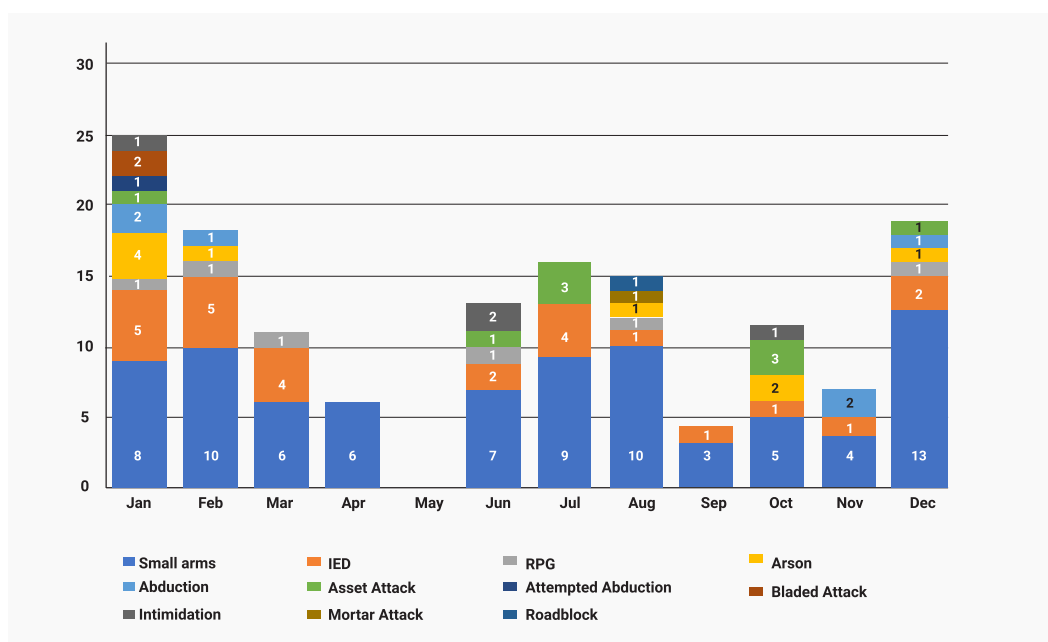


Figure 3: VE incidents by month & type, 2022

The high rate of violent extremist activity continued into February, with five IEDs recorded, two in Lamu, two in Garissa and another in Wajir. Although the frequency of crude violent incidents in Lamu declined, a village elder was killed in Magumba village. Separately, an Assistant Chief was executed in Mandera' Omar Jillow. There was nothing particularly unusual about these attacks, with similar incidents reported sporadically over the last few years. But they may have been intended to create fear amongst communities and discourage prospective candidates from running for office.

In March 2022, at least 15 people were killed, including ten members of the law enforcement agencies and five civilians. A further four IEDs were recorded, one in each of Garissa and Wajir and two in Mandera. A particularly significant attack the same month led to the deaths of five people, including a Chinese national, involved in road construction in Lamu. The frequency of activity then began to decline in April. However, it is notable that all six incidents recorded targeted law enforcement, and all involved small arms. Remarkably, no al Shabaab incidents were recorded at all in May (notably the month of the election in Somalia). According to WS Insight data, this was the first month since March 2016

that not a single al Shabaab attack was recorded in Kenya.

June saw a resurgence with 13 attacks, the majority targeting security forces and incidents recorded in all four border counties. The high frequency of attacks continued through July and August with most incidents recorded in Wajir and Mandera, but, remarkably, no deaths were confirmed between June and August due to al Shabaab violence.

In September, activity decreased significantly with only four attacks recorded, all in Mandera County. Activity spiked again in December 2022 and continued into 2023. An increase in activity over December, the Christian festive season, is not unusual.

With this outline of al Shabaab attacks through the year as a baseline, it is worth looking in greater detail at whether any of this activity was associated with the elections. June represented the first month in which reports indicated al Shabaab were warning local residents not to vote and, in the middle of the month, several incidents were recorded that were directly related to the elections:¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ All incident data sourced from the REINVENT database.

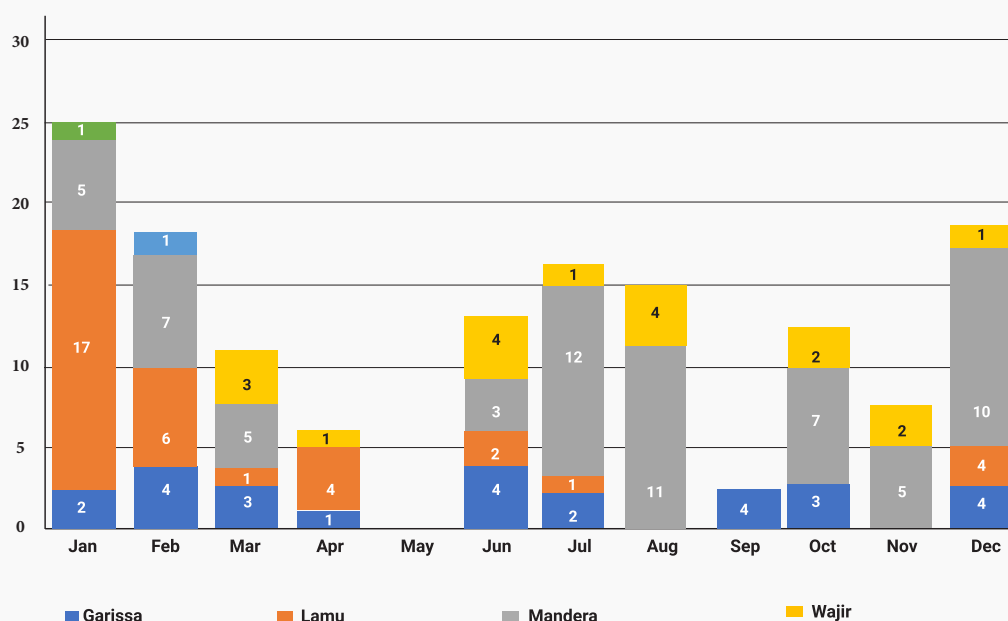


Figure 4: VE incidents by month & county, 2022

- **5 June:** an IED struck a police vehicle as it escorted an aspirant for the Ijara parliamentary seat. Three officers were injured.
- **15 June:** a group of militants invaded the village of Boji Garas, located between Wajir Bor and Riba, in Wajir County. National Police Reservists in the village engaged the militants in a brief firefight before withdrawing. No casualties were reported. The militants then proceeded to address residents, stating that they had 'explained to them the truth about the upcoming Kenyan elections and warned them not to be drawn into its trap'.¹¹¹
- **15 June:** A KDF election security convoy was ambushed by militants near Riba in Wajir County. No casualties were confirmed.
- **16 June:** militants attacked Kenyan troops at camps in the Daidai area of Rhamu, Mandera County. Law enforcement personnel withdrew and al Shabaab claimed to have control of the area until the following day. The militants are said to have lectured those in the area, again revealing the 'truth' about the upcoming elections and warning them not to take part.

On occasions when al Shabaab militants claim to have lectured residents, 'warning' them to boycott the polls, it is highly likely that such messages are heard by both men and women. In cases when only men are invited to listen, these messages will no doubt still reach the women in the community. In July, at least one incident took place which can be directly linked to the elections:

- **3 July:** a vehicle carrying supporters of Azimio la Umoja was allegedly attacked by al Shabaab in Rhamu. One person was wounded.

¹¹¹ SITE Intelligence Group 2022a

In early August, the month of the polls, further incidents again involved election-related targets:

- **2 August:** al Shabaab claimed to have attacked ‘two vehicles carrying workers for the elections’ in the Tahabo area (perhaps Takaba) of Mandera County. Few details are available.
- **8 August:** on the day before the elections, al Shabaab claimed to have targeted a polling centre in Warabeyo, Mandera County. The group claimed that those present fled before the militants ‘proceeded to destroy the headquarters after rigging it with explosives’.¹¹² The incident received minimal attention in the media, but it is understood that the polling centre was at the Hareri Primary School and that two classrooms were destroyed.¹¹³
- **8 August:** al Shabaab also claimed to have attacked a truck and motorcycle that were transporting ballot boxes in the Kantun area of Khorof Harar, Wajir District. The incident was confirmed by law enforcement.¹¹⁴

It is plausible that some of this activity was designed to cause civilian displacement and to prevent the local electorate from turning out to vote, but this is nothing more than conjecture. It would require further data collection to determine if there is a gendered strategy in place for target selection to achieve these types of goals. On election day itself, the group claimed to have attacked law enforcement camps in both Khorof Harar in Wajir County, and Arabiya in Mandera County. Few details were made available. More significantly, there were no attacks against election targets on the day of the polls. The highest frequency of attacks in any one month was recorded in January and activity then declined through April. May, when

no incidents were recorded, could conceivably have been a period in which al Shabaab regrouped and made plans for the months ahead. However, it is equally possible that the group was merely distracted by the ongoing elections in Mogadishu at that time. Attacks resumed in June and were sustained in the build up to the elections in August before declining. Indeed, if we review the number of attacks per week in the build-up to the polls, the most consistent period of activity took place in the four weeks immediately preceding election day and the week that followed. Twenty-seven incidents were recorded over this five week stretch (Figure 5), before activity declined once again.

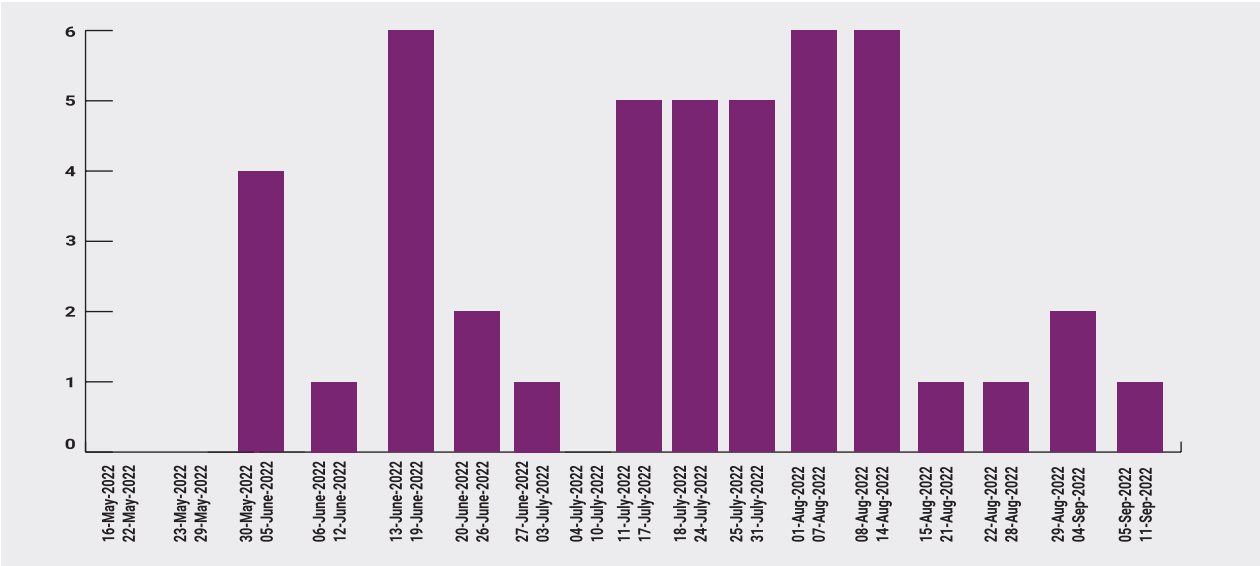


Figure 5: Al Shabaab attacks by week, 16 May to 11 September 2022

¹¹² SITE Intelligence Group 2022b

¹¹⁴ The Star 2022b

¹¹³ Nation Africa 2022b

The targets for attacks around the elections are also worth noting, as they appear to suggest that al Shabaab became more discriminate, with a decrease in violence against civilians (Figure 6). In addition to the incidents listed against election-specific targets, the following should be considered in relation to the period between June and August:

- Only 9.1% of incidents between June and August targeted civilians, compared to an average of 31.4% across the other months of the year.
- Between July and August, 70.5% of attacks were against law enforcement, while the average proportion of attacks targeting law enforcement during the remaining months of the year was lower, at 61.8%.
- Of the nine communications masts targeted in 2022, four were attacked between June and July, arguably representing an attempt to damage communications infrastructure in advance of the elections.
- Six of the ten attacks against businesses were recorded in June and July. In addition to the targeting of communications masts, these also involved attacking construction

workers, particularly those working to improve the road network in the region.

There is thus some evidence that al Shabaab were more careful in their targeting around the elections, seeking to impact state law enforcement and avoid civilians. Rarely do reports mention the gender of the victims in VE attacks against civilians. Almost two-thirds of attacks in 2022 targeted law enforcement and the vast majority of those working in armed security in Kenya are male.¹¹⁵ The reports that militants lectured residents on the need to boycott the elections are important and it is highly likely that al Shabaab fighters moving through other areas will have conveyed similar messages, which went unreported. It would require further data collection to determine if these efforts to intimidate civilians targeted men and women differently and/or whether al Shabaab even targeted the various marginalised communities rather than focusing on the men seen as holding leadership positions and social influence in these matters. Moreover, the small collection of incidents impacting election targets and the security officials protecting them suggest that at the very least militants in the area were aware of ongoing political events and the significance of this period.

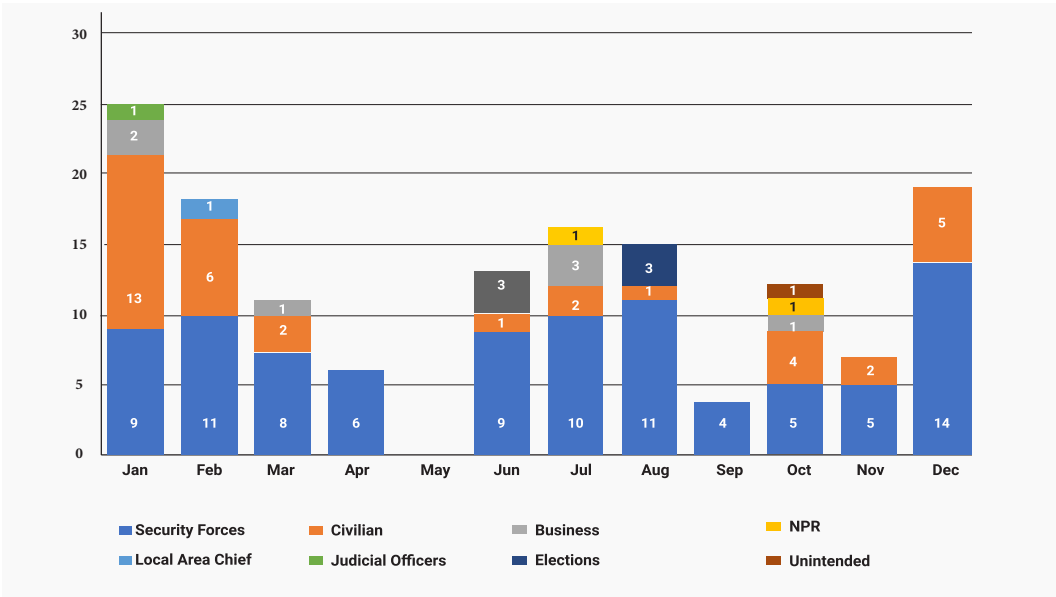


Figure 6: VE incidents by month & target, 2022

¹¹⁵ In 2012, it was estimated that only 11% of the police service was made up of women (UN Women 2012). More up-to-date statistics are difficult to obtain, but both domestic and external initiatives have been put in place to increase female representation in law enforcement agencies (U.S. Department of Justice 2022; The Standard 2019)

5.3 Law enforcement response

Additional law enforcement officers were sent to areas along the border to provide security during the elections.¹¹⁶ Kenya law enforcement agencies were broadly praised for their activity during the elections, with the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) stating that the agencies were more prepared and better trained to respond appropriately than they had been during the 2017 polls.¹¹⁷ There was also evidence that police sought to deescalate incidents of public disorder, without resorting to heavy-handed tactics.¹¹⁸

To better understand perceptions of the law enforcement during the polls, key informant interviews were conducted along the border with both men and women. Almost all key informants explained that voting had been secure and that they did not feel intimidated during voting. There was an appreciation for the work of law enforcement during the elections, with a businessperson from Mandera town stating, 'without them, the elections would have not been peaceful'.¹¹⁹ A pastoralist also noted that he felt safe at the polling station.¹²⁰ One key informant noted that officials had provided secure transport to pastoralist voters to help them get to and from polling centres.¹²¹

Provisions were also made to ensure that even those living in remote, high-risk areas were able to exercise their democratic right, with election materials delivered – in Mandera South, for instance – by air.¹²²

Thirty-three separate law enforcement incidents targeting al Shabaab in Kenya were reported between January and August 2022, a marginal increase on the 30 over the same period the year before. Operations involved raids on alleged al Shabaab camps, the arrests of operatives, interdictions along al Shabaab logistical routes, the seizure of weapons caches and the defence of communications masts from al Shabaab sabotage. In addition to several arrests, reports suggest that as many as 28 militants were killed between January and March alone.¹²³ Operations against al Shabaab appear to have slowed from May onwards, suggesting that agencies shifted their focus towards overall elections security at this time. However, in July, KDF forces conducted a clearance operation in the Boni Forest. At least ten al Shabaab militants were reportedly killed, with weapons and ammunition seized.¹²⁴ The operation may well have had a significant impact on al Shabaab capability in the area over the next few months.

5.4 An analysis of AS strategy during the 2022 elections

Having provided a description of al Shabaab activity in 2022, this section looks to assess how this helps us to understand al Shabaab efforts to influence the elections.

Ultimately, this paper argues that the group did not appear to launch any coordinated effort to disrupt the elections with either violence or propaganda. Although there is some evidence of sporadic attacks against election-related targets and efforts to avoid civilian casualties around the elections, these appear to have had minimal impact on proceedings. Sustained activity was reported throughout June and August, but the

frequency of incidents was not particularly unusual with more incidents recorded in each of the months of January, February, and December 2022. Furthermore, the nature of the attacks in 2022 were relatively small in scale and appeared opportunistic, rather than well-planned. It should be noted that there would have been a heavier presence of law enforcement and state personnel in the North-eastern counties during the elections, providing more opportunities for attacks along roads. This alone could have contributed to the numbers around July and August.¹²⁵

¹¹⁶ The Star 2022

¹¹⁷ People Daily 2022

¹¹⁸ Citizen TV 2022

¹¹⁹ Key informant interview – MAN1

¹²⁰ Key informant interview – WAJ1

¹²¹ Key informant interview – GAR1

¹²² Nation Africa 2022b

¹²³ REINVENT Violence Monitoring database

¹²⁴ Ministry of Defence 2022

¹²⁵ The presence of more security forces arguably could make it more challenging to conduct attacks against civilians. However, an increase in the movement of security forces along roads primarily presents greater opportunities for attacks.

Importantly, al Shabaab released significantly fewer propaganda statements in relation to the elections than they had done in 2017. The group's propaganda demonstrated a general opposition to the electoral process but there was no evidence that the group tried to influence the outcome of the elections in favour of either of the main presidential candidates. Rather, citizens along the border were told to boycott the elections altogether. Any efforts against election-related targets appeared to be attempts to cause disruption, not influence the results in any particular way.

Regardless, the delivery of a message alone does not necessarily mean that al Shabaab will successfully have influenced people's behaviours or their attitudes.¹²⁶ Theorists observe that communication is inherently social and involves a relationship between the messenger and the recipient.¹²⁷ The way a message is interpreted by the recipient will depend on their own social context and lived experiences.¹²⁸ Men and women can also interpret messages differently depending on their own gendered experiences. Without controlling territory, al Shabaab are unable to provide the same services in Kenya as they do in Somalia. Their messages may therefore lack credibility in the eyes of recipients on the Kenya side of the border if they fail to back them up with action.¹²⁹

Although more al Shabaab attacks were recorded in Kenya in 2022 than in previous years, there were multiple factors – beyond the electoral process – that potentially contributed to this absolute number. Among other variables, the frequency of activity was impacted by operations against the group within Somalia, drought conditions, the resources available to al Shabaab at any given time and the availability of targets. Given that so few of these incidents seem directly related to the elections, it would be difficult to argue that the increase in 2022 was only the result of the polls.¹³⁰

This was a year of considerable turbulence for al Shabaab. Firstly, there was the prolonged political transition in Somalia which, in May, finally led to the election of former president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud.¹³¹ Secondly, in July, al Shabaab launched operations in Ethiopia, something it had not been seen to do previously.¹³² These attacks involved extensive planning,¹³³ but ultimately failed to lead to the group establishing a foothold.¹³⁴ Thirdly, the year was marked by increasingly severe drought conditions, leading to mass displacement.¹³⁵ Al Shabaab have historically struggled to support the communities in the areas in which they control through periods of drought, balancing the mitigation of reputational damage with a reluctance to accept humanitarian support.¹³⁶ Finally, and most critically, since August 2022 the group has been facing a major offensive involving both Somali National Army (SNA) forces and clan-militia, often referred to as Ma'awisley.¹³⁷ The current offensive – mainly taking place in the Somali federal member states of Hirshabelle and Galmudug (as of March 2023)¹³⁸ – has already seen al Shabaab lose considerable amounts of territory.¹³⁹

Amid the growing military pressure on the group, and the distraction of Ethiopia and Somalia's elections, the Kenyan elections may well have slipped down the order of priorities. It is particularly notable that the clan-led offensives are thought to have been launched against al Shabaab in August, the same month as the elections in Kenya. In addition to the military offensive, the Somali government has begun to genuinely crack down on 'al Shabaab's taxation and governance in areas beyond its military control'.¹⁴⁰ The group also continues to face drone strikes carried out by both the U.S. and Turkey.¹⁴¹ In such a climate, a coordinated, well-planned initiative to disrupt the Kenyan elections would have been difficult. Resources and personnel would likely have been redirected towards defending territory in other parts of Somalia.

¹²⁶ Freear and Glazzard 2020; Jones 2020

¹²⁷ Freear and Glazzard 2020

¹²⁸ Archetti 2013; Bilazarian 2019; Hamid 2018

¹²⁹ Freear 2019

¹³⁰ Just 5.6% of the al Shabaab recorded in 2022 directly impacted election-related targets

¹³¹ The New York Times 2022

¹³² AP News 2022

¹³³ UN Panel of Experts 2022

¹³⁴ Hansen 2023

¹³⁵ UN News 2022 ¹³⁶ Hockey and Jones 2020

¹³⁷ Hansen 2023; Clan militia have become known as Ma'awisley ('men with sarongs') as a result of the garments worn by the civilian fighters (Reuters 2022).

¹³⁸ Hansen 2023

¹³⁹ VoA News 2023

¹⁴⁰ Hansen 2023

¹⁴¹ Hansen 2023

6 . PERCEPTIONS OF AL SHABAAB'S IMPACT ON THE 2022 ELECTIONS

What impact did the al Shabaab activity and propaganda discussed above actually have on local populations living along the border during the 2022 elections? To attempt to answer this question, the perceptions of those living in these areas must be explored. Two approaches were taken. Extended interviews (KIs) were conducted with particular individuals, including those living in the area or with particular knowledge of al Shabaab operations. In addition, a quantitative survey of perceptions was conducted amongst voting age men and women living in all four border counties.

The community perceptions survey was conducted a few months after the elections in December 2022. The timing of the anonymous survey, when the heightened political tension of the campaigning period and the polls themselves had calmed, allowed respondents to reflect on what and who had influenced their decisions during the polls. The quantitative survey was carried out in the four border counties of Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, and Lamu. Questions

were focused on the different factors impacting the voting preferences and on security concerns relating to the elections. All results were gender disaggregated to enable an exploration of how gender affects individual's response to the threat presented by al Shabaab.

As noted in the methodology (and in Annex 2), some of the areas worst affected by al Shabaab violence were avoided due to security concerns and this should be recognised as a limitation. However, the sub-counties that were included have all been impacted by al Shabaab in some way (Figure 7). Respondents of voting age were selected completely randomly. Details on the demographics and socio-economic status of respondents can be found in Annex 3.

Based on both KIs and survey data, this section therefore unpacks participant perceptions around political participation, security concerns, and voting to understand the impact of al Shabaab, and identify other influential dynamics and factors conditioning local preferences and decision-making.

6.1 Political participation

Most study respondents, 91%, said that they were registered voters.¹⁴² Notably, a higher proportion (95%) of female respondents were registered than males (88%). Across counties, Wajir had the highest proportion of sampled registered voters (97%), followed by Mandera (92%), Lamu (90%), and Garissa (86%).¹⁴³ These figures were above the national average of registered voters (79.41%),¹⁴⁴ and suggest a politically active sample population.

The respondents were asked why they had decided to register or not. These questions were open-ended, and the answers were revealing.

Amongst those that did register (n=504), the most common stated reasons were 'to exercise my rights' (42.9%) or 'to vote for the right/preferred leader' (40.1%). Many answers spoke of patriotism and duty as Kenyans. Others said they wanted to create change. There were also more frank answers such as 'I was promised a job', 'my family member was vying' and 'to vote for my clan'. Answers to the quantitative survey were generally supported by the key informants. A pastoralist in Wajir declared that they had 'voted for the candidate that [they] felt would best represent my interests and the interests of my community'.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Registered as at the end of mass voter registration on 06 February 2022.

¹⁴³ Consideration of security and accessibility in selecting respondents under this study may have led to the higher rates of voter turnout amongst the sample than national figures suggest.

¹⁴⁴ A KPMG audit report on the voters register revealed that out

of 27,857,598 eligible voters as per the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 22,120,458 were registered, representing 79.41% voter registration – a marginal increase on the 77.8% registered in 2017 (Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission)

¹⁴⁵ Key informant interview – WAJ1

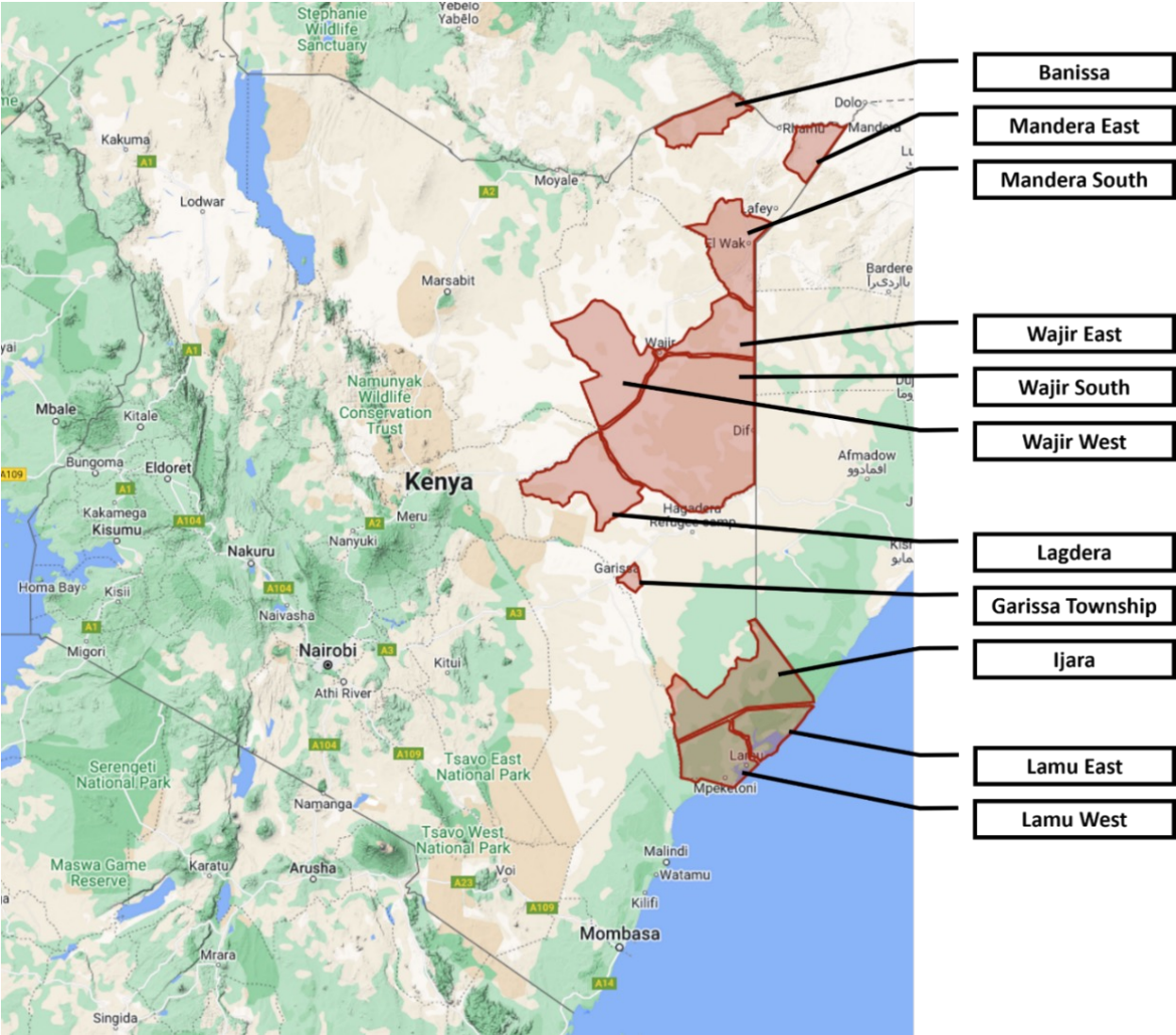


Figure 7: Map showing sub-counties selected for survey data collection

The most common reason given amongst those that did not register (n=48) was a ‘lack of time’ or being too ‘busy’ (n=10), and a ‘lack of interest’ (n=10). Eight respondents say they had travelled out of the country; others said they were unwell

and at least seven mentioned not having ID cards. A few were more directly critical of the election system, but such answers represented a minority:

“*I felt my vote doesn’t make any change because the system is corrupt and controlled by the deep state*”
“*mistrust of the politicians*”
“*because the Kenyan elections were not fair*”
“*because my vote is not recognised, nor does it make any difference because votes are stolen all the time*”

Asked whether they would consider standing as a candidate in future elections, more than a third (37%) answered in the affirmative. A higher proportion of male (42%) than women (30%) respondents said that they would consider running. This is perhaps unsurprising – at least in Garissa, Wajir and Mandera – given the limited role usually afforded to women in Somali public life, as was confirmed by several of the KIIIs. Moreover, so-called ‘negotiated democracy’ is said to be common in the North-eastern counties. In this system, clan agreements (largely decided amongst male elders) dictate who the candidates should be and how political positions will be distributed prior to an election.¹⁴⁶ Clan elders are seen as representatives of their communities and negotiate on behalf of their lineage.¹⁴⁷ With decisions on who should run and who communities should support made by male clan elders, women are usually excluded. A 2022 publication by International Alert explains that ‘negotiated democracy’ limits women’s inclusion since ‘it’s a big barrier to women elected leadership because there is no clan or tribe that will prefer a woman to be a flag bearer or a woman to represent them’.¹⁴⁸

This demonstrates the challenging power dynamics of gender inequality in this context. As male elders hold the power, they are able to ensure that power remains with their male decedents. There can, therefore, be significant difficulty in incentivising them to share this power more equally across the demographics of their communities. They often fail to consider the benefits of a more inclusive, representative, and diverse decision-making process, integrating women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised communities to generate comparatively comprehensive solutions to community challenges, and improve security and prosperity more widely. In addition to a lack of willingness to share power, or the adoption deliberately anti-women/anti-diversity approaches, there are likely to be some who fear women or other marginalised community

members may distribute resources differently or challenge existing/familiar structures. So, instead of being willing to explore the benefits that this different perspective or distribution might bring, even to themselves, they deny access to power to anyone that is ‘other’ to them. It is important to note too, that it is common for women to enforce engrained perceptions of gender roles upon other women, often upholding unequal, patriarchal structures because they have been convinced by their own marginalisation that this is the correct or moral role of women.¹⁴⁹

Female representation in politics remains low across Kenya and is not unique to the North-eastern counties. In IEBC’s Post-Election Evaluation Report, the European Union’s Election Observation Mission noted that, nationally, the number of female candidates was extremely low at around 11% in 2022.¹⁵⁰ Opportunities for women are often limited to the Women’s Representative position in each county, a seat with limited powers. Women continue to face considerable challenges in their political endeavours, including violence, threats and intimidation. A 2018 study noted that female candidates faced the same challenges in 2017 as they did in 2013 which included: inadequate political support from their parties especially in the primaries (nominations), a lack of financial resources, gender-based violence, gender stereotyping, and patriarchal structures.¹⁵¹ This emphasises the false dichotomy of a perceived public-private divide, with women trying to enter the public sphere often suffering lack of support, structural barriers, backlash, or even violence in their public and personal lives due to their attempt to challenge the norms around public engagement. Additionally, it may be that responsibilities in their private lives (for example, caretaking) might preclude them from having the time and or capacity to enter political life.

Looking at the difference between counties, half of those in Wajir said they would consider contesting positions in future elections, a significantly higher proportion than in the other

¹⁴⁶ The Star 2023

¹⁴⁷ Menkhaus 2015

¹⁴⁸ Mogire 2022

¹⁴⁹ White 2022

¹⁵⁰ IEBC: 124

¹⁵¹ NDI and FIDA 2018

counties. Wajir also had the highest proportion of women who would consider standing for election. The International Alert study noted that 11 women vied for Member of County Assembly (MCA) positions in Wajir in August 2022, with three winning.¹⁵² This was the first time since devolution that women had been elected MCA in Wajir.¹⁵³ By comparison, only 10% of those in Lamu – and only 8% of women – were interested in running as a candidate in elections. No women were elected to the County Assembly in Lamu in August 2022,¹⁵⁴ but a woman – Ruweida

Mohamed – became the first female Member of Parliament (MP) from Lamu, representing Lamu East.¹⁵⁵ Further investigation is needed into gender role dynamics and expectations that may explain why a larger number of women in Wajir were interested in political office than elsewhere. Future studies should look at intersectional identity markers, patriarchal structures within family or clans and urban-rural differences that may help to explain why more liberal interpretations of gender roles emerge in certain contexts.

Table 1: Positions considered for future elections, by gender

	Male	Female	Overall
MCA	47%	42%	45%
MP	28%	21%	25%
Governor	13%	7%	11%
Women's Rep	0%	25%	10%
Senator	12%	4%	8%

Of all respondents that said they would consider political office, almost half (45%) would seek an MCA seat, a ward level position.¹⁵⁶ Far fewer would run for MP (25%), Governor (11%) or Senator (8%). Standing as a candidate for political office in Kenya is extremely expensive.¹⁵⁷ Notably, a lower proportion of women in the sample stated that they had some form of employment income (see Table 21 in Annex 3), which may also have contributed to the fact that fewer women would consider running for political office.

Only 25% of female respondents said they would consider the position of Women's Representative, indicating that there is a perception that this role is either limited in its impact or limiting by the nature of its stereotypical interpretation of the gender role of 'women'. The 2010 constitution established the Women's Representative position at the county level exclusively for women to promote the interests of women and girls in politics at the county level and nationally. However, a higher proportion of women were interested in the (42%) MCA seat. This result is corroborated by the findings contained in IEBC's

post-evaluation report for the 2022 general election which established that, nationally, more women registered to run for MCA position (1,292) than vied for the women rep seat (360).¹⁵⁸ Crucially, it is worth noting that out of 1,292 women who vied for MCA seat, 114 were elected, representing 8.82% 'win-rate' nationwide.

Female respondents were less likely than male respondents to seek more senior positions (Table 1). Whereas 13% of men said they would consider the gubernatorial seat and 12% said that they were interested in the Senator position, only 7% and 4% of women respectively identified these positions. This could indicate one of two things. Firstly, that women may feel more engaged at the lower political levels, where influence is most dynamic within their own community environments, seeking to make changes close to home. Alternatively, the patriarchal structure is only reinforced the higher within the political structure you go – thus, making it more difficult for women to engage in high-level positions or less appealing for them to even try due to perceived difficulties or backlash they might encounter.

¹⁵² Mogire 2022

¹⁵³ NTV 2022

¹⁵⁴ The Star 2022c

¹⁵⁵ Tuko 2022

¹⁵⁶ It has been suggested that populations in the North-eastern

counties think that the MCA post should be reserved for young people and this prevailing norm may have impacted results. However, no correlation was identified in the data between the age of voters and the political positions they were interested in.

6.2 Security concerns

Interviewed key informants overwhelmingly stated that they felt secure at the polling centres, however most acknowledged the fear created by al Shabaab. Security fears mentioned relating to the elections particularly concerned travelling to and from polling centres.¹⁵⁹ A pastoralist from Wajir declared that despite feeling safe at the voting station, he was concerned that he may face repercussions the next time he crossed into Somalia if al Shabaab discovered he had voted.¹⁶⁰

Key informants also spoke about the general impact of al Shabaab on their community regardless of the elections. Although some suggested that the group had limited influence in their area,¹⁶¹ the pastoralist in Wajir said that the group regularly threatened civilians in an attempt to control the population. This interviewee recognised that the group's interpretation of Islam had led to divisions in his community.¹⁶² However, it was said that al Shabaab had a greater influence outside of towns and were most likely to affect pastoralists with whom they interacted in rural areas. A respondent in Liboi, Garissa County, said that their town was secure and they only heard about movements of the militants in the outskirts.¹⁶³ An individual in Wajir narrated how al Shabaab stole a considerable sum of money for him while he was travelling outside of town.¹⁶⁴ Some key informants mentioned that they had to pay 'zakat' to al Shabaab with a pastoralist noting that he particularly faced these demands when crossing into Somalia to find grazing land.¹⁶⁵

Key informants pointed out that men were more affected by the demands for Zakat because men 'are the breadwinners'.¹⁶⁶ Another in Wajir stated

they felt that women were less affected by al Shabaab.¹⁶⁷ However, it was implicitly recognised that women were impacted by al Shabaab in other ways, with one man saying that it was a good thing that al Shabaab made women wear the hijab and segregated women from men.¹⁶⁸ This man explained that women in the area rarely left their homes and were 'not involved in political or religious activities'.¹⁶⁹

Ultimately, despite recognising the constant security threat presented by al Shabaab and the fear the group created, no key informants said that their voting decisions had been influenced by the group. Their responses, however, do indicate that there is gender inequality both in gender roles expectations but also in perceptions of security and insecurity. Respondent explanations did not consider the influence women might exert from within their homes on political activities, the potential impact on their home life due to external insecurities caused by al Shabaab (for example, domestic violence), the insecurity caused by their lack of opportunities, and/or the more extreme threat that might be posed to them on the more limited occasions they might leave the home.

Several questions were included around security in relation to the polls in the quantitative survey. Firstly, all participants were asked whether they thought candidates in the area had faced security threats. Only 16% said yes and a further 13% said they did not know, but the overwhelming majority, 71%, said no.¹⁷⁰

Many more women (22%) than men (6%) said they did not know (Table 2). This may reflect the limited role women often play in public life or community security more specifically. They may

¹⁵⁷ A study by Kanyinga and Mboya (2021) revealed that, of the four seats – Senate, MP, women representative, and MCA – running for Senate was the most expensive. It costs an average of USD 350,000 to run for Senate, USD 228,000 for Women Rep, USD 182,000 for MP, and USD 31,000 for an MCA seat. It should also be noted that the Senate position in particular is potentially seen as less attractive because of its limited powers – it has no exclusive legislature function as all bills are subject to the National Assembly's approval. ¹⁵⁸ IEBC: 76; it should be noted that there are many more MCA seats than there are for the position of Women's Representative.

¹⁵⁹ Key informant interviews – MAN1 and WAJ1

¹⁶⁰ Key informant interview – WAJ1

¹⁶¹ Key informant interviews – GAR1 and GAR2

¹⁶² Key informant interview – WAJ1

¹⁶³ Key informant interview – GAR2

¹⁶⁴ Key informant interview – WAJ2

¹⁶⁵ Key informant interview – WAJ1; While it is often assumed that Somali women spend more time at home, the data from the survey suggests that a significant portion of the female respondents were in some form of employment, presumably outside of the household (see Table 21 in Annex 3).

¹⁶⁶ Key informant interview – GAR1

¹⁶⁷ Key informant interview – GAR1

¹⁶⁸ Key informant interview – MAN1

¹⁶⁹ Key informant interview – WAJ1

¹⁷⁰ There were no significant county-wide differences (15% - 18%) in the proportion of respondents who felt that candidates did face security threats in the last general election. However, it is worth noting that as many as 33% in Lamu said they did not know. This meant that only 51% in Lamu declared outright that they did not think candidates faced security threats.

feel they do not have an adequate understanding of what security is or that it is not their place to comment on it. Recent RUSI-led research in Lamu and Garissa counties found that women in these

areas are often less comfortable speaking about other people’s security due to prevailing cultural and social norms.¹⁷¹

Table 2: Perception of whether candidates faced security threats, by gender

	Male	Female	Overall
Yes	19%	13%	16%
No	75%	65%	71%
Don’t know	6%	22%	13%

Those that said candidates did face threats (N=89) were subsequently asked where this threat came from. Able to provide multiple answers, the majority cited rival politicians (53%), but 19% identified al Shabaab as the source of

threats faced by politicians. It should be noted that this figure only represents 17 individuals, most located in Mandera (46%) and Lamu (23%), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Source of threats as reported by respondents, by county (multiple response)

	Lamu	Garissa	Wajir	Mandera	Overall
Rival politicians	77%	50%	46%	50%	53%
Al Shabaab	23%	4%	8%	46%	19%
Criminal groups	38%	18%	8%	4%	15%
Family	0%	21%	8%	13%	12%
Elders	0%	18%	8%	13%	11%
No response	0%	4%	17%	0%	6%
Neighbouring clans/internal conflicts	0%	7%	4%	4%	4%

Separately, respondents were asked about their own concerns over insecurity during the elections. Only 16% said they were ‘not concerned at all’ while 47% said they had been either ‘concerned’ (24%) or ‘very much concerned’ (23%). There was minimal difference in the answers provided by male and female respondents, but there was significant variation between counties in the answers to this question (Table 4). Ninety-nine percent of respondents in Lamu were concerned to some degree about insecurity during the election, with a third (33%) saying they were ‘very much concerned’. Figures were also relatively high in Mandera, where 25% were ‘very much concerned’ during the election period. Notably, Lamu and Mandera are the two counties that experienced the most al Shabaab attacks over 2022 (Figure 8).

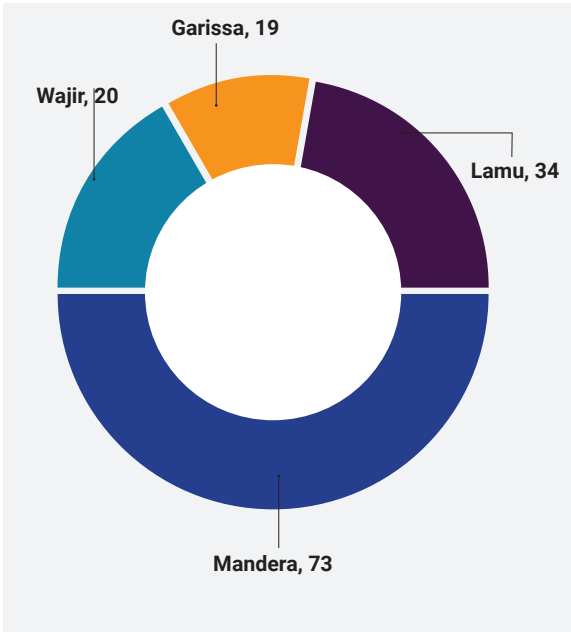


Figure 8: Frequency of al Shabaab attacks in 2022, by county

¹⁷¹ Zeuthen et al. 2022

Table 4: Respondents concerned about insecurity during the election period, by county

	Lamu	Garissa	Wajir	Mandera	Overall
Not concerned at all	1%	19%	22%	16%	16%
Less concerned	1%	26%	14%	25%	19%
Somewhat concerned	33%	13%	20%	15%	18%
Concerned	31%	23%	25%	20%	24%
Very much concerned	33%	19%	20%	25%	23%

Those who said they were concerned at least to some degree (84%, n=463) were then asked what they were most concerned about. Twenty-eight percent named al Shabaab as their greatest concern. Although there was minimal difference between genders in terms of concern for insecurity, a higher proportion of females (36%) than males (22%) were most concerned about al Shabaab (Table 5). This is a dynamic that deserves further exploration, as it is unclear

why women were more concerned than men when the perception amongst key informants seemed to be that women are less impacted by al Shabaab. This finding should also be assessed alongside a recognition that al Shabaab may seek to generate fear through threats without resorting to violence. The suggestion from the data is that women may be more affected by such threats.

Table 5: Most concerned about regarding insecurity during the election period, by gender

	Male	Female	Overall
Political violence	38%	36%	37%
Al Shabaab	22%	36%	28%
Communal/ethnic conflict	21%	12%	17%
Crime	15%	15%	15%
SGBV	3%	2%	2%

Several points should be made from the results from this question. Firstly, though more than a quarter named al Shabaab, many more (37%) were most concerned about political violence. Others felt that communal conflict (17%), crime (15%) or SGBV (2%) were a greater cause for concern.

Secondly, it is notable that respondent security concerns did not extend to candidates. Despite most being concerned over security, fewer than one in five respondents thought that political candidates experienced threats during the election. Those that did think candidates were threatened suggested these threats were more likely to have come from rival politicians than al Shabaab.

Thirdly, those who said they were most concerned about al Shabaab were on average less likely to say that they would consider standing for election in the future. Only 20% of those most concerned

about al Shabaab said they were interested in elective posts, compared to an average of 37% of all respondents. Concerns over other forms of violence had a less significant impact on willingness to take part in elections.

It is also worth looking at the geographic distribution of responses. More than half (59%) of respondents from Lamu and 38% of those in Mandera were most concerned about al Shabaab during the election period (Table 6). In both counties, al Shabaab was identified as the greatest concern more than any other threat. By comparison, only 15% and 11% of respondents in Garissa and Wajir counties respectively cited al Shabaab as their biggest insecurity concern. Again, it should be noted that more violent extremist activity is recorded in Lamu and Mandera than in Garissa and Wajir. Moreover, looking at the data collected for 2022, a higher percentage of attacks in Lamu (55.9%) targeted civilians than in and Mandera (27.4%),

Garissa (26.3%) and Wajir (10%). Attacks in Lamu are intrinsically linked to local politics and land disputes. RUSI's recent study on 'barriers to reporting' in Lamu and Garissa suggested

that civilians in Lamu are generally more open to discussing security-related problems they experience and more likely to report these to the authorities.¹⁷²

Table 6: Most concerned about regarding insecurity during the election period, by county

	Lamu	Garissa	Wajir	Mandera	Overall
Political violence	29%	28%	53%	36%	37%
Al Shabaab	59%	15%	11%	38%	28%
Communal/ethnic conflict	4%	42%	8%	10%	17%
Crime	8%	13%	24%	14%	15%
SGBV	1%	2%	3%	1%	2%

At the 'sub-county' level, it is noted that most of those in Mandera who said they were most concerned about al Shabaab were located in Banissa and Mandera East. Seventeen attacks were recorded in Mandera East in 2022, but far fewer took place in Banissa (only 2). Banissa, located further from the Somali border, has only really been affected since early 2020 and it is possible that communities in this area are less accustomed to the threat. Only three people in Mandera South said that al Shabaab were their main concern, a sub-county that has experienced substantial levels of al Shabaab violence for several years, with 17 incidents in 2022. In Lamu, those who suggested that they were most concerned about al Shabaab were split relatively evenly between the sub-counties of Lamu East (21) and Lamu West (26). These two sub-counties experience different forms of extremist violence. IEDs and attacks against police are common in Lamu East, but in Lamu West most attacks are cruder and are believed to be linked to communal tensions.

Despite the general concern over al Shabaab and the overwhelming evidence that al Shabaab content is able to flourish on social media,¹⁷³ only 2% of respondents said that they knew others who had received al Shabaab information relating to the election. Examples provided can broadly be categorised as attempts at intimidation, including threats that IEDs would

be placed along roads. Two percent amounts to just 13 people, ten of whom were in Mandera. It is, however, important to note that, despite the fact that the survey maintained the anonymity of all respondents and the fact that the question deliberately enquired about others rather than the respondents themselves, it is likely that individuals were concerned about self-incrimination. It is plausible that more people were aware of al Shabaab propaganda than this figure suggests.¹⁷⁴

Across the whole sample, the fact that political tensions were most frequently cited as respondents' greatest concern should not be considered surprising given the country's history with electoral violence. Localised tensions during elections in North-eastern Kenya are determined to a large extent by the process of 'negotiated democracy'. It has been argued after previous elections that deals brokered between clans in advance have served to reduce the risk of communal conflict during or after the polls.¹⁷⁵ However, reports indicates that, unlike in previous elections, 'negotiated democracy' failed to bring consensus among the three main clans in Wajir County in 2022 leading to a more crowded race for the gubernatorial position.¹⁷⁶ This may contribute to explaining why 53% of respondents from Wajir said that political violence had been their biggest concern.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Zeuthen et al. 2022

¹⁷³ Ayad et al. 2022

¹⁷⁴ When asked what 'al Shabaab were trying to achieve' in the area, respondents generally demonstrated weak understandings of the group, though most answers were overtly negative.

¹⁷⁵ Menkhaus 2015

¹⁷⁶ The Degodia clan fielded six candidates, the Ogaden two candidates and the Ajuuran one candidate (Nation Africa 2022a)

¹⁷⁷ There was no significant violence in Wajir during the elections. It is possible, that with the field of candidates split across clans, the result was considered a foregone conclusion with the favourite being the candidate from the clan with the fewest options.

6.3 Voting decisions

Of those who confirmed they were registered (n=504), the vast majority (93%, n=468) said that they exercised their democratic right on election day. Proportions were similar across genders (males- 92%, females- 94%) and across the four counties. These figures are much higher than the official voter turnout figures for each of the four counties.¹⁷⁸ The fact that the survey did not reach some of the more remote and more high-risk areas may have affected these figures, and it is also conceivable that respondents were not being truthful.

Those that were registered but said they did not vote (n=36) were asked why. This was an open-ended question, with 44% declaring that they were simply too busy and a further 17% saying they were unwell. More relevant here is that 36% (n=13) said they did not trust the system and a further 17% (n=5) said that they did not think their vote would make a difference. Those who provided this answer were mainly located in Garissa Town, Lamu West and Mandera East, but these numbers are relatively small (only 2.4% and 0.9% of the total sample respectively). No respondents said that they did not vote due to reasons related to al Shabaab.

Those respondents who said they had voted (n=468) were asked why they voted for the candidate that they did. They were able to identify multiple reasons in their response. Close to half (47%) voted for their preferred candidate because of “promises of employment”, followed

closely by 37% and 35% who voted for their candidate because of “campaign message/manifesto of the candidates/party” and “I voted with my clan/community” respectively. Notably, no respondents outright said that they voted for their candidate because they were coerced or threatened.

Reasons for selecting candidates varied by the gender of respondent. A greater proportion (59%) of females said they voted for their chosen candidate because of promises of employment, compared to only 38% of males. This is important to note as it indicates a significant portion of the female population wishes to be in the workforce rather than being confined to domestic roles, as is the prevailing socio-cultural gender norm in this context. Additionally, groups such as al Shabaab are often very clever at exploiting these gendered inequalities for their own propaganda and recruitment, with promises for employment and other empowerment opportunities.¹⁷⁹ Forty-six percent of females voted for their preferred candidate because of campaign message/manifesto of the candidates/party as compared to 29% of males. “Voting with my clan/community” was noted by 36% of male respondents compared to 32% of females (Table 7). This highlights how gender inequalities impact access to resources and opportunities – thus impacting the hopes and desires of individuals – as well as how gendered dynamics are utilised within narratives to convince people.

Table 7: Reasons that influenced respondents' voting decision for the preferred candidate, by gender (respondents were allowed to identify more than one reason)

	Male	Female	Overall
Promises of employment	38%	59%	47%
Campaign message/manifesto of the candidates/party	29%	46%	37%
I voted with my clan/community	36%	32%	35%
Offers of financial reward	9%	10%	9%
Encouragement/advice from family members or other opinion leaders	8%	7%	8%
They belong to the preferred political party	7%	7%	7%
No response	5%	3%	4%

¹⁷⁸ The official figures stated that turnout for Wajir County was 64%, Mandera 62%, Lamu 61% and Garissa 54% (figures provided by TIFA Research)

¹⁷⁹ Salifu and Ndung'u 2017.

Socio-economic factors may have played a part in driving voter preferences. Indeed, more men were employed in some capacity (63%) than women (59%) and this may have contributed to women more frequently citing promises of employment as important in their decision making. Furthermore, a higher proportion of male respondents (44%) stated that their income met their household basic needs compared to female respondents (31%). Gendered socio-cultural norms in the studied communities stipulate that males should be providers. Due to these expectations, men are perhaps less likely than women to admit their income cannot meet their basic household needs. It is also possible that, due to traditional gender roles, men are not as aware as women of household needs. Regardless, if women feel that their household needs are not being met, this may also help explain the higher proportion who cited employment as key reasons for their voting choices. Of course, it must be recognised that promises of employment are not necessarily made directly to individuals, but greater

opportunities are often pledged by candidates to whole communities. Female respondents are not necessarily prioritising employment for themselves; they may also seek opportunities for the men in their community.

Differences between counties were also observed (Table 8). In Lamu a majority (78%) of respondents voted for the candidate they did because of campaign message/manifesto of the candidates or party, followed by 62% who chose their candidate based on promises of employment. In Mandera County, 58% of respondents voted for their candidate due to promises of employment,¹⁸⁰ followed by 45% who identified campaign message/manifesto of the candidates/party, and lastly 29% who voted with their clan/community. Contrastingly, in Garissa and Wajir counties, 41% of respondents in each of the counties voted for their candidates because they wanted to vote with their clan/community. Promises of employment influenced 43% and 33% of respondents in Garissa and Wajir counties respectively.

Table 8: Reasons that influenced respondents' voting decision for the preferred candidate, by county (respondents were allowed to identify more than one reason)

	Lamu	Garissa	Wajir	Mandera	Overall
Promises of employment	62%	43%	33%	58%	47%
Campaign message/manifesto of the candidates/party	78%	37%	5%	45%	37%
I voted with my clan/community	23%	41%	41%	29%	35%
Offers of financial reward	19%	9%	5%	8%	9%
Encouragement/advise from family members or other opinion leaders	6%	14%	3%	8%	8%
They belong to the preferred political party	12%	6%	2%	10%	7%
No response	0%	0%	14%	0%	4%

Respondents who voted (n=468) were also asked to identify actors who had tried to influence their own decision on who to vote for. Potential influences were read out by enumerators and respondents could select multiple answers. Nearly half (47%) said family members, 38% clan elders, 27% politicians/political party officials and 25% friends (Table 9). These results

were relatively similar among male and female respondents. However, more males (42%) than females (32%) identified clan elders as an influence on their voting decisions, while more females cited politicians (37%) and friends (29%) than males (politicians- 20%, friends- 21%). The media was also seemingly more influential with female respondents (9%) than males (2%).

¹⁸⁰The survey established that 33% of respondents in Mandera County were 'unemployed - has never worked', significantly more than in the other counties.

Table 9: Actors who tried to exert pressure on respondents' own decision who to vote for, by gender (multiple response)

	Male	Female	Overall
Family members	48%	45%	47%
Clan elders	42%	32%	38%
Politicians/political party officials	20%	37%	27%
Friends	21%	29%	25%
Religious leaders	7%	9%	7%
Media	2%	9%	5%
Businesspeople	2%	3%	2%
None	2%	2%	2%
Al Shabaab	1%	1%	1%
Criminal groups	0%	1%	1%

Family members were identified as a common influence on voting decisions across all four counties. In the three North Eastern counties, clan elders were also said to have frequently tried to influence respondents' decisions as mentioned by 52% of respondents in Garissa, 47% in Mandera and 30% in Wajir. In Lamu County, where identity groups are structured around 'tribes' rather than 'clans', 52% of respondents said politicians/political party officials exerted pressure on their decision on who to vote for; 45% stated family and 39% friends. However, in such a dynamic context, categories of family members, religious leaders and other actors can overlap. Unlike in the North-eastern counties, a significant portion in Lamu (23%) noted the influence of the media. Lamu's population is increasingly cosmopolitan, at least more so than the North-eastern counties, and as such more people likely have access to mainstream media.

Critically, only 2% (n=3) of respondents in Mandera and 1% (n=1) in Garissa identified al Shabaab as an influencing actor on their decision regarding who to vote for. In Mandera, these responses came from within Banissa Sub-County, an area in which al Shabaab has been increasingly active since 2020. The key informants provided potential explanations for these extremely low figures. Stating that al Shabaab did not influence their voting decisions, a small business owner in Hulugho said that the existence of the threat 'has been going on for years and sadly has become a part of life; we just deal with it and go on with our lives'.¹⁸¹ Another said that despite fears over repercussions from al Shabaab, the group had not influenced his voting preferences and declared that the group 'does not have much influence' in the political realm.¹⁸²

Table 10: Actors who tried to exert pressure on respondents' own decision who to vote for, by county (multiple response)

	Lamu	Garissa	Wajir	Mandera	Overall
Family	45%	44%	49%	47%	47%
Clan elders	10%	52%	30%	47%	38%
Politicians/political party officials	52%	16%	9%	42%	27%
Friends	39%	26%	10%	30%	25%
Religious leaders	16%	11%	1%	6%	7%
Media	23%	3%	1%	1%	5%
Businesspeople	9%	0%	1%	3%	2%
None	1%	2%	4%	1%	2%
Al Shabaab	0%	1%	0%	2%	1%
Criminal groups	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%

¹⁸¹ Key informant interview – GAR1¹⁸² Key informant interview – WAJ1

In addition to influences on their own decision, respondents were asked whether they felt people living in their area made their decisions on their own or were influenced by others. It was anticipated that this question may result in more honest answers, without any social desirability bias. Only 28% of respondents said 'yes',

suggesting people were influenced by others, but this number was much higher in Garissa where 43% said people had been influenced on who to vote for (Table 11). It is also worth noting that more males (31%) answered in the affirmative than females (24%).

Table 11: People in my area were influenced by others on whom to vote for, by county

	Lamu	Garissa	Wajir	Mandera	Overall
Yes	32%	43%	25%	16%	28%
No	67%	56%	69%	76%	67%
Not Sure	1%	1%	7%	8%	5%

Those respondents who said people had been influenced in their voting decisions (n=156) were asked to identify who exerted pressure. Interestingly, no respondents selected al Shabaab as an influence on voting preferences. More than half (54%) mentioned clan elders, though this figure was much higher in Mandera (77%), Wajir (51%), Garissa (66%) than in Lamu (4%), reflecting the significant clout these figures wield across

North-eastern counties (Table 12).¹⁸³ Politicians and family/friends were also frequently cited in all counties. Although religious leaders and businesspeople were named as important actors in Mandera (27%), their influence appeared more limited in other counties. In Lamu, politicians and political party officials were considered influential on people's voting preferences (69%), as were family/friends and the media (both 46%).

Table 12: Perceptions of actors influencing which candidate people in the area voted for, by county (respondents able to identify more than one influence)

	Lamu	Garissa	Wajir	Mandera	Overall
Clan elders	4%	66%	51%	77%	54%
Politicians/political party officials	69%	16%	22%	42%	31%
Family/Friends	46%	19%	16%	35%	26%
Religious leaders	12%	10%	3%	27%	12%
Media	46%	4%	3%	4%	11%
Businesspeople	4%	1%	0%	12%	3%
Culture	0%	0%	11%	4%	3%
Religion	8%	1%	0%	0%	2%
Criminal groups	4%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Education	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%

There were gender differences in respondents' views on the type of actors influencing their vote (Table 13). Specifically, nearly two out of three male respondents (64%) mentioned that clan elders had a role in influencing which candidates people voted for, compared to just 36% of females. A sizable proportion of female

respondents (46%), compared to 22% of male respondents, considered politicians/political party officials as those exerting influence. These statistics are supported by the answers provided by respondents on their own voting decisions and emphasise the power dynamics driving influence.

¹⁸³ There was some confusion in response to this question due to the intrinsic links between 'clan', 'family' and 'culture' and the challenges translating these terms. In Somali communities, the family forms the basis of the expansive kinship network which includes extended family members who all belong to a broader clan (Evason 2019). Somali families are therefore collectivist with communal responsibilities. With intrinsic overlaps between 'clan', 'family' and 'culture', it is conceivable that respondents in the North-eastern counties considered these different options provided by the enumerators to be one and the same.

Table 13: Perceptions of actors influencing which candidate people in the area voted for, by gender
(respondents able to identify more than one influence)

	Male	Female	Overall
Clan elders	64%	36%	54%
Politicians/political party officials	22%	46%	31%
Family/Friends	24%	29%	26%
Religious leaders	11%	13%	12%
Media	5%	21%	11%
Businesspeople	3%	4%	3%
Culture	4%	2%	3%
Religion	1%	4%	2%
Criminal groups	0%	2%	1%
Education	1%	0%	1%



Locals queue to vote at Mandera DEB Primary School in Mandera East Constituency. Photo: Courtesy

7. CONCLUSIONS

In 2017 al Shabaab demonstrated considerable interest in the Kenyan elections, conducting several attacks against political targets and releasing a barrage of propaganda dismissing the democratic process. However, the evidence from 2022 elections suggests that the group did not build on this approach and appeared less coordinated. Fewer propaganda messages were released relating to the elections in comparison to 2013 and 2017 and, though there was some evidence of discriminate targeting, attacks were not conducted at an intensity capable of disrupting the polling process. There was only a half-hearted attempt through militants on the ground to encourage Kenyan citizens to boycott the poll. Thus, in response to the first research question, al Shabaab's direct response to the 2022 elections was minimal.

It was clear from the analysis of incident data that state law enforcement successfully limited the capabilities and freedom of movement of al Shabaab during the elections in 2022. For example, significant operations early in the year degraded al Shabaab's presence in the Boni Forest. Moreover, key informants explained that they had felt safe during at polling stations largely due to the work of state security forces. There were no reports of excessive violence, further undermining any attempts by al Shabaab designed to provoke a response that could work in their favour. Although law enforcement actors in Kenya have a marked history along the border,¹⁸⁴ their measured approach during these elections served to build trust and stability.

The findings from the incident analysis were supported by the quantitative survey conducted in the four border counties. Level of fear related to al Shabaab correlated with areas worst affected by the group's violence in 2022, with the most concern recorded in the two counties where most attacks were recorded, Lamu and Mandera. However, despite the evidence that those along the border are concerned about al Shabaab, these considerations did not impact their voting preferences. No respondents said they were

coerced or threatened to vote in a certain way; very few (2%) said they knew of anyone who had received al Shabaab information; not a single respondent declared that they did not vote due to al Shabaab pressure; and a negligible number said that al Shabaab were an actor that tried to influence their decision. The statistics from Lamu were particularly striking. Ninety-nine percent of respondents said they were concerned about insecurity, with 59% saying they were most concerned about al Shabaab, but no respondents said they were influenced by al Shabaab in deciding who to vote for. In response to the second research question, al Shabaab does not appear to have directly influenced levels of participation in, or the outcome of, the elections.

This study reveals a remarkable level of resilience amongst the communities studied who refuse to let the prevailing threat impact their lives and their democratic rights. The suggestion here is that over time communities can learn to live with the threat presented by violent extremists. While al Shabaab may limit community freedoms, the data suggests that a persistent threat – even over more than a decade – does not necessarily lead to a degradation of commitment to the democratic cause or the Kenyan state building project. These ties to the nation-state make it more challenging for al Shabaab to gain a foothold.

Over the decade since Kenya's devolution, county politics has become intimately tied up with local dynamics associated with identity and development. In North-eastern counties, 'negotiated democracy' plays an important role in the distribution of positions of power. Al Shabaab is not positioned to enter the fierce contestation of Kenya's democratic process and there are no indications from the current study that an al Shabaab backed candidate would have any success at the polls. The quantitative survey suggested the group is perceived as a security threat, not a political actor.

The survey results demonstrated that factors other than insecurity drive the voting preferences of the electorate along the border. In the three North-eastern counties, clan loyalties were evidently important, but many based their decisions on the issues that mattered to them as a community, citing campaign messages or the promises of employment opportunities. In Lamu, where the Somali clan system is less ubiquitous, promises of employment and campaign messages were all important. Rather than al Shabaab, respondents identified clan elders, family, friends, and politicians as the key players in influencing voting preferences.

There were some clear distinctions between gendered groups in survey responses, especially in relation to the questions around influences on voting preferences. Women were far more likely to base their decisions on 'promises of employment' compared to men. It was evidently important to many women that they be allowed into the workforce, rather than being confined to domestic duties. Women were also more likely to cite campaign messages and less likely to vote with the clan. While clan elders and family members were also seen as important, more women than men identified friends and politicians as influences on their decision. Men were more likely to mention clan elders as influential. As clan elders in North-eastern Kenya are invariably men, women are rarely included in discussions on 'negotiated democracy'. Broadly, the data suggests that women were more likely to prioritise socio-economic issues over kinship, and that women are more vested in challenging or disregarding the prevailing patriarchal dynamics of existing familial and social structures, which are often self-replicating.

Women were less likely to be interested in competing in future elections as candidates, but female representation in politics remains a concern across the country and is not unique to those areas where al Shabaab is most active. Across the three North-eastern counties, the survey suggested a higher proportion of women were registered to vote than men and more

woman actually voted on polling day. There was minimal difference between men and women in terms of the level of concern over insecurity during the elections, but women were notably more worried about al Shabaab than men and may therefore have been more influenced by the group's threats. It remains an important point of future studies to examine sources of insecurity for women and explore the implications of this question more fully.

As discussed, it is clear that al Shabaab failed to exert any meaningful direct influence on the elections. However, additional research should also explore whether the group is able to exert a more subtle or indirect influence on Kenyan politics. The data suggests that the threat of al Shabaab evidently impacts social and cultural norms, and it is plausible that some clan elders, who were seen to be particularly influential on others, could be manipulated by al Shabaab. It is equally plausible that al Shabaab's warped interpretation of Islam has an impact on the teachings of certain religious leaders. This requires further investigation, including an exploration of how gendered power dynamics and socio-cultural gender role expectations in clan leadership structures impact behaviour and response.

The conceptual framework outlined above looks for comparisons between country-wide democratic structures and how these might impact the ability of terrorists to operate. However, it is evidently less relevant at the sub-national level. The 2022 elections in Kenya demonstrate that opportunities for al Shabaab in Kenya are often related to highly localised factors, such as the deployment of law enforcement and the attitudes of the local population, as well as the internal dynamics of the threat actor itself, including conflicting priorities. The distinction between democracy and authoritarianism is also arguably less relevant in the periphery where the state may be weaker. The strength of Kenya's core democracy itself is not the defining variable in understanding the threat presented by a terrorist group based in a neighbouring state.

7.1 Outlook

The findings of this study bode well for the future of democracy in Kenya. However, efforts to devolve powers to the counties must be maintained and more effort is needed on gender equality in politics. Despite the ongoing offensive in Somalia, al Shabaab have repeatedly demonstrated an ability to regroup and regenerate. Unless efforts against the group are replicated in Jubaland, the organisation's stronghold, current efforts are unlikely to have a lasting impact.¹⁸⁵ The potential for the offensive to force militants closer to the Kenyan border must also be considered.

There are several other developments that will require careful monitoring. Firstly, al Shabaab will be aware that the dynamics of its operating environment are likely to change significantly over the next few years. Following a decision made by the Peace and Security Council, in April 2022 the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was superseded by ATMIS, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia.¹⁸⁶ Under ATMIS, security responsibilities in Somalia are

expected to slowly transition to Somali Security Forces, with a deadline of December 2024. The organisation's senior leadership will be waiting to see how these changes will affect them. It is possible that new opportunities for attacks both within and outside of Somalia will emerge.

Secondly, Kenyan authorities, in cooperation with Mogadishu, have announced their intention to 'reopen' the border between the two countries.¹⁸⁷ The move – which will start with Mandera – will necessitate the fortification of official crossing points and is likely to be seen by local communities as a burden. Those used to moving across the border relatively freely will now be faced with added bureaucracy and new fees. The government is hoping to increase trade and manage the movement of illicit goods. It is unclear how this change will affect al Shabaab's ability to move into Kenya, but it is possible that it will lead to increased tensions at least in the short term.

¹⁸⁵ Hansen 2023

¹⁸⁶ Garowe Online 2022

¹⁸⁷ News360 2023

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

GOVERNMENT

- The government should continue to strengthen democracy in the North-eastern counties and Lamu, building on the apparent desire amongst the electorate to be involved in politics. This will necessitate strengthening devolution to allow county authorities to offer strong public services to their constituents, as well as encouraging increased participation from women and other marginalised groups across the spectrum of political roles, to reflect the diversity of the societies being represented.
- The government must carefully consider how it communicates with populations in Kenya's peripheries, especially those areas regularly affected by violent extremism. The survey data suggests that politicians play an important role in influencing local perceptions and people remain concerned about al Shabaab. With this influence comes a responsibility not to stoke fear but to communicate transparently and honestly, listening to the priorities of the communities, and understanding the sources of insecurities across identity groups.
- The government should bolster opportunities for the empowerment of women and other marginalised communities (e.g., persons with disabilities, etc.). This should include mainstreaming gender into labour, education, law enforcement, judicial and other ministries across the government, which deal with and impact opportunities for the population.
- The proposed reopening of the Kenya-Somalia border must be managed carefully to minimise the impact on local populations. This will necessitate ensuring that official crossing points are run efficiently, that communities are supported with obtaining the required paperwork, and that fees are kept low. Decisions on border security will also need to consider changes in al Shabaab's ability to operate in Somalia, recognising the potential impact of the ongoing offensive and the drawdown of ATMIS.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Law enforcement actors must recognise that trust can only be built with communities in Kenya's peripheries through the impartial provision of security. The electorate along the border evidently responded well to the presence of security forces during the 2022 elections, but this improved social contract can easily be degraded by the use of unjustified and disproportional force. Additionally, the make-up of the security forces needs to better reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. This will improve relationships with the community and the effectiveness of services provided.
- The government should consider options for increasing the representation of women in security agencies, both in the counties along the border with Somalia and nationwide. There are significant challenges to overcome, especially in relation to gendered social norms. For example, children generally stay with their mother and most posts in the border counties are not considered family duty stations.

CIVIL SOCIETY / NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOS)

- Recognising the strong commitment to the state, development actors working in the border counties should consider integrating civic education into existing programmes, with a particular focus on increasing the political participation of women and other marginalised groups. This should focus on the more remote areas and include an exploration of how Kenya's democratic system works and the benefits of voting, as well as the creation of spaces within the communities where beneficiaries can engage.
- Women should be encouraged and supported to run for all offices (including the post of MCA), not only the Women's Representative position. Gender and other intersectional identities should be mainstreamed across representation. The survey data shows that women along the border are keen to seek elected office in county government. If finances present an obstacle, civil society should assist women in finding the means to launch their campaigns, as well as support them in the face of potential backlash.
- Civil society should also collaborate with government on the opening of the border, offering access to research, raising awareness, and conducting needs-assessments of security concerns across different groups (including women and other marginalised communities).

RESEARCHERS

- A larger gender-disaggregated quantitative survey sample size would have been more enlightening. The survey was revealing, but also led to further questions that could have been answered with a larger sample, and more time and resources. Results were not statistically significant at the sub-county level and more granular local analysis could have been conducted with a larger sample.
- Security incident data should be collected consistently over several years and be gender-sensitive and gender-disaggregated. The quality of publicly available databases is inconsistent, but this study demonstrates the level of nuanced analysis that can be conducted with high quality trusted incident data. Historic data can help us understand the current situation through a better appreciation of prevailing norms. This can be important in debunking the broad statements about VE threats that are so often propagated in this space. However, security analysts must be careful to distinguish between what VE groups claim in their propaganda and what they actually do. This is only possible if longitudinal data on both incidents and propaganda is available.
- The study has also highlighted where more research is required:
 1. An exploration is needed of the indirect influence al Shabaab may have on communities along the border through efforts to change how religion is taught, or perhaps through the manipulation of clan divisions. This exploration should be conducted with a gender lens, assessing how the gendered power dynamics of the clan divisions and structures implicates responses to indirect influence.
 2. A future study should carefully assess the gendered perceptions of security and insecurity, especially looking to understand gendered difference in perceptions of al Shabaab as a security threat. Additionally, the research should explore further how the deeply ingrained gendered inequality impacts voter behaviour and influence, as well as will ingness to stand as a candidate for office.
 3. Though not all directly relevant to the main research questions of this paper, the survey produced some interesting data on the factors driving decision making during elections in Kenya. These variables deserve further exploration. For example, research is needed to better understand the impact of gender and other inequalities, socio-economic factors (household income, employment status and literacy) and patriarchal leadership power structures on individual voting practices in Kenya's peripheries.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 – KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Interviews, approximately one hour long, were conducted over the phone, with measures taken to ensure the safety of both the interview and respondent. No personal identifiable information was collected or stored. Transcripts were held on a non-internet connected and encrypted drive and were later deleted. Informed consent was received from all respondents, with an information sheet provided in advance and the purpose of the interviews communicated verbally before the start of the interview. To mitigate the potential for emotional trauma, best practice guidelines were adhered to, with sensitive subjects or traumatic triggers to be avoided agreed in advance.

The interviews were semi-structured, with a list of guiding questions considered. Flexibility was

always maintained and questions avoided if they were deemed too sensitive in a given context.

For each KII, the researcher assessed and recorded the level of knowledge (or access) that the interviewee had and their ability to answer the questions; their authority on the subject matter based on their background; how open they were willing to be (candour); and efforts to corroborate the interviewees statements (validation). In addition, the geographic area to which the interview was able to speak about and the broader relationships they were known to maintain were noted. All respondents were also offered the opportunity to receive any final reporting connected to the study.

Data protection and privacy

By default, the identity of all interviewees was anonymised, unless the subjects declared that they were happy for their name to be used. A code identifier was applied to each interviewee based on county and number. Each transcript was held on a non-Internet connected and encrypted drive. The transcript will be stored for two weeks after

publication of this report according to European GDPR standards, after which it will be deleted permanently.

No risks are anticipated by keeping the identity of interviewees anonymous. It will not be possible to use the questions asked as evidence in any criminal investigations.

ANNEX 2 – SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted by TIFA Research in December 2022 and targeted 550 adults who were aged 18 years and above as at end of voter registration on 06 February 2022. All interviews were conducted face-to-face through Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). This meant that data was collected on secure mobile devices. Enumerators – with equal gender representation – were local to the survey areas which ensured greater access and questions were translated into Kiswahili and Somali as appropriate. Questions were asked in a sensitive manner, with al Shabaab only mentioned as one of several potential influences on voting preferences and one of multiple potential sources of insecurity. While no personal identifiable information was collected, the gender, age and socio-economic status of each respondent was recorded.

Training was provided to enumerators in advance of data collection. This covered the objectives of the study, sampling methodology, research ethics, and questionnaire content. The survey questionnaire was subsequently piloted and changes

made where respondents did not understand questions or deemed them too sensitive. A variety of quality control measures were incorporated into the survey methodology, including regular supervisor reviews of data collected, tracking of the GPS coordinates of enumerators, monitoring of the time taken to complete each survey response and in-field spot checks as enumeration was underway. The survey team was regularly in contact with relevant state authorities and all necessary permissions were obtained.

A multi-stage sampling method was used to randomly identify both male and female respondents of voting age at the time of the elections. Firstly, the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census (KPHC) was used to identify sample sizes at the county level. Secondly, this same data was used to calculate sample distribution at the sub-county level. Thirdly, the sampling points/locations were selected randomly broadly using probability-proportion-to-size (PPS) calculations. Fourthly, houses were selected randomly, and finally individuals chosen through a kish grid (random number table).

Table 14: Sample distribution, by county

County	Rural	Urban	Total	Sample proportion	Quota sample	Purposive Sample (final)
Mandera	210,407	109,237	319,644	29%	160	160
Wajir	242,498	78,853	321,351	29%	161	150
Garissa	284,720	96,237	380,957	35%	190	160
Lamu	55,892	22,562	78,454	7%	39	80
Total	793,517	306,889	1,100,406	100%	550	550

In the initial step, quota sampling was used for sample allocation where counties with a larger population were allocated a larger sample size. However, because of the lower assigned sample in Lamu County, purposive sampling was used to redistribute samples in the four counties as shown in Table 14.

A quota approach was also applied to distribute the sample at the sub-county level but geographical spread of the counties and access due to se-

curity concerns were also considered. Sub-locations were then identified as the sampling points, which were then selected randomly using probability-proportion-to-size (PPS) to mitigate bias. Crucially, households in this survey were selected randomly using the 'left-hand' rule methodology. In this technique, a landmark (such as mosque, school) was selected as a starting point in the sampling point location and each enumerator was advised to walk down their assigned road from the landmark to household determined by

the 'day code' or the distance covered in the rural population. The 'day code' was determined by day of the month such that the two digits in the day of the month are added together until a number between 1 and 9 was reached to determine the number of houses to be skipped while maintaining a 'left-hand' walk to the households.

In some rural areas, where houses are sparsely populated, a distance of 200 meters was used to skip the households. Inside the households, kish grid was used to randomly select eligible household members where a single respondent per household was selected.

ANNEX 3 – SURVEY NUMBERS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey reached a total of 552 respondents in the four counties of Lamu, Garissa, Wajir and Mandera. Out of 552 respondents, 30% (n=164) were located in Mandera County, 28% (n=156) in Garissa County, 27% (n=151) in Wajir County and 15% (n=81) in Lamu County (Figure 9).

In Lamu County, the study was conducted in

both Lamu East and Lamu West sub-counties. In Garissa, data was collected in three sub-counties – Garissa Township, Ijara and Lagdera – while in Wajir, interviews were held in all the sub-counties except Wajir North. In Mandera County, the survey was conducted in Mandera South, Mandera East and Banissa sub-counties (Table 15).

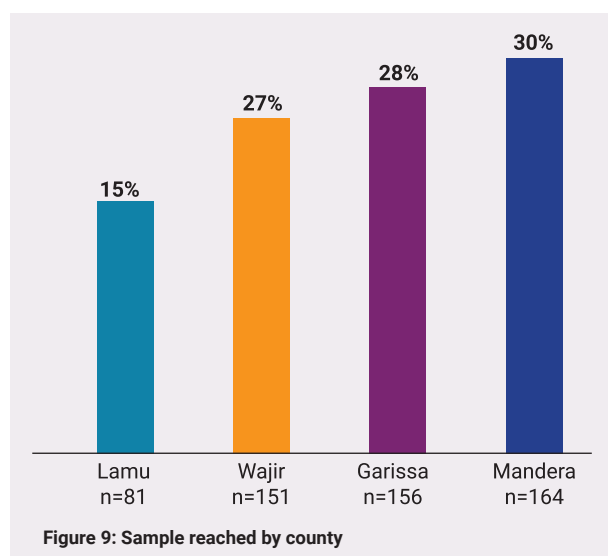


Table 15: Sample distribution, by sub-county

County	Sub-County	Sample
Lamu	Lamu East	31
	Lamu West	50
Garissa	Garissa Township	78
	Ijara	59
	Lagdera	19
Wajir	Wajir East	52
	Wajir South	51
	Wajir West	48
Mandera	Mandera South	38
	Banissa	64
	Mandera East	62
Total		552

Table 16: Gender of respondents

	Lamu	Garissa	Wajir	Mandera	Overall
Male	37%	71%	63%	51%	58%
Female	63%	29%	37%	49%	42%

Table 17: Age of the respondents, by county

	Lamu	Garissa	Wajir	Mandera	Overall
18 - 24 years	22%	28%	45%	13%	27%
25 - 34 years	43%	40%	48%	46%	44%
35 - 44 years	22%	25%	4%	24%	19%
45 - 54 years	7%	6%	1%	12%	6%
55 - 64 years	3%	1%	1%	4%	2%
Above 65 years	3%	0%	1%	1%	1%

Table 18: Age of respondents, by gender

	Male	Female	Overall
18 - 24 years	29%	25%	27%
25 - 34 years	43%	46%	44%
35 - 44 years	19%	19%	19%
45 - 54 years	6%	7%	6%
55 - 64 years	2%	2%	2%
Above 65 years	1%	1%	1%

Table 18: Age of respondents, by gender

	Male	Female	Overall
18 - 24 years	29%	25%	27%
25 - 34 years	43%	46%	44%
35 - 44 years	19%	19%	19%
45 - 54 years	6%	7%	6%
55 - 64 years	2%	2%	2%
Above 65 years	1%	1%	1%

Table 20: Respondent current employment status, by county

	Lamu	Garissa	Wajir	Mandera	Overall
Self employed	32%	47%	38%	31%	38%
Unemployed - has never worked	1%	18%	15%	33%	19%
Employed part time	22%	12%	14%	11%	14%
Unemployed – was working before	14%	10%	19%	9%	13%
Employed full time	19%	8%	4%	11%	9%
Student	7%	5%	9%	5%	7%
Retired with a pension	2%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Retired without a pension	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%

Table 21: Respondent current employment status, by gender

	Male	Female	Overall
Self employed	41%	34%	38%
Unemployed – has never worked	16%	23%	19%
Employed part time	13%	15%	14%
Unemployed – was working before	14%	11%	13%
Employed full time	9%	10%	9%
Student	6%	7%	7%
Retired with a pension	1%	1%	1%
Retired without a pension	1%	0%	1%

Table 22: How often a household member goes to bed hungry, by gender

	Male	Female	Overall
Often	6%	6%	6%
Sometimes	32%	37%	34%
Rarely	22%	27%	24%
Never	38%	22%	31%
No Response	2%	9%	5%

Table 23: Disability in a household, by gender

	Male	Female	Overall
Household has a member with disability			
Yes	13%	14%	13%
No	87%	86%	86%
Type of disability (multiple response)			
Hearing	65%	64%	64%
Walking	65%	45%	57%
Visual	59%	41%	52%

AL SHABAAB AND THE 2022 ELECTIONS IN KENYA

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