

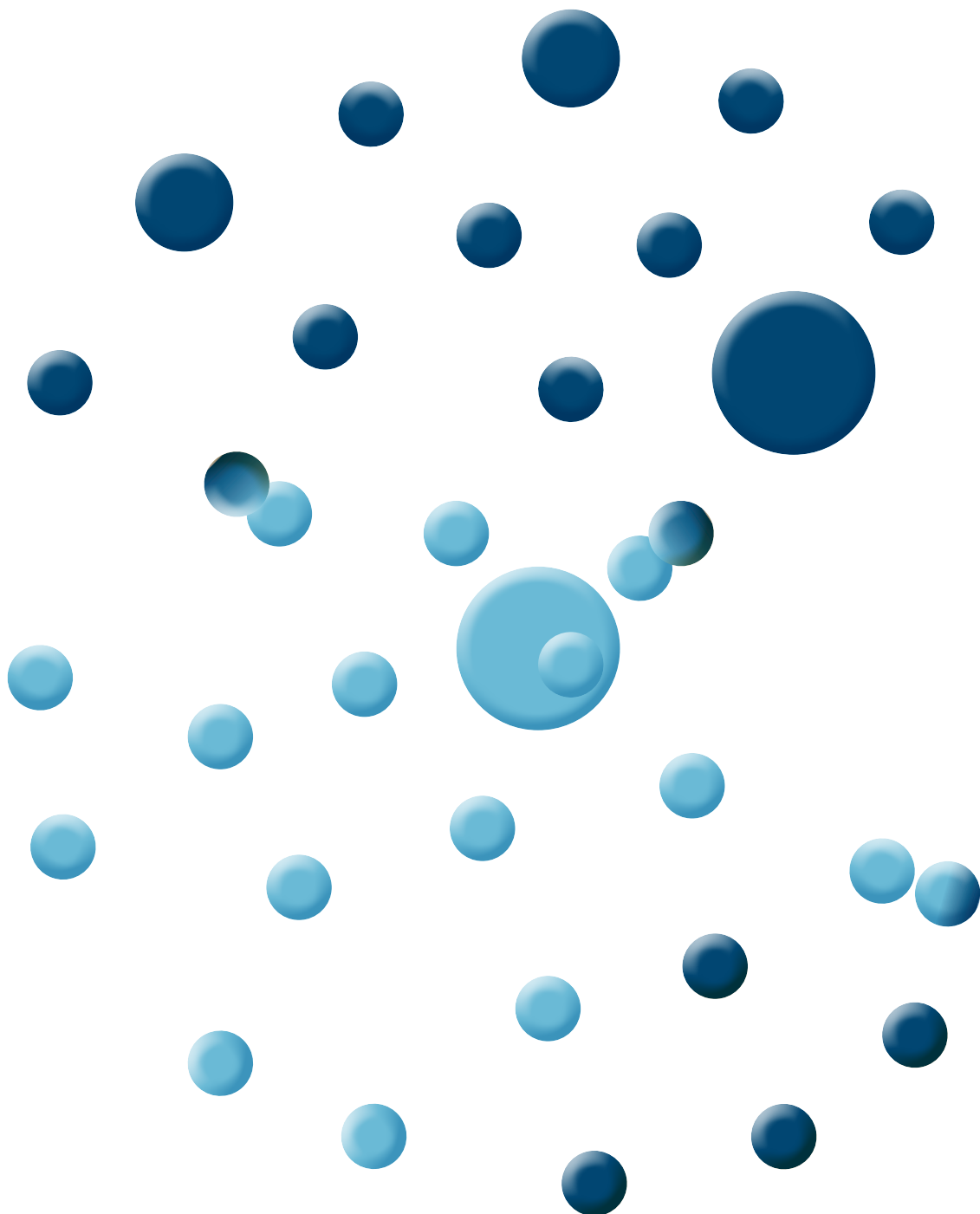
# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

## ON TERRORISM AND EXTREMISM NARRATIVES



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**EDITED BY**

Denis Suljić  
Galen Lamphere-Englund  
Farangiz Atamuradova  
Chloe Smith

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This series of reports use ideological or ideologically motivated extremism to refer to forms that are religiously, politically, and/or nationalistically inspired. Recognizing that typologies of extremism are fluid and lacking a global standard definition, we have elected to use this larger catch-all term to cover groups ranging from nationalist radical right actors to religiously-based fundamentalists. This includes racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE), as well as religiously motivated violent extremism (RMVE).

Whenever possible, we eschew umbrella terms and refer directly to the extremist or violent extremist organization by name and, where discernible, the specific ideology advanced by the group.

We also refer to the radical right as a catch-all for hateful or violent far-right extremists and organizations when no specific organizational affiliation is noted.

Across these reports, we refer to Daesh instead of ISIS, ISIL, or IS.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the research findings on the impact of the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic on terrorism and violent extremism in East Africa, including the Horn of Africa region, between January and December 2021. The scope includes Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. This research offers preventing and countering violent extremism findings and policy recommendations to stakeholders, including government, media, academia, the donor community, and interested readers.

Violent extremist organizations and terrorist groups have exploited the COVID-19 pandemic by changing their narratives within the East and the Horn of Africa. Anti-vaccination narratives are the most popular and have appeared throughout the later stages of the pandemic. One of the primary groups creating and disseminating these types of narratives was Al-Shabaab in Somalia, fulminating against the AstraZeneca vaccination but not against all vaccines.<sup>1</sup>

The pandemic affected changes in the use of communication platforms and channels by extremist regional actors. In Uganda, for example, the Allied Democratic Force started to use Telegram – via its affiliation with Daesh and the group’s Amaq media group – to claim responsibility for their actions while continuing to draw on in-person recruitment in Uganda.<sup>2</sup> Al-Shabaab used new mediums online to radicalize and recruit due to pandemic restrictions, while still maintaining in-person contact in spite of these restrictions. Changes in extremist organizations’ use of communication platforms and channels were mostly noted in Somalia, Tanzania, Kenya, and Ethiopia. Extremist organizations continued to leverage pandemic-related misinformation in the region, with a particular focus on the nature and efficacy of vaccines, to sow distrust in government entities with the broader aim of replacing those governments. In its disinformation attempts, Al-Shabaab used the pandemic as an opportunity to spread narratives against specific vaccinations while providing alternative suggestions for how East Africans should protect their health.

Yet, the available evidence demonstrates that these efforts by violent extremist organizations yielded minimal success. While in Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia, some forms of notable recruitment efforts were noted, in Tanzania, Uganda, and Eritrea, there was little evidence to suggest an increase in recruitment and radicalization. Uganda experienced only one terrorist incident in the first half of 2021, but at least seven terrorist attacks were reported from October to November. There was also an increase in terrorist attacks in Somalia and Ethiopia in 2021. Meanwhile, Kenya and Tanzania saw fewer attacks in 2021 compared to 2020. Eritrea did not encounter any terrorist attacks in 2021, though it faced threats from locally designated terrorist organizations in Ethiopia originating from the Tigray region.

1 C. Ero, ‘Africa’s Peace and Security: The Pressures of COVID-19,’ *International Crisis Group* (6 May 2021), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/af-ricas-peace-and-security-pressures-covid-19>, accessed 20 October 2021.

2 M. Schwikowski, ‘ADF: The group blamed for the bombings in Uganda,’ *DW Akademie* (17 November 2021), <https://www.dw.com/en/adf-the-group-blamed-for-the-bombings-in-uganda/a-59845415>, accessed 22 April 2022.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Governments, civil society organizations, religious institutions, and the private sector (including technology companies) should collaborate on efforts to create tailored counter-narratives and alternative messaging campaigns disseminated by violent extremist organizations in the East and the Horn of Africa, particularly those that spread COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation. This should include campaigns to limit the spread of COVID-19 vaccine misinformation and disinformation.
- 2** Governments should work with organizations such as Tech against Terrorism (TaT) and the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) to improve coordination to limit the spread of terrorist messages online. This may include sharing tools, resources, and best practices to improve enforcement of dangerous content disseminated by violent extremist organizations.
- 3** Governments and non-governmental organizations should work together to resolve internal grievances and improve trust in public institutions. These grievances and mistrust may be manipulated by violent extremist organizations to polarize communities and recruit individuals to their cause in the context of COVID-19.
- 4** Appropriate provision of adequate social and health services, as well as addressing economic concerns by governments, will likely discourage citizens from supporting violent extremist organizations and non-state armed actors. **To counter violent actors in the East and Horn of Africa, a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach is needed.** Specifically, increased cooperation and efficient information-sharing between the public sector and civil society is needed to ensure the needs of those on the front lines affected by extremist activity are understood and addressed by policymakers– which is even more important in times of a public health crisis. Bottom-up and efficient communication between sectors will improve abilities to address grievances that may otherwise lead to radicalization and recruitment.





# BACKGROUND

At the end of December 2021, East Africa had reported at least 1.2 million cases of COVID-19 and approximately 23,000 deaths, with Ethiopia and Kenya reporting the most fatalities of 6,969 and 5,394, respectively.<sup>3</sup> Vaccination efforts were slower to roll out in East Africa compared to global standards. While COVID-19 vaccines started to be administered globally in the last quarter of 2021, less than 8% of Africans had received the vaccine by the end of the year.<sup>4</sup> To expedite the vaccine rollout, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda participated in the COVAX Facility initiative, though Eritrea did not.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the challenges that East Africa was facing in terms of the pandemic, it also led to significant stress on the health care system and a resulting decline in standard (non-COVID-19) health care.

African economies were also severely affected by the pandemic in 2021. Factors underpinning economic strife included price volatility and increased global demand for key natural resources. Concurrently, the World Food Program reports that the pandemic has contributed to a rise in severe food insecurity in parts of Africa.<sup>6</sup> During the last months of 2021, several countries in the East and the Horn of Africa region restricted travel. They re-imposed lockdowns and other strict COVID-19 measures to prevent the spread of the newly emerged Omicron variant.<sup>7</sup> Despite many competent government responses, decreased resource exports (especially oil and key extractives), disruptions in trade and tourism, reduced remittances from African workers abroad, and local lockdown measures had a significant impact on the region. The World Bank estimated in April 2021 that COVID-19 had pushed up to 40 million more Africans into extreme poverty. Despite many competent government responses, resources are strained, and international assistance “to help African states mitigate the economic effects of the pandemic may not be enough”<sup>8</sup> to protect vulnerable individuals from the effects of COVID-19.

During the various phases of COVID-19, the general security situation across the continent remained volatile. Various active violent extremist actors and insurgencies were likely exacerbated by the pandemic, including across preexisting internal conflicts in vulnerable areas. The region experienced activity from Al-Shabaab, originating from Somalia, that continued to carry out various suicide attacks against the military, police, and

3 J. Faria, ‘Coronavirus deaths in East Africa 2022, by country,’ *Statista* (January 2022), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1175313/coronavirus-deaths-by-country-in-east-africa/>, accessed 11 January 2022.

4 ‘Address the access issue and the pandemic will be managed tomorrow: Global vaccine inequity’s impact in East Africa,’ *Amnesty International* (14 December 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/AFR0450842021ENGLISH.pdf>, accessed January 2022.

5 The COVAX Facility is a program co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi and the World Health Organization (WHO) that aims to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines in a way that is fair and equitable. UNICEF is a key delivery partner in the program. ‘What is COVAX?’ *Gavi*, <https://www.gavi.org/covax-facility>, accessed 10 April 2022.

6 A. Arief et al., ‘Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Impact in Africa,’ *Federation of American Scientists*, Congressional Research Services, 2021, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF11532.pdf>, accessed 20 October 2021, p. 1.

7 B. Materu, ‘Region on alert over Omicron variant,’ *The East African* (December 2021), <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/region-on-alert-over-omicron-variant-3640986>, accessed 13 January 2022.

8 C. Ero, ‘Africa’s Peace and Security: The Pressures of COVID-19,’ *International Crisis Group* (6 May 2021), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/af-ricas-peace-and-security-pressures-covid-19>, accessed 20 October 2021.



civilians.<sup>9</sup> In May 2021, Ethiopia added the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front and its ally Oromo Liberation Army to the list of proscribed terrorist groups during the ongoing conflict in the Tigray region.<sup>10</sup> The Tigray People's Liberation Front and Oromo Liberation Army stepped up attacks in the Tigray and neighboring Amhara and Afar regions, and thus the Ethiopian government continued military operations against the Tigray People's Liberation Front.<sup>11</sup> In Uganda, the Allied Democratic Forces, a local group based in the Democratic Republic of Congo and aligned with Daesh, claimed responsibility for a series of attacks. One of these attacks in November 2021 killed seven people, and corresponding police activity killed seven suspects and led to the arrests of 106 people related to the bombings.<sup>12</sup> While there is no direct evidence that the attackers had crossed the border as asylum-seekers in early November 2021 from the Democratic Republic of Congo due to humanitarian reasons, the short border opening may have helped to expedite the coordination of the bombings that occurred later that month.<sup>13</sup>

- 9 J. Mroszyk and M. Abrahms, 'Terrorism in Africa: Explaining the Rise of Extremist Violence Against Civilians', *E-International Relations* (April 2021), <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/04/09/terrorism-in-africa-explaining-the-rise-of-extremist-violence-against-civilians>, accessed 09 January 2022; 'Suicide bomber kills six police officers', *Reuters* (10 May 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/suicide-bomber-kills-six-police-officers-somali-capital-police-2021-05-10/>, accessed 12 April 2022; 'Somali al-Shabab militants attack Afrik hotel in Mogadishu', *BBC* (1 February 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55879679>, accessed 12 April 2022.
- 10 'Ethiopia to designate TPLF, OLF-Shene as 'terror' groups', *Al Jazeera* (May 2021), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/1/ethiopia-to-designate-tplf-olf-shene-as-terror-groups>, accessed 09 January 2022.
- 11 'Ethiopian gov't says TPLF forces kill over 100 residents in northern state', *Huaxia, XinhuaNet* (November 2021), [http://www.news.cn/english/2021-11/01/c\\_1310284248.htm](http://www.news.cn/english/2021-11/01/c_1310284248.htm), accessed 10 January 2022.
- 12 'Several suspects killed in Uganda after bombings: Police', *Al Jazeera* (November 2021), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/22/at-least-seven-suspects-killed-in-uganda-after-suicide-bombings>, accessed 05 January 2022.
- 13 'Fighting in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo forces 11,000 to flee to Uganda', *UNHCR* (9 November 2021), <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2021/11/618a2e134/fighting-eastern-democratic-republic-congo-forces-11000-flee-uganda.html>, accessed April 2022.



# METHODOLOGY

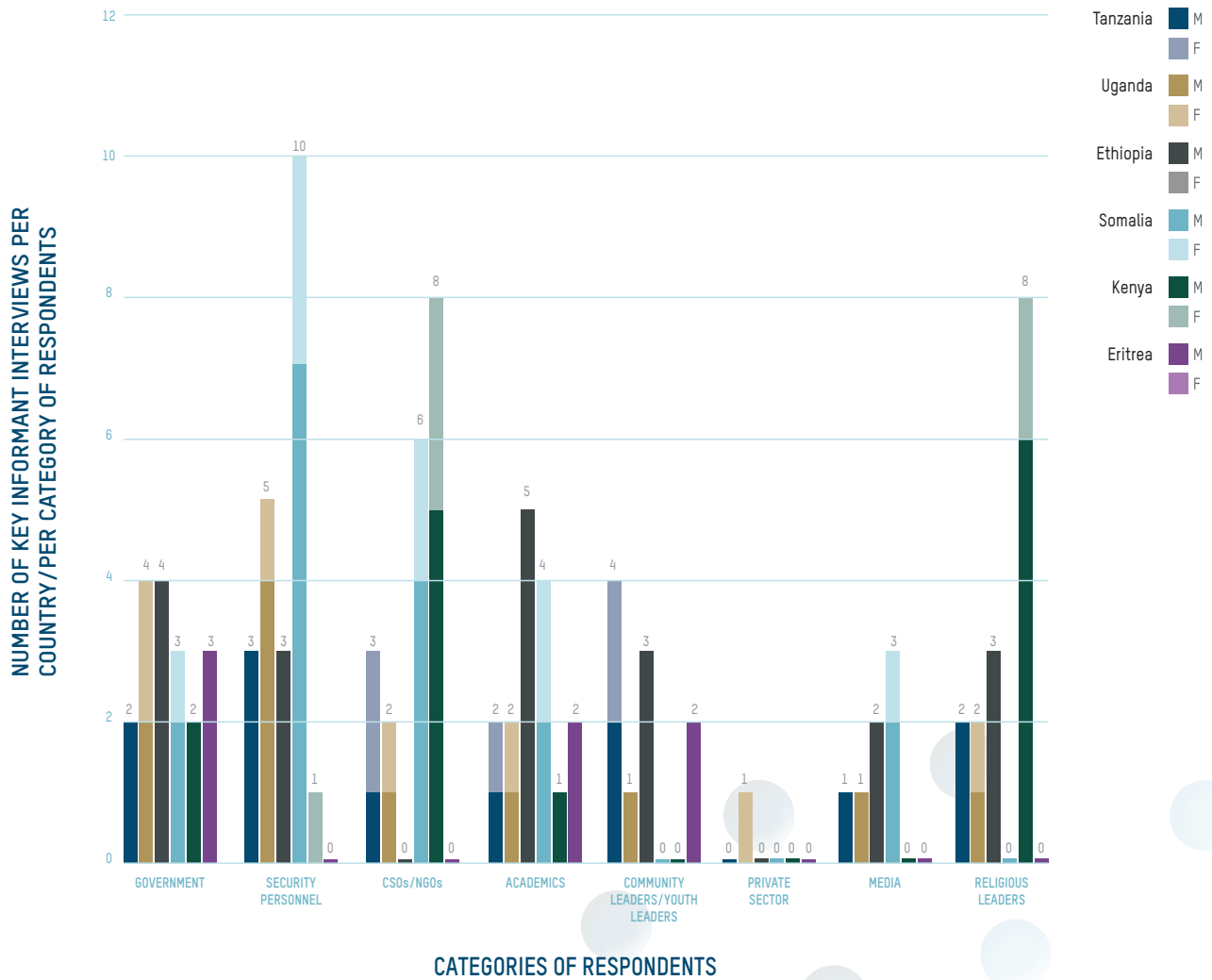
Some reports have explored the relationship between COVID-19 and violent extremism. Yet, the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected violent extremism and terrorism in East and the Horn of Africa has not been systematically studied by using raw COVID-19 data and evaluating it against the violent extremism and terrorist narratives and activities in the region. This study, therefore, intends to understand the impact of COVID-19 on terrorism and violent extremism in the East and the Horn of Africa from January to December 2021.

Countries within the scope of this research include the United Republic of Tanzania, the Republic of Kenya, the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Republic of Uganda, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, and the State of Eritrea. Several methods of qualitative data collection were employed for this study. The first included conducting key informant interviews with individuals operating and practicing in a diverse range of different fields – notably government officials, members of civil societies organizations, non-government organizations employees, security personnel, academics, community leaders, private sector professionals, and the media personnel. These participants were chosen to represent a wide subsection and variety of perspectives of those familiar with the topic of violent extremism and violent extremist organization recruitment. A total of 108 key informant interviews were conducted, with 81 male and 27 female participants. Table 1 below summarizes the number of key informant interviews with different categories of participants involved.

This study analyzed primary source narratives from materials shared by violent extremist organizations on platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook and in magazines such as Gaidi Mtaani. The analysis also leveraged secondary sources from websites and research institutions such as Statistica, Counter Extremism Project, Critical Threats, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. These resources helped the researchers understand the impact of COVID-19 on violent extremism, capture the common narratives used by violent extremist organizations, understand the commonly used communication channels used by violent extremist organizations, gain insights into recruitment channels and patterns, and understand how COVID-19 grievances are exploited by violent extremist organizations online and offline. It also offered insights into context-specific narratives like memes, GIFs, videos, hashtags, and materials being circulated in relation to violent extremism, as well as the relevant

social media accounts that spread disinformation and propaganda about COVID-19 online. To further understand the trends of violent extremism in the East and the Horn of Africa region, the study reviewed two main databases – the Global Terrorist Index and Afro Barometer.

Table 1: List of key informant interviews





# NARRATIVES

Violent extremist organizations, including Al-Shabaab, the Allied Democratic Force, Daesh, the Oromo Liberation Army, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (which was designated as an extremist organization by the national government at time of writing) continued to exploit the pandemic to advance various narratives to gain support, radicalize, and recruit audiences, and the same narratives that were distributed by violent extremist organizations during 2020 also emerged in 2021. Conspiracy theories often overlapped with extremist narratives and included contending that COVID-19 was a curse from God, a "Chinese sickness," a "biological weapon aimed to cause World War III," and "punishment from Allah [[God]] because of the destruction of mosques in China."<sup>14</sup> Continuation of these narratives throughout 2021 may have weakened governments' efforts in the region to deal with the pandemic.

<sup>14</sup> L. Storer et al., 'Do COVID-19 conspiracy theories challenge public health delivery?', [blog post], *LES* (April 2021), <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/af-ricaatlse/2020/04/21/conspiracy-theories-curses-in-uganda-wuhan-origins-covid-19-health-policy/>, accessed 8 October 2021.

## COVID-19 AS A FOREIGN INVADER

Compared to 2020, researchers noted an increase in narratives claiming that COVID-19 was intended to “cleanse” certain communities and religions. These narratives were seemingly being used to stimulate internal conflicts, especially in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, where propaganda may have accelerated confrontation between armed groups and the federal government.<sup>15</sup> For example, a respected elder from the Ethiopian Elders Association<sup>16</sup> stated:

*“I have [heard] campaigns of wrong narratives tacitly orchestrated by terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab, noting Islam as a religion is being unjustly treated in Ethiopia and not treated equally to Christianity.”<sup>17</sup>*

In Somalia, Al-Shabaab continued to use COVID-19 to advance their narratives, blaming Western forces for spreading COVID-19. Civil society groups contacted by the field researchers corroborated this finding, noting that Al-Shabaab continued to spread their dominant narrative blaming crusader forces who have invaded the country for spreading COVID-19. The violent extremist organizations have continued to emphasize during daily mosque sermons and media platforms that people should not accept medical assistance from non-Muslim countries.<sup>18</sup>

## VIOLENT EXTREMIST ORGANIZATION DISSEMINATION OF ANTI-VACCINE CONSPIRACIES

Another notable difference in violent extremist narratives around COVID-19 in 2021 was related to the vaccine distribution, which was not readily available throughout Africa in 2020. Following the lead of European regulators questioning the safety of the AstraZeneca vaccine, Al-Shabaab leveraged this incident to advise Muslims to use medications found in the Qur’an, such as “black seed and honey,”<sup>19</sup> and to “not trust the disbelievers to benefit you in any way,”<sup>20</sup> when directly referring to the WHO and UNICEF. In this public statement, Al-Shabaab urged Muslims not to be used as “guinea pigs in the race to develop a potent vaccine” for COVID-19 (see Image 1).<sup>21</sup> Al-Shabaab seemingly spread these types of harmful narratives to gain support from the public and advance recruitment efforts.

15 Ero, ‘Africa’s Peace and Security’.

16 The Ethiopian Elders Association is made up of clergy, intellectuals, athletes, diplomats, and traditional leaders working to mediate conflicts and prevent further deterioration of the political crisis in Ethiopia.

17 Key Informant Interview with a respected elder in Ethiopia, September 2021.

18 Key Informant Interview with a civil societies organization official in Somalia, September 2021.

19 E. Ogao, ‘Use Honey Instead of COVID Vaccines, Al-Qaeda Backed Militants Say’, *Vice* (8 April 2021), <https://www.vice.com/en/article/5dbmpq/al-shabaab-somalia-covid-vaccine-anti-vax>, accessed 22 October 2021.

20 Office of Politics and Wilaayat, ‘Muslims of Somalia must reject the unsafe coronavirus vaccine [AstraZenica]’, 30 March 2021, in Morad News (@MoradNews), ‘BREAKING: #AlShabaab calls on #Somalia people’, Twitter, 30 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/MoradNews/status/1376958971546845189/photo/1>, accessed 12 April 2022.

21 M. Oduor, ‘Al-Shabaab issues warning against AstraZeneca vaccine’, *Africanews* (31 March 2021), <https://www.africanews.com/2021/03/31/al-shabaab-issues-warning-against-astrazeneca-vaccine/>, accessed 20 October 2021.





Image 1: Al-Shabaab statement on AstraZeneca vaccine (Citation in text).

Other vaccine misinformation was spread throughout Somalia and Kenya, complicating government efforts to encourage citizens to get vaccinated. For example, a common narrative spread by extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab was that the vaccine contained pig enzymes and was, therefore, Haram (forbidden) for Muslims to receive.<sup>22</sup> Pastoral communities in Kenya on the border with Somalia reported that Al-Shabaab claimed that the vaccine was “a weapon to eradicate Muslims, contains pig products, would sterilize Somali women, and would infect girls with promiscuous habits.”<sup>23</sup> Interviews with religious leaders in Shimoni, Vanga, and Mombasa cities in Kenya demonstrated the depth of the propaganda acceptance among the general Muslim population. For instance, one respondent said:

*The vaccine contains ethanol which is alcohol. Alcohol is Haram [forbidden] according to Islamic beliefs. This makes the vaccine Haram, and unfit for consumption by anyone who proclaims the Islamic faith. We have also read on social media that the vaccine contains pork products; again, pork is Haram.*<sup>24</sup>

For Tanzania, it is worth noting that the government did not report a significant number of coronavirus cases in the country until a task force was set up in April 2021, upon the death of President Magufuli.<sup>25</sup> Prior to his death, the President stated that “prayers, steam inhalation or herbal remedies were better than the ‘dangerous’ foreign vaccines.”<sup>26</sup> This is notable because some of the narratives spread by groups like Al-Shabaab in the region may

22 A. Khalif, ‘Kenya: Combating Extremist Narratives Around Covid-19’, *Institute for Peace and War Reporting* (1 May 2021), <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kenya-combating-extremist-narratives-around-covid-19>, accessed 15 October 2021.

23 A. Khalif, ‘The Kenyan women resisting Al-Shabaab’s war on COVID-19 vaccines’, *The Optimist* (29 June 2021), <https://www.standard.co.uk/optimist/vaccine-world/kenyan-women-al-shabaab-war-on-covid19-vaccines-b942939.html>, accessed 12 April 2022.

24 Key Informant Interview with a religious leader in Kenya, October 2021.

25 ‘Tanzania: President’s new COVID-19 taskforce a positive move but the work starts now’, *Amnesty International* (26 April 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/04/tanzania-presidents-new-covid-19-taskforce-a-positive-move-but-the-work-starts-now/>, accessed 30 April 2021.

26 J. Burke, ‘Tanzania leader says prayer will cure Covid, as hospitals overflow’, *The Guardian*, 28 February 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/28/tanzania-leader-says-prayer-will-cure-covid-as-hospitals-overflow>, accessed 12 April 2022.

have been amplified due to this context in Tanzania regarding COVID-19 and the vaccine. However, there is no direct evidence of these narratives increasing radicalization or recruitment in the country from primary or secondary sources.

In the Tanzanian context, there was reportedly a video circulating on WhatsApp in June 2021 of the leader Sheikh Farid Hadi of the Association for Islamic Mobilization and Propagation (UAMSHO)<sup>27</sup>, a Zanzibar-based separatist group that frequently had frictions with the mainland government. The video was shown with Hadi quoting a sura that suggested that nothing that was not created by God should belong in the body and that vaccinations were un-Islamic.<sup>28</sup> Notably, this video was created shortly after his release after 8 years in prison (and terrorism charges against him dropped),<sup>29</sup> and he did not continue to make public statements about COVID-19 after that video.

## COVID-19 AS DIVINE PUNISHMENT

Uganda and Eritrea did not have COVID-19-related narratives from extremist groups targeting these countries specifically. However, the spread of narratives from other countries – made easier via the Internet – led to widespread fear and social tensions. Researchers found that conspiracy theories in Uganda followed similar patterns as extremist narratives in Kenya and Somalia: COVID-19 was characterized as a curse from God, a Chinese sickness, a biological weapon with efforts to initiate a World War III, or a punishment from God because of the destruction of mosques in China.<sup>30</sup>

The continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 facilitated a situation where violent extremist organizations could adopt some of the conspiracy theories and narratives that existed in 2020, while expanding on these narratives related to the vaccine.

27 Swahili acronym for the Association for Islamic Mobilization and Propagation, a separatist group in Zanzibar, Tanzania. Nicknamed “The Awakening.”

28 M. Schilinger, ‘Tanzania claimed the coronavirus was a hoax. Is it too late to turn things around?’, (30 July, 2021), <https://www.nzz.ch/english/can-tanzania-thetanzania-claimed-covid-19-was-a-lie-now-its-changing-course-country-that-claimed-the-coronavirus-was-a-lie-turn-things-around-ld.1638016>, accessed 12 April 2022.

29 A. Sultan, ‘Leaders of Islamist group in Tanzania freed, charges dropped’, *AP News* [16 June 2021], <https://apnews.com/article/africa-tanzania-0dd64ce8844163886f1b997461bd0441>, accessed 12 April 2022.

30 Storer, et al., ‘Do COVID-19 conspiracy theories challenge public health delivery?’

Below is a summary of such narratives as captured in the data:

Table 2: Dominant COVID-19 Narratives Gathered During the Pandemic (2021)

● Somalia      ● Tanzania      ● Ethiopia      ● Kenya      ● Uganda

Al-Shabaab warns against using the AstraZeneca vaccine, declaring it unsafe for distribution or administration to people.<sup>31</sup>

Note: Many European governments put the distribution of the AstraZeneca vaccine temporarily on hold after some side effects emerged. The vaccine was re-tested and confirmed to be safe.

UNICEF and the WHO are not to be trusted because they have overtly and covertly been involved in exacerbating drought, diseases and poverty in Somalia and other Muslim lands.<sup>32</sup>

Western “crusaders” are the source of the COVID-19 virus, specifically the Halane military complex and TurkSom military base. Muslims should avoid these bases at all costs.<sup>33</sup>

The vaccine would sterilize Somali women, and is a punishment for indiscretions.<sup>34</sup>

The vaccine contains ethanol which is alcohol. Alcohol is Haram according to the Islamic beliefs.<sup>35</sup>

COVID-19 vaccines come from pig’s enzymes and are therefore Haram (forbidden) for Muslims.<sup>36</sup>

31 Oduor, ‘Al-Shabaab issues warning against AstraZeneca vaccine’.

32 Office of Politics and Wilaayat, ‘Muslims of Somalia must reject the unsafe coronavirus vaccine [AstraZeneca]’.

33 Ibid; Key Informant Interview with a civil societies organization official in Somalia, September 2021.

34 Khalif, ‘The Kenyan women resisting Al-Shabaab’s war on COVID-19 vaccines.’

35 Key Informant Interview with a religious leader in Kenya, October 2021

36 Khalif, ‘Kenya: Combating Extremist Narratives Around Covid-19’.

COVID-19 is a “divine curse” or a “curse from God.”<sup>37</sup>

COVID-19 is a “Chinese sickness.”<sup>38</sup>

COVID-19 is a “biological weapon aimed to cause World War III.”<sup>39</sup>

COVID-19 is and a punishment from God because of the destruction of mosques in China.<sup>40</sup>

COVID-19 is a profit-making venture for government officials.<sup>41</sup>

A sign of the apocalypse, the end of the world, an indication of Jesus’ second coming, or a test of faith<sup>42\*</sup>

37 Storer, et al., ‘Do COVID-19 conspiracy theories challenge public health delivery?’

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Key Informant Interviews, July – September 2021.

42 Storer, et al., ‘Do COVID-19 conspiracy theories challenge public health delivery?’ \*Note: While not inherently an extremist narrative, the use of end-times manipulation of narratives has been noted by violent extremist organizations in other regions and is included here as the potential for narrative re-framing and misdirection is present.

# COMMUNICATIONS PLATFORMS

The results of this study demonstrate that violent extremist organizations continued to use a range of different pre-pandemic communication platforms and channels in the East and the Horn of Africa region throughout 2021, including those online and, to a lesser degree, offline. The most notable communication channels used by violent extremist organizations in the region included Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp, while other platforms such as blogs, websites, radio, and religious sermons in mosques served as a secondary avenue of communication.<sup>43</sup> Al-Shabaab-affiliated radio channels such as Quran Karim Radio FM, Somali Wayen Radio FM, HornAfrik Radio and Radio Al-Andalus continued to run on and off during the pandemic.

This study found that although violent extremist organizations have been using both old and new media for their activities recently, they have increasingly relied on new media platforms during the pandemic as in-person contact became limited due to government restrictions. For instance, in Uganda, interviewees within security agencies, civil society, the private sector, and religious leadership confirmed that violent extremist organizations continued to use social media to spread propaganda, attract followers and recruit new active members during COVID-19. Notably, these messages were mainly coming from groups like Al-Shabaab and to a lesser extent, the Allied Democratic Force, which operated outside of Uganda (in Somalia and Democratic Republic of Congo, respectively).

By spreading disinformation, conspiracy theories, and propaganda about COVID-19 online and offline, violent extremist organizations continued to influence the public by sowing seeds of mistrust in authorities and their abilities to manage the crisis. Some violent extremist organizations have also attempted to exploit political protests and tensions in the lead-up to elections and their aftermath to spread extremist narratives, expand their support base and recruit new members.

In addition to spreading specific messages about COVID-19, violent extremist organizations continued to leverage social media to claim responsibility for attacks. For example, with respect to the attack in Dar es Salaam in August 2021,<sup>44</sup> Daesh claimed responsibility for this attack through social media, particularly on Telegram (see Image 2).<sup>45</sup>

43 R. Harshe, 'Burgeoning Terrorism in Africa: A Critical Overview', *Observer Research Foundation* (28 September 2021), <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/burgeoning-terrorism-in-africa-a-critical-overview/>, accessed 02 October 2021.

44 M. Fick, 'Tanzania says gunman who killed four people last month was a terrorist', *Reuters* (2 September 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tanzania-says-gunman-who-killed-four-people-last-month-was-terrorist-2021-09-02/>, accessed 30 September 2021.

45 Jasusi, (@Chahali), '#Update: Telegram channel "ConflictZone" reports that supporters of ISIS claim the man who killed 3 police officers....', Twitter (26 August 2021), <https://twitter.com/chahali/status/1430936913272258561>, accessed 30 August 2021.





Image 2: Conflictzone Telegram channel claiming attack in Dar es Salaam (Citation in text).

This research also found that messages that may have originated with violent extremist organizations were sometimes spread on social media accounts of mainstream media networks that were covering violent extremist organization activity in Somalia and Kenya, and therefore their messages were being also disseminated throughout Uganda and Tanzania. For example, the Twitter page of Shabelle Media Network, a news station based out of Mogadishu that covers Somalia's news, occasionally was subject to commentary that had similar arguments as Al-Shabaab.<sup>46</sup> Local radio stations affiliated with Al-Shabaab also continued to broadcast throughout the pandemic, and video clips recorded by the violent extremist organizations were disseminated on YouTube and sent via WhatsApp.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, utilizing memes and tags such as #CovidVaccinelsHaram on platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp may have contributed to discouraging vaccination among Kenyan Muslims.<sup>48</sup>

In Ethiopia, one of the interviewees from the Ethiopian security forces confirmed that social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube are commonly used by violent extremist organizations to mobilize followers, and an Ethiopian journalist noted that "extremist groups and movements... spread conspiracy theories and disinformation on social media platforms aimed at mobilizing like-minded individuals to violence."<sup>49</sup>

In Somalia, the findings from the interviews show that Al-Shabaab continued to exploit traditional and new media to reach the public in and outside Somalia. Somalis in and outside of the country use Facebook, Snapchat,

46 Shabelle Media Network (@ShabelleMedia), Twitter profile, <https://twitter.com/ShabelleMedia>, accessed 20 October 2021.

47 'Al-Shabaab calls for attacks on U.S, French interests in Djibouti', *Africanews* (29 March 2021), <https://www.africanews.com/2021/03/29/al-shabaab-calls-for-attacks-on-u-s-french-interests-in-djibouti/>, accessed 30 September 2021.

48 'COVID-19 vaccine controversy: Chinese vaccine with pork gelatin cannot be given to Muslims, say Sunni scholars', *Times Now News* (24 December 2020), <https://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/covid-19-vaccine-controversy-chinese-vaccine-with-pork-gelatin-cannot-be-given-to-muslims-say-sunni-scholars/698473>, accessed 20 September 2021; Khalif, 'Kenya: Combating Extremist Narratives Around Covid-19'.

49 Key Informant Interview with a journalist in Ethiopia, September 2021.

and Twitter to discuss politics, national issues, religion, and identity; Facebook is the main news source, for instance, for Somalis.<sup>50</sup> Violent extremist organizations like Al-Shabaab take advantage of these spaces to attempt to recruit new individuals to their cause. In some cases, Al-Shabaab has targeted journalists who depict their activities negatively.<sup>51</sup> In this respect, reporting on violent extremist activity, particularly in Somalia, comes at a high cost to journalists, who risk their lives in getting the facts right or speaking in a way that undermines Al-Shabaab's activity and can be even more dangerous in the context of "civilian journalism," which is often the style used on social media posts like Facebook or Twitter.

The exception to the widespread use of social media by violent extremist organizations across the region was Ethiopia. Since social media was banned in the country, very little activity by violent extremist organizations was conducted online and instead relied on traditional face-to-face interactions. A journalist from Eritrea stated: "The people in Eritrea don't have access to social media; hence it's hard to note any online content" or narratives of violent extremist organizations.<sup>52</sup> Limiting access to social media has been a longstanding practice by the Eritrean government even before the pandemic, and therefore radicalization and recruitment in this context has taken place offline or through traditional media sources.<sup>53</sup>

50 'Facebook: Friend or foe to Somalia's press freedom', *Amnesty International* (3 May 2020), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/05/facebook-friend-or-foe-to-somalia-press-freedom/>, (Accessed 30 August 2021).

51 'Facebook: Friend or foe to Somalia's press freedom'.

52 Key Informant Interview with a journalist in Eritrea, September 2021

53 Committee to Protect Journalists, '10 Most Censored Countries, Committee to Protect Journalists' *CPJ*, (2019), <https://cpj.org/reports/2019/09/10-most-censored-eritrea-north-korea-turkmenistan-journalist/>, accessed 19 September 2021.

# PUBLIC SERVICES

The research conducted in this study indicated limited evidence on public social and health services and information being provided to the public by violent extremist organizations in the East and the Horn of Africa in 2021. Al-Shabaab allegedly continued to operate their “Coronavirus treatment center” in Somalia, set up in 2020, however, what treatments the militia group administers to its patients remains unclear. Notably, with less than 2% of the government budget spent on health services, and with limited access to health care in remote areas, Al-Shabaab patient care may have been the only viable option for medical needs in many areas of Somalia.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, Al-Shabaab addressed the use of vaccines for the first time in 2021, calling on citizens not to “allow your family to be used as subjects in the experimentation of the safety of the Astra-Zeneca vaccine,” as indicated in a statement issued by the violent extremist organization and posted on Twitter.<sup>55</sup> It did, however, potentially allow for other vaccines to be used in the future, as it did not directly outlaw all vaccines. There is no evidence that other violent extremist organizations in the region were able to provide services for East Africans, or claimed to do so, throughout 2021.



54 ‘Somalia Economic Update: Investing in Health to Anchor Growth,’ *The World Bank* (14 September 2021), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/somalia/publication/somalia-economic-update-investing-in-health-to-anchor-growth>, accessed 14 April 2022.

55 Morad News (@MoradNews), ‘BREAKING: #AlShabaab calls on #Somalia people to reject the “unsafe and deadly #coronavirus vaccine” ....’.

# RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT

The study found that the countries in the East and the Horn of Africa have not had any notable surge in extremist recruitment associated with COVID-19. While violent extremist organizations continued to exploit the pandemic to intensify and contextualize radicalization and recruitment through targeted narratives and mis- or disinformation campaigns, there is limited evidence to support an increase in recruitment taking place in the region to date. However, interviewees in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea feared that the narratives on COVID-19 could lead to future recruitment and radicalization.

In Tanzania, this study found that a single terrorist attacker who killed four policemen in August 2021 was radicalized and received online training from Al-Shabaab and Daesh.<sup>56</sup> As noted, Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack that took place in Dar es Salaam.<sup>57</sup> It is not yet clear if there has been any meaningful increase in recruitment due to COVID-19, however, the impact and aftermath of the pandemic may contribute to the radicalization and recruitment of Tanzanian youth in the future. Youth may also have heightened vulnerability due to the high rates of unemployment, exacerbated by the pandemic, as well as potentially increased online activity without sufficient training in digital literacy and knowledge of counter-messages.<sup>58</sup>

In Ethiopia, limited recruitment and radicalization have taken place from external, violent extremist organizations; however domestic violent extremist groups such as Tigray People's Liberation Front and Oromo Liberation Army have been active in the Tigray region. Interviewees confirmed that recruitment efforts by domestic violent extremist organizations are not necessarily related to COVID-19. According to an interview with an Ethiopian security officer, Tigray People's Liberation Front is potentially trying to forge a strong relationship with Al-Shabaab to destabilize Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.<sup>59</sup> Other sources suggested that Al-Shabaab had an interest in entering Ethiopia to expand their territory and recruit new followers from the Tigray People's Liberation Front and Oromo Liberation Army.<sup>60</sup>

Respondents in Uganda noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly increased internet usage and caused a dramatic surge in the popularity of social networking sites all over Uganda. Extremist groups have significantly increased their global reach, taking advantage of the lockdown and curfews to spread propaganda and recruit from the convenience of social media platforms, including exploiting the aftermath of attacks in November across Kampala, Uganda.<sup>61</sup>

56 Fick, 'Tanzania says gunman who killed four people last month was a terrorist'.

57 Jasusi, (@Chahali), 'Update: Telegram channel "ConflictZone" reports....'.

58 M. Blume, 'Covid-Africa Part 1: The pandemic risks turning young people to extremism: How should we respond?', *Wasafiri* (2020), [www.wasafirihub.com/covid-africa-part-1-the-pandemic-risks-turning-young-people-to-extremism-how-should-we-respond/](http://www.wasafirihub.com/covid-africa-part-1-the-pandemic-risks-turning-young-people-to-extremism-how-should-we-respond/), accessed 28 September 2021.

59 Key Informant Interview with an Ethiopian security officer, September 2021

60 Channel 4 News, 'Ethiopia's border fight: The war against al-Shabaab', YouTube, [23 November 2021], <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUGDikMuWrl>, accessed 14 April 2022.

61 H. Athumani, 'Uganda Police Kill 5, Including Cleric, After Bomb Blasts', *VOA* (November 2021), <https://www.voanews.com/a/uganda-police-kill-5-including-cleric-after-bomb-blasts-/6319497.html>, accessed 14 January 2022.

In Kenya, one participant in an interview noted that Al-Shabaab had faced challenges in their recruitment outside Somalia due to limited mobility and community resistance.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, COVID-19 narratives used by Al-Shabaab are perceived to be less influential by communities that have already understood the impact of the pandemic, including from their own experience. This potentially indicates that communities with access to information about or personal experience with COVID may possess better resilience to extremist narratives. An interview with a Kenyan police officer noted, “There is no clear evidence of recruitment incidents or tactics from Al-Shabaab who are still around, they mainly target military and police movement, but I have not heard of anyone missing or joining the violent extremist organizations.”<sup>63</sup>

However, COVID-19 has continued to offer avenues for youth radicalization and recruitment in Kenya during the pandemic, even if the channels for this radicalization are not easily observed or if misinformation is deemed less effective by the community. This includes documented examples of Al-Shabaab capitalizing on youth from low-income neighborhoods struggling to cope with economic challenges of the pandemic by offering them phoney jobs that result in kidnapping.<sup>64</sup> It is possible that because the lockdowns have limited social interactions and physical movement in some areas, an increase in recruitment could have gone unnoticed. Another interview with a community member in Dadaab sub-county indicated, “In this area, it is very difficult to know if recruitment is going on, the activity is majorly done silently and secretly in person, not the way we think, so an individual can be recruited and goes to serve Al-Shabaab and comes back without notice.”<sup>65</sup> Similar sentiments were echoed by a Kenyan security officer, stating:

*We can't show evidence of the exact channel of recruitment, the channels are not public, but I believe violent extremist organizations have people working for them to support recruitment. Most of the people we interview are the returnees and the majority of them join for money, they just go there to serve the violent extremist organizations doing services like cooking, washing, and things like that.*<sup>66</sup>

The violent extremist organizations in Somalia have also used COVID-19 vaccine narratives to support their outreach efforts. However, this study has not established any direct recruitment links associated with COVID-19 vaccines in the country during the relevant period.

62 Key Informant Interview with a Kenyan civil societies organization officer, October 2021.

63 Key Informant Interview with a Kenyan police officer, October 2021.

64 R. Elmendorp, ‘COVID-19 exacerbating terrorist recruitment in Kenya, experts say’, VOA (27 July 2021), [https://www.voanews.com/a/episode\\_covid-exacerbating-terrorist-recruitment-kenya-experts-say-4759141/6117820.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/episode_covid-exacerbating-terrorist-recruitment-kenya-experts-say-4759141/6117820.html), accessed 12 September 2021.

65 Key Informant Interview with a Kenyan community member at Dadaab, October 2021.

66 Key Informant Interview with a Kenyan security personnel, October 2021.



# FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS

COVID-19 travel and border restrictions have tightened up security at ports of entry between African countries, and government services have diverted significant efforts towards health services and monitoring at the official crossings. However, areas, where the border were already quite porous, remained so throughout the pandemic. The porous nature of the Kenya-Tanzania border along the Lungu Lungu stretch is an example of the ease of crossing borders in this region. When the Kenyan government suspended social gatherings such as attending mosques and wedding ceremonies and celebrations, field researchers for this report noted that certain members from the communities living along the Lungu Lungu border in areas like Shimoni and Vanga reportedly crossed to Jasini and Moa in Tanga to attend to their Friday prayers and even conduct wedding ceremonies. Security personnel have raised concerns about increased movements of violent extremist organizations between the same borders and between Mozambique and Kenya through Tanzania.<sup>67</sup> Recently, the Kenyan anti-terror police arrested two suspected terrorists in Mombasa. The two foreign terrorist fighters (although one was a native Kenyan) were believed to have entered the country through the porous Lungu Lungu border with plans for targeted attacks against police stations and other institutions in Mombasa.<sup>68</sup>

The November attacks in Uganda were linked to the Allied Democratic Forces, a group who refer to themselves as Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) and is based in the Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>69</sup> Trans-border movements of fighters or individuals linked to the group may have become more permissive in 2021, as borders were closed previously in 2020 for most of the year.<sup>70</sup> In particular, the border has opened up several weeks before the attacks after a long period of closure due to the pandemic which may have provided opportunities for the Allied Democratic Force to provide resources or communication around the attacks to the perpetrators.

67 A. Olingo, 'Tanzania: Security Agony for Dar, Nairobi As Terror Suspects Sneak Back Home', *The East African* (28 August 2021), <https://allafrica.com/stories/202108290005.html>, accessed 12 September 2021.

68 S. Cece, 'Security agencies put Kenya-Tanzania border on terror watch list', *The East African* (30 August 2021), <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/security-agencies-put-border-on-terror-watch-list-3531578>, accessed 30 October 2021.

69 P. Fabricius, 'Uganda terror attacks point to deeper Jihadi coordination', *Institute for Security Studies* (November 2021), <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/uganda-terror-attacks-point-to-deeper-jihadi-coordination>, accessed 11 January 2022.

70 'Country Reports on Terrorism 2020: Uganda', *U.S Department of State: Bureau of Counterterrorism* (2020), <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2020/uganda/>, accessed 1 January 2022.

# COUNTRY SUMMARIES

## ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

Ethiopia was one of the worst-affected countries by COVID-19 in East Africa, with a large spike in daily cases to more than 4,000 cases per day at the end of December 2021 compared to 137 cases per day at the beginning of December 2021. At the end of 2021, Ethiopia had accumulated 424,340 COVID-19 cases and 6,947 confirmed deaths, whereas Eritrea had 8,026 total cases and 76 confirmed deaths since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>71</sup> In terms of vaccinations, only 7.9% of the population had received one dose of the vaccine by the end of 2021 in Ethiopia, and no vaccines were administered in Eritrea during 2021.<sup>72</sup>

In terms of terrorism, Ethiopia was also impacted by an increase in terrorist attacks. Unlike the two terrorist attacks reported in 2020, most attacks in 2021 have been carried out by internally designated terrorist organizations engaged in conflict against the internationally recognized government, particularly the Tigray People's Liberation Front and Oromo Liberation Army in the Tigray region.<sup>73</sup> These groups started their operations in the Tigray region, and have escalated their attacks towards the border of Eritrea, which has resulted in the Eritrean military also becoming involved in the conflict.<sup>74</sup> The sustained attacks in the Tigray region have killed thousands of civilians, including children, as well as destroyed public services and infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and roads.<sup>75</sup> The Tigray People's Liberation Front has also been accused of rape, robbery, and torture (physical/verbal assaults) on civilians in the Amhara and Afar regions.<sup>76</sup> The study found that the ongoing crisis in Tigray has a minimal correlation with COVID-19, as the actors operating in the region have not created or leveraged narratives relating to COVID-19 on a large or particularly influential scale. Both Ethiopia and Eritrea are faced with internal conflicts advanced by Tigray People's Liberation Front and Oromo Liberation Army who have been designated by the Ethiopian government as terrorist organizations.

71 'Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)', *Our World Data [website]*, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/>, accessed 24 April 2022.

72 Ibid.

73 Getachew, 'Tigray rebels have damaged, destroyed 7,000 schools in Ethiopia: Minister', *AA News* (31 August 2021), <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/tigray-rebels-have-damaged-destroyed-7-000-schools-in-ethiopia-minister/2351031>, accessed 15 September 2021.

74 'Terrorist TPLF has killed 240 civilians in Afar region', *Al Jazeera* (9 August 2021), <https://ethiopianembassy.org/terrorist-tplf-has-killed-240-civilians-in-afar-region-al-jazeera-august-9-2021/>, accessed 22 October 2021.

75 C.A. Ray, 'Violence in the Tigray Threatens Ethiopia's Already Fragile Stability', *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (2021), <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/08/violence-in-tigray-threatens-ethiopias-already-fragile-stability/>, accessed 22 October 2021.

76 'Ethiopia: Survivors of TPLF attack in Amhara describe gang rape, looting and physical assaults', *Amnesty International* (9 November 2021), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/ethiopia-survivors-of-tplf-attack-in-amhara-describe-gang-rape-looting-and-physical-assaults/>, accessed 15 April 2022.

## KENYA

Kenya was also heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with 297,155 total cases by the end of 2021 and 5,381 confirmed deaths.<sup>77</sup> By the end of 2021, 10.9% of the population had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccination, the highest percentage in East Africa.<sup>78</sup>

With respect to terrorism, fewer attacks were witnessed in Kenya in 2021, with 51 terrorist attacks occurring between January and December 2021, a slight decrease from 69 attacks in 2020.<sup>79</sup> Compared to 2020, the number of casualties also decreased to 100 from 122, but the number of injuries increased from 42 to 73.<sup>80</sup> The decreased number of attacks and deaths may be attributed to the closure of borders, banned gatherings and movements, and curfews that were imposed in Kenya throughout 2021, which potentially made planning and carrying out attacks more complicated. Some notable terrorist incidents include the following:

Date	Location	Perpetrator	Casualties	Description
January 2021	Tarbaj, Wajir State	Al-Shabaab	0	A group of Al-Shabaab gunmen flagged down a passenger bus looking for Christians. <sup>81</sup>
March 2021	Mandera, near Lafey	Al-Shabaab	4 killed, dozens injured	A bus ran over a planted roadside improvised explosive device. <sup>82</sup>
May 2021	Lamu	Al-Shabaab	7 soldiers killed	Kenyan soldiers were killed in attack and one went missing. <sup>83</sup>
June 2021	Jabibar, Mandera	Al-Shabaab	3 killed	Bombing and ambush attack while on patrol (improvised explosive device). <sup>84</sup>

77 'Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)', accessed 24 April 2022.

78 Ibid.

79 R. Ramadhan and L. Ouma, 'Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya,' *Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies*, Report No. 4 (February 2021), <https://www.chrips.or.ke/publications/research-reports/trends-of-violent-extremist-attacks-and-arrests-in-kenya-january-december-2020/>, accessed 18 October 2021; R. Ramadhan and M. Mwaura, 'Trends of Violent Extremist Attacks and Arrests in Kenya, January-December 2021,' *Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies*, Report No. 5, (January 2022), <https://www.chrips.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Trends-of-Violent-Extremist-Attacks-and-Arrests-in-Kenya-2021.pdf>, accessed 15 April 2022.

80 Ibid.

81 'Al Shabaab attacks bus traveling in Kenya looking for Christians', *International Christian Concern* (13 January 2021), <https://www.persecution.org/2021/01/13/al-shabaab-attacks-bus-traveling-kenya-looking-christians/>, accessed 27 September 2021.

82 '4 killed, dozens injured in bus attack in North-Eastern Kenya', *Xinhua* (24 March 2021), [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/af-rica/2021-03/24/c\\_139832647.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/af-rica/2021-03/24/c_139832647.htm), accessed 12 October 2021.

83 T. Odula, 'Seven Kenyan Soldiers Killed in Jihadi Ambush in Lamu County', *Associated Press* (19 May 2021), <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-05-19/seven-kenyan-soldiers-killed-in-jihadi-ambush-in-lamu-county>, accessed 12 October 2021.

84 A. Wasike, '3 killed in Al Shabaab terror attack in Kenya', *AA News* (21 June 2021), <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/3-killed-in-al-shabaab-terror-attack-in-kenya/2280885>, accessed 27 September 2021.

Of note is the escape of three terrorist inmates from a maximum-security prison in November 2021. One of the prisoners, Mohamed Ali Abikar, had been sentenced to 41 years in prison for involvement in the Garissa University attack in 2015 that killed 148 people.<sup>85</sup> The group was captured a few days later as they sought directions to Boni Forest near the Somali border, presumably on their way to rejoin Al-Shabaab.<sup>86</sup>

## SOMALIA

COVID-19 affected Somalia less than its neighboring country Kenya in terms of cases and deaths. By the end of 2021, Somalia had 23,532 total cumulative COVID-19 cases, and 1,333 confirmed deaths.<sup>87</sup> At the end of December 2021, Somalia had achieved a 7.3% vaccination rate (at least one dose) throughout the population.<sup>88</sup>

With respect to terrorism in Somalia, there has been a significant increase in terrorist attacks during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 compared to 2020. Over 230 attacks were carried out across Somalia by Al-Shabaab compared to just over 100 attacks between January and December 2020, including at least three significant attacks in November 2021 alone.<sup>89</sup> The majority of Al-Shabaab attacks have targeted government buildings, airports, hotels, police stations, police checkpoints, and military convoys. These attacks were conducted using improvised explosive devices, explosive vests, and Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs). Notably, this increase in violent extremist organization attacks in Somalia correlates with the allocation of government resources towards COVID-19 mitigation and relief efforts, heightened political tensions around the electoral process, and the adaptation of violent extremist organizations to the pandemic. Notable attacks in 2021 include:

Date	Location	Perpetrator	Casualties	Description
March 2021	Mogadishu	Al-Shabaab	10 killed, 30 injured	Three-wheeler rickshaw pushed into a restaurant and detonated remotely. <sup>90</sup>
April 2021	Mogadishu	Suicide bombing, Al-Shabaab	5 civilians killed	Attack at a local tea shop. <sup>91</sup>
July 2021	Mogadishu	Car bombing (suicide), Al-Shabaab	9 killed, 8 injured	Attack aimed at a convoy of government officials. <sup>92</sup>

85 'Kenyan Police Say Three 'Dangerous' Inmates Flee Maximum Security Prison,' *Reuters* (November 2021), <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-11-15/three-terrorism-suspects-in-kenya-escape-prison-police> accessed 13 January 2022.

86 'Three convicted militants recaptured after Kenya prison break,' *Reuters* (18 November 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/three-convicted-militants-recaptured-after-kenya-prison-break-2021-11-18/>, accessed 15 April 2022.

87 'Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)', accessed 24 April 2022.

88 Ibid.

89 'Somalia Country Report', *Crisis24* (September 2021), <https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/somalia>, accessed 22 October 2021.

90 'Rickshaw bomb kills 10 as Islamists target Mogadishu restaurant', *The Guardian* (6 March 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/06/rickshaw-bomb-kills-10-as-islamists-target-mogadishu-restaurant>, accessed 15 October 2021.

91 'Somalia: six die in suicide bombing at Mogadishu tea shop', *The Guardian* (3 April 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/03/somalia-five-die-in-suicide-bombing-at-mogadishu-tea-shop>, accessed 15 October 2021.

92 'Mogadishu car bombing kills at least nine people, says official', *The Guardian* (10 July 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/10/mogadishu-car-bombing-kills-at-least-eight-people>, accessed 15 October 2021.

September 2021	Mogadishu	Suicide bombing, Al-Shabaab	11 soldiers and civilians killed	An attack on a local Wadajir tea shop near a military base, where security forces frequently met. <sup>93</sup>
September 2021	Mogadishu	Car bombing (suicide), Al-Shabaab	8 killed	Occurred at a security checkpoint near the presidential palace. <sup>94</sup>
October 2021	Mogadishu		28 African Union Mission to Somalia <sup>95</sup> and Somali National Army soldiers killed <sup>96</sup>	
November 2021	Mogadishu	Suicide bombing, Al-Shabaab	8 killed, 17 injured	Attack on a UN convoy. <sup>97</sup>
November 2021	Mogadishu	Suicide bombing, Al-Shabaab	1 journalist killed	Individual attack against a journalist. <sup>98</sup>
November 2021	Baidoa city, South West State	Al-Shabaab	1 soldier and 1 civilian killed, several injuries	Attack on a military base (African Union Mission to Somalia) and airport. <sup>99</sup>

## TANZANIA

Tanzania did not report numbers on the COVID-19 pandemic until the middle of 2021, during the transition to President Samia Suluhu Hassan's administration after the death of former President John Magufuli. This means that the COVID-19 statistics in Tanzania may not fully reflect how the pandemic has affected the country when compared to other countries in East Africa. By the end of 2021, Tanzania had reported 29,306 COVID-19 cases and 737 deaths.<sup>100</sup> Tanzania administered some vaccinations towards the end of 2021, and 3.4% of the population had received one vaccine dose.<sup>101</sup>

During 2021, Tanzania experienced one terrorist attack (compared to two attacks in 2020). In August 2021, Dar es Salaam experienced a terrorist attack that led to the death of three Tanzanian police officers, one private

93 A. Agency, '11 killed as suicide bombing hits Somalia's Mogadishu', *Daily Sabah* (14 September 2021), <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/africa/11-killed-as-suicide-bombing-hits-somalias-mogadishu>, accessed 28 September 2021.

94 'Suicide bomber kills at least eight in Somali capital', *Al Jazeera* (25 September 2021), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/25/suicide-bomber-kills-at-least-eight-in-somali-capital>, accessed 22 October 2021.

95 The African Union Mission in Somalia is an active, regional peacekeeping mission operated by the African Union with the approval of the United Nations Security Council.

96 'Al Shabaab claims 28 casualties among AMISOM and NSA soldiers in Mogadishu', *Site Intelligence Group* (21 October 2021), <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Statements/shabaab-claims-28-casualties-among-amisom-and-sna-forces-in-mogadishu-15-soldiers-killed-in-kenya-s-lamu-county.html>, accessed 22 October 2021.

97 M. Kahiye, 'Al-Shabab Militants Claim Somalia Suicide Bombing Aimed at UN Convoy', *VOA* (November 2021), <https://www.voanews.com/a/deadly-bombing-hits-somali-capital/6327336.html>, accessed 14 January 2022.

98 'Somali suicide bomber kills well-known Somali journalist', *Reuters* (November 2021), [https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somali-suicide-bomber-kills-well-known-somali-journalist-2021-11-20/?utm\\_source=iterable&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=3246795](https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somali-suicide-bomber-kills-well-known-somali-journalist-2021-11-20/?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=3246795), accessed 13 January 2022.

99 M. Dhaysane, 'Al-Shabaab terror group attacks Ethiopian troops, airport in Somalia', *AA* (November 2021), <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/al-shabaab-terror-group-attacks-ethiopian-troops-airport-in-somalia/2434655>, accessed 14 January 2022.

100 'Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)', accessed 24 April 2022.

101 Ibid.



security officer, and the injury of six others. The attacker was confirmed by the Tanzanian Police Force to be a terrorist who was radicalized and received online training from Al-Shabaab and Daesh.<sup>102</sup>

This terrorist attack in Tanzania happened shortly after the government's efforts began to focus on COVID-19 relief, mitigation and recovery, and during a critical political transition after the death of President Magufuli. The attack shows that Tanzania remains vulnerable to violent extremism, and there is a pressing need for government and non-state actors to implement preventive and reactive measures to curb violent extremist organizations.

Further vulnerabilities from actors in Mozambique were also noted by the Tanzanian President Hon Samia Suluhu Hassan in comments on the Tanzania border situation:

*In the recent months, peace, and security on our borders, especially in the southern parts of the country, were threatened by a terrorist group from Cabo Delgado Province in Mozambique. This group has been attempting to carry out attacks in our villages of Mtwara, causing deaths, injuries, and destruction of property. But our special forces deployed along the border have helped strengthen security and restore tranquility in the troubled region.*<sup>103</sup>

## UGANDA

Uganda's COVID-19 pandemic numbers at the end of 2021 stood at 142,604 accumulated cases and 3,297 confirmed deaths.<sup>104</sup> One of the highest rates in East Africa, Uganda had 17.7% of the population having received one dose of the vaccine by the end of 2021.<sup>105</sup>

In early 2021, Uganda experienced only one terrorist incident, an attack on Uganda People's Defence Force soldiers. However, at least seven bomb attacks (three in a coordinated attack) were carried out in Uganda between October and November 2021. These attacks occurred shortly after international borders were partially reopened during the pandemic and were claimed by the Allied Democratic Forces, a local Daesh affiliate operating out of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The terrorist incidents in Uganda in 2021 are summarized below:

Date	Location	Perpetrator	Casualties	Description
July	Unknown military base	Allied Democratic Force	1 soldier killed	Fire exchange between Allied Democratic Force rebels and soldiers <sup>106</sup>
October 2021	Kawempe, Kampala	Allied Democratic Force claimed (Daesh affiliate)	No casualties	Improvised explosive device at a police post. <sup>107</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Fick, 'Tanzania says gunman who killed four people last month was a terrorist'.

<sup>103</sup> K. Makoye, 'Tanzania's president says peace restored along border with Mozambique', AA (November 2021), <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/tanzania-president-says-peace-restored-along-border-with-mozambique/2421579>, accessed 14 January 2022.

<sup>104</sup> 'Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)', accessed 24 April 2022.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> 'Security arrests 13 suspected terrorists'

<sup>107</sup> E. Griffith, 'Uganda gripped by domestic terrorism as Islamic State claims two of four bombings in a month', *Action on Armed Violence* (4 November 2021), <https://aoav.org.uk/2021/uganda-gripped-by-domestic-terrorism-as-islamic-state-claims-two-of-four-bombings-in-a-month/>, accessed 15 April 2022.

October 2021	Kampala	Allied Democratic Force linked, suicide bomber (Daesh affiliate)	3 civilians injured	Bus explosion. <sup>108</sup>
October 2021	Kampala	Allied Democratic Force claimed (Daesh affiliate)	1 civilian killed	Improvised explosive device packed with nails and shrapnel at a roadside eatery. <sup>109</sup>
October 2021	Kampala	Allied Democratic Force linked (Daesh affiliate)	2 children killed	Children given a bomb that looked like a jackfruit. <sup>110</sup>
November 2021	Kampala	Allied Democratic Force linked (Daesh affiliate)	4 killed, 37 injured	Coordinated attack that included a suicide bomber that detonated at the entrance of a police station and two others that detonated on the road that leads to parliament. <sup>111</sup>

Notably, prior to the attacks, the United Kingdom announced a high risk of violent extremist organization attacks in Uganda, warning of sleeper cells in the country.<sup>112</sup> Shortly thereafter, 13 suspected members of the Allied Democratic Force were arrested in Buikwe, Zombo and Kasese that had recently returned to Uganda from the Democratic Republic of Congo after 10 years.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> 'UK issues alert over possible terror attacks in Uganda', *The Citizen* (16 October 2021), <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/africa/unit-ed-kingdom-issues-uganda-terror-alert-3585378>, accessed 20 October 2021.

<sup>113</sup> 'Security arrests 13 suspected terrorists', *The Independent* (18 October 2021), <https://www.independent.co.ug/security-arrests-13-suspected-terrorists/>, accessed 20 October 2021.



Hedayah  
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