



The nexus between maritime insecurity and land-based terror activities in Lamu County, Kenya

Constar Haggai Katamu¹
Ferdinand Makhanu Nabiswa²
Standslause Elijah Onyango Odhiambo³

¹babuconstary@gmail.com
²nabiswa2009@gmail.com
³standslauseodhiambo@yahoo.com

^{1,2}Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, ³Bomet University College, ^{1,2,3}Kenya

Recommended Citation: Katamu, C. H., Nabiswa, F. M., & Odhiambo, S. E. O. (2026). The nexus between maritime insecurity and land-based terror activities in Lamu County, Kenya. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 3(2), 580–590. <https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.3.2.49>

ABSTRACT

The threats of terror activities in the Indian Ocean led to the Kenyan government's reaction to the maritime asymmetric threats by putting in place maritime security strategies. Despite these strategies, maritime environments continue to face challenges. The study examined the nexus between maritime insecurity and land-based terror activities in Lamu County, Kenya. The study was grounded on two theories: routine activity and securitization theory. Convergent parallel research design was utilized. The study area was in Lamu County. The target population of the study was 966, for which Slovin's formula was used to derive a sample size of 320. Primary data was collected using questionnaires, an interview guide, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Secondary data was obtained from police records, academic journals, books, policy papers, government publications, and online sources. The obtained data was analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. The study established that external links in the Indian Ocean region contributed to the smuggling and illicit trade of weapons and drug trafficking at 66%, while maritime ecosystems and natural harbors allowed the freelancing of pirates by providing them with shelter and concealment at 50%. This situation has enabled terror groups to conceal their activities (66%) using small boats to exploit the maritime domain, leading to maritime insecurities that negatively affect the livelihoods of locals (84%). Based on the data, the statistical results highlight a compromised maritime security environment in the Indian Ocean Region. The findings indicate high rates of illicit activity, driven by exploitation of natural geography, which severely impacts local communities. The study concludes that the Indian Ocean region is facing a complex maritime insecurity nexus where weak governance and natural coastal features allow criminal and terror networks to thrive. Terror groups have leveraged this environment, utilizing small boats to conceal movements and exploit the maritime domain for attacks on land. The study recommends enhanced maritime domain awareness and surveillance using satellite and automatic identification system monitoring; strengthened law enforcement and regional cooperation, including joint regional patrols and legal framework enhancement; community-based resilience and livelihood protection, like inclusive maritime security with local fishing communities in maritime security dialogues and resource protection; and adoption of strategic counter-smuggling measures through geographic risk assessment and coast guard professionalization.

Keywords: Asymmetric Threats, Lamu County, Land-Based Terror Activities, Maritime-Based Terror Activities, Kenya

I. INTRODUCTION

Nations have committed enormous resources to their security and to countering terrorism but terrorism still pervades (Barnett, 2013). The shift demands for the reflection and re-evaluation of the strategies in place and reorganise the government in a different way to respond to grave threats posed by terrorists. This calls for new and innovative counter terrorism strategies hence the need for the study on maritime security strategies influencing management of land-based terror activities in Lamu County. Till (2001) noted that the emergence of violent non-state actors has substantial capacity to contest the developing economic order. Yet, lack of resources has hindered insurgencies from formulating a coherent strategy for targeting their preferred governments. This has led to the exertion of control over marine territories for financial gain. The case of the seizure of the yacht *Le Ponant* by small boat-borne pirates taking its crew prisoner for ransom in the Gulf of Aden (Joubert, 2013) showed their capability.

The geopolitical landscape of Pakistan poses a risk to both its external and domestic security. It has been incapable of entirely preventing non-state actors from operating on its territory against neighbouring states (John & Charles, 2005). Terrorist organizations motivated by Jihadist ideology have employed tactics such as suicide bombings and fidayeen assaults in India and Afghanistan, utilizing Pakistan's coastal areas to execute an attack on the Indian metropolis of Mumbai (Joubert, 2013). The US National Security Strategies (NSS) consistently express apprehensions

regarding terrorist activity in Africa, specifically identifying Somalia, the Maghreb, and the Sahel as regions where AQ affiliates have sought to establish safe havens (Ben, 2010). According to Lumpe (2000) on the impact of globalization on security, revealed that the maritime trading system is susceptible to piracy, terrorism, illegal drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and human trafficking. And fraud, exacerbated by the absence of a robust maritime security strategy.

The alleged participation of numerous non-Somali East African nationals in the bombings across African nations indicates that violent extremist groups are effectively recruiting and establishing networks in East Africa via coastal regions, which may have significant policy implications for African security policymakers (Hansen, 2013). Despite the increasing interest of terrorist organizations in the marine sector, there is less study examining its impact on land-based terrorist actions. This study addresses the gap by examining the correlation between marine security methods and terrestrial terrorist activity in Lamu County.

Kenya shares a border with the unstable state of Somalia, which has experienced decades of anarchy and is currently compromised by the Al Shabaab terrorist organization that utilizes the Indian Ocean as a refuge for financing its operations and conducting training. This non-state actor, al-Shabaab, has been able to launch its attacks in Kenya from these poorly controlled areas. The group has been charged with recruiting and radicalizing adolescents in Lamu, a significant Al Qaeda stronghold, to combat their own nation (Botha & Institute for Security Studies (South Africa, 2013). Menkhaus (2006) observed that the recruitment and utilization of local residents have facilitated numerous attacks by Al-Shabaab on East African Community territory. Such as the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, despite the group's absence in the region, presenting a significant challenge for Kenyan law enforcement agencies. Although states prioritize combating and preventing terrorism within their jurisdictions, terrorist activities in Kenya provide a compelling rationale to further investigate the modus operandi of terrorist organizations, including their funding sources and operational facilitators, thereby underscoring the necessity of this study.

Shani and Joshua (2009) determined that the infiltration of small arms and light weapons along Kenya's coastline presents a substantial security danger. Coastal Kenya has emerged as a critical battleground in the struggle against Al Qaida and related factions in the Horn of Africa (Shani & Joshua, 2009). This prompts a transition to a novel counter-terrorism strategy that necessitates more investigation. According to the analysis in Africa Report No. 184 (2012) regarding the Kenyan military engagement in Somalia suggests that the objective of the Kenya Defence Forces to secure control of Kismayo port was a crucial strategy for managing land-based terrorist activity. The port was crucial to Alshabaab, and their assault necessitated reallocating some of their cash to compensate and replenish their fighters, thereby effectively managing land-based terrorist activities in Lamu County.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The terrorist activities and responses in Lamu illustrate broader dynamics in Kenya and provide significant insights for academia to interrogate link between maritime and land operations to mitigate terror activities. Mutinda (2016) asserts that Kenya's coastal interactions with Middle East and Europe allow terrorist to blend into local communities, complicating counter terrorism in Lamu County. The unconventional nature of terror tactics points to an urgent need for Kenya to explore creative and alternative approaches beyond the existing strategies which are yet to be exhaustively explored in the national context and thus a priority area for the research. Whereas several studies have been done on effectiveness of counter terrorism strategies (Magogo, 2012 and Mutinda, 2016), much focus was put on hinterland strategies with little focus on marine/ coastal waters yet there is a likelihood that untimed terror activities could be significantly due failure by empirical studies to get the nexus between maritime insecurities and insurgency of terror activities on hinterland of Kenya.

1.2 Research Objective

To examine the nexus between maritime insecurity and land-based terror activities in Lamu County

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Routine Activity Theory (Felson & Cohen, 1979)

According to this school of thought, a crime can only be committed if three things happen simultaneously. A determined lawbreaker, an ideal victim, and the lack of a competent defender make up the three parts. An ideal victim would be someone who is physical, vulnerable, easy to reach, and highly valued; an offender would be someone who is both inclined to break the law and capable of carrying it out. Along with the ransom that pirates want and the high value of tuna, the West Indian Ocean route is a major commercial activity route that marine criminals target (Potgieter, 2008).

Individuals that engage in piracy do so because they consider it to be a normal part of their lives, as stated in the Routine Activities Theory. The desire to assault a profitable target, even whether the danger is little or not worth it, is what drives pirates, who are criminals. Theorists have also speculated that the Somali terrorist group Al Shabaab may



have connections to the pirates. Piracy, armed robbery, and other marine criminal operations were more severe, frequent, and better organized due to Somalia's status as a failed state, which further hindered law enforcement efforts (Pratt *et al.*, 2010).

2.1.2 The securitization theory

Securitization theory posits that threats are formulated by a sequence of assertions that rely on a specific generic framework. This grammar presents an issue, such as piracy, as an existential threat to a certain referent object, such as the nation-state or international trade (Barry & Waever, 1998). Such assertions are only effective when articulated by entities possessing the authority to address security matters and when a pertinent target audience acknowledges these threats. Threat construction typically accompanies a proposal for measures to safeguard the reference object from the threat. Buzan and Waever assert that a defining trait of security is that counter-measures are exceptional and frequently extreme. They may entail military measures commensurate with armed conflict or a substantial reduction of civil liberty.

The study seeks to elucidate securitization theory and its connection to maritime security by identifying various threats within the maritime domain, as outlined in the 2008 UN Secretary General's Report on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, including piracy and armed robbery, illicit trafficking in arms and weapons of mass destruction, narcotics trafficking, human smuggling and trafficking by sea, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. The securitization of these operations necessitates the formulation of strategies to resist them, ultimately contributing to the deterrence of terrorists exploiting the marine domain (Rao, 2010).

2.2 Empirical Review

According to Bellish (2014), maritime domain is predominantly influenced by piracy, armed robbery against vessels, the trafficking of illicit drugs, small and light weapons, human trafficking, maritime terrorism, and illegal fishing, which Barnett (2013) and Hamad (2016) identify as forms of maritime terrorism. The lack of robust maritime security has led to a transformation in the methods employed by terrorist organizations to fund their operations through maritime terrorism, which in turn has resulted in an increase in land-based terror activities.

The study conducted by Ida (2019) regarding the implications of piracy on the maritime dispute between Kenya and Somalia recognizes that Al-Shabab has derived financial support from various income streams over the years, notably from terrorist organizations, piracy, and kidnapping, as articulated in the research. Bellish (2014) posits that historically, pirates have served as financiers for terrorist activities. A notable example is the \$1.2 million ransom paid to Somali pirates in 2008 for the release of a Spanish fishing vessel and its 26 hostages, which further substantiates the connection between piracy and terrorism; Al-Shabaab reportedly received a five-percent share of the ransom (Bellish, 2014).

Uncovered indications of collusion between pirates and Al Shabaab, suggesting that pirates may have facilitated the smuggling of weapons and ammunition into Somalia, which contributed to an increase in terror activities within the region (Hughes, 2011). The organization has utilized the funds generated from its illicit activities to enhance its influence and reach. The connection is significant as it elucidates the underlying causal mechanism contributing to the escalation of violence at sea and the terrorist activities in the coastal region of Lamu.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research utilized a convergent parallel design with the mixed research approach. The design entails the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data, independent analysis of each, and subsequent integration of the findings to achieve a more holistic understanding of the study issue (Creswell, 2014). This approach contextualizes statistical security data with community experiences in Lamu County, yielding robust, actionable insights for policy.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Lamu County. The expansive Boni Forest constitutes roughly 21.4% of the county's land area. Lamu's closeness to Somalia and the Boni Forest renders it an optimal place for Al-Shabaab infiltration. The forest functions both a tactical site for hit-and-run operations and a sanctuary for training. The closeness to Somalia enables the trafficking of illicit weapons perpetrate crimes via the Indian Ocean. Pandanguo Basuba, Boni Forest, Pangani, Gamba, Milihoi, Bargoni, Mpeketoni, Amu, Witu, Kiunga, Faza, Pate, and Siu are regions in Lamu characterized by violent extremism and terrorism. Figure 2. indicates the study area.

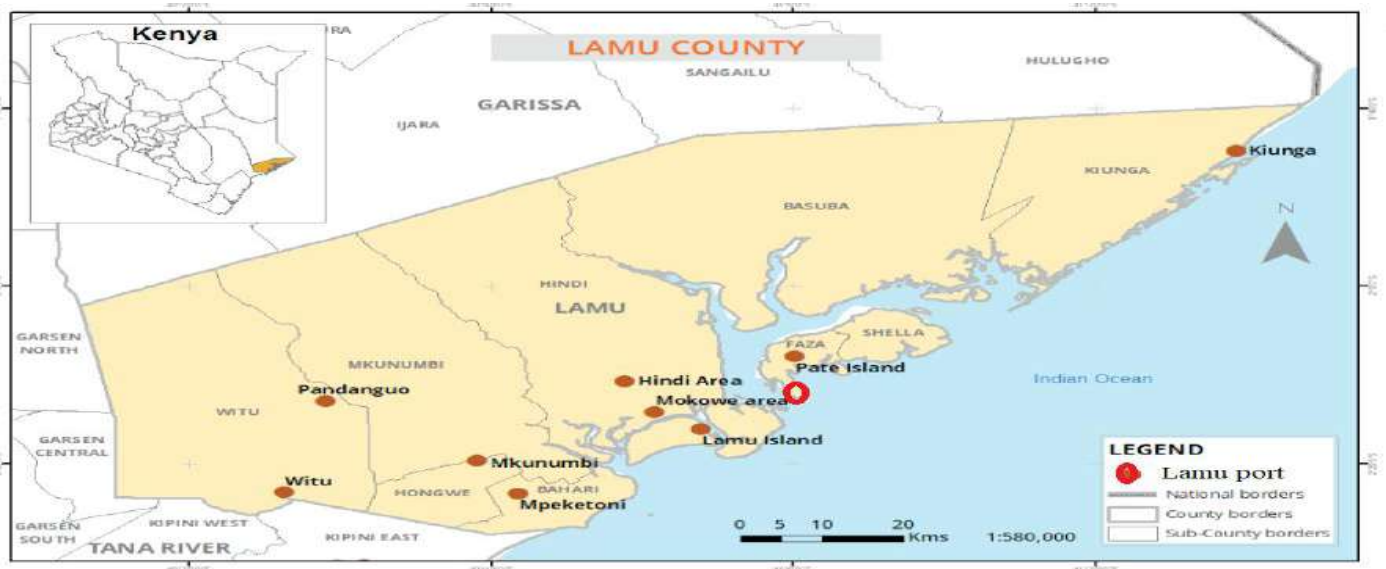


Figure 2
 Study Area, Lamu County
 Source: GIS Expert, 2024

3.3 Target Population

The entities selected for this study represent a segment of the maritime sector within the Indian Ocean region of Kenya. Some segment of the target population relies directly and heavily on these water bodies for their sources of livelihoods hence any insecurity activities in these marine ecosystems directly affects the economic status. Therefore, the target population of the study was; 966 comprising of; state actors under national government; two Multiagency team (platoon commanders from GSU and ATPU), Kenya Navy Fleet Commander, Kenya Coast Guard Service Lieutenant Commander, Lamu County Commissioner, Kenya Maritime Authority Manager. Together with county government officials, the director from the Ministry of Fisheries, the director from the Blue Economy, the Kiunga Youth Bunge leader, and two sub-county Ministry of Education directors were the key informants. The focus group discussions consisted of two groups: one group that is one section of the Kenya Maritime Police comprising 10 officers and a second group from the non-governmental organization Save Lamu civil society management committee comprising 12 members and 933 locals, comprising 117 traders from Lamu West Sub-County and 17 from Lamu East Sub-County; 83 fishermen; 177 village elders; 303 youths; 130 women fishmongers; 73 religious leaders from Muslim and 33 from Christian; and 7 radicalized youths.

3.4 Sampling and Sample size

The study employed simple random sampling on the unit of analysis that is locals, census on selection of Key Informant participants while purposive sampling method on Focus Group participants to identify and select the respondents who participated in the research reflecting the interpretive paradigm's emphasis on gathering respondents' perspectives and validating them to explore insights and essential matters that are relevant to the study's aims. In alignment with this, the study determined the sample size of respondents utilizing Slovin's formula. The formular provides exact probabilities and avoids assumptions of other tests Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) articulated as follows;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where:

n= is the sample size

N= 966 (Target population)

e= 0.0457 (Desired marginal error)

$$n = \frac{966}{1 + 966 \cdot (0.0457)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{966}{1 + 966 \cdot 0.00208849}$$

$$n = \frac{966}{3.01748} = 320$$

$$n = 320$$



3.5 Data Collection Instruments and procedures

Primary data was collected using interview guides, focus group discussion, observation protocols, archival documents, questionnaires which were self-administered, as well as secondary data sourced from books, journals, newspapers, magazines, and other pertinent materials. The instruments covered both restricted and open questions to elicit precise responses that extend beyond mere opinions, observations, and insights. To guarantee that all pertinent information regarding the evolving nature of the terrorism threat in Lamu County was comprehensively captured, key informant interviews and focus group discussions was employed. In order to determine the content validity a pilot study was conducted in Mombasa County where the research question and objective formulated earlier against the expected responses with the item elicited from the field.

To assess the reliability of pilot study, results were analysed using SPSS version 27 with aid of Reliability Analysis, which calculated Cronbach's Alpha to indicate the internal consistency of measurement instrument. According to de Vet *et al.* (2017), the Cronbach's Alpha is expected to be ideally above 0.70 to indicate good internal consistency so as to assist in finding item statistics, which can help identify potentially weak items that might be improved or removed. For the calculation, type I error (alpha) was set at a maximum value of 0.05, and power was set at a minimum value of 80.0%. By setting Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the null hypothesis (CA_0) as 0.0 and the alpha coefficient in the alternative hypothesis (CA_1) as 0.6 along with a group of 5 items, the minimum required sample size is 24 (Wellek, *et al.*, 2014). To incorporate a non-response rate of 20.0%, a minimum sample size of 30 respondents was required. Therefore, the piloting sample size of the study was 28. The Cronbach coefficient alpha test score was 0.74. These results exceeded 0.70 which is acceptable reliability.

3.6 Data Analysis

The data was processed and analyzed in alignment with the study's specific objective. Qualitative data was classified and categorized into a series of codes, establishing coding associations based on identifiable qualities of the data to group analogous thoughts, ideas, and opinions. The subsequent phase of analysis involved a meticulous line-by-line scrutiny of all data sources. This entailed methodical analysis of raw data to establish categories of comprehension. Categories were consolidated to form linkages for systematic data interpretation. Consequently, qualitative data was first processed, summarized, and categorized into relevant themes. Content analysis was employed to ascertain the most prevalent topics, their settings, and their interrelations (Patton, 2015). Sentimental analysis was used to record the opinions expressed by respondents concerning events or phenomena through Focus Group Discussion.

Data obtained through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions was triangulated to evaluate their efficacy and to arrive at the objective of the study. Conversely, quantitative data, being numeric, underwent descriptive analysis, which involved the statistical description, aggregation, and presentation of the components of interest. Inferential statistics derived from the results was analyzed to draw inferences regarding associations between variables. In this context, data was transformed into numerical representations and analyzed in relation to the study's objectives. The study entailed the analysis of frequencies and percentages. Data analysis and reporting of quantitative data was conducted with aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Researcher complied with stringent ethical standards governing study. Individuals and organizations participating in the study guaranteed confidentiality and privacy, with the assurance that information obtained during the research not to be disclosed to third parties under any circumstances.

The study commenced only after securing authorization and approval from relevant parties and competent authorities. An authorization letter was procured from the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. The researcher acquired a research permission and authorization from the National Commission of Science and Technology (NACOSTI) after Institutional Review Board. With the letter, informants and respondents were solicited with respect and decorum to engage in the research. Letters of request were dispatched to prospective respondents and interviewees to participate in interviews at the designated times and locations.

Participants were ensured that their involvement in the study was voluntary. The principles of secrecy and anonymity were upheld. The researcher complied with the regulations regulating access to designated entities and respondents to ensure that the sample size is achieved through official means.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Nature of Maritime Environment Influencing Maritime Based Terror Activities

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for two items that measure on how Nature of maritime domain influence maritime based terror activities in Lamu County. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 means very



little extent, 2 means little extent, 3 means moderate extent, 4 means great extent and 5 means very great extent. The table provides response rate for each item.

Table 1
Nature of Maritime Domain Influence on Maritime Based Terror Activities in Lamu County

Nature of maritime domain	1	2	3	4	5
Indian Ocean region external links contributing to smuggling and illicit trade of weapons	5(2%)	11(3%)	43(13%)	211(66%)	50(16%)
Maritime ecosystem, presence of wealthy bays and other natural harbours accessible to pirates, providing pirates with plentiful shelter, hampering the ability of the local navies and coastguards to patrol the entire coastline	15(5%)	13(4%)	75(23%)	161(50%)	56(18%)

Out of response rate of 320, 66% (211) indicated that Indian Ocean region external links contributed to smuggling and illicit trade of weapons at great extent.

On whether maritime ecosystem, presence of wealthy bays and other natural harbours provided pirates with shelter and concealment influencing maritime based terror activities, out of response rate of 320, 50% (161) of the respondents cited that it influenced it at great extent. To test the association between the items basing on the data, there was a statistically significant association between the two groups. The Chi-Square test result is;

$$x^2=20.90, P=0.00033$$

Since the p-value is much less than (0.05) the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there was strong evidence of association between the items. From the study findings, the researcher argue that the existence of maritime based terror activities could be influence by Indian Ocean region external links contributing to smuggling and illicit trade of weapons and Maritime ecosystem, presence of wealthy bays and other natural harbours accessible to pirates, providing them with shelter, hampering the ability of the local navies and coastguards to patrol the entire coastline. Terror groups have taken this to their advantage to exploit the maritime environment with ease.

4.2 Indian Ocean External Links

The study on Indian Ocean region external links influence on smuggling and illicit trade of weapons, in which 66% (211) of the respondents indicated at great extent. The study findings aligns with Lumpe (2000) who posits that measures against the trafficking of arms and goods that facilitate proliferation in a precarious international landscape are crucial, as the spread of conventional weapons poses a significant threat to the stability of various regions worldwide, manifesting through acts of terror and violence. Yet criminal networks, including terrorists, pirates, and traffickers, are exploiting these instabilities to procure individual or collective weaponry through maritime channels. Mkutu’s (2007) asserts that the destabilizing accumulation and unchecked proliferation of small arms and light weapons across various global regions exacerbate the intensity and duration of armed conflict. The absence of robust international regulations governing the arms trade, coupled with inadequate enforcement and a lack of awareness regarding the transportation of these weapons by land or sea, perpetuates the criminal-terrorist nexus in these regions (Mkutu, 2007).

Abidde (2023) further indicated that long stretches of uncontrolled Coastline of East Africa, provide illegal groups with the opportunity to expand their areas of influence from land to sea through access to transnational smuggling networks that profit from trafficking illicit goods across the African continent and beyond, including to Europe. The networks deal in drugs and women and control lucrative migrant routes, which create revenues that are used to expand group operations (Abidde, 2023). Mkutu (2004) observed that the extensive porous border separating Kenya and Somalia presents significant challenges in regulating the influx of small arms and light weapons. The instability in Somalia presents an opportunity for gunrunners to transport arms to neighbouring states via seas and Indian Ocean. Field data indicated that;

“Sometimes terror group who conceal as fishermen from deep sea uses small speed boats loaded with big fish. They normally operate fish and place explosives and ammunitions inside those fish to avoid detection by security agencies. When they get on shores, they pack the fish and take them to favourable place where they can remove explosives.” (Interview with a local fisherman in Lamu County, 11th August, 2025).

Al-Shabaab possesses considerable familiarity with the waters of the East African Community, encompassing the ports of Mombasa and Dar es Salaam. The organization has executed several successful acts of terrorism across diverse regions in Kenya (Anzalone, 2012). A portion of the weaponry and explosives utilized in those assaults has been transported to the shores of Kenya via maritime means. Illustration 3 delineates the pathways utilized for the smuggling of arms and weaponry across the Indian Ocean.

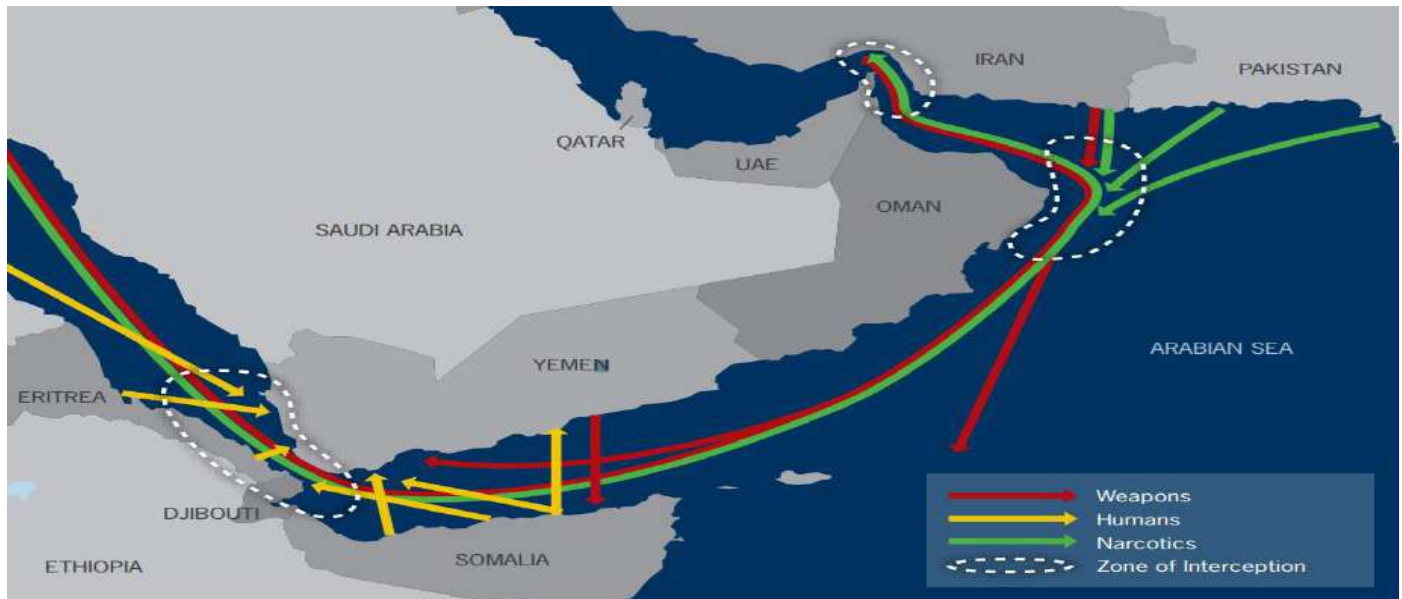


Figure 3

Showing the Arms and Weapon Smuggling Routes in the Indian Ocean

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], (2017).

Badurdeen (2024) study on Cross-border dynamics in terrorist mobility and infiltration along the East African Coastlines indicated that terrorist operatives of the Al-Qaeda network such as Fazul Abdulla Mohamed blended well with the lifestyles of local coastal communities by marrying a local woman, establishing businesses, NGOs, or entrepreneurial opportunities such as the building of boats, assisting with fishing ventures, and even starting up local football clubs (Badurdeen, 2024). Fazul was designated as the mastermind behind the 1998 Al-Qaeda terror attack that led to the bombing of the US Embassy in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (Keller, 2005). Fazul's fishing activities on Faza Island in the Indian Ocean were an important link between Somalia and Lamu and instrumental in bringing in the explosives and other weaponry of the terror group. The study reveals the presence of thriving traffick and criminality networks and all the way down the Swahili Coast (Badurdeen, 2024). The Coastal region notoriously highlighted as the heroin coast (Haysom *et al.*, 2018) has been receiving drug cargo from Makran Coast of Iran and Pakistan. The net effect has been to further play into the erosion of state authority and control on the coastline to prevent the narcotics trade.

4.2.1 Marine Ecosystems Contributing to Illicit Activities

Natural and physical characteristics of Lamu County, the Boni forest presents a quintessential environment conducive to the emergence of insurgency and terrorism. The geographical closeness to Somalia facilitates the potential for Al-Shabaab infiltration. The forest serves as a sanctuary for military exercises and a strategic location for executing hit-and-run maneuvers (Joseph & Mwachinalo, 2017). The proximity to Somalia facilitates the movement of illicit weapons by terrorists and provides a conducive environment for recruitment by the Al-Shabaab group, which operates within Somalia (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2017). The geographic positioning of Somalia endows it with the most extensive coastline on the African continent, rendering it the nearest African nation to the Middle East. This facilitates Somalia's role as a conduit for the trafficking of prohibited items and weaponry into Kenya (Badurdeen, 2024).

4.2.2 Indian Ocean as a Defacto to Recruitment and Radicalization

Study findings 50% (161) concurs with Cece (2011) who indicated that Al-Shabaab had operational and tactical partnerships with Tanga-based criminal networks engaged in smuggling and drug trafficking. According to Shani and Joshua (2009), many young people were ferried from Pongwe (Tanga) and Korogwe to Kismayo (Somalia) by Al-Shabaab recruiters using boats via Mombasa and Malindi. Lamu, Malindi, and Kwale. This has made it pivotal hubs for Al-Shabaab movement in the sea (Hamad, 2016). In support, Smit and Pilifosova (2003) further indicated that local fishermen and fishing vessels were being employed by the network of terror groups for transportation of recruits to Somalia; the smuggling of Al-Shabaab members from Somalia via Tanga to other destinations in Africa; highlighting Yusuf Madi A.K.A Yusuf Bakar, an Al shabaab affiliate of Muslim Youth Centre from Lamu who facilitated the ferrying of Al shabaab members and recruits from Tanzania to Kismayo and Barawe in Somalia (Badurdeen, 2024).



According to Rogers (2008), the domestic conditions in Kenya played a significant role in the radicalization of its nationals. Al-Shabaab's involvement in the recruitment and radicalization of several Muslim youths in the Kenyan Coastal regions are poised to assume the role of 'Mujahideen', engaging in conflict against their own nation. A significant number of individuals who have undergone radicalization are thought to align them with al-Qaeda, particularly in the context of Lamu, which serves as a crucial stronghold for the organization.

One of the Key Informant indicated that;

“Youth are normally taken from Mombasa and Lamu regions to Somalia using small boats. They conceal as fishermen to defeat security agencies observation, with use of vegetation covers along the Coastal regions. They get radicalized and then send back to their home land to carry out terror activities.” (Interview with GSU Platoon Commander, Mokowe Base, in Lamu County, 12th August, 2025).

4.3 Extent of Maritime Based Terror Activities

4.3.1 Influence on Respondent's Source of Livelihood

Respondents were asked if maritime based terror activities had impact on their source of livelihood. Their response was as shown in Figure 4.

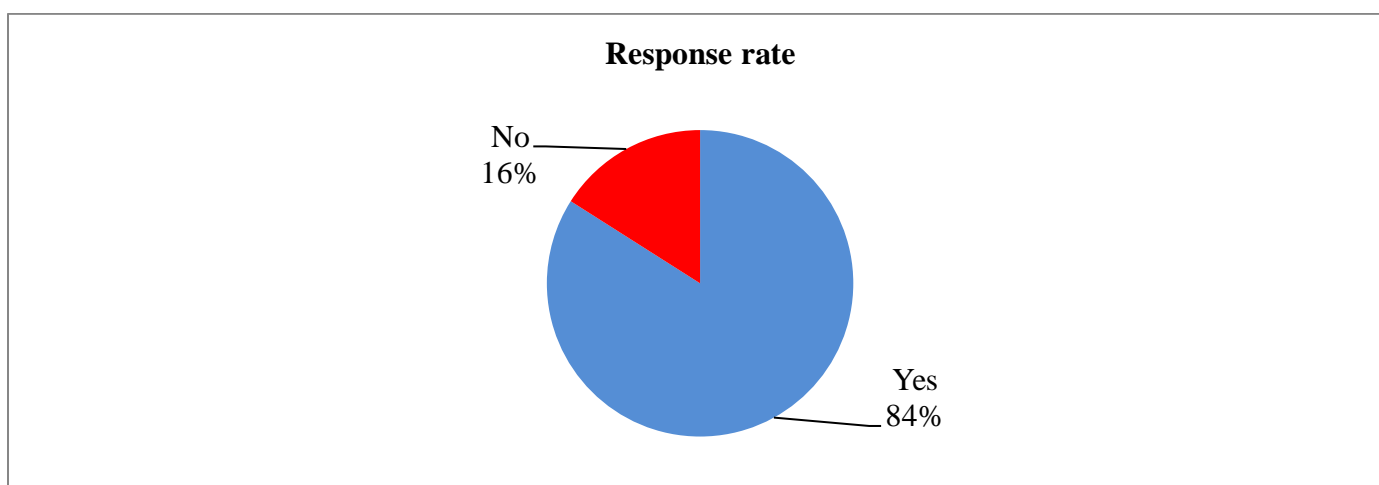


Figure 4
Maritime Based Terror Activities Influence on Respondent's Source of Livelihood

From figure 4; 84% (269) of the respondents indicated that maritime based terror activities had negatively affected their source of livelihood while 16% (51) indicated that maritime based terror activities had not affected their source of livelihood negatively. The study findings indicated that maritime based terror activities had negatively affected source of livelihood of the respondents. The connection between vulnerability and poverty in artisanal fishing communities has been increasingly recognized by Bailey and Pamoroy (1996) and Smit and Pilifosova (2003). The analysis of fisheries and poverty showed that fishing represents the endeavour of ultimate recourse. Furthermore, it is asserted that fishermen are the poorest among the poor (Bailey & Pamoroy, 1996). Onyango (2011) posits that fishing is often regarded as a profession of last resort, suggesting that individuals typically pursue this vocation when more favourable options are unavailable. This concept indicates that individuals face constraints in exploring alternative livelihoods due to a scarcity of resources, including limited access to land, inadequate educational qualifications, and a deficiency in skills.

The impact of piracy affects their households and livelihoods all together preventing fisher folks to provide essential needs for their families (Le Sage & Majid, 2002). Pirates attack them to steal their outboard motors, fuels, fish stocks and fishing gears. This affects their financial and physical assets somewhat leaving fisher folks jobless, poorer, and incapable of acquiring credits assistance as discussed in the sustainable livelihood framework. According to Hughes (2011) argument, a household below the threshold is too poor to accumulate assets and that if such households lack the opportunity to borrow, the household remains trapped at a low well-being state. A direct outcome of the above is the reduction in both quantity and quality of their meal set. When artisanal folks do not have other resources or assets to liquidate to get them through lean seasons, they are bound to reduce consumption. Consequently, this renders them increasingly hopeless and vulnerable, thereby heightening their susceptibility to radicalization (Hughes, 2011). Save Lamu civil society group indicated that;

“The porous coastline of Lamu is the facilitator of exploitation of the Alshabaab insurgencies. The government neglect of securing its coastline has made Lamu locals to feel brunt of the effects of illegal activities in the ocean from the group as it spills over to the land. This renders them hopeless and

vulnerable, thereby heightening their susceptibility to attacks.” (Interview with Save Lamu civil society group in Lamu County, 14th August, 2025).

4.4 Application of Theories to the Study Findings

Existence of maritime insecurities like unreported, unregulated illegal fishing, illicit trafficking in arms and weapons, piracy and human smuggling in Lamu County and its negative impact on both the livelihood of the locals shows that they have become a security concern, to which the researcher using Barry and Waever (1998) securitization theory believes that they have become existential threat to the referent object for this case the locals. This has been enabled by the vast, unpoliced nature of the maritime domain, combined with bays and harbors, making it impossible for local navies to monitor all activities. By labelling these natural features as safe havens for criminals, the issue is shifted from a logistical challenge (needing better radars) to an existential security threat (needing military intervention). However, according to securitization theory, the issue of maritime insecurities is only effective when articulated by responsible entities possessing the authority to address the security matters (Regional governments, navy personnel, and maritime security analysts).

Collaborative approach from response organizations after securitization of those insecurities can assist in solving maritime insecurities. Presence terror networks and extremist groups, such as Al-Shabaab, act as motivated offenders operating in coastal regions. Ideal victim, the livelihoods of Lamu locals (fishing, tourism, trade) are easily targeted by these groups, leading to disruption.

Poorly policed maritime waters and inadequate cooperation between maritime law enforcement agencies allow these acts to persist due to lack of competent defender (effective maritime security strategy to respond to maritime insecurities) qualifies the maritime insecurities to be termed criminal acts, further bringing Routine Activity theory (put forth by Felson & Cohen, 1979) on board.

Therefore, both theories; securitization theory and Routine Activity theory provides insight into understanding the nature and extent of maritime based terror activities in Lamu County.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study indicated that Indian Ocean region external links contributed to smuggling and illicit trade of weapons and drugs trafficking at 66%, maritime ecosystem and natural harbours allowed freelancing of pirates by providing them with shelter and concealment (50%) response rate. This has enabled terror groups to conceal or use pirates (66%) with aid of small boats to exploit the maritime domain to commit maritime insecurities, negatively affecting the livelihood of the locals at 84%. The researcher argues that the nature of maritime domain could be the cause of influx of maritime based terror activities in Lamu County negatively affecting the livelihood the locals. The study findings fills the gap left by empirical studies, whose study on effectiveness of counter terrorism strategies. Their study emphasized on hinterland strategies with little focus on marine/ coastal waters. The gap was filled by this study by bringing out the nexus between maritime security strategies and land-based terror activities in Lamu County.

The study findings support both the Securitization and Routine Activity theories; On securitization theory, the study findings demonstrate a classic securitization move by providing data that elevates piracy and smuggling into a crime-terror nexus that threatens the state, thereby justifying a transition from routine management to high-security, emergency responses in the Indian Ocean. It further supports Routine Activity Theory which posits that crime occurs when a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian converge in time and space. The study findings show how the Indian Ocean has become a high-opportunity environment for crime, where weak governance (lack of guardians) allows motivated offenders to use natural conditions to exploit targets, thereby directly lowering the security of local populations. Therefore, both theories; securitization theory and Routine Activity theory provides insight into understanding the nature and extent of maritime based terror activities in Lamu County.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends; enhanced Maritime Domain Awareness and surveillance using satellite and Automatic Identification System monitoring along Kenya Coastal regions. Strengthen law enforcement and regional cooperation including joint regional patrols between Regional bodies and Kenya Navy in the Indian Ocean. Based on 84% who identified that maritime insecurities negatively affected the livelihood of the locals, the study recommends community-based resilience and livelihood protection like inclusive maritime security with local fishing communities in maritime security dialogues, and resource protection, and adoption of strategic counter-smuggling measures through geographic risk assessment and coast guard professionalization.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

- Abidde, S. (2023, March 2–November 30). *Maritime security challenges in Africa: Piracy, armed robbery, smuggling, kidnapping, and terrorism*. Alabama, United States.
- Anzalone, C. (2012, May 4). Kenya's Muslim Youth Center and Al-Shabab's East African recruitment [Twitter account @MYC_Press]. *Associated Press*. G.J.I.S.S., 4(3), 48–56.
- Badurdeen, F. (2024). *Cross-border dynamics in terrorist mobility and infiltration along the East African coastlines*. French Institute of International Relations.
- Bailey, C., & Pomeroy, C. (1996). Resource dependency and development options in coastal Southeast Asia. *Society & Natural Resources*, 9(2), 191–199.
- Barnett, R. M. (2013). *The next terrorist attack: A detailed look at al Qaeda's maritime history and ambitions*. Consultancy Africa Intelligence.
- Buzan, B., & Wæver, O. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis* (p. 32). Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Bellish, J. (2012/2014). The systematic prosecution of Somali pirate leadership and the primacy of multi-level cooperation. The Ved Nanda Center for International & Comparative Law, Sturm College of Law, University of Denver.
- Ben, S. (2010, August 19). Uganda charges 32 over bombings. *Agence France Presse*. <http://www.hiiraan.com>
- Botha, A., & Institute for Security Studies (South Africa). (2013). *Assessing the vulnerability of Kenyan youths to radicalisation and extremism*. Institute for Security Studies.
- Cece, S. (2011, August 31). Security agencies put Kenya-Tanzania border on terror watch list. *The East African*. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory method: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13, 3–21.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009/2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- de Vet, H. C., Mokkink, L. B., Mosmuller, D. G., & Terwee, C. B. (2017). Spearman–Brown prophecy formula and Cronbach's alpha: Different faces of reliability and opportunities for new applications. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 85, 45–49.
- Felson, M., & Cohen, L. E. (1979). Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach. *American Sociological Review*, 44(4), 588–608.
- Hamad, H. B. (2016/2017). Maritime terrorism: Why the East African Community is the next potential target of maritime terrorism. *Research on Humanities and Social Science*, 6(6), 126–133.
- Hansen, S. J. (2013). *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The history and ideology of a militant Islamic group, 2005–2012*. C. Hurst & Co.
- Haysom, S., Gastrow, P., & Shaw, M. (2018). The heroine coast: A political economy along the Eastern African seaboard. *ENACT Research Paper*, (4).
- Hughes, J. (2011). The piracy-illegal fishing nexus in the Western Indian Ocean. In L. G. Luke & T. Luttrell (Eds.), *Indian Ocean: A sea of uncertainty* (pp. 41–45). Future Directions International.
- Ida, N. (2019). Study on the implications of piracy on the Kenya-Somalia maritime dispute. Global Centre for Policy and Strategy (GLOCEPS).
- John, M., Jr., & Charles, M. (2005, November). The 1,000-ship navy: Global maritime network. *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 131, 18.
- Joubert, L. (2013). The extent of maritime terrorism and piracy: A comparative analysis. *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies*, 41(1), 111-1055.
- Joseph, K. M., & Mwachinalo, S. (2017). Inside Kenya's war on terror: The case of Lamu. An assessment of maritime insecurity in the Kenya maritime domain. *Occasional Paper Series*, 8(1), 1-27.
- Keller, W. (2005). Anatomy of a terrorist attack: An in-depth investigation into the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. [Capstone course]. University of Pittsburgh.



- Le Sage, A., & Majid, N. (2002). The livelihoods gap: Responding to the economic dynamics of vulnerability in Somalia. *Disasters*, 26(1), 10–27.
- Lumpe, L. (2000). *Running guns: The global black market in small arms*. Zed Books.
- Magogo, S. (2012). The effectiveness of counter-terrorism strategies in Kenya: A case study of Eastleigh location, Nairobi County [Research project]. University of Nairobi.
- Menkhaus, K. (2006). Governance without government in Somalia: Spoilers, state building, and the politics of coping. *International Security*, 31(3), 74–106.
- Mkutu, K. (2007). Small arms and light weapons among pastoral groups in the Kenya–Uganda border area. *African Affairs*, 106(422), 47–70.
- Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (1999). *Research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Acts Press.
- Mutinda, M. K. (2016). Assessment of counter-terrorism strategies in East Africa: Case of Kenya [Research project]. University of Nairobi.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2013, February). *Transnational organised crime in West Africa: A threat assessment*. Vienna: UNODC.
- Onyango, P. O. (2011). Occupation of last resort? Small-scale fishing in Lake Victoria, Tanzania. In *Poverty mosaics: Realities and prospects in small-scale fisheries* (pp. 97–124). Springer Netherlands. <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11810/2848>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Potgieter, T. (2008). The maritime security quandary in the Horn of Africa region: Causes, consequences and responses. *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies*, 36(2).
- Pratt, T. C., Holtfreter, K., & Reisig, M. D. (2010). Routine online activity and internet fraud targeting: Extending the generality of routine activity theory. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 47(3), 267–296.
- Rao, P. V. (2010). Indian Ocean maritime security cooperation: The employment of navies and other maritime forces. *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 6(1), 129–137.
- Shani, R., & Joshua, B. (2009, August 20). Somali piracy: An escalating security dilemma. *International Institute for Counter Terrorism. The Harvard Africa Policy Journal*, 5, 55–70.
- Smit, B., & Pilifosova, O. (2003). From adaptation to adaptive capacity and vulnerability reduction. In *Climate change, adaptive capacity and development* (pp. 9–28).
- Rogers, P. (2008). Global terrorism. In M. Cox & D. Stokes (Eds.), *US foreign policy* (pp. 359–373). Oxford University Press.
- Till, G. (2001/2009). *The future of British sea power*. Macmillan.
- Wellek, S., Lackner, K. J., Jennen-Steinmetz, C., Reinhard, I., Hoffmann, I., & Blettner, M. (2014). Determination of reference limits: Statistical concepts and tools for sample size calculation. *Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine*, 52(12), 1685–1694.