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THE NEW ERA OF TERROR: EVOLVING SECURITY THREATS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA REGION

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: This study sought to establish emerging terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa.

Problem Statement: The evolving nature of terrorism has introduced new and complex security challenges that extend beyond conventional forms of violent extremism, particularly in the Horn of Africa. Emerging threats such as bioterrorism, drone technology, cyberterrorism, and religious extremism continue to reshape the regional security landscape, necessitating adaptive counterterrorism approaches.

Methodology: The study adopted a mixed-methods approach employing descriptive and longitudinal research designs.

Result: The findings revealed that respondents identified drone technology, cyberterrorism, and religious extremism as significant emerging terrorist threats, while perceptions regarding bioterrorism were comparatively mixed, reflecting uncertainty about its immediacy despite recognition of its potential security implications. Key informant interviews and documentary analysis also demonstrated that the evolving nature of terrorism is increasingly driven by technological advancements, digital transformation, and ideological manipulation.

Conclusion: The region's terrorism landscape has evolved beyond conventional forms to encompass emerging threats characterized by technological innovation, digital transformation, biological risks, and ideological manipulation with the potential to undermine regional peace and security in the Horn of Africa Region.

Keywords: *Emerging terrorist threats, Horn of Africa, bioterrorism, drone technology, cyberterrorism, religious extremism, counterterrorism.*

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism has evolved into one of the most complex and persistent security threats confronting the contemporary international system. Traditionally, terrorist activities were largely characterized by bombings, assassinations, hostage-taking, hijackings, and armed attacks directed against civilians and state institutions. However, the changing global security environment has enabled terrorist organizations to adapt their operational strategies by exploiting technological innovations, globalization, and transnational communication networks, resulting in increasingly sophisticated and decentralized forms of violence (Hoffman, 2021; Crenshaw, 2022).

In Africa, the evolution of terrorism has significantly altered the continent's security landscape. Extremist groups have progressively shifted from relying solely on conventional methods of violence to adopting emerging tactics that exploit technological advancements, digital communication platforms, and ideological narratives. According to Njoku (2023), terrorism in Africa has become increasingly adaptive, reflecting the changing political, socio-economic, and technological realities that influence the operational capabilities of violent extremist organizations. Consequently, the continent has witnessed a transformation in terrorist activities, requiring governments and regional security actors to continuously reassess existing counterterrorism strategies.

The Horn of Africa has remained one of the most vulnerable regions to terrorism because of its strategic geopolitical position, fragile state institutions, protracted armed conflicts, porous borders, and persistent governance challenges. The region has experienced sustained terrorist activities, particularly those associated with Al-Shabaab, whose operational capabilities have continued to evolve in response to changing regional and international security dynamics. Kagwanja (2006) argues that the strategic significance of the Horn of Africa has increasingly attracted both regional and international security interests due to the evolving nature of terrorism and violent extremism. Similarly, Hansen (2013) observes that Al-Shabaab has consistently demonstrated remarkable adaptability by modifying its recruitment strategies, operational tactics, and organizational structure to sustain its influence despite intensified military pressure.

The contemporary evolution of terrorism has expanded the spectrum of threats confronting the Horn of Africa beyond conventional attacks to include emerging forms of terrorism that increasingly exploit advances in science, technology, and extremist ideologies. Recent scholarship suggests that cyberterrorism, bioterrorism, the potential misuse of unmanned aerial systems, and the persistence of religious extremism are gradually reshaping the regional security environment by introducing unconventional methods capable of undermining national and regional stability (Botha, 2021; Njoku, 2023). These developments underscore the need to understand the emerging dimensions of terrorism and their implications for regional security.

Despite the growing body of literature on terrorism in Africa, existing studies have largely concentrated on insurgency, radicalization, violent extremism, and conventional counterterrorism interventions. Comparatively limited empirical attention has been devoted to establishing the emerging terrorist threats characterizing the evolving security environment in the Horn of Africa. This study therefore examines the emerging terrorist threats in the region, with particular focus on bioterrorism, drone technology, cyberterrorism, and religious extremism.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Horn of Africa has remained one of the regions most affected by terrorism, with violent extremist groups continuously adapting their operational strategies in response to evolving political, technological, and security dynamics. Although significant progress has been made in counterterrorism through military operations, intelligence sharing, and regional cooperation, terrorist organizations have increasingly diversified their methods of operation by exploiting technological innovations and evolving extremist ideologies. This transformation has resulted in the emergence of unconventional terrorist threats that are more difficult to predict, prevent, and counter using traditional security approaches (Hoffman, 2021; Njoku, 2023).

Existing literature on terrorism in the Horn of Africa has predominantly focused on conventional terrorist activities, including armed insurgency, suicide bombings, violent extremism, and counterterrorism interventions undertaken by regional governments and international partners (Hansen, 2021; Botha, 2021). Consequently, comparatively little empirical attention has been devoted to examining emerging terrorist threats such as bioterrorism, drone technology, cyberterrorism, and religious extremism, despite their growing relevance within the evolving regional security environment. This has created an empirical gap in understanding the nature of these emerging threats and their implications for security in the Horn of Africa.

This study therefore sought to establish the emerging terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa by examining bioterrorism, drone technology, cyberterrorism, and religious extremism. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on evolving terrorism in the region and provide evidence that can inform contemporary counterterrorism policy and practice.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To establish the emerging terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa Region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review provides the conceptual and empirical foundation for examining emerging terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa. It critically synthesizes existing scholarship to establish the current state of knowledge, identify areas of consensus and divergence, and highlight gaps that warrant further investigation.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Structural Realism Theory (Kenneth Waltz, 1979)

This study was anchored on Structural Realism (Neorealism), developed by Kenneth Waltz (1979). The theory argues that the anarchic nature of the international system compels states to prioritize their survival by continuously responding to actual and perceived security threats. According to Waltz (1979), the absence of a central authority capable of guaranteeing state security forces states to rely on self-help strategies, military preparedness, and strategic alliances to safeguard their national interests. Consequently, the behaviour of states is largely influenced by changes in the international security environment and the distribution of power.

The emergence of unconventional terrorist threats presents new security challenges that require states to continuously adapt their security strategies. Unlike conventional terrorism, emerging terrorist threats exploit technological innovation, cyberspace, biological agents, and evolving extremist ideologies, thereby increasing the complexity of contemporary security environments.

From a structural realist perspective, such threats constitute external security challenges capable of undermining state sovereignty, regional stability, and national survival. Consequently, states within the Horn of Africa are compelled to strengthen regional cooperation, intelligence sharing, and strategic partnerships to respond effectively to these evolving threats (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001).

Despite its relevance, Structural Realism has been criticized for its state-centric orientation. The theory primarily emphasizes interstate competition and pays comparatively limited attention to non-state actors such as terrorist organizations, whose operations increasingly transcend national boundaries and exploit technological advancements. Nevertheless, the theory remains relevant to this study because it explains why states perceive emerging terrorist threats as significant security concerns requiring coordinated national and regional responses. It therefore provides an appropriate framework for understanding how evolving terrorist threats influence security policies within the Horn of Africa.

Securitization Theory (Barry Buzan & Ole Wæver, 1998)

The study was also informed by Securitization Theory, developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde (1998). The theory posits that an issue becomes a security concern when political leaders and other influential actors successfully present it as an existential threat requiring extraordinary measures beyond normal political processes. According to Buzan et al. (1998), security is socially constructed through "speech acts," whereby issues are transformed from ordinary political matters into urgent security priorities that justify exceptional policy responses.

The emergence of bioterrorism, drone technology, cyberterrorism, and religious extremism illustrates how evolving forms of terrorism have increasingly been framed as existential threats to national and regional security. As terrorist organizations adopt unconventional methods of operation, governments are compelled to redefine security priorities by strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing technological capabilities, and expanding regional counterterrorism cooperation. Securitization Theory therefore provides a useful lens for understanding how emerging terrorist threats become prioritized within national security agendas and why governments adopt extraordinary counterterrorism measures in response to evolving security challenges.

Although Securitization Theory has been criticized for placing greater emphasis on political discourse than on the material capabilities of security threats, it remains particularly relevant to this study because it explains how emerging terrorist threats gain prominence within policy and security debates. The theory complements Structural Realism by demonstrating that, while states respond to objective security threats, the manner in which those threats are perceived and communicated significantly influences policy formulation and counterterrorism strategies. Consequently, the integration of Structural Realism and Securitization Theory provides a comprehensive framework for examining the emergence of contemporary terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Empirical studies demonstrate that terrorism has undergone significant transformation in response to changing political, technological, and socio-economic environments. Rather than relying exclusively on conventional methods such as bombings, kidnappings, and armed attacks, terrorist organizations have increasingly adopted sophisticated operational strategies that exploit

technological innovation, globalization, and transnational networks. In their assessment of terrorism in Africa, Botha and Graham (2021) argue that terrorist groups across the continent have become increasingly adaptive, compelling African states to continuously reassess their counterterrorism approaches to address emerging and evolving threats.

Similarly, Njoku (2021) contends that terrorism research in Africa has historically concentrated on state-centric security concerns and conventional manifestations of terrorism, with comparatively limited scholarly attention devoted to emerging forms of terrorist activity. These observations suggest that while terrorism continues to evolve, empirical scholarship has not adequately examined the full spectrum of emerging terrorist threats within the African context, particularly in the Horn of Africa.

Bioterrorism

Existing literature has increasingly identified bioterrorism as an emerging security concern, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic and recurring disease outbreaks that exposed vulnerabilities in public health systems. Arnold (2021) argues that although Africa has experienced relatively few documented cases of deliberate biological attacks, terrorist organizations may exploit epidemics and pandemics to advance political objectives by undermining public confidence, disrupting healthcare systems, and exacerbating social instability. The study also emphasizes that weak disease surveillance systems and limited biosecurity capacity increase the continent's susceptibility to biological threats.

Additionally, Botha and Graham (2021) maintain that while bioterrorism deserves greater policy attention, conventional terrorist activities continue to pose the most immediate security challenge across Africa. Their analysis suggests that the continent's security priorities remain largely focused on armed insurgencies, terrorist financing, and violent extremism, with bioterrorism receiving comparatively limited empirical and policy attention. This perspective contrasts with Arnold's (2021) argument by suggesting that the current threat of bioterrorism should be understood primarily as an emerging rather than an imminent security concern.

Although these studies contribute significantly to understanding bioterrorism within Africa, they primarily examine the issue from a continental perspective. Consequently, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how bioterrorism is perceived as an emerging terrorist threat within the Horn of Africa, thereby creating a context-specific knowledge gap that warrants further scholarly investigation.

Drone Technology

The increasing accessibility and affordability of unmanned aerial systems (UAS), commonly referred to as drones, has attracted considerable scholarly attention due to their potential exploitation by terrorist organizations. Recent studies indicate that drones have transformed contemporary terrorism by providing non-state actors with enhanced surveillance capabilities, improved intelligence gathering, precision targeting, and propaganda opportunities. While initially associated with military operations, drones have increasingly become available for civilian use, inadvertently creating opportunities for terrorist groups to adapt them for malicious purposes (Clarke, 2022; Rassler, 2023).

Within the African context, scholars have expressed growing concern regarding the potential use of drone technology by extremist groups operating in fragile security environments. Botha (2021) argues that terrorist organizations in Africa have demonstrated remarkable adaptability by

exploiting emerging technologies to overcome conventional security barriers and enhance operational effectiveness. Similarly, Hansen (2022) observes that extremist groups operating within the Horn of Africa have increasingly demonstrated technological innovation, suggesting that drone technology may become an important component of future terrorist operations. Moreover, Solomon (2023) contends that despite the growing concern surrounding drone-enabled terrorism, documented evidence of sustained operational deployment by terrorist groups within the Horn of Africa remains relatively limited. According to Solomon (2023), existing concerns are largely precautionary and reflect the rapid technological evolution occurring globally rather than widespread regional application.

These contrasting perspectives demonstrate that while scholars acknowledge drone technology as an emerging terrorist threat, empirical evidence regarding its operational significance within the Horn of Africa remains limited. Existing studies have largely examined drone technology from broader security and military perspectives, creating a need for context-specific research examining its emergence as a contemporary terrorist threat within the region.

Cyberterrorism

Cyberterrorism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing dimensions of contemporary terrorism due to increasing dependence on digital infrastructure and communication technologies. Recent empirical studies indicate that terrorist organizations have progressively exploited cyberspace for recruitment, radicalization, propaganda dissemination, fundraising, intelligence gathering, and coordination of terrorist activities. Consequently, cyberspace has become an important operational domain through which extremist groups expand their influence beyond geographical boundaries (Grobbelaar, 2024).

Existing literature similarly emphasizes the growing cyber capabilities of extremist organizations operating across the continent. Njoku (2023) argues that the digital transformation experienced across African states has simultaneously created opportunities for terrorist organizations to exploit weak cybersecurity systems and expanding internet penetration. Likewise, Grobbelaar (2024) maintains that cyberterrorism presents an increasingly significant challenge because attacks targeting digital infrastructure possess the potential to disrupt essential government services, financial systems, and communication networks without requiring physical presence.

In contrast, other scholars argue that although cyberterrorism represents an emerging security concern, conventional terrorist attacks continue to constitute the primary operational strategy employed by extremist organizations within Africa. According to Mlambo (2024), terrorist organizations continue to prioritize physical violence while utilizing cyberspace primarily as a complementary tool for communication, recruitment, and propaganda rather than as an independent method of attack. These divergent findings suggest that although scholars recognize cyberterrorism as an evolving security concern, disagreement persists regarding its operational maturity and immediate implications within the Horn of Africa.

Religious Extremism

Religious extremism continues to feature prominently within contemporary terrorism literature as one of the principal drivers of violent extremism and terrorist recruitment. Recent empirical studies suggest that extremist organizations increasingly manipulate religious narratives to legitimize violence, recruit followers, strengthen group cohesion, and justify attacks against perceived adversaries. Rather than functioning solely as a religious phenomenon, contemporary religious

extremism has increasingly been understood as a multidimensional process shaped by political grievances, governance failures, socio-economic exclusion, identity politics, and ideological manipulation (Botha, 2021).

Within the Horn of Africa, Hansen (2022) argues that extremist organizations have become increasingly sophisticated in their use of religious narratives, particularly through digital platforms that facilitate transnational recruitment and ideological dissemination. Similarly, Njoku (2023) observes that religious extremism remains a significant enabling factor in the evolution of terrorism across Africa because it provides terrorist organizations with ideological legitimacy while strengthening recruitment networks among vulnerable populations.

Conversely, Mlambo (2024) argues that attributing terrorism primarily to religious extremism oversimplifies a complex security phenomenon. According to the study, factors such as political instability, economic marginalization, state fragility, and weak governance frequently interact with religious narratives to facilitate radicalization and violent extremism. These contrasting perspectives suggest that while scholars generally acknowledge religious extremism as a significant contributor to terrorism, disagreement remains regarding the relative importance of religious ideology compared to broader structural and political drivers of terrorist violence.

The reviewed literature demonstrates significant scholarly attention to terrorism and counterterrorism in the Horn of Africa Region, however, it has predominantly examined conventional forms of terrorism, including insurgency, violent extremism, and terrorist financing, with comparatively limited attention given to emerging threats such as bioterrorism, the misuse of drone technology, cyberterrorism, and evolving manifestations of religious extremism within the Horn of Africa. In addition, much of the existing literature has analyzed these threats independently, providing limited understanding of how they collectively shape the evolving regional security landscape.

Methodologically, many previous studies have relied primarily on qualitative approaches, including case studies and document analysis, with limited integration of quantitative evidence and stakeholder perspectives. This has constrained a comprehensive assessment of emerging terrorist threats from both policy and practitioner perspectives. The study addresses these gaps by adopting a mixed-methods approach to examine emerging terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa. It integrates quantitative findings, qualitative evidence from key informant interviews, and document analysis to provide a comprehensive assessment of bioterrorism, drone technology, cyberterrorism, and religious extremism as interconnected dimensions of the region's evolving terrorism landscape. In doing so, the study contributes empirical evidence that strengthens the understanding of contemporary terrorist threats and informs adaptive counterterrorism strategies within the Horn of Africa.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach employing descriptive and longitudinal research designs. The descriptive research design facilitated the systematic collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data on stakeholders' perceptions of emerging terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa. The longitudinal research design enabled the study to examine the evolution of terrorist threats over time, thereby providing insights into the changing nature of terrorism and its implications for regional security. The integration of the two research designs allowed the study to

generate both statistical evidence and contextual explanations regarding emerging terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Nairobi City County, Kenya, which served as the study area because of its strategic significance in regional peace and security governance within the Horn of Africa. Nairobi hosts the headquarters and regional offices of several institutions involved in counterterrorism, migration management, conflict prevention, and regional security, including government ministries, regional organizations, diplomatic missions, research institutions, and international organizations. The concentration of these institutions provided access to respondents with extensive knowledge and experience in terrorism and regional security, making Nairobi an appropriate study area for examining emerging terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa.

Target Population

The study targeted 300 participants drawn from institutions directly involved in counterterrorism, foreign policy, security governance, public health, cybersecurity, academia, civil society, and the media. These participants were selected because of their knowledge, experience, and institutional roles in addressing terrorism and emerging security threats within the Horn of Africa. A planned sample size of 250 respondents was determined to provide adequate representation across the identified participant categories. Of these, 217 respondents successfully participated in the study, representing a response rate of 86.8%, which was considered adequate for analysis.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

A combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques was employed to select participants. Purposive sampling was used to identify respondents possessing specialized knowledge and experience in terrorism, security, foreign policy, biosecurity, and regional peace and security. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure adequate representation of participant categories whose perspectives were considered critical to understanding emerging terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa. The table below summarizes the target population, planned sample size, sampling strategy, and methods of data analysis.

Table 1: Sample Size

Target Population	Sample Size (n)	Sampling Strategy
Policymakers (Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Foreign Affairs)	22	Purposive
Security Officers (NCTC, ATPU and KDF)	43	Purposive
Civil Society Organizations and NGOs	29	Stratified & Purposive
Academic Experts and Researchers	36	Stratified
Health and Biosecurity Officials	22	Purposive
Community Leaders	15	Stratified
Private Sector Representatives (Technology and Cybersecurity)	36	Stratified & Purposive
Media Practitioners and Analysts	14	Purposive
Total	217	

Source: Researcher (2026)

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, and the results were presented in tables and figures. Qualitative data obtained from key informant interviews were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and perspectives relating to emerging terrorist threats. The findings from both datasets were integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive analysis of the study objective.

Ethical Considerations

To enhance the quality of the findings, the study adhered to established ethical research principles. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, and the collected data were used solely for academic purposes.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Bioterrorism as an Emerging Terrorist Threat in the Horn of Africa Region

The results in Table 2 are descriptive analysis outcome on bioterrorism as an emerging terrorist threat in the horn of Africa region.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Bioterrorism

Value	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Bioterrorism	18.43	25.35	29.95	18.43	7.83
Drone Technology	43.78	33.64	19.35	3.23	
Cyberterrorism	53	33.18	11.52	2.3	
Religious Extremism	45.62	38.71	11.52	4.15	

Source: Researcher (2026)

The findings indicate that respondents held mixed views regarding bioterrorism as an emerging terrorist threat in the Horn of Africa. While 43.78% agreed that bioterrorism constitutes an emerging threat, 29.95% remained neutral, suggesting uncertainty regarding its prevalence within the region. The findings nevertheless indicate growing recognition that evolving terrorist capabilities may extend beyond conventional attacks to include biological threats.

This finding is consistent with Arnold (2021), who argues that weak biosecurity systems and limited disease surveillance increase Africa's vulnerability to biological terrorism despite the absence of documented attacks. Similarly, Botha and Graham (2021) contend that terrorist organizations continue to adapt their operational methods in response to technological and security changes. However, they maintain that conventional terrorism remains the more immediate security challenge, highlighting differing scholarly perspectives on the immediacy of bioterrorism.

One security officer remarked:

> *"Although the Horn of Africa has not experienced a confirmed biological terrorist attack, weaknesses in public health systems and border surveillance require governments to remain prepared for such possibilities."*

This observation suggests that practitioners view bioterrorism as a precautionary security concern requiring proactive preparedness rather than a response to existing incidents. Similarly, document analysis of the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (2016) emphasizes institutional preparedness, inter-agency coordination, and resilience against evolving security threats, reinforcing the need to strengthen biosecurity as part of broader counterterrorism efforts.

Drone Technology as an Emerging Terrorist Threat in the Horn of Africa Region

The findings indicate a strong consensus among respondents that drone technology has emerged as a significant terrorist threat in the Horn of Africa. A majority (77.42%) agreed or strongly agreed that terrorist organizations are increasingly exploiting drone technology, while only 3.23% disagreed. This suggests that stakeholders perceive the growing accessibility of unmanned aerial systems as a potential enabler of terrorist operations, including surveillance, intelligence gathering, and the delivery of attacks.

The findings corroborate Rassler (2023), who argues that terrorist organizations have increasingly adopted commercially available drones to enhance operational capabilities due to their affordability, accessibility, and adaptability. Similarly, Clarke (2022) contends that advances in drone technology have lowered the barriers to entry for non-state actors, creating new security challenges for governments. These studies suggest that the proliferation of drone technology has fundamentally altered the operational environment within which terrorist organizations operate.

A senior counterterrorism officer observed:

> *"Commercial drones are no longer just recreational devices. Their affordability and ease of modification present new security concerns because extremist groups can exploit them for surveillance, intelligence gathering, or even delivering harmful payloads while minimizing direct exposure."*

The key informant's observation reinforces the quantitative findings by highlighting the operational advantages that drone technology offers terrorist organizations. Similarly, document analysis of the Kenya–United States Strategic Partnership Framework (2022) underscores the importance of strengthening technological capacity, intelligence sharing, and joint security cooperation to address evolving threats driven by emerging technologies. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that drone technology has become an important dimension of contemporary terrorism, necessitating adaptive counterterrorism strategies capable of responding to rapidly evolving technological threats.

Cyberterrorism as an Emerging Terrorist Threat in the Horn of Africa Region

The findings revealed a strong consensus among respondents that cyberterrorism constitutes an emerging terrorist threat in the Horn of Africa. A majority (86.18%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while only 2.30% disagreed. These findings suggest that stakeholders increasingly recognize cyberspace as a critical domain that terrorist organizations can exploit for recruitment, radicalization, propaganda dissemination, intelligence gathering, and the coordination of terrorist activities.

The findings are consistent with Njoku (2023), who argues that increasing digitalization across Africa has created new opportunities for extremist groups to exploit cyberspace for operational and ideological purposes. Similarly, Grobbelaar (2024) contends that the growing reliance on digital infrastructure has heightened the vulnerability of states to cyber-enabled terrorism,

requiring governments to strengthen cybersecurity alongside conventional counterterrorism measures. Together, these studies underscore the growing importance of cyberterrorism within the evolving terrorism landscape.

A cybersecurity expert interviewed during the study observed:

> *"Terrorist organizations no longer require physical proximity to influence or coordinate their activities. Through encrypted communication platforms and social media, they can recruit, disseminate propaganda, mobilize supporters, and coordinate operations across borders with minimal detection."*

The key informant's remarks reinforce the quantitative findings by illustrating how digital technologies have expanded the operational reach of terrorist organizations beyond traditional geographical boundaries. Similarly, document analysis of the Kenya National Cybersecurity Strategy (2022–2027) emphasizes strengthening cyber resilience, protecting critical information infrastructure, and enhancing collaboration among government agencies and international partners to counter emerging cyber threats. This demonstrates that cyberterrorism has become an integral component of contemporary security planning within Kenya and the wider Horn of Africa. The findings indicate that cyberterrorism is increasingly perceived as one of the most significant emerging terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa, underscoring the need for enhanced cybersecurity capabilities, intelligence sharing, and regional cooperation to address the evolving digital dimension of terrorism.

Religious Extremism as an Emerging Terrorist Threat in the Horn of Africa Region

The findings demonstrate a strong consensus among respondents that religious extremism remains an emerging terrorist threat in the Horn of Africa. A substantial majority (84.33%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, while only 4.15% disagreed. These findings suggest that respondents perceive the manipulation of religious ideologies as a significant driver of radicalization, recruitment, and the persistence of terrorist activities within the region.

The findings are consistent with Botha (2021), who argues that religious extremism continues to provide ideological justification for violent extremist groups operating across Africa, particularly in fragile security environments. Similarly, Hansen (2022) observes that groups such as Al-Shabaab have increasingly exploited religious narratives to recruit followers, legitimize violence, and sustain their operational influence in the Horn of Africa. However, Njoku (2023) contends that religious ideology alone does not explain the persistence of terrorism, arguing that political instability, socioeconomic marginalization, and weak governance often interact with extremist ideologies to facilitate radicalization. These perspectives suggest that while religious extremism remains a significant terrorist threat, it is reinforced by broader structural and governance challenges.

A regional security expert interviewed during the study remarked:

> *"Religious extremism remains one of the most potent tools used by terrorist organizations because it exploits identity, distorts religious teachings, and creates a sense of ideological obligation among vulnerable individuals. Countering this threat therefore requires not only security interventions but also community engagement and credible counter-narratives."*

Similarly, a community leader observed:

> *"Some individuals posing as religious leaders exploit vulnerable people by promising spiritual rewards in exchange for financial contributions. In contexts where economic hardship is widespread across the Horn of Africa, such manipulation can increase vulnerability to extremist narratives and desperate actions."*

The views expressed by the two key informants demonstrate that religious extremism extends beyond ideological indoctrination to encompass socioeconomic vulnerabilities that extremist actors exploit. While the regional security expert emphasized the misuse of religious ideology as a recruitment and mobilization tool, the community leader highlighted how poverty, economic hardship, and false religious promises can increase susceptibility to manipulation.

These observations support Njoku's (2023) assertion that religious extremism is sustained not only by ideology but also by structural factors such as socioeconomic exclusion and weak governance. Similarly, document analysis of the National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism (2016) underscores the importance of community engagement, strategic communication, and interfaith collaboration in addressing the drivers of radicalization. Collectively, the findings suggest that effective responses to religious extremism should integrate security interventions with socioeconomic empowerment and community-based prevention initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that the region's terrorism landscape has evolved beyond conventional forms of violent extremism to encompass emerging threats characterized by technological innovation, digital transformation, biological risks, and ideological manipulation. While perceptions regarding bioterrorism remained relatively mixed, there was broad consensus that drone technology, cyberterrorism, and religious extremism constitute significant emerging terrorist threats with the potential to undermine regional peace and security.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study underscore the need for governments within the Horn of Africa to strengthen biosecurity preparedness as part of broader counterterrorism efforts. This can be achieved by enhancing disease surveillance systems, improving laboratory biosecurity, investing in early warning mechanisms, and strengthening cross-border cooperation among public health and security institutions. Such measures would enhance the region's capacity to prevent and respond to potential biological threats before they materialize.

In response to the growing threat of cyberterrorism, governments should prioritize the development of resilient cybersecurity systems by strengthening critical information infrastructure, enhancing regional intelligence-sharing frameworks, and promoting collaboration between security agencies, technology companies, and other relevant stakeholders. Continuous investment in cybersecurity capacity building and digital monitoring will be essential in countering the exploitation of cyberspace by terrorist organizations.

Addressing religious extremism requires a comprehensive approach that extends beyond conventional security responses. Governments should collaborate with religious leaders, community organizations, educational institutions, and civil society to promote credible counter-narratives, interfaith dialogue, and community awareness programs. At the same time, efforts should be directed towards addressing underlying socioeconomic vulnerabilities, including

poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion, which increase susceptibility to extremist recruitment and radicalization.

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