

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN GARISSA COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

This study explored the relationship between socioeconomic factors and violent extremism in Kenya. Cross-sectional survey research design was used. The target population was all the residents of Garissa Town (18 years and above) who were members of anti-radicalization group and had information regarding the topic under discourse. They were 318 in number. A total of 101 respondents participated. The respondents were drawn through purposive sampling. A questionnaire was used to gather information from the respondents. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance. The results obtained determined that there was statistically significant relationship between income inequality, social exclusion and violent extremism. The findings from this study sought to inform the county government of Garissa and Kenya at large, on whether there exists a relationship and to what magnitude. It also grants recommendations on what should be done about the socioeconomic factors so as not to lead to violent extremism.

1 Introduction

Violent extremism is a pressing global issue that has attracted significant attention from scholars and experts across disciplines. According to Hoffman, [1] violent extremism refers to the use or advocacy of violence to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives. It manifests in various forms and has different ideological motivations. For instance, Islamist extremism has been a major concern in regions like the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), as well as in Western countries [2]. On the other hand, far-right extremism has gained prominence in Europe and North America. Islamist extremism has had significant impacts on both the Middle East and North America, albeit with different dynamics and consequences. In the Middle East, Islamist extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS) have destabilized entire regions, leading to protracted conflicts, widespread violence, and large-scale displacement of populations. The rise of ISIS, in particular, resulted in the establishment of a self-proclaimed caliphate, which subjected civilians to brutal rule, perpetrated acts of terrorism, and sought to impose a strict interpretation of Islamic law. The conflicts in Iraq and Syria, fueled by Islamist extremism, have caused immense human suffering, destroyed infrastructure, and hindered socioeconomic development in these countries [3].

In North America, Islamist extremism has also had significant implications. While the frequency of Islamist-inspired terrorist attacks remains relatively low compared to other regions, the impact of such attacks has been substantial. Incidents like the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States and the 2017 Quebec City Mosque shooting in Canada have left lasting scars on

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society, leading to increased security measures, heightened surveillance, and debates over issues of immigration, religious freedom, and national security. The influence of Islamist extremist ideologies has also affected communities and individuals within these regions [4][5].

Violent extremism has also been a growing concern in West Africa, particularly in countries like Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Cameroon. This region has witnessed the emergence and activities of various extremist groups, including Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Boko Haram, founded in Nigeria in the early 2000s, has since become one of the deadliest terrorist organizations in the world [6]. The group's initial objective was to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria, but its activities have expanded to neighboring countries [7]. Boko Haram's tactics involve suicide bombings, mass killings, abductions, and attacks on security forces, resulting in significant human suffering and displacement of populations. ISWAP, an affiliate of the Islamic State, split from Boko Haram in 2016 and has also gained prominence in the region. It has carried out attacks against military forces and civilians, contributing to the deteriorating security situation in the Lake Chad Basin [8].

Kenya has experienced the impact of violent extremism, primarily associated with the Somalia-based extremist group Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab has carried out numerous attacks within Kenya, particularly in the border regions near Somalia and in major cities like Nairobi and Mombasa. The group's activities have included bombings, shootings, and kidnappings, leading to loss of life and creating a climate of fear [9]. Scholars and experts have highlighted several factors contributing to the presence of violent extremism in Kenya. These factors include social, economic, and political grievances, marginalization of certain communities, and recruitment efforts by extremist groups [5]. The porous border between Kenya and Somalia has allowed for the movement of individuals and weapons, facilitating the activities of extremist groups [10]. In response, the Kenyan government has implemented various counterterrorism measures, including security operations, intelligence gathering, and community engagement efforts [11].

International collaboration has also played a role, with Kenya cooperating with neighboring countries and international partners in intelligence sharing and capacity-building initiatives [12]. Efforts to address the root causes of violent extremism in Kenya involve promoting inclusive governance, socioeconomic development, and countering extremist narratives [13]. Community-led initiatives focusing on youth empowerment, education, and dialogue have also been implemented to prevent radicalization [14].

Garissa, a town in northeastern Kenya, has been affected by the presence of violent extremism, primarily associated with the activities of Al-Shabaab, an extremist group based in Somalia. The region's proximity to the Somalia border and its marginalized socio-economic conditions have made it vulnerable to the influence and recruitment efforts of extremist organizations. The attacks carried out by Al-Shabaab in Garissa have targeted various locations, including educational institutions, places of worship, and security forces. These attacks have resulted in significant loss of life and have had a profound impact on the local community [11]. Efforts to address violent extremism in Garissa involve a multi-faceted approach.

The Kenyan government, in collaboration with international partners, has implemented security operations to disrupt extremist networks and prevent attacks. Intelligence sharing and cooperation with neighboring countries, particularly Somalia, have been important in addressing the cross-border activities of extremist groups. Additionally, efforts have been made to promote community resilience and engagement. Community-led initiatives (joining members of anti-radicalization group in Garissa that focus on countering extremist narratives, fostering dialogue, and providing alternative pathways for vulnerable individuals have been implemented. These initiatives aim to address underlying grievances, promote social cohesion, and empower communities to reject violent extremism [13].

Scholars in other parts of the world have highlighted various factors contributing to the rise of violent extremism. Socioeconomic factors, including poverty, unemployment, and marginalization, have made certain communities more vulnerable to recruitment [3]. Weak governance, corruption, and limited state presence in certain areas have also created fertile ground for extremist groups to exploit grievances [15]. Online radicalization has also become a significant concern in recent years. Social media platforms and the internet provide a space for the dissemination of extremist propaganda and recruitment [16]. It became apparent to establish

whether there could be a connection between socioeconomic factors and violent extremism in Kenya and if there is, to what degree, which was the concern of this article.

2 Main and Specific Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between socioeconomic factors and violent extremism in Garissa County. The Study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To establish whether there is a relationship between income inequality and violent extremism
- ii. To determine whether there is a relationship between social exclusion and violent extremism

Hypotheses

H₀1 There is no statistically significant relationship between income inequality and violent extremism

H₀2 There is no statistically significant relationship between social exclusion and violent extremism

3 Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Framework

Rational Choice Theory

Stein, & Tanter, [17] are renowned for their use of rational choice theory in studying economic impacts of terrorism. The researchers argue that terrorists, their actions and consequent damage demonstrate that perpetrators appear to calculate the desired impact of their terror action as they pursue their set political goal. Despite being considered by many to be inhumane and irrational, terrorists are nevertheless human beings who commit their acts of terrorism based on reasoned ideology that most often stem from religious beliefs.

According to rational choice theory, it is argued that any behavior is rational if it is goal-oriented, reflective and consistent across time and different choice situations. Rational choice theory is based on the notion that man is a reasoning being who weighs the costs and benefits of choices and therefore makes decisions based on rational calculations. In this study, it is postulated that terrorists make choices and decide on strategic location of attacks to inflict maximum pain and it is the totality of this pain (economic, social and political) that hurts the political economy of Garissa County.

Andreß, & Lohmann [18] point out that the theory does not describe the choice process rather that it predicts the outcome and pattern of choices. They hold that terrorists usually carry out “cost-benefit analysis and constrained utility maximization” before perpetrating an attack. The argument that terrorists seek to minimize costs is useful in understanding choices of weapons and personnel deployed in terror attack. Most attacks in Garissa County have been carried out using Improvised Explosive Devices, which are easily assembled, less costly and effective for lone suicide attack. RCT effectively explains the motivations, behaviour and thinking of terrorists, terrorist groups and even government leadership as they attempt to tackle terrorist threats.

Conceptual Framework

The researcher in conceptualizing this study, considered the following variables. The independent variable was socioeconomic factors, the dependent variable was violent extremism. The intervening variable was literacy levels which can affect the study either positively or negatively.

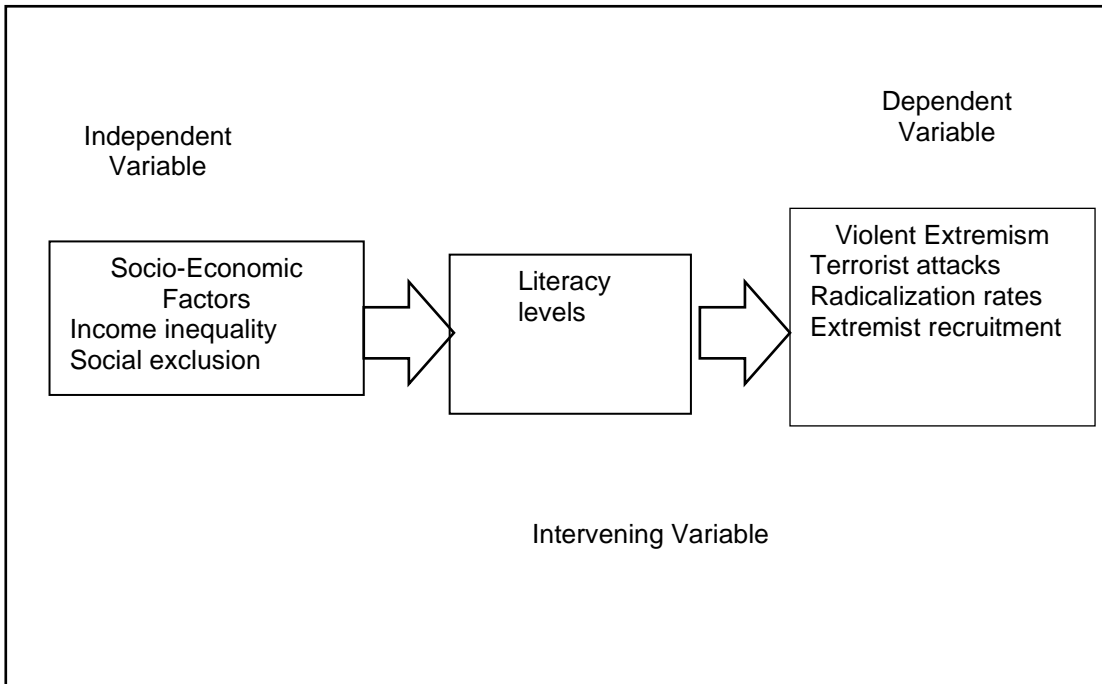


Figure 1: Own Conceptualization showing interaction of variables(2023)

4 Research Methods

The cross-sectional survey research design was employed in this study. The study was conducted in Garissa County- Kenya. The target population were the residents of Garissa Town (18 years and above) who were members of anti-radicalization group and had information regarding the topic under discourse. Their population was 318 from which a total of 101 respondents who participated was drawn. According to [19] a sample of 30% is appropriate to make generalizations. The sample was selected through purposive sampling. The questionnaire used was researcher-administered. A quantitative structured questionnaire constructed by the researcher was used to obtain information about the relationship between socioeconomic factors and violent extremism in the area of study. The questionnaire was administered to 101 residents. The questionnaire contained 2 items (indicators of socioeconomic factors) and 3 items (indicators of violent extremism). Pearson coefficient correlation was used in analysis. This method not only indicates the presence, or absence of correlation between any two variables but also, determines the exact extent, or degree to which they are correlated. Under this method, we can also ascertain the direction of the correlation i.e. whether the correlation between the two variables is positive, or negative. The accused persons were asked whether or not they agreed with the statements under each indicator by ticking Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Not Sure, Agree and Strongly Agree in the boxes which were provided.

5 Results and Discussions

Demographic representation of Participants

Table 1

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	28	26.8
Male	73	73.2
Total	101	100.0

The following question and hypotheses were answered and tested respectively:

Existence of relationship between socioeconomic factors and violent extremism

It was determined that, 82% of the respondents alluded that there was a relationship between income inequality and violent extremism while 18% on the other hand were of the contrary opinion. This has an implication that the majority were of the opinion that there indeed exists a relationship between the two variables. The information is as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Showing the whether there exists a relationship between socioeconomic factors and violent extremism

<i>Relationship exists</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Yes	83	82
No	17	18
<i>Total</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>100</i>

There is no statistically significant relationship between income inequality and violent extremism in Garissa County

Table 3. Showing relationship between income inequality and violent extremism in Garissa County

Area of Study	Income inequality	Violent extremism	Pearson Correlation Coefficient Value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Garissa County			.734*	.000

* - Means significant at 5% level

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) of the variables i.e., income inequality and violent extremism is .734 and a significant level of .000 which is less than .05. This means that there is a statistically significant relationship between income inequality and violent extremism. The coefficient (r) is a strong positive correlation which means that as income inequality increases so does violent extremism. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

There is no statistically significant relationship between social exclusion and violent extremism in Garissa County.

Table 4. Showing relationship between social exclusion and violent extremism in Garissa County

Area of Study	Social exclusion	Violent extremism	Pearson Correlation Coefficient Value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Garissa County			.726*	.001

* - Means significant at 5% level

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) of the variables i.e., social exclusion and violent extremism is .726 and a significant level of .001 which is less than .05. This means that there is a statistically significant relationship between social exclusion and violent extremism. The coefficient (r) is a strong positive correlation which means that as social exclusion increases so does violent extremism. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

There is no statistically significant relationship between socioeconomic factors and violent extremism in Garissa County.

Table 5. Showing relationship between socioeconomic factors and violent extremism in Garissa County

Area of Study	Socioeconomic factors	Violent extremism	Pearson Correlation Coefficient Value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Garissa County			.711*	.000

* - Means significant at 5% level

Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient (r) of the variables i.e., socioeconomic factors and violent extremism is .711 and a significant level of .000, which is less than .05. This means that there is a statistically significant relationship between socioeconomic factors and violent extremism. The coefficient (r) is a strong positive correlation which means that continuous practice of the socioeconomic factors leads to promotion of violent extremism.

6 Discussion

Mutahi, [10] asserts that income inequality serves as a breeding ground for resentment and grievances, creating conditions conducive to the radicalization and recruitment of individuals into violent extremist groups. This sentiment is echoed by [20] who states that "the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities fosters a sense of alienation and discontent, making individuals more susceptible to radicalization as they seek alternative pathways for socio-economic advancement.

Thompson, [21] on the other hand emphasizes that economic disparities and unequal access to resources breed frustration and disillusionment, leaving individuals vulnerable to the appeals of extremist narratives that promise social justice and equality through radical means. Furthermore, [4] highlights the impact of income inequality on societal trust, stating that "when income disparities widen, it erodes trust in institutions and fuels a sense of injustice, which can be exploited by extremist groups to recruit marginalized individuals who perceive violence as a means of rectifying economic disparities.

With respect to social exclusion, Martinez, [22] argues that social exclusion, whether based on ethnicity, religion, or other factors, breeds grievances and a sense of injustice, making individuals more susceptible to radicalization and recruitment by extremist organizations. In support of this notion, Johnson, [20] notes that the lack of social inclusion and opportunities can contribute to a loss of hope and a sense of disempowerment, pushing individuals towards extremist ideologies that promise a radical transformation of the existing social order.

In summary, the above quotes from various authors illustrate the consensus among scholars regarding the link between social inequality, social exclusion and violent extremism which was found to be in tandem with this current study.

7 Limitations of the Study

The study focused only on social and economic factors affecting violent extremism however, there are other factors which may influence the same but were not considered in this study.

8 Conclusion and Recommendations

There existed a relationship between socioeconomic factors and violent extremism. income inequality contributes to violent extremism as the coefficient (r) was a strong positive correlation which meant that as income inequality increases so does violent extremism. Social exclusion contributes to violent extremism as the coefficient (r) was a strong positive correlation which meant that as social exclusion increases so does violent extremism. Income inequality can contribute to feelings of economic disparity, social alienation, and marginalization, which may create fertile ground for the emergence of violent extremist ideologies. Income inequality can lead to a sense of

injustice and grievances, which can be exploited by extremist groups to recruit disaffected individuals. Social exclusion from mainstream society, increasing the appeal of extremist narratives that promise a sense of belonging and purpose. Socially excluded individuals may feel a sense of injustice, frustration, and resentment towards the society that has marginalized them, making them more vulnerable to radicalization.

9 Recommendations

The national and county government of Garissa should implement policies that foster economic growth and reduce income inequality. This can include investing in infrastructure development, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, and promoting entrepreneurship. This will address the economic disparities that contribute to violent extremism. The two levels of government should ensure equal access to quality education and vocational training for all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

This will enable individuals to acquire the skills and knowledge needed for better employment prospects, reducing the likelihood of resorting to extremist ideologies. The two governments should implement policies that promote equal opportunities and address the structural factors that contribute to social exclusion. This can include policies that focus on poverty alleviation, employment generation, and fair distribution of resources. By reducing socioeconomic disparities, the risk of social exclusion and its potential link to violent extremism can be mitigated. Others include; Strengthen intelligence and law enforcement efforts to identify and disrupt extremist activities. Promote inclusive and equitable societies that address the root causes of grievances and marginalization. Invest in education and critical thinking skills to promote resilience against extremist ideologies. Encourage community engagement and dialogue to foster social cohesion and counter extremist narratives. There is need to carry out a comparative study of socioeconomic factors on violent extremism with other counties with an aim of informing on better ways to achieve socioeconomic empowerment.

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