

Is Kenya's anti-terrorist crackdown exacerbating drivers of violent extremism?

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 37 | Stephen Buchanan-Clarke and Rorisang Lekalake

Summary

Kenya has seen a dramatic rise in violent extremism: Between 1970 and 2007, the country experienced 190 terrorist attacks, an average of five per year; since 2008, the average has escalated to 47 attacks a year. The overwhelming majority of these incidents have been attributed to Al-Shabaab. Originating in Somalia in 2005, the group has since regionalized its operations and established an active presence in Kenya, where it has successfully recruited and radicalized Kenyan nationals and carried out numerous attacks on a variety of local targets (Botha, 2014). The 2 April 2015 attack on Garissa University College, which killed 147 people, was the group's most deadly to date.

According to the 2014 Global Terrorism Index (GTI), two of the primary correlates of terrorism are "state-sponsored violence against vulnerable communities" and "social hostilities between different ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups, lack of intergroup cohesion, and group grievances" (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2014). Martha Crenshaw (1981) identifies "the existence of concrete grievances among ... an ethnic minority discriminated against by the majority" as the first condition that can be considered a direct cause of terrorism. While feelings of social and political isolation may be widely held among a community, usually only a minority come to hold views that make them susceptible to radicalization and recruitment into terrorist organisations.

In Kenya's attempts to address the threat of violent extremism, the Somali Kenyan community is often stigmatized, and serious human rights violations during counter-terrorist operations by the police and other security forces have been reported (Amnesty International, 2014). This raises the question: Is the current political context in Kenya exacerbating the Somali Kenyan community's vulnerability to recruitment by terrorist organisations?

Recent Afrobarometer survey data show that Kenyans disapprove of their government's handling of terrorism and that the Somali Kenyan community is even more critical than citizens from other ethnic communities. Somali Kenyans feel marginalised by the state and express problematic levels of social intolerance, factors that indicate the presence of political and social conditions associated with higher levels of violent extremism. Like most Kenyans, a majority of Somali Kenyans see the police as corrupt and untrustworthy.

These findings suggest that the Kenyan government should curb police abuses and explore more developmental approaches to counter-terrorism to ensure that measures aimed at engaging Al-Shabaab do not generate further grievances among an already isolated and vulnerable community.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more

than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Kenya, led by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi, interviewed 2,400 adult Kenyans in November-December 2014. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level.

However, given the small size of the Somali Kenyan subsamples (6% of the total 2014 sample, n=131), the resultant wider margin of uncertainty surrounding generalizations about Somali Kenyans calls for caution in interpreting associated numerical results.

Key findings

- Approval of the government's performance in fighting terrorism dropped substantially between 2011 and 2014. Half of Kenyans (51%) believe the fight against terrorism is going badly, compared to only 11% in 2011. Furthermore, although two-thirds believe that the military intervention in Somalia has been necessary, half (48%) support withdrawal of the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF).
- Somali Kenyan respondents are significantly more critical of the government's security efforts than citizens of other ethnicities.
- Somali Kenyans are more than twice as likely to say that they are "always" or "often" treated unfairly by the government (51%) as citizens of other ethnicities (22%).
- Somali Kenyans are far more intolerant of other religions and ethnic groups than Kenyans of other ethnicities.
- Most Somali Kenyans (like most Kenyans) say they do not trust the police and believe that "most" or "all" police officers are corrupt. The KDF is more trusted and less likely to be perceived as corrupt than the police.

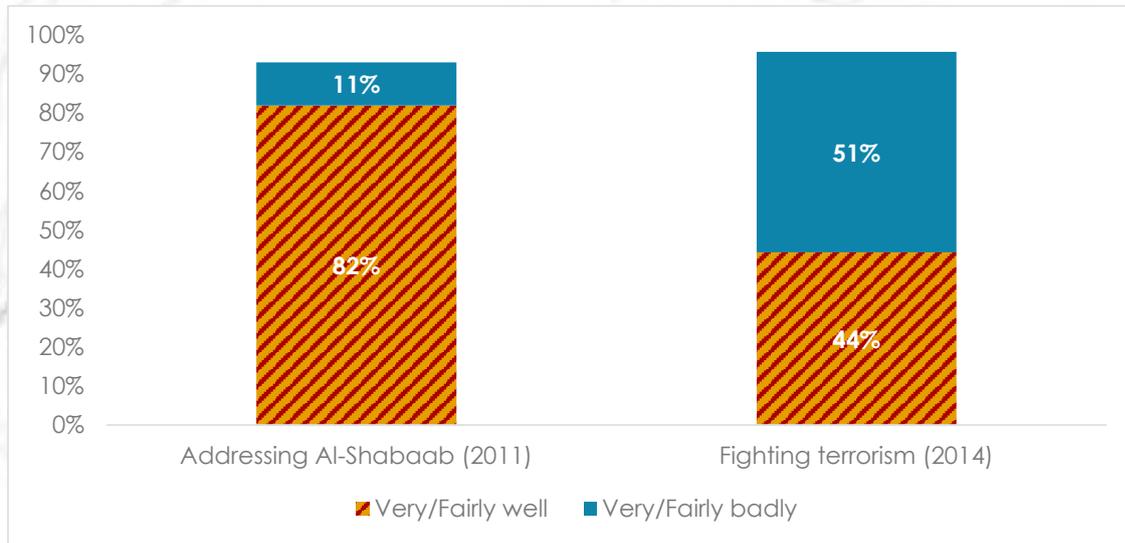
Kenyans increasingly disapprove of the government's handling of terrorism

On 16 October 2011, Kenyan troops entered the border regions of southern Somalia as part of a military offensive against Al-Shabaab named Operation *Linda Nchi* ("Protect the Country"). The primary goal of the operation was to create a 100km buffer zone along the border and eliminate Al-Shabaab militants, who had been mounting increasing numbers of terrorist attacks on some of Kenya's northern and coastal towns.

In November 2011, most Kenyans (82%) held a favourable opinion of their government's handling of the threat posed by Al-Shabaab. By 2014, after a substantial increase in major Al-Shabaab attacks in Kenya, public approval of government counter-terrorism efforts declined sharply, to 44%, with 51% of Kenyans indicating that their government is doing "very badly" or "fairly badly" in the fight against violent extremism (Figure 1).

Whilst two-thirds of Kenyans say that KDF involvement in Somalia has been necessary despite Al-Shabaab reprisals, 48% of citizens support KDF withdrawal (Figure 2).

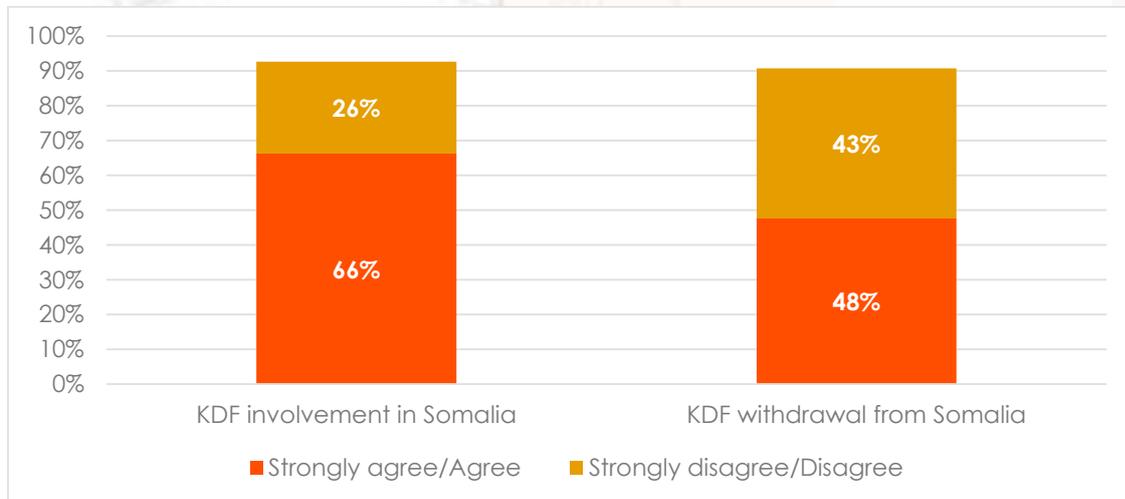
Figure 1: Evaluations of government performance in fighting terrorism | Kenya | 2011-2014



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say:

1. Addressing terrorist threats by Al-Shabaab terror group? (2011)
2. Fighting terrorism in Kenya? (2014)

Figure 2: Evaluations of security initiatives | Kenya | 2014



Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say:

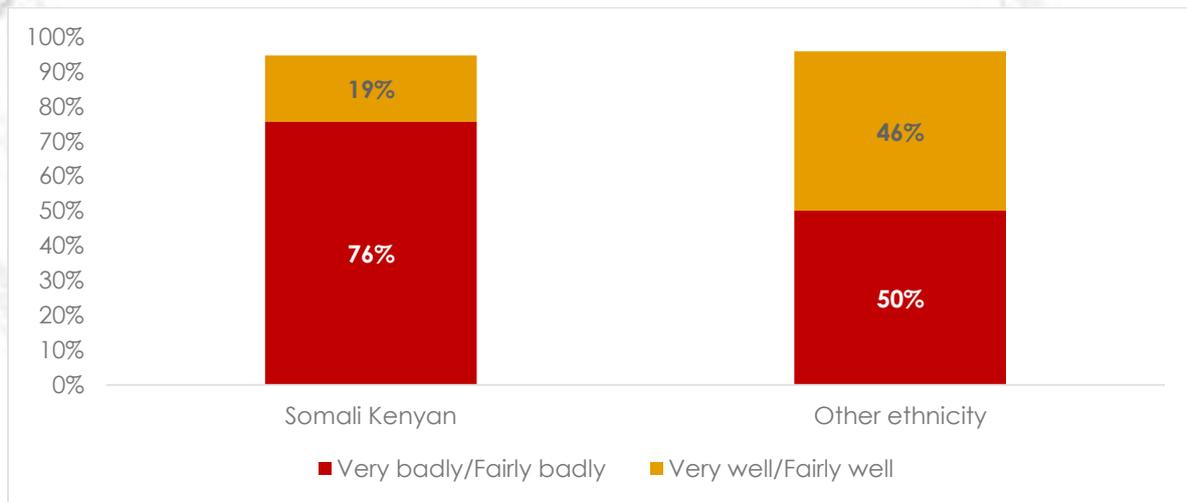
1. The involvement of Kenya Defence Forces, or KDF, in Somalia has been necessary despite the terrorist problems resulting from it?
2. The KDF should pull out of Somalia?

Analysis by ethnicity reveals striking differences of opinion between Somali Kenyans and citizens from other communities on these measures. Somali Kenyan respondents are significantly more critical of the government's security efforts (76%) than citizens of other ethnicities (50%) (Figure 3).

Furthermore, they are less likely to agree that the KDF's intervention in Somalia has been necessary despite the resulting terrorist activity (32%, as opposed to 68%) and that this involvement should continue (28% vs. 44%) (Figure 4).

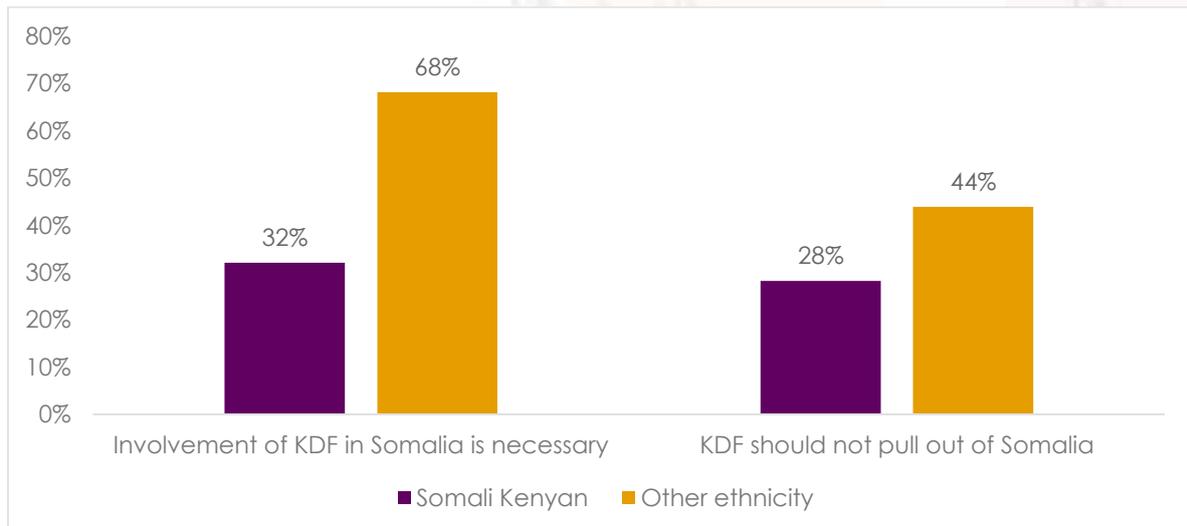
Disapproval of how the state is handling the fight against terrorism, in addition to the increased frequency and scale of attacks, has put pressure on the Kenyan government to step up its security efforts. It is important to be cognizant that aggressive security-led approaches could exacerbate underlying social tensions and community grievances that improve conditions for radicalization and recruitment by extremist organisations.

Figure 3: Evaluation of government performance in fighting terrorism | by ethnicity | Kenya | 2014



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Fighting terrorism in Kenya?

Figure 4: Support for security initiatives | by ethnicity | Kenya | 2014



Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say:

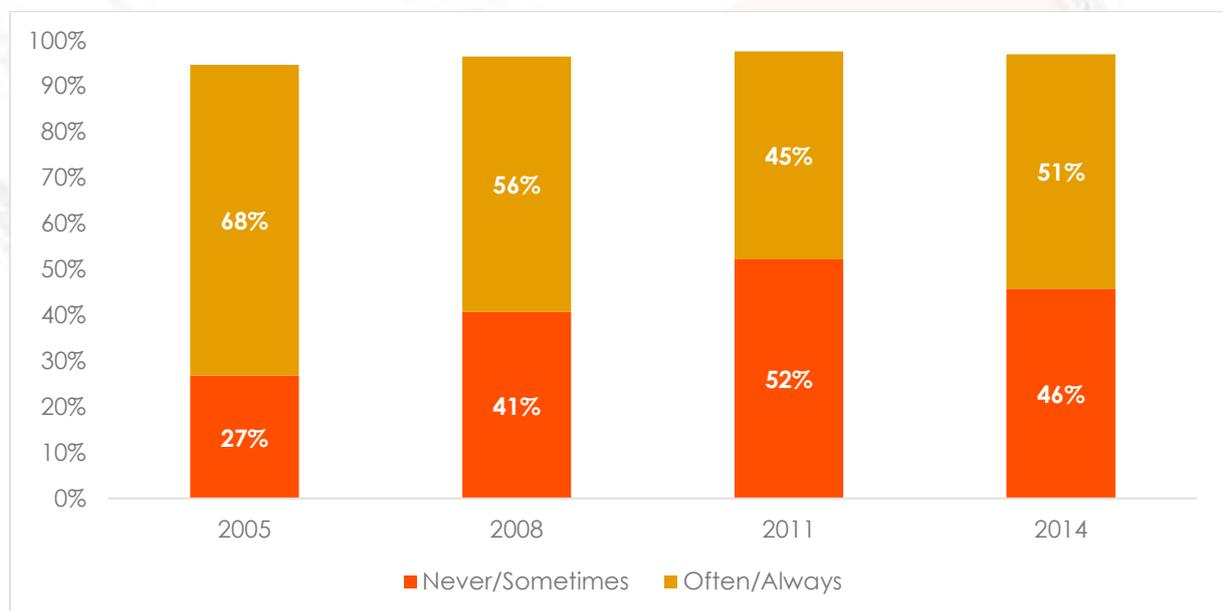
1. The involvement of Kenya Defence Forces, or KDF, in Somalia has been necessary despite the terrorist problems resulting from it? (% who say "strongly agree" or "agree")
2. The KDF should pull out of Somalia? (% who say "strongly disagree" or "disagree")

Somali Kenyans feel marginalised by the state

Amnesty International (2014) has reported that government counter-terrorist operations, such as Operation *Usalama Watch* (Security Watch), have unfairly targeted Somali Kenyans, serving as a pretext for blanket punishment and mass human rights violations, including arbitrary arrest, extortion, ill-treatment, forced relocations, and unlawful expulsion.

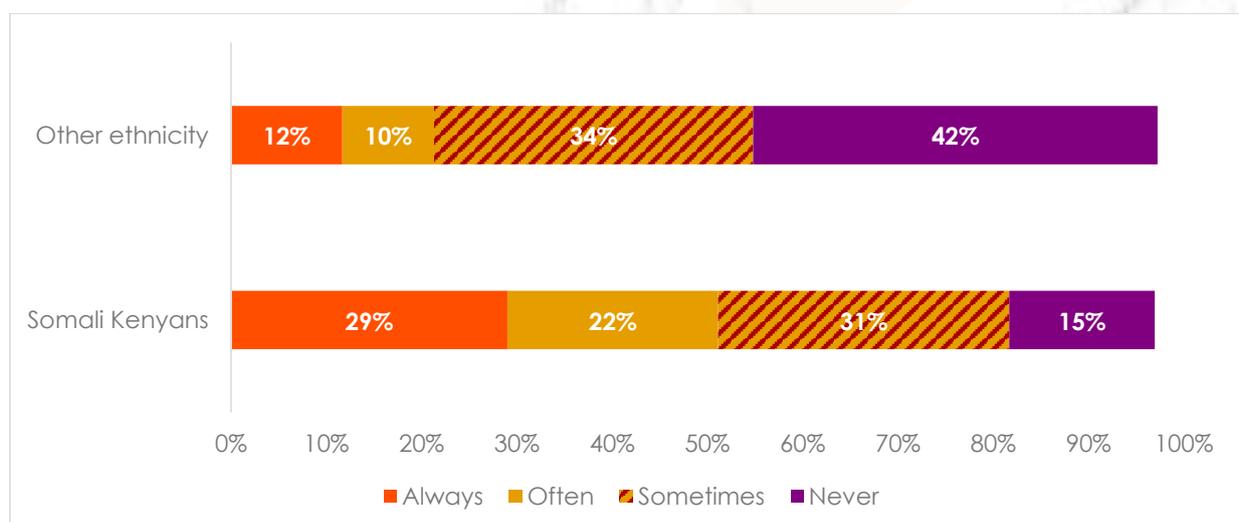
Afrobarometer survey findings going back to 2005 indicate that a considerable proportion of Somali Kenyans have consistently felt marginalised by the government. In 2005, almost seven in 10 Somali Kenyans (68%) said that their community was “often” or “always” treated unfairly by the government. This proportion steadily dropped to 45% by 2011 before rising again to 51% in 2014 (Figure 5). Somali Kenyans are more than twice as likely to feel this way as other ethnicities (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Somali Kenyans’ perceptions of unfair treatment | 2005-2014



Respondents were asked: How often, if ever, are _____ [members of the respondent's ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government?

Figure 6: Perceived government treatment of different ethnic groups | Kenya | 2014



Somali Kenyans are more intolerant than other ethnicities

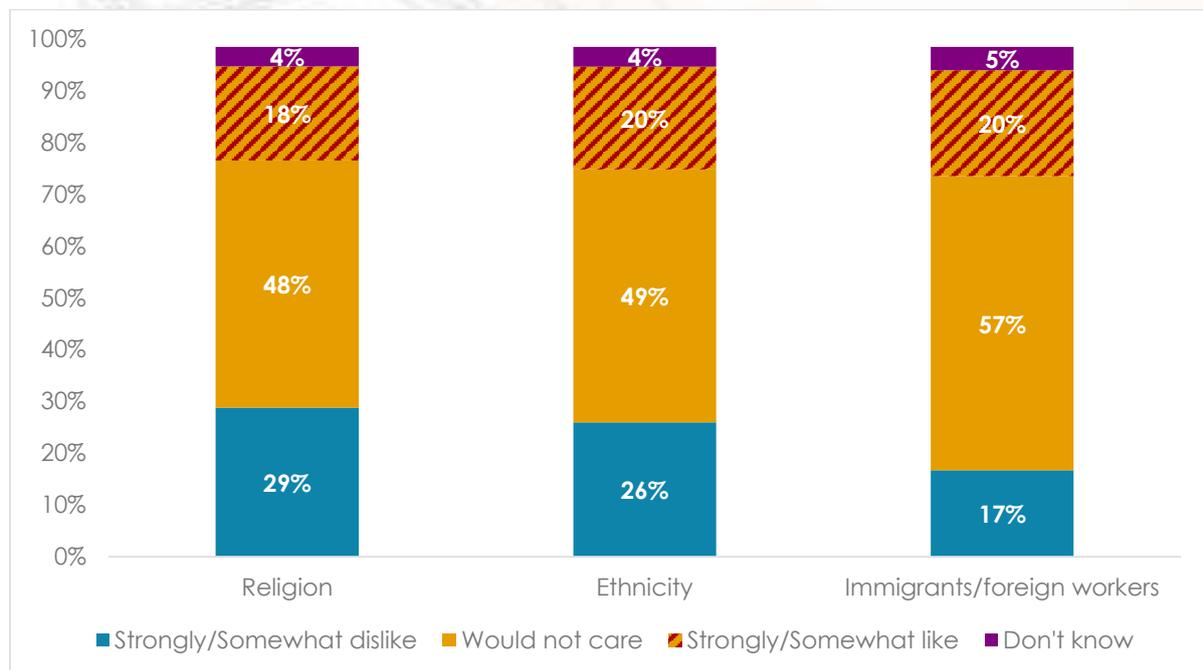
Somali Kenyans are concentrated in Kenya's northeastern counties, and there have been fluctuating levels of tension between the community and wider Kenyan society since the 1960s. This social fault line poses challenges to national cohesion and has the potential to incite civil unrest if left unaddressed (National Cohesion and Integration Commission, 2011). While radical and intolerant views may generally be held only by a minority of a given community, extremist organisations recruit from these peripheries, and it is the size and distribution of this minority that is most important to security risk analysis frameworks.

Among the 131 Somali Kenyan respondents in Afrobarometer's 2014 survey, 75% are aged 18-35 years, compared to 57% of Kenyans of other ethnicities, and 99% are Muslim, compared to 4% of Kenyans of other ethnicities.

A majority of Somali Kenyans express tolerance regarding people of other religions, ethnicities, and nationalities (Figure 7). Nonetheless, Somali Kenyans express far higher levels of intolerance than do other Kenyans: They are three to four times as likely as Kenyans of other ethnicities to say they would "strongly dislike" or "somewhat dislike" having a neighbour of a different ethnicity or religion.

Somali Kenyans are slightly more tolerant than other Kenyans of immigrants or foreign workers (Figure 8). This could be due to a large proportion of recent immigrants in Kenya being Somali nationals, who share a similar ethnic background and cultural experience with Somali Kenyans.

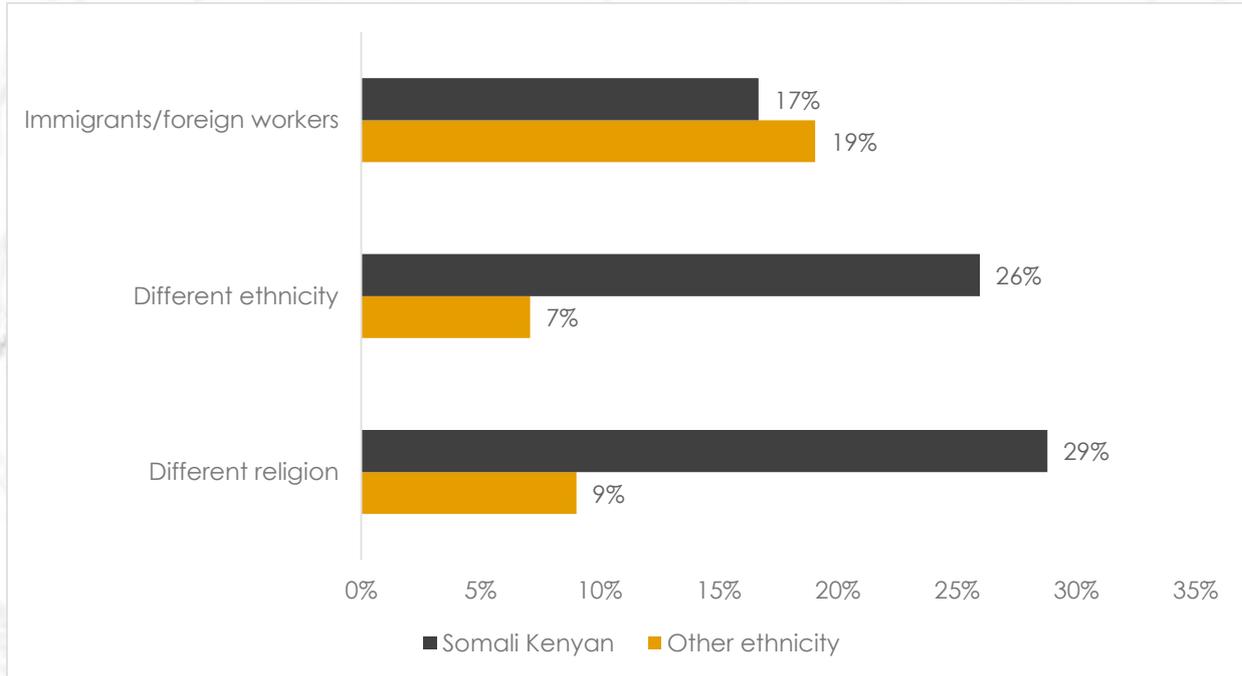
Figure 7: Social tolerance among Somali Kenyans | 2014



Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care:

1. People of a different religion?
2. People from other ethnic groups?
3. Immigrants or foreign workers?

Figure 8: Social intolerance | by ethnicity | Kenya | 2014



(% who say they would “dislike” or “strongly dislike” having such a person as a neighbour)

Trust and perceived corruption in the police and military

Kenya is plagued by high levels of corruption, ranking 145th of 175 on the 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index, which cites the police as the state’s most corrupt institution (Transparency International, 2014). Furthermore, allegations of arbitrary and unlawful killings of suspected criminals are common; human rights groups estimate the police to be responsible for at least 1,000 extrajudicial killings between 2008 and 2012 (U.S. Department of State, 2013). In 2013, the Kenyan government established the Independent Policing Oversight Authority to address endemic corruption within the Kenyan police. The authority’s first report (2013) contained witness reports of police misconduct in the forms of “unwarranted shooting, assault, bribery, threat of imprisonment, and falsification of evidence” (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

Similarly, Amnesty International describes the extortion of bribes as a common part of abuses of Somali Kenyans by the police and other security forces (Amnesty International, 2014).

A majority of Somali Kenyans (58%) say they trust the police “just a little” or “not at all” (Figure 9). Similarly, a majority (63%) say that “most” or “all” police officers are corrupt (Figure 10), in addition to 17% who say they “don’t know.” These assessments of the police are actually slightly less negative than those by Kenyans overall, who have consistently expressed low levels of trust and high perceptions of corruption in the police (Figure 11). In contrast, two-thirds of Kenyans trust the KDF, and 60% say that “none” or “some” KDF members are corrupt.

Figure 9: Trust in the police force | by ethnicity | Kenya | 2014

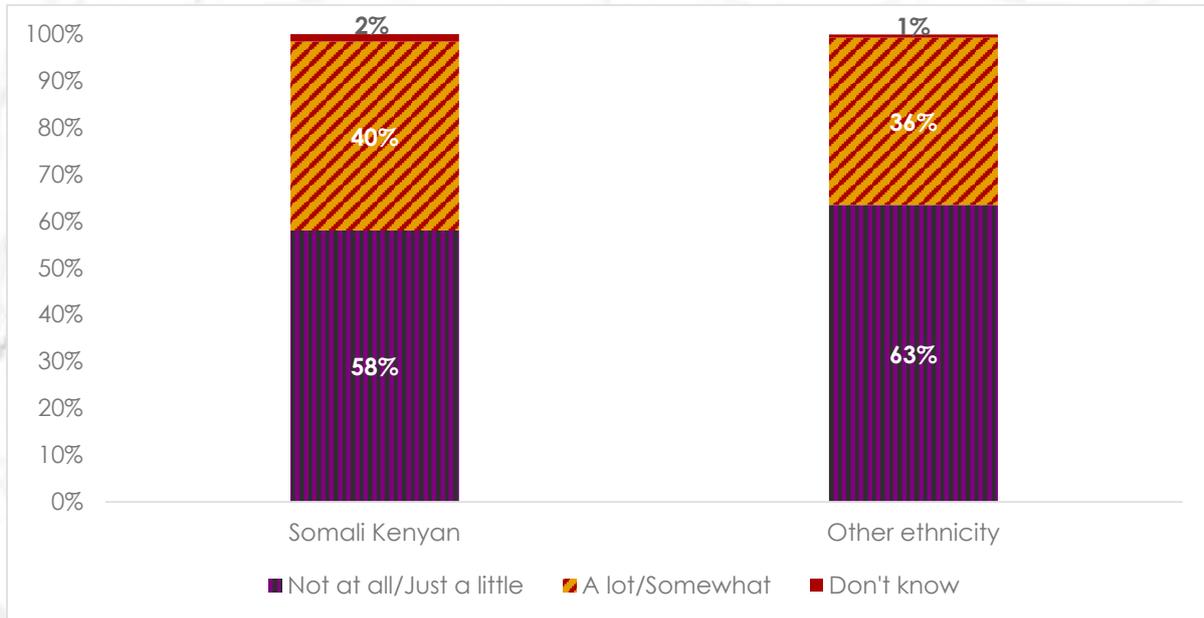


Figure 10: Perceived corruption in the police force | by ethnicity | Kenya | 2014

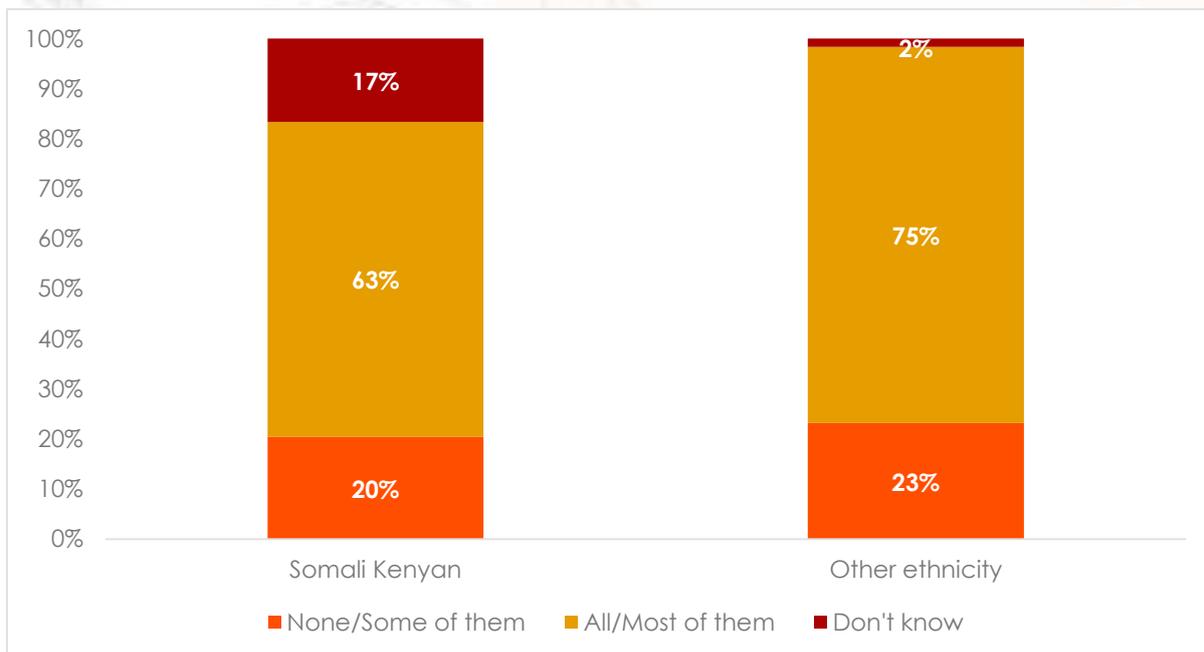
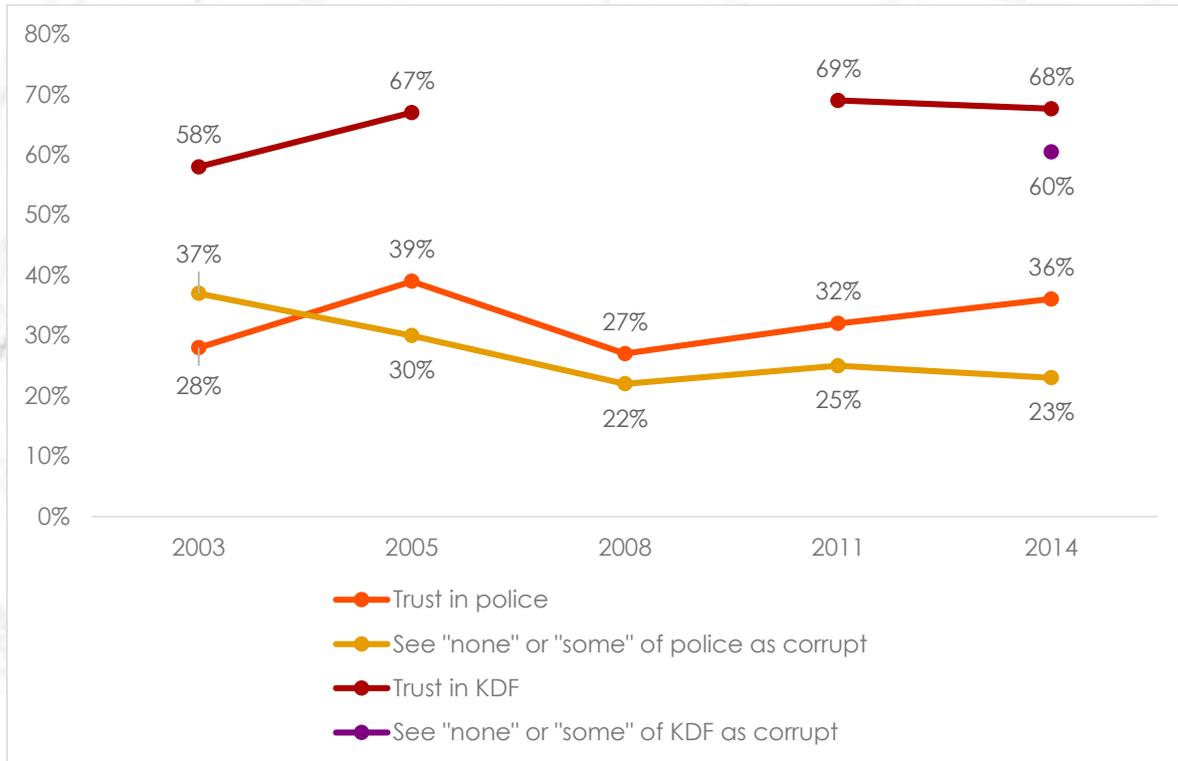


Figure 11: Confidence in police and KDF | Kenya | 2003-2014



Respondents were asked:

- How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say:
 - The police?
 - The Kenya Defence Forces (KDF)?
 (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")
- How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say:
 - The police?
 - The Kenya Defence Forces (KDF)?
 (% who said "none" or "some of them")

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