



Knowledge, evidence
and learning for
development

Conflict analysis of North Eastern Kenya

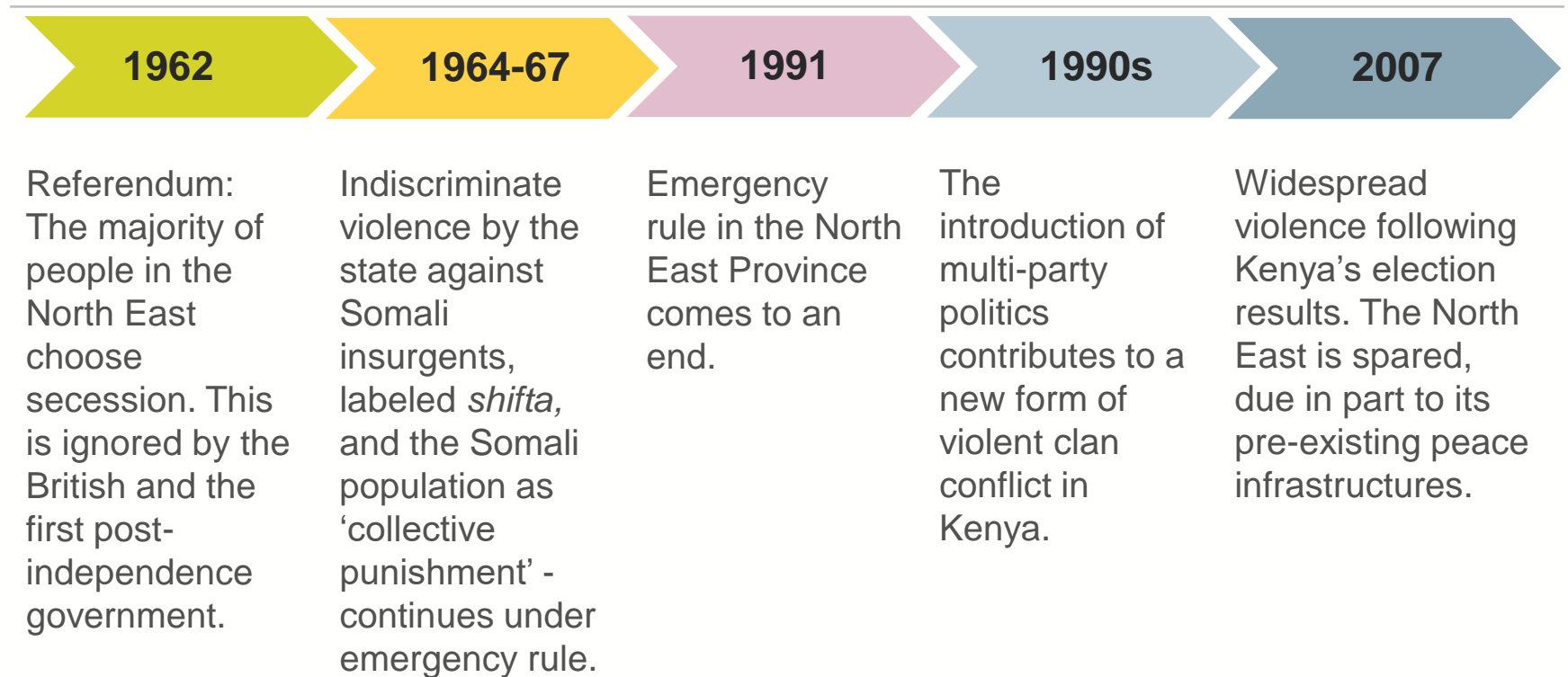
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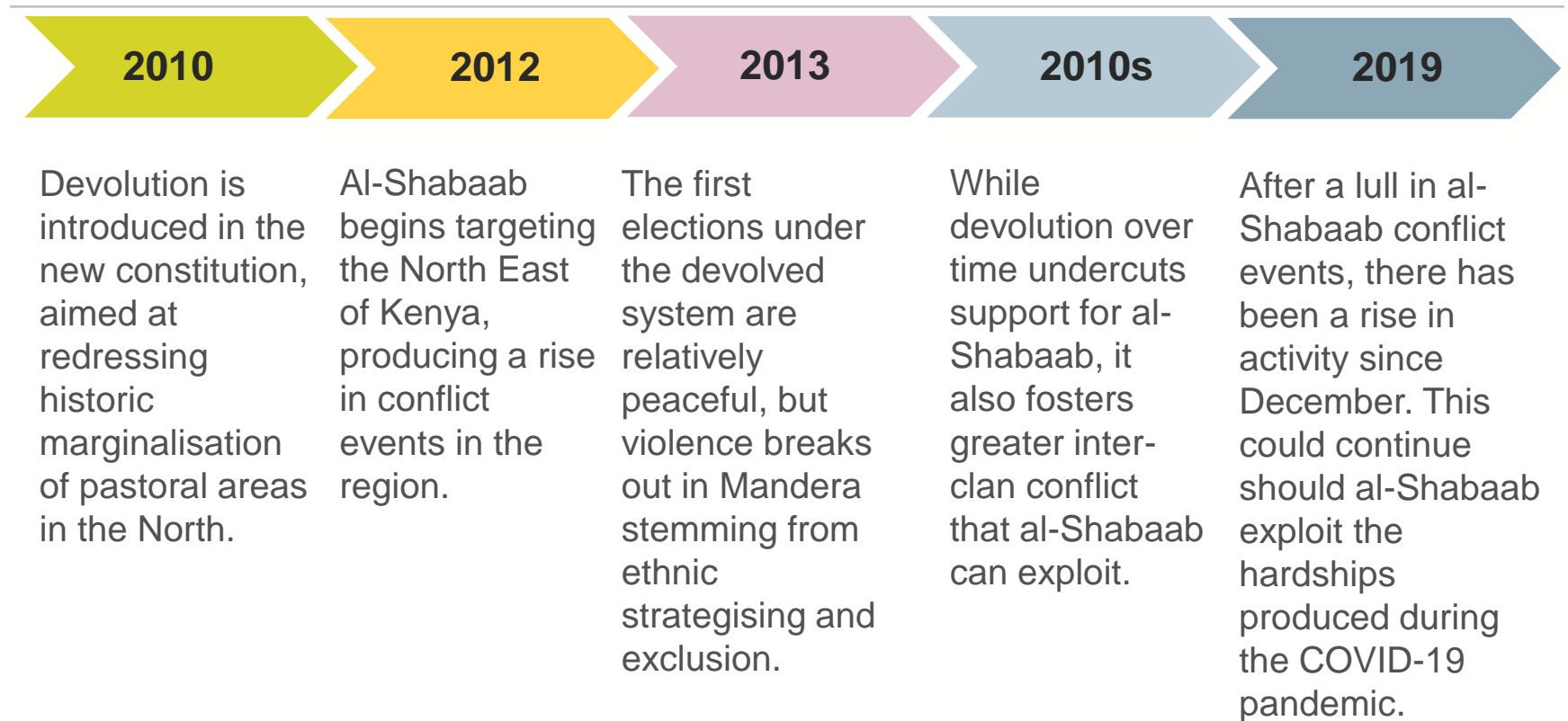
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Conflict history and events (1)



Threats to peace and security in North Eastern Kenya are closely linked to legacies of state violence and marginalisation.

Conflict history and events (2)



Threats to peace and security in recent years have been triggered by heightened inter-clan conflict and al-Shabaab.

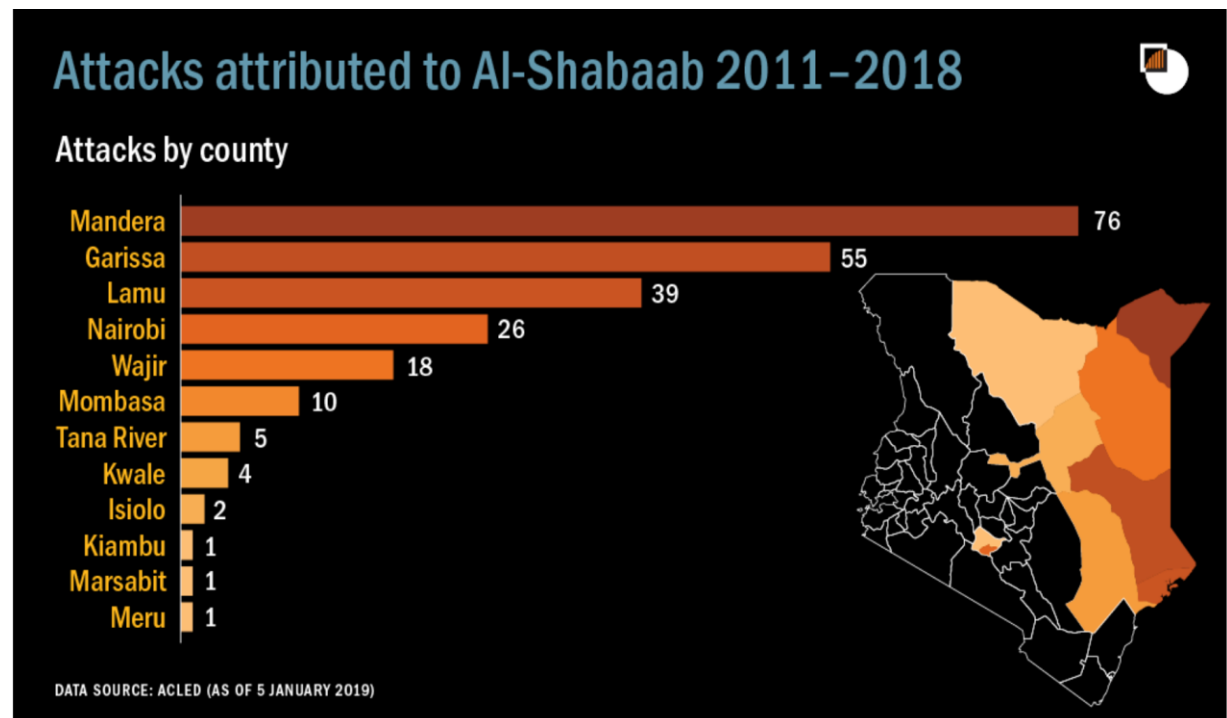
Key areas of conflict (1)

- **Ethno-political related violence:** Ethnic profiling and mobilisation of ethnic alliances during elections can fuel violent conflict (NCIC, 2018; Nolasco, 2017; Menkhaus, 2015). Devolution has increased competition and ‘winner-takes-all’ ethnic politics at the county level (ICG, 2018).
 - **Cross-border conflict:** The porosity of borders, illicit trade and spread of small arms, and cross-border clan groupings, produce complex conflict dynamics across countries and counties (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017; Nolasco, 2017; Wakube et al., 2017; Menkhaus, 2015).
 - **Radicalisation and violent extremism:** These operations entail a pattern of repeated violent attacks, inextricably linked with regional political problems, particularly in connection to Somalia (Nolasco, 2017).
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Radicalism and violent extremism

The North East of Kenya shares characteristics with other recruitment hotspots: a history of atrocities perpetrated by unaccountable security forces, along with official neglect and exclusion

(ICG, 2018).



Source: Abdille, 2019. © Crisis Group*.

Key areas of conflict (2)

- **Pastoralist-related, resource and land conflicts:** Depleting resources and access to land escalates inter-ethnic or inter-clan conflict over land, water and pasture (Nolasco, 2017; Mkutu et al., 2014).
- **Violence against women and girls (VAWG):** The North East has the highest prevalence of female genital mutilation or cutting (28 Too Many, 2018; Nolasco, 2017) and high levels of child marriage (OECD, 2019). Sexual offences are often addressed through the traditional *Maslaha* system, resulting in under-reporting (USDOS, 2019).

There is significant overlap and mutual dependence between the various kinds of conflict.

Conflict and resilience actors (1)

Government and security actors

- **Government officials:** County governments, with greater local knowledge, are well placed to address conflicts. County governors have, however, been accused of rewarding their ethnic constituencies, and marginalising minorities (Menkhaus, 2015; Mkutu et al., 2014).
 - **Military:** Indiscriminate state violence has eroded trust between the local population and security agencies. Kenyan Defence Forces have also been accused of corruption (Cannon & Pkalya, 2019; Mongare, 2019).
 - **Police:** The police have protected the political and economic elite at the expense of all citizens. Despite reforms to improve accountability, corruption remains entrenched (Nolasco, 2017). Efforts have been made to improve civilian-police trust.
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Conflict and resilience actors (2)

Kenyan Somalis, refugees and displaced persons

- **Kenyan Somalis:** The state has historically treated the Somali population, who live primarily in the North East, as outsiders (Lind, 2015). Kenyan Somalis hold various roles: marginalised citizens, high-ranking politicians, businesspeople and urbanised (lower) middle class Kenyans (Scharrer, 2018).
 - **Refugees and displaced persons:** From the early 1990s onwards, anti-refugee sentiments have been directed at the Somali population. They were collectively associated with insecurity and later terrorism and with taking commercial opportunities away from Kenyans (Scharrer, 2018; Lind et al., 2015).
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Conflict and resilience actors (3)

External actors and influences

- **Cross-border clans:** Ethnic Somali clan groupings exist on both sides of various borders. Loyalty to one's clan is manipulated at times by powerful individuals and groups to mobilise clans (or sub-clans) against the others. Clan conflict is related to wider cross-border factors, interests and spillovers (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017; Menkhaus, 2015).
 - **Al-Shabaab:** Al-Shabaab incursions from Somalia into Kenya are arguably the country's main threat from foreign enemies (Botha & Abdile, 2020; Lind et al., 2017).
 - **Al-Hijra:** This Kenyan fundamentalist group became the means for al-Shabaab to take the war to Kenya (Nolasco, 2017).
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Conflict and resilience actors (4)

Civil society actors

- **Women** have played crucial and successful roles as peacemakers, though at times have also incited clan conflict.
 - **Elders** retain influence and authority, including applying customary law in conflict resolution. They have also been key actors, however, in mobilising voters along ethnic and clan lines.
 - **Religious leaders** have played important roles in cross-border dialogue, often called upon by the state to help contain violence.
 - **Youth** marginalisation and mistreatment by security actors is a driver of radicalisation (Pact & Mercy Corps, 2018). Youth are also involved in peacebuilding.
 - **Businesspeople** have a vested interest in peace and stability, working across clan-lines. Business monopolies have also incited violence, however, and turned to al-Shabaab to protect their interests (Mohamed & Warfa, 2019; Menkhaus, 2015).
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County profiles: Garissa County

- 841,353 residents (2019 census).
- Ethnic Somalis: Ogaden clan.
- Largely rural.
- Garissa town is the biggest commercial centre in Northern Kenya.
- Semi-arid climate with higher rainfall than the rest of Northern Kenya
- The Abduwak sub-clan dominates political seats, county positions and economic resources (Rotich & Warfa, 2019).
- Political competition is a key source of clan hostilities (Rotich & Warfa, 2019).



Source: © 2018 [AlmostValDay1996](#).*

County profiles: Mandera County

- 867,457 residents (2019 census).
- Garre, Murulle and Degodia clans and 'corner tribes'.
- Largely rural and pastoral.
- Hot and arid climate.
- Poverty levels fall near the bottom of all counties.
- The Garre clan dominates politics. Its alliance with the Murule (2013-17) isolated the Degodias (Mohamed & Warfa, 2019).
- Local-level competition is influenced by political events in Somalia and Ethiopia (Chome, 2016).



Source: © 2018 [AlmostValDay1996](#).*

County profiles: Wajir County

- 781,263 residents (2019 census).
- Degodia (majority), Ogaden and Ajuraan clans.
- Largely rural and pastoral.
- Hot and arid climate.
- Degodia and Ogaden have ties with kin in Mandera and Garissa counties, and in Ethiopia and Somalia.
- While clan numerical majority is exploited to gain political and economic power, the County's political and civic leadership have shown commitment to manage conflict (Karienyé & Warfa, 2020; Menkhaus, 2015).



Source: © 2018 [AlmostValDay1996](#).*

Root causes of conflict

- Political and institutional factors
 - Elite power struggles, identity politics and political exclusion
 - Weak social contract
 - Regional inequality, exclusion and marginalisation
 - Resource and environmental factors
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Elite power struggles, identity politics and political exclusion

- The behaviour of political elites is deeply tied to identity politics and clientelism: state resources, jobs and contracts are allocated on an ethnic basis (Nolasco, 2017; Cox et al., 2014).
 - Communities previously marginalised at the national level are now powerful majorities in their local counties under devolution (D'Arcy & Nistotskaya, 2019).
 - Minority clans within counties are at a political, economic and socio-cultural disadvantage relative to the big clans (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017).
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Weak social contract








- North Eastern Kenya and its populations have historically been relegated to the periphery of the nation (Scharrer, 2018; Kochore, 2016).
 - State-society relations are undermined by the absence of the state from people's daily lives, evident in absent or poor basic public services, including security (Lind, 2018; International Alert, 2016).
 - The state has not only neglected and marginalised the region, it has also committed atrocities – including two massacres in Garissa (1980) and Wajir (1984) districts.
 - A violent nationwide 'screening' of all ethnic Somalis residing in Kenya during 1989-1990 demonstrated the fragility of citizenship and belonging for Kenyan Somalis.
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Regional inequality, exclusion and marginalisation (1)

Threats to peace and security in the North East are strongly linked to entrenched forms of marginalisation and inequality.

- Poverty levels are 66% (Garissa), 63% (Wajir) and 78% (Mandera), compared to 36% nationwide.
 - The three counties are among the seven poorest of Kenya's 47 counties (Abdille, 2019).
 - *Shifita* counter-insurgency measures taken by the state, which resulted in livestock losses and impoverishment, continue to affect pastoralist groups today (Scharrer, 2018; Whittaker, 2012).
 - The region lags behind the rest of the country in a range of education, health, and infrastructure indicators.
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Regional inequality, exclusion and marginalisation (2)

NEDI Counties Development Indicators		NEDI	National
	Average Poverty Rate	68%	36%
	Primary School Attendance	55%	82%
	Secondary School Attendance	19%	37%
	Skilled Births	34%	71%
	Literacy Among Women	41%	89%
	Access to Safe Water	57%	72%
	Improved Sanitation	34%	59%

Source: World Bank, 2018. © The World Bank Group.*

Note: NEDI = North and Northeastern Development Initiative (NEDI)

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Resource and environmental factors

- More resources were historically allocated by the state to high-rainfall areas, with the view that such areas would give better returns to investments than arid or semi-arid lands in the North East (Njoka et al., 2016).
 - Pastoral conflicts have become more frequent and unpredictable, exacerbated by scarce resources (water, arable land and pasture), and have increasingly involved small arms (Njoka et al., 2016; Witsenburg & Adano, 2009).
 - The weaker socio-economic situation in the arid or semi-arid lands means that climate shocks and stresses, especially drought, often have greater consequences, such as acute food shortages (Njoka et al., 2016).
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Conflict dynamics

- Cross-border conflict dynamics
 - Devolution dynamics
 - Hate speech
 - Security issues
 - Radicalisation and violent extremism
-

Cross-border conflict dynamics

- Poor security and porous borders in the North East have contributed to the infiltration of al-Shabaab and the proliferation of small arms, which have led to more violent pastoral conflict (Nolasco, 2017).
 - Cross-border clan groupings and identities play a significant role in conflict dynamics and conflict spillover (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017; Nolasco, 2017).
 - There is inadequate coordination between Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia on issues of peace, security, trade, and the movement of people across the borders (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017).
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Devolution dynamics

The benefits of devolution have come with unintended negative consequences.

- Devolution aims to bring the government closer to the people and to address historical marginalisation.
 - It provides a counter to the centre, greater political power to Kenyan Somalis, and larger resource allocations to marginalised areas (Cannon & Ali, 2018).
 - It has also had the effect of intensifying inter-clan competition for political and economic power.
 - The ethnicisation of politics at county levels can undermine the accommodation of different groups (Lind, 2018; Carrier & Kochore, 2014).
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Hate speech

- Incitement by politicians, local elites and mainstream and community media is a key feature in the majority of prior violent conflicts in Kenya (Nolasco, 2017).
 - There are specific reports of politicians inciting clans in Mandera County during election time, with abusive and derogatory statements about rival clans (Mohamed & Warfa, 2019).
 - Despite progress in countering hate speech (e.g. monitoring social media, court cases), politics in Kenya remains divided along ethnic lines (Nolasco, 2017).
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Security issues

Communities in the North East have low levels of trust in security institutions.

- Low trust is due to inadequate service delivery, alleged police corruption and a history of heavy-handed security operations directed against them (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017; International Alert, 2016).
- Blanket suspicion of local communities by security agencies undermines willingness of residents to provide information (Botha & Abdile, 2020; NCIC & Interpeace, 2017).
- Alleged corruption among border police is considered an ‘enabler’ for extremism – allowing terror suspects and illegal goods to enter the country (Mongare, 2019).
- Small arms availability have rendered communal conflict, such as cattle raiding, increasingly violent (NCIC & Interpeace, 2017; Nolasco, 2017; Mukutu et al., 2014).

Radicalisation and violent extremism

- While al-Shabaab remains focused on enforcing its variant of Islamic law in Somalia, it has exploited local grievances and regional cleavages in North East Kenya to gain support (ICG, 2018; Lind et al., 2017).
 - Recent research indicates that al-Shabaab exploits clan disputes in Kenya to foster insecurity and advance their operations (Mohamed & Warfa, 2019; Sahgal et al., 2019; ICG, 2018).
 - Lack of opportunities for youth and poor youth-police relations can render youth susceptible to extremist recruitment (Anderson and McKnight, 2015; Mkutu et al., 2014).
 - Attacks have prompted an exodus of civil servants from the North East, with dire effects on services (Abdille, 2019; ICG, 2015; HFTT, 2015).
 - The securitisation of the government's response to violent extremism has been counter-productive.
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Sources of resilience

- Devolution, constitutional reform and local government
 - Citizenship, social cohesion and social contract
 - Strengthened security arrangements
 - Transitional justice
 - Peace committees
 - Traditional elders and Council of Elders
 - Religious leaders and inter-faith dialogue
 - Media
 - Business
-

Devolution, constitutional reform and local government

Devolution remains one of the most promising ways in which to prevent conflict in the North East, despite negative unintended consequences (Lind, 2015).

- The role of ethnic Somalis in politics has gained importance (Kirui, 2019; Carrier & Kochore, 2014).
 - County-level administrations responsible for spending government funds have extended state-building processes into previously marginalised areas (Mosley & Watson, 2016).
 - Devolved government structures require adequate skills and capacities, effective links to national government, and proper oversight (Chome, 2016).
 - Ethnic and inter-clan tensions and marginalisation of minority clans need to be addressed (Lind, 2018; NCIC & Interpeace, 2017).
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Citizenship, social cohesion and social contract

- Kenya Vision 2030 gives a prominent role to infrastructure that connects periphery areas to the centre, addressing historic underdevelopment of infrastructure in these areas (Kochore, 2016).
 - Monitoring of hate speech and peace messaging helped reduce electoral violence in 2013, but there are concerns that fear of conflict elevates stability over democracy (Lynch et al., 2019).
 - New narratives of collaboration and shared public spaces can lessen inter-clan conflict and foster unity.
 - Guaranteeing equal citizenship rights for all Kenyans can also improve state-society relations and lessen community tensions (Scharrer, 2018; Lind, 2017; International Alert, 2016).
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Strengthened security arrangements (1)

- Operations led by local, ethnic Somali security officials in the North East has built trust in security services and improved information gathering as residents consider locally rooted offices more responsive to their needs (ICG, 2018; Mkutu et al., 2014).
 - Trust-building between youth and security officers (e.g. soccer matches) could help to counter youth susceptibility to extremism (Pact & Mercy Corps, 2018).
 - Trust-building between women and girls and the police (e.g. school visits and clubs) is also necessary to raise awareness of rights and on reporting VAWG (Beston, 2018).
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Strengthened security arrangements (2)

- Community policing and neighbourhood watch (e.g. Nyumba Kumi – *ten houses*) can improve trust between communities and the police.
 - Communities become a key part of front-line strategies to prevent violence in their own communities.
 - They can provide early warning for crime and extremist recruitment (Nolasco, 2017).
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Transitional justice

- Investigation of the Wagalla massacre, and the wider impact of the *shifita* war, were key components in the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission of Kenya (TJRC) report.
 - Lack of acknowledgement by state actors of past atrocities against the Somali population undermines the important findings of state culpability (Anderson, 2014).
 - Progress toward implementing the TJRC report and acknowledgment by elites would help to address historical injustices (Kirui, 2019; Nolasco, 2017).
 - Civil society actors have made efforts to achieve some form of acknowledgement, such as through a public monument to the victims of the Wagalla massacre (Anderson, 2014).
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Peace committees (PCs)

The marked decline in violence in Northern Kenya from the late 1990s is attributed in large part to the formation of PCs (Menkhaus, 2008).

- The **Wajir District Peace and Development Committee**, formed in 1995, as well as other District Peace Committees, are vastly inclusive, giving marginalised social groups (e.g. elders, women, and youth) a central place in civic-government collaboration (Nolasco, 2017; Menkhaus, 2008).
- PCs can produce beneficial spill-over effects, in which one successful PC is emulated elsewhere (Nolasco, 2017).
- Critiques and challenges include inadequate participation of women and inability to address root causes (Wise et al., 2019).
- PCs have been weakened by underfunding and neglect by county leaders under devolution (Karienyé & Warfa, 2020; ICG, 2015).

Traditional elders and Council of Elders (CoEs)

- Traditional elders and CoEs have played an effective role in enforcing peace initiatives and agreements and managing conflict in Northern Kenya (Nyamweru & Chidongo, 2018; Nolasco, 2017).
 - There are few CoEs that transcend ethnicity, however, and elders and CoEs have engaged in clan politics, eroding their own influence (Nyamweru & Chidongo, 2018; Carrier & Kochore, 2014).
 - CoEs have also rarely supported a female candidate for any national position (Nyabola, 2016).
 - Although the resolution of disputes through traditional systems can offer quick justice and prevent retaliation, they can fail to address gender-based violence adequately (USDOS, 2019).
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Religious leaders and inter-faith dialogue

- Customary and religious leaders continue to influence attitudes and behaviours of pastoral communities (Pact & Mercy Corps, 2018).
 - Local religious leaders have successfully mediated conflict, leading to the development of permanent peace dialogue mechanisms involved in addressing cross-border conflict, violent extremism and VAWG.
 - Strategies to counter violent extremism include engaging with Christian and Muslim religious leaders to address divisive narratives (International Alert, 2016).
 - Inter-faith dialogue should take place not only among religious leaders and their partners, but also at the community level and in the educational system (Wesonga, 2017).
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Media

- Kenya's vibrant and dynamic media can contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes (Maweu, 2019).
 - Community radio facilitates dialogue, the portrayal of peaceful alternatives, and trust-building among different communities (Maweu, 2019).
 - Wajir community radio is a trusted source of climate information and a platform to voice grievances (Mercy Corps, 2019; Sladkova, 2019).
 - Community-based media may suffer from lack of funding (Maweu, 2019).
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Business

- Cross-border trade has produced a network of business elites whose partnerships span national and ethnic boundaries (Menkhaus, 2015).
 - Communities on both sides of the Mandera County-Somalia border use one another's services, including livestock markets and airstrips (Mohamed & Warfa, 2019).
 - Such interdependence has helped to prevent or resolve conflicts that could adversely affect mutual interests.
 - The business success of Kenyan Somalis can also transform perceptions of them (Varming, 2020).
 - Businesspeople have, however, also incited violence and relied on extremist actors to protect their interests (Mohamed & Warfa, 2019; Menkhaus, 2015).
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