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**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNTER-
INSURGENCY AGAINST AL-SHABAAB IN SOMALIA, 2006–2024**

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Community Engagement and The Effectiveness of Counter-Insurgency Against Al-Shabaab in Somalia, 2006–2024

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Abstract:

Purpose of the Study: This study evaluated the influence of community engagement on the effectiveness of counter-insurgency against Al-Shabaab in Somalia between 2006 and 2024. Specifically, it examined the contribution of community policing, local leadership participation, civic education, and youth engagement in peacebuilding to improving security outcomes and reducing insurgent influence.

Methodology: The study employed a mixed-methods design integrating descriptive and correlational approaches. Data were collected from 207 respondents across Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidoa, Beledweyne, and Dhusamareeb using questionnaires and key informant interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson

correlation, and multiple regression, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis.

Findings: The findings established that all four dimensions of community engagement positively and significantly influenced counter-insurgency effectiveness. The regression model explained 73.2 percent of the variation in counter-insurgency outcomes ($R^2 = .732$, $p < .001$). Local leadership participation emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .347$), followed by community policing ($\beta = .289$), civic education ($\beta = .276$), and youth engagement ($\beta = .213$). The study further found that community trust, intelligence sharing, civic awareness, and youth participation strengthened resilience against extremist influence and enhanced cooperation between citizens and security agencies in affected communities.

Conclusion: The study concludes that military operations alone cannot achieve sustainable success against Al-Shabaab. Effective counter-insurgency in Somalia requires an integrated community-based approach anchored on accountable local leadership, trust-based community policing, civic education, and meaningful youth participation to strengthen security, resilience, and long-term peace and stability.

Keywords: Counter-insurgency; community engagement; Al-Shabaab; Somalia; local leadership; community policing; peacebuilding.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The nature of contemporary security threats has shifted from conventional warfare to insurgencies that exploit weak state institutions and social grievances. As a result, effective counter-insurgency extends beyond military operations to include meaningful engagement with local communities. Scholars such as Ozaltin (2024) and Roshid et al. (2025) argue that sustainable security requires addressing the political, economic, and social conditions that encourage insurgent recruitment. Similarly, Miron (2022) emphasize that military action alone cannot defeat insurgencies without civilian participation. Salihu (2021) further identifies the local population as the decisive factor in counter-insurgency, making community engagement an essential component of long-term peace and stability.

International experiences demonstrate the value of community-based counter-insurgency strategies. In Europe, community policing reforms implemented after Northern Ireland's "Troubles" contributed to a significant reduction in politically motivated violence, while Spain's community dialogue and reintegration initiatives encouraged members of the Basque separatist group ETA to abandon violence (European Commission, 2022). In the Americas, Colombia's Territorial Consolidation Program strengthened community participation and was associated with substantial declines in violence linked to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (Pilar & Torres, 2024). Similarly, India's Civic Action Program and Integrated Action Plan combined community policing with development initiatives, leading to reduced insurgent activities in affected regions (Singh & Sharma, 2020). According to Beath et al. (2011), these experiences demonstrate that active community participation enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of counter-insurgency efforts.

Across Africa, community engagement has also played an important role, although outcomes have varied. Nigeria's Civilian Joint Task Force significantly strengthened local resistance against Boko Haram through community participation (Agbibo, 2020). In Mali, community peace committees helped reduce violent incidents in several villages, although their effectiveness was constrained by weak state institutions and continuing communal conflicts (Baalén, 2024). Conversely, Mozambique's efforts in Cabo Delgado achieved limited success because inconsistent implementation and persistent socio-economic challenges weakened community participation (Feijo & Orre, 2024). These experiences suggest that successful community engagement depends on public trust, local legitimacy, and sustained government support.

Within the Horn of Africa, Kenya has adopted community-centred security initiatives such as Nyumba Kumi and community policing to strengthen collaboration between citizens and security agencies (Owino & Moi, 2024). These programs contributed to a decline in terror-related incidents in counties bordering Somalia, including Mandera, Garissa, and Wajir (Onyari et al., 2024). However, excessive use of force during security operations sometimes weakened community trust and reinforced perceptions of exclusion, limiting the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Somalia presents a particularly important case because of its prolonged conflict following the collapse of the central government in 1991. Since emerging in the mid-2000s, Al-Shabaab has remained resilient by exploiting weak governance and clan divisions while establishing alternative



governance structures in areas under its control (Yigzaw & Tegegne, 2025). In response, Somalia has promoted community engagement through clan elders, religious leaders, youth groups, and international partners. Programs such as the Baidoa Local Reconciliation Process and rehabilitation centres have supported dialogue and the reintegration of former combatants (Zeuthen, 2023). Nevertheless, Gelot and Khadka (2024) argue that successful reintegration largely depends on community and clan acceptance. Despite these efforts, limited research has examined how community engagement strategies have evolved, been implemented, and influenced counter-insurgency outcomes in Somalia over time. This study therefore investigates the evolution, implementation, and effectiveness of community engagement strategies in Somalia's counter-insurgency campaign against Al-Shabaab between 2006 and 2024 to inform more effective and locally responsive security approaches.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Effective counter-insurgency is expected to integrate military operations with community engagement to strengthen public trust, improve intelligence sharing, encourage local participation, and reduce insurgent influence. In fragile states such as Somalia, strategies including community policing, civic education, local leadership participation, and youth involvement are expected to enhance cooperation between citizens and security agencies while supporting long-term peace and stability (Abdi et al., 2026). However, despite these expectations, Al-Shabaab has remained a resilient insurgent group since 2006, continuing to challenge state authority despite sustained military operations by the Federal Government of Somalia and the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). The group continues to exploit weak governance, socio-economic grievances, and clan divisions while generating substantial financial resources and conducting deadly attacks, including the October 2022 Mogadishu bombings.

The continued resilience of Al-Shabaab suggests that military operations alone have not achieved sustainable counter-insurgency outcomes. Limited community participation, weak trust in state institutions, fear of reprisals, and inadequate collaboration between communities and security agencies continue to undermine intelligence sharing and local security initiatives (Alehegn et al., 2025). Although previous studies have examined Al-Shabaab's financing, recruitment, and military responses, limited empirical evidence exists on how community policing, civic education, local leadership participation, and youth involvement influence counter-insurgency outcomes in Somalia (Prah, 2023). This study therefore addresses this gap by examining the influence of community engagement strategies on counter-insurgency against Al-Shabaab in Somalia between 2006 and 2024.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective was to evaluate the influence of community engagement on counter-insurgency against Al-Shabaab in Somalia, 2006–2024.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To assess the influence of community policing initiatives on counter-insurgency outcomes against Al-Shabaab in Somalia, 2006–2024.



- ii. To examine the influence of local leadership participation on counter-insurgency outcomes against Al-Shabaab in Somalia, 2006–2024.
- iii. To evaluate the influence of civic education on counter-insurgency outcomes against Al-Shabaab in Somalia, 2006–2024.
- iv. To analyze the influence of youth engagement in peacebuilding activities on counter-insurgency outcomes against Al-Shabaab in Somalia, 2006–2024.

2. LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Non-military approaches have become central to counter-insurgency thinking, reflecting a shift from purely kinetic responses toward strategies that draw on civilian participation and legitimacy. Evidence from the United States, Southeast Asia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Kenya, and Mozambique converges on a consistent finding: structured platforms for civilian participation improve trust between communities and security actors, and produce measurable results were paired with tangible economic or rehabilitative incentives rather than dialogue alone (Shukla et al., 2023). Somali-specific studies largely mirror this pattern, reporting that leadership engagement, awareness campaigns, and youth economic programs reduce recruitment vulnerability, but remain largely descriptive and cross-sectional, with none tracing programs beyond their initial implementation phase or examining urban-rural and gendered differences in outcomes.

On community policing specifically, a substantial body of Kenyan and regional research spanning Kwale, Nakuru North, Njoro, and West Pokot consistently finds that community policing improves information-sharing and trust but is undermined by inadequate training, weak resource allocation, and inconsistent implementation – a pattern this study’s Somali evidence closely mirrors (Njiri et al., 2024). Within Somalia, grassroots resilience is well documented, from informal dispute-resolution around Mogadishu’s Bakhara Market to the Macawisley movement’s success in reclaiming territory from Al-Shabaab in Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle, yet across this evidence, informal policing structures remain poorly integrated into the national security architecture, so local gains are neither institutionalized nor easily replicated.

On leadership, cross-border comparison between Lamu, Kenya, and Baadadhe, Somalia finds that neighborhood watch groups and religious collaboration reduce terrorist threats in both settings, indicating that leadership legitimacy, rather than state strength, is the operative variable. Within Somalia, research on Banadir-based leadership styles and on the Macawisley’s territorial effectiveness suggests that leadership participation and community policing are empirically entangled rather than separable phenomena, though the literature offers little guidance on which leadership style performs best under which local conditions (Samatar, 2020).

The civic education literature is comparatively thin on Al-Shabaab-specific evidence but converges, across university and rural-learning settings alike, on a central finding: structured educational and civic engagement measurably reduces youth support for armed groups, particularly where messaging is localized rather than generic. The youth literature is unusually consistent in identifying poverty, limited education, marginalization, and weak governance as drivers of vulnerability to recruitment across Kenya and Somalia, while reintegration research shows that returnee reintegration often fails not from lack of programming but from community-level suspicion, indicating that youth engagement cannot be treated as a standalone intervention separate from the trust-building addressed by leadership and community policing.



Across these five themes, three cross-cutting weaknesses recur in the literature: components are studied in isolation despite evident interdependence, most studies are cross-sectional rather than longitudinal, and urban-rural and gender-differentiated effects are repeatedly flagged as important but rarely tested. This study addresses these gaps by examining the four dimensions as an integrated system across the full 2006–2024 period.

The study is anchored in two complementary theories. Hearts and Minds Theory treats insurgency as fundamentally a political contest for civilian support rather than a purely military one; insurgent groups persist by exploiting governance deficits to build legitimacy, and Al-Shabaab's durability reflects its capacity to position itself as an alternative provider of order where the state has failed to deliver services or security. This theory grounds the study's expectations for community policing and civic education. Social Capital Theory examines how trust, networks, and shared norms – distinguished as bonding capital within groups such as clans, bridging capital across groups, and linking capital between communities and formal institutions – enable collective action, and grounds the study's expectations for local leadership and youth engagement (Schweers, 2021). Applied jointly, the two theories address the limitation each carries alone: Hearts and Minds Theory explains the legitimacy that formal counter-insurgency actors must earn, while Social Capital Theory explains how informal community structures generate the trust that sustains that legitimacy where state capacity is thin.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods design combining descriptive and correlational approaches, integrating structured questionnaires with semi-structured key informant interviews and focus group discussions to allow triangulation of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Fieldwork was conducted in Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidoa, Beledweyne, and Dhusamareeb sites selected for their sustained exposure to Al-Shabaab activity and the presence of community-based counter-insurgency initiatives, spanning urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts.

The target population of 523 comprised community policing personnel, local leaders, security personnel, civic education facilitators, youth organization representatives, government officials, and community members from affected areas. Using Yamane's formula at a 95 percent confidence level and 5 percent margin of error, a sample of 227 respondents was drawn through a multi-stage procedure combining purposive site selection, stratified sampling across stakeholder categories, and systematic random sampling of community members. Data collection used a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire with dedicated sections for each of the four independent variables and for counter-insurgency effectiveness, complemented by interview guides for key informants. Where insecurity restricted physical access, secure virtual platforms and trained local research assistants were used, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality given the sensitivity of counter-insurgency research. Quantitative data were analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression; qualitative interview data were analyzed thematically to explain and enrich the statistical findings. Ethical clearance was obtained from relevant Kenyan and Somali authorities, and conflict-sensitivity protocols, including secure meeting locations and strict political neutrality, were maintained throughout.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate and Respondent Profile

Of the 227 targeted respondents, 207 completed the study instruments, an overall response rate of 91.2 percent, exceeding conventional thresholds for social science research and strengthening confidence that the findings are not distorted by non-response bias.

Table 1: Response Rate of the Study

Category	Target Population	Responses Received	Response Rate (%)
Community Members	100	92	92.0
Local Leaders	40	36	90.0
Security Officers/Police	35	32	91.4
Youth Representatives	30	27	90.0
Civil Society/NGOs	22	20	90.9
Total	227	207	91.2

Source: Field Survey Data (2025)

The respondent profile skewed toward young and middle-aged adults, consistent with Somalia's demographic structure: 37.7 percent were aged 26–35 and 27.1 percent were aged 36–45. Respondents were 64.7 percent male and 35.3 percent female, reflecting the continued dominance of men in Somalia's formal security and leadership institutions, though the female share was sufficient to capture meaningful perspectives on mobilization and peacebuilding. Educational attainment was relatively high, with 67.6 percent of respondents holding tertiary qualifications, and 32.9 percent reported four to six years of direct experience in counter-insurgency or community engagement work, a period corresponding with the post-2017 expansion of community-based programming in Somalia.

4.2 Community Policing Initiatives

Respondents consistently endorsed community policing as a driver of counter-insurgency effectiveness, with item means ranging from 3.70 to 3.97 on the five-point scale (Table 2).

Table 2: Community Policing Initiatives

Statement	SD f(%)	D f(%)	N f(%)	A f(%)	SA f(%)	Mean	SD
Increasing community trust in police has significantly improved intelligence gathering for counter-insurgency against Al-Shabaab.	3.9%	5.8%	11.1%	49.3%	30.0%	3.96	1.02



Local police response time to Al-Shabaab threats has noticeably improved since the introduction of community policing strategies.	4.8%	8.7%	15.0%	45.9%	25.6%	3.78	1.11
The frequency of community patrol programs has contributed to deterring Al-Shabaab activities in my area.	3.4%	7.2%	13.5%	47.3%	28.5%	3.90	1.05
There is strong collaboration between local authorities and communities, especially in reporting suspicious activities.	2.9%	6.3%	12.1%	50.7%	28.0%	3.95	0.99
Police regularly organize community meetings to strengthen trust and collaboration on counter-insurgency efforts.	5.8%	10.6%	16.4%	42.0%	25.1%	3.70	1.15
Rapid police response to reported threats reduces the success rate of Al-Shabaab operations.	4.3%	7.7%	13.0%	44.9%	30.0%	3.88	1.08
Regular community patrols supported by police reassure locals and reduce fear of Al-Shabaab infiltration.	3.9%	6.8%	14.5%	46.9%	28.0%	3.88	1.04
Joint efforts between community leaders and police forces have increased the success of anti-Al-Shabaab operations.	3.4%	5.3%	12.6%	48.8%	30.0%	3.97	0.99

Source: Field Survey Data (2025)

The strongest endorsement went to joint efforts between community leaders and police forces increasing the success of anti-Al-Shabaab operations ($M = 3.97$), followed closely by improved intelligence gathering through community trust ($M = 3.96$) and stronger collaboration in reporting suspicious activity ($M = 3.95$). A senior police commander in Mogadishu captured the operational logic directly, observing that operations become far more effective when clan elders and community leaders provide intelligence and mobilize local support, and that without them security forces are effectively operating blind in unfamiliar terrain. A community elder in Baidoa described the practical shift this represents: direct phone contact with local police commanders now allows immediate reporting of suspicious movements, a level of cooperation that would have been unthinkable five years earlier when communities feared police almost as much as Al-Shabaab.

The lowest-rated item concerned the regularity of police-organized community meetings ($M = 3.70$), reflecting shortages of personnel, transport, and funding that disrupt consistent engagement, particularly during operation-intensive periods. This pattern is instructive: the relational dimensions of community policing – trust, intelligence-sharing, and joint decision-making – score consistently higher than the institutional dimensions requiring sustained resourcing, suggesting that social capital has outpaced institutional capacity to sustain it. The findings support both Social Capital Theory and community-policing scholarship emphasizing partnership and shared responsibility, and are consistent with Abdi et al. (2026) research showing that police-community partnerships improve intelligence collection through local legitimacy, extending it by showing that trust-based collaboration appears to matter more than routine operational activity alone.

4.3 Local Leadership Participation

Local leadership participation recorded the highest overall endorsement among the four study variables, with means ranging from 3.66 to 4.02 (Table 3).

Table 3: Local Leadership Participation

Statement	SD f(%)	D f(%)	N f(%)	A f(%)	SA f(%)	Mean	SD
Local leaders mobilize resources and people effectively in support of anti-Al-Shabab counter-insurgency operations.	4.3%	8.2%	14.0%	46.4%	27.1%	3.83	1.08
Local leadership has actively influenced the development of policies that address Al-Shabab's threat in our community.	5.3%	9.2%	15.9%	44.0%	25.6%	3.75	1.12
Accountability and transparency among local leaders are essential in gaining public trust in counter-insurgency efforts.	2.4%	4.8%	10.6%	52.2%	30.0%	4.02	0.95
Our leaders consistently engage in community outreach to educate us on counter-insurgency measures.	6.3%	10.1%	16.9%	41.1%	25.6%	3.70	1.16
The mobilization capacity of local leadership has improved our community's resilience to Al-Shabab propaganda and threats.	3.9%	7.7%	15.0%	45.4%	28.0%	3.86	1.06
Local leaders have been instrumental in influencing policy	4.8%	8.7%	15.5%	44.4%	26.6%	3.79	1.10

decisions that disrupt Al-Shabab activities.							
Strong leadership accountability mechanisms are necessary to ensure efficient implementation of security interventions.	2.9%	5.8%	11.6%	49.8%	30.0%	3.98	0.99
Frequent town hall meetings led by local leaders have improved awareness and readiness to report Al-Shabab-related risks.	6.8%	11.1%	17.4%	39.6%	25.1%	3.66	1.18

Source: Field Survey Data (2025)

Accountability and transparency among local leaders emerged as the single most valued attribute ($M = 4.02$), followed closely by the necessity of accountability mechanisms for effective implementation ($M = 3.98$). A government official in Dhusamareeb described how district security committees requiring monthly reporting on activities and expenditure had dramatically reduced misappropriation of funds, while a clan elder in Beledweyne explained how clan councils convene to mobilize volunteers and resources whenever security operations are planned. A religious scholar in Garowe added that leaders work with imams to expose Al-Shabaab's misuse of religion, illustrating leadership's ideological as well as operational role.

Notably, statements about local leaders' influence over policy formulation scored lower ($M = 3.75$ – 3.79) than those about accountability and mobilization, suggesting leaders exert greater influence during implementation than during the formulation of strategic security policy, which tends to remain centralized. The weakest-rated items concerned the frequency of town-hall meetings ($M = 3.66$), constrained in several sites by Al-Shabaab's threats against public gatherings. Overall, leadership characteristics tied to legitimacy and accountability consistently outperformed those tied merely to frequency of engagement – a pattern that helps explain why, in the inferential analysis below, local leadership emerged as the strongest predictor of counter-insurgency effectiveness: accountable leaders simultaneously build trust, mobilize resources, coordinate with civic education efforts, and facilitate community policing, functioning as the enabling factor for the other three dimensions of engagement. This finding is in line with Alehegn et al. (2025) research which emphasizes that accountable, transparent, and trusted local leadership is essential for effective community-based counter-insurgency and the successful implementation of security interventions.

4.4 Civic Education and Awareness Campaigns

Civic education and awareness campaigns were also strongly endorsed, with means ranging from 3.76 to 3.97 (Table 4).

Table 4: Civic Education and Awareness Campaigns

Statement	SD f(%)	D f(%)	N f(%)	A f(%)	SA f(%)	Mean	SD
Civic education programs have increased public awareness about Al-Shabab's recruitment tactics and operational strategies.	3.4%	6.8%	12.6%	48.8%	28.5%	3.92	1.02
Due to civic awareness campaigns, more citizens now participate in community-led counter-insurgency initiatives.	4.3%	8.2%	14.5%	45.9%	27.1%	3.83	1.07
These campaigns have shaped public perceptions about the real threat posed by Al-Shabab in daily life.	3.9%	7.2%	13.5%	47.3%	28.0%	3.88	1.05
Radio and social media used in civic education have helped disseminate counter-insurgency information more effectively.	2.9%	6.3%	12.1%	50.2%	28.5%	3.93	0.99
Community forums and civic meetings have enhanced awareness of Al-Shabab operations and preventive security measures.	4.8%	8.7%	15.0%	44.4%	27.1%	3.80	1.09
Awareness programs have led to a significant increase in youth participation in anti-radicalization campaigns.	5.3%	9.7%	15.9%	42.5%	26.6%	3.76	1.13
The effectiveness of communication channels, such as public forums and broadcasts, has improved our readiness against Al-Shabab.	3.9%	7.7%	14.0%	46.4%	28.0%	3.87	1.06
As a result of civic education, I am more likely to report suspicious activities linked to Al-Shabab to authorities.	3.4%	5.8%	11.6%	49.3%	30.0%	3.97	1.00

Source: Field Survey Data (2025)

The strongest result was behavioural rather than attitudinal: respondents most strongly agreed that civic education had made them more likely to report suspicious activity to authorities ($M = 3.97$), indicating that awareness translates into concrete cooperative behaviour rather than knowledge alone. A civic educator in Baidoa explained that communities previously avoided reporting out of fear and distrust, but now understand confidential reporting channels and see tangible results from their information. Radio and social media were rated as particularly effective dissemination channels ($M = 3.93$), with practitioners describing a deliberate channel strategy – Somali-language radio for rural audiences and social media for urban youth – tailored to how different populations actually consume information. The weakest-rated item concerned youth participation in anti-radicalization campaigns specifically ($M = 3.76$), with practitioners attributing this to competing livelihood pressures: young people often prioritize earning income over unpaid civic activities unless awareness programming is paired with vocational training or employment. This pattern indicates that civic education is more effective at shaping individual attitudes and reporting behaviour than at mobilizing sustained collective participation, complementing rather than substituting for community policing and leadership. This finding is in line with Gelot and Khadka (2024) study which argues that civic education and awareness campaigns enhance public vigilance, increase reporting of suspicious activities, and strengthen community resilience against extremist recruitment and radicalization.

4.5 Youth Engagement in Peacebuilding

Youth engagement recorded the lowest, though still positive, endorsement among the four variables, with means ranging from 3.70 to 3.92 (Table 5).

Table 5: Youth Engagement in Peacebuilding Activities

Statement	SD f(%)	D f(%)	N f(%)	A f(%)	SA f(%)	Mean	SD
Youth actively participate in community peacebuilding programs, which contributes to reducing Al-Shabab's local influence.	4.3%	8.7%	15.5%	44.9%	26.6%	3.81	1.09
Youth advocacy for peaceful coexistence has helped shift community attitudes away from violence and extremism.	3.9%	7.7%	14.5%	46.4%	27.5%	3.86	1.06
The involvement of youth in peacebuilding efforts has reduced cases of radicalization among vulnerable young people.	4.8%	9.2%	16.4%	43.5%	26.1%	3.77	1.11
Youth-led initiatives often collaborate with NGOs and government agencies in	5.3%	10.1%	16.9%	41.5%	26.1%	3.73	1.14



implementing anti-Al-Shabab programs.							
Youth dialogue forums and workshops on peace have been instrumental in countering violent ideologies in the community.	4.3%	8.2%	15.0%	45.4%	27.1%	3.83	1.08
Engaged youth leaders serve as role models, discouraging peers from joining extremist groups like Al-Shabab.	3.4%	6.8%	13.0%	47.8%	29.0%	3.92	1.03
There is growing evidence that youth-focused peace programs lower the appeal of Al-Shabab's radical messages.	3.9%	7.7%	14.0%	46.9%	27.5%	3.87	1.05
Youth from our area work alongside local government bodies to rebuild areas affected by Al-Shabab.	5.8%	10.6%	17.4%	40.6%	25.6%	3.70	1.16

Source: Field Survey Data (2025)

The strongest-rated item concerned peer influence: engaged youth leaders serving as role models who discourage peers from joining Al-Shabaab ($M = 3.92$). A youth representative in Mogadishu illustrated this with the example of a former street youth who became a peace advocate, noting that his testimony carries more weight than any government official's speech. A psychologist working with vulnerable youth in Baidoa framed the underlying mechanism succinctly: Al-Shabaab offers young people significance, identity, and belonging, and peacebuilding programmes succeed to the extent that they provide credible alternatives through education, employment, and recognition. The weakest item concerned formal collaboration between youth and government on reconstruction ($M = 3.70$), with a district youth council member in Dhusamareeb observing that agencies often treat youth as beneficiaries rather than partners. This gap between strong informal, peer-driven impact and weak formal institutional integration explains why youth engagement, while statistically significant, exerted the smallest influence on counter-insurgency effectiveness among the four variables: its power depends on the supportive environment created by leadership, policing, and civic education operating in tandem. The findings reinforce Roshid et al. (2025) arguments in the literature that the effectiveness of youth peacebuilding initiatives lies in their ability to foster social inclusion, strengthen peer influence, and offer viable alternatives to recruitment by Al-Shabaab.

4.6 Counter-Insurgency Effectiveness

Perceptions of overall counter-insurgency effectiveness were consistently positive, with means ranging from 3.73 to 3.95 (Table 6).

Table 6: Counter-Insurgency Effectiveness Against Al-Shabaab

Statement	SD f(%)	D f(%)	N f(%)	A f(%)	SA f(%)	Mean	SD
There has been a noticeable reduction in the frequency and intensity of Al-Shabab attacks in recent years.	4.3%	7.7%	13.5%	47.3%	27.1%	3.85	1.07
Somali government forces and allies have successfully regained and maintained territory previously under Al-Shabab control.	5.3%	9.2%	15.5%	44.0%	26.1%	3.77	1.11
The community's sense of safety and security has improved significantly due to ongoing counter-insurgency measures.	3.9%	7.2%	14.0%	46.9%	28.0%	3.88	1.05
Al-Shabab's ability to recruit new members and secure resources has declined since community engagement intensified.	4.8%	8.7%	15.0%	45.4%	26.1%	3.79	1.09
Community-based efforts have disrupted Al-Shabab's financial and logistical support networks across multiple regions.	3.4%	6.8%	13.0%	48.3%	28.5%	3.92	1.02
Public trust in government security forces has increased due to effective joint operations and intelligence sharing.	5.8%	9.7%	15.9%	43.0%	25.6%	3.73	1.13
Community vigilance and reporting mechanisms have helped foil several planned attacks by Al-Shabab in our area.	3.9%	7.7%	14.5%	45.9%	28.0%	3.87	1.06
The success of counter-insurgency operations can be attributed to increased cooperation between civilians and security agencies.	2.9%	6.3%	12.6%	49.3%	29.0%	3.95	0.99

Source: Field Survey Data (2025)

The highest-rated item attributed counter-insurgency success directly to increased cooperation between civilians and security agencies (M = 3.95) the clearest statistical expression of the study's

central argument. The lowest-rated item concerned public trust in security forces ($M = 3.73$), which respondents and informants alike described as slow to rebuild given histories of insecurity, corruption, and civilian harm during past operations. A military officer in Beledweyne summarized the strategic implication precisely: liberating territory, he noted, is only the first step, since maintaining control requires community support, functioning local administration, and continued government presence – otherwise Al-Shabaab returns. These findings align with Yigzaw and Tegegne (2025) study, which emphasizes that sustained success against insurgent groups depends largely on effective collaboration between civilian populations and security institutions rather than military force alone.

4.7 Correlation and Regression Analysis

Pearson correlation confirmed statistically significant positive relationships between all four community engagement dimensions and counter-insurgency effectiveness (Table 7).

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Coefficients ($n = 207$)

		Community Policing	Local Leadership	Civic Education	Youth Engagement	Counter-Insurgency
Community Policing	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.				
Local Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.634**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000				
Civic Education	Pearson Correlation	.598**	.657**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000			
Youth Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.512**	.543**	.579**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000		
Counter-Insurgency	Pearson Correlation	.668**	.721**	.654**	.591**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.023	0.000	0.000	0.000

**** Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

Source: Field Survey Data (2025)

Local leadership showed the strongest bivariate relationship with counter-insurgency effectiveness ($r = .721$), followed by community policing ($r = .668$), civic education ($r = .654$), and youth engagement ($r = .591$), all significant at $p < .01$. Multiple regression confirmed and refined this pattern.

Table 8: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	.856	.732	.727	.38945

Source: Field Survey Data (2025)

Table 9: ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	84.267	4	21.067	138.756	.000**
Residual	30.663	202	.152		
Total	114.930	206			

a. Dependent Variable: Counter-Insurgency Effectiveness.

Source: Field Survey Data (2025)

Table 10: Regression Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.412	.148		2.784	.006
Community Policing	.267	.052	.289	5.135	.000
Local Leadership	.321	.055	.347	5.836	.000
Civic Education	.245	.049	.276	5.000	.000
Youth Engagement	.178	.046	.213	3.870	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Counter-Insurgency Effectiveness.

Source: Field Survey Data (2025)

The four predictors jointly explained 73.2 percent of the variance in counter-insurgency effectiveness ($R^2 = .732$, Adjusted $R^2 = .727$), and the overall model was highly significant ($F(4,202) = 138.756$, $p < .001$). The resulting regression equation is:

$$Y = 0.412 + 0.267X_1 + 0.321X_2 + 0.245X_3 + 0.178X_4 + \varepsilon$$



where Y is counter-insurgency effectiveness, X_1 is community policing, X_2 is local leadership, X_3 is civic education, and X_4 is youth engagement. All four beta coefficients were positive and statistically significant at $p < .001$, confirming rejection of all four null hypotheses. Local leadership participation exerted the strongest standardized effect ($\beta = .347$), followed by community policing ($\beta = .289$), civic education ($\beta = .276$), and youth engagement ($\beta = .213$).

This ordering is consistent with the qualitative findings throughout the study: leadership functions as the cross-cutting variable that enables the other three. Accountable leaders build the trust on which effective policing depends, lend credibility to civic education messaging, and create the institutional space within which youth initiatives can operate. Community policing then converts that trust into operational intelligence; civic education converts it into informed, vigilant citizens; and youth engagement converts it into a long-term buffer against recruitment. None of the four dimensions' functions as a substitute for the others; together they explain nearly three-quarters of the variation in how effective communities perceive counter-insurgency to be, a finding that squares with the study's combined Hearts and Minds and Social Capital theoretical framework, and with the broader literature's observation that these components are empirically entangled rather than separable.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study concluded that community engagement is essential for improving the effectiveness of counter-insurgency efforts against Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Community policing strengthens trust between communities and security agencies, improves the sharing of security information, and encourages joint action to address security threats. As a result, citizens become active partners in maintaining security rather than passive recipients of protection. However, community policing can only succeed when supported by adequate resources, strong institutions, and continuous collaboration between security agencies and local communities. The study also found that local leadership participation has the greatest influence on counter-insurgency effectiveness. Trusted and accountable local leaders strengthen public confidence, mobilize community support, coordinate local security activities, and promote cooperation between citizens and government institutions.

Their leadership also creates an enabling environment for other community engagement strategies to succeed. In addition, civic education increases public awareness of extremist recruitment methods, encourages peaceful conflict resolution, and motivates citizens to report suspicious activities. However, its long-term success depends on support from trusted leaders, responsive security agencies, and programs that address community needs. The study further established that youth engagement reduces vulnerability to radicalization, strengthens community resilience, and promotes peaceful coexistence by giving young people meaningful opportunities to participate in peacebuilding and local governance. Overall, the study concludes that lasting counter-insurgency success requires military operations to be supported by community policing, effective local leadership, civic education, and active youth participation working together within a coordinated community-based security approach.

Recommendations



The study recommends that the Federal Government of Somalia, Federal Member States, and security agencies make community policing a permanent part of the national counter-insurgency strategy. This can be achieved by establishing permanent community policing units, improving systems for sharing security information, holding regular meetings between police officers and community members, and providing adequate financial and operational support. The study also recommends formally involving traditional leaders, religious leaders, clan elders, and other community representatives in security planning, implementation, and monitoring. Community security committees, regular consultation forums, and leadership training programs should be established to strengthen cooperation, accountability, and public confidence in security initiatives.

In addition, government institutions, civil society organizations, religious institutions, and development partners should expand civic education programs that raise awareness about violent extremism, promote peaceful conflict resolution, and encourage the public to report security concerns through appropriate channels. These programs should use accessible platforms such as radio, schools, community meetings, religious institutions, and social media, and should be regularly reviewed to remain relevant. Finally, the study recommends increasing youth participation in peacebuilding by expanding leadership opportunities, vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and employment programs that reduce the risk of extremist recruitment. Youth organizations should also participate in community security planning and post-conflict recovery. Implementing these recommendations will strengthen cooperation between communities and security agencies and contribute to lasting peace, security, and stability in Somalia

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