



## The Impact of the Threat of Terrorism on Tourism Growth in East Africa

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**Abstract.** East Africa has great potential in the tourism sector, but is vulnerable to the threat of terrorism that can hinder economic growth and regional stability. This research aims to analyze the impact of terrorism on tourism development, especially in Kenya as a case study. The research uses a Library Research method with a descriptive qualitative approach based on narrative and contextual. The theory used is the tactical definition of terrorism by C.A.J Coody which emphasizes violence against civilians for political interests and Esmailzadeh's perspective which states the adaptive and global nature of terrorism. The results of the analysis show that terror attacks, such as those that occurred in several countries in the East African region, do not only cause physical casualties but also psychological and symbolic impacts in the form of declining tourist numbers, disruption of security perceptions and a negative image of the destination in the eyes of the international community. This study emphasizes the importance of an integrated approach: hard security, inclusive economic development, and soft power-based promotion. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of theoretical-philosophical approaches and empirical data to assess the linkages between security and tourism in conflict-prone areas, which have rarely been studied in depth in the East African context.

**Keywords:** East Africa, Kenya, Security, Terrorism, Tourism.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

East Africa is one of the regions in the African continent that has great potential in the tourism sector, starting from its biodiversity, stunning natural landscapes, and rich culture, which make East Africa a destination for international tourists. Countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda have tourist attractions such as national parks, wildlife safaris, and cultural heritage that are widely known throughout the world (Zsuzsanna, Bekele, Dénes, & Zsolt, 2023, pp. 3-4). In this case, tourism can benefit the economy in East Africa, but it is not only a major contributor to economic growth; it can also create jobs and sustainable development in the region.

According to a report from the World Tourism Organization (WTO), tourism can be defined as travel undertaken by individuals from one country to another or from one region to another for the purpose of vacation, business, or other needs (Kangana & Safari, 2020, p. 29). The journey described by the WTO is similar to the tourist trips taken by travelers in East Africa. The tourism sector is of great importance to East Africa's economic development, with sectoral connectivity expected to improve the quality of life index and generate multiplier effects in the economy (Robert, 2021, p. 45). It can be concluded that one of the sectors supporting the economy of East Africa is the tourism sector.

One of the countries in East Africa that has the greatest tourism potential in its economy and is famous for its natural beauty is Kenya. Kenya's tourism industry began to develop in the early 20th century, specifically around the 1930s, when the country was still under British colonial rule. It was during this period that the first wildlife safaris in Africa were introduced in Kenya, which at the time resembled exploratory expeditions into untouched wilderness areas teeming with various exotic animal species (Kenya Tourism, 2025). One clear example of the tourism potential in East Africa can be seen in the performance of Kenya's tourism sector. According to World Data, in 2019 the country recorded 2.05 million tourist visits, making it one of the main destinations in the region. In 2022, Kenya generated approximately 1.11 billion US dollars in the tourism sector alone, a figure equivalent to 1.0 percent of the gross domestic product and around 6 percent of total international tourism revenue in East Africa (WorldData, 2025).

Tourists are very concerned about safety and comfort. Tourists naturally want to travel without any threats to their safety, so when they feel safe, they will feel comfortable during their trip. Therefore, stability is one of the important factors for the development of the tourism industry (Claudia, Pedro, & Luís, 2020, p. 2). It is understandable that if a destination becomes a safe place for us to visit, it will certainly attract many visitors, and this will also influence the development of industry in that area.

In 2024, based on data from the African Union Counter-Terrorism Center (AUCTC), there were more than 3,400 terrorist attacks that caused more than 13,900 deaths in Africa. The threat of terrorism is now growing rapidly, as seen from these figures. This highlights the significant challenges Africa faces in combating terrorism, which is increasingly threatening stability and security across the entire continent (African Union, 2025). Based on this, it can be concluded that this is a serious warning for countries in Africa and the international communist movement.

Terrorism in Africa has become a serious threat, not only claiming thousands of lives but also hampering socio-economic development and creating instability in various African countries. With this threat growing, the African Union (AU) feels it necessary to take decisive and concerted action to combat terrorism effectively (African Union, 2025). Africa is working to develop a robust counterterrorism strategy by strengthening the capacity of member states and promoting regional solidarity. Although it still faces major challenges, these measures are an important foundation for maintaining stability and security on the African continent.

Among the regions in Africa, East Africa is particularly vulnerable to the threat of global terrorism. Terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Al Shabaab, and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) continue to launch coordinated attacks targeting civilians, government institutions, and strategic infrastructure in various countries in the region. This situation is exacerbated by weak border controls, political instability, and socio-economic challenges that enable terrorist groups to expand their influence and recruit new members more easily. This situation not only threatens regional stability but also has serious implications for global security, particularly in the context of international cooperation in countering extremism and preventing the spread of terrorist networks (INTERPOL, 2025). Therefore, a comprehensive and integrated strategy is needed, encompassing military, diplomatic, and socio-economic approaches, to address this threat effectively and sustainably.

ISIS in Africa is not a new phenomenon, but most senior government officials rarely discuss it openly in the context of national security. The head of the US counterterrorism center has emphasized that the ISIS threat in Africa has the potential to become one of the greatest long-term threats to US interests. ISIS branches in Africa mostly operate as local threats, focusing on spreading their ideology, creating ethnic and social divisions in regions with weak governments, and seeking to expand their influence by overthrowing local governments (Robbie, 2024). This phenomenon shows that political instability, weak government institutions, and poor socio-economic factors are the main catalysts for ISIS expansion in Africa.

In response to the rapidly growing threat of terrorism in East Africa, INTERPOL and AFRIPOL have launched a joint operation involving eight countries in the region. The operation aims to identify and arrest terrorist suspects, strengthen border controls, and reduce criminal activity linked to international terrorist networks. This initiative is part of a global effort to combat terrorism, which not only threatens regional stability but also international security (INTERPOL, 2025). Through cross-border cooperation and security capacity building, this operation is expected to reduce the escalation of terrorist threats and establish more effective mechanisms for preventing and combating terrorism in East Africa.

This study aims to analyze how the threat of terrorism impacts the growth of the tourism sector in East Africa, with a primary focus on Kenya as a case study. The study will evaluate the direct and indirect impacts of terrorist activities on tourist visitation numbers, perceptions of security, and the contribution of tourism to the national economy. By selecting Kenya as one of the main tourist destinations in the region that has also been severely affected by the threat

of terrorism, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the relationship between security stability and the sustainability of the tourism sector.

## **2. THEORY**

### **Terrorism**

In his book *The Meaning of Terrorism*, Oxford University Press 2021, C.A.J. Coady develops a conceptual approach called the “tactical definition” to understand terrorism. This definition emphasizes that terrorism is a form of violence deliberately directed at civilians (non-combatants), with the aim of creating widespread fear and influencing political policies or decisions (Coady, 2021). Coady asserts that political or ideological motivation alone is not sufficient to categorize an act as terrorism; the most important element is the explicit intention to target civilians as a means of producing a psychological effect on the public or ruling actors. Thus, this definition emphasizes the tactical and strategic aspects of terrorist acts, distinguishing them from other forms of political violence such as armed rebellion or conventional warfare. This approach helps clarify the normative boundaries in the discourse on the legitimacy of political violence and ethically rejects the use of violence against civilians as a means of achieving political goals.

The main focus of terrorism lies in attacks on people who are not directly involved in the conflict, and this is what distinguishes it from other forms of violence such as conventional warfare. In addition, Coady also highlights the importance of understanding the status of civilians in conflict and how this often becomes a subject of debate in the philosophy of war. Furthermore, Coady discusses how, in some contexts, acts of terrorism have even been defended from certain moral and political perspectives (Coady, 2021). This shows that Coady's theory not only provides conceptual boundaries for acts of terrorism, but also invites readers to reflect on the ethical and political complexities behind the practice of violence against non-combatants.

Esmailzadeh explained that terrorism is not static. This phenomenon continues to change in line with developments in the political, social, and economic situations. Terrorism has the ability to survive and adapt to the conditions of the times, so that it remains capable of causing widespread fear. Due to its ever-evolving nature and significant impact, terrorism poses a serious challenge to global security, peace between nations, and the welfare of global society (Esmailzadeh, 2023). This quote emphasizes that terrorism is transnational in nature, deeply rooted in socio-political dynamics, and characterized by widespread fear and threats to public safety.

## **Tourism**

The phenomenon of tourism has become the subject of study in various disciplines with diverse theoretical approaches. One perspective presented by Enzensberger (1958) identifies tourism as an aspect that has emerged in modern culture. He argues that mass tourism is driven not only by economic factors but also by psychological and cultural motivations, particularly a romantic interest in distant, exotic, and pristine natural environments. According to the author, tourism serves as an escape from the oppressive and restrictive realities of modern society. This perspective suggests that the motivation for travel is not merely practical but also involves a search for meaning and freedom within the context of modernity (McCabe, 2024).

In tourism development studies, the sustainable approach has become one of the dominant paradigms, especially since the rise in global awareness of environmental crises and social inequality. According to Sharpley (2021), although sustainable tourism is often promoted as a solution to the negative impacts of mass tourism, this concept still faces serious challenges in its application. He emphasizes that conventional development theories such as modernization and dependency are not fully capable of explaining the dynamics of sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, the sustainable approach itself has not yet demonstrated significant theoretical contributions, as it often remains merely a normative discourse without strong implementation mechanisms (Sharpley, 2021).

In recent developments in tourism studies, the degrowth approach has begun to be considered as a more critical alternative framework. This approach emphasizes the importance of limiting economic growth in order to achieve environmental sustainability and social justice. Sharpley (2021) states that degrowth is a viable approach to be explored as a development theory in the context of tourism, as it offers a new perspective that moves beyond the dominance of economic growth logic alone. Thus, the concept of sustainable tourism is no longer understood merely as a practical policy goal but has evolved into a theoretical discourse addressing global challenges such as the climate crisis and social pressures resulting from mass tourism.

## **3. METHODS**

This study uses the Library Research method as the main strategy for data collection and analysis. Literature Review is a method that relies on searching through various relevant literature sources to gain a deep understanding of the researcher's problem. Literature Review not only involves searching for and reading information sources but is also a literacy-based learning process that enables the author to gain a broad and contextual understanding through

the use of library resources (Kowalsky, 2019). This focuses on narrative and contextual understanding because it is considered most appropriate for gaining a deep understanding of how the threat of terrorism impacts the development of the tourism sector, particularly in East Africa and Kenya as the main focus. This approach does not aim to measure or test statistically, but rather to describe and explain the situation comprehensively, from social and economic aspects to tourists' perceptions of security at tourist destinations. Through this approach, researchers can explore phenomena in a more flexible and contextual manner. This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to understanding the interplay between security stability and sustainable tourism development in conflict-prone regions such as East Africa.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

East Africa, particularly Kenya, has experienced a significant impact on the tourism sector as a result of terrorist attacks. According to data from World Data (2025), following the terrorist attack at the DusitD2 Complex in Nairobi in 2019, the number of international tourists visiting Kenya dropped sharply by 28% within a year. This decline reflects the high sensitivity of the tourism industry to security issues and disruptions to stability in a destination (WorldData, 2025). This phenomenon is in line with the “tactical definition” approach, which asserts that terrorism aims to create mass fear among civilians and influence public policy or behavior (Coady, 2021). This explains that the tourism industry is highly dependent on tourists' perception of safety in a destination. In the context of Kenya, terrorist attacks not only cause direct impacts in the form of casualties and physical damage, but also have a broader psychological effect in the form of a decline in confidence in the stability of the country.

Terrorism also has a significant impact on the international image of a destination. Countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, which have long been known as icons of African safari tourism and centers of cultural heritage, are now beginning to be perceived in the global media as areas with a high risk of terrorist attacks. This change in perception not only affects the interest of international tourists, but also has the potential to reduce the competitiveness of these destinations in the global tourism market (INTERPOL, 2025). This has led to a distortion of global public perception, which tends to view the region as high-risk and unsafe to visit. This situation reinforces negative stereotypes about Africa that are often perpetuated by the international media, thereby hindering efforts to promote tourism and build a positive image in the eyes of the world.

Terrorism is a cross-border phenomenon whose impact is not limited to physical damage, but also touches on deep psychological and symbolic dimensions. Terrorism can create widespread fear, destabilize society, and disrupt public perceptions of security and a country's global image (Esmailzadeh, 2023). Thus, the threat of terrorism must be understood as a complex phenomenon that requires a response not only from the military aspect, but also a more holistic social, political, and symbolic approach. This poses a serious challenge for the reputation management of tourist destinations that are highly dependent on public and media perceptions.



**Figure 1.** Kenya Tourism Map

Source: (Kenya peta wisata, 2025)

Kenya has developed into one of the leading tourist destinations in Africa in recent decades. Its natural beauty, biodiversity, and cultural richness make it attractive to international tourists. In 2019, Kenya recorded 2.05 million foreign tourist arrivals, placing it 101st in the global tourism destination rankings based on absolute visitor numbers (WorldData, 2025). This achievement reflects the significant role of the tourism sector in Kenya's national economy and international recognition of its tourist attractions.

In response to terrorist attacks, the Kenyan government has implemented several mitigation strategies through the Kenya Tourism Board (KTB), including the “Magical Kenya” campaign, which aims to strengthen destination security and diversify tourist locations to more stable areas (Travel and Tour World , 2025). In addition, regional cooperation programs such

as the East African Tourism Platform (EATP) can strengthen cross-border promotional coordination. The perception of safety plays a crucial role in determining the attractiveness of a tourist destination. When governments fail to convince tourists that their region is safe to visit, the process of restoring the tourism sector after a crisis will be much slower. Therefore, efforts to maintain and enhance the security image are a strategic aspect that must be prioritized to accelerate the return of tourist confidence and promote sustainable growth in the tourism industry (Claudia, Pedro, & Luís, 2020).

**Table 1. The Terrorist Action in East Afrika**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Terrorist Actions</b>	<b>Location</b>
2019	The attack began with the throwing of bombs into the hotel parking area by a group of armed men, followed by random shooting as they entered the lobby. One of the perpetrators blew himself up inside the building. As a result, 21 people were killed and 28 others were injured. The attack took place in a business district and targeted expatriates and foreign businesspeople.	DusitD2 Complex, Nairobi, Kenya.
2022	Two bombs exploded in succession: the first hit the building, the second during the evacuation. The huge explosion destroyed the surrounding area, killing approximately 100 people and injuring more than 300.	Mogadishu (near the Ministry of Education) in Somalia.
2023	Students were brutally attacked at night. A massacre of schoolchildren. It resulted in 41 deaths, including 38 students who were burned, shot, and hacked to death.	A secondary school in Uganda near the Congo border.
2024	A bomb exploded in a beach restaurant crowded with civilians. The attack was intended to cause public panic, resulting in 37 civilian deaths and 212 injuries.	A popular beach restaurant in Somalia.

2024	A cart pulled by two donkeys and carrying bombs exploded at a border checkpoint. The explosion killed one Kenyan police officer and critically injured four others. The perpetrators fled to Somalia before the explosion and were later arrested by Somali police.	Mandera (Kenya-Somalia border).
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Source: (BBC, 2019), (Tempo.co, 2022), (Muhumuza & Press, 2023), (Reuters, 2024), (Udula, 2024).

Figure 2 shows a summary of terrorist acts that have occurred in East Africa over the past five years (2019-2024), focusing on Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda. The table illustrates that East Africa is a region vulnerable to extremist violence, with significant impacts on civilian safety, regional stability, and international security perceptions. Identifying these patterns is crucial in formulating more comprehensive prevention and mitigation strategies.

The impact of terrorism on the tourism sector cannot be separated from various multisectoral structural challenges. This study identifies several key factors that exacerbate the vulnerability of tourist destinations, including weaknesses in government institutions in the political sphere, social inequality and high unemployment rates that have the potential to trigger radicalization, as well as a lack of surveillance and control at regional borders (African Union, 2025). In addition, bias in global media coverage has contributed to the negative image of Africa in the eyes of the world, thereby deepening negative perceptions of destination safety. Given the complexity of these challenges, an integrated strategy involving various sectors is needed. This strategy must include countering terrorism through a hard security approach, sustainable local economic development as a form of developmental security, as well as cultural diplomacy and international promotion that emphasizes soft power. This comprehensive approach is expected to strengthen the resilience of the tourism sector while building a positive image of destinations on the global stage (Robbie, 2024).

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this study, researchers sought to uncover the relationship between terrorism and tourism by investigating the direct impact of terrorism on tourism. Although this study does not provide answers on how terrorism has a direct impact, the researchers concluded, based on the results of their analysis and literature review, that the threat of terrorism has a significant impact on many sectors in East Africa, particularly in Kenya. Terrorist attacks over the past

five years have caused major impacts, ranging from loss of life to infrastructure damage. Furthermore, terrorism creates psychological and symbolic effects that disrupt public perceptions of security. In line with Esmailzadeh's theory, terrorism creates widespread fear, undermines social stability, and damages a country's global security image. This is reflected in the drastic decline in the number of international tourists following attacks, highlighting how vulnerable the tourism sector is to issues of stability and security threats. In addition, the international image of tourist destinations in regions such as Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda has also been affected, with global media often reinforcing negative stereotypes of Africa as a conflict-ridden region. Social inequality, weak government institutions, and inadequate border control are structural factors that increase vulnerability to extremist actions. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy is needed that includes a hard security approach, inclusive local economic strengthening (developmental security), as well as cultural diplomacy and international promotion based on soft power. Cross-border cooperation and capacity building of security institutions are key to building destination resilience, restoring tourism image, and creating long-term stability in the East African region.

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