



Influence of Strategic Culture on the Resolution of Territorial Disputes: A Case Study of Kenya

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Abstract: *This study explored the relationship between Kenya's strategic culture and its national security decision-making processes, with particular focus on how this culture has shaped the country's responses to territorial disputes. The study is grounded in the Path dependence and Rational Choice theories, which provide insights into how historical events and established institutional norms influence future decisions and how the selection and implementation of strategies towards the resolution of the disputes have not always been the most optimal, due to the underlying cost-benefit analysis variables impacting the State's policies and actions. The study adopted a mixed methods approach; and was based on a case study research design. Findings indicate that Kenya's strategic culture, characterized by a consistent preference for diplomacy, leniency, and compromise, has significantly shaped the country's national security decisions, particularly in relation to territorial disputes. This ambiguity, devoid of decisive diplomatic, legal, or military actions has undermined Kenya's credibility as a regional economic and military power. Her preferences for military or diplomatic responses are shaped by past experiences and political regimes, among others. While a cooperative, antimilitaristic stance is prudent, it also reveals weaknesses in resolutely resolving threats to national security. Recommendations include prioritizing control of the disputed territories, enhancing inter-agency coordination, establishing a think tank for long-term planning, and regularly reviewing national security policies and strategies.*

Keywords: *Strategic Culture, National Interests, Territorial Integrity, Military Action, Diplomacy*

1.1 Introduction

According to Lippmann (1943),

"A nation has security when it does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by war" (Lippmann, 1943, p. 3). National security is a critical element for any nation's survival and development, encompassing a wide range of internal and external challenges. Strategic culture offers a valuable perspective to understand the enduring patterns in international crises and the driving forces behind a state's behaviour. It is rooted in a state's historical inclination to protect its perceived spheres of influence, shaping its strategic thinking for long periods. In essence, strategic culture seeks to incorporate cultural factors, collective historical memory and their impacts into the analysis of a state's security policies and interactions with the international community. A state's responses to matters of national security are significantly influenced by its strategic-cultural

predispositions. Kenya's strategic-cultural predispositions include a strong emphasis on diplomacy, regional cooperation, and multilateralism, reflecting its historical experiences and societal norms. The country's strategic culture also prioritizes peaceful resolution of conflicts, a legacy of its post-independence leadership and its role in regional peacekeeping initiatives. Across the globe, the strategic culture of different states is evident through their national security policies. Strategic culture is manifested by the consistency or predictability of the methodology as well as the resolve and determination to safeguard national interests.

1.2 Study Background

Three generations of scholars address strategic culture. Jack Snyder represented the first generation and is credited with coining the term strategic culture five decades ago (Hudaya & Putri, 2018). In *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options*, Snyder states that the behaviour of states emanates from their unique culture, from which strategic culture is derived. Using the Soviet Union as an example, Jack Snyder opines that the Soviet Union's cultural aspects informed its behaviour. He argues that while assessing a state's actions from a strategic cultural viewpoint, it is important to evaluate the uniqueness of the situation, historical and heritage factors, military culture, and the military's involvement in policy-making. He suggests that analysing a country's strategic culture may be done by studying its military doctrine and the statements of its presidents and military commanders. Snyder (1977) defines strategic culture as a viewpoint used to examine a state's behaviour when confronted with a threat. Internal elements of a country including cultural mind-set, historical background, the distinctiveness of a situation and military ethos determine a state's behaviour. While this study to a large extent agrees with Snyder's (1977) definition, it is important to consider that strategic culture can also be influenced by external factors such as international alliances and global geopolitical dynamics. This broader perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of how strategic culture shapes national security policies. In relation to this study, strategic culture refers to the combination of internal and external influences that have shaped Kenya's approach to national security, particularly in the context of territorial disputes, since independence. This includes Kenya's historical experiences, societal values, leadership decisions, and interactions with regional and international actors.

In the article *A theory of Strategic Culture*, Yitzhak Klein (1991), a second-generation scholar of strategic thinking, contends that a nation's policies are not enough to understand its strategy and that its strategic culture must also be investigated. In this article, he defines strategic culture as "the set of attitudes and beliefs held within a military establishment concerning the political objective of war and the most effective strategy and operational method of achieving it" (Klein, 1991). This shows that the second-generation conception of the term strategic culture is focused on the use of the military as a means of achieving political goals. He largely concurs with Snyder that the military plays a critical role in the development of the strategic culture of a nation. Klein (1991) also agrees with Snyder that each country has a unique strategic culture because it develops out of internal uniqueness.

In her article, *Culture and Military Doctrine: France Between the Wars*, Kier (1995). Who is regarded as one of the third-generation scholars of strategic thinking, explains that "choices between offensive and defensive military doctrines are best understood from a cultural perspective." She opines that it is not that military organisations favour offensive doctrines, but rather, it is their culture that bounds such choices. Jeffrey Legro (1994), another third-generation scholar, defines strategic culture as the pattern of ideas, beliefs and assumptions that prescribe how a state manages its internal structure and adapts to

external factors. These patterns therefore shape the state's actions and preferences during war. The three generations of scholars have therefore provided a contextual definition of strategic culture as the focal concept of this study.

Zandee and Kruijver (2020) outline five elements that make up countries' strategic cultures. These elements are: 1) the aim for use of coercive means; 2) threat perceptions; 3) decision making model of the State; 4) how coercive methods are used, and 5) the state's historical experiences and practices. They argue that these elements have influenced the courses of action that countries have taken throughout their histories when faced with issues that concern territorial integrity. Therefore, the mentioned elements of strategic culture manifest in the country's action towards territorial disputes. Accordingly, this study focused on these five key aspects of strategic culture, among others.

Using the strategic culture framework, Lantis (2002), interpreted how America's and the Soviet Union's nuclear doctrines came about as products of historical, political, technological, and organisational constraints. His prediction was that based on their strategic cultures, the Soviet Union would prefer pre-emptive offensive use of force. As such, strategic culture is linked to national security because it provides the basis of understanding a state's military strategies and security policies. The link between strategic culture and national security can be explained through the behaviour of various states. For instance, Japan's strategic culture of being largely antimilitarist shapes its security policy. Japan's antimilitarism can be observed by considering the outcome of World War II, whereby the world was expecting Japan to begin efforts to take over the mantle of leadership from the US, which did not happen (Berger, 1993). According to Izumikawa (2010), Japan's post-World War 2 antimilitarist culture is influenced by its experience. This is because Japan felt victimised by its ambition to achieve wartime military leadership. Japanese public opinion supports a gradual approach to security policy and is against a significant rise in the Japanese defence budget, even after the Cold War.

In North America, Canada, endowed with vast oceans and the Arctic as natural geographical defences, enjoys a unique strategic position that significantly influences its national security posture. Bounded by a friendly neighbour and great power, the United States, Canada's geographic location and geopolitical context contribute to its perception of minimal threats to its territory. The absence of direct territorial challenges, coupled with the strategic advantage of proximity to a powerful ally, allows Canada to maintain a modest military force relative to its economic capacity and landmass (Smith, 2005). In line with this, Canada's defence strategy is shaped by a cooperative approach, emphasising diplomacy, international partnerships, and peacekeeping efforts. The reliance on these mechanisms aligns with Canada's strategic culture, emphasising multilateral engagement and conflict resolution through non-coercive means. The absence of perceived territorial threats enables Canada to prioritize other aspects of national development while contributing selectively to global security initiatives.

In contrast, Russia's strategic culture is deeply influenced by its lack of natural defences and historical anxieties (Fasola, 2023). The absence of significant geographical barriers exposes Russia to potential threats from multiple directions, contributing to a longstanding sense of vulnerability. The trauma of losing the Soviet Empire and the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) into what Russia considers its historical fiefdoms, intensifies these anxieties (Trenin, 2016). As a result, Russia maintains a robust military posture, emphasising a proactive approach to securing its territorial integrity. This includes assertive actions in regions perceived as strategically crucial, reflecting a strategic culture

rooted in historical experiences and the need to protect perceived spheres of influence. The complex interplay of historical contingencies and contemporary geopolitical challenges shapes Russia's military strategy and its reliance on military force as a tool of statecraft.

Turning to Asia, the strategic cultures of Pakistan, India, China, and Taiwan underscore the diverse influences that shape national security perspectives. In South Asia, Pakistan's strategic culture, influenced by historical conflicts with India, has led to a predisposition for military responses, particularly regarding territorial disputes over Kashmir. India, on the other hand, maintains a strategic culture that balances military capabilities with a preference for diplomatic resolutions to territorial issues (Cohen, 2018). In East Asia, China's strategic culture reflects historical narratives of territorial integrity and rejuvenation. China's growing military capabilities align with its assertive posture in regional territorial disputes. Taiwan, in response to China's claims, emphasises a strategic culture rooted in self-determination and the maintenance of de facto independence.

In Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) faces the challenge of the resource curse, where abundant natural resources contribute to internal conflict and external meddling. The strategic culture of neighbouring nations, such as Rwanda and Uganda, intersects with the DRC's vulnerability, leading to a complex web of territorial disputes. Sudan and Ethiopia provide additional insights into the limitations of military action in the face of determined nationalism. The secession of South Sudan from the Sudan and Eritrea's separation from Ethiopia illustrate how historical and cultural factors influence territorial dynamics, with nationalism among the South Sudanese and Eritreans overcoming the military might of both the Sudan and Ethiopia respectively, leading to independence. Military strategies alone often prove inadequate in resolving deeply rooted disputes, emphasising the necessity of comprehensive integrated approaches, including diplomacy, military and others (Clapham, 1996).

Kenya's strategic culture echoes India's balanced approach. Like India, which navigates historical tensions with strong military capabilities while pursuing diplomatic solutions, Kenya recognises the need for a capable military alongside a preference for peaceful resolutions. This delicate balance manifests in Kenya's modernisation of its armed forces for self-defence, while pursuing peaceful solutions to territorial disputes like the long-standing border issue with Somalia. Further, the African context adds crucial brushstrokes to the Kenyan canvas. The challenges faced by neighbouring countries like the DRC, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia - marked by resource complexities, historical legacies, and internal conflicts - resonate deeply with Kenya's own experiences. This shared regional experience underlines the complex interplay of historical contingencies, threat perceptions, and decision-making models that shape Kenya's security landscape.

Kenya's strategic culture is deeply rooted in its historical experiences, geopolitical environment, and societal values. Since gaining independence in 1963, Kenya has navigated a complex and often volatile regional security landscape. From the early post-independence period marked by the Shifta War (1963-1967) to more recent engagements in regional security initiatives, Kenya's strategic culture has evolved to reflect a blend of pragmatism, resilience, and a strong emphasis on diplomacy. The shared beliefs and values that shape Kenya's perception and response to security threats include a deep commitment to regional cooperation, a preference for peaceful resolution of conflicts, and a strong belief in multilateralism. These values are a reflection of Kenya's historical experiences with colonialism, its diverse ethnic composition, and its strategic position in East Africa.

Moreover, Kenya's strategic culture is characterized by a cautious approach to the use of military force, often preferring diplomacy and negotiation over confrontation. This is evident in Kenya's consistent efforts to mediate regional conflicts and its active participation in international peacekeeping missions. However, this defensive and diplomatic posture has sometimes led to challenges in assertively safeguarding its territorial integrity, as seen in the territorial disputes with neighbouring countries. Understanding Kenya's strategic culture in light of this diverse global tapestry is crucial. Her historical experiences, shaped by colonialism, internal political dynamics, and regional complexities, have woven a unique approach to security. Analysing these factors, as proposed in the broader study theme and timeframe from 1963 to 2023, sheds light on how strategic culture has influenced Kenya's national security decisions. According to Wiegand (2011), understanding the interplay between strategic culture and national security is crucial for addressing future challenges.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Kenya's national security strategy is deeply influenced by its strategic culture, as shaped by geography, climate, historical experiences, norms, beliefs, and practices that guide decision-making and the formulation of strategies to achieve political objectives (Biava et al., 2011). This strategic culture shapes how policymakers perceive threats, define national interests, and choose methods whether military, diplomacy, or otherwise to achieve security goals. However, Kenya's strategic culture, characterized by proclivity to diplomacy and compromise, has faced significant challenges in addressing the persistent territorial disputes with neighbouring countries, by leaving them unresolved. The country is embroiled in disputes with Somalia over their maritime border, South Sudan over the Ilemi Triangle and Uganda over Migingo island, which threaten to diminish its land and maritime territory should neighbouring states' expansionist or revisionist claims succeed. Despite these challenges, Kenya has struggled to assert a robust and effective strategy to protect its territorial integrity, raising questions about the role of its strategic culture in these ongoing disputes.

Kenya's strategic culture, while promoting peaceful resolutions and regional cooperation, has at times contributed to the country's vulnerabilities. For example, the loss of maritime territory to Somalia following the 2021 ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) illustrates the potential consequences of a strategic approach that prioritizes diplomacy over assertiveness. Furthermore, the unresolved disputes over the Ilemi Triangle with South Sudan and Migingo Island with Uganda, reflect the limitations of Kenya's current strategies in safeguarding its borders. The essence of a state's existence lies in its defined territory, yet Kenya's ability to maintain its territorial integrity is increasingly under threat. Disputed borders, particularly those rich in resources, have the potential to escalate into larger conflicts if not managed effectively. The presence of valuable resources in areas like the Ilemi Triangle and the claimed maritime territory by Somalia, has attracted powerful external actors, complicating these disputes and challenging Kenya's strategic culture. This study sought to understand how Kenya's strategic culture has influenced its national security responses, particularly in the context of these territorial disputes. It will examine the extent to which Kenya's strategic culture has either contributed to or hindered the country's ability to protect its territorial integrity. The central question of this study is why Kenya, despite its regional economic and military strength, appears unable to leverage its influence for effective deterrence or diplomatic advantage in these disputes. By focusing on specific cases like the Ilemi Triangle, the Somalia-Kenya maritime dispute, and Migingo Island, the study aimed to provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of Kenya's strategic culture and offer recommendations for

enhancing its national security policies and strategies. Ultimately, the study highlighted the need for Kenya to reassess her strategic culture and adopt a more assertive posture in safeguarding her territorial integrity. The findings will contribute to ongoing debates about the role of strategic culture in national security and provide a basis for improving Kenya's approach to managing territorial disputes.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The Path Dependence Theory, initially developed in economics and later expanded by scholars like Goldstone (1998), provides a robust framework for understanding how historical decisions and events shape enduring patterns of behaviour, particularly in a nation's foreign policy. Goldstone's contributions highlight the significance of historical dynamics in influencing social and economic development, where early choices can create self-reinforcing mechanisms, making it increasingly difficult for systems to change their trajectory over time. Goldstone emphasizes that historical events and institutions create structural constraints that shape the potential success of revolutionary movements and other significant changes. These contingencies act like pivotal moments, setting nations on particular paths that continue to influence their strategic culture. Scholars such as Lantis (2002) as well as Götz & Staun (2022) further explore this impact, noting that past decisions, even those that may seem suboptimal in the present, have a lasting influence on current and future decision-making.

The theory posits that a nation's past does more than merely set the stage; it profoundly influences its future direction. Strategic culture, deeply rooted in these historical contingencies, becomes a guiding force that shapes how a nation views its security environment and reacts to threats. While adherence to established paths can ensure continuity and stability, it can also limit a nation's ability to innovate or adapt to new security challenges (Lantis, 2009). The connection between path dependence and strategic culture becomes evident when examining key historical events. Götz & Staun (2022) illustrate this with Russia's actions in Ukraine, showing how the dissolution of the Soviet Union has left a deep imprint on Russia's strategic culture, which continues to shape its policies today. This relationship provides valuable insights into the complexities of national security decision-making, demonstrating how past events continue to influence the present.

In Kenya's context, the historical evolution of its strategic culture and the decision-making processes surrounding territorial disputes exhibit path-dependent characteristics. Kenya's strategic culture, shaped by its historical experiences, institutional frameworks, and social norms, has led to an inclination to ambiguity and non-confrontation rather than decisive action in resolving territorial disputes. This path-dependent approach may result in the continuation of certain decision-making patterns, even when they are not the most effective or efficient.

However, the path-dependent framework also encourages consideration of the dynamic interaction between historical constraints and agency. While historical forces exert a strong influence, they do not necessarily determine a nation's future. Leaders and policymakers can navigate these constraints through conscious choices and proactive strategies, forging new paths that better align with contemporary realities. Understanding this interplay is essential for developing effective national security strategies in a constantly changing world.

Rational Choice Theory on the other hand provides a valuable perspective for analyzing strategic culture, focusing on decision-making processes that are grounded in rational calculations aimed at achieving

optimal outcomes. This theory posits that individuals and states make decisions by assessing the costs and benefits of various options, striving to achieve the best possible results given their circumstances. In the context of strategic culture, Rational Choice Theory can help explain why states choose specific policies or strategies based on their interests, preferences, and the anticipated utility of different courses of action (Green & Shapiro, 1994).

Rational Choice Theory contrasts with Path Dependence by emphasizing the role of strategic calculation and objective analysis in decision-making. While Path Dependence suggests that historical precedents heavily influence state behaviour, Rational Choice Theory argues that states are capable of making decisions based on a rational evaluation of their current situation. For example, when faced with a territorial dispute, a state guided by Rational Choice Theory would carefully consider the potential costs of military confrontation, the benefits of a diplomatic resolution, and the risks associated with various strategies before deciding on the most advantageous course of action. This decision-making process is pragmatic, relying on systematic evaluation rather than being confined by historical or cultural narratives (Levi, 1997).

In applying Rational Choice Theory to the study of strategic culture, it becomes evident that states often act strategically to maximize their security and economic benefits while minimizing risks. This theory offers a lens through which to view state behaviour as driven by rational actors seeking to optimize their position within the international system. It suggests that even in situations where historical influences are strong, states may still pursue strategies that deviate from past practices if they believe that doing so will yield better outcomes. Rational Choice Theory, therefore, provides insights into how states might shift their strategies in response to changing circumstances, such as emerging threats, shifting alliances, or evolving economic conditions (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962).

One of the key strengths of Rational Choice Theory is its ability to account for the dynamic nature of state behaviour. Unlike Path Dependence, which emphasizes continuity and the influence of past decisions, Rational Choice Theory allows for the possibility of change and adaptation in response to new information or changing conditions. This adaptability is particularly relevant in the context of international relations, where states must continually assess and reassess their strategies to respond effectively to an ever-changing global environment. Rational Choice Theory also highlights the importance of strategic flexibility, suggesting that states that are able to adjust their policies in response to new challenges are more likely to achieve their national security objectives (Ostrom, 1990).

In the context of Kenya's territorial disputes, Rational Choice Theory provides a framework for analysing the decision-making process by considering several factors that have influenced Kenya's approach. These factors include the perceived costs and benefits of different resolution strategies, such as diplomatic negotiations, legal action, or military intervention. The theory also considers the potential consequences of each strategy, both in the short-term and long-term, as well as the availability of resources (e.g., financial, military, diplomatic) to support these strategies. For instance, when deciding whether to pursue a diplomatic or military resolution to a territorial dispute, Kenya may weigh the economic and political costs of military action against the potential benefits of achieving a favourable outcome through diplomacy or legal means. This rational assessment of the situation helps to explain why Kenya has often opted for diplomatic solutions, even when faced with aggressive or assertive neighbours.

However, Rational Choice Theory also suggests that states are not bound by any single strategy; they are free to adapt and change their approach as circumstances evolve. This flexibility is evident in Kenya's strategic culture, where the country has at times taken more assertive stances, such as its military intervention in Somalia to counter the threat posed by Al-Shabaab, while in other instances, it has adhered to a more cautious and diplomatic approach, such as in the ongoing maritime boundary dispute with Somalia.

While Rational Choice Theory offers a structured approach to understanding decision-making in strategic culture, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The theory assumes that decision-makers are fully rational actors who have access to all relevant information and can accurately assess the costs and benefits of their actions. In reality, however, decision-makers are often influenced by a range of factors, including cultural values, historical experiences, and personal biases, which may lead to decisions that are not entirely rational. Additionally, the theory does not fully account for the complexities of human behaviour, particularly in situations where emotions, social pressures, or ideological commitments play a significant role. Despite these limitations, Rational Choice Theory provides a valuable counterpoint to Path Dependence, offering a more dynamic and flexible framework for understanding state behaviour.

By applying Rational Choice Theory to Kenya's territorial disputes, it becomes clear that Kenya's strategic decision-making is guided by a rational assessment of the costs and benefits associated with different resolution strategies. This approach allows Kenya to pursue its national interests in a manner that is both pragmatic and adaptable to changing circumstances. At the same time, the path-dependent nature of Kenya's strategic culture, shaped by historical experiences and institutional norms, continues to influence the decision-making process. This dual influence suggests that while Kenya's strategic culture may be deeply rooted in its past, it is also capable of evolving and adapting to meet the challenges of the present and future.

This theoretical framework provides a foundation for analysing the influence of strategic culture, as shaped by path dependence, on Kenya's decision-making process in resolving its territorial disputes, while also considering the role of rational choice in the selection and implementation of its resolution strategies. Based on the literature review, it is evident that there exists a gap in the study of Kenya's strategic culture and its nexus with national security. Previous studies, such as Frank's (2017) dissertation on Uganda and Tanzania's role in Somalia, and Achieng's (2017) exploration of Kenya's approaches to threats to her territorial integrity, have not been predicated on the application of Rational Choice Theory to strategic culture. This presents an opportunity to explore how Kenya's strategic culture can be understood through the lens of Rational Choice Theory, potentially offering new insights into the decision-making processes that shape national security strategies.

1.5 Empirical review

Determination of the Origins and Nature of Strategic Culture

Strategic culture refers to the way in which governments and their leaders perceive their adversaries, the purpose of warfare, and the appropriate application of force against certain targets (Wiltenburg, 2020). A country's national security policies and objectives are largely influenced by its strategic culture. It denotes the strategic and operational choices for the deployment of military troops. Snyder (1977)

defines strategic culture in his work "*The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations.*" as the,

“... sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation...” (p. 8).

O'Reilly (2012) further explains that the strategic cultures of states are products of their unique historical experiences, which are sustained and reaffirmed as policymakers become socialized into a particular way of thinking. The influence of strategic culture on decision-making is therefore a crucial aspect, as it may independently guide a state's conduct and establish the environmental context within which national security questions are addressed. O'Reilly also notes that while strategic culture is generally stable, external shocks such as significant geopolitical shifts or internal crises can occasion disruptions, leading to an evolution in a nation's strategic culture.

Key Elements of Strategic Culture

Strategic culture is also denoted by states' perceptions of adversaries, the role of military force, decision-making models, and national identity. Perceptions of adversaries affect threat assessment and the willingness to use force (Gotz & Staun, 2022). The role of military force indicates a country's preference for hard power versus diplomacy (Lo, 2015). Decision-making models, shaped by institutional structures and political dynamics, guide security policy formulation and implementation. National identity defines a country's values, interests, and aspirations (Barthwal, 2022). These elements collectively shape responses to security challenges and a state's foreign policy.

Influence on Territorial Disputes

Strategic culture significantly impacts how states handle territorial disputes. For example, Pakistan's military-oriented strategic culture has led to a series of conflicts with India over Kashmir (Barthwal, 2022). Russia's strategic culture, driven by historical experiences including past invasions, loss of an empire and perceived vulnerability from expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), prompted its military intervention in Ukraine (Gotz & Staun, 2022). Understanding strategic culture provides insights into states' motivations and behaviours that influence their foreign and security policies, enhancing comprehension of regional and international security dynamics.

Strengths and Weaknesses in Addressing Territorial Disputes

The strengths and weaknesses of a state's strategic culture are evident in its handling of territorial disputes. Russia's intervention in Ukraine, driven by its militarist strategic culture, has faced criticism due to what has fanned out into a prolonged conflict and lack of decisive victory in Ukraine (Blinken, 2023; Rumer, 2023). Conversely, Kenya's diplomatic approach, influenced by a strategic culture prioritizing peaceful resolutions and multilateral engagement, promotes regional stability (Burgess, 2018). Evaluating the effectiveness of strategic cultures in territorial disputes helps identify strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for conflict resolution. The literature review highlights a lack of comprehensive studies on Kenya's strategic culture and its impact on national security. While Uganda and Tanzania's roles in Somalia have been studied through a strategic culture lens (Frank, 2017), Kenya's case remains underexplored. This despite Kenya's involvement in counterterrorism operations in Somalia since 2011, with no extensive research on its strategic culture and how it shapes its foreign and security policies and strategies. Achieng (2017) examined Kenya's responses to territorial threats but did not focus on how strategic culture impacted these responses. This gap underscores the need for a detailed

investigation of Kenya's strategic culture and its influence on national security, which would facilitate the crafting of effective security and foreign policies, thereby fine tuning her strategic culture and statecraft.

1.6 Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods approach; and was based on a case study of Kenya. The research location was Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, rather than in the specific disputed areas such as Migingo Island, Ilemi Triangle, the Horn of Africa, or areas proximate to the Kenya - Somalia maritime boundary. Conducting the study in Nairobi allowed for access to key policymakers, diplomats, military officials, and experts who are directly involved in the formulation and execution of Kenya's security policies.

The target population was key stakeholders involved in Kenya's national security and foreign policy, based in Nairobi. This population comprises policymakers, military officials, diplomats, security experts, and representatives from regional and international organizations headquartered in Nairobi. Specifically, the target population is drawn from: six (6) top officials (key informant interviewees), 70 from Kenya Defence Forces (KDF), 40 from National Intelligence Services (NIS), 30 from the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, and a total of 20 drawn from the National Security Council Committee (NSCC), the Attorney General's Office and the Kenya International Boundaries Officer (KIBO). The estimated target population consisted of 166 individuals. This population was chosen because these stakeholders are directly involved in the decision-making processes related to Kenya's foreign policy and national security, providing valuable insights into the country's responses to territorial disputes. A purposive sampling technique was employed for this study, targeting individuals and groups directly involved in Kenya's strategic culture and national security decision-making processes. To determine the appropriate sample size for this study, Fisher's formula was used. The sample size for this study was therefore 96 respondents. However, considering practical constraints, including access to participants, time limitations, and the in-depth nature of the research, the sample size was adjusted to 48 participants. This adjustment was made to ensure a manageable and focused study while still capturing a representative and diverse range of perspectives. The adjusted sample size is made up of individuals who fit the inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria based on their relevance to the subject matter concerning Kenya's strategic culture and national security.

Data collection instruments and procedures included a questionnaire and an interview guide. Quantitative data was analysed using differential statistics with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data analysis entailed content/key themes, discourse analysis; coding, identifying patterns and interpreting meaning. Quantitative data was presented through charts, graphs and tables as necessary, while qualitative data was presented in textual methods/themes.

1.7 Findings

Response Rate

The researcher administered 42 questionnaires, out of which only 33 respondents returned fully filled questionnaires. This represented a response rate of 78.6%. This response rate conforms to Ørngreen and Levinsen (2017) stipulation that a response rate of 50 percent is adequate for analysis, which meant that

78.6% was even better. Moreover, the response rate for the interviews was five (5) out of a targeted six (6), which represents 83.3%.

Background Information

Respondents were asked to provide their gender, age, and education level. Their responses were summarised and presented in the following figures.

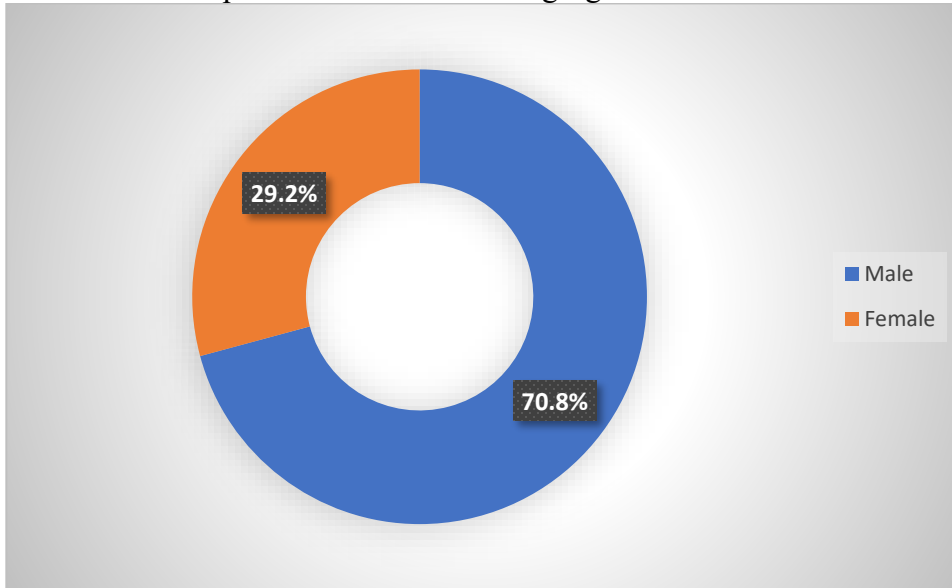


Figure 1: Gender of the Respondents
Source: Field Data (2024)

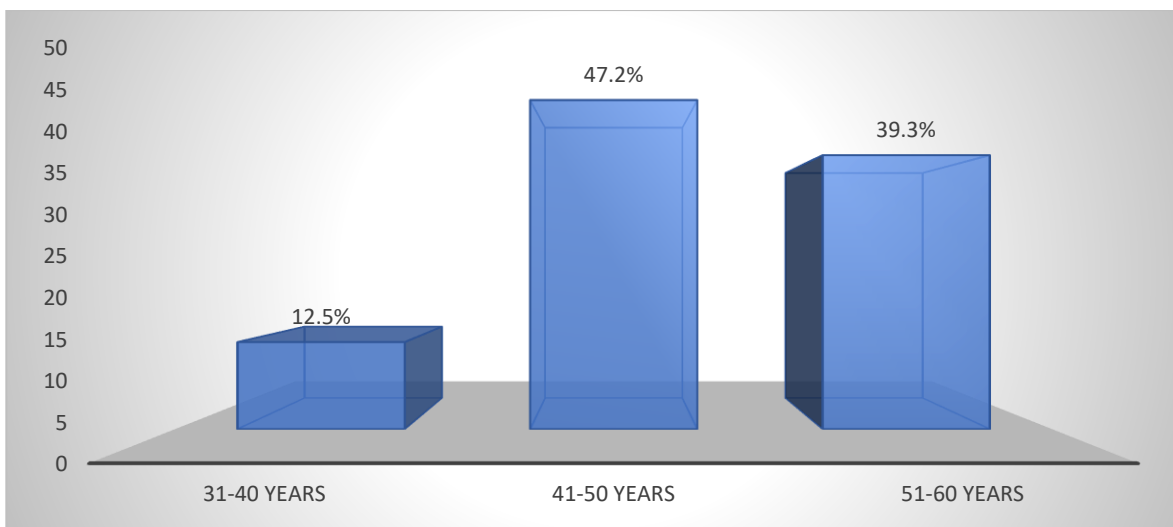


Figure 2: Respondents' Age Bracket
Source: Field Data (2024)

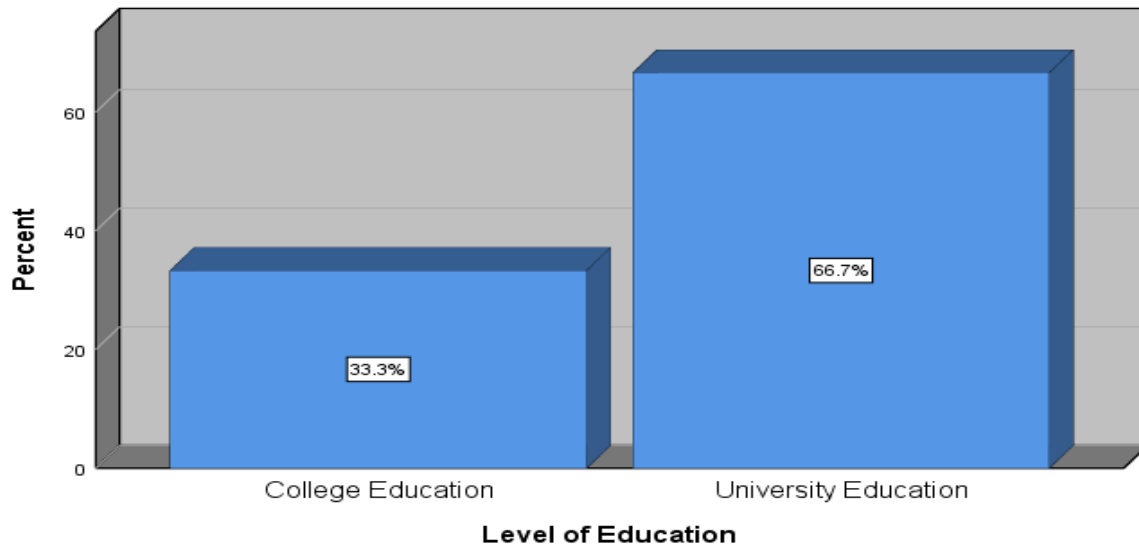


Figure 3: Respondents' Highest Level of Education
 Source: Field Data (2024)

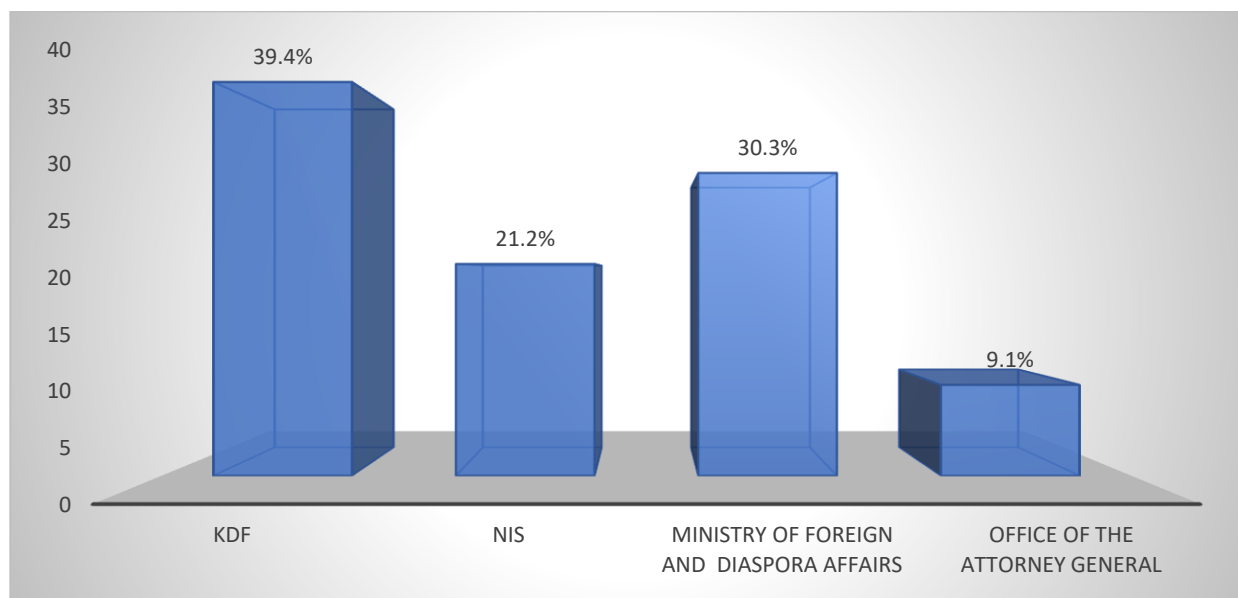


Figure 4: Distribution of Respondents by Organisation
 Source: Field Data (2024)

The sample included 70.8% male and 29.2% female respondents, reflecting the male-dominated nature of the industry understudy. While mixed gender is key to providing diverse perspectives, it the male dominated sample did not impact the outcome of the study, given that the topic of the study is not subjective to any gender biases. Most respondents were between 41-50 years old (47.2%) and 51-60 years old (39.3%), indicating a mature and knowledgeable participant group. Regarding education,

66.7% had reached university level, while 33.3% had college education, suggesting a well-educated sample, capable of providing reliable information.

Origins of Kenya’s Strategic Culture

Respondents were queried on the diverse origins of Kenya’s strategic culture. The findings are presented in Figure 5, 6 and 7.

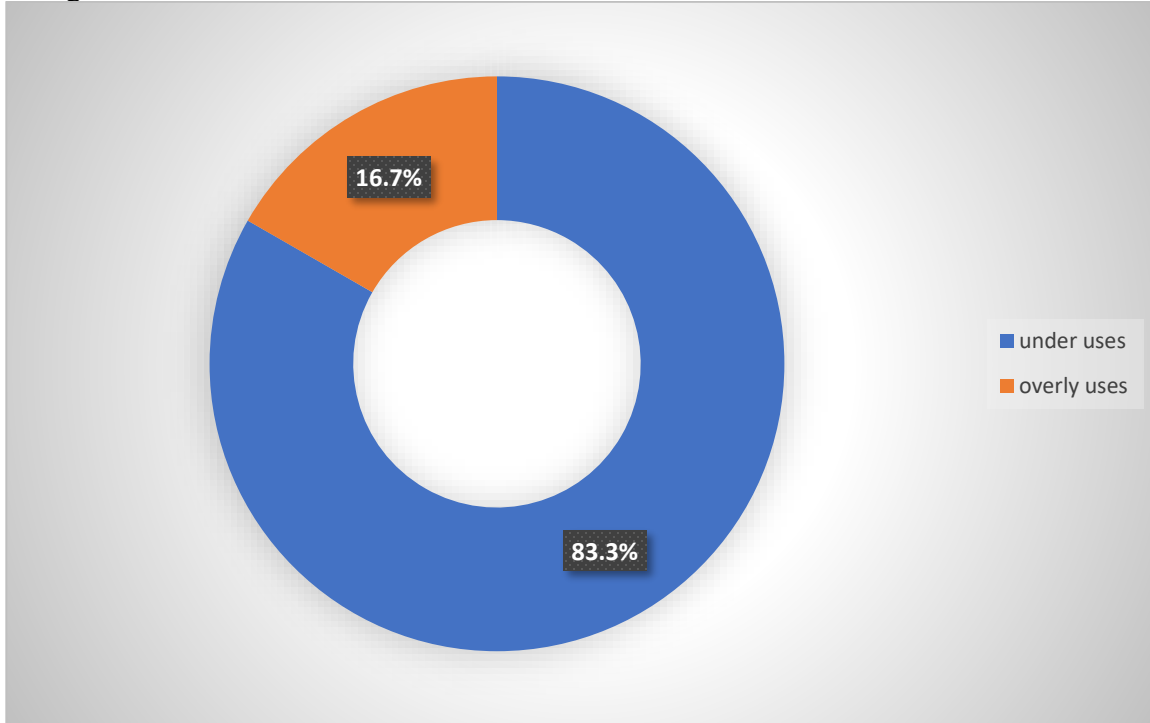


Figure 5: Extent to which Kenya Relies on its Military to Resolve Territorial Conflicts and Threats to National Security

Source: Field Data (2024)

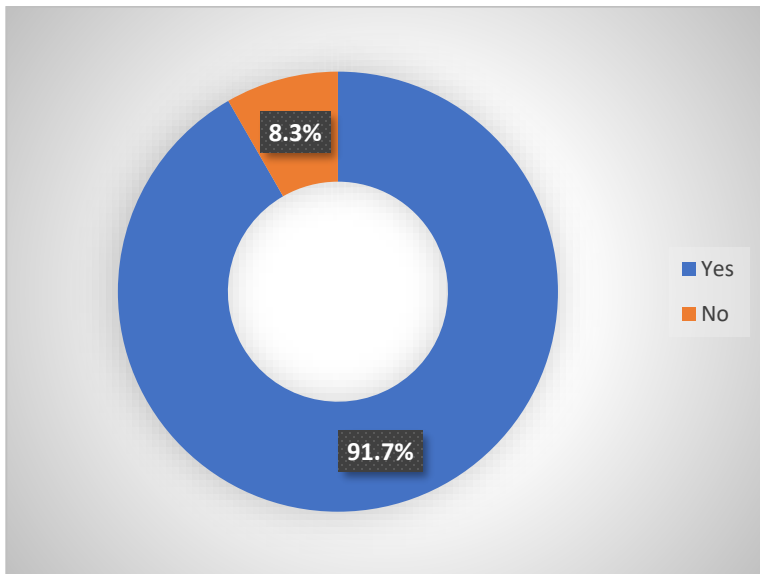


Figure 6: Diplomacy versus Military Action in Resolving Territorial Conflicts and Other Threats to National Security

Source: Field Data (2024)

The findings revealed that 83.3% believed Kenya under-relies on its military, while 16.7% thought it over-relies. Additionally, 91.7% indicated that Kenya leans more towards diplomacy than military action in resolving conflicts.

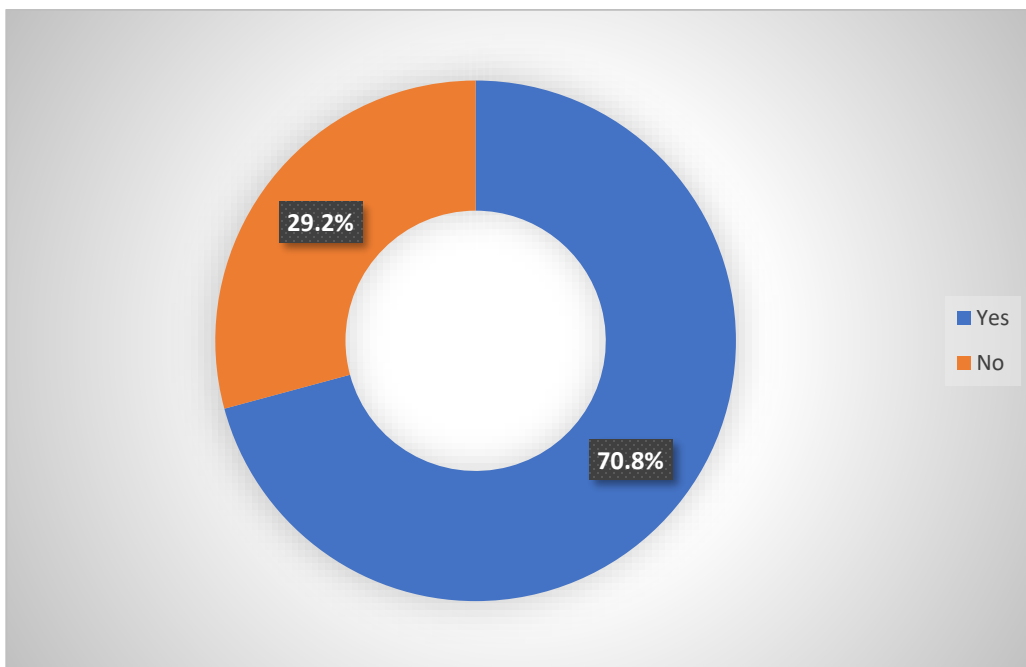


Figure 7: Kenya's Political System

Source: Field Data (2024)

Regarding Kenya's political system, 29.2% of respondents felt it supports responses to key territorial disputes or threats, while 70.8% viewed it as restraining. The latter group cited that democratic principles, while beneficial for public participation, can slow decision-making due to divisive politics and litigation tendencies.

Effects of Kenya's Strategic Culture on Territorial Disputes/Threats to National Security

The research aimed to examine the effects of Kenya's strategic culture on territorial disputes. The respondents were asked to rate the following factors in terms of their influence on Kenya's apparent indecisive response to key territorial disputes/threats to national security. The results are as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The Rate of Factors in Terms of Their Influence in Kenya's Apparent Indecisive Response to Key Territorial Disputes/Threats to National Security

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Leadership and Decision-Making Model of the State - Decisions, policy direction, leadership style/quality, capabilities and personal style/beliefs/assertiveness of the president and their significance in shaping Kenya's response to national security challenges	3.625	0.939
External Influences - Alliances, international institutions/norms/agreements (e.g. the United Nations, the African Union, or the East African Community), regional dynamics, geopolitical context, and relationships with other states significantly impact Kenya	3.708	0.988
Societal Factors - The size and quality of the population, national character (intellectual and moral qualities), public opinion, citizens' values, norms, beliefs, economic status, level of education, culture, ethnicity, and societal pressure as playing a crucial role in influencing Kenya's responses to threats	4.750	0.532
Aim for Use of Coercive Means - The offensive or defensive military posture, threat perceptions and the level of aggression a state intended to project, along with its willingness to use force/coercive measures, as crucial determinants of Kenya's response	3.583	0.501
Threat Perceptions - How Kenya perceives the risks and challenges it faces, the nature of the threat(s), threat proximity, potential consequences, and their influence on the state's willingness to compromise or assert itself and their significance in shaping strategic culture	2.750	0.982
How Coercive Methods are used - Influence of deterrence, compellence, military power projection beyond borders, alliances, partnerships and psychological operations/information manipulation on Kenya's strategic response to national security threats	3.333	0.606

Source: Field Data (2024)

With a resounding mean score of 4.750, societal factors emerged as the most significant driver. This suggests that public opinion, values, cultural norms, and even economic realities deeply influence decision-making. This may likely be attributable to Kenya's political system as a participatory constitutional democracy. Similarly, cultural values of pacifism versus assertiveness shape Kenya's willingness to compromise or hesitance to project strength. Economic constraints or dependence on trade partners can further limit response options. External influences were rated to hold substantial weight (mean score: 3.708).

The key informant interviewees were also asked to offer insights into the role of economic factors in shaping Kenya's responses to territorial disputes.

According to Interviewee (I5):

Kenya's strong economy, especially in comparison to the countries involved in the territorial disputes, serves as an enabler rather than an impediment. The economic strength of Kenya positions it favourably, providing opportunities for decisive action (Inter 5, 2024).

Alliances, international norms and regional dynamics all play a part. Membership in regional security organisations also likely influences preference for collective and collaborative action against external threats over unilateralism. State action under such social and institutional norms can tend to be constrained.

While slightly less influential (mean score: 3.625), leadership and decision-making remain vital. The President's style, assertiveness, and personal beliefs were rated as likely to significantly impact strategic choices. Interviewee (I2) lamented the apparent departure from the proactive approach of the first and second presidents, stating that:

Kenya's second President, Daniel Arap Moi, continued the trend of decisive leadership in managing territorial disputes. Specifically, Moi successfully handled Uganda's Idi Amin claim to Kenyan territory up to Naivasha, leading to Amin's withdrawal. ... Moi's leadership style mirrored Kenyatta's assertive approach, reinforcing the nation's commitment to preserving its territorial integrity (Inter 2, 2024).

The interviewee (I2) however noted that:

Regrettably, internal politics particularly during the Grand Coalition Government, contributed to the failure to address the Migingo Island dispute decisively. Despite changes in leadership dynamics, the Migingo issue remained unresolved. [Additionally], ... the influx of Somali citizens into Kenya, raises concerns about demographics, business influence, and political participation, necessitating the need for strategic consideration of these demographic changes and their potential long-term implications (Inter 2, 2024).

Interviewee (I5) posited that:

Kenya needs to adopt a more pre-emptive and anticipatory approach in dealing with territorial matters. After presidents Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi, subsequent leaders appeared to leave matters to chance rather than pursuing intentional strategies guided by national interests. This underscores the importance of examining leadership styles and their impact on Kenya's strategic culture in managing territorial disputes (Inter 5, 2024).

Strong leadership is often crucial in navigating complex and evolving threats. Kenya's military posture, willingness to use force, and threat perception (mean score: 3.583) significantly influence response intensity. Striking a balance between deterrence and measured action is key. How coercive methods are employed (mean score: 3.333) holds moderate significance. Data shows that the effectiveness of military

interventions, alliances, and information operations can significantly impact outcomes. Choosing the right tools and using them strategically becomes crucial. Kenya's perception of threats (mean score: 2.750) was rated as moderately significant. Accurate assessments of the severity of the threat, potential consequences and threat proximity are essential for informed decision-making.

These findings paint a complex diversity of the forces shaping Kenya's response to national security threats. Understanding and addressing each factor is crucial for crafting effective strategies. Ultimately, a holistic approach that recognises the interplay of internal and external influences is key to safeguarding national security interests.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Kenya's Strategic Culture in Addressing Key Territorial Disputes/Threats to National Security

The study aimed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Kenya's strategic culture in addressing territorial disputes. The respondents were asked to indicate what they believed were the pros and cons of a diplomatic or military response to the Ilemi Triangle Dispute in relation to the protection of Kenya's territorial integrity.

Respondent (R24) noted that:

Diplomacy has continued to embolden the GoSS and its peoples to now extend their claim beyond Ilemi to the Kenyan territory in the area between Nadapal and Nakodok. The lack of coherent and forceful diplomatic and legal approach to the disputes with Uganda and Somalia undermine Kenya's reputation and image (R24, 2024).

Nearly a third of the respondents (28.6%) however pointed to a drawback associated with Kenya's policy not to abide by the ICJ ruling and the burden both economically and militarily, to have to exercise effective occupation and control of the disputed maritime territory. A further 23.7% of the respondents indicated that the pros of diplomatic means are that it promotes peaceful settlement, fosters cooperation, and avoids the potential human and economic costs associated with military action. Most respondents (89.4%) however, observed that diplomacy was bound to take time, and that its success depends on the willingness of all the parties to negotiate, some of whom may not be willing to do so.

Moreover, 75.3% of the respondents felt that there has often been a replication of projects and efforts as well as lack of proper coherence in the formulation and implementation of government policies and strategies, which robs the country of the much-needed focus. This is largely driven by competition for budgetary resources by various entities for the perceived benefit accruing from such budgets. Further, the multiagency concept is a novel idea meant to enhance collaboration and coordination, which requires the involvement of all ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) and by extension, the public, in working seamlessly, in the protection of Kenya's national interests. Most respondents (76.9%) argued that working in silos has only resulted in disjointedness and derails the implementation of very noble ideas and well thought out policies.

Respondent (R28) observed that:

Multiagency bundling without a clearly designated leader, who wields the legal and professional gravitas and personal oomph to drive collaborative action across agencies could well result in bystander effect and the diffusion of responsibility where no single individual or agency can be called out for not acting as expected (R28, 2024).

The findings demonstrate that despite the Government's good intentions at achieving coherence and unity of effort, the concept of multiagency approach has not percolated deep enough as it should, pointing to an imperative for necessary interventions, to make it an enduring *modus operandi*.

The respondents were asked to indicate whether there were any specific areas or aspects where improvements or adjustments to Kenya's strategic culture are needed. At 73.6%, they indicated that legislation on the creation of a multi-agency framework for the management of Kenya's international boundaries and other matters of national interest is overdue. They also advocated on the need to inculcate the tenets of strategic culture across all government institutions. A further 89.3% of the respondents impressed on the need to cultivate and nurture a common understanding of national interests by all and sundry and cascade the same in all social and political spheres.

Respondent (R3) mentioned that:

Re-engineering the civil service is a key priority. Kenya surfs the risk of losing institutional memory as the civil service has become more driven by politics, than service to the country (R3, 2024).

The respondents were also asked to share any additional views they had based on their experience as to how Kenya can foster a robust strategic culture that provides clarity and predictability in national security policy and strategy. They (49.2%) indicated that it is important to invest in strategic communication targeting regional and global audience on Kenya's international boundaries/territorial integrity. Respondents (89.5%) opined that despite past efforts to resolve the matter, Kenya and South Sudan still do not have a mutually agreeable position on their common boundary and particularly regarding the Ilemi triangle.

Interviewee (I2) expressed the view that strategic culture is crucial for Kenya and should extend beyond defence and security to encompass a broader perspective that prioritises the country's interests over individual whims. Interviewee (I1) also emphasised the need for the nurturing of a strategic culture that places high premium on the full gamut of national interests, to include national security and sustainable development.

Interviewee (I4) raised concerns regarding the harassment of locals and law enforcement officers in Migingo Island and Lake Victoria, as well as the influx of foreigners/migrants, under the guise of refugees, with considerable wealth, potentially impacting Kenyans' access to property and in particular, land and housing. To him, such occurrences are a threat to the economic and security interests of Kenya and the citizen wellbeing, warranting government counteraction.

Kenya's strategic culture has demonstrated both strengths and weaknesses in addressing territorial disputes. The decisive military response during the Shifta War is a testament to the strength of Kenya's

strategic culture in defending its territorial integrity when national unity and security are perceived to be directly threatened. However, the country's strategic culture has also shown weaknesses, particularly in the case of the maritime dispute with Somalia, where the reliance on diplomacy and compromise over assertive action led to significant loss of territory. The mixed results seen in the Ilemi Triangle and Migingo Island disputes further underscore the dual nature of Kenya's strategic culture, where the emphasis on peaceful resolution has sometimes been at odds with the need for a more robust defence of national boundaries.

Contributions of the Study

The analysis of Kenya's strategic culture in territorial disputes reveals key insights into decision-making complexities, confirming the dominance of path dependence theory. Historical legacies, leadership styles, and internal and external dynamics significantly influence responses, sometimes hindering objective, threat-driven approaches.

Kenya's first two presidents employed decisive strategies not replicated by later regimes, suggesting that strategic culture is shaped by various factors, including regime types, individual leadership, and historical contexts. This aligns with O'Reilly's (2012) assertion that strategic culture, while consistent, can be disrupted by external shocks like democratization, thereby reinforcing the assumptions of the rational choice theory.

The Ilemi Triangle dispute, dating back to early 20th century border adjustments, shows a consistent irresolute approach, mirroring Kenya's handling of other disputes like Migingo Island and the maritime boundary with Somalia. This supports the premise that Kenya's strategic culture favours peaceful coexistence over confrontation.

Differences in leadership styles, such as the proactive stances of Kenyatta and Moi compared to later administrations, highlight how individual decisions can deviate from established paths based on situational contexts. Political interests, economic considerations, and public opinion exert pressure, reinforcing rational choice theory and Kenya's non-militaristic posture.

The study emphasizes the potential downsides of military interventions, such as economic burdens and escalation risks, advocating for measured responses based on cost-benefit analysis. It underscores the benefits of pursuing diplomatic solutions and legal frameworks with military action as a last resort. Action taken however needs to be conclusive and forestall the potential for conflagration.

This analysis enriches path dependence theory by showing that despite complex historical legacies and other dynamics, states often maintain a predictable stance in safeguarding national interests. For Kenya, this stance has been one of ambiguity, leniency and compromise, favouring a cooperative strategic culture over militaristic approaches. This cautious approach finds explanation in the rational choice theory.

1.8 Conclusion

The study concluded that Kenya's strategic culture is deeply rooted in its historical experiences, particularly the struggle for independence, which established a foundation of national pride and territorial integrity. These historical legacies continue to influence but do not pre-ordain Kenya's preference for

diplomacy over military aggression in resolving disputes. The study concludes that elite beliefs, political leadership, and national identity play a crucial role in shaping Kenya's strategic culture. The emphasis on national symbols, unity, and the avoidance of confrontation reflects a strategic culture that prioritizes internal cohesion and the maintenance of international cooperation.

The study concludes that Kenya's strategic culture heavily favours diplomatic and multilateral engagement over military solutions in addressing territorial disputes. This approach, while promoting regional stability, has sometimes limited Kenya's ability to assertively resolve disputes, as seen in the handling of the Kenya-Somalia maritime boundary issue. The study concluded that despite its strategic advantages, Kenya has struggled to effectively leverage its influence in resolving the territorial disputes. The study concluded that one of Kenya's strategic strengths lies in its commitment to diplomatic engagement and participation in regional and international organizations. This approach has fostered a cooperative security environment and prevented escalation of conflicts, thereby contributing to regional peace and stability. The research identifies weaknesses in Kenya's strategic culture, particularly in its decision-making models. The tendency to avoid confrontational or militaristic approaches has only served to prolong disputes. This suggests the need for more decisive and coherent strategies in safeguarding national interests. The study concluded that while Kenya's strategic culture has consistently leaned towards ambiguity, leniency and compromise, there are opportunities for refining this approach. It espouses Kenya as a country that ought to be more assertive in its strategic posture, especially given the volatile regional environment, while continuing to leverage its strengths in diplomacy and international cooperation.

1.9 Recommendations

Based on the study's objectives, several key recommendations have been proposed to address the challenges identified in Kenya's strategic culture and its handling of territorial disputes:

- The first objective focused on determining the origins and nature of Kenya's strategic culture. The study recommended that the Kenyan Government prioritizes the effective occupation and control of disputed territories, such as the Ilemi Triangle, Migingo Island, and the maritime boundary with Somalia. The research suggested that Kenya should use its diplomatic and statecraft tools pre-emptively to prevent these disputes from escalating into more significant crises. Strengthening the commitment to safeguarding territorial integrity, grounded in historical and strategic understanding, is essential for maintaining national security and asserting Kenya's position in the region.
- The second objective examined the effects of Kenya's strategic culture on territorial disputes and national security. The study recommended the establishment of an interdisciplinary think tank responsible for crafting an integrated, long-range national security and development blueprint or grand strategy. This blueprint, the research suggested, should be anchored in law to ensure its continuity beyond political cycles and to serve as a binding framework for all future administrations. The think tank should also play a crucial role in inducting incoming presidents, cabinet secretaries, principal secretaries, and other key officials on Kenya's national interests, fostering a unified strategic culture across government institutions. Furthermore, the study

recommended integrating this strategic culture within the national education system to promote national pride and a shared understanding of Kenya's long-term goals.

- The third objective focused on assessing the strengths and weaknesses of Kenya's strategic culture in addressing territorial disputes. The study recommended adopting a long-term and proactive vision that is deeply rooted in statecraft, for safeguarding national interests including territorial integrity. The vision should be insulated from political/regime changes. The research also emphasized the need for regular assessments and reviews of national security policies and strategies to adapt them to evolving geopolitical dynamics and emerging threats.
- Additionally, the study recommended that Kenya should strengthen its diplomatic, legal, and defence strategies by investing in maritime and boundary legal expertise, enhancing diplomatic engagements, and sharpening its legal capabilities to secure favourable outcomes in potential legal settlements. This approach, the research suggested, will enable Kenya to maintain its historical advantage and effectively manage its territorial disputes.

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