



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Somalia: Al Shabaab

Version 3.0

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Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- The general humanitarian situation is so severe as to breach Article 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC (the Qualification Directive) / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules
- The security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that it would breach Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- A claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

5th Floor

Globe House

89 Eccleston Square

London, SW1V 1PN

Email: chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk

Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

Updated: 28 October 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution and/or serious harm from:

- Al Shabaab because the person is, or is perceived as being, in opposition to the group on political and/or religious grounds
- the state and/or society because the person is, or is perceived as being, a (former) member of Al Shabaab.

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1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 Actual or perceived political and/or religious grounds could include, but is not limited to: working for the Government, particularly those supporting elections; spying for the Government or AMISOM; working for certain international and/or aid organisations; non-adherence to Al Shabaab's interpretation of Sharia; refusing to join or 'defecting' as a fighter.

1.2.2 For information on fearing indiscriminate violence from Al Shabaab and the application of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive, see the country policy and information note on [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).

2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

2.2.1 Al Shabaab is proscribed by the UK government as an international terrorist group and has been responsible for serious human rights abuses (see [Proscription](#) and country policy and information note on [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#).)

2.2.2 If there are serious reasons to consider that the person has been involved in terrorist activities, decision makers must consider whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses applies. Each case must be considered on its

individual facts and merits. If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.

- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention, Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 Actual or imputed political opinion, actual or imputed religion; or – in the case of women – actual or imputed membership of a particular social group.
- 2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the particular person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.
- 2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Risk

a. General context and background

- 2.4.1 Al Shabaab's main aims are the strict interpretation of Islamic law, the removal from Somalia of foreign forces and foreign influences, and the regaining of territory lost from the forces of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) (see [Aims of Al Shabaab](#)).
- 2.4.2 After 2011, Al Shabaab's military capability was degraded due to the efforts of AMISOM and Somali government forces, an increased number of US airstrikes as well as internal division within Al Shabaab. However, in 2020 it is reported that Al Shabaab's operational activities have intensified again. Al Shabaab continues to control large parts of south and central Somalia, particularly rural areas including smaller towns and villages. Sources generally point to AMISOM and the Somali Government as having control of Mogadishu and other cities. Government/international forces also retain control of main transport routes to and from the major towns and cities. However, Al Shabaab continues to be able to conduct attacks in Mogadishu and other areas outside of its control (see [Control of territory](#) and [Military strength and capability](#)).

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b. Targets of Al Shabaab

- 2.4.3 Al Shabaab has targeted persons and/or institutions representing (or perceived to be supporting) the international community and the Somali government throughout the country, including government-controlled areas. These groups include:
- members of the security forces
 - parliamentarians and government officials
 - election monitors

- clan leaders who support the government
 - those believed to be spying for the government including Al Shabaab defectors
- 2.4.4 Such people may be targeted by Al Shabaab and are likely to be at risk of serious harm or persecution (see [Leaving and 'defecting' from Al Shabaab](#) and [Al Shabaab's targeted groups](#))
- 2.4.5 Sources indicate that others may be a target depending on their activities and to what extent they are critical of Al Shabaab. These include:
- humanitarian aid workers
 - Somalis working for international organisations, such as the UN
 - non-government organisations (NGO) employees
 - journalists
- 2.4.6 However, sources indicate that Al Shabaab does not generally target local staff or those from international or national NGOs with a low-level profile (see [Al Shabaab's targeted groups](#)).
- 2.4.7 In general, people without a government or international profile or perceived link to these organisations are unlikely to be at risk of persecution or serious harm (see [Al Shabaab's targeted groups](#)).

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c. [Treatment of persons in areas under Al Shabaab control](#)

- 2.4.8 In country guidance (CG) case of [AMM and others \(conflict; humanitarian crisis; returnees; FGM\) Somalia CG \[2011\] UKUT 00445 \(IAC\)](#) (AMM and others), heard 13 to 21 June and 15 July 2011, promulgated on 25 November 2011, the Upper Tribunal (UT) held that:

'In general, a returnee with no recent experience of living in Somalia will be at real risk of being subjected to treatment proscribed by Article 3 in an Al-Shabab controlled area. "No recent experience" means that the person concerned left Somalia before the rise of Al-Shabab in 2008. Even if a person has such experience, however, he or she will still be returning from the United Kingdom, with all that is likely to entail, so far as Al-Shabab perceptions are concerned, but he or she will be less likely to be readily identifiable as a returnee. Even if he or she were to be so identified, the evidence may point to the person having struck up some form of accommodation with Al-Shabab, whilst living under their rule. On the other hand, although having family in the Al-Shabab area of return may alleviate the risk, the rotating nature of Al-Shabab leadership and the fact that punishments are meted out in apparent disregard of local sensibilities mean that, in general, it cannot be said that the presence of family is likely to mean the risk ceases to be a real one.

'Al-Shabab's reasons for imposing its requirements and restrictions, such as regarding manner of dress and spending of leisure time, are religious and those who transgress are regarded as demonstrating that they remain in a state of kufr (apostasy). The same is true of those returnees who are identified as coming from the West. Accordingly, those at real risk of such

Article 3 ill-treatment from Al-Shabab will in general be refugees, since the persecutory harm is likely to be inflicted on the basis of imputed religious opinion.

‘Although those with recent experience of living under Al-Shabab may be able to “play the game”, in the sense of conforming with Al-Shabab’s requirements and avoiding suspicion of apostasy, the extreme nature of the consequences facing anyone who might wish to refuse to conform (despite an ability to do so) is such as to attract the principle in RT (Zimbabwe). The result is that such people will also in general be at real risk of persecution by Al-Shabab for a Refugee Convention reason.

‘The same considerations apply to those who are reasonably likely to have to pass through Al-Shabab areas.’ (paragraphs 599 to 602)

- 2.4.9 Since [AMM and others](#) was heard, Al Shabaab has continued to impose a strict version of Sharia in areas under its control. This has included torture, stoning, amputations, public lashings and executions as punishments, and as a means of intimidating the local population, as well as sexual and gender-based violence. One source however, explained that Al Shabaab have also been flexible in the application of Sharia, depending on the level of control in the area or the need to maintain popular support (see [Justice, law and order in Al Shabaab-controlled territory](#)).
- 2.4.10 Sources point to a degree of regional variation on how Sharia is implemented, and how the group interacts and behaves. Al Shabaab are reported to outlaw particular types of activities it deems as un-Islamic and have been reported to detain people for infringements. However, it is unclear what the scale is or frequency of this. The USSD 2019 report, repeating information from the 2018 report, suggests that people have been arbitrarily arrested and detained without giving a sense of scale. While the Finnish Immigration Service reported paying taxes was more important than monitoring moral behaviour, suggesting a more nuanced approach by Al Shabaab (see [Ban on cultural activities](#), [Justice, law and order in Al Shabaab-controlled territory](#) and [Al Shabaab background](#)).
- 2.4.11 Sources all report that Al Shabaab collect taxes (‘zakat’) as a means to fund their ongoing insurgency against the Somali Government – including paying the salaries of their fighters. Sources are mixed on the extent to which punishments for non-payment are meted out, although some sources have claimed torture and extortion through threats, and forced recruitment of children through family members (see [Financing, commerce and taxes \(‘zakat’\)](#)).
- 2.4.12 The country evidence does not indicate that there very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from the findings of the UT in AMM. Persons living in an area controlled by Al Shabaab will not be at risk of persecution simply by living in such an area. However, persons who have no experience of living under Al Shabab control and/or do not conform to Al Shabaab’s strict interpretation of Islamic behaviour are likely to be at risk of persecution but this may depend on the area and how strictly Sharia or local polices are enforced. The onus is on the person to show that their profile and

activities are such that they are reasonably likely to attract Al Shabaab's adverse attention and be targeted as a result.

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d. [Forced recruitment to Al Shabaab](#)

- 2.4.13 Al Shabaab recruits its members voluntarily and also by force, though their ability to recruit and their method of doing so will vary in areas under their control and those held by the government/international forces.
- 2.4.14 Those who choose to join Al Shabaab may do so for a variety of reasons including ideological, religious or economic (see [Joining Al Shabaab](#) and [Recruitment methods](#)).
- 2.4.15 Al Shabaab deploy a range of different techniques to encourage or compel people to join. UNSOM's August 2017 paper listed the main methods:
- direct recruitment of vulnerable groups – often with social and economic incentives
 - influence and pressure from friends and family
 - clan negotiated recruitment
 - forced recruitment
 - media publicity
 - religious persuasion (see [Recruitment methods](#))
- 2.4.16 Children and young men are Al Shabaab's primary recruitment targets and have been subject to forced recruitment, although sources vary on their assessment of the frequency with which this happens. The UN Independent Expert noted a substantial number of children have been abducted by Al Shabaab, whilst Mohamed Haji Abdullahi's paper described forced recruitment as happening rarely, as did Mary Harper who stated it did occur, but mainly in Al Shabaab controlled areas and rarely in Mogadishu (see [Recruitment to Al Shabaab](#)).
- 2.4.17 Clan-negotiated recruitment also occurs as does forced marriage and the recruitment of women to roles in fundraising, intelligence gathering, recruitment and domestic roles. Women are not placed in combative roles although there have been recent, rare examples of women being used as suicide bombers. Recruitment methods can vary depending on the area, the individual, and the needs of Al Shabaab at a particular time (see [Recruitment methods](#) and [Recruitment of women](#)).
- 2.4.18 The UT in the CG case of [MOJ & Ors \(Return to Mogadishu\) Somalia CG \[2014\] UKUT 00442 \(IAC\)](#) (MOJ and Ors), heard on 11 to 13, 25 February, and 9 September 2014, promulgated on 3 October 2014, held that '[t]here is no real risk of forced recruitment to Al Shabaab for civilian citizens of Mogadishu, including recent returnees from the West' (paragraph 407e). While there is evidence that Al Shabaab sometimes forcibly recruits in areas under its control there is limited information to indicate that it does so in government-controlled areas, including Mogadishu, on a systematic or widespread basis (see [Recruitment to Al Shabaab](#)).

2.4.19 There are not very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from the UT's findings in [MOJ and Ors](#). Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.

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e. Defectors – fear of the state

2.4.20 The Somali government provides an amnesty and rehabilitation programme for those who choose to leave Al Shabaab and enter government-controlled areas. Hundreds of people considered by the government as 'low risk' have passed through the various rehabilitation centres in southern and central Somalia. There are however, no government-run rehabilitation centres for women, and children are accommodated through NGO-operated educational and vocational training centres. The government grants amnesty from prosecution to 'low risk' defectors completing their rehabilitation programme but one source noted the legal uncertainty and lack of explicit guarantees around amnesty from prosecution (see [Amnesty and rehabilitation program](#), [Rehabilitation centres](#) and [Prosecution of defectors](#)).

2.4.21 Those 'low risk' defectors having participated and completed the rehabilitation process are unlikely to be at risk of persecution by state security forces for that reason alone. The onus will be on the person to demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution based on their individual circumstances, notwithstanding the background country information (see [Prosecution of defectors](#).)

2.4.22 Those considered as 'high risk' defectors are not eligible for the rehabilitation centres and are subject to house arrest, prosecution and imprisonment.

2.4.23 There are no juvenile justice measures for children facing allegations of Al Shabaab related crimes (see [Amnesty and rehabilitation program](#) and [Prosecution of defectors](#).)

2.4.24 If there are serious reasons to consider that the person has been involved in terrorist activities, decision makers must consider whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses applies. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits (see [Exclusion](#) and the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#)).

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f. Defectors fearing Al Shabaab

2.4.25 Al Shabaab has control of large sections of rural areas, and in many areas members are integrated into the local population. It also has a presence in other areas not under its control, such as Mogadishu and other cities. Al Shabaab defectors are seen as a threat due to their knowledge of the organisation or being perceived as holding sensitive information. Al Shabaab has an active intelligence wing 'Aminyat', and it is likely they would be able to locate a person should they so wish (see [Control of territory](#), [Organisation / composition](#) and [Treatment of defectors by Al Shabaab](#)).

2.4.26 Generally, an Al Shabaab defector is likely to be at real risk of serious harm or persecution from Al Shabaab in areas under its control. Decision makers

must however, consider the profile and role of the person within Al Shabaab, the area and the extent to which Al Shabaab controls that territory or not, and whether it would have the motivation and/or means to track and pursue a person considered a low-profile defector, particularly when that person leaves an area Al Shabaab controls (see [Challenges faced from Al Shabaab.](#))

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g. Defectors fearing wider society

- 2.4.27 Sources are mixed on the extent to which a person who joined and then left Al Shabaab could successfully reintegrate into society. Defectors have faced suspicion, hostility, resentment and fear on return to the community. Other sources point to them not being blamed for their actions or being welcomed. One source noted women returning to their communities with their children have faced stigma, ostracism, retaliation and the risk of being expelled (see [Treatment of defectors by society](#)).
- 2.4.28 However, the level of discrimination is not on its own sufficiently serious by its nature and repetition as to constitute persecution or serious harm.
- 2.4.29 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where a person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, they will be unable to avail themselves to the protection of the authorities.
- 2.5.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from Al Shabaab in an Al Shabaab-controlled area, they will be unable to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities (see [Control of territory](#) and the country policy and information note on [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#).)
- 2.5.3 Al Shabaab is able to provide effective security for the movements of vehicles and individuals on the roads it controls. Its parallel justice system is reported to be seen as effective, swift and non-corrupt, such that some travel from outside Al Shabaab-controlled areas to seek it out, particularly in relation to issues such as inheritance, divorce and land disputes. A person therefore may be able to approach Al Shabaab for a 'civil' issue such as a community or inter-personal dispute, and subsequently obtain justice and protection. Each individual case must be carefully considered on its own facts, taking into account any past experiences in the ability to seek and gain protection from Al Shabaab (see [Justice, law and order in Al Shabaab-controlled territory](#)).
- 2.5.4 However, the country evidence suggests that the justice mechanisms Al Shabaab utilise do not provide protection to 'prevent the persecution or suffering of serious harm by operating an effective legal system for the detection, prosecution and punishment of acts constituting persecution or serious harm' as set out in [Regulation 4 of the Refugee or Person in Need of International Protection \(Qualification\) Regulations 2006](#). Therefore, a

person who demonstrates a real risk of persecution or serious harm from a non-state actor would be unable to access protection from Al Shabaab.

- 2.5.5 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from Al Shabaab in a government-controlled area, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.5.6 The government is striving to improve its security services with assistance from AMISOM and international partners. However, in Mogadishu and other urban areas controlled by the government and its allies, the continuing structural weaknesses in the security forces, including a lack of resources, training and adequate equipment, weak command and control structures together with corruption and official impunity for serious abuses, mean it is largely unable to provide basic law enforcement services, which undermines its effectiveness. Despite recent improvements, the judiciary remains underfunded, understaffed, inadequately trained, ineffective, and subject to threats, political influence, and corruption (see the country policy and information note on [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#) and [Somalia: background note](#)).
- 2.5.7 Therefore, in general, the state is willing but not able to offer effective protection.
- 2.5.8 However some persons, such as senior members of the government and military, may have access to resources to provide protection. There are, however, no clan militias remaining in Mogadishu and it is unlikely a person would be able to obtain clan protection against Al Shabaab (see [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#)). Each case must be carefully considered on the facts of the case.
- 2.5.9 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Decision makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person.
- 2.6.2 The Court of Appeal in [SC \(Jamaica\) v Home Secretary \[2017\] EWCA Civ 2112](#) held that ‘the evaluative exercise is intended to be holistic and ... no burden or standard of proof arises in relation to the overall issue of whether it is reasonable to internally relocate’ (para 36).
- 2.6.3 Freedom of movement is constitutionally granted but in practice restricted by checkpoints in operation throughout the country operated by government forces, allied groups, armed militias, clan factions, and Al Shabaab; and where citizens have been subjected to looting, extortion, harassment, and violence. The general security and humanitarian situation in the country also inhibits the ability to move freely throughout Somalia (see the country policy and information note on [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#) and [Somalia: background note](#))

2.6.4 In the CG case of MOJ and Ors, the UT held, in regard to return and relocation to Mogadishu, that:

‘The evidence indicates clearly that it is not simply those who originate from Mogadishu that may now generally return to live in the city without being subjected to an Article 15(c) risk or facing a real risk of destitution. Large numbers of Somali citizens have moved to Mogadishu where, as we have seen there is now freedom of movement and no clan based discrimination. Such a person seeking to settle in Mogadishu but who has not previously lived there would be able to do so provided he had either some form of social support network, which might be in the form of membership of a majority clan or having relatives living in the city, or having access to funds such as would be required to establish accommodation and a means of on-going support. That might be in terms of continuing remittances or securing a livelihood, based on employment or self employment.

‘On the other hand, relocation in Mogadishu for a person of a minority clan with no former links to the city, no access to funds and no other form of clan, family or social support is unlikely to be realistic as, in the absence of means to establish a home and some form of ongoing financial support there will be a real risk of having no alternative but to live in makeshift accommodation within an IDP camp where there is a real possibility of having to live in conditions that will fall below acceptable humanitarian standards.’
(paragraphs 424 to 425)

2.6.5 For areas of south and central Somalia which are not under the control of Al Shabaab, the UT in [AMM and others](#) found that family and/or clan connections may have an important part to play in determining the reasonableness of a proposed place of relocation (paragraph 604). Travel by land across southern and central Somalia to a home area or proposed place of relocation may pose real risks of serious harm from Al Shabaab checkpoints (para 605). [AMM and others](#) also referred to famine conditions (para 605), which no longer apply, but decision makers must consider the wider humanitarian situation when deciding the reasonableness of internal relocation (see country information and policy note on [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#)).

2.6.6 The country evidence indicates that the UT’s findings in AMM and others and MOJ and Ors continue to apply. In general, a person who is not associated with the government, an international organisation, or is able to demonstrate continuing high interest to Al Shabab, or where the risk is local, are likely to be able to internally relocate to an urban area not under Al Shabaab control, including Mogadishu (see [Al Shabaab’s targeted groups](#) and [Control of territory](#)).

2.6.7 Decision makers must, however, continue to consider the factors outlined in paragraph 407h of [MOJ & Ors](#) when deciding cases involving a person returning or internally relocating to Mogadishu.

2.6.8 Persons who work for the international community or Somali government officials or is a parliamentarian, or a defector with a high profile, or is able to demonstrate continuing high interest to Al Shabaab, will be unlikely to be able to internally relocate within south and central Somalia as Al Shabaab is

likely to have the means and motivation to pursue such persons (see [Al Shabaab's targeted groups](#), [Control of territory](#) and [Military strength and capability](#))

- 2.6.9 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from Al Shabaab, relocation to an area controlled by Al Shabaab, or if they must travel through an area controlled by Al Shabaab, will not generally be reasonable.
- 2.6.10 For single women and female-headed households with no male protection, internal relocation will not generally be reasonable in the absence of meaningful support networks (see country policy and information notes [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#) and [Somalia: Women fearing gender-based violence](#).)
- 2.6.11 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 28 October 2020

3. AI Shabaab background

3.1 Name

3.1.1 Global Security, in an undated report, noted the different names of Al Shabaab:

'Al-Shabaab (Also known as: Al-Shabaab Al-Islaam, Al-Shabaab al-Islamiya, Al-Shabaab Al-Jihaad, Al-Shabab, Ash-shabaab, Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, Harakat Shabab Al-Mujahidin, Harakatul Shabaab al-Mujaahidiin, Hizbul Shabaab, Hisb'ul Shabaab, HSM, Mujahideen Youth Movement, Mujahidin Al-Shabaab Movement, Mujaahidiin Youth Movement, Mujahidin Youth Movement, Shabaab, MYM, The Popular Resistance Movement in the Land of the Two Migrations, The Unity of Islamic Youth, The Youth, Young Mujahideen Movement, Young Mujahideen Movement in Somalia, Youth Wing)...'¹

3.1.2 Sources use a variety of spellings for Al Shabaab including Al-Shabaab², al-shabaab³, al-Shabab⁴ and al shabaab⁵.

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3.2 Proscription

3.2.1 Al Shabaab was proscribed by the UK government as an international terrorist group in March 2010⁶.

3.2.2 The group have also, since 18 March 2008, been a US Government Designated Foreign Terrorist Organization⁷.

3.2.3 The Australian Government first proscribed Al Shabaab as a terrorist organisation under the Criminal Code on 22 August 2009. It was relisted on 18 August 2012, 11 August 2015 and 4 August 2018⁸.

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3.3 Aims

3.3.1 Roland Marchal, a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for International Researches, Sciences-Po in Paris, noted that 'Al-Shabaab has built itself on a clear agenda: ridding Somalia of foreign forces, portrayed as Christians, and implementing the Sharia.'⁹

3.3.2 The Australian Government described 'Al-Shabaab's primary objective is the establishment of an Islamist state in the Horn of Africa based on Sharia law

¹ Global Security, '[Para-military: Al-Shabaab](#)', no date

² Encyclopedia Britannica, '[Al-Shabaab](#)', no date

³ Encyclopedia Britannica, '[Al-Shabaab](#)', no date

⁴ Washington Post, '[Twin al-Shabab attacks in Somalia target U.S...](#)', 30 September 2019

⁵ France24, '[The Somali government's attention is not focused...](#)', 29 December 2019

⁶ Home Office, '[Proscribed Terrorist Organisations](#)' (Al-Shabaab), 17 July 2020

⁷ USSD, '[Foreign Terrorist Organizations](#)', undated

⁸ Australian Government, '[Australian National Security - Terrorist organisations...](#)', no date

⁹ Keating & Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 309), Hurst (London) 2018

and the elimination of secular and foreign influence, including through violent means.¹⁰

3.3.3 In the January 2019 briefing paper for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Yashasvi Chandra outlined the group's 2 objectives as being 'to recapture territories it lost to the [African Union Mission to Somalia] AMISOM forces, and to implement sharia in Somalia.'¹¹

3.3.4 In a June 2019 paper, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), explained that 'Al-Shabaab aims to replace the Federal Government of Somalia with its own version of sharia or an Islamic government. The group also demands the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country.'¹²

See also [Al Shabaab's targeted groups](#)

For information Al Shabaab's tactics see the country policy and information note on [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#)

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3.4 Size

3.4.1 The Counter Extremist Website cited a March 2016 Daily Beast article (updated in April 2017)¹³, which estimated Al Shabaab to have 6,000 to 12,000 fighters¹⁴. In December 2017, the BBC reported it '... is believed to have between 7,000 and 9,000 fighters.'¹⁵ A July 2019 forecast by the Security Council Report, whose self-described mission is to '... advance the transparency and effectiveness of the UN Security Council'¹⁶, claimed that 'According to recent reports, Al-Shabaab's numbers are estimated to be between 5,000 and 10,000'¹⁷

3.4.2 A December 2019 article on France24 cited figures which are '...variously estimated to number between 5,000 and 9,000 men'¹⁸. A January 2020 Council on Foreign Relations backgrounder on Al Shabaab reported a '...membership range between three thousand and nine thousand.'¹⁹ The Organization for World Peace noted in April 2020 an estimated '...4000 – 9000 fighters, including 1500 foreign fighters'.²⁰

3.4.3 A September 2019 article in the Washington Post explained '[m]ost analysts put the number of al-Shabab fighters somewhere just short of 10,000, although the true number is hard to discern, as many of the group's members blend into civilian life.'²¹ Although the source did not cite the analysis considered to form this figure.

¹⁰ Australian Government, '[Australian National Security - Terrorist organisations...](#)', no date

¹¹ CPA, '[The threat of Al-Shabaab in Kenya](#)' (page 4), January 2019

¹² ISS, '[Time to consider negotiating with al-Shabaab in Somalia?](#)', 11 June 2019

¹³ Daily Beast, '[The Return of al-Shabaab](#)', 13 April 2017

¹⁴ Counter Extremism Project, '[Al-Shabab – Overview](#)' (Executive Summary), no date

¹⁵ BBC, '[Who are Somalia's al-Shabab?](#)', 22 December 2017

¹⁶ Security Council Report, '[About Security Council Report](#)', no date

¹⁷ Security Council Report, '[August 2019 Monthly Forecast](#)', 31 July 2019

¹⁸ France24, '[The Somali government's attention is not focused...](#)', 29 December 2019

¹⁹ CFR, '[Al-Shabab](#)', updated 10 January 2020

²⁰ The Organization for World Peace, '[Al-Shabaab Insurgency ...](#)'(Facts), 21 April 2020

²¹ Washington Post, '[Twin al-Shabab attacks in Somalia target U.S...](#)', 30 September 2019

- 3.4.4 The US Department of Defence Office of Inspector General quarterly report to the US Congress 'East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation', for the period 1 April to 30 June 2020 noted 'Al-Shabaab had between 5,000 and 10,000 fighters during the quarter, according to estimates from USAFRICOM and the DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency].'²²

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3.5 Organisation / composition

- 3.5.1 The Danish Immigration Service's fact finding report, 'Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups' (DIS 2017 report), published 8 March 2017, based on a range of interviews in Nairobi, Kenya, 3 to 10 December 2016 considered that 'Al-Shabaab has an extensive network of sympathisers, informants/spies, and other collaborators throughout Somalia...'²³
- 3.5.2 According to BBC Monitoring, a subscription source, information about the organisation, published on 16 July 2020, noted the intelligence wing is known as Amniyat and is 'reportedly responsible for most of the group's most high profile attacks'.²⁴
- 3.5.3 The BBC article 'Somalia's frightening network of Islamist spies', 26 May 2019 noted:
"The Amniyat is the veins of the organisation. It is all-powerful. If the Amniyat was destroyed, there would be no al-Shabab," says Hussein Sheikh Ali, a former security adviser to the Somali president and director of the Hiraal Institute, a Mogadishu-based think tank. He says the Amniyat is more than an intelligence unit. "It literally controls al-Shabab. As well as its core purpose which is intelligence gathering, it deals with sensitive areas of security. If a senior member of al-Shabab is sick or injured, the Amniyat will deal with it. It manages finances of a secret and delicate nature, and plans the big terror attacks inside and outside the country. "People in the Amniyat are better paid than other members of the movement."²⁵
- 3.5.4 The same BBC article, citing Mohamed Mubarak, a researcher based in Mogadishu, estimated that the number of people in the Amniyat ranges from between 500 and 1,000²⁶.
- 3.5.5 Jane's in its undated profile 'Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen Al-Shabaab', explained 'A consultative council (majlis al-shura)... serves as the group's overall decision-making body. Regional political and military leaders, however, have a significant degree of autonomy in implementing these policies. Al-Shabaab appoints governors for each region in Somalia where it has a significant presence. Al-Shabaab limits dissent through an internal security apparatus known as the Amniyat.'²⁷

²² US Lead Inspector General, '[Report to the US congress...](#)', (page15), 28 August 2020

²³ DIS, '[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)' (p.10), 8 March 2017

²⁴ BBC Monitoring (subscription source), '[Al-Shabab](#)', 16 July 2020

²⁵ BBC, '[Somalia's frightening network of Islamist spies](#)', 26 May 2019

²⁶ BBC, '[Somalia's frightening network of Islamist spies](#)', 26 May 2019

²⁷ Jane's, '[Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen](#)' (Organisation...), no date

See also [Military strength and capability](#)

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3.6 Military strength and capability

- 3.6.1 The Berghoff Foundation report by Karin Göldner-Ebenthal, 'Salafi jihadi armed groups and conflict (de-)escalation - The case of al-Shabaab in Somalia', published in 2019 from case study research conducted between November 2017 to August 2019 noted:
- '... the organisational status of al-Shabaab has remained fairly stable, even though the continuing military pressure on al-Shabaab has made it officially retreat from the main cities and decentralise. This has granted the regional leaders more freedom from the central command and the group has lost some coherence. Interviewees agreed that how the group interacts and behaves now largely varies by region. Nevertheless, the Amniyat has managed to keep overall internal coherence, including through the brutal use of force against internal dissenters.'²⁸
- 3.6.2 The US Congressional Research Service in 'Somalia', updated 16 January 2020, noted 'Al Shabaab maintains the ability to conduct frequent attacks in the capital and other areas beyond its control.'²⁹
- 3.6.3 The article in the New Delhi times, 'Al-Shabaab's strengthening capabilities require urgent International attention', 14 October 2019, noted '...the military capabilities of the Al-Shabaab have taken an upward hike in the past few years that is openly manifested in the number of violent attacks carried out by the extremist group on regular basis.'³⁰
- 3.6.4 The US Department of Defence Office of Inspector General report for the period 1 April to 30 June 2020 noted '[t]he DoS [Department of State] reported that al-Shabaab is currently unable to mass large forces but maintains economic influence at the village level. The DoS assessed that the group will continue to attempt to destabilize the region through targeted assassinations and IED attacks.'³¹
- 3.6.5 The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported in August 2020 that 'Al Shabaab's operational activities have been allowed to intensify, despite ongoing military support from the United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM) and African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeeping forces....'³²
- 3.6.6 The same ACLED report noted 'The ability of Al Shabaab to orchestrate attacks on senior political and military figures highlights the operational strength of the group in 2020, but also exposes substantial state weaknesses exacerbated by political infighting across and between the Somali federal government and the various regional governments.'³³

²⁸ Karin Göldner-Ebenthal, '[Salafi jihadi armed groups \[...\]](#)' (section 3.4), Berghoff Foundation, 2019

²⁹ US Congressional Research Service, '[Al Shabaab](#)', 16 January 2020

³⁰ New Delhi Times, '[Al-Shabaab's strengthening capabilities...](#)', 14 October 2019

³¹ US Lead Inspector General, '[Report to the US congress...](#)' (page 15), 28 August 2020

³² ACLED, '[Mid-Year Update: 10 conflicts to worry about in 2020](#)', 18 August 2020

³³ ACLED, '[Mid-Year Update: 10 conflicts to worry about in 2020](#)', 18 August 2020

3.6.7 A news report in Nation, a Kenyan news organisation, dated 30 August 2020 citing a policy briefing by the Africa Policy Institute noted the impact of Covid-19 has caused Al Shabaab to reduce:

"...radicalisation and recruitment. The militia's recruitment in public spaces and other offline settings have decreased significantly. Restriction on free movement of citizens and diminished crowded public spaces have weakened Al-Shabaab's ability."... The withdrawal of Al-Shabaab fighters back to Mogadishu, and the increasing use of ambushes may mean sectors outside the capital could be winning ground against the group. However, some analysts warned against celebrating yet, saying the group is known for rising from the dead.'³⁴

See also [Size of Al Shabaab](#), [Control of territory](#) and [Al Shabaab's targeted groups](#)

For more information on Al Shabaab attacks, tactics and levels of violence see the country policy and information note on [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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Section 4 updated: 20 August 2020

4. Control of territory

4.1 Country-wide overview

4.1.1 In Keating and Waldman's book 'War and Peace in Somalia', published in 2018, Somali researcher Hussein Yusuf Ali contributed a paper ('Youth Radicalisation: Causes, Consequences and Potential Solutions'). In it he noted that 'sustained AMISOM operations have removed overt influence of Al Shabaab from major urban centres'³⁵.

4.1.2 A May 2019 paper by Landinfo noted that '[t]here are few opportunities to map and verify information about power relations in Southern Somalia'³⁶.

4.1.3 A July 2019 forecast by the Security Council Report, whose self-described mission is to '... advance the transparency and effectiveness of the UN Security Council'³⁷, claimed that Al Shabaab controlled roughly 20% of Somalia³⁸.

4.1.4 The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS), a Mogadishu based research and analysis institute in 'State of Somalia Report 2019' published in 2020 noted 'Al-Shabaab currently controls roads to the north and the south to Mogadishu. Even within the capital, Al-Shabaab was able to penetrate deep into the "green zone"... AlShabaab roams freely in almost all cities and town in south central Somalia.'³⁹

³⁴ Nation, '[Weakened in battle, Shabaab now opts for softer targets](#)', 20 August 2020

³⁵ Keating & Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 331), Hurst (London) 2018

³⁶ Landinfo, '[Somalia: Al-Shabaab areas in Southern Somalia](#)', 21 May 2019

³⁷ Security Council Report, '[About Security Council Report](#)', no date

³⁸ Security Council Report, '[August 2019 Monthly Forecast](#)', 31 July 2019

³⁹ HIPS, '[State of Somalia Report 2019](#)' (page 2), 2020

- 4.1.5 An October 2019 article in the Washington Post explained ‘[t]he Somali authorities and AMISOM control most large urban settlements across south-central Somalia, [...]. Al-Shabab retains control of much of the countryside.’⁴⁰
- 4.1.6 The same article opined that:
 ‘After the Trump administration increased the number of airstrikes in Somalia, al-Shabab stepped up its attacks in Mogadishu. Some experts believe the two upticks are connected because the airstrikes restricted al-Shabab’s freedom of movement across the country. Much of its equipment and fighters that enter Mogadishu travel via a corridor to the southwest of the city along the Shabelle River.
 ‘In mid-2019, this realization prompted the Somali government and AMISOM forces to launch offensive operations to dislodge al-Shabab from several towns in the corridor and disrupt the group’s ability to attack Mogadishu. In recent months, there have been several battles to control the settlements recovered by the SNA and AMISOM — notably Sabiid, Barire, Ceel Saliin and Awdheegle. Meanwhile, al-Shabab’s attacks in Mogadishu persist because of existing operatives in the city and alternative routes.’⁴¹
- 4.1.7 A December 2019 article on France24, based largely on ‘Horn of Africa expert Matthew Bryden’, explained that Al Shabaab’s ‘...forces have lost control of the capital and other cities, but they retain control of large rural swathes of the country.’⁴² It added a quote from Bryden “‘Basically, most of southern Somalia is a governance vacuum, and although al Shabaab doesn’t actually control that territory it has free rein to move and operate there,’ [...] ‘It also has a presence in major towns, including the capital Mogadishu.’”⁴³
- 4.1.8 In January 2020, the Wall Street Journal reported that ‘Al-Shabaab once controlled some 40% of Somalia’ but they did not expand on the timeframe for that or the current levels of control other than adding that ‘[t]he African Union Mission in Somalia, with support from U.S. airstrikes and special forces, has limited the group’s territory and movements.’⁴⁴
- 4.1.9 A January 2020 BBC article cited Michael Keating, the former head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) from 2016 to 2018, as having considered that ‘Al-Shabab has largely been physically removed from most of the main population centres but its influence in cities and towns is possibly increasing once again’⁴⁵.
- 4.1.10 A January 2020 article in the Daily Telegraph, which reported on protests against the group and their justification for bombing of civilians also suggested that Al Shabaab’s control of Mogadishu was unlikely. The same article questioned whether they were going through a resurgence but noted

⁴⁰ Washington Post, [‘In Somalia, al-Shabab targeted U.S. and E.U. forces ...’](#), 3 October 2019

⁴¹ Washington Post, [‘In Somalia, al-Shabab targeted U.S. and E.U. forces ...’](#), 3 October 2019

⁴² France24, [“‘The Somali government’s attention is not focused...’](#), 29 December 2019

⁴³ France24, [“‘The Somali government’s attention is not focused...’](#), 29 December 2019

⁴⁴ WSJ, [‘The Terrorist Horn of Africa’](#), 6 January 2020

⁴⁵ BBC, [‘US in East Africa: Is it still a safe haven for al-Shabab?’](#), 6 January 2020

that they were 'driven out of Mogadishu in 2011'. It added that 'Al-Shabaab still controls large parts of the country'⁴⁶.

- 4.1.11 The US Department of State Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) 'Somalia 2020 Crime & Safety Report' of 1 May 2020 noted 'Al-Shabaab maintains strongholds in rural areas in the south, where it controls a large swathe of the Lower and Middle Juba and Lower Shabelle regions.'⁴⁷
- 4.1.12 The US Department of Defence Office of Inspector General quarterly report to the US Congress 'East Africa Counterterrorism Operation and the North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation', for the period 1 April to 30 June 2020 noted that '[d]espite its success in holding territory, the SNA [Somali National Army] did not liberate any new territory from al-Shabaab during the quarter.'⁴⁸.

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4.2 Maps

- 4.2.1 For a map of Somalia and maps showing control of territory at different points in time, see [Annex A: Control of Territory Maps](#).

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4.3 Bay and Bakool

- 4.3.1 In Keating and Waldman's book 'War and Peace in Somalia', Stig Jarle Hansen (a specialist in jihadist war economies and Al Shabaab), alongside Dr Linnéa Gelot (a specialist in African conflict management) and Alin Hilowle (the Founder, Executive Director and Chairperson of the IHSA human rights group based in the Bay and Bakool area) contributed a paper ('Anatomy of Counter-Jihad: Community Perspectives on Rehabilitation and Reconciliation'), they explained how Al Shabaab enjoyed 'semi-territorial control of the Bay and Bakool regions'⁴⁹ but also that 'according to a majority of respondents [of their studies], the community in Bay/Bakool is prepared to speak out against Al Shabaab and resist them'⁵⁰.
- 4.3.2 The Global Shelter Cluster (an Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) coordination mechanism that supports people affected by natural disasters and conflict) explained in an undated entry that 'All districts of Bakool are now liberated and under the control of SNAF/AMISOM forces but still under siege.'⁵¹
- 4.3.3 In a May 2019 article for the International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCIV), the authors noted that at the time of writing that the Government controlled the town of Baidoa but '[d]irectly outside of Baidoa is Al-Shabaab controlled territory, and Al-Shabaab has undercover operators inside the town.'⁵²

⁴⁶ Daily Telegraph, '[Somalis protest against al-Shabaab \[...\]](#)', 2 Jan 2020

⁴⁷ OSAC, '[Somalia 2020 Crime & Safety Report](#)', 1 May 2020

⁴⁸ US Lead Inspector General, '[Report to the US congress...](#)' (page 22) , 28 August 2020

⁴⁹ Keating & Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 380), Hurst (London) 2018

⁵⁰ Keating & Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (p379 and p385), Hurst (London) 2018

⁵¹ Global Shelter Cluster, '[Bay/Bakool](#)', no date

⁵² Taylor, Semmelrock, McDermott, '[The Cost of Defection \[...\]](#)'. IJCIV Vol. 13/2019, 22 May 2019

4.3.4 A May 2019 paper by Landinfo noted that the Al Shabaab- controlled district capitals in the Bay region were Rabdhure and Tieglow⁵³.

4.3.5 Radio Dalsan, an independent radio station based in Mogadishu, reported in April 2020 that the 'Somali National Army [SNA] had liberated Banduub and Bilane towns in Dinsoor (Bay region) from Al Shabaab however, 'Al Shabaab still control some towns in Bay and Bakool...'⁵⁴.

See also [Country-wide overview](#) and [Annex A: Control of Territory Maps](#).

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4.4 Lower Shabelle

4.4.1 In February 2019, Intelligence Fusion reported that 'Over the last six months, the U.S. Air Force has conducted at least nine drone strikes in the vicinity of Gandarshe, a city north of Merca. The consistency of these strikes indicates that the militant group likely uses Gandarshe as a staging area to launch attacks in Merca and neighbouring cities.'⁵⁵

4.4.2 In January 2020, The East African website reported how Somali Special Forces had recaptured the town of Toratorow from al-Shabaab, but noted it was not the first time the town, which is an al-Shabaab stronghold, was captured by government forces⁵⁶.

4.4.3 The Global Shelter Cluster explained that 'Marca [the regional capital] and its surrounding areas has also been the object of a targeted SNF/AMISOM offensive since March 2014' and that Al-Shabaab had been removed from key areas in the region⁵⁷.

4.4.4 The DIS 2017 report noted: 'The control of Marka is disputed and uncertain... According to a Somalia Country Director of a humanitarian agency the control of Marka has shifted hands a number of times in recent years. In 2013 AMISOM took over control, but al-Shabaab had an extensive presence in the surrounding rural areas. Since 2013 frequent take-overs by respectively al-Shabaab and AMISOM/SNA have taken place.'⁵⁸

4.4.5 A May 2019 paper by Landinfo noted that the Al Shabaab- controlled district capitals in the Lower Shabelle region were Kurtun Warey and Sablale⁵⁹.

4.4.6 According to a December 2019 piece by Paul D. Williams, Professor of International Affairs at the George Washington University, on the British Military Thought website Wavell Room, 'in April 2019, SNA and AMISOM forces, with some US assistance, embarked on a series of operations to capture a string of strategic villages in Lower Shabelle controlled by al-Shabaab. These settlements included Sabiid, Ceel-Saliini, Barire, and Aw Dheegle, all of which are within 50km of Mogadishu'⁶⁰. A May 2019 article on

⁵³ Landinfo, '[Somalia: Al-Shabaab areas in Southern Somalia](#)', 21 May 2019

⁵⁴ Radio Dalsan, '[SNA Captures Banduub And Bilane Towns From Alshabab](#)', 19 April 2020

⁵⁵ Intelligence Fusion, '[The Threat of Al-Shabaab to Somalia in 2019](#)', 17 February 2019

⁵⁶ The East African, '[Somali security forces recaptures key town from al-Shabaab](#)', 14 Jan 2020

⁵⁷ Global Shelter Cluster, '[Lower Shabelle](#)', no date

⁵⁸ DIS, '[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)' (page 13), 8 March 2017

⁵⁹ Landinfo, '[Somalia: Al-Shabaab areas in Southern Somalia](#)', 21 May 2019

⁶⁰ Wavell Room, '[Stabilisation 2.0? \[...\]](#)', 19 December 2019

Strategic Intelligence reported on the recapture of the town of Bariire⁶¹. A May 2019 article by AMISOM also noted the recapture of the towns of Sabiid and Bariire⁶².

- 4.4.7 A March 2020 article on the East African website reported on the liberation of the major town of Jannale from Al Shabaab, which is ‘approximately 90km south-west of the capital Mogadishu, ha[d] been the hub for the terrorists’ operations and activities.’ The same article added that ‘the town, with approximately 30,000 people, is currently under the full control of the joint forces – Amisom and SNA.’ And that ‘Amisom forces jointly with Somali security forces have conducted offensive operations in Lower Shabelle to capture the four Bridge Towns. They include Sabiid-Anole, Bariire, Awdheegle and Ceel Saliini.’⁶³
- 4.4.8 The UN Security Council (UNSC) in the ‘Situation in Somalia Report of the Secretary-General’ dated 13 May 2020, covering the period between 5 February to 4 May 2020 noted, in response to the liberation of Jannale, Al-Shabaab increased its attacks in the area⁶⁴.
- 4.4.9 The Lead Inspector General’s 1 April to 30 June 2020 quarterly report to the US Congress noted the SNA continued to hold the former Al Shabaab territory around Jannale and ‘SNA and AMISOM units increased patrols in the Lower Shabelle region to disrupt al-Shabaab activities and clear supply routes of IEDs...’⁶⁵

For sources that provide updates on Al Shabaab’s territorial control see the UNSC’s [Security Council Reports](#) and the US Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, [Lead Inspector General quarterly updates](#)

See also [Country-wide overview](#) and [Annex A: Control of Territory Maps](#).

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4.5 Middle Shabelle

- 4.5.1 The Global Shelter Cluster explained that ‘[I]ong controlled by the Al-Shabaab, access to Jowhar [the regional district capital] by the humanitarian agencies was very limited until February 2013 when the Somali national army supported by AMISOM liberated the city. Since then, the region was managed by an interim administration appointed by the Somali government’⁶⁶
- 4.5.2 A May 2019 paper by Landinfo noted that the Al Shabaab-controlled district capital in the Middle Shabelle region was Adan Yabal⁶⁷.

See also [Country-wide overview](#) and [Annex A: Control of Territory Maps](#).

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⁶¹ Strat Intel, [‘SNA And Allied US-AMISOM Troops Recapture Bariire Town...’](#), 2 May 2019

⁶² AMISOM, [‘Senior Leadership of AMISOM ...’](#), 19 May 2019

⁶³ The East African, [‘Amisom captures key town in Somalia’](#), 18 March 2020

⁶⁴ UNSC, [‘Situation in Somalia Report of the Secretary-General’](#) (paragraph 52), 13 May 2020

⁶⁵ US Lead Inspector General, [‘Report to the US congress...’](#), (page 22) 28 August 2020

⁶⁶ Global Shelter Cluster, [‘Middle Shabelle’](#), no date

⁶⁷ Landinfo, [‘Somalia: Al-Shabaab areas in Southern Somalia’](#), 21 May 2019

4.6 Lower Juba

- 4.6.1 Andalou Agency in the article, 'Somalia claims liberating 5 villages from al-Shabaab', 20 January 2020, reported the claim by Somali forces that they '...conducted an operation against al-Shabaab in lower Juba province [and]... liberated Malayley, Janale-gay, Rernerow, Bandar Jadiid and Bengani villages from al-Shabaab during the military operation. The liberated villages located approximately 90 kilometers (56 miles) from the port city of Kismayo, the administrative capital of Jubaland State.'⁶⁸
- 4.6.2 A May 2019 paper by Landinfo noted that the Al Shabaab-controlled district capitals in the Lower Juba region were Badhadhe and Jamame⁶⁹.

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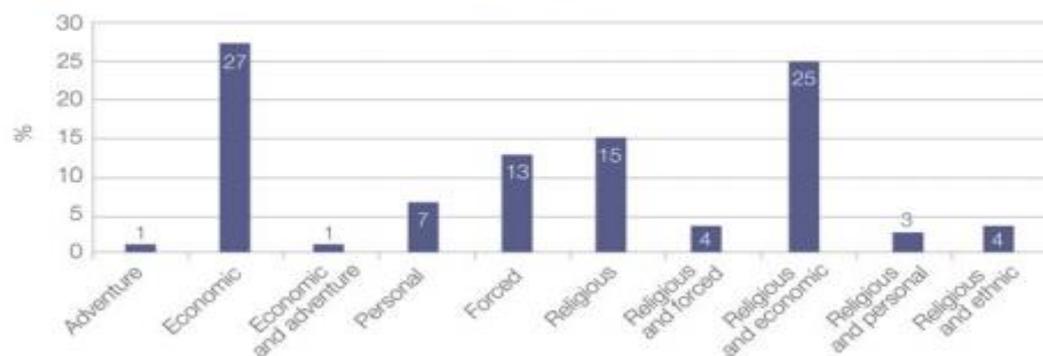
Section 5 updated: 26 October 2020

5. Recruitment to Al Shabaab

5.1 Reasons for joining

- 5.1.1 A 2014 paper, based on interviews with 88 former Al Shabaab fighters, included the following table showing as a percentage of responses the primary reasons for joining the group⁷⁰.

Figure 7: Interviewees' reasons for joining al-Shabaab



- 5.1.2 Vanda Felbab-Brown, a senior fellow in the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC in her paper, 'The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional Justice And Violent Extremism Somalia Case Study', for The Institute for Integrated Transition (IFIT) in May 2018, citing information from interviews with sources in Mogadishu in 2017 observed:
- '...recruitment messaging toward local youth tends to emphasise injustice and power abuse issues. It often exposes very specific local misgovernance, corruption, and grievances, such as: the usurpation of public resources private gain; the corruption of Somali courts and politics; and the view that the Somali elite-centric system is perpetuates economic, political, and social injustice. Some two-thirds of members join al Shabaab for economic reasons due to a lack of legitimate economic opportunities, or as a result of

⁶⁸ Andalou Agency, '[Somalia claims liberating 5 villages from al-Shabaab](#)', 20 January 2020

⁶⁹ Landinfo, '[Somalia: Al-Shabaab areas in Southern Somalia](#)', 21 May 2019

⁷⁰ Botha and Abdile, '[Radicalisation and al-Shabaab recruitment in Somalia](#)', December 2014

grievances against clan discrimination or abuses and corruption of local authorities.’⁷¹

- 5.1.3 In their October 2018 Fact-Finding Mission report, based on their mission in January 2018 in which they visited Mogadishu and Nairobi, the Finnish Immigration Service (FIS) concluded that ‘Al-Shabaab recruits fighters both voluntarily and by force’ and that ‘[a]lthough many people join al-Shabaab voluntarily, there is often a lack of viable options under the circumstances’. The FIS also concluded that ‘[m]embership is often the sum of many factors and can involve religious and ideological reasons, but for many it is a pragmatic solution based on financial and safety-related factors’⁷².
- 5.1.4 In a paper for Keating and Waldman’s book ‘War and Peace in Somalia’, Mohamed Haji Abdullahi – a PhD candidate in the Faculty of History at the University of Oxford - contributed a paper (‘Al Shabaab’s Youth Recruitment Project’) based on a review of extensive literature and ‘intensive one-on-one and group interviews with former Al-Shabaab defectors’ conducted between May 2015 and August 2016⁷³. In it he argued that the main reasons why many young Somalis join Al Shabaab were based on 4 clusters: economic vulnerability; social injustice; environment and demography; and political exclusion⁷⁴.
- 5.1.5 In a paper by Stig Jarle Hansen, Dr Linnéa Gelot and Alin Hilowle, they concluded that ‘Al Shabaab’s rise has been induced by [...] lack of security, lack of opportunity, clan conflicts, and lack of justice’⁷⁵. They also noted that the ‘underlying fact that the reasons people join Al Shabaab can be both related to economics and to the need for security’⁷⁶.
- 5.1.6 In a June 2019 paper, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) explained that ‘[a]nalysts describe three main reasons for people joining al-Shabaab. The first is ideological, the second is the desire for personal gain, and the third is socio-economic and political grievances.’⁷⁷
- 5.1.7 A 2019 paper by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) explained how ‘[a]pproximately half the sample [interviews with 27 Serendi residents through a snapshot study conducted in November 2015, focusing on how and why they joined Al-Shabaab, and how and why they disengaged] conceded that they were driven to join Al-Shabaab in part by the promise of a salary, with several adding that this decision was taken with limited alternative livelihood prospects in mind’ and that ‘[r]oughly one-third of the sample claimed that their recruitment was partly driven by actual or implied Al-Shabaab threats, with various others conceding that they knew of cases where this was applicable.’⁷⁸
- 5.1.8 In a May 2019 article for the International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCIV), the authors concluded – based on data they gathered from 32

⁷¹ Felbab-Brown, IFIT, ‘[The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional Justice ...](#)’ (p.8), May 2018

⁷² FIS, ‘[Fact-finding Mission Report](#)’ (section 1.5), 5 October 2018

⁷³ Keating & Waldman, ‘War and Peace in Somalia’ (page 340), Hurst (London) 2018

⁷⁴ Keating & Waldman, ‘War and Peace in Somalia’ (page 341), Hurst (London) 2018

⁷⁵ Keating & Waldman, ‘War and Peace in Somalia’ (page 383), Hurst (London) 2018

⁷⁶ Keating & Waldman, ‘War and Peace in Somalia’ (page 385), Hurst (London) 2018

⁷⁷ ISS, ‘[Time to consider negotiating with al-Shabaab in Somalia?](#)’, 11 June 2019

⁷⁸ RUSI, ‘[Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia](#)’, January 2019

interviews with disengaged Al Shabaab combatants in July 2017 – 84% joined voluntarily, while 12% were forced to join Al-Shabaab.⁷⁹

5.1.9 A paper dated 17 October 2019 by Katharine Petrich ‘Cows, Charcoal, and Cocaine: Al Shabaab’s Criminal Activities in the Horn of Africa’, published in the *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* journal, based on field research conducted in Nairobi, Kenya in 2018, noted:

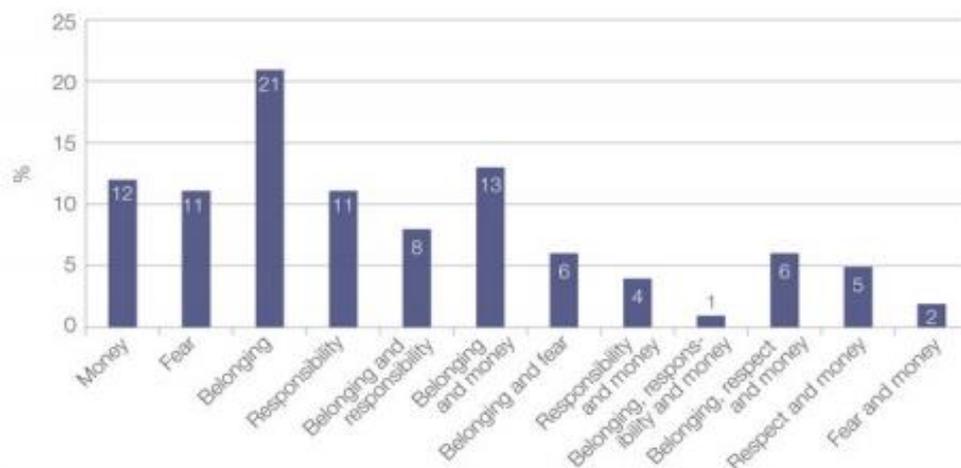
‘Beyond funding, crime is important to al-Shabaab as a recruitment tool and entry mechanism for new members. Many young men begin as petty criminals before “graduating” to terrorism. Criminals have already displayed reduced respect for the existing political system, making them more receptive to cooption into political violence. Gang members in particular are relatively blase about al-Shabaab’s violent resistance....

‘To be clear, al-Shabaab recruits far more broadly than just petty criminals. Indeed, the most common recruitment story I heard during fieldwork was one of limited economic opportunities, compounded by police brutality and corruption that came to a head through a radicalizing incident or a charismatic recruiter.’⁸⁰

5.1.10 The Danish Immigration Service’s July 2020 report ‘South And Central Somalia Security Situation , Forced Recruitment , And Conditions For Returnees’ (The DIS report 2020) using open source material and interviews with three sources noted ‘Many join the organisation for financial reasons. These promises are rarely kept, however, but according to a source, al-Shabaab is still more consistent than the government in terms of paying out wages, and they generally pay more... Fighters recruited by the organisation earn between \$50 and \$200 a month and this incentivises some to join al-Shabaab in order to provide for their family.’⁸¹

5.1.11 In a 2014 paper, based on interviews with 88 former Al Shabaab fighters, included a table showing why people remained in Al Shabaab⁸².

Figure 20: Why interviewees stayed in al-Shabaab



⁷⁹ Taylor, Semmelrock, McDermott, ‘[The Cost of Defection \[...\]](#)’. *IJC* Vol. 13/2019, 22 May 2019

⁸⁰ Katharine Petrich ‘[Cows, Charcoal \[...\]](#)’ (page 9), *Studies in Conflict Terrorism*, 17 October 2019

⁸¹ DIS, ‘[DIS report 2020](#)’ (page 13), July 2020

⁸² Botha and Abdile, ‘[Radicalisation and al-Shabaab recruitment in Somalia](#)’, December 2014

See also [Financing, commerce and taxes \('zakat'\)](#)

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5.2 Recruitment methods

5.2.1 In an August 2017 paper by UNSOM, based on 'a total of nine focus groups and three individual interviews [...] conducted over the course of 2016'⁸³ (see pages 5 to 6 for details of the groups) explained that:

'Respondents offered a broad range of methods used by Al Shabaab to contact new recruits. They give out free phones, which they then use to communicate. They are also subject to the influence of friends and family members who are already part of the group. Some respondents discussed douras (public meetings), which feature stirring lectures and sermons that culminate in calls for audience members to step up and fight in the name of their religion.'⁸⁴

5.2.2 UNSOM's August 2017 paper listed 5 main modes that Al-Shabaab uses to recruit people into their organisation:

- Direct recruitment of groups like women, unemployed youth and other vulnerable populations. Social and economic incentives are often utilised to entice recruits
- Forced recruitment including abduction, threats and forcing parents to give up one son
- Third-party recruitment using friends and relatives (peer pressure)
- Media publicity, using propaganda messaging on social media, radio and the Internet
- Religious persuasion, based on preaching from religious leaders and radicalised madrasa teachers⁸⁵

5.2.3 The DIS 2017 report, in information from a UN source, noted '...that if al-Shabaab is to accept that a person refuses to be recruited, some kind of compensation is required. If a person refuses to compensate al-Shabaab, he will have to flee otherwise al-Shabaab will locate him and execute him.'⁸⁶

5.2.4 Vanda Felbab-Brown's 2018 Somalia case study, citing information from interviews with sources in Mogadishu in 2017, observed '...recruitment is a complex process that... varies according to the place, the individual, and the needs of al Shabaab at a particular time. Forcible recruitment and clan-negotiated recruitment also play an important role'.⁸⁷

5.2.5 A May 2019 article on Reuters, referring to information from researchers who interviewed Al Shabaab defectors, explained differing recruitment techniques used by Al Shabaab in Kenya. These included how '[w]idespread poverty

⁸³ UNSOM, '[Countering AS Propaganda and Recruitment Mechanisms ...](#)', 14 August 2017

⁸⁴ UNSOM, '[Countering AS Propaganda and Recruitment Mechanisms ...](#)' (page 13), 14 August 2017

⁸⁵ UNSOM, '[Countering AS Propaganda and Recruitment Mechanisms ...](#)' (page 14), 14 August 2017

⁸⁶ DIS, '[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)' (page 21), 8 March 2017

⁸⁷ Felbab-Brown, IFIT, '[The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional Justice ...](#)' (page 8), May 2018

and unemployment mean al Shabaab can tempt recruits by offering cash or promises of work' and through the use of the internet⁸⁸.

- 5.2.6 Hansen, Gelot and Hilowle also concluded from their studies in 2016 and 2017 that 'Al Shabaab's recruitment efforts were said to mainly target youth under 18 and minority clans'⁸⁹
- 5.2.7 Mary Harper, the BBC's Africa editor⁹⁰, provided a contribution ('Is Anybody Listening? Al-Shabaab's Communications') to Keating and Waldman's book 'War and Peace in Somalia' covering Al Shabaab's communication methods. In it she explained that 'Al Shabaab offers bespoke communication packages for individuals it wants to recruit, which often contain threats.'⁹¹
- 5.2.8 Mary Harper's paper added '[p]eople who have recently fled the group described its indoctrination and recruitment techniques, which range from long lectures in Mosques, to films projected on large outdoor screens, to false promises of laptops, white Land Cruisers, and driving lessons'⁹².
- 5.2.9 In Mohamed Haji Abdullahi's paper ('Al Shabaab's Youth Recruitment Project') for Keating and Waldman's book 'War and Peace in Somalia', he concluded that 'local – rather than external – recruitment is less costly for Al Shabaab and can take the form of forced recruitment, though this happens rarely' and that 'forced recruitment is conducted when Al Shabaab's leadership feels threatened by external forces, such as the 2011 retreat from Mogadishu'⁹³.
- 5.2.10 A 2019 paper by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) explained '[w]hile each story is of course unique, certain broad patterns may be identified. For instance, the initial point of contact with Al-Shabaab was generally someone from existing familial or friendship networks.'⁹⁴
- 5.2.11 The RUSI's paper explained how, in their study, '[i]t was also noteworthy that only one individual highlighted that religious institutions had been involved in the recruitment process'⁹⁵
- 5.2.12 The DIS report 2020 noted 'Al-Shabaab employs a wide range of tactics in order to recruit civilians, ranging from forced recruitment to indoctrination through qur'anic schools (madrassas) and monetary offers.'⁹⁶ In notes of the meeting the DIS had with Mary Harper the BBC's Africa editor⁹⁷, the report noted 'The source stated that forced recruitment by al-Shabaab still takes place, mainly in the areas controlled by al-Shabaab...According to the source, recruitment by al-Shabaab in areas not controlled by the

⁸⁸ Reuters, '[Spreading the net: Somali Islamists now target Kenyan recruits](#)', 17 May 2019

⁸⁹ Keating & Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 385), Hurst (London) 2018

⁹⁰ Mary Harper's website, [Home](#), no date

⁹¹ Keating and Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 373), Hurst (London) 2018

⁹² Keating and Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 373), Hurst (London) 2018

⁹³ Keating & Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 342), Hurst (London) 2018

⁹⁴ RUSI, '[Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia](#)', January 2019

⁹⁵ RUSI, '[Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia](#)', January 2019

⁹⁶ DIS, '[DIS report 2020](#)' (page 13), July 2020

⁹⁷ Mary Harper's website, [Home](#), no date

organisation, such as Mogadishu, does take place, although, this rarely happens.’⁹⁸

5.2.13 The DIS report 2020 also noted:

‘Al-Shabaab frequently requests locals to join or give up younger family members to the organisation, and although this may not include elements of force per se, the reputation of the group leaves little room for civilians to refuse the offer to join. People who reject al-Shabaab are threatened and labelled as infidels who reject Islam and the Sharia law. In some cases the person who rejects the offer is killed in order to set an example for the rest of the community...

‘Although young men are the primary target, al-Shabaab recruits from all age groups as well as among women. Variables such as age, gender, educational background, or prior professions influences for what purpose one is recruited. A source interviewed people, who were recruited to the organisation’s transport sector, working as a mechanic or with logistics. The organisation needs people with other skills than just fighting skills as they govern the areas they control. One sources [sic] mentioned that al-Shabaab often seeks to recruit people returning to the organisations territories, as these people can often carry out tasks like information gathering and armed attacks since the locals and the authorities are less suspicious of these people.’⁹⁹

See also [Access to information and the internet](#)

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5.3 Recruitment of women

5.3.1 In an August 2017 paper by UNSOM, based on ‘a total of nine focus groups and three individual interviews [...] conducted over the course of 2016’¹⁰⁰ (see pages 5 to 6 for details of the groups) concluded that ‘[w]omen are often recruited, because they may attract less attention than men and can thus more easily carry out suicide explosions. Women may also be used to entice male recruits’¹⁰¹.

5.3.2 The DIS 2017 report noted: ‘Women are mostly recruited to al-Shabaab for logistical tasks, housekeeping, sexual exploitation, as mobilisers of other women, and as wives to al Shabaab fighters. In some cases, women are also recruited in order to collect information as women travel more easily disguised than men... None of the sources knew of female al-Shabaab fighters’¹⁰²

5.3.3 A July 2018 blog by academic Phoebe Donnelly on the Women in International Security (WIIS) website, based on data from Kismayo, Somalia noted ‘[g]roups like Al-Shabaab understand the role gender plays in Somalia and are able to use traditional ideas about women and what they see as

⁹⁸ DIS, ‘[DIS report 2020](#)’ (page 23), July 2020

⁹⁹ DIS, ‘[DIS report 2020](#)’ (page 13 and 14), July 2020

¹⁰⁰ UNSOM, ‘[Countering AS Propaganda and Recruitment Mechanisms ...](#)’, 14 August 2017

¹⁰¹ UNSOM, ‘[Countering AS Propaganda and Recruitment ...](#)’ (page 12), 14 August 2017

¹⁰² DIS, ‘[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)’ (page 22), 8 March 2017

their unique strengths to successfully fulfill the group's needs...'¹⁰³. The blog noted the roles women fulfilled were fundraising, intelligence gathering, recruitment and domestic roles such as medical care for Al Shabaab fighters¹⁰⁴.

- 5.3.4 In Stig Jarle Hansen, Dr Linnéa Gelot and Alin Hilowle's paper, they noted that 'importantly, women are not only subjects but have active roles in Al Shabaab. Typically, they are shopkeepers, tax collectors, informants, checkpoint guards, teachers in schools, or wives; they are also involved in fetching supplies'¹⁰⁵.
- 5.3.5 A March 2019 article by the Jamestown Foundation, which largely cites other (earlier) articles considered that 'the scope of women's involvement in al-Shabaab remains unknown, but security experts have advanced various reasons why they joined the militant group'¹⁰⁶. It added that '[s]ome help in planning local attacks, help form terror cells and channel finances to the terror organization. They are known to take food to family members in police custody over terror charges. Others facilitate financial transactions to fund the operations of the group.'¹⁰⁷ The report concluded that '... women are starting to play a key role within al-Shabaab. While they are not known to be on the frontline, they are supporting the war through other actions such as intelligence and information gathering, cooking for the fighters and offering medical care, among other roles ... These core roles are essential to al-Shabaab's survival.'¹⁰⁸
- 5.3.6 An article in New Policy Digest, 'Female Suicide Bombers Shows al-Shabaab's Desperation', 14 August 2019 reported:
'Somalia has recently witnessed a dramatic uptick of female suicide bombers. In the past four weeks alone, al-Shabaab conducted two suicide attacks and both perpetrators were female... From al-Shabaab's emergence in late 2006, the group has deployed female suicide bombers only three times in 208 suicide attacks... al-Shabaab's use of women to conduct suicide bombings has thus far proven to be an anomaly. The group operates on the strict gender binary wherein men are modeled as fighters and women play domestic roles.'¹⁰⁹
- 5.3.7 The New Arab reported on the Al Shabaab attack in Mogadishu on the UN on 22 July 2020 and noted it was a '...rare instance of al-Shabaab using a female suicide bomber'¹¹⁰

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¹⁰³ WIIS, '[Women in Al-Shabaab through a New War's Lens](#)', 25 July 2018

¹⁰⁴ WIIS, '[Women in Al-Shabaab through a New War's Lens](#)', 25 July 2018

¹⁰⁵ Keating & Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (p386), Hurst (London) 2018

¹⁰⁶ Jamestown Foundation, '[Asset or Victims \[...\]](#)', 25 March 2019

¹⁰⁷ Jamestown Foundation, '[Asset or Victims \[...\]](#)', 25 March 2019

¹⁰⁸ Jamestown Foundation, '[Asset or Victims \[...\]](#)', 25 March 2019

¹⁰⁹ New Policy Digest, '[Female Suicide Bombers Shows al-Shabaab's Desperation](#)', 14 August 2019

¹¹⁰ The New Arab, '[Somalia's Al-Shabaab use woman suicide bomber in UN attack](#)', 25 July 2020

5.4 Recruitment of children

- 5.4.1 In an August 2017 paper by UNSOM, based on ‘a total of nine focus groups and three individual interviews [...] conducted over the course of 2016’¹¹¹ (see pages 5 to 6 for details of the groups) concluded that ‘[r]espondents identified youth aged 10–15 years as Al-Shabaab’s primary recruitment targets. [...] Specifically, Al Shabaab targets uneducated, unemployed youth with the promise of good pay, free Islamic education and marri[a]ge.’¹¹²
- 5.4.2 A 2017 VOA article cited the governor of Bay region as having claimed (at the time) they were launching a forced recruitment campaign in which they were ‘pressuring leaders of local villages to make sure teenagers join its ranks’¹¹³.
- 5.4.3 Reuters, in a January 2018 report cited ‘an Al Shabaab spokesman’ as denying that the group forcibly recruited children¹¹⁴.
- 5.4.4 The UN Human Right Council, ‘Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia’, for the Thirty-ninth session 10 to 28 September 2018 dated 19 July 2018 noted: ‘Apart from the abduction of children, the main root causes for the recruitment by Al-Shabaab of young people include socioeconomic and political exclusion, poverty, unemployment and radicalization, or the indoctrination with a violent extremist ideology. A substantial number of children have been abducted by Al-Shabaab from schools and villages to join their ranks.’¹¹⁵
- 5.4.5 The USSD’s 2019 Country Report on Human Rights Practices noted the abduction of children and the use of child soldiers by Al Shabaab¹¹⁶. The report also noted ‘Al-Shabaab raided schools, madrassas, and mosques, and harassed and coerced clan elders to recruit children... The Somali press frequently reported accounts of al-Shabaab indoctrinating children at schools and forcibly recruiting students into its ranks.’¹¹⁷
- 5.4.6 Human Rights Watch (HRW) in its ‘World Report 2020’ covering events in Somalia in 2019 noted ‘[i]n 2018, the UN documented more cases of children recruited and used as soldiers in Somalia than in any other country in the world. This trend continued in 2019 as Al-Shabab pursued an aggressive child recruitment campaign with retaliation against communities refusing to hand over children.’¹¹⁸
- 5.4.7 Anadolu Agency reported on 15 August 2020 the release of 33 children in a military operation against Al-Shabaab in Kurtunwaarey, lower Shabelle region. The source cited government spokesman Ismail Mukhtar Oronjo who said the children were taken by Al Shabaab for indoctrination.¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ UNSOM, ‘[Countering AS Propaganda ...](#)’, 14 August 2017

¹¹² UNSOM, ‘[Countering AS Propaganda ...](#)’ (page 12), 14 August 2017

¹¹³ VOA, ‘[Somali Teenagers Flee Al-Shabab Recruitment Campaign](#)’, 27 Sept 2017

¹¹⁴ Reuters, ‘[Somalia’s AS denies forcibly recruiting children to fight](#)’, 18 Jan 2018

¹¹⁵ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Independent Expert...](#)’ (paragraph 54), 19 July 2018

¹¹⁶ USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (Section 1g), 11 March 2020

¹¹⁷ USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (Section 1g), 11 March 2020

¹¹⁸ HRW, ‘[World Report 2020](#)’, 14 January 2020

¹¹⁹ AA, ‘[Somali military frees 33 children from al-Shabaab](#)’, 15 August 2020

5.4.8 The UNICEF press release, 'Denmark contributes DKK115 million to uphold the protection rights of Somali children', 15 January 2020 cited the Danish Ambassador to Somalia who said "I met with several children who were forced to join Al-Shabaab... These children were often tortured, beaten, indoctrinated with extreme ideology and trained to be foot soldiers."¹²⁰

5.4.9 A joint report by UNSOM/UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) covering the protection of civilians from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2019 noted that 'Al Shabaab continued to carry out abductions for the purpose of recruitment and use of children, forcing community elders and parents to provide children for recruitment. During the reporting period, CTFMR documented the recruitment and use of 5,775 children (5,634 boys; 141 girls) by different parties to the conflict. Al Shabaab was responsible for the recruitment of 4,707 children (82 per cent) ...'¹²¹

5.4.10 The DIS report 2020 noted:

'Recruitment of children into al-Shabaab is often undertaken when the organisation suffers losses in battle and the organisation primarily recruits children from amongst the rural population. Throughout the fall of 2017 and 2018, al-Shabaab launched a number of recruitment campaigns targeting children. In October 2017, al-Shabaab started to enforce their curricula in schools thereby seeking to recruit children from the schools. Al-Shabaab also demands children from local clan leaders and from families living within their territory. According to one source, once a child is recruited, a process of indoctrination begins where they are persuaded to fight in the name of Islam. The source elaborated that one defector described this form of indoctrination as if al-Shabaab had changed the sim-card in his mind and that it was a challenge to get the sim-card out of his mind again. The organisation considers anyone above the age of 15 to be an adult, and therefore, it is acceptable to be recruited as a fighter if you are older the age of 15. Al-Shabaab mostly recruits young males between the age of 12 and 24, but there have been cases of children as young as eight years old being recruited.'¹²²

See also [Treatment of children](#)

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Section 6 updated: 20 August 2020

6. Leaving and 'defecting' from Al Shabaab

6.1 Numbers of defectors

6.1.1 The Africa Defense Forum (ADF) article, 'There Is A Way Out', 10 May 2017, cited Robert Kaneiss, formerly of the US Navy, who directed security for the Disengaged Combatants Programme (DCP). He estimated, based on intelligence that, among the 5,600 to 6,000 active Al-Shabaab members at that time, as many as 2,000 were 'ready to defect'¹²³.

¹²⁰ UNICEF, '[Denmark contributes DKK115 million...](#)', 15 January 2020

¹²¹ UNSOM/OHCHR, '[Protection of Civilians Report...](#)' (page 32), 2 October 2020

¹²² DIS, '[DIS report 2020](#)' (page 15), July 2020

¹²³ ADF, '[There is a Way Out](#)' (Returning to the Mainstream), 10 May 2017

6.1.2 In a May 2019 article for the International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCIV), the authors noted that '[a]lthough there are no confirmed figures, Somali government officials estimate two thousand disengaged Al-Shabaab combatants have gone through some form of DRR program in Somalia'¹²⁴. The same article also noted that '[w]hile there is limited empirical data specifically on Al-Shabaab defection, there are numerous news articles on the subject, primarily interviews with defectors and coverage of mass defections.'¹²⁵

See also [Amnesty and rehabilitation programme](#) and [Rehabilitation centres](#)

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6.2 Reasons for leaving

6.2.1 A 2019 paper by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) explained

- 'disengagements [that is people leaving Al Shabaab] were often motivated in part by the repulsion felt towards abuses perpetrated by Al-Shabaab, particularly attacks against civilians.' Other, lesser cited reasons included 'changes in the state apparatus or wider conflict environment'. This included 'evidence from the November 2017 study that at least a few disengagements were driven partly by optimism still then associated with the administration of President Mohamed Abdullahi "Farmajo" Mohamed, who assumed office in February 2017.'
- how 'slightly over half of the respondents claiming that they were driven to leave Al-Shabaab partly because their income was inadequate. Put simply, their salaries often did not meet the expectations held at the point of enlistment, and these respondents felt that they could earn more outside the group'
- 'However, a sense of familial obligation was perhaps the most important driver of disengagement, with a substantial majority of the respondents highlighting its relevance. In specific cases this manifested as families threatening to disown respondents, or alternatively promising to identify wives for them if they disengaged.'¹²⁶

6.2.2 The RUSI paper also explained how 'individuals reported that it took them many months or even years to find an opportunity to disengage, in the knowledge that this action was potentially punishable by death' and that 'Al-Shabaab's loss of territory between 2011 and 2015 provided a major enabling factor for disengagement'¹²⁷.

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6.3 Government amnesty and rehabilitation programme

6.3.1 An August 2017 article in Voice of America explained '[t]he amnesty and rehabilitation program was launched in 2009.'¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Taylor, Semmelrock, McDermott, '[The Cost of Defection \[...\]](#)'. IJCIV Vol. 13/2019, 22 May 2019

¹²⁵ Taylor, Semmelrock, McDermott, '[The Cost of Defection \[...\]](#)'. IJCIV Vol. 13/2019, 22 May 2019

¹²⁶ RUSI, '[Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia](#)', January 2019

¹²⁷ RUSI, '[Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia](#)', January 2019

¹²⁸ VoA, '[Al-Shabab Defectors Being Rehabilitated to Re-enter Somali Society](#)', 29 August 2017

- 6.3.2 A January 2020 article on Garowe online, reporting on the defection of a ‘senior Al-Shabaab foreign commando’ (also noted by other sources^{129,130,131}), noted that ‘the Somali Government has an open amnesty program for those defecting from al-Shabab as long as they renounce violence and the ideology.’¹³²
- 6.3.3 The May 2017 ADF article, in information provided by Robert Kaneiss, formerly in the US Navy, who directed security for the Disengaged Combatants Programme (DCP) stated ‘Once militants are off the battlefield and in custody, program stakeholders collect defectors’ biometric data and interview them ...former militants who defected from a leadership position or who hold Western passports are generally sent to a separate “high-level” program with different procedures, and sometimes to prison.’¹³³
- 6.3.4 The same source stated “‘There is a stringent vetting process for the low-level volunteers, either walk-ins or brokered by the government; they are vetted by government intelligence, background checks are performed, with oversight by NISA [National Intelligence and Security Agency] and the U.N.’”¹³⁴
- 6.3.5 The ADF article also noted ‘...program graduates receive amnesty from prosecution, as mandated by the Somali government ... A highly sophisticated exit board determines who is ready to graduate and qualify for social reintegration’¹³⁵. Kaneiss added that the defectors had to “‘...convincingly demonstrate and assure disengagement and affiliation with al-Shabaab, terrorism...’”¹³⁶
- 6.3.6 An October 2018 IRIN article explained that ‘[a]ll former al-Shabab members are supposed to be processed by the National Intelligence Security Agency (NISA), which hands those deemed to be of higher risk over to the Ministry of Justice for possible prosecution.’¹³⁷
- 6.3.7 Ingvild Magnæs Gjelsvik’s paper, ‘Should I Stay or Should I Go?: Security Considerations for Members Leaving Al-Shabaab in Somalia’, published in the Norwegian Institute for International Affairs (NUPI), 2019, noted:
- ‘[The Defector and Rehabilitation Programme] DRP consists of five phases: outreach, reception, screening, rehabilitation and reintegration... (NISA) is responsible for the screening phase, where these individuals are assessed as either “low” or “high risk”. The “high-risk” cohort is taken to safe houses, or sentenced and imprisoned. Individuals in the low-risk group are transferred to rehabilitation centres; young persons under 18 years are placed in separate centres for minors.’¹³⁸

¹²⁹ VoA, [‘Senior al-Shabab Foreign Fighter Defects in Somalia’](#), 21 January 2020

¹³⁰ African News, [‘Senior Al-Shabab Foreign Fighter Defects In Somalia’](#), 23 January 2020

¹³¹ Somaliland Standard, [‘Senior Al Shabaab fighter in Somalia defects...’](#), 22 January 2020

¹³² Garowe, [‘Veteran Al-Shabaab foreign commando defects in Somalia’](#), 22 January 2020

¹³³ ADF, [‘There is a Way Out’](#) (Returning to the Mainstream), 10 May 2017

¹³⁴ ADF, [‘There is a Way Out’](#) (Returning to the Mainstream), 10 May 2017

¹³⁵ ADF, [‘There is a Way Out’](#) (Returning to the Mainstream), 10 May 2017

¹³⁶ ADF, [‘There is a Way Out’](#) (Returning to the Mainstream), 10 May 2017

¹³⁷ Pulitzer Centre, [‘Heal Somalia’s Former Child Soldiers, Heal a Nation’](#), 29 October 2018

¹³⁸ Gjelsvik, Ingvild Magnæs [‘Should I Stay or Should I Go?\[...\]’](#), NUPI, 2019

- 6.3.8 A February 2020 article on Voice of America cited an example of a former Al Shabaab member who had been sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment for his past membership of the group but this was as he had 'failed to follow the proper process to register himself as a defector when he left the group'.¹³⁹

See also [Prosecution of defectors](#)

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6.4 Government rehabilitation centres

- 6.4.1 The UNSOM article cited facilities for disengaged combatants, such as the Baidoa Rehabilitation Centre¹⁴⁰. An August 2017 article in Voice of America explained '[t]he Somali government says thousands of militants have passed through [the amnesty and rehabilitation programme], although Mohamed [programme director at the Mogadishu centre] says only 800 have come through the Mogadishu center'¹⁴¹ and noted there were 'reintegration programs in Baidoa, Beledweyne, Huddur and Kismayo, each treating 30 to 70 men.'¹⁴²
- 6.4.2 The Africa Defense Forum (ADF) article, 'There Is A Way Out', 10 May 2017 stated there were rehabilitation centres in Beledweyne, Mogadishu and Baidoa, with a fourth planned for Kismayo at that time. The Disengaged Combatants Programme (DCP) director was quoted as saying about 1,800 ex- Al Shabaab combatants had been through rehabilitation and training¹⁴³.
- 6.4.3 The 2017 RUSI paper noted that, at the time of writing the report, '241 beneficiaries had completed their rehabilitation and departed the centre [Serendi Rehabilitation Centre in Mogadishu] through the formal exit process established in 2015, with a further 62 currently in residence.'¹⁴⁴
- 6.4.4 An article by IRIN, dated October 2018, described a 'centre that works with young al-Shabab defectors'¹⁴⁵. The IRIN article explained that '[a]bout 120 boys now live there, two hours' drive from the capital, but at one point it housed as many 520.'¹⁴⁶
- 6.4.5 The October 2018 IRIN article further explained that '[t]he government has several rehabilitation centres for lower-risk adults, but none for minors Instead, children are placed in approved centres run by various NGOs, which provide education and vocational training.'¹⁴⁷
- 6.4.6 The UN Human Right Council, 'Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia' for the 39th session 10 to 28 September 2018 dated 19 July 2018, noted the existence of rehabilitation programmes for young people. The Independent Expert visited 2 rehabilitation camps for recaptured children [from Al Shabaab] in Mogadishu and Puntland which provided vocational training and psychosocial

¹³⁹ VoA, '[Somali Court Sentences Mogadishu Official for Past \[AS\] Membership](#)', 16 Feb 2020

¹⁴⁰ UNSOM, '[Countering AS Propaganda and Recruitment ...](#)' (page 20), 14 August 2017

¹⁴¹ VoA, '[Al-Shabab Defectors Being Rehabilitated to Re-enter Somali Society](#)', 29 August 2017

¹⁴² VoA, '[Al-Shabab Defectors Being Rehabilitated to Re-enter Somali Society](#)', 29 August 2017

¹⁴³ ADF, '[There is a Way Out](#)' (Returning to the Mainstream), 10 May 2017

¹⁴⁴ RUSI, '[Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia](#)' (page 4), January 2019

¹⁴⁵ Pulitzer Centre, '[Heal Somalia's Former Child Soldiers, Heal a Nation](#)', 29 October 2018

¹⁴⁶ Pulitzer Centre, '[Heal Somalia's Former Child Soldiers, Heal a Nation](#)', 29 October 2018

¹⁴⁷ Pulitzer Centre, '[Heal Somalia's Former Child Soldiers, Heal a Nation](#)', 29 October 2018

counselling to children ‘...the majority of whom appeared to be below the age of majority.’¹⁴⁸

- 6.4.7 A July 2018 blog by academic Phoebe Donnelly on the Women in International Security (WIIS) website, based on data from Kismayo, which was ruled by Al Shabaab until 2012 noted that defector programmes were usually designed for men and in the case of Al Shabaab ‘...found [no] evidence of any defector programs that accept women’¹⁴⁹. Vanda Felbab-Brown’s 2018 Somalia case study found that ‘[t]he absence of rehabilitation facilities for low-level female al Shabaab defectors, associates, and victims is a major gap in existing programs.’¹⁵⁰
- 6.4.8 In a May 2019 article for the International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCv), the authors noted that at the time of writing ‘there were Disarmament, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DRR) centers in Baidoa, Kismayo, Mogadishu, and Beledweyne, all under the umbrella of the Somali National Program for the Treatment and Handling of Disengagement Combatants.’¹⁵¹
- 6.4.9 The authors of the May 2019 IJCv article explained that:
‘The DRR center, run in coordination by the Bay Ministry for DRR and IOM [International Organization for Migration], operates a four-month rehabilitation and training program consisting of religious and ideological re-education, trauma counselling, and technical training in electrical work, masonry, carpentry, and mechanics. Completing the rehabilitation program entitles recipients to receive a \$1,500 grant toward materials to start a business.’¹⁵²
- 6.4.10 The May 2019 IJCv article also noted that ‘the DDR centre [in Baidoa] was located on a cordoned-off street along with the AMISOM base (after the research was conducted, the center was re-located), and had AMISOM personnel guarding the fortified compound.’¹⁵³ The IJCv article hypothesized that ‘[i]f the disengaged combatants remained in the center they were safe from Al-Shabaab, but if they left to visit family, reintegrate back into their home community, or start a business, their personal security became vulnerable.’¹⁵⁴ However, the article also concluded that ‘[b]ased on our research, we believe defection is a viable mechanism to sustainably degrade Al-Shabaab—if the [Federal Government of Somalia] FGS and its supporters can provide security and opportunity to defectors.’¹⁵⁵
- 6.4.11 The UNICEF 15 January 2020 press release noted ‘UNICEF and partners are supporting many rehabilitation centers throughout the country and the ultimate goal of these safe spaces is to help these [former child soldiers] overcome the harrowing experience they have endured and to

¹⁴⁸ UNHRC, ‘[Report of the Independent Expert...](#)’ (paragraph 56), 19 July 2018

¹⁴⁹ WIIS, ‘[Women in Al-Shabaab through a New War’s Lens](#)’, 25 July 2018

¹⁵⁰ Felbab-Brown, IFIT, ‘[The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional Justice ...](#)’ (page 23), May 2018

¹⁵¹ Taylor, Semmelrock, McDermott, ‘[The Cost of Defection ...](#)’. IJCv Vol. 13/2019, 22 May 2019

¹⁵² Taylor, Semmelrock, McDermott, ‘[The Cost of Defection ...](#)’. IJCv Vol. 13/2019, 22 May 2019

¹⁵³ Taylor, Semmelrock, McDermott, ‘[The Cost of Defection ...](#)’. IJCv Vol. 13/2019, 22 May 2019

¹⁵⁴ Taylor, Semmelrock, McDermott, ‘[The Cost of Defection ...](#)’. IJCv Vol. 13/2019, 22 May 2019

¹⁵⁵ Taylor, Semmelrock, McDermott, ‘[The Cost of Defection ...](#)’. IJCv Vol. 13/2019, 22 May 2019

reunite them with their families.¹⁵⁶ It is not clear from this report whether the rehabilitation centres referred to are government or non-state centres.

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6.5 Prosecution of defectors

- 6.5.1 The 2017 DIS report noted '[h]igh profiled al-Shabaab members might successfully turn themselves over to the government in exchange for information, but such defection would have to be well arranged. The average al-Shabaab defector will risk being killed by government forces.'¹⁵⁷
- 6.5.2 The 2017 RUSI paper, 'drawing from 27 interviews conducted with former residents [of the Serendi Rehabilitation Centre in Mogadishu] in September 2017'¹⁵⁸ explained that '[t]he current policy states that exiting residents cannot return to communities if the threat to their security is deemed excessive, and many in any case choose to reintegrate into Mogadishu with extended family members for this reason. The overwhelming majority of former residents interviewed in September 2017 claimed to have experienced no issues with the state security forces after their release.'¹⁵⁹
- 6.5.3 Vanda Felbab-Brown's 2018 Somalia Case study noted in respect of the prosecution of alleged Al Shabaab members generally:
'Somalia has not yet passed a terrorism law, the goal of which is to enable civilian courts, instead of military courts, to try terrorism suspects such as al Shabaab members. With respect to prosecutions, in the absence of a terrorism law, the legal basis on which military courts sentence alleged members of al Shabaab is not always clear. Mostly, military courts resort to the 1960s criminal code, but even then it is not always clear why and how they issue the death penalty. Since the 1960s code predates al Shabaab, membership in the group is not legally criminalised.'¹⁶⁰
- 6.5.4 Human Rights Watch in 'World report 2020', covering events in Somalia in 2019 noted: 'Somali federal and regional authorities unlawfully detained children simply for alleged ties to Al-Shabab and at times prosecuted in military courts, children for terrorism-related offenses. The government failed to put in place juvenile justice measures, notably for children accused of Al-Shabab-related crimes.'¹⁶¹
- 6.5.5 Felbab-Brown's paper noted the position for Al Shabaab defectors and observed they '... also face legal uncertainty, as there is no legal framework for the defectors programs and amnesty declarations, and those who undergo the former successfully do not appear to receive explicit guarantees against future prosecution for their association with al Shabaab. That lack of legal certainty applies even to high-value defectors.'¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ UNICEF, '[Denmark contributes DKK115 million...](#)', 15 January 2020

¹⁵⁷ DIS, '[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)' (pages 17 to 18), 8 March 2017

¹⁵⁸ RUSI, '[Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia](#)' (page 28, January 2019)

¹⁵⁹ RUSI, '[Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia](#)' (page 28), January 2019

¹⁶⁰ Felbab-Brown, IFIT, '[The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional Justice ...](#)' (page 11), May 2018

¹⁶¹ HRW, '[World Report 2020](#)', 14 January 2020

¹⁶² Felbab-Brown, IFIT, '[The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional Justice ...](#)' (page 25), May 2018

- 6.5.6 The USSD's 2019 Country Report on Human Rights Practices noted '[t]he government held some suspects under house arrest, particularly high-ranking defectors from al-Shabaab with strong clan connections.'¹⁶³

See also [Government amnesty and rehabilitation programme](#)

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6.6 Treatment of defectors by Al Shabaab

- 6.6.1 The 2017 RUSI paper explained how 'individuals reported that it took them many months or even years to find an opportunity to disengage, in the knowledge that this action was potentially punishable by death'¹⁶⁴.

- 6.6.2 The same RUSI paper also explained that '[b]y contrast [to treatment experienced by defectors from the Somali government], concerns regarding Al-Shabaab were far more regularly highlighted by the respondents, although only one reported specific threats. This individual received SMS messages from the organisation for roughly one week after his release from Serendi, including content indicating that they knew he had recently graduated.'¹⁶⁵

- 6.6.3 According to sources interviewed for the DIS 2017 report

'Al-Shabaab defectors are... considered a prime target for al-Shabaab, as they are regarded as having sensitive information about al-Shabaab...When asked if a defector could relocate safely to urban centres with AMISOM presence, for instance to Mogadishu, several sources pointed out that al-Shabaab has informants everywhere, including in Mogadishu, and would be able to find a defector.

'Sources explained that when al-Shabaab tries to track down a defector they use clan networks and bio-data collected by al-Shabaab on each individual member...A defector who is tracked down will likely be killed....'¹⁶⁶

- 6.6.4 Sources within the DIS 2017 report noted '[f]amily members to al-Shabaab defectors are in general not considered a target for al-Shabaab.'¹⁶⁷

- 6.6.5 Ingvild Magnæs Gjelsvik's 2019 paper noted the security challenges in the reintegration process:

'Due to al-Shabaab's modus operandi it is hard to know whom to trust in the community. In many areas al-Shabaab members are integrated elements of local society. In addition, there are areas that are still controlled by al-Shabaab where the organisation has significant support from the local population....

'Careful consideration must be given to whether participants will be secure living with family, relatives or others in their networks. Some may have family members or friends who are still active members or supporters of al-

¹⁶³ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (Section1d), 11 March 2020

¹⁶⁴ RUSI, '[Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia](#)', January 2019

¹⁶⁵ RUSI, '[Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia](#)' (page 28), January 2019

¹⁶⁶ DIS, '[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)' (pages 17 to 18), 8 March 2017

¹⁶⁷ DIS, '[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)' (sections 1.3, 2), 8 March 2017

Shabaab. In some cases, the best solution is to relocate individuals to a different area than their community of origin.

‘Some local communities are hesitant to receive former members of al-Shabaab. As a result, individuals may be stigmatised or isolated in the reintegration process if their background should become known. ... The safety of those who are relocated to a local community may, in some cases, hinge on the willingness of clan leaders, elders, religious leaders and other central figures to provide protection and support.’¹⁶⁸

- 6.6.6 In a May 2019 article for the International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCV), the research focused on ‘post-defection challenges, where we found the primary concern to be lack of personal security. Without adequate security, disengaged combatants are vulnerable to being hunted and killed by Al-Shabaab. This significant threat discourages further mass and individual defections [...] if disengaged combatants are not protected from retribution, defection will lose its appeal.’¹⁶⁹
- 6.6.7 A January 2020 article on Garowe online, reporting on the defection of a ‘senior Al-Shabaab foreign commando’ noted that following his defection he received threats and that Al-Shabaab had reportedly visited his shop to force him to pay zakat (taxes)¹⁷⁰.
- 6.6.8 The DIS report 2020 noted ‘... a source mentioned several cases where defected women return to al-Shabaab after their families where [sic] threatened.’¹⁷¹
- 6.6.9 The joint report by UNSOM/OHCHR covering the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2019 it was reported that ‘A study supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to understand the drivers for men and women joining Al Shabaab, either voluntarily or forced, revealed that the majority of women were wives who followed their husbands and left for security reasons. They face real threats when they leave Al Shabaab, especially when there is dispute over children. These women are vulnerable to re-joining Al Shabaab, being forced to conduct activities so that they can keep their children and maintain themselves.’¹⁷²

See also [Military strength and capability](#), [Financing, commerce and taxes \(“zakat”\)](#) and [Al Shabaab’s targeted groups](#)

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6.7 Treatment of defectors by society

- 6.7.1 In an August 2017 paper by UNSOM, based on ‘a total of nine focus groups and three individual interviews [...] conducted over the course of 2016’¹⁷³ (see pages 5 to 6 for details of the groups) explained that ‘[t]he majority of respondents felt positively toward efforts to integrate disengaged Al Shabaab

¹⁶⁸ Gjelsvik, Ingvild Magnæs [‘Should I Stay or Should I Go?\[...\]’](#), NUPI, 2019

¹⁶⁹ Taylor, Semmelrock, McDermott, [‘The Cost of Defection \[...\]’](#). IJCV Vol. 13/2019, 22 May 2019

¹⁷⁰ Garowe, [‘Veteran Al-Shabaab foreign commando defects in Somalia’](#), 22 January 2020

¹⁷¹ DIS, [‘DIS report 2020’](#) (page 13), July 2020

¹⁷² UNSOM/OHCHR, [‘Protection of Civilians Report...’](#) (p. 30), 2 October 2020

¹⁷³ UNSOM, [‘Countering AS Propaganda and Recruitment ...’](#) (page 20), 14 August 2017

combatants back into their communities. Respondents expressed that this welcoming attitude was central to Somali values.¹⁷⁴

6.7.2 A July 2018 article explained how people ‘defect’ from Al Shabaab, but ‘often encounter hostility and suspicion’ after they have done so¹⁷⁵.

6.7.3 Vanda Felbab-Brown’s May 2018 Somalia case study noted:

‘Reinsertion processes [into communities] for al Shabaab defectors and people who lived under al Shabaab rule also remain underdeveloped, under-resourced, and inadequate. Resentment is growing in communities about al Shabaab abuses and broader impunity. New resentments are being generated as a result of what some Somalis perceive as privileging al Shabaab defectors while neglecting the community. Some even speak of a moral hazard, with those who joined al Shabaab temporarily qualifying for rehabilitation services and vocational training. At other times, communities fear former al Shabaab members and associates.’¹⁷⁶

6.7.4 The same report discussed the societal challenges faced by women and children formally associated with Al Shabaab:

‘Women who worked for al Shabaab or who were labelled al Shabaab “wives” have faced acute challenges in returning to their communities with their children. They are often seen by families and communities as disgraced; they cannot be married off again; and sometimes they are accused of being al Shabaab spies (since the group has in fact used women for such purposes). In some cases, they are expelled from the community. Women who come from minority clans and/or are displaced face the highest risk of marginalisation...’

‘In the social sphere, women are highly vulnerable to community ostracism, retaliation, and expulsion, which can have severe implications for their safety and security and that of their children.’¹⁷⁷

6.7.5 In Stig Jarle Hansen, Dr Linnéa Gelot and Alin Hilowle’s paper they pointed to a ‘strong pattern [of the respondents in their study] refrain from blaming people in the community for their various supporting roles in Al Shabaab.’¹⁷⁸

6.7.6 In a March 2020 interview with Mary Harper, the Director of the Defector Rehabilitation Programme, Mohammed Ali, acknowledged that there is mistrust in previous fighters as crimes are still being committed in Al Shabaab’s name. This can cause anger amongst people however, generally people are supportive¹⁷⁹.

See also [Al Shabaab’s targeted groups](#) and [Other aspects of life in Al Shabaab-controlled territory](#)

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¹⁷⁴ UNSOM, ‘[Countering AS Propaganda and Recruitment ...](#)’ (page20), 14 August 2017

¹⁷⁵ Pulitzer Centre, ‘[Surviving al-Shabab ...](#)’, 28 July 2018

¹⁷⁶ Felbab-Brown , IFIT, ‘[The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional Justice ...](#)’ (page 26), May 2018

¹⁷⁷ Felbab-Brown, IFIT, ‘[The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional ...](#)’ (pages 8, 23), May 2018

¹⁷⁸ Keating & Waldman, ‘War and Peace in Somalia’ (pages 380, 383), Hurst (London) 2018

¹⁷⁹ Mary Harper, [interview with Mohamed Ali \(Defector Rehabilitation program\)](#), 19 March 2020

7. Justice, law and order in Al Shabaab-controlled territory

7.1 Governance, law and order

- 7.1.1 The 2019 Berghoff Foundation report by Karin Göldner-Ebenthal, a humanitarian practitioner in June 2018 is quoted as saying: "Al-Shabaab controls all areas in between [towns and cities]. If you leave a city you cannot go 10 km without an al-Shabaab check point. And if you ask people who is providing government services, taxing them and providing security they will respond that it is al-Shabaab."¹⁸⁰
- 7.1.2 Vanda Felbab-Brown's May 2018 Somalia case study in information from interviews with Somali businessmen, NGO representatives, journalists, military officials and international political analysts in Mogadishu in December 2017 noted:
- 'Crucially, both political powerbrokers and powerful businessmen often rely on al Shabaab to maintain the security, exclusivity, and hegemony of their economic interests in particular areas, in exchange for paying al Shabaab zakat [tax]....
- 'Moreover, al Shabaab is significantly better able to provide security for the movements of vehicles and individuals on the roads it controls than are other actors. Militias, police and SNA units often charge varying, multiple, and high fees along their segments of the road; and cargo and people are still subject to ambushes, robberies, and rapes. In contrast, checkpoints manned by al Shabaab charge one uniform fee, whereby entering vehicles receive a receipt and people and cargo are allowed to proceed safely.'¹⁸¹
- 7.1.3 Jane's, an open-source defence intelligence company, in the report 'Al-Shabaab's civil administration highlights major clan dispute mediation as part of domestic governance drive' published 3 December 2019 noted '[t]he militant group continues to engage local clans and sub-clans through organising sharia courses, schools for clan children, and conflict resolution initiatives in a bid to further ingratiate itself within local communities and contexts...'¹⁸²
- 7.1.4 The Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index (BTI) 'Somalia Country Report 2020' stated '[i]n areas governed by al-Shabaab, politics and everyday administration are strictly guided by religious dogma.'¹⁸³
- 7.1.5 The US Congressional Research Service in 'Somalia', updated 16 January 2020 noted '[t]he group capitalizes on grievances and distrust of the government in parts of Somalia and fills local governance roles, providing basic services and resolving disputes.'¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Karin Göldner-Ebenthal, '[Salafi jihadi armed groups \[...\]](#)' (section 3.4), Berghoff Foundation, 2019

¹⁸¹ Felbab-Brown, IFIT, '[The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional Justice ...](#)' (page7), May 2018

¹⁸² Jane's, '[Al-Shabaab's civil administration...](#)', 19 December 2019

¹⁸³ BTI, '[Somalia Country Report 2020](#)' (Rule of Law), 2020

¹⁸⁴ The Congressional Research Service, '[Somalia](#)', 10 April 2019

- 7.1.6 The USSD's 2019 Country Report on Human Rights Practices, repeating information from the 2018 report¹⁸⁵ noted that Al-Shabaab arbitrarily arrested and detained people¹⁸⁶.
- 7.1.7 The 2019 USSD report also noted
 'Residents of Bariire in the Lower Shabelle Region reported in June that al-Shabaab regularly forced locals to attend public executions, amputations, and other punishments as a means of intimidating the local population, particularly ahead of government operations in local areas....
 'Al-Shabaab imposed harsh punishment on persons in areas under its control. AMISOM alleged that al-Shabaab tortured residents under its control in el-Baraf for offenses ranging from failure to pay tax to being a government agent'¹⁸⁷
- 7.1.8 Human Rights Watch's World Report 2020 (covering events in 2019) alleged evidence of 'media reporting an uptick in executions mid-year'¹⁸⁸ but seemingly pointed to one July 2019 article on Voice of America (VoA) which cited the execution of 18 people between Wednesday and Monday (the date of the article)¹⁸⁹. The 18 were: 4 people in the southern town of Jamame – reasons unclear in the article; 2 men and a woman accused of being a spy for Kenya killed by firing squad; one man publicly stoned to death for allegedly raping a 16-year-old girl; 3 men killed by firing squad accused of being Somali government soldiers in the town of Kurtunwarey in the Lower Shabelle region; and 10 men in two separate executions in Hagar and Salagle towns in southern Somalia accused of spying for the Somali government¹⁹⁰.
- 7.1.9 The joint report by UNSOM/OHCHR covering the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2019 noted:
 'Al Shabaab used methods such as executions, armed attacks, and targeted killings as punishment in areas under its control.
 'Al Shabaab uses public executions as one of its methods to punish acts it considers as crimes and in many instances forces the civilian population to attend and watch them carried out. Public executions are also intended to intimidate populations under their control and to send a clear message of what would happen to anyone not complying with their rules. With the same aim, Al Shabaab described publicly accusations of spying for the Government or for international forces as the main reason for the executions.'¹⁹¹
- 7.1.10 The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in its 7 September 2020 'Briefing notes' reported that 'On 04 September 2020, fighting broke out between al-Shabaab and villagers of Shabeelow village, Mudug region.

¹⁸⁵ USSD, '[2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 1d), 13 March 2019

¹⁸⁶ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section1d), 11 March 2020

¹⁸⁷ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 1a and 1c), 11 March 2020

¹⁸⁸ HRW, '[World Report 2020](#)', 14 January 2020

¹⁸⁹ VoA, '[Al-Shabab Kills 18 in Surge of Executions](#)', 8 July 2019

¹⁹⁰ VoA, '[Al-Shabab Kills 18 in Surge of Executions](#)', 8 July 2019

¹⁹¹ UNSOM/OHCHR, '[Protection of Civilians Report...](#)' (pages 11-12), 2 October 2020

Several people were killed on both sides. The militia group tried to force the villagers to hand over their weapons and livestock.¹⁹²

- 7.1.11 The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in its 28 September 2020 'Briefing notes' stated that 'There are reports that on 25 September 2020 al-Shabaab publicly executed two men who were accused of spying for the government and a government soldier in the town of Buale, Hiiran region. Another man was executed by al-Shabaab on 24 September 2020 after he had been sentenced to death for witchcraft and therefore apostasy in the town of Jilib in Middle Juba region.'¹⁹³

See also [Al Shabaab's targeted groups](#)

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7.2 Application of Sharia

- 7.2.1 Al Shabaab imposes strict version of Sharia in areas under its control¹⁹⁴¹⁹⁵. For information on which areas Al Shabaab controls or operates within, see [Control of territory](#) and [Annex A: Control of territory maps](#).
- 7.2.2 BBC's December 2017 overview of Al Shabaab noted the strict imposition of Sharia included '... stoning to death women accused of adultery and amputating the hands of thieves.'¹⁹⁶ The Council on Foreign Relations backgrounder on Al Shaabab, last updated 10 January 2020 noted '[s]tonings and amputations have been meted out to suspected adulterers and thieves.'¹⁹⁷
- 7.2.3 Roland Marchal, cited in the book 'War and Peace in Somalia', pointed to the need for a more nuanced understanding of Al Shabaab's application of Sharia. He noted that the group are willing to enforce all punishments, including hudud (an Islamic term referring to punishments seen as mandated and determined by God, which range from public lashing to publicly stoning to death to the amputation of hands). But he also mentioned that Al-Shabaab have shown themselves to be more flexible 'especially in cases of its own members infringing Sharia: instead of facing a hard punishment, they were relocated'. Variations in implementing Sharia depended on factors such as the level of control of an area they had and the need to maintain popular support¹⁹⁸.
- 7.2.4 In the same book, Richard Barrett – Director of The Global Strategy Network – explained that '[w]here Al Shabaab is in control, it offers justice through Sharia courts, though not always in strict accordance with Sharia law'¹⁹⁹.
- 7.2.5 A January 2019 paper by Daisy Muibu, a Doctoral student at American University who focuses primarily on matters of police legitimacy and law

¹⁹² Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Germany), '[Briefing Notes](#)', 7 September 2020

¹⁹³ Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Germany), '[Briefing Notes](#)', 28 September 2020

¹⁹⁴ BBC, '[Who are Somalia's al-Shabab?](#)', 22 December 2017

¹⁹⁵ Counter Extremism Project, '[Al-Shabab – Overview](#)' (Executive Summary), undated

¹⁹⁶ BBC, '[Who are Somalia's al-Shabab?](#)', 22 December 2017

¹⁹⁷ CFR, '[Al-Shabab](#)', updated 10 January 2020

¹⁹⁸ Keating and Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (pages 312 to 3), Hurst (London) 2018

¹⁹⁹ Keating and Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 365), Hurst (London) 2018

enforcement responses to terrorism in the Horn of Africa²⁰⁰, also concluded that it was ‘not clear whether al-Shabaab courts rely solely on Sharia, or if their rulings incorporate customary law to varying extents, especially during the mediation of clan disputes.’²⁰¹

See also [Other aspects of life in Al Shabaab-controlled territory](#) and [Al Shabaab’s justice and dispute resolution system](#)

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7.3 Al Shabaab’s justice and dispute resolution system

- 7.3.1 Mary Harper, the BBC’s Africa editor, was quoted in Garowe online as having described Al Shabaab’s court system as ‘...speedy and efficient compared to the government’s secular version – so much so that many Somalis in Mogadishu travel to Al Shabab-controlled zones to settle disputes’²⁰².
- 7.3.2 A 2017 article on the International Peace Institute’s Global Observatory, which is cited in a January 2019 report by the Africa Security Lab²⁰³, described how Al Shabaab ‘...operates mobile courts that deal with cases swiftly and effectively. Most commonly, Somalis who have a land or property dispute turn to the group because they consider it likely to provide the most consistent and thorough response. This sort of parallel justice network exists across the country and even the capital Mogadishu.’²⁰⁴
- 7.3.3 Roland Marchal also noted that ‘... Al-Shabaab courts addressed many problems of the population it controlled (such as inheritance, divorce and land title disputes) and provided solutions it was able to enforce’²⁰⁵.
- 7.3.4 Hussein Yusuf Ali, a Somali researcher²⁰⁶, also noted from his work that Al Shabaab ‘... has managed to respond to the community’s need for justice, specifically in the areas of land and property disputes, commercial disagreements, and access to natural resources (particularly pasture and water), discrimination against unarmed clans, unlawful arrests, detention, extortion, and killings among the civilian population’²⁰⁷.
- 7.3.5 Vanda Felbab-Brown’s May 2018 Somalia case study, in information from interviews with Somali businessmen, NGO representatives, journalists, military officials and international political analysts in Mogadishu in December 2017, noted: ‘Al Shabaab ...outcompetes other actors in Somalia in its capacity to deliver justice and dispute resolution. It retains a reputation for delivering swift, effective, and, crucially, noncorrupt and fair rulings to disputes based on sharia. Thus, even people from government-held territories, and by some anecdotal accounts occasionally even policemen, go to al Shabaab for dispute resolution.’²⁰⁸

²⁰⁰ Daisy Muibu, [‘Justice and Terror: Al-Shabaab’s Informal Justice Mechanism’](#), 5 January 2019

²⁰¹ Daisy Muibu, [‘Justice and Terror: Al-Shabaab’s Informal Justice Mechanism’](#), 5 January 2019

²⁰² Garowe, [‘Al Shabab remains a potent and lethal force in Somalia’](#), 19 July 2019

²⁰³ Africa Security Lab, [‘Justice and Terror: Al-Shabaab’s informal justice mechanism’](#), 5 Jan 2019

²⁰⁴ IPI Global Observatory, [‘Can Military Might Alone Defeat al-Shabaab?’](#), 21 March 2017

²⁰⁵ Keating and Waldman, ‘War and Peace in Somalia’ (page 313), Hurst (London) 2018

²⁰⁶ Keating and Waldman, ‘War and Peace in Somalia’ (page 329), Hurst (London) 2018

²⁰⁷ Keating and Waldman, ‘War and Peace in Somalia’ (page 335), Hurst (London) 2018

²⁰⁸ Felbab-Brown, IFIT, [‘The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional Justice ...’](#) (page 7), May 2018

- 7.3.6 The 2019 Berghoff Foundation report by Karin Göldner-Ebenthal, in interviews with political analysts and INGO [International Non-Governmental Organisations] representatives in May 2018 noted: ‘One of the core services al-Shabaab has been providing in the areas under their control was and is a harsh but functioning justice system. It is sought after by the population to the point where Somalis even today travel out of Mogadishu to a close-by al-Shabaab court to have their conflicts settled’.²⁰⁹
- 7.3.7 Muibu’s January 2019 paper observed that ‘... the broad appeal of al-Shabaab’s courts can be found in the group’s ability to render relatively quick and thorough verdicts and enforce those decisions... Consequently, anecdotal accounts suggest that people travel out of AMISOM and government held regions to seek al-Shabaab’s courts.’²¹⁰
- 7.3.8 The USSD’s 2019 Country Report on Human Rights Practices noted ‘[t]here was no functioning formal judicial system in al-Shabaab-controlled areas.’²¹¹

See also [Other aspects of life in Al Shabaab-controlled territory](#) and [Application of Sharia](#)

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Section 8 updated: 20 August 2020

8. Other aspects of life in Al Shabaab-controlled territory

8.1 Ban on cultural activities

- 8.1.1 In the Finish Immigration Service’s (FIS) October 2018 Fact-Finding Mission report, based on their mission in January 2018 in which they visited Mogadishu and Nairobi, they reported that ‘monitoring moral behaviour, dress code and length of hair are not a key issue from al Shabaab’s perspective ... people paying taxes as demanded is more important than monitoring their moral behaviour.’²¹²
- 8.1.2 A May 2019 paper by Landinfo, based on a range of sources – including those interviewed by Landinfo in Mogadishu in 2017– noted that Al Shabaab ‘are not concerned with “everything and everyone” in such areas but primarily with people paying taxes (zakat) and not cooperating with the government.’²¹³
- 8.1.3 A January 2020 Council on Foreign Relations backgrounder on Al Shabaab also noted it ‘prohibit[ed] various types of entertainment, such as movies and music; the sale of khat, a narcotic plant that is often chewed; smoking; and the shaving of beards.’²¹⁴
- 8.1.4 The USSD’s 2019 Country Report on Human Rights Practices repeating information from the 2018²¹⁵ report noted that Al-Shabaab detained persons under its control for relatively minor “offenses,” such as smoking, having illicit

²⁰⁹ Karin Göldner-Ebenthal, ‘[Salafi jihadi armed groups \[...\]](#)’ (section 3.4), Berghoff Foundation, 2019

²¹⁰ Daisy Muibu, ‘[Justice and Terror: Al-Shabaab’s Informal Justice Mechanism](#)’, 5 January 2019

²¹¹ USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1e), 11 March 2020

²¹² FIS, ‘[Fact-finding Mission Report](#)’ (section 1.4), 5 October 2018

²¹³ Landinfo, ‘[Somalia: Al-Shabaab areas in Southern Somalia](#)’, 21 May 2019

²¹⁴ CFR, ‘[Al-Shabab](#)’, updated 10 January 2020

²¹⁵ USSD, ‘[2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1c), 13 March 2019

content on cell phones, listening to music, watching or playing soccer, wearing a brassiere, or not wearing a hijab²¹⁶. The 2019 report also noted that although there were no restrictions on attending cultural events, playing music, or going to the cinema in some areas, this did not apply to Al-Shabaab-controlled areas²¹⁷.

- 8.1.5 In a July 2019 paper on Al Shabaab governance, the The Zomia Center for the Study of Non-State Spaces (the Zomia Centre), commented that ‘although the ban on plastic bags, cutting trees, chewing the drug “qat” and smoking are generally seen as reasonable measures, the ban on the internet, music, TV and the lack of mobility to engage the world outside Al Shabaab areas is deeply resented.’²¹⁸

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8.2 Financing, commerce and taxes ('zakat')

- 8.2.1 An undated UNODC resource for lecturers noted that ‘Al-Shabaab benefits from the revenue generated at charcoal production sites, from checkpoints along trucking routes and from exports. Al-Shabaab allegedly uses the taxation of the illicit trafficking of charcoal to fund its daily operations and to pay the salaries of its fighters. There is also evidence to suggest that these revenues are used to purchase weapons.’²¹⁹ The report on Somalia by the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea submitted to the Chair of the UN Security Council Committee, dated 9 November 2018, noted that charcoal trade was a significant source of revenue for Al Shabaab²²⁰.

- 8.2.2 A February 2018 article on CNN explained how Al Shabaab was ‘extorting thousands of dollars per day through road blocks and taxes on merchants attempting to transport food and supplies to sell to internally displaced people in towns where they are concentrated.’²²¹

- 8.2.3 A July 2018 paper by the Hiraal Institute looked specifically at the financing of Al Shabaab. It contained details of different taxes, rates, how taxes were collected, the issuing of receipts and potential consequences for non-payment²²². An article on Anadolu Agency refers to the paper by the Hiraal Institute²²³

- 8.2.4 The report on Somalia by the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea submitted to the Chair of the UN Security Council Committee, dated 9 November 2018, noted:

‘Case studies into Al-Shabaab’s domestic financing revealed that the militant group generates more than enough revenue to sustain its insurgency....

‘Al-Shabaab derives its revenue from a variety of domestic sources, primarily taxation on transiting vehicles and goods, business and agricultural taxation,

²¹⁶ USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1c), 11 March 2020

²¹⁷ USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 2a), 11 March 2020

²¹⁸ The Zomia Center for the Study of Non-State Spaces, ‘[Al Shabaab Governance](#)’, 10 July 2019

²¹⁹ UNODC, ‘[Exploitation of natural resources and terrorism](#)’, no date

²²⁰ UNSC, ‘[Report on Somalia of the Monitoring Group...](#)’ (page 6), 9 November 2018

²²¹ CNN, ‘[Funding al-Shabaab: How aid money ends up in terror group's hands](#)’, 12 Feb 2018

²²² Hiraal Institute, ‘[The AS Finance System](#)’, July 2018

²²³ Anadolu Agency, ‘[Somalia suffers in deadly grip of Al-Shabaab terrorism](#)’, 3 January 2020

and forced zakat (alms) levies. Al-Shabaab's financial system is systematic and centralized, with revenue directed from regional departments to the financial hub ... The funds are then at the disposal of the head of the Al-Shabaab Department of Finance ... and its governing council ... to distribute to specific Al-Shabaab departments.'²²⁴

- 8.2.5 In his paper, contributed to Keating and Waldman's book 'War and Peace in Somalia' covering Al Shabaab's ability to govern ('Can Al Shabaab Deliver? Reality and Rhetoric in the Struggle for Power'), Richard Barrett – Director of The Global Strategy Network – explained that Al Shabaab 'raises taxes and levies, though not always according to the rules it espouses.'²²⁵
- 8.2.6 A December 2019 article on France24 cited 'Horn of Africa expert Matthew Bryden' as having claimed that Al Shabaab '...has a presence in major towns, including the capital Mogadishu, that are nominally controlled by the government, where it acts as a shadow government, collecting taxes and dispensing justice'.²²⁶
- 8.2.7 Human Rights Watch's World Report 2020 (covering events in 2019) claimed that Al Shabaab 'extorted "taxes" through threats.'²²⁷
- 8.2.8 The USSD report 2019 taking information from the UN Panel of Experts on Somalia noted '...the substantial increase in "taxation" by Al-Shabaab, which extorted high and unpredictable zakat (a Muslim obligation to donate to charity) and sadaqa (a voluntary charity contribution paid by Muslims) taxes in the regions it controlled. In particular the panel noted increased al-Shabaab extortion from the port and airport of Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab also diverted and stole humanitarian food aid.'²²⁸
- 8.2.9 The DIS report 2020 noted '...al-Shabaab finances its operations primarily through collecting tax (zakat) from households and local businesses and from fees at checkpoints. Families who are not able to meet the zakat-obligation are often forced to give up their children for recruitment or pay the organisation in some other way. People who refuse to pay zakat risk having their shop burned down or even being killed.'²²⁹

See also [Justice, law and order in Al Shabaab-controlled territory](#)

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8.3 Access to information and the internet

- 8.3.1 Mary Harper, the BBC's Africa editor, in a paper in Keating and Waldman's book 'War and Peace in Somalia' covering Al Shabaab's communication methods ('Is Anybody Listening? Al-Shabaab's Communications') explained that 'communications have played a central, indeed exaggerated, role in its strategy' and cited the group itself as having described "'the media battle" as one of the most important elements of its campaign'. She also explained that

²²⁴ UNSC, '[Report on Somalia of the Monitoring Group...](#)' (pages 4, 25 to6), 9 November 2018

²²⁵ Keating and Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 365), Hurst (London) 2018

²²⁶ France24, '["\[Govt's\] attention is not focused on defeating al Shabaab"](#)', 29 December 2019

²²⁷ HRW, '[World Report 2020](#)', 14 January 2020

²²⁸ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 4), 11 March 2020

²²⁹ DIS, '[DIS report 2020](#)' (page 13), July 2020

'Al Shabaab recognise the media-savvy nature of Somalis for whom rapid information flows have always been crucial to their existence.'²³⁰

- 8.3.2 In her paper Mary Harper also argued that '[Al Shabaab's] communications department operates like a modern, international media body. The advent of the smart phonehas enable even the poorly resourced to produce high quality media on multiple platforms [meaning it] ...can project an exaggerated, glossy image of itself and its activities leading some people to believe it is more powerful than it really is'²³¹. She further pointed out that 'the availability of cheap, reliable internet services in Somalia means Al-Shabaab material "can go viral in Baidoa" and elsewhere'²³².
- 8.3.3 The USSD's 2019 Country Report on Human Rights Practices, repeating information from its 2018 report²³³ noted that Al-Shabaab '... prohibited companies from providing access to the internet and forced telecommunication companies to shut data services in al-Shabaab-controlled areas.'²³⁴
- 8.3.4 The USSD 2019 report also stated 'Al-Shabaab banned journalists from reporting news that undermined Islamic law as interpreted by al-Shabaab and forbade persons in areas under its control from listening to international media outlets.'²³⁵

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8.4 Treatment of women

- 8.4.1 Vanda Felbab-Brown's May 2018 Somalia case study, in a section discussing community attitudes to women formally associated with Al Shabaab noted 'Women who bear children for members of the group are granted more freedom of movement and communications, such as easier access to cell phones. In some cases, these women – particularly wives of al Shabaab commanders – are even granted more informal influence than they would enjoy within traditional clan structures. Reports of such privileges...fuel community suspicions.'²³⁶
- 8.4.2 A June 2019 paper by International Crisis Group (ICG) noted that 'While Al-Shabaab imposes restrictions upon women, it can provide some security and its courts often uphold Islamic family law to their benefit. Some women recruit, fundraise, spy or smuggle arms for the group.'²³⁷
- 8.4.3 ICG noted that 'Assessing how Al-Shabaab's rule affects women and the role women play in the movement is hard.'²³⁸ Crisis Group's report further noted that:
- 'Al-Shabaab's brutal insurgency has entailed considerable suffering and hardship for many women but its rule can bring benefits. It imposes severe

²³⁰ Keating and Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 369), Hurst (London) 2018

²³¹ Keating and Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 372), Hurst (London) 2018

²³² Keating and Waldman, 'War and Peace in Somalia' (page 372), Hurst (London) 2018

²³³ USSD, '[2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 2a), 13 March 2019

²³⁴ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 2a), 11 March 2020

²³⁵ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 2a), 11 March 2020

²³⁶ Felbab-Brown, IFIT, '[The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional Justice ...](#)' (page 8), May 2018

²³⁷ ICG, '[Women and Al-Shabaab's Insurgency](#)', 27 June 2019

²³⁸ ICG, '[Women and Al-Shabaab's Insurgency](#)', 27 June 2019

limits on women's comportment and access to the public sphere, restrictions resented across much of Somali society. Where it controls territory it can, however, offer women and girls a degree of physical safety – hardly complete, but still appreciable – in a country where they are otherwise exposed to violence.'²³⁹

8.4.4 The USSD report 2019 noted Al-Shabaab 'committed sexual violence, including through forced marriages'²⁴⁰ and 'The exclusion of women was more pronounced in al-Shabaab-controlled areas, where women's participation in economic activities was perceived as anti-Islamic.'²⁴¹

8.4.5 The DIS 2017 noted 'Women as a generic category are not considered al-Shabaab targets. One source found that there is not a big distinction between men and women when it comes to risk of being targeted by al-Shabaab. It depends on their profile. An independent organisation assessed that, in general, women are less likely than men to be targeted by al-Shabaab in areas with AMISOM/SNA presence.'²⁴²

8.4.6 The DIS report 2020 noted:

'Women are often recruited for domestic care and house hold tasks, as well as for sexual purposes and as wives for the fighters. Women are also used for intelligence and transfer of weapons since women can cross check points without being checked, and their apparel allows them to hide weapons. One source further explained that in some cases women plan and carry out attacks. According to another source, alShabaab denies that they recruit women.'²⁴³

8.4.7 In the period from 1 August 2019 to 30 June 2020 the UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia recorded that 'During the period under review, the United Nations recorded hundreds of sexual violence incidents against women and girls attributed to unidentified armed men, clan militiamen, Al-Shabaab elements and members of the Somali police and armed forces.'²⁴⁴

See also [Justice, law and order in Al Shabaab-controlled territory](#) and [Recruitment to Al Shabaab](#)

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8.5 Treatment of children

8.5.1 Vanda Felbab-Brown's 2018 Somalia case study, citing information from interviews with Somali NGO representatives and UN officials in Mogadishu in December 2017 observed:

'Like other militant actors in Somalia and even Somali intelligence and security forces, al Shabaab recruits many under eighteen, often forcibly. Moreover, many children who become associated with al Shabaab are born and live all their lives in al Shabaab controlled areas. They do not have any

²³⁹ ICG, '[Women and Al-Shabaab's Insurgency](#)', 27 June 2019

²⁴⁰ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 1g), 11 March 2020

²⁴¹ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 1g), 11 March 2020

²⁴² DIS, '[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)' (page 19), 8 March 2017

²⁴³ DIS, '[DIS report 2020](#)' (page 14), July 2020

²⁴⁴ UNHRC, '[Report of the Independent Expert.](#)' (paragraph 78), 24 August 2020

concept of life outside of al Shabaab control and may truly believe that they are defending their communities from dangerous infidels and apostates; or they may simply be obeying orders so as to survive physically and economically.’²⁴⁵

8.5.2 The USSD’s 2019 Country Report on Human Rights Practices repeating information from its 2018 report²⁴⁶ claimed Al Shabaab ‘continued to recruit and force children to participate in direct hostilities, including suicide attacks.’²⁴⁷

8.5.3 The USSD’s 2019 report also noted:

‘Children in al-Shabaab training camps were subjected to grueling physical training, inadequate diet, weapons training, physical punishment, and religious training. The training also included forcing children to punish and execute other children. Al-Shabaab used children in combat.. [and] in support roles, such as carrying ammunition, water, and food; removing injured and dead militants; gathering intelligence; and serving as guards. The organization sometimes used children to plant roadside bombs and other explosive devices.’²⁴⁸

8.5.4 The UN Security Council (UNSC) in the ‘Situation in Somalia Report of the Secretary-General’ dated 13 August covering the period from 5 May to 4 August 2020 noted that the UN country task force ‘...verified 546 grave violations affecting 495 children ...A total of 143 children were abducted, 185 children were victims of killing and maiming, 165 were victims of recruitment and use and 48 were victims of conflict-related sexual violence’. The report noted that 320 or 58.6% of the total number of violations were attributed to Al-Shabaab²⁴⁹. For the previous reporting period (5 February to 4 May 2020) 526 or 63.7% of the total number of violations were attributed to Al-Shabaab²⁵⁰ and for the period (1 November to 31 December 2019), out of 407 grave violations, 275 (68%) were attributed to Al-Shabaab²⁵¹.

See also [Recruitment methods](#) and [Recruitment of children](#)

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Section 9 updated: 14 September 2020

9. Al Shabaab’s targeted groups

9.1 Targets: overview

9.1.1 The DIS 2017 report stated that ‘[w]ith regard to who can become a target profile in areas under the full control of al-Shabaab sources referred particularly to three factors: The background of a person, i.e. the links the person has, his/her behaviour in relation to conformity with al-Shabaab’s

²⁴⁵ Felbab-Brown, IFIT, ‘[The Limits Of Punishment: Transitional Justice ...](#)’ (page.21), May 2018

²⁴⁶ USSD, ‘[2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1g), 13 March 2019

²⁴⁷ USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1g), 11 March 2020

²⁴⁸ USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1g), 11 March 2020

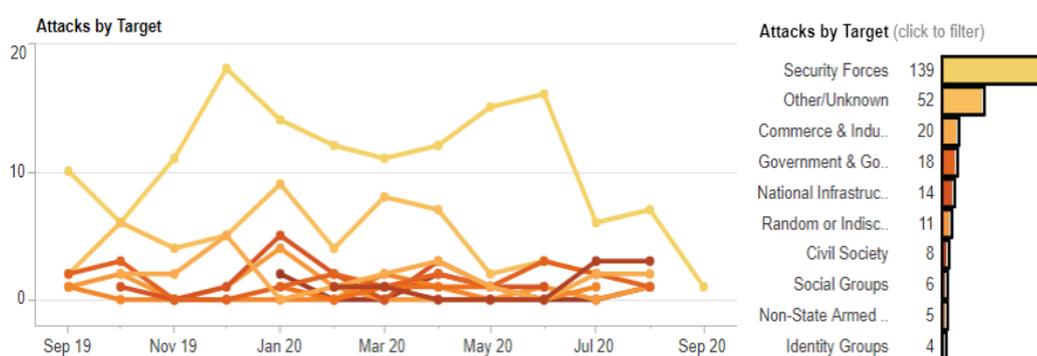
²⁴⁹ UNSC, ‘[Situation in Somalia Report of the Secretary-General](#)’ (paragraph 55), 13 August 2020

²⁵⁰ UNSC, ‘[Situation in Somalia Report of the Secretary-General](#)’ (paragraph 52), 13 May 2020

²⁵¹ UNSC, ‘[Situation in Somalia Report of the Secretary-General](#)’ (paragraph 56), 13 February 2020

interpretation of Sharia law, and finally acts and attitudes that can raise suspicion of spying.²⁵²

- 9.1.2 The UN report from the Security Council (UNSC) meeting on 20 August 2020 in a briefing by Francisco Caetano José Madeira, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of the African Union Mission in Somalia noted that Al Shabaab ‘...sustained attacks against Government officials, businesses, civilians, security forces and international personnel.’²⁵³
- 9.1.3 Jane’s ‘Sentinel Security Assessment - North Africa’ published 26 March 2020 in a section last updated 2 December 2019 considered: ‘Foreign personnel perceived to support the government, including humanitarian, non-governmental organisation, and United Nations personnel, face a severe risk of abduction by Al-Shabaab militants in southern Somalia, including the capital, Mogadishu...’²⁵⁴
- 9.1.4 Jane’s in their profile on Al Shabaab, ‘Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen Al-Shabaab’, undated, provided information on Al Shabaab attacks by target between 14 September 2019 and 14 September 2020²⁵⁵.



- 9.1.5 The DIS 2017 report stated, ‘Al-Shabaab is regarded by an independent organisation to mainly attack high profile targets and according to a UN source, civilians, who do not belong to any of the ... mentioned categories, are not considered targets.’²⁵⁶

For the categories referred to in the DIS 2017 report see [The Somali government, AMISOM/SNA and international organisations](#) and [Journalists, human rights activists and NGOs](#).

- 9.1.6 Amnesty International in their 2019 Somalia report noted that Al Shabaab were responsible for ‘...carrying out summary killings of those it perceived to be linked to the government, as well as journalists and other civilians.’²⁵⁷ But did not state the profile of the civilians referred to.

²⁵² DIS, ‘[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)’ (p23), 8 March 2017

²⁵³ UNSC, ‘[Security Council meeting ...](#)’ (page 5), 20 August 2020

²⁵⁴ Jane’s, ‘[Sentinel Security Assessment - North Africa](#)’ (Risk to Individuals), 26 March 2020

²⁵⁵ Jane’s, ‘[Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen](#)’ (Operational methods), 12 March 2020

²⁵⁶ DIS, ‘[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)’ (s1.3 and 2), 8 March 2017

²⁵⁷ Amnesty, ‘[Human Rights in Africa: Review of 2019 – Somalia](#)’, 8 April 2020

9.1.7 In the period from 1 August 2019 to 30 June 2020 the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia noted that ‘On 27 May [2020], seven health workers and one civilian were abducted and killed by AlShabaab in Gololey village, Middle Shabelle Region.’²⁵⁸

9.1.8 The joint report by UNSOM/OHCHR covering the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2019 noted

‘Al Shabaab... carried out targeted killings of individuals who participated in the 2016/2017 electoral process and abducted aid workers. It was also responsible for 1,745 incidents of arbitrary deprivation of liberty, with most victims suspected of spying for the Government of Somalia or foreign forces, or for otherwise cooperating with the Somali authorities.

‘... Al Shabaab mainly targets entities and individuals located in Mogadishu (the Federal Parliament, federal ministries and individual government officials) as the seat of the Federal Government. The presence of the international community in the capital provides additional publicity to attacks.’²⁵⁹

9.1.9 The same UNSOM/OHCHR report noted:

‘On 15 July 2019—possibly as part of its continuous propaganda campaign in the lead-up to the 2020/21 elections—Al Shabaab released a public statement [which] called upon elders who elected the Federal Parliament’s House of the People in 2016 to repent their participation in this process within a 45-day window (15 July to 1 September 2019) to safeguard their lives. The deadline was subsequently extended to 10 September 2019. Al Shabaab further demanded that the elders openly disavow their participation in the electoral process, register with Al Shabaab to confirm their repentance, and accept Shariah law above all forms of legislation. ... Al Shabaab indicated that it aimed at accommodating some 200 clan elders who had declared their intent to register but were allegedly facing challenges to reach the territory under the group’s control. According to Al Shabaab, 635 Somali electoral delegates who participated in the 2016 electoral process had so far complied with their directive to “repent” and register with the group.’²⁶⁰

See also [Leaving and ‘defecting’ from Al Shabaab](#)

For information on Al Shabaab tactics, attacks and levels of violence see the country policy and information note on [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#).

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9.2 The Somali government, AMISOM/SNA and international organisations

9.2.1 Sources interviewed in the DIS 2017 report stated:

‘Most sources agreed that the main al-Shabaab targets are federal state officials, high-ranking politicians, clan leaders supporting the federal government, AMISOM, and SNA [Somali national army]. A UN source

²⁵⁸ UNSOM/OHCHR, [‘Protection of Civilians Report...’](#) (page 27), 2 October 2020

²⁵⁹ UNSOM/OHCHR, [‘Protection of Civilians Report...’](#) (page 2 and 3), 2 October 2020

²⁶⁰ UNSOM/OHCHR, [‘Protection of Civilians Report...’](#) (page 14), 2 October 2020

mentioned that al-Shabaab may also target cleaning staff and other low-ranking staff at government and AMISOM facilities. UN staff and staff of international organisations at all levels are also a target. A UN source elaborated that anybody identified to be under a contract with the UN i.e. travelling regularly by the road to the airport of Mogadishu – and therefore assumed to be working there – can be a target. The same source mentioned that day workers at government and UN facilities are not considered a target.’²⁶¹

9.2.2 The Guardian, in ‘Life in the shadow of al-Shabaab: ‘If I don’t call, my mother thinks I’m dead’’, 14 February 2019 reported:

‘Somalia “is particularly dangerous for locals who work for foreign organisations,” says a senior Somali official working with the UN in Mogadishu, who has himself had to live apart from his wife and children for the past six years.

‘Experts and international staff live in heavily fortified places such as the airport and other well-guarded guest houses, but for locals like me there are no such protection measures in place,” he says.

‘He now lives near the airport, which is home to the AU forces, UN agencies and embassies including the British high commission – and as such one of the most protected zones in the capital.’²⁶²

9.2.3 Jane’s profile ‘Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen Al-Shabaab’, undated noted Al Shabaab ‘...targets a wide range of security force, state, and civilian target sectors, but its primary focus continues to be the FGS and its allies, including AMISOM and government-aligned militias.’²⁶³

9.2.4 The USSD 2019 report noted ‘Al-Shabaab continued to abduct persons, including humanitarian workers and AMISOM troops taken hostage during attacks.’²⁶⁴

9.2.5 ACLED reported in August 2020 that:

‘More than just an intensification of operations, Al Shabaab has also demonstrated an increasingly bold strategy in attacks targeting the upper echelons of government...the chief of the SNA, General Odawaa Yusuf Rageh, narrowly escaped an attempt in Mogadishu’s Hodan district in July. Although Al Shabaab has frequently orchestrated the targeted killings of military officers, an assassination attempt on such a senior military figure is unheard of in recent years...’²⁶⁵

See also country policy and information note on [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#)

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²⁶¹ DIS, ‘[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)’ (sections 1.3, 2), 8 March 2017

²⁶² The Guardian, ‘[Life in the shadow of al-Shabaab...](#)’, 14 February 2019

²⁶³ Jane’s, ‘[Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen](#)’ (Operational methods), undated

²⁶⁴ USSD, ‘[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)’ (section 1g), 11 March 2020

²⁶⁵ ACLED, ‘[Mid-Year Update: 10 conflicts to worry about in 2020](#)’, 18 August 2020

9.3 Journalists, human rights activists and NGOs

9.3.1 Sources within the DIS 2017 report noted:

'Journalists, human rights activists and employees of NGO's might also be targeted depending on their activities and how distinct they criticise al-Shabaab. A Somali NGO elaborated that it would depend on the context of each case. Al-Shabaab can potentially target everyone in these categories, but that does not mean that any person with such profile automatically is a target. It will depend on the circumstances. The source made reference to the fact that, in general, aid workers from NGO's are a target to al-Shabaab, but if an approval from al-Shabaab is obtained, the staff members of an approved NGO will not be targeted. However, the source stressed that NGO's affiliated with the US are a general target.'²⁶⁶

9.3.2 The February 2019 Guardian article, in an interview with a journalist in Mogadishu reported:

'The city has become so dangerous for Dahir [a journalist] that he could not even attend his younger brother's funeral last month... Such is the life of not only journalists but also aid workers, government employees and youth leaders working in Mogadishu. Faced with constant risk of violence and targeted killings, many are forced to leave their childhood neighbourhoods and settle in the city centre and around the "green zone" area near the airport, which is deemed safer.'²⁶⁷

9.3.3 Report of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator to the UNSC, 7 October 2019 noted: 'In August [2019], seven local NGO staff were detained by Al-Shabaab in Shabelle Hoose on suspicion of being United Nations personnel and working on stabilization activities in areas newly recovered by the Government. They were released days later following confirmation of their identity and non-involvement in stabilization activities...'²⁶⁸

9.3.4 Amnesty International in their 2019 Somalia report noted that 'Al-Shabaab members ...targeted journalists with violence, intimidation and threats. In July [2019], two journalists were killed in an al-Shabaab attack in Kismayo.'²⁶⁹

9.3.5 HRW in its World Report 2019 – Somalia noted '...targeted attacks on aid workers.'²⁷⁰ And The USSD 2019 report noted: 'Al-Shabaab continued to abduct persons, including humanitarian workers ... taken hostage during attacks.'²⁷¹

9.3.6 In the period from 1 August 2019 to 30 June 2020 the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia recorded that '...human rights defenders and journalists, continue to be the targets of assassinations (at least 35 of which allegedly by Al-Shabaab) ...The Independent Expert has continued to receive reports of alleged killings, physical attacks, arbitrary

²⁶⁶ DIS, '[Security Situation, al-Shabaab Presence and Target Groups](#)' (sections 1.3. 2), 8 March 2017

²⁶⁷ The Guardian, '[Life in the shadow of al-Shabaab...](#)', 14 February 2019

²⁶⁸ UNSC, '[Report of the Under-Secretary-General ...](#)', 7 October 2019

²⁶⁹ Amnesty, '[Human Rights in Africa: Review of 2019 – Somalia](#)', 8 April 2020

²⁷⁰ UN OCHA, '[Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Somalia](#)', 22 May 2019

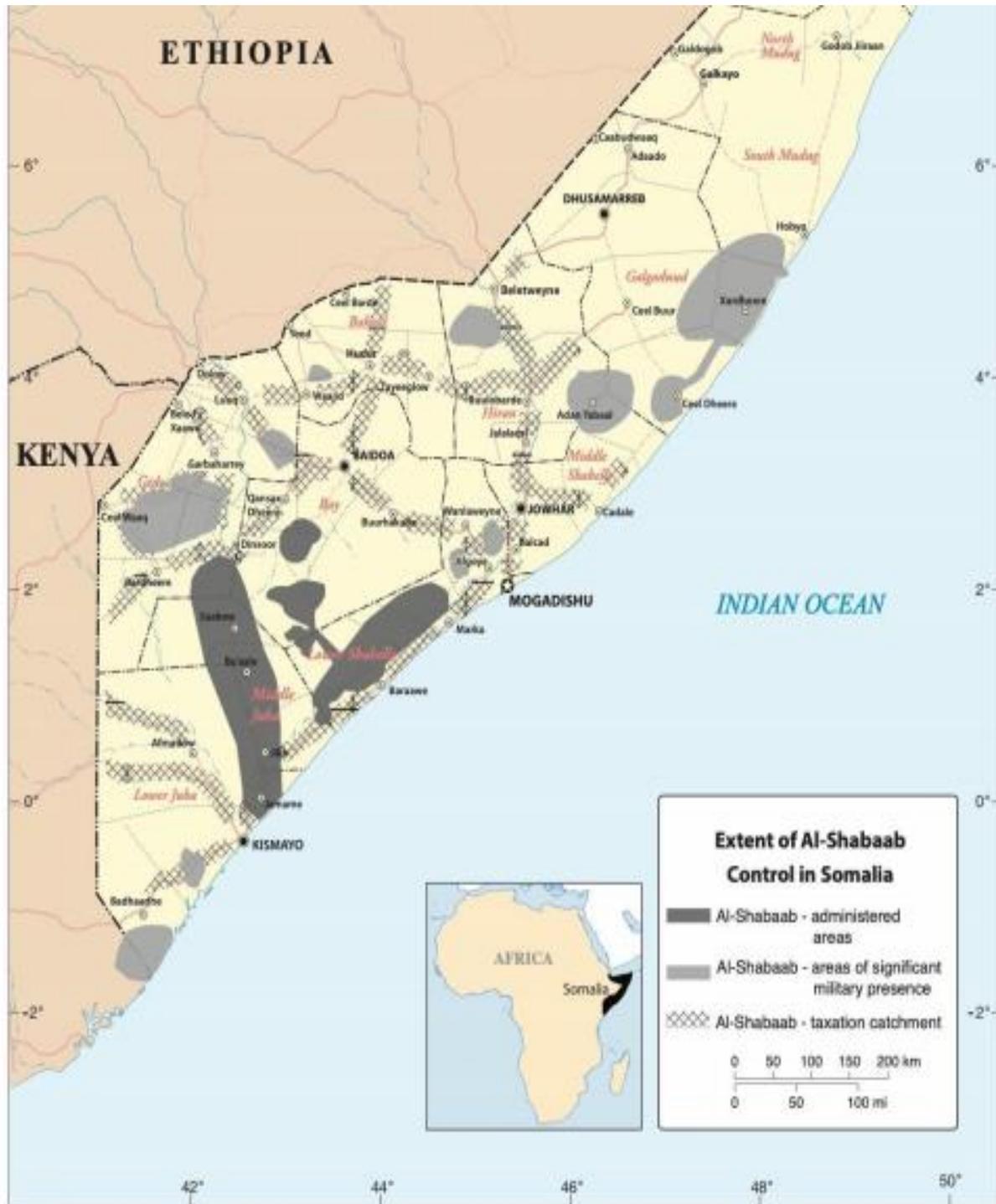
²⁷¹ USSD, '[2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#)' (section 1g), 11 March 2020

arrests and detentions without charges, acts of harassment and intimidation of journalists, suspension of broadcasts aired by television stations and other media outlets by the Somali authorities at the federal and state levels and by Al-Shabaab.²⁷²

See also country policy and information note on [Somalia \(South and Central\): Security and humanitarian situation](#)

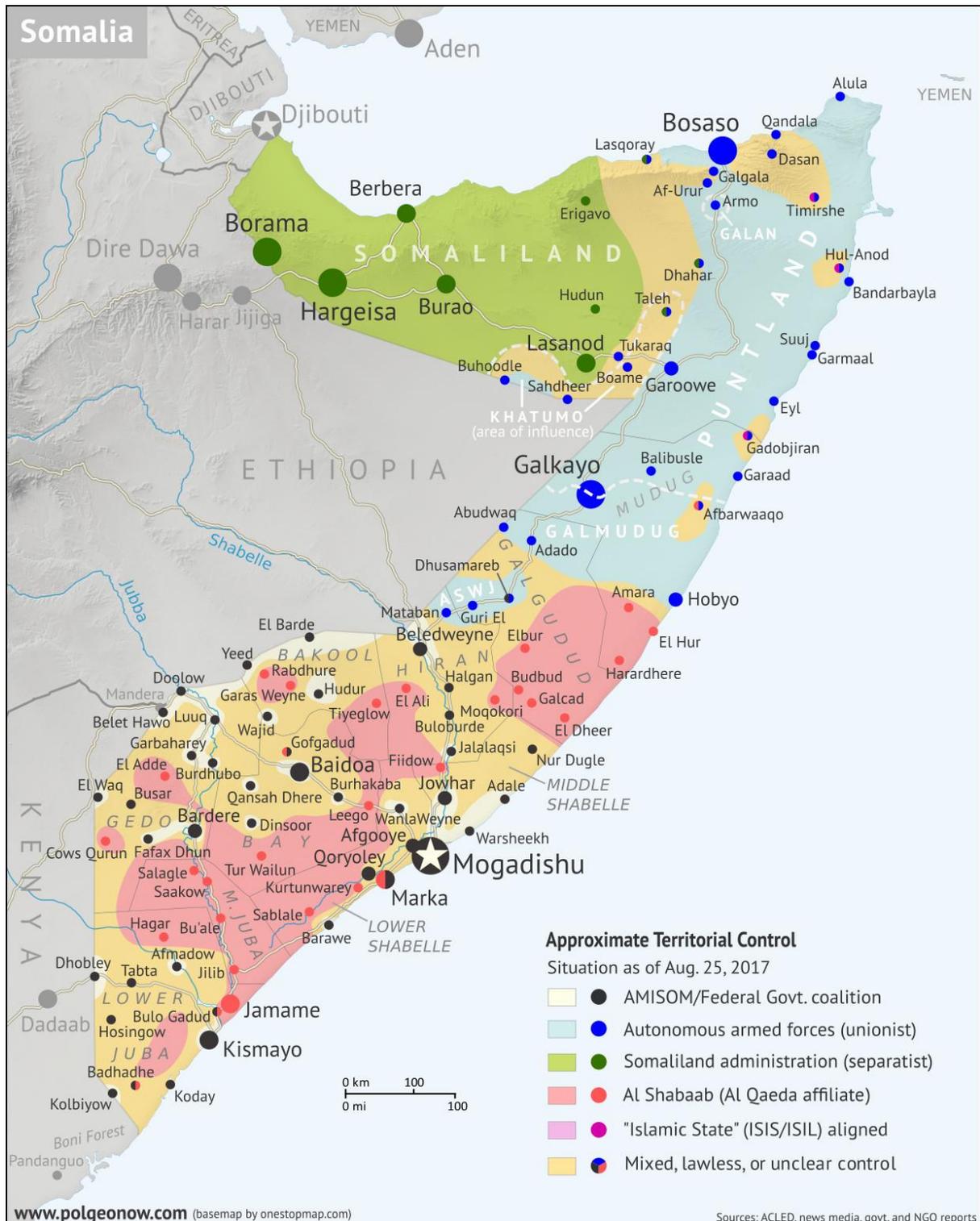
²⁷² UNHRC, '[Report of the Independent Expert..](#)' (para 33 and 34), 24 August 2020

Annex A2: A map produced as part of a letter dated 1 November 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Somalia addressed to the President of the Security Council²⁷⁴.



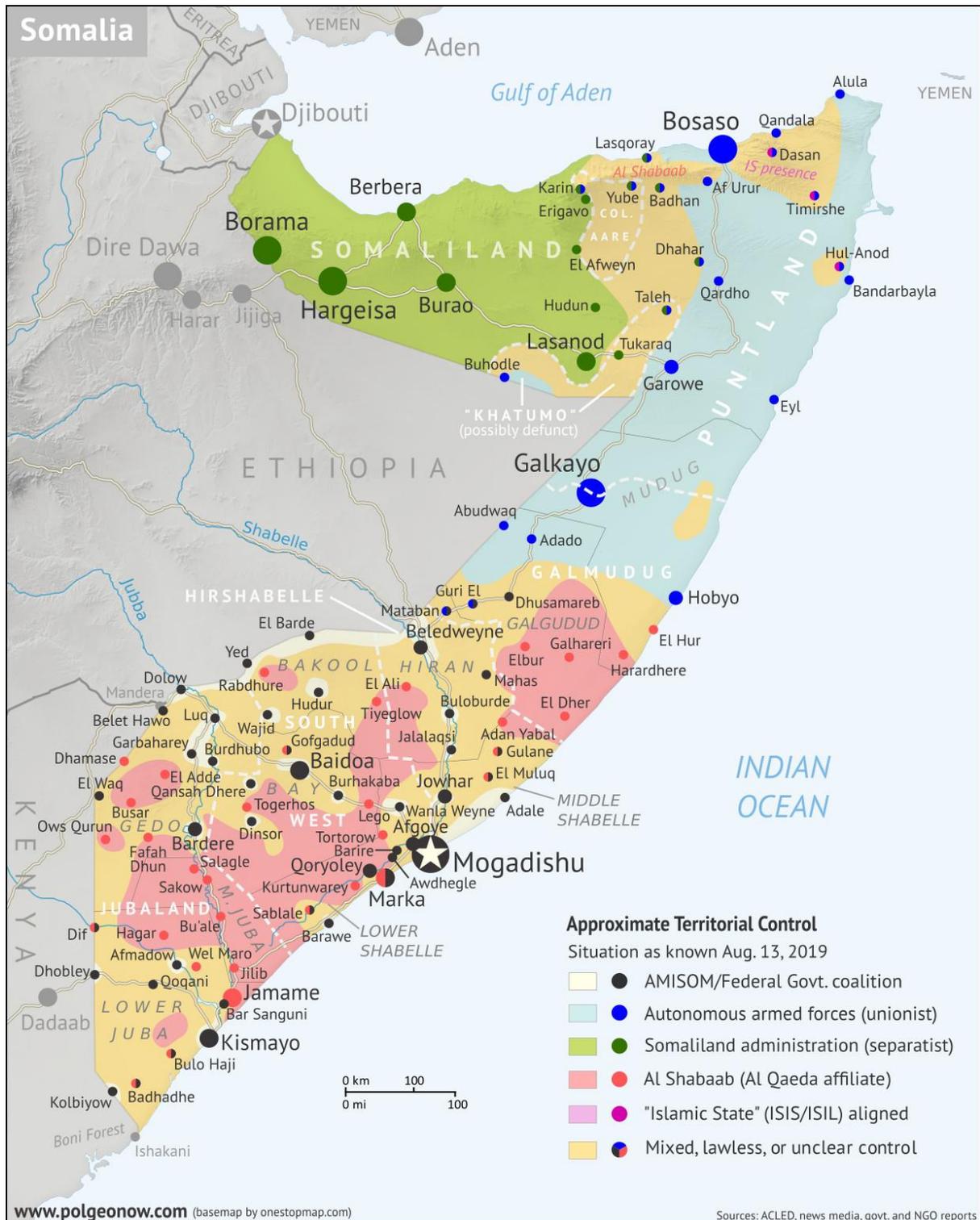
²⁷⁴ UNSC, [‘Letter \[...\] to President of the Security Council’](#), 1 November 2019

Annex A3: The Polgeonow website has produced 2 which it bases on 'ACLED, news media, NGOs and Govt'. The first shows control of territory in Somalia in August 2017²⁷⁵ (see also Annex A4).



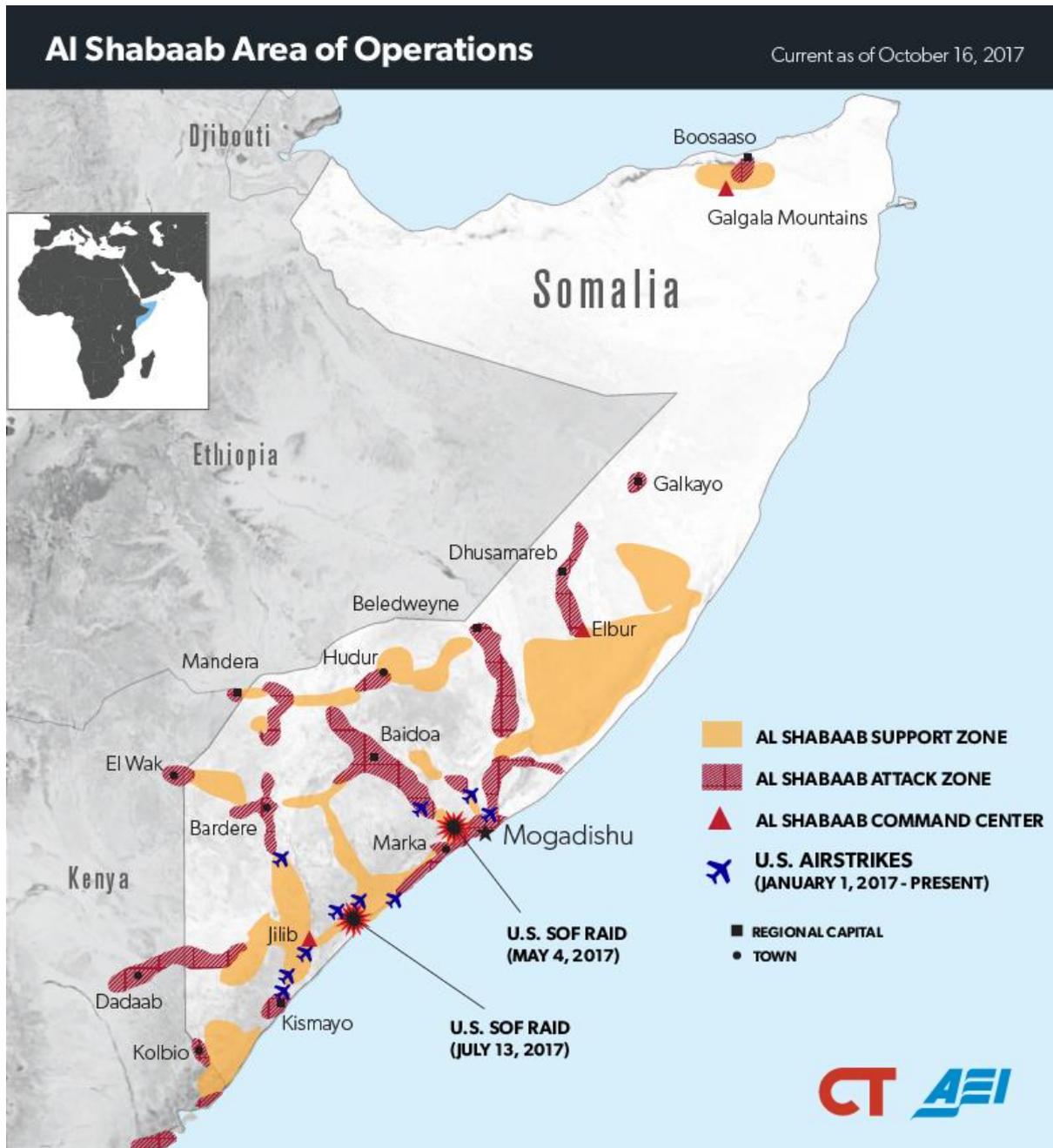
²⁷⁵ Polgeonow, '[Somalia Control Map & Timeline](#)', 25 August 2017

Annex A4: The Polgeonow website has produced 2 maps, which it bases on 'ACLED, news media, NGOs and Govt'. The second shows control of territory in Somalia in August 2019²⁷⁶ (see also Annex A3).



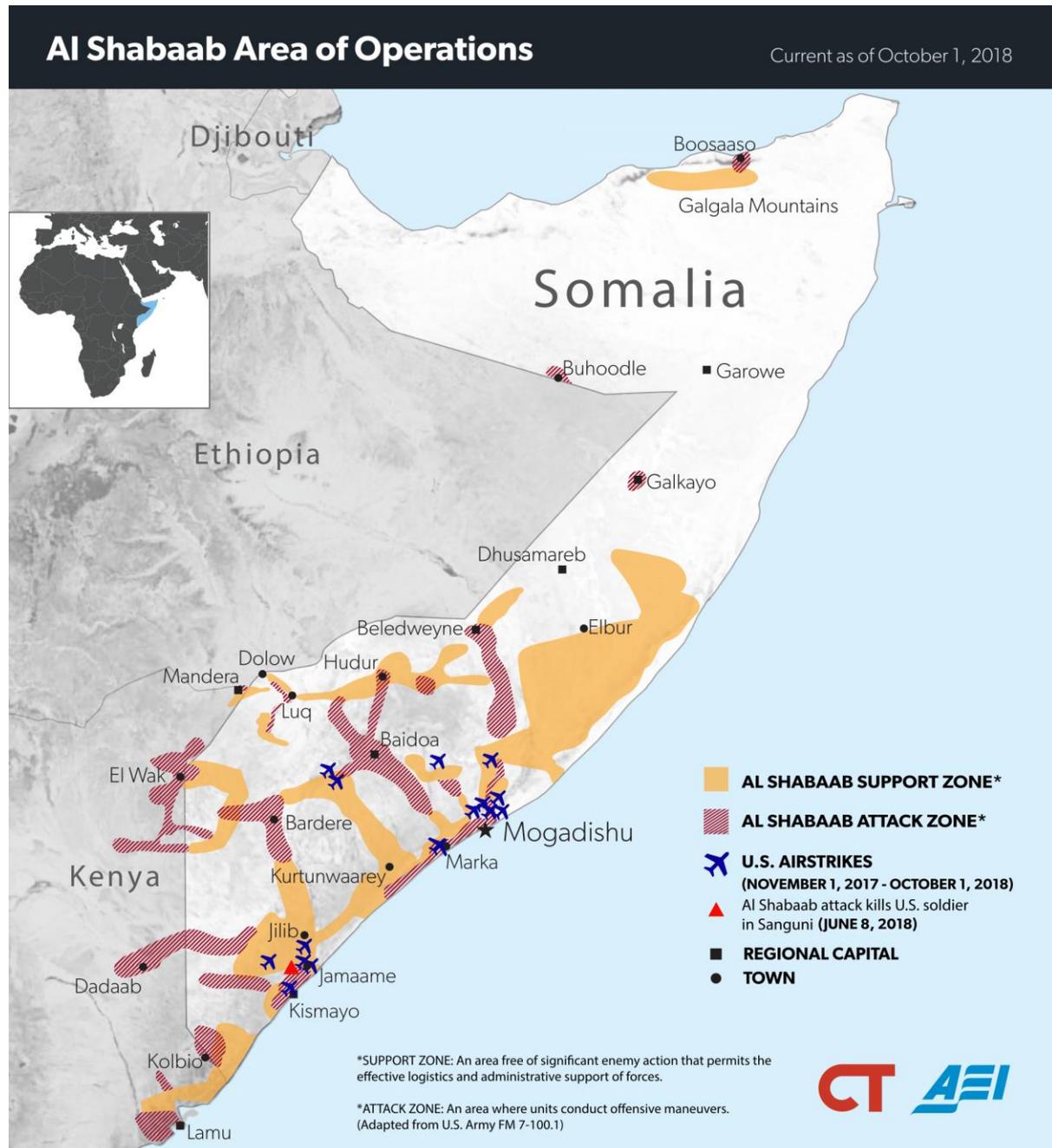
²⁷⁶ Polgeonow, '[Somalia Control Map & Timeline](#)', 13 August 2019

Annex A5: The Critical Threats website produced 2 comparative maps to show areas where Al Shabaab were attacking and areas where they had logistical support. The first shows the situation in October 2017²⁷⁷ (see also Annex A6).



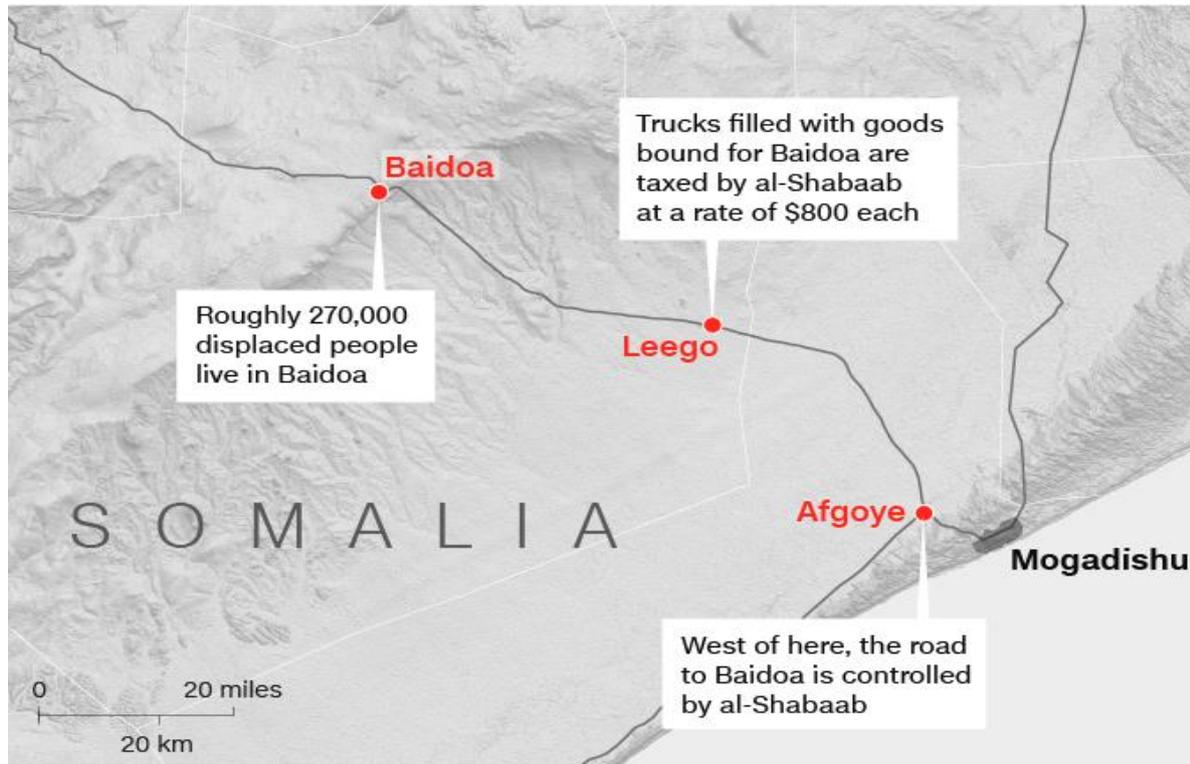
²⁷⁷ Critical Threats, '[Al Shabaab Area of Operations](#)', 16 October 2017

Annex A6: The Critical Threats website produced 2 following comparative maps to show areas where Al Shabaab were attacking and areas where they had logistical support. The second shows the situation in October 2018²⁷⁸ (see also Annex A5).



²⁷⁸ Critical Threats, '[Al Shabaab Area of Operations](#)', 1 October 2018

Annex A7: A February 2018 article on CNN included a map alongside the main text of the article which explained (then) that the Government/AMISOM controlled the road between Mogadishu and Afgoye, but not from there to Baidoa²⁷⁹



²⁷⁹ CNN, '[Funding al-Shabaab: How aid money ends up in terror group's hands](#)', 12 February 2018

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToRs, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Background to AS
 - Who they are?
 - Aims (tactics covered in Sec & Hmt CPIN)
 - Capacity
 - size
 - Capability
 - Military strength
 - Funding
- Control of territory
 - Where does it control?
 - Where (else) does it operate?
- Life under AS
- Recruitment to, retention within and defection from AS
 - Extent to which forced recruitment is used
 - Recruitment profiles and methods
 - Recruitment of particular vulnerable groups (e.g. women, children)
 - Consequences of leaving AS
 - From the state
 - From AS
 - From society

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **5 November 2020**

Changes from last version of this note

Updated COI and assessment

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