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# 2.4.2. Middle Shabelle

### ☐ (a) Background

Middle Shabelle region shares internal borders with Hiraan region to the north, Galgaduud region to the north-east, and Lower Shabelle and Banadir regions to the south-west. To the south, it borders the Indian Ocean. The region is divided into four districts: Adan Yabaal, Cadale, Balcad (also Bal'ad) and Jowhar, with Jowhar city serving as the capital of both Middle Shabelle region and Hirshabelle State.997

As of September 2024, sources varyingly estimated the population of Middle Shabelle at 1 013 352 (IPC),998 and 1 257 049 (IOM).999 The dominant clan in Middle Shabelle is the Abgal clan.1000 Minority groups include the Somali Bantu in Jowhar district and others.1001 For more detailed information on clans in Middle Shabelle region, please see section 2.4.2.1 of the EASO COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (September 2021) and section 2.4.2 (a) of the EUAA COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023).

### ○ (b) Actors' presence and conflict dynamics

**Al-Shabaab control areas, presence and influence, along with other actors**

According to Map 3 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 31 March 2025, most of Middle Shabelle was under 'mixed, unclear, and/or local control' involving Al-Shabaab and 'federal-aligned coalition' forces, except for the area along the coastline,

which was fully controlled by federal and aligned forces. Al-Shabaab fully controlled a strip of land in the region's north-west, stretching between the town of Fidow and the border to Southwest State, as well as the area east of Adan Yabaal town. The town itself and other urban centres, such as Jowhar and Mahaday and Adale, were under control of federal-aligned coalition forces, while Fidow, El Baraf and Masajid Ali Gadud were under mixed or unclear control, involving Al-Shabaab and federal-aligned forces.[1002] According to Map 2 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 1 April 2023, most of Middle Shabelle was controlled by ATMIS/federal government coalition forces. Areas along the internal borders to Galmudug and South West states were under mixed or unclear control, involving Al-Shabaab and ATMIS/federal government coalition forces.[1003]

CTP assessed, in a map of May 2024, that the northeastern and northwestern parts of Middle Shabelle region were Al-Shabaab-contested support zones. A small part of territory north of Jowhar along the border with Hiraan was assessed an Al-Shabaab support zone, while the areas around the towns of Adale, Jowhar and Balcad, as well as the area east of Jowhar were targeted by Al-Shabaab attacks.[1004]

SMN reported in November 2024 that Al-Shabaab controlled the road connecting Balcad to Jowhar, thus 'severely' restricting movement.[1005] As of February 2025, military operations against Al-Shabaab continued along the Shabelle River[1006] and in the Adan Yabaal district.[1007]

AUSSOM police forces will reportedly be based in Jowhar,[1008] the operational base for Sector Five AUSSOM troops.[1009]

**Conflict dynamics**

In April 2024, Al-Shabaab regained control over key strategic locations in Middle Shabelle, only a few months after having been driven out by the SNA. Corruption and low morale among government forces as well as inter-clan disputes between Hawadle and Abgal – stoked and exploited by Al-Shabaab – reportedly undermined the collaboration between government forces and clan militia in their fight against Al-Shabaab, allowing for the group's return.[1010]

Local media reported on fighting between Al-Shabaab and government forces in Balcad district, including Al-Shabaab attacks on military checkpoints in April,[1011] and on military bases of FGS forces in August[1012] and November 2024, as well as airstrikes on the group's strongholds in November,[1013] and December 2024.[1014] Run-Nirgod in Adan Yabaal district was reportedly recaptured by government forces in June 2024,[1015] although Al-Shabaab's presence in the area persisted.[1016] International Crisis Group recorded military operations against Al-Shabaab in Yaagle in November and December 2024 and in Hawadley town (Balcad District) in December 2024.[1017] In February 2025, Al-Shabaab attacked and recaptured several areas in Middle Shabelle, among them El Baraf, and others.[1018]

Violent conflicts were reported between the Abgal sub-clans Abdalle Arone and Mohamed Muse in July 2023,1019 but were reportedly resolved through a peace agreement in August 2024.1020 The killing of at least six Hawadle soldiers in El Baraf district in Middle Shabelle by militia fighters in December 2024 was presumably linked to ongoing clan conflicts,1021 and led to the withdrawal of over 200 Hawadle soldiers from their positions.1022 Local media reported on violent inter-clan conflicts between Hawadle and Abgal over grazing land along the border of Hiraan and Middle Shabelle regions in November 20241023 and early 2025.1024

## ○ (c) Recent security trends

**Security incidents, estimated civilian fatalities and casualties**

Between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025, ACLED recorded 424 security incidents in Middle Shabelle region (battles, explosions, or other forms of remote violence, and violence against civilians), causing 1 867 fatalities. Figure 16 below shows their evolution per type across the reference period.1025 At district level, Balcad district recorded the highest number of security incidents between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025 (147 incidents), followed by Jowhar district (125 incidents), Adan Yabaal district (108 incidents), and Cadale district (44 incidents).1026

Security events Middle Shabelle

Figure 16. Evolution of ACLED security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025 in Middle Shabelle.1027

ACLED recorded 251 security incidents involving Al-Shabaab (coded as either ‘Actor 1’, ‘Associated Actor 1’, ‘Actor 2’, or ‘Associated Actor 2’) and the Military and Police Forces of Somalia. 23 incidents involved both, Abgal and Hawadle clan militias, including Abgal and Hawadle Sub-Clan militias.1028

For incidents involving civilian fatalities or civilians being injured, please see below an illustrative and non-exhaustive list:

- several civilians were injured when a suicide car bomb exploded in Balcad town on 6 April 2024. The main market and the District Hospital were severely damaged.1029

- five civilians were killed and eight injured in a roadside explosion in Balcad on 25 June 2024. The improvised explosive device (IED) was reportedly targeting ATMIS troops travelling behind the vehicle hit by the explosion;1030

- seven civilians travelling on a minibus were killed and several others injured when a roadside bomb exploded on the Jowhar-Mogadishu road north of Balcad in August 2024.1031

**Conflict-related displacement**

Between 1 April 2023 and 16 March 2025, 66 238 individuals were newly displaced from Middle Shabelle region due to conflict or insecurity, according to the UNHCR PRMN. Of this group, 43 889 individuals were displaced within the region, while 22 349 individuals left for other regions, including Banadir, Bari, Gedo, Hiraan, and Nugal. In the same period, 1 068 individuals arrived in Middle Shabelle from other regions in a single case of displacement: all arrivals were recorded in March 2024, coming from Jalalaqsi, Hiraan region, and arriving in Jowhar district. At district level, Jowhar was also the district most affected by individuals leaving for other regions (10 496). Cadale was the district most affected by individuals arriving (38 087) and by individuals leaving (34 789) for other locations within Middle Shabelle (including movements within the district).1032 For information on conflict-related displacement prior to April 2023, please see section 2.4.2 of the EUAA COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023).

**Other impacts on civilian life**

The Somali Digest reported on mutual abductions between Al-Shabaab and Ma'awisley clan militias in Run-Nirgod district in June 2023, including of civilians suspected of having links with the respective other side. Moreover, Al-Shabaab reportedly briefly took control over a village in the district, setting houses on fire, destroying a water well and damaging the local mosque.1033

Al-Shabaab's control over the Balcad-Jowhar road reportedly disrupted the delivery of aid as well as of daily supplies for the residents.1034

UNOCHA recorded 14 humanitarian access incidents in Middle Shabelle region in 2024, 1035 including, for example, inter-clan violence preventing aid deliveries and the explosion of a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) near a hospital in Balcad damaging the infrastructure in the period from 1 April to 30 June 2024.1036

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