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2.2.2. Bay

(a) Background

Bay, a rural region[694] predominantly inhabited by agro-pastoralists,[695] shares internal borders with Bakool, Lower Shabelle, Middle Jubba, and Gedo. It is divided into four districts: Baidoa, Buur Hakaba, Qansax Dheere, and Diinsoor. The region's capital is Baidoa city,[696] locally known as Baydhabo.[697] While the official capital of the South West State is Baraawe in Lower Shabelle region,[698] the strategically important city of Baidoa[699] serves as the de facto capital of the South West State.[700]

As of September 2024, sources variously estimated the population of Bay region at 1 247 975 (IPC),[701] and 1 801 464 (IOM).[702] Baidoa district hosted the highest number of IDPs among the country's districts assessed by IOM (731 492 individuals as of September 2024).[703] Bay region is mainly inhabited by Rahanweyn clans, with Mirifle groups mainly populating the northern half and the Digil predominating in the south. The region is also home to small communities of Hawiye groups.[704] Baidoa city is mainly populated by the Mirifle and Digil clans, with the Mirifle the more powerful clan.[705] For more detailed background information on Bay region, see section 2.2.2. of the EUAA COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023).

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☐ (b) Actors' presence and conflict dynamics

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

Al-Shabaab maintained a strong presence in Bay region[706] and exerted influence through blockades of humanitarian assistance[707] heavy tax burdens[708] and a high incidence of abductions of children for recruitment purposes[709].

According to Map 3 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 31 March 2025 and Map 2 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 1 April 2023, Al-Shabaab controlled the towns of Lego, Labatan Jirow, and Bulo-Fulay. It also controlled large swaths of territory encompassing more than half of Bay's rural terrain, extending from the surroundings of Labatan Jirow in the north and Lego in the east into central and southern Bay, with the exception of the environs of Diinsoor. Control over the remaining rural areas of Bay region was mapped as being mixed between Al-Shabaab and the FGS coalition. The towns of Baidoa, Buur Hakaba and Berdale (all located on the Mogadishu–Doolow road), as well as Qansah Dhere, Diinsoor remained under the control of the FGS coalition.[710] During the reference period, the SNA regained control of several previously Al-Shabaab-controlled villages,[711] including north of Baidoa (April 2023) and along the Bay–Bakool border (December 2023).[712]

In spring 2024, SNA and South West State forces started to reposition their troops in some areas of Bay as part of their efforts to liberate the region from Al-Shabaab elements.[713] Meanwhile, amid rising tensions between the FSG and the South West State administration, both sides deployed forces in parts of the state.[714] Units of the 8th Brigade of the SNA's 60th Division were operating in the region.[715] Both SNA forces[716] and Ethiopian troops were stationed in Diinsoor town.[717]

Conflict dynamics

Al-Shabaab continued to pose a significant threat across southern Somalia.[718] During the early months of the reference period, Al-Shabaab carried out several attacks on ATMIS troops in Diinsoor (April/May 2023)[719] and imposed a near-two-week siege on the city of Baidoa (July 2023).[720] Another spike in Al-Shabaab operations was observed from December 2023 and continued into 2024[721] as the group pursued ground raids against armed forces stationed in the region.[722] Over the summer of 2024, Baidoa city witnessed four artillery attacks by Al-Shabaab that targeted Baidoa airport, Baidoa Regional Hospital, and UN and ATMIS facilities (with no reported casualties),[723] while an IED attack attributed to the group targeted security forces near Aawdiinle village[724] of Baidoa district.[725] Another focal area of Al-Shabaab's attacks and ambushes was the important Mogadishu–Baidoa road.[726] For more detailed information on road incidents, see section 2.2.4 South West - Checkpoints and road security of this report.

The reference period also witnessed unclaimed IED attacks striking SNA troops in the Bay–Bakool border zone (June 2024)727 and in the Baidoa airport area (July 2024),728 with the June attack notably killing the commander of the 8th Brigade of the 60th SNA Division and several soldiers, thus highlighting the challenges faced by the SNA in securing the area.729

Meanwhile, new anti-Al-Shabaab operations in the South West State were announced by the South West State administration in July 2023.730 Military and security campaigns against Al-Shabaab were reported near Baidoa city (including in April 2023 731 and May 2024732), around Berdale town (July 2023),733 at the Bay–Bakool border, 734 and in Diinsoor district (December 2023),735 resulting in deaths736 and arrests of Al-Shabaab members.737 Furthermore, Al-Shabaab-controlled areas on the Diinsoor outskirts were shelled by Ethiopian forces,738 while several civilians were killed in suspected US airstrikes in Buur Hakaba district (July 2023).739

2024 saw a notable increase in clan violence.740 In March and April 2024, clashes between clan groups were reported in Diinsoor district (including Diinsoor town)741 and Buur Hakaba town,742 resulting in several deaths.743

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☐ (c) Recent security trends

Security incidents, estimated civilian fatalities and casualties

Between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025, ACLED reported 670 security incidents in Bay region, including battles, explosions, or other forms of remote violence and violence against civilians, causing 621 fatalities. Figure 12 below shows their evolution per type across the reference period.744At district level, Baidoa recorded the most

security incidents (431 incidents), followed by Diinsoor (148 incidents) and Qansax Dheere (55 incidents).745

Security events in Bay

Figure 12. Evolution of ACLED security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025 in Bay.746

ACLED recorded 630 incidents involving Al-Shabaab (coded as either ‘Actor 1’, ‘Associated Actor 1’, ‘Actor 2’, or ‘Associated Actor 2’). Of these incidents, 486 involved both Al-Shabaab and the Military or Police Forces of Somalia, including 154 incidents involving Al-Shabaab and Southwest Special Police Forces. Five incidents involved both Leysaan Clan Militia and Southwest Special Police Forces, while another three incidents occurred between members of Rahanweyn-Elay Sub-Clan Militia.747

For incidents involving fatalities, including civilian deaths, please see below an illustrative and non-exhaustive list:

- in mid-June 2024, an unclaimed IED attack in the Bay–Bakool border zone killed the commander of the 8th Brigade of the 60th SNA Division and several soldiers; 748
- on 24 July 2023, suspected US airstrikes struck civilian areas in Buur Hakaba district, killing five civilians and injuring 10 others;749
- between 25 and 29 March 2024, clashes between clan groups broke out in Biilile village of Diinsoor district and spread to Diinsoor town, leaving at least five men dead and escalating into a significant conflict between the two clans dominating the town;750
- on 13 April 2024, inter-clan hostilities re-erupted in Buur Hakaba town, leaving at least one person dead.751

Conflict-related displacement

Between 1 April 2023 and 16 March 2025, 23 722 individuals were newly displaced from Bay due to conflict or insecurity, according to the UNHCR PRMN. Of this group, the majority (13 373 individuals) were displaced within the same administrative region,

while 10 349 individuals were displaced to other regions, including Lower Shabelle, Benadir, Gedo, Middle and Lower Juba, Nugal, and Bari. During the same period, only 102 individuals arrived in Bay from another region (Bakool, all arriving in Baidoa district). At district level, Diinsoor was both the district most affected by individuals leaving for other regions (3 955) and by intra-regional IDP departures to other locations within Bay region (11 644).752 UNOCHA similarly noted that Diinsoor was one of Somalia's districts most severely affected by conflict-related internal displacement in 2024.753

Hostilities between clans in Diinsoor in late March 2024 resulted in the displacement of 1 371 households, as recorded by UNHCR,754 while an unspecified number of people were displaced by months-long inter-clan skirmishes in Buur Hakaba that were reported to have come to an end in April 2024.755

For information on conflict-related displacement prior to April 2023, see section 2.2.2. of the EUAA COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023).

Other impacts on civilian life

UNOCHA recorded 20 humanitarian access incidents in Bay region between April and December 2023756 and another 17 over the year 2024,757 including the temporary abduction of two humanitarian workers (first quarter of 2024),758 mortar projectiles allegedly fired by Al-Shabaab hitting the UN facilities in Baidoa (third759 and fourth quarter of 2024), the seizure of a lorry with food supplies by Al-Shabaab in the Daynuunay area, the detention of humanitarian staff in Diinsoor, and an IED detonation damaging a humanitarian-rented building in Baidoa (fourth quarter of 2024).760 A temporary siege imposed by Al-Shabaab on Baidoa city in July 2023 prompted shortages in food and fuel.761

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