

2.2.3. Lower Shabelle

○ (a) Background

Lower Shabelle region is situated along the coast of south Somalia and shares internal borders with Middle Jubba, Bay, Bakool, Hiraan, Middle Shabelle, and Benadir regions. Lower Shabelle is divided into seven districts: Marka, Wanla Weyn, Afgooye, Qoryooley, Baraawe, Kurtunwaarey, and Sablaale. The region's capital is Marka,⁷⁶² while the city of Baraawe is the official capital of the South West State.⁷⁶³ Lower Shabelle is known for yielding the country's largest agricultural output⁷⁶⁴ and is of key strategic importance due to its location along two main roads connecting Mogadishu with Baidoa and Kismayo and the presence of the port towns of Marka and Baraawe.⁷⁶⁵

As of September 2024, sources variously estimated the population of Lower Shabelle region at 1 593 117 (IPC),⁷⁶⁶ and 835 126 (IOM).⁷⁶⁷ The structure of Lower Shabelle's population has been described as highly diverse and complex, encompassing large numbers of Digil-Mirifle subclans, the Biyomaal (Dir) clan around Marka, and numerous Hawiye clans in the east.⁷⁶⁸ For more detailed background information on Lower Shabelle region, see section 2.2.3. 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](#) and [Map 2 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 1 April 2023](#), Al-Shabaab controlled nearly all of the region's central, southern and south-western areas, including the towns of Mubarak, Kurtunwaarey and Sablaale, as well as Basra north of Mogadishu. During the reference period, the group added the previously FGS-controlled town of Awdhegle to its realm of control. Meanwhile, the towns of Marka, Baraawe, Qoryooley, Bullo Mareer, Afgooye and Wanla Weyn remained under the control of the FGS coalition, while control of their rural hinterlands was mostly mapped as being mixed between Al-Shabaab and the FGS coalition. The same could be observed in the rural areas surrounding Benadir/Mogadishu.⁷⁶⁹

Lower Shabelle has been described as one of Somalia's regions where Al-Shabaab's control was most strongly felt, including through isolation from humanitarian assistance,⁷⁷⁰ use of force against residents to extort harvested crops as a form of taxation,⁷⁷¹ and a high incidence of abductions of children for recruitment into the group's ranks.⁷⁷²

SNA brigades operating in the region during the reference period included the 7th Brigade of the 60th Division,⁷⁷³ the 83rd Brigade,⁷⁷⁴ and the 143rd Brigade.⁷⁷⁵ SNA and South West regional forces started to reposition in some areas of Lower Shabelle in spring 2024 as part of their efforts to liberate the region from Al-Shabaab.⁷⁷⁶

Conflict dynamics

Lower Shabelle has been affected by insecurity resulting from Al-Shabaab activity and hostilities between clan militia groups.⁷⁷⁷ Al-Shabaab ‘continued to pose a major threat’ in Lower Shabelle and other parts of southern Somalia.⁷⁷⁸ Al-Shabaab has been using the region as a strategic zone to control food supplies⁷⁷⁹ and stage attacks across southern Somalia.⁷⁸⁰ The group’s tactics included hit-and-run attacks, IED attacks and ambushing small groups of soldiers.⁷⁸¹ A focal area of Al-Shabaab’s attacks and ambushes has been the key Mogadishu–Baidoa road⁷⁸² running through Wanla Weyn.⁷⁸³

As of spring 2023, Lower Shabelle recorded one of the highest incidences of IED attacks among all regions.⁷⁸⁴ During the early months of the reference period, Al-Shabaab carried out a series of attacks on ATMIS troops, including in Bulo Mareer⁷⁸⁵ (where Al-Shabab targeted an ATMIS base using vehicle-borne IEDs and claimed to have killed more than 137 soldiers), Janale, Marka, Qoryooley, Baraawe, and the Mogadishu outskirts of Bariirre and Awbocow (April/May 2023)⁷⁸⁶ and Arbacow (July 2023).⁷⁸⁷ Moreover, the group launched attacks against the SNA⁷⁸⁸ and local government and security infrastructure. The group’s activities saw another increase in December 2023 and continued at heightened levels into early 2024.⁷⁸⁹ The second half of 2024 witnessed Al-Shabaab attacking multiple ATMIS positions in Daanow, Bur Colow⁷⁹⁰ and Bulo Mareer,⁷⁹¹ targeting Baraawe airport,⁷⁹² and ambushing South West regional forces.⁷⁹³ The group launched a further series of attacks in December 2024⁷⁹⁴ and re-escalated its operations against military sites in late February 2025.⁷⁹⁵

Dozens of civilians were killed in drone strikes by the FGS,⁷⁹⁶ by patrolling ATMIS forces,⁷⁹⁷ and in artillery crossfire.⁷⁹⁸ Moreover, there were reports of unattributed explosions resulting in dozens more civilian casualties,⁷⁹⁹ including a detonation of an unexploded shell in Qoryooley (June 2023),⁸⁰⁰ and an attack on a bus on the Marka–Qoryooley road (August 2023).⁸⁰¹ An increase in child casualties due to mortar fire, unexploded ordnance and remnants of war documented over the summer of 2023⁸⁰² continued through late 2023 and early 2024⁸⁰³ with Al-Shabaab reported as the main perpetrator across regions.⁸⁰⁴ The group also carried out several public executions of individuals it accused of spying.⁸⁰⁵

While anti-Al-Shabaab operations were announced in the South West State in July 2023,⁸⁰⁶ as of early 2024, efforts to combat Al-Shabaab were limited to sporadic aerial operations.⁸⁰⁷ Later months, however, saw several security operations targeting Al-Shabaab strongholds,⁸⁰⁸ hideouts⁸⁰⁹ and checkpoints,⁸¹⁰ while aerial strikes reportedly killed a high-ranking Al-Shabaab commander⁸¹¹ and dozens of Al-Shabaab fighters.⁸¹²

2024 saw a notable increase in clan violence.⁸¹³ High levels of tension between clan groups were reported in the Baraawe, Qoryooley⁸¹⁴ and Wanla Weyn areas,⁸¹⁵ escalating into armed violence in June–July 2024,⁸¹⁶ including a clash in Qoryooley between the Jiido and Garre clans⁸¹⁷ (both part of Digil) ⁸¹⁸that reportedly left at least two people dead.⁸¹⁹

○ (c) Recent security trends

Security incidents, estimated civilian fatalities and casualties

Between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025, ACLED reported 1 416 security incidents in Lower Shabelle region, including battles, explosions, or other forms of remote violence and violence against civilians, causing 2 122 fatalities. Figure 13 below shows their evolution per type across the reference period.⁸²⁰ At district level, Afgooye recorded the most security incidents (639 incidents) ⁸²¹, followed by Marka (424 incidents) and Qoryooley (169 incidents).

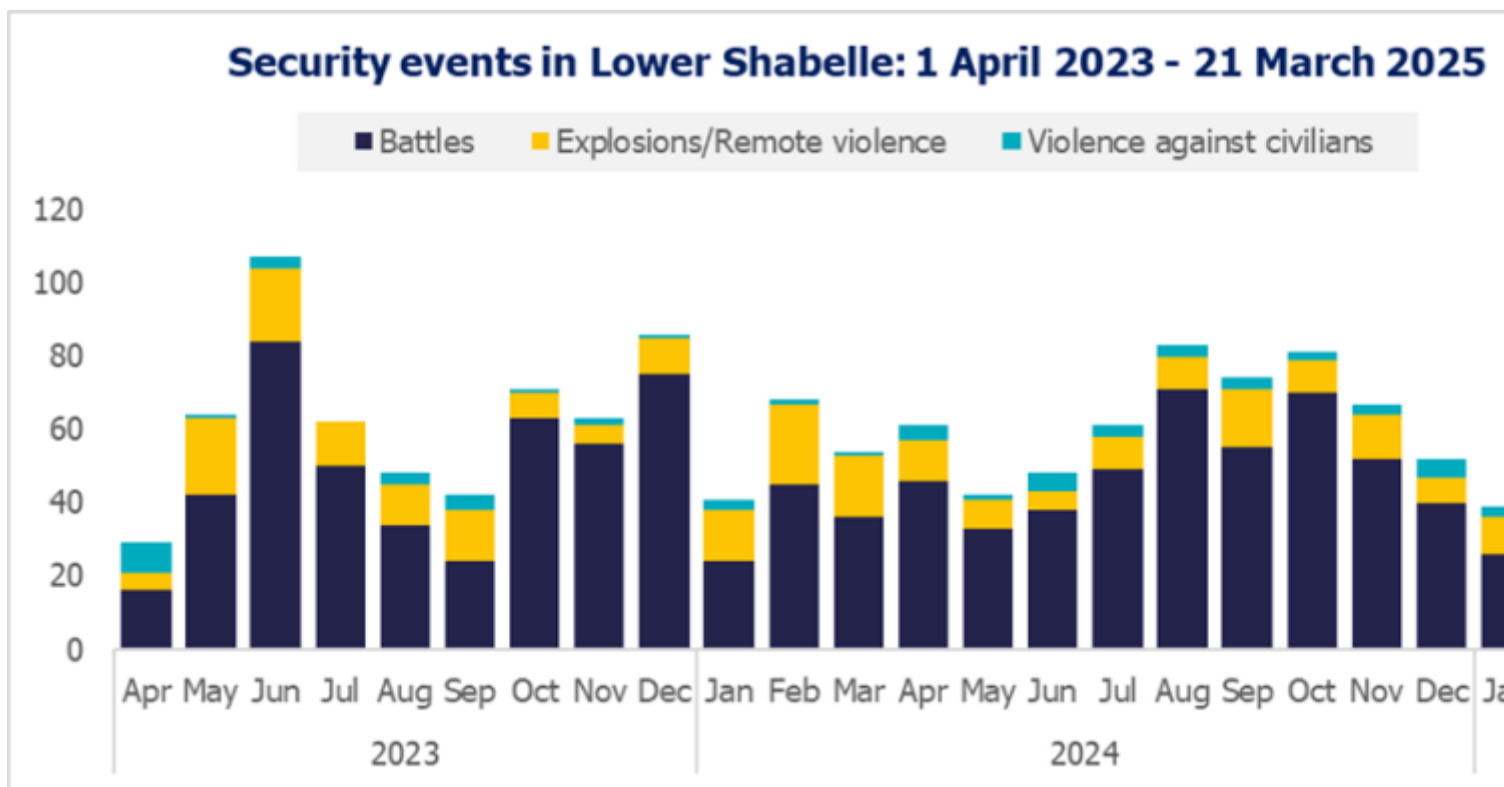


Figure 13. Evolution of ACLED security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025 in Lower Shabelle.[822](#)

ACLED recorded 1 302 incidents involving Al-Shabaab (coded as either ‘Actor 1’, ‘Associated Actor 1’, ‘Actor 2’, or ‘Associated Actor 2’). Of these incidents, 832 involved both Al-Shabaab and the Military or Police Forces of Somalia, including five incidents involving Al-Shabaab and Southwest Special Police Forces. A further four incidents involved both Gaaljecel clan militia and Shanta Caleemo clan militia, while another three incidents involved both Gaaljecel clan militia and Rahanweyn-Hubeer subclan militia.[823](#)

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

- on 26 May 2023, large numbers of Al-Shabaab fighters carried out a complex attack on Ugandan forces at the ATMIS forward operating base in Bulo Mareer district,[824](#) with the militants claiming that 137 troops had been killed in the attack;[825](#)
- on 9 June 2023, a detonation of an unexploded mortar shell in Qoryooley town killed around 27 people, mainly children, and left another 53 injured;[826](#)
- on 9 August 2023, an attack by an unidentified armed group on a passenger bus travelling on the Marka–Qoryooley road left at least six people dead and another 12 injured;[827](#)
- on 18 March 2024, drone strikes launched during military operations killed 23 civilians of the marginalised Gorgaarte clan near Bagdad village;[828](#)

- between 8 and 9 July 2024, a clash between the two clans in Qoryooley district over administrative power in the district⁸²⁹ reportedly left at least two civilians dead.⁸³⁰

Conflict-related displacement

Between 1 April 2023 and 16 March 2025, 78 367 individuals were newly displaced from areas of Lower Shabelle due to conflict or insecurity, according to the UNHCR PRMN. Of this group, 32 836 individuals were displaced within the same administrative region, while 45 531 individuals were displaced to other regions, including Benadir, Gedo, Hiraan, Lower Juba, Nugal, and Bari. During the same period, only 167 individuals arrived from other regions (Galgaduud and Bay, all arriving in Afgooye district). At district level, Kurtunwaarey (16 824) and Qoryoley (12 344) were the most affected by individuals leaving for other regions. Kurtunwaarey, by a wide margin, was also the district most affected by intra-regional IDP departures to other locations within Lower Shabelle region (24 063).⁸³¹ The clashes between the Jiido and Garre clans in Qoryooley district in early July 2024 resulted in the displacement of around 2 100 individuals to Bulo-Mareer and Marka, while others fled to nearby areas within the same district.⁸³²

For information on conflict-related displacement prior to April 2023, see section 2.2.3. of the [EUAA COI Report Somalia: Security Situation \(February 2023\)](#).

Other impacts on civilian life

UNOCHA recorded 19 humanitarian access incidents in Lower Shabelle region between April and December 2023⁸³³ and another nine over the year 2024,⁸³⁴ including disruptions of humanitarian activities due to clashes between two clans in Qoryooley and between military actors in the Baraawe area (second quarter of 2024).⁸³⁵ In 2023, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) and Insecurity Insight recorded one case of violence against health care staff by Al-Shabaab in Lower Shabelle, who shot and injured the director of an NGO-run hospital.⁸³⁶

[762](#)

UNOCHA, Somalia Administrative Reference Map, as of 20 July 2023, [url](#)

[763](#)

Halqabsi News, South West Security Minister arrives in Barawe, 2 August 2023, [url](#); EASO, Somalia – Security Situation, September 2021, [url](#), p. 73

[764](#)

Horn Observer, Lower Shabelle Farmers Struggle Between Al-Shabaab Threats and Government Neglect, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

[765](#)

EASO, Somalia – Security Situation, September 2021, [url](#), p. 79

[766](#)

IPC, Somalia Acute food insecurity and acute malnutrition analysis July – December 2024, 23 September 2024, [url](#), p. 3

[767](#)

IOM, DTM Somalia – Baseline Assessment Dataset – Round 3 (February 2024 – September 2024), 3 December 2024, [url](#)

[768](#)

EASO, Somalia – Security Situation, September 2021, [url](#), p. 79

[769](#)

PolGeoNow, Somalia Approximate Territorial Control, as of 31 March 2025, n.a.; PolGeoNow, Somalia Approximate Territorial Control, as of 1 April 2023, n.a.

[770](#)

CSHRD, Somalia: 01/07/2024: – Human Rights Second Quarter Report 2024, 30 September 2024, [url](#)

[772](#)

UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2024/129, 2 February 2024, [url](#), para. 59

[773](#)

Hiiraan Online, Somali forces strike al-Shabaab strongholds in Lower Shabelle, 31 December 2024, [url](#); Radio Dalsan, Somali Army Kills Over 50 Al-Shabaab Militants in Operations, 7 October 2024, [url](#)

[774](#)

SD, SNA forces liberate districts in Janale in Lower Shabelle, 17 December 2023, [url](#)

[775](#)

SONNA, SNA conducts clearing operations in Afgooye area in the Lower Shabelle region, 3 February 2025, [url](#)

[776](#)

BBC Monitoring, Programme Summary of Somalia's Radio Mustaqbal News 1730 gmt 22 Mar 24, 2 April 2024

[778](#)

International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., [url](#)

[779](#)

SMN, Two Soldiers Killed in Al-Shabaab Ambush in Somalia's Lower Shabelle Region, 12 November 2024, [url](#)

[780](#)

Hiiraan Online, Somali forces strike al-Shabaab strongholds in Lower Shabelle, 31 December 2024, [url](#)

[781](#)

SMN, Two Soldiers Killed in Al-Shabaab Ambush in Somalia's Lower Shabelle Region, 12 November 2024, [url](#)

[782](#)

Williams, P.D., The Somali National Army Versus al-Shabaab: A Net Assessment, CTC Sentinel, April 2024, [url](#), p. 39

[784](#)

UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/443, 15 June 2023, [url](#), para. 13

[785](#)

ACLED, Somalia: Al-Shabaab Regains Lost Territories as Tax Dispute Halts Counter-Insurgency Operation, 2 June 2023, [url](#); UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/443, 15 June 2023, [url](#), para. 19

[786](#)

ACLED, Somalia: Al-Shabaab Regains Lost Territories as Tax Dispute Halts Counter-Insurgency Operation [Map], 2 June 2023, [url](#)

[787](#)

International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., [url](#)

[788](#)

International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., [url](#); VOA, Suicide Car Bomb Kills Somali Security Personnel, 21 October 2023, [url](#)

[789](#)

UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2024/129, 2 February 2024, [url](#), para. 10-11

[790](#)

Somali Digest (The), ATMIS Bases in Lower Shabelle Attacked by Al-Shabab, 24 August 2024, [url](#)

[791](#)

Somali Digest (The), Al-Shabab Launches Attacks on Security Targets in Mogadishu and Lower Shabelle, 28 September 2024, [url](#)

[792](#)

Mogadishu24, Al-Shabaab Claims Responsibility for Mortar Attacks on Mogadishu's International Airport, 5 September 2024, [url](#)

[793](#)

SMN, Two Soldiers Killed in Al-Shabaab Ambush in Somalia's Lower Shabelle Region, 12 November 2024, [url](#)

[794](#)

International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., [url](#)

[795](#)

Hiiraan Online, Al-Shabaab attacks military bases near Afgoye in Lower Shabelle region, 20 March 2025, [url](#)

[796](#)

Amnesty International, Somalia: Death of 23 civilians in military strikes with Turkish drones may amount to war crimes – new investigation, 7 May 2024, [url](#)

[797](#)

Radio Dalsan, ATMIS Troops Kill and Slaughter Civilians in Somalia's Lower Shabelle Region, 17 July 2024, [url](#)

[798](#)

Radio Dalsan, Deadly Mortar Attack Kills 10 Civilians in Lower Shabelle Village, 10 July 2024, [url](#)

[799](#)

UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/758, 13 October 2023, [url](#), para. 59; Raxanreeb, Three Civilians Killed in Landmine Explosion in Somalia's Lower Shabelle Region, 18 November 2024, [url](#)

[800](#)

New Arab (The), Mortar shell explosion kills 27 people in Somalia, mainly children, 10 June 2023, [url](#)

[801](#)

Al Jazeera, At least six killed, 12 wounded in targeted Somali bus explosion, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

[802](#)

UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/758, 13 October 2023, [url](#), para. 59

[803](#)

UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2024/129, 2 February 2024, [url](#), para. 59

[804](#)

UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/758, 13 October 2023, [url](#), para. 59; UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2024/129, 2 February 2024, [url](#), para. 59

[805](#)

Garowe Online, Somalia: Al-Shabaab publicly executes suspected ‘spies’, 16 November 2024, [url](#); SMN, Al-Shabaab executes 5 men on espionage charges, 16 June 2023, [url](#)

[806](#)

Hiiraan Online, Somali Army kills 25 al-Shabab militants, including five foreign fighters in Bakool region, 26 July 2023, [url](#)

[807](#)

International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., [url](#)

[808](#)

Hiiraan Online, Somali forces strike al-Shabaab strongholds in Lower Shabelle, 31 December 2024, [url](#)

[809](#)

SONNA, SNA conducts clearing operations in Afgooye area in the Lower Shabelle region, 3 February 2025, [url](#)

[810](#)

Hiiraan Online, Somali forces raid Al-Shabaab checkpoints, free civilians in Lower Shabelle, 14 February 2025, [url](#); ACLED, State officials in Somalia crack down on clan militia checkpoints, 30 September 2024, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., [url](#)

[811](#)

International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., [url](#)

[812](#)

AA, Somali forces kill 82 al-Shabaab terrorists in airstrikes, 21 March 2025, [url](#)

[813](#)

ACAPS, Somalia: Impact of clan conflicts [Map], 19 March 2025, [url](#), p. 2

[814](#)

Mustaqbal Media, Somalia: South West administration brokers peace deal between two warring clans in Diinsoor, 20 April 2024, [url](#)

[815](#)

Horn Observer, Somalia Lower Shabelle: Clashes Spark Fear of Full-Fledged Clan Conflict, 22 August 2024, [url](#); Mustaqbal Media, Somalia: South West administration brokers peace deal between two warring clans in Diinsoor, 20 April 2024, [url](#)

[816](#)

International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., [url](#); Muibu, D., Somalia's Stalled Offensive Against al-Shabaab: Taking Stock of Obstacles, CTC Sentinel, February 2024, [url](#), p. 24

[817](#)

UNHCR Somalia, Protection and Return Monitoring Flash Alert #13, 11 July 2024, [url](#), p. 1

[818](#)

Somali Digest (The), Qoryoley Clashes Reveal Clan Mobilization Consequences, 19 June 2024, [url](#)

[819](#)

UNHCR Somalia, Protection and Return Monitoring Flash Alert #13, 11 July 2024, [url](#), p. 1; Somali Digest (The), Qoryoley Clashes Reveal Clan Mobilization Consequences, 19 June 2024, [url](#)

[820](#)

EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Somalia, data covering 1 April 2023 to 21 March 2025, as of 26 March 2025, [url](#)

[821](#)

EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Somalia, data covering 1 April 2023 to 21 March 2025, as of 26 March 2025, [url](#)

[822](#)

EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Somalia, data covering 1 April 2023 to 21 March 2025, as of 26 March 2025, [url](#). Please note that data covering the entire month of March 2025 was not yet available during the drafting of this report.

[823](#)

EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Somalia, data covering 1 April 2023 to 21 March 2025, as of 26 March 2025, [url](#)

[824](#)

UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/443, 15 June 2023, [url](#), para. 19

[825](#)

Horn Observer, Uganda initiates inquiry after deadly al-Shabaab raid on Somalia's Buulo Mareer army base, 28 May 2023, [url](#)

[831](#)

UNHCR, PRMN Datafile – Somalia, as of 21 March 2025, [url](#)

[833](#)

UNOCHA, Somalia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot: October – December 2023, 1 January 2024, [url](#), p. 1;
UNOCHA, Somalia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot: July to September 2023, 2 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1;
UNOCHA, Somalia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot: April – June 2023, 25 July 2023, [url](#), p. 1

[834](#)

UNOCHA, Somalia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot: January – December 2024, 22 January 2025, [url](#), p. 1

[835](#)

UNOCHA, Somalia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot: 01 April to 30 June 2024, 8 August 2024, [url](#), p. 2

[836](#)

SHCC and Insecurity Insight, Critical Condition. Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2023, May 2024, [url](#), p. 94