

Please cite as: EUAA, '[2.2.3. Lower Shabelle](#)' in *COI Report - Somalia: Security Situation*, May 2025.

## 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 output[764](#) 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 Awdhegale to its realm of control. Meanwhile, the towns of Marka, Baraawe, Qoryooley, Bulo 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 supplies[779](#) 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 road[782](#) 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 Mareer[785](#) (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 SNA[788](#) 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 Colow[790](#) 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 2024[794](#) 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 2023 [802](#) continued through late 2023 and early 2024[803](#) 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](#) hideouts[809](#) and checkpoints,[810](#) while aerial strikes reportedly killed a high-ranking Al-Shabaab commander[811](#) 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, Qoryooley[814](#) and Wanla Weyn areas,[815](#) escalating into armed violence in June-July 2024,[816](#) including a clash in Qoryooley between the Jiido and Garre clans[817](#) (both part of Digil) [818](#)that 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).

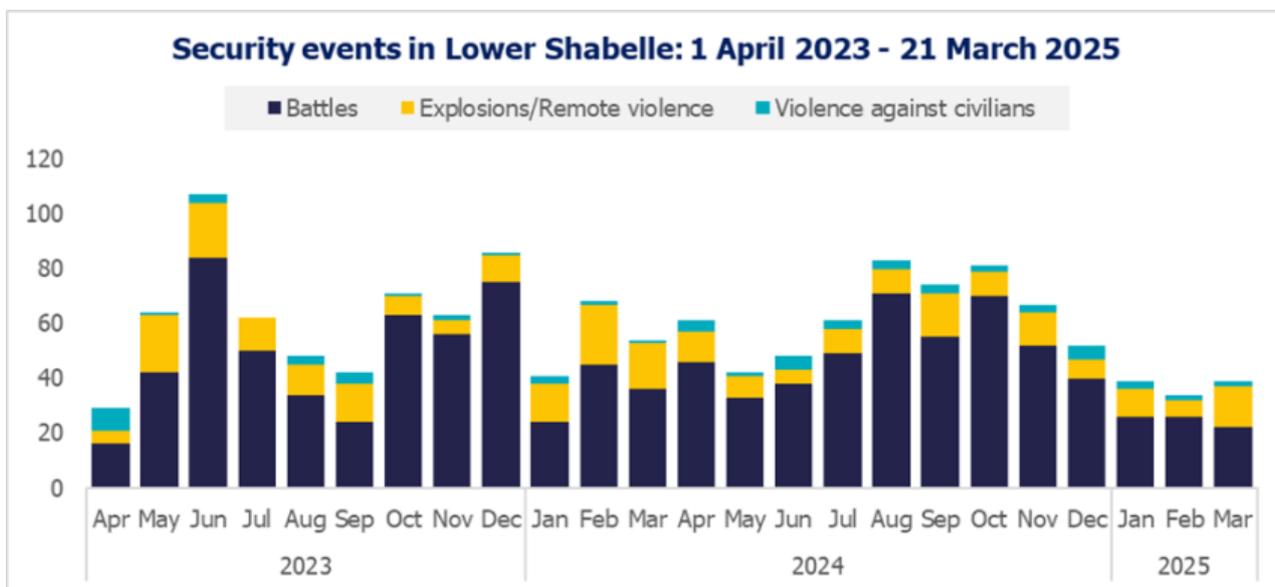


Figure 13. Evolution of ACLED security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025 in Lower Shabelle.[822](#)

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 district[829](#) 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 Qoryooley (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 Bullo-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 2023[833](#) 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](#)

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