



1.2.2. Al-Shabaab control areas, presence, and influence

Al-Shabaab maintained a stable and intact leadership structure in the reference period. Its overarching organisational structure consists of 18 senior leaders, seven of whom belong to Hawiye subclans. Ahmed Diriye (aka Sheikh Ahmed Umar Abu Ubaidah) continues to serve as the group's emir. According to the UN Panel of Experts on Somalia, as of late 2025, no substantial degradation could be observed in the group's ability to conduct attacks.[75](#)

Control. Al-Shabaab operates its command centre in Jilib (Middle Jubba)[76](#) and maintains control[77](#) and/or a heavy presence across large swathes of south-central Somalia, particularly Galmudug, Hiraan and the southern regions, occupying important supply routes across these parts of Somalia.[78](#) Most rural areas[79](#) and many smaller towns in these regions were under the group's control.[80](#) Sources estimated that the group controlled around 30 % of the country's territory[81](#) and numerous district capitals, while it exercised co-governance in other areas nominally controlled by the FGS.[82](#) As it shifted its strategy in 2025 from hit-and-run attacks towards seeking to hold its positions and conquered lands,[83](#) the group made several territorial gains in Hiraan and Middle Shabelle,[84](#) exploiting security vacuums.[85](#) These gains further extended to coastal areas northeast of Mogadishu (Nuur Dugle village and areas around Warsheikh).[86](#)

Presence and influence. Al-Shabaab maintains operational capabilities[87](#) and exerts influence in areas that lie well beyond its immediate realm of control.[88](#) In areas marked by political leadership disputes and weak state governance,[89](#) including in rural parts of Jubbaland, Bay and Lower Shabelle,[90](#) the group asserts itself as an alternative authority,[91](#) providing civilians security as well as services such as administration of justice[92](#) and even environmental protection.[93](#) Amongst others, the group maintains a sustained presence in Bakool and Gedo's border regions with Ethiopia and Kenya[94](#) and has reinforced its siege of Ceel Dheere (Galgaduud region)[95](#) after its failed September 2025 attack on the town.[96](#) Sources also pointed to Al-Shabaab presence in the Galgala mountains[97](#) (Bari region)[98](#) and Al-Madow mountains (Sanaag region).[99](#) A further group of fighters whose degree of association with Al-Shabaab, if any, was subject to controversy,[100](#) operated in southern parts of the NES under the command of Abdi Madobe.[101](#)

Al-Shabaab activities continued to be reported in Mogadishu,[102](#) including in the form of extortion, deadly suicide attacks on military installations[103](#) and a complex attack on the NISA-linked Godka Jilicow prison.[104](#) At the same time, Samira Gaid, a Mogadishu-based security analyst, held that Al-Shabaab was 'not interested in taking Mogadishu'.[105](#)

For further information on Al-Shabaab's territorial control across Somalia, see the control maps in section [1.2.1. Territorial control maps](#) depicting the situation at the beginning (31 March 2025, [Map 2](#)) and at the end of the reference period (31 March 2026, [Map 3](#)). For more information on checkpoints and routes controlled by the group, see section [1.5. Checkpoints and road security in Somalia](#) below. Additional information on Al-Shabaab as a military and political organisation, including the group's outreach, can be consulted in the [EASO COI Report Somalia: Actors \(July 2021\)](#).¹⁰⁶ For information on Al-Shabaab's financial capacity and sources of revenue, see section 1.10 on Individuals who have to pay 'taxes' to Al-Shabaab or other groups and militias in the [EUAA COI Report Somalia: Country Focus \(May 2025\)](#). For details about Al-Shabaab operations, see the regional chapters of this report.¹⁰⁷

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