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Report

Somalia: Security challenges in Mogadishu



LANDINFO

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SUMMARY

There are no official statistics on violence in Mogadishu, but the organization Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) provides an indication of the security challenges facing the population. Challenges include firefights and other attacks on military targets, assassinations and murders committed by unknown perpetrators, al-Shabaab-attacks and violence from government forces.

There is little information about the security challenges facing people living in settlements compared to the general population. Police and courts are under construction, but there is broad consensus among the sources that their integrity and capacity to protect individuals against violence are still very inadequate. Clan affiliation can protect individuals from violence by deterring potential perpetrators, but the deterrence has its limitations. Members of non-dominant clans and groups are potentially more vulnerable to crime, including in the encounter with government forces, but there is no information indicating that they are systematically exposed to violence in Mogadishu today.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report concerns matters related to security and protection in Mogadishu and addresses issues relevant to the immigration authorities. It focuses on the situation of the civilian population. The term “civilian” is in contrast to “military” and refers to persons who are neither members of armed groups nor participate in armed hostilities. Security is defined as freedom from violence, in other words, intentional use or threat of physical force. Protection includes conditions or measures that contribute to security.

The report seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the biggest security challenges in Mogadishu?
- How does the security situation in the settlements compare to the security situation in the city in general?
- To what extent can the authorities protect individuals against violence?
- To what extent can the clan protect its members against violence?
- Are some clans or groups more vulnerable to violence than others?

We emphasise that it is not possible to provide a detailed and exhaustive description of security and protection in Mogadishu, because there is limited publicly available information about these matters and because the existing source material is of a general nature. Throughout the report, it is accounted for what information is available, what information is not available and where the information appears unclear.

The report is based on open sources and information obtained in connection with Landinfo’s fact-finding missions, most recently to Mogadishu in September 2017. Sources met in Mogadishu are anonymised for the sake of their work situation and/or security.

2. SECURITY CHALLENGES

There are no official statistics on violent incidents in Mogadishu, but the organization Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) collects information from, among others, media and local organizations in a database. This database provides an *indication* of the number killed in the city in 2017, who is responsible for the violence and who are the victims of it (ACLED 2018). Although ACLED gives exact numbers, as used in this report, the numbers should be regarded as *estimates*.¹ Landinfo has previously published a more detailed source assessment of ACLED, as well as an analysis of the data for previous years (see Landinfo 2017a).

The following subsections outline what, according to ACLED, are the biggest security challenges in Mogadishu. ACLED does not distinguish between military and civilian

¹ The picture as indicated of ACLED corresponds to the findings from Landinfo’s fact-finding missions to Mogadishu.

casualties but has recorded 321 out of a total of 678 acts of violence as attacks against civilians (see Table 1) in 2017.² These attacks resulted according to ACLED in 1,004 persons being killed, which accounts for approximately three-quarters of the total number of recorded fatalities (1,376) in the same year.³ It is reasonable to assume that these victims were mainly civilians.

Table 1: Recorded violent events in Mogadishu in 2017

Targets	Recorded violent events	Recorded fatalities
Military	313	366
Civilian	321	1,004
Other ⁴	44	6
Total	678	1,376

Table compiled by Landinfo based on data from ACLED's dataset *Africa 1997-present (data through 24 February 2018)* (ACLED 2018).

Table 2 shows who, according to ACLED, were responsible for the recorded violent events in Mogadishu in 2017. Subsections 2.1 to 2.5 below explain the different circumstances. The order in which they are presented is determined by how many times the particular incident is recorded in ACLED.

Table 2: Recorded attacks on civilians in Mogadishu in 2017

Perpetrators	Recorded attacks on civilians	Recorded fatalities
Unknown	155	143
Al-Shabaab	115	809
Government forces	51	52
Total	321	1,004

Table compiled by Landinfo based on data from ACLED's dataset *Africa 1997-present (data through 24 February 2018)* (ACLED 2018).

² Attacks against civilians include events that ACLED categorizes as "violence against civilians" and "remote violence" which affects civilian persons and locations.

³ There are no reliable population figures for Mogadishu, but a population survey from 2014, conducted by Somali authorities with support from, among others, the UN Population Fund, provided an estimate of 1.65 million (UNFPA 2014, p. 31). The estimate includes internally displaced persons.

⁴ "Other" includes events that ACLED categorises as "strategic development". This category includes arrests and failed attacks. According to ACLED, the six recorded fatalities in this category are believed to be persons associated with al-Shabaab being killed by their own bombs detonating prematurely.

2.1 SKIRMISHES AND OTHER ATTACKS AGAINST MILITARY TARGETS

As shown in Table 1, 313 of the reported violent events in Mogadishu in 2017 were according to ACLED, attacks on military targets.⁵ The events include both attacks on government forces and skirmishes between government forces. Attacks, primarily by al-Shabaab, against government forces occur both by shooting and by the use of hand grenades and bombs. According to ACLED, firefights between government forces typically occurred between forces from different clans and were often related to property conflicts.

The 313 recorded attacks on military targets resulted in 366 recorded fatalities according to ACLED. It is unclear how many civilians there were among the killed, but it is reasonable to assume that they constituted a minority. Civilians are not direct targets of these attacks, but risk being killed by being “in the wrong place at the wrong time”. Most of the local sources that Landinfo has met in Mogadishu in recent years, most lately in September 2017, expressed that most persons in the city fear to be “in the wrong place at the wrong time”.

2.2 ASSASSINATIONS AND MURDERS COMMITTED BY UNKNOWN PERPETRATORS

As shown in Table 2, unknown perpetrators were responsible for about half of the reported attacks on civilians. These attacks seem to a large degree to have been attacks directed at businesspersons, clan elders and government officials, including tax collectors. The attacks were mainly carried out by the use of firearms. Because the perpetrators are unknown, the motives also remain unknown. According to Landinfo’s sources, such attacks are often economically motivated or a result of private conflicts (sources A, B and C, meetings in Mogadishu 2017; Landinfo 2017a, p. 6). Al-Shabaab, individuals with or without connection to government forces and/or other actors may be behind one or more of the events.

2.3 AL-SHABAAB ATTACKS

Al-Shabaab has no visible presence in Mogadishu,⁶ but the organization continues to carry out attacks in the city. Hidden agents/operators, sympathizers, informants and other supporters assist in these attacks. According to ACLED (2018) al-Shabaab is *assumed* to be responsible for about half of the recorded acts of violence in Mogadishu in 2017 (344 of 679).⁷ 115 (33%) of these are recorded as being attacks against civilians. As shown in table 2, this represents 36% of all recorded attacks on civilians in 2017. The attacks were mainly attacks directed at government officials, clan elders and businesspersons, but also included bomb attacks against government agencies and other places frequented by government officials, including hotels and restaurants.

Al-Shabaab attacks on civilians include, according to ACLED (2018), the truck bomb attack on 14 October 2017 (see, for example, BBC 2017). The truck bomb exploded in one of Mogadishu’s busiest streets and killed 512 persons according to ACLED. It

⁵ Attacks against military targets include events categorized by ACLED as “battles” and “remote violence” against military persons and locations.

⁶ Al-Shabaab is present a few kilometers outside the city (see Landinfo 2017b).

⁷ Al-Shabaab assumes responsibility for some attacks, but it is unclear who is behind others. ACLED records violent events of which al-Shabaab is suspected of being behind, as al-Shabaab attacks.

is reasonable to assume that al-Shabaab was responsible, but they have not assumed responsibility (Hansen & Anzalone 2017). This may indicate that the attack did not go as planned, and it is uncertain what the target of the attack was (Hansen & Anzalone 2017).⁸ It is Landinfo's assessment that the civilian population in Mogadishu in itself is not a target for al-Shabaab, but at the same time, al-Shabaab show little consideration for accidental victims when they attack their targets (see also Landinfo 2017a, pp. 7-8). The assessment is substantiated by the fact that the majority of attacks of which al-Shabaab are believed to be responsible for are recorded as military attacks by ACLED (2018). Local sources met by Landinfo in Mogadishu have expressed awareness of which hotels and other places are associated with the authorities and therefore are potential targets for al-Shabaab.

Some al-Shabaab attacks may be economically motivated (Menkhaus 2016, pp. 30-31 and 34). Sources A, B, C and D (meetings in Mogadishu 2017) explained that al-Shabaab requires "protection money" or taxes from businesspersons in the city. The sources agree that this is a form of extortion or mafia activity and that al-Shabaab only provides little protection other than against other the violence the organization itself can cause if it does not receive payment. It is unclear how extensive this activity is.

2.4 VIOLENCE COMMITTED BY GOVERNMENT FORCES

According to ACLED (2018), government forces (see Table 2) committed 16% of the reported attacks against civilians. The circumstances surrounding these events are unclear, but according to ACLED, several of the events involved government forces shooting persons who refused to give them money. Authorities also make arrests that can be economically motivated or arbitrary (Human Rights Watch 2018; Landinfo 2015b).

2.5 OTHER VIOLENT CRIME

According to ACLED, the database only includes politically motivated violence, but Landinfo considers that it also contains events that are not necessarily politically motivated.⁹ However, the degree to which ACLED provides a good indication of the occurrence of ordinary violence is uncertain.

The organization Saferworld conducted a survey in Mogadishu in 2012 to map the population's experience of various security issues, including ordinary crime. Landinfo is not aware of similar surveys conducted after this. Saferworld's survey is based on information gathered from 800 households, revealing that during the last 90 days they had, among other things, experienced 8 kidnappings, 13 rapes, 38 robberies and 36 other physical assaults (Saferworld 2012, p. 10). According to Saferworld, members of the government forces were amongst the perpetrators. It is uncertain to what extent the findings in the survey still provide a correct picture of ordinary violent crime in Mogadishu, but in Landinfo's assessment, there is no evidence to suggest a worsening

⁸ Several sources, including the authorities, believe that a Turkish military base or airport area where AMISOM, UN and other international supporters of the authorities have their main bases was the target (Anzalone 2018, p. 14; Burke 2017b; Maraf 2017).

⁹ As shown in section 2.2, ACLED (2018) contains many violent events committed of unknown perpetrators. Landinfo considers there is no basis for concluding that violence is politically motivated when the perpetrators are unknown (see also Landinfo 2017a, p. 2).

of the situation. Landinfo's assessment is based on talks with a large number of local and international resource persons in Mogadishu since 2012.

2.5.1 Sexual violence

ACLEED does not provide information about the occurrence of sexual violence. A number of sources claim that sexual violence is widespread in Mogadishu and that this violence particularly affects girls and women living in settlements (Human Rights Watch 2018, 2014a & 2014b; UN Secretary-General 2017 p. 16; see also chapter 3). According to the sources, members of the government forces are among the perpetrators. However, to the best of Landinfo's knowledge, there are no updated and exhaustive statistics on this topic. As mentioned above, Saferworld (2012, p. 10) reported 13 rapes among 800 households in 90 days in 2012. The UN (UN Secretary-General 2015 p. 13) refers that around 800 rapes were recorded in Mogadishu in the period January to August 2014 and that 81% of the victims were internally displaced.¹⁰ Both Saferworld and UN assume that the number of unrecorded cases is large.

The Somali Provisional Constitution (Provisional Constitution 2012, art. 15 point 4) prohibits circumcision of girls and women, but the practice is still assumed to be very widespread. UNICEF (2016) estimates that up to 98% of all girls and women over 15 years old in Somalia have been circumcised.¹¹

3. SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE SETTLEMENTS

About 1/3 of the population in Mogadishu is believed to live in one of the many settlements in and around the city (see Landinfo 2016c).¹² The majority of residents are internally displaced, but there are also economic migrants and others living in the settlements. The common denominator of those living in the settlements is that they have few resources and live on land owned by others. As demand for and prices of real estate in Mogadishu have risen,¹³ many of those living in settlements have been forced to move to increasingly peripheral areas in and around the city (Amnesty International 2018; Refugee Aid 2018; UNHCR 2016, p. 22). This happens through violence and threats of violence (sources E and F, meeting in Mogadishu 2016; Human Rights Watch 2015). According to some sources, it is not uncommon for government forces to assist in forced expulsions. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC 2018), the development peaked in 2017, when it was assumed that 190,000 persons (i.e. about 40% of the number of persons thought to live in settlements) were forcefully expelled.

¹⁰ Not all internally displaced persons live in settlements, but internally displaced constitute the majority of people living in settlements. It is unclear how the registration to which the UN refers was carried out.

¹¹ See Landinfo 2011 for a more detailed description of this topic.

¹² A study conducted by UNHCR, Somali authorities and various non-governmental organizations estimate that in the autumn of 2015, 464 486 persons lived in the settlements in and around Mogadishu (UNHCR 2016, p. 18).

¹³ This development took place after al-Shabaab was forced out of Mogadishu in 2011/2012 (see, for example, Ali 2013, Amnesty International 2013).

Apart from the expulsions, little information is available about the security challenges facing residents in the settlements, compared with the population in Mogadishu as a whole. There are several hundred different settlements in and around the city (UNHCR 2016, p. 18), and conditions are probably not uniform. Some settlements are run by international organizations, but most are informal and are run by so-called gatekeepers.¹⁴ International organizations normally have access to the latter form of settlements only through local actors, and the ability to map conditions in these settlements is therefore limited (source E, meeting in Mogadishu 2017). However, as mentioned in point 2.5.1, there is still broad agreement among the sources that sexual violence is widespread in the settlements, especially against internally displaced girls and women. However, the extent of such violence is uncertain. Source E emphasised that most probably, not only outsiders are responsible for such violence, but also family members and other residents.

4. GOVERNMENT PROTECTION

Somali government institutions were dissolved in 1991 and were more or less absent for two decades. With the help of the international community, new government institutions are currently under construction. These efforts have in particular been focused on the capital Mogadishu. Even though there has been a positive development, the capacity and integrity of the police and the judiciary are still very inadequate.

4.1 POLICE (SOMALI POLICE FORCE)

In contrast to just a few years ago, there are now police stations operating day and night in all the districts of the city (sources B and G, meeting in Mogadishu 2017; US Department of State n.d., p. 8). Landinfo has visited Mogadishu a number of times in the period 2012-2017. Our impression from these visits is that the police (Somali Police Force) are clearly visible on the streets, especially in the southern part of the city, where most government institutions are located. The UN Monitoring Group for Somalia and Eritrea (2016, p. 89) estimates that there are between 5,000 and 6,000 police officers in Mogadishu.¹⁵ However, how many officers are actually available at any given time is uncertain, because some police officers and other members of the government forces prioritize to take private and better paid assignments (UN Monitoring Group for Somalia and Eritrea 2016, p. 74; Menkhaus 2016, p. 27). Some also stop working in the afternoon to chew khat (Hills 2014, p. 3).

¹⁴ Gatekeepers (also referred to as “informal settlement managers”) are men or women who decide whether internally displaced persons and others may settle in a given land area in exchange for paying rent. The gatekeepers usually have good connections and act as intermediaries between settlements and relief organizations. Gatekeepers generally have great power over those living in the settlements. There is broad consensus among the sources that Landinfo has met over the years that gatekeepers most of all see residents as a means of accessing resources from aid organizations.

¹⁵ Other government agencies in the city include the NISA (National Intelligence and Security Agency) and the Army (Somali National Army - SNA) (Menkhaus 2016, p. 22; own observations). Forces from the African Union (African Union Mission in Somalia - AMISOM) and military actors from other countries are also present in Mogadishu.

There is a broad consensus amongst the sources that the police have little capacity to protect individuals from violence and investigate incidents of violence (see, for example, US Department of State 2017; World Bank 2017, p. 40; IRB 2016). Like other government forces in Mogadishu, the main focus of the police is to prevent al-Shabaab attacks on government agencies. They do so largely by guarding government buildings and operating checkpoints throughout the city. During Landinfo's visit to Mogadishu in September 2017, checkpoints were set up on most of the city's main roads.

The police also enforce the weapon restrictions imposed by the authorities in the city.¹⁶ In contrast to the past, individuals who carry firearms openly on the street in Mogadishu today have to expect attention and/or reactions from police or other government forces (source C, meeting in Mogadishu 2017; Menkhaus 2016, p. 31). The police also conduct weapon searches and other security operations in the city (see for example Garowe Online 2017 and Garowe Online 2018; see also Landinfo 2015b). According to source C, there are still many hidden weapons in the city, as well as possibilities of acquiring weapons. ACLED (2018) corroborates this with the fact that many acts of violence in the city still involve the use of firearms.

There is also wide agreement among the sources that trust in the police is very low among the population. Corruption is widespread.¹⁷ Police officers routinely demand bribes to do their job and they release suspects in return for payment (Menkhaus 2017, pp. 25-26). Also, according to source C (meeting in Mogadishu 2017), it is not difficult to pay the police to arrest others. As mentioned in chapter 2, the police and other government forces themselves commit violence against civilians (Egal 2016, pp. 34-37). Offenders are seldom held accountable (Human Rights Watch 2018; source C, meeting in Mogadishu 2017; US Department of State n.d., p. 7). The government forces include members with backgrounds from warlord militias and other criminal groups (Egal 2016, pp. 33-34). Government forces also include members with backgrounds from al-Shabaab, and some members are loyal to al-Shabaab (source B and G, meeting in Mogadishu 2017; source H, meeting in Mogadishu 2016).

To the extent that the population turns to the police for assistance, they turn, according to source C (meeting in Mogadishu 2017), to police officers from the same clan. Other sources also emphasize that the loyalty of the police and other members of the government forces normally rests with their own clan (Menkhaus 2016, 23, Egal 2016, pp. 47-48). This is reflected in ACLED (2018) by the fact that there are occasional firefights between government forces from different clans.

4.2 COURTS

There are a number of government courts in Mogadishu (Goobjoog News 2017; UNDP 2015). Sources agree that, like the police, these are characterised by corruption. According to source C (meeting in Mogadishu 2017) and source I (meetings in Mogadishu 2016), the courts normally demand payment to perform their work, and whoever pays the most, wins. According to source C (meeting in Mogadishu 2017) it

¹⁶ According to source C (meeting in Mogadishu 2017), it is in principle prohibited for individuals to carry firearms in public spaces in Mogadishu. However, there are exceptions. For example, businesspersons may be allowed to have a limited number of armed guards as security escorts.

¹⁷ Transparency International (2018) ranks Somalia as the country with the most corruption.

can also happen that the courts leave it to the clans to find a solution, even in murder cases. If the clans then, for example, agree on compensation, the court may endorse that and the perpetrator will walk free.¹⁸

The absence of trust in government courts is reflected by the fact that persons have recently begun making use of al-Shabaab courts located outside the city in order to deal with conflicts (sources A, B, D & E, meetings in Mogadishu 2017). The extent of this phenomenon is unknown, but according to the sources, there is a widespread opinion among the population that al-Shabaab's courts are more fair than the government courts, in the sense that al-Shabaab is not dictated by money or clan affiliation (see also Anzalone 2018, p. 17-18).¹⁹

5. CLAN AFFILIATION AND PROTECTION

The clan (kin) is of great importance in Somalia, including in Mogadishu. This is especially true in the socioeconomic perspective (see Landinfo 2016a). Clan affiliation can also protect individuals from violence by deterring potential aggressors (see Landinfo 2012). Deterrence presupposes membership of a clan that is (or appears) strong enough to inflict violence or costs on others. There is no overview of clan composition in Mogadishu, but sources agree that the city is dominated by Hawiye clans – especially the two Hawiye clans Abgal and Haber Gedir (sources B, C & E, meeting in Mogadishu 2017; Menkhaus 2016, p. 22; Bryll & Kamau 2012; source B emails 2014; source D emails 2006). According to the sources, these clans constitute a significant part of the population and of the government forces in Mogadishu. According to Landinfo's assessment, it is therefore first and foremost belonging to the Hawiye clans Abgal and Haber Gedir that *may* act as a deterrent to potential aggressors in Mogadishu.

Neither ACLED (2018) nor Saferworld (2012) provide information about victims' clan affiliation or background, and it is therefore not possible to uncover any patterns. However, there is broad agreement among the local sources met by Landinfo in Mogadishu in the period 2012-2017 that the protection that may come from clan affiliation has its limitations. Clan affiliation does not protect against random or arbitrary violence. Nor does clan affiliation protect against violence from unknown perpetrators. In such cases, the victim's clan does not know who to react against.

Clan affiliation may under certain circumstances affect al-Shabaab's behaviour towards individuals (see, for example, Landinfo 2015a), but the sources that Landinfo met in September 2017 were clear that this is not the case in Mogadishu today. This means that clan affiliation only provides limited protection against the biggest security challenges in Mogadishu today: being "in the wrong place at the wrong time",

¹⁸ Other sources have mentioned this phenomenon in Somaliland (Land Info 2016b, p. 5) and in the Somali Region in Ethiopia (source J, meeting in Jigjiga 2016). Landinfo therefore sees no reason to doubt this.

¹⁹ Asked to what extent the al-Shabaab courts are able to implement their decisions in Mogadishu, the sources explained that most people fear al-Shabaab and therefore obey them. According to the sources, al-Shabaab typically contacts persons in Mogadishu by mobile phone. Source D and G (meets in Mogadishu 2017) explained that the parties normally also have to meet physically in front of the court (outside Mogadishu) during the trial process.

becoming a victim of attacks/killings committed by unknown perpetrators or al-Shabaab attacks (see chapter 2). Consequently, clan affiliation may primarily deter other violent crime, including from government forces. Businesspeople and other persons who as a result of individual wealth and/or status may be more exposed to robbery or other crime will usually acquire other protection in the form of, for example, armed guards (Menkhaus 2016, pp. 26-28 and 33).

Members of non-dominant clans and groups are *potentially* more vulnerable to criminal acts such as robbery and rape, including in the encounter with government forces. However, to Landinfo's knowledge, there is no information to suggest that people who do not belong to one of the dominant clans in the city are systematically subjected to violence in Mogadishu today. Unlike the beginning of the 1990s, when many non-Hawiye fled from Mogadishu because they were exposed to violence from Hawiye militias (see, for example, Rift Valley Institute 2017, p. 43 and Marchal 2011, pp. 11-12), Mogadishu today appears as a cosmopolitan city, attracting migrants from various clans and population groups (see, for example, Burke 2017a; source C, meeting in Mogadishu 2017; source F, meeting in Mogadishu 2016).

There is no survey of the clan or group affiliation of Mogadishu's residents, but according to local resource persons, "most" clans are represented in the city (source C, meeting in Mogadishu 2017; source I, meeting in Mogadishu 2016). Besides, Somalia's government and parliament, where all four major clans in southern Somalia (Darod, Dir, Hawiye and Rahanweyne/Digil), as well as minority groups, are represented (see, for example, UNSOM 2016), are located in Mogadishu.

Although Mogadishu's population to a large degree settle according to clan affiliation (see, for example, Rift Valley Institute 2017, p. 65 and Menkhaus 2016, p. 31) and their loyalty primarily lies with their own clan, it is important to emphasize that people come together across clan boundaries in terms of work, trade, schooling and other social settings. People from different clans also marry.

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