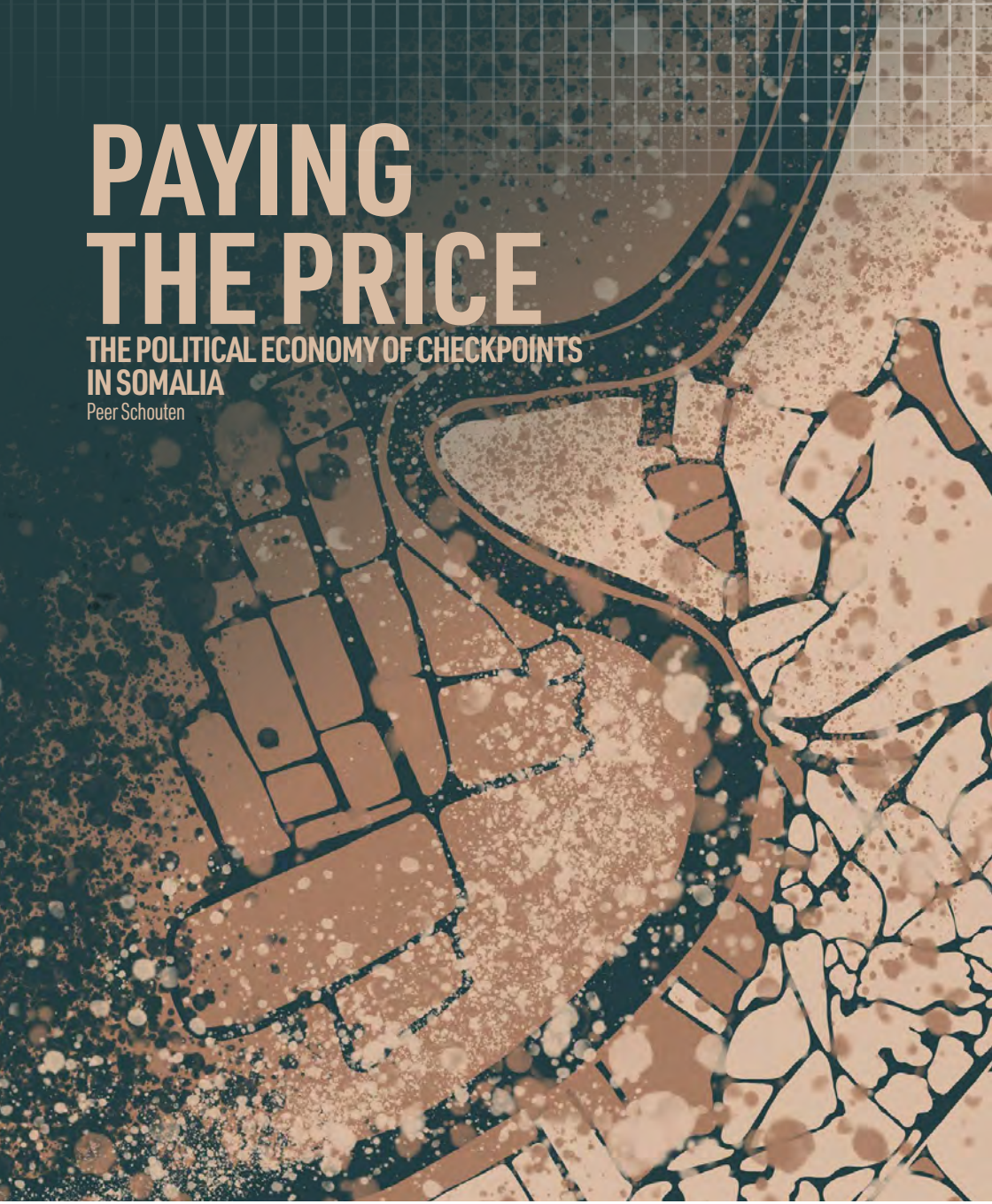
PAYING THE PRICE

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CHECKPOINTS IN SOMALIA

Peer Schouten



Rift Valley Institute
MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WORK

XCEPT
CROSS-BORDER CONFLICT
EVIDENCE / POLICY / TRENDS

PAYING THE PRICE

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CHECKPOINTS IN SOMALIA

Peer Schouten

Rift Valley Institute
MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WORK

XCEPT
CROSS-BORDER CONFLICT
EVIDENCE / POLICY / TRENDS

THE AUTHOR

Peer Schouten is a senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies, associate researcher at the International Peace Information Service, and visiting professor at Ghent University. He researches the political economy of conflict, and is the author of Roadblock Politics: the Origins of Violence in Central Africa (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is the product of a collaboration between RVI, IPIS, and DIIS. The bulk of the interview data cited in this report was collected by Jamal Mohammed, Abdirahman Ali, Philemon Ng'asike and Peer Schouten. Thomas Muller at the International Peace Information Service (IPIS) was the engine behind data analysis and map production. Thanks to Rune Korgaard, Hannah Arndal Rasmussen and Clara Johansen at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) for research assistance; Abdulkadir Dahir and Anne-Kathrin Landherr at the World Food Programme (WFP) for facilitating data collection; International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) headquarters for sharing incident data; and XCEPT/Satellite Applications Catapult for providing satellite imagery. Thanks to Tobias Hagmann, Mark Bradbury, Hannah Stogdon, Nisar Majid, Colin Robinson, Partha Moman, Jethro Norman and Finn Stepputat for their generous reviews, and Magnus Taylor for his editing. All remaining errors are the responsibility of the author.

RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE

The Rift Valley Institute works in Eastern and Central Africa to bring local knowledge to bear on social, political and economic development.

DANISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (DIIS)

Based in Copenhagen (Denmark), the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) is an independent public research institution for international studies. We conduct and communicate multidisciplinary research and we aim to be agenda-setting in research, policy and public debate.

INTERNATIONAL PEACE INFORMATION SERVICE (IPIS)

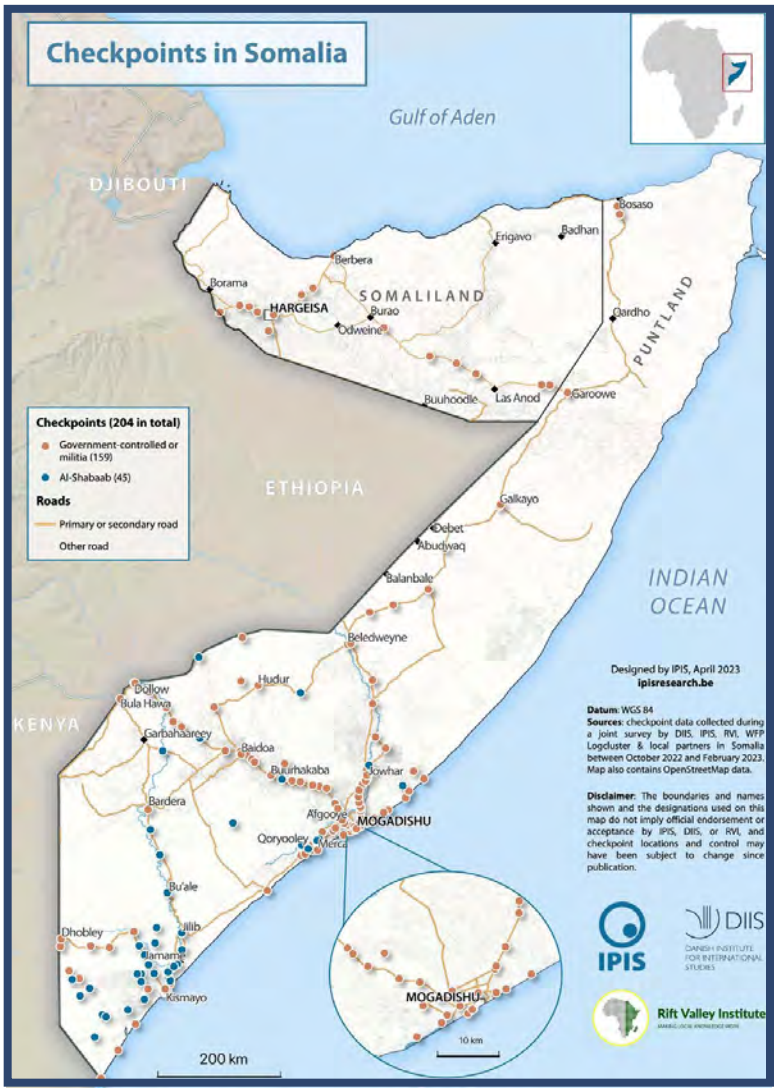
Based in Antwerp (Belgium), the International Peace Information Service (IPIS) is an independent research institute providing tailored information, analysis and capacity enhancement to support those actors who want to realize a vision of durable peace, sustainable development and the fulfillment of human rights.

XCEPT

This report is a product of the FCDO's Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) programme, funded by UK aid from the UK government. XCEPT brings together leading experts to examine conflict-affected borderlands, how conflicts connect across borders, and the factors that shape violent and peaceful behaviour. The programme carries out research to better understand the causes and impacts of conflict in border areas and their international dimensions. It supports more effective policymaking and development programming and builds the skills of local partners. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

CONTENTS

MAP: CHECKPOINTS IN SOMALIA



SUMMARY

This report explores the political economy of checkpoints in Somalia: What drives their formation? What impacts do they have on trade, society and political projects? To explore these factors, new empirical data is presented on the distribution and costs of checkpoints operated by al-Shabaab and government actors, along with allied militia. Key findings are contextualized through interviews with key stakeholders and systematic review of earlier findings. The checkpoints are further situated in their historical context through detailed analysis of historical data.

The report delves into the significant interconnections between checkpoints, cross-border commerce and state formation in south-central Somalia, focusing in particular on two case studies. The first is the Baidoa corridor, a trade route linking the capital city, Mogadishu, with Kenya and Ethiopia. The second is the Garissa corridor, a trade route that connects the harbour city of Kismayo with the grazing lands of Afmadow and north-eastern Kenya. Both case studies illuminate the broader context of competition over the revenues that accrue from cross-border trade in the Horn of Africa.

OVERVIEW

Between October 2022 and March 2023, the research identified a total of 204 checkpoints, 44 (or 23 per cent) of which are operated by al-Shabaab. The remaining 77 per cent of checkpoints are controlled by government actors or allied militia. Most routes have a checkpoint roughly every 15–20 kilometres, translating to an average of around 5 checkpoints per 100 km travelled (see map of checkpoints). Generally, checkpoints are concentrated in the southern regions of Somalia, with 58 per cent of all checkpoints clustered in Lower Juba, Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle. If the Banadir region of the capital city is included, this rises to 69 per cent of all checkpoints. Al-Shabaab checkpoints are particularly concentrated in Jubaland, where the group controls 48 per cent of a total of 69 checkpoints. Importantly, the number and distribution of checkpoints is highly changeable. This is a function of both the seasonality of transport routes and ongoing fighting, which often revolves around control over checkpoints.

IMPACTS ON TRADE

- Checkpoint taxes make up the biggest part of transport costs and therefore literally constitute trade barriers. There are, however, important differences between checkpoints. The fiscal regime of al-Shabaab discriminates against short-distance transport, while the fiscal approach in government-held territory discriminates

against long-distance and cross-border transport because the level of checkpoint taxes increases with distance. With the exception of the Garissa corridor, along most routes, the total of checkpoint taxes levied in government-controlled areas exceeds the amount levied by al-Shabaab.

- Checkpoints have differential impacts on domestic and cross-border trade, and affect the balance between them. In port cities, for instance, foodstuff imported from Southeast Asia may be cheaper than the locally produced equivalent because customs duties are lower than checkpoint taxes along local roads.

- Checkpoint taxes discriminate against farming produce and other low-value bulk cargo, with checkpoint taxes along agricultural feeder roads three times higher per tonne than checkpoint taxes for imported manufactured goods and commodities destined for exports. In this way, checkpoints are implicated in a wealth transfer from already marginal and vulnerable populations in farming areas towards well-connected traders and checkpoint operators.

SOCIETAL IMPACTS

- While ostensibly installed to ensure security, checkpoints are flashpoints for conflict. On average, one or two checkpoint-related violent incidents take place every day in Somalia. Transporters and road users most of all express a desire for the predictability of checkpoint taxes and regimes, and therefore prefer the al-Shabaab checkpoint regime to taxation on roads in areas under (nominal) government control.

- Crucially, checkpoints are indirect taxes the impact of which is absorbed elsewhere. In this way, checkpoints entail a structural form of predation by checkpoint operators and their bosses on Somali consumers and foreign donors. While transporters and traders pay checkpoint fees, they systematically pass them onward to consumers who rely on the market for their subsistence. This includes women, minorities and other vulnerable groups, as well as internally displaced people.

- Checkpoint taxes are also paid for indirectly by beneficiaries of aid programmes who use cash aid to purchase goods at inflated prices. Ultimately, then, aid organizations still pay checkpoint fees but this involves more intermediaries than in the past. Given the frequency of near-famine conditions, this entails a perverse structural entanglement of aid flows with the checkpoint economy.

POLITICAL EFFECTS

- Revenue collection at checkpoints forms a crucial part of the finances of various state administrations and al-Shabaab. Whereas 30 years ago, checkpoints were an expression of lawlessness, in 2023 they are more firmly lodged in competing political

projects in the Somali territories.

- Transit taxes levied at checkpoints are a key factor in cooperation (and sometimes conflict) between administrations at the local level and the political projects at the federal member state (FMS) level. Checkpoint revenues are used as much for enrichment as to buy loyalty from local security forces and clan militia, consolidating nominal FMS control over trade routes.

INTRODUCTION

Checkpoint in Mogadishu. © Study participant

WELCOME TO *ISBAARO*LAND

This report explores the political economy of checkpoints in Somalia. Checkpoints—*isbaaro* in Somali—are a ubiquitous reality along Somali roads and form an intricate part of the political economy built around cross-border trade in the country. High volumes of cross-border traffic represent concentrated wealth that acts as a magnet for various authorities to set up checkpoints and claim transit taxes. As such, checkpoints are key sites where trade meets imposition, and where mobile economies must negotiate competing claims to revenue and authority.[1] While formal national borders are notoriously porous in the Horn of Africa, checkpoints constitute the de facto borders that transporters and road users must navigate, which turn even small displacements into cross-border adventures. Studying internal checkpoints thus reveals an intricate landscape of points of passage to which competing authorities lay claim, ranging from clans and federal member states (FMS) to al-Shabaab and the Federal Government of Somalia

1 See Tobias Hagmann and Finn Stepputat, eds., *Trade Makes States: Governing the Greater Somali Economy, London: Hurst*, May 2023.

(FGS). That is, 'It is at these border crossings, whether a formal border post, an informal "bush" border or checkpoints along main roads, where state and state-like entities seek to govern and capture revenues from passing goods.'[2] Yet the relative ease of taxing passing vehicles also induces competition over strategic bottlenecks to trade, as well as disagreements over the spoils—dynamics that can easily lead to violence and the duplication of checkpoints.[3]

Based on a mapping of 204 checkpoints along the main transport routes in Somalia, the report attempts to answer some basic questions about checkpoints, including the origins and transformation of the phenomenon, its impact on the Somali economy and society, and on past and ongoing state-building efforts. It also assesses the main drivers and impacts of checkpoints, both as a source of income for checkpoint operators and as a burden for society.

This report builds on a small but burgeoning literature on the intersections of trade and state-building in the Somali territories, with a particular focus on taxation.[4] It complements existing evidence in two ways. Existing research on taxation and state-building efforts tends to focus heavily on ports, and then particularly in Somaliland and Puntland, where access has generally been better.[5] In south-central Somalia, by contrast, research focuses predominantly on producing evidence on the role of checkpoints in financing Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, better known as al-Shabaab.[6] Much less is known, however, about checkpoints in government-controlled areas or about the combined effects of government and al-Shabaab checkpoints along trade routes. This is the first way the report complements existing evidence: It aims to contribute to addressing this imbalance by exploring checkpoints operated by various types of actors as they manifest along the cross-border and local supply chains through which commodities, livestock, people and food move. In so doing, this report underscores the complex

2 Tobias Hagmann, 'Trade, taxes and tensions in the Somali borderlands', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2021, 9.

3 See Tobias Hagmann and Finn Stepputat, 'Tilly in the Tropics: Trade and Somali State-Making', in *Trade Makes States: Governing the Greater Somali Economy*, eds. Tobias Hagmann and Finn Stepputat, London: Hurst, May 2023.

4 See S Abshir, K Abdirahman and H Stogdon, 'Tax and the State in Somalia: understanding domestic revenue mobilization', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2020; Hagmann, 'Trade, taxes and tensions'; Ahmed M Musa, Finn Stepputat and Tobias Hagmann, 'Revenues on the hoof: livestock trade, taxation and state-building in the Somali territories', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 15/1 (2020): 108–127; Gael Raballand and Justine Knebelmann, 'Domestic Resource Mobilization in Somalia', Washington DC: World Bank, 2021; Somali Public Agenda, 'Fiscal Federalism in Somalia: Constitutional Ambiguity, Political Economy and Options for a Workable Arrangement', Mogadishu: Somali Public Agenda, July 2021; Aisha Ahmad, Tanya Bandula-Irwin and Mohamed Ibrahim, 'Who governs? State versus jihadist political order in Somalia', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 16/1 (2022); V van den Boogaard and F Santoro, 'Financing governance beyond the state: Informal revenue generation in south-central Somalia', African Affairs, 121/485 (2022).

5 Nasir Majid, S Hassan and Khalif Abdirahman, 'Maritime and Overland Transport Costs and Dynamics', Washington DC: World Bank, 2020, 4.

6 For example, see: United Nations, Security Council, 'Somalia report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea submitted in accordance with resolution 2385 (2017)', 9 November 2018, S/2018/1002; Hiraal Institute, 'The AS Finance System', Mogadishu: Hiraal Institute, July 2018; Hiraal Institute, 'A Losing Game: Countering Al-Shabab's Financial System', Mogadishu: Hiraal Institute, October 2020; Jay Bahadur, 'Terror and Taxes: Inside al-Shabaab's revenue-collection machine', Geneva: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, December 2022.

and often ambivalent relations that exist between checkpoints and a trade-based economy in a context marked by competing and tentative claims to authority.

The second way in which this report adds to ongoing knowledge is by exploring how the costs of checkpoints are distributed in Somali society. While checkpoints are often analysed narrowly as a burden on traders and transporters, checkpoint taxes are indirect taxes that are ultimately paid elsewhere. In particular, this report explores how checkpoints are implicated in dynamics of marginalization and the transfer of wealth from already vulnerable populations to powerful elites.

This report is structured in relation to a series of primary questions:

- How did the phenomenon of checkpoints evolve historically?
- Where are checkpoints located today, and who operates them?
- What do checkpoints cost, how are these costs distributed along trade routes (and who charges more—al-Shabaab or the government)?
- Who pays for checkpoints, and how is the burden of checkpoint costs distributed in society?
- How do transporters and traders navigate the checkpoint geography in Somalia?
- What role do checkpoints play for competing state-building efforts?

Each section is accompanied by tables, graphs, charts and maps that illustrate key findings. The report as a whole is complemented by an interactive webmap, which allows users to further explore the data in more detail.[7] Whereas the current report presents an overview of the main findings about checkpoints in Somalia, the case studies each focus on a key trade route, exploring the phenomenon in detail: 1) the Kismayo–Garissa corridor; and 2) the Mogadishu–Baidoa–Bula Hawa corridor. These are two of the most important cross-border trade routes in southern Somalia.[8]

7 See: https://ipisresearch.be/mapping/webmapping/somalia/v1/.

8 Jamal Mohammed, 'Navigating Trade Controls: The political economy of checkpoints along Somalia's Garissa corridor', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, October 2023 (hereafter Garissa corridor case study); Abdirahman Ali, 'Brokering Trade Routes: The political economy of checkpoints along Somalia's Baidoa corridor', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, October 2023 (hereafter Baidoa corridor case study).

METHODOLOGY

To offer a more comprehensive understanding of the role of checkpoints at the intersection of trade and competing state-building efforts in Somalia, this study explores the phenomenon by adopting a corridor approach,[9] in which the checkpoints are mapped as they appear to road users and affect commodities moving along Somali trade routes. To do so, it relies on a methodology developed during similar exercises in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and South Sudan.[10] Based on a review of available literature, initial stakeholder interviews and working together with the local researchers, a tailor-made questionnaire was developed that was coupled to fieldwork-based geographical data collection on checkpoints.

The questionnaire focuses on collecting information for each checkpoint, including its location, who operates it, the reason of existence for the checkpoint and the forms of taxation that are levied. Whereas such data was collected through in-person travel along checkpoints for earlier studies, the security conditions in south-central Somalia did not permit this. Al-Shabaab, which is present along most major transport routes in Somalia, upholds a strict prohibition of researchers and NGO staff in areas under its control.[11] Data collection on individual checkpoints therefore relied on a combination of key stakeholder interviews and participatory mapping with transporters, traders and other road users along specific routes. Data on checkpoints along other routes was obtained through the assistance of the World Food Programme (WFP).

Using this approach, data on 204 different checkpoints was collected between October 2022 and February 2023. This data was then analysed to identify statistical patterns that may provide insight into the political economy of checkpoints in Somalia. The findings were triangulated and contextualized through interviews with traders, farmers, humanitarian stakeholders and experts, focus group discussions with road users, qualitative fieldwork, and by incorporating and contrasting data on checkpoints from earlier reports.

9 Tobias Hagmann and Finn Stepputat, 'Corridors of trade and power: economy and state formation in Somali East Africa', Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2016.

10 Peer Schouten and Soliel Kalessopo, 'The Politics of Pillage: the political economy of roadblocks in the Central African Republic,' Copenhagen/Antwerp: Danish Institute for International Studies/International Peace Information Service, 2017; P Schouten, J Murairi and S Kubuya, '"Everything that moves will be taxed": the political economy of roadblocks in North and South Kivu', Copenhagen/Antwerp: Danish Institute for International Studies/International Peace Information Service, 2017; P Schouten, K Matthysen and T Muller, 'Checkpoint economy: the political economy of checkpoints in South Sudan, ten years after independence', Copenhagen/Antwerp: Danish Institute for International Studies/International Peace Information Service, 2021.

11 See: European Asylum Support Office, 'Somalia Security Situation: Country of Origin Information Report', Brussels: European Asylum Support Office, 2021.

It is important to note that number and distribution of checkpoints is highly changeable. This is a function of both the seasonality of trade and transport routes and ongoing armed offensives, which often revolve around control over checkpoints, as well as changes in the security context along roads. Thus, the data provided in this report should be taken as indicative, as the situation on the ground may have changed in the intervening period.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

This study covers checkpoints along major transport routes in Somalia. The network of Somali trade routes has the particularity that most traffic circulates along corridors that connect from a specific port into the hinterland, eventually crossing into the hinterland of neighbouring Ethiopia and Kenya. The routes covered in this report include the Kismayo–Dhobley, Mogadishu–Dollow, Mogadishu–Beledweyne, Berbera–Garowe and Berbera–Hargeisa–Wajale. Information is also provided on main checkpoints along the Beledweyne–Bosaso corridor, as well as on important regional routes, such as Kismayo–Jamaame, Mogadishu–Bulo Mareer, and Mogadishu–Adale. Given budget constraints, a number of other key routes were not included.

A more complete study would also have to: pay more attention to the taxation of non-motorized transport such as cattle on the hoof and donkey carts; map the many informal checkpoints in Puntland and Somaliland;[12] include checkpoints along portions of routes across the border in Kenya and Ethiopia; and cover the many secondary routes in the country. Similarly, while this report maps major checkpoints at the entry points to Mogadishu, there are reportedly dozens if not hundreds more urban checkpoints in the Somali capital.[13] While the mapping in this report should thus not be taken as reflecting the total landscape of checkpoints on the ground, it has the benefit of displaying the most important checkpoints along major cross-border trade routes.

Finally, it is important to explain how checkpoint operators are labelled. In Somalia, checkpoints are operated by armed people with a variety of possible associations to any of the competing state-building projects. Roadblocks may be operated by *mooryaan* or bandits, a label used for armed men (they may be clan militia, soldiers or freelance operators) who block anybody who passes with the purpose of robbing road users or extorting large sums.[14] These kinds of checkpoints are less prevalent in 2023 than in the past and are often temporary. For this reason, Somalis often refer to them as '*isbaaro soo booda*', which translates loosely into 'pop-up

12 See: Khalif Abdirahman, 'Contested Commerce: Revenue and state-making in the Galkayo borderlands', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2021, 28. The report mentions 15 checkpoints between Bosaso and Galkayo. Se: Ahmed M Musa, 'Lasanod: City at the margins. The politics of borderland trade between Somaliland and Puntland', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2021, 25. The report mentions 10 checkpoints between Berbera and Lasanod.

13 Finnish Immigration Service, 'Somalia: Fact-finding mission to Mogadishu in March 2020; Security situation and humanitarian conditions in Mogadishu', Vienna: European Country of Origin Information Network, March 2020, 22.

14 For discussion, see: Mohamed Mohamed-Abdi, 'De gaashaanqaad à mooryaan: quelle place pour les jeunes en Somalie?', *Autrepart* 18/2 (2001).

checkpoints'.[15] Another form of temporary checkpoints is associated with clan conflict, when militia of one *diya* or blood money paying group or sub-clan erect a checkpoint specifically targeting members of the group with which blood debt exists. These checkpoints are often restricted to a specific geographical area and typically disappear after the dispute has ended.[16]

For purposes of this study, none of these two types of temporary roadblocks are mapped, as focus is instead on the more permanent checkpoints operated by government-affiliated actors or al-Shabaab. Some checkpoints are clearly associated to specific authorities—such as al-Shabaab—but in many government-controlled areas, checkpoints are staffed by individuals whose link to the state authorities they purport to represent is loose at best.[17] In the worst case scenario, they may simply be local clan militia wearing a government uniform. In most cases, the report follows the designations that transporters use, most often the blanket term 'government forces and/or government-affiliated militia'. When possible and relevant, further information on the chains of command behind individual checkpoints, along with sources for that information, is provided.

In no small part, the interlocutors who participated in this study use general terms because of the sensitivities surrounding revenue mobilization in Somalia. Despite the best efforts of the research team to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, high levels of mistrust and suspicion in research locations made it difficult to delve into more sensitive topics such as revenue sharing, clan dynamics within government administrations and negative practices by government or community leaders. While hotly debated on social media, such topics are sensitive in formal research settings. Focus groups were especially challenging as participants may have felt pressured to conform to the group opinion, making it harder to gather diverse viewpoints. In general, participants are more forthcoming with negative opinions about government officials than negative perceptions of taxation by clan militia or al-Shabaab, perhaps for fear of retribution by al-Shabaab.[18] Additionally, the composition of the research team placed limits on capacities to cover how checkpoints intersect with gender to produce intersectional outcomes—a topic that merits urgent future study.

Finally, Somali checkpoints are highly politicized and militarized, not in the least because of the international designation of a key checkpoint operator as a terrorist organization. Therefore, this report does not provide the most granular level available of the data that was collected. This is both to protect the sources of that information and to ensure that the report findings cannot be used for harmful purposes.

15 For example, see: 'Howlgal Isbaaro qaadis ah oo laga sameeyay Shabeellaha Hoose', Radio Risaala, 22 October 2021. Accessed 14 September 2023, https://radiorisaala.com/howlgal-isbaaro-qaadis-ah-oo-laga-sameeyay-shabeellaha-hoose/.

16 See LandInfo, 'Somalia: Practical issues and security challenges associated with travels in Southern Somalia', Oslo: Country of Origin Information Centre, 2017, 8.

17 In UN Security Council reports, the preference is to speak of 'state-affiliated armed groups'. See, for instance, United Nations, Security Council, 'Report of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator', 15 October 2020, S/2020/1004, 35.

18 European Asylum Support Office, 'Somalia Security Situation', 43–44.

A CHECKPOINT HISTORY OF SOMALIA

Militia checkpoint during the 1990s.

The phenomenon of checkpoints is often dated to 1991, when the Siad Barre regime collapsed. It is then seen as a symptom of the collapse of the central government and a symptom of the decentralized and fragmented control of militia. Checkpoints have a much deeper history, however. The logic of claiming a transit tax for the right of passage in the Somali territories arguably started with the expansion of long-distance caravan trade in the early nineteenth century:

> Each [clan] required some access to the major nodes and arteries of commercial exchange; each guarded its right to oversee one leg of the caravan trade as jealously as its guarded its home well and reserve grazing areas. Tribute—or protection money—exacted from caravans in transit was a source of income and prestige for the local community.[19]

19 Lee Cassanelli, *The shaping of Somali society: reconstructing the history of a pastoral people*, 1600-1900, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982, 156.

Checkpoints in the physical form known at present probably were initiated during colonial rule, in the shape of Italian and British customs and border posts. They were likely insignificant for most Somalis, who practiced a form of nomad pastoralism that does not rely on paved roads and therefore easily eluded state controls and taxation.[20] What is known is that checkpoints formed an integral feature of Siad Barre's military dictatorship.

DURING THE SIAD BARRE REGIME

It seems checkpoints became widespread in 1977–1978, when Siad Barre ordered regional and district governors to requisition crops and animals from every district, leading to a countrywide network of checkpoints along roads and at water points to confiscate produce, which was used to finance the Ogaden War with Ethiopia.[21] In the aftermath of the war, resistance against the Barre regime started to mount. Military checkpoints proliferated to limit freedom of movement, as sites of inspection for the permits that were required to circulate out of one's hometown.[22] Thus, in the 1980s, the roads between towns were littered with military checkpoints requiring bribes. As resistance against the regime intensified towards 1988, the military and the clan militia, which Barre had armed, formed more intense rings of checkpoints around major towns, where members of clans associated to resistance movements became targets of specific harassment, as did goods travelling to areas associated to opposition groups.[23] At the same time, checkpoints at the entrance to refugee camps were used to systematically divert aid.[24]

AFTER 1991

As the Barre regime progressively broke down between 1988 and 1991, the number of checkpoints increased, exploding after the army disintegrated in 1991. In a period that is often in hindsight referred to popularly as the 'isbaaro wars', road blocking became an occupation for anyone with a weapon. As one commentator observes, 'Once the state collapsed, roaming thugs mimicked the old order to demand "tax for safe passage". Warlords turned this into an art form.'[25]

Muse Sudi Yalahow, then one of most powerful warlords in Mogadishu, who would go on to become a minister and senator, was one of them. In a media interview in 2000, he uses the pretext of banditry to defend his checkpoints along the road between Mogadishu and Balcad,

20 Jutta Bakonyi, 'Moral Economies of Mass Violence: Somalia 1988–1991', Civil Wars, 11/4 (2009), 439.

21 AH Shirwa, 'The role of agriculture in the origins and solutions of Somali problems', paper presented at the European Association of Somali Studies conference, 1993, London, 23–25 September 1993, 4.

22 Human Rights Watch, 'Somalia: A Government at War with its Own People: Testimonies About the Killings and the Conflict in the North: An Africa Watch Report, January 1990', New York, Human Rights Watch, June 1990, 71.

23 Human Rights Watch, 'Somalia: A Government at War', 77–79, 84, 88, 189.

24 Personal communication with Mark Bradbury, 20 August 2023.

25 Personal communication with Abdi Samatar (professor at the University of Minnesota), 18 January 2023.

offering protection in exchange for a 'minimum fee' to 'cover logistical expenses'.[26] In a large sense, therefore, rather than a radical break with the past, the checkpoints mounted by the clan militias in the 1990s 'mimicked the recurrent behaviour of the security apparatus since the late 1970s'.[27]

Widely shared image on social media of militia checkpoint in the early 2000s.

26 'Somali warlord in bid to catch bandits', IOL, 14 March 2002. Accessed 15 January 2023, https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/somali-warlord-in-bid-to-catch-bandits-31607.

27 Daniel Compagnon, 'State-sponsored violence and conflict under Mahamed Siyad Barre: the emergence of path dependent patterns of violence', Blog, World Peace Foundation, 22 October 2013. Accessed 11 September 2023, https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2013/10/22/state-sponsored-violence-and-conflict-under-mahamed-siyad-barre-the-emergence-of-path-dependent-patterns-of-violence/.

Around 2000, the warlords lost ground to the militias organized by Mogadishu business elites, who made handsome profits providing logistics to the burgeoning aid industry.[28] A few key individuals became the brokers of aid and their companies gained the majority of contracts, the profits of which they diversified into other sectors, such as real estate and ports; they controlled their own armed militia to secure their operations and that of their clients.[29] It became popular to refer to the Somalia of this period as an 'economy without a state' or a 'duty free economy'.[30] Checkpoints, however, put an unbearable weight on trade profits.[31] For instance, between Mogadishu and Afgoye, a distance of around 50 km, there were a reported 54 checkpoints in 2004, which could not be safely passed without an armed escort.[32] At the same time, checkpoints had become a key source of revenues for warlords, who used the proceeds to buy loyalty, *khat*[33] and ammunition (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Select overview of warlord checkpoint revenues in 2005 (USD)

Warlord	Checkpoint	Annual revenue (USD)
Muse Sudi Yalahow	Madina/Wadajir (in Mogadishu)	416,880
Muse Sudi Yalahow	Darmoole (along Mogadishu–Balad road)	819,000
Muse Sudi Yalahow	Balad (Balcad)	951,120
Osman Hassan Ali (Atto)	Afgoye	4,310,640
Mohamed Qanyare	Bakara (in Mogadishu)	605,160

Source: United Nations, Security Council, 'Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1630 (2005)', 4 May 2006, S/2006/229, annex VI.

28 See J Gundel, 'Humanitarianism and spoils politics in Somalia', in *Eroding local capacity: international humanitarian action in Africa*, eds. Monica Kathina Juma and Astri Suhrke, Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2002; International Crisis Group, 'Somalia: Countering Terrorism in a Failed State', Africa Report N°45, Nairobi/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 23 May 2002; Aisha Ahmad, 'The Security Bazaar: Business Interests and Islamist Power in Civil War Somalia', International Security 39 (2014): 89–117.

29 Susanne Jaspars, Guhad M Adan, and Nisar Majid, 'Food and Power in Somalia: Business as Usual? A scoping study on the political economy of food following shifts in food assistance and in governance', London: London School of Economics, 2020, 12–14.

30 Peter D Little, S*omalia: Economy Without State*, Oxford/Bloomington in: James Currey/Indiana University Press, 2003; Tobias Hagmann, 'From state collapse to duty free shop: Somalia's path to modernity', *African Affairs* 104/416 (2005).

31 According to one male business person who was involved, the armed escorts to navigate checkpoints cost 30 per cent of profits. Cited in: United Nations, Security Council, 'Report of the Panel of Experts on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1474 (2003), 4 November 2003, S/2003/1035, 155.

32 Asylum and Immigration Tribunal, 'HH & others (Mogadishu: armed conflict: risk) Somalia CG' [2008] UKAIT 00022, section 4.27, London: Crown Copyright, 2007.

33 *Khat* (also known as *miraa* in Kenya) is a mildly narcotic plant (*catha edulis*) native to the Horn of Africa.

At about the same time, in Mogadishu, small Shari'a court groups were addressing the militia problem in their own neighbourhoods, replacing militia checkpoints with their own for safe passage, which earned them widespread community support. In mid-2006, the Mogadishu business community supported the consolidation of these groups into the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which was ideologically strict but economically liberal, to repress checkpoints and establish a stable business environment across the whole of south-central Somalia, with taxes negotiated between this business elite and the ICU.[34] The ICU weeded out many checkpoints in southern Somalia, instead demanding a relatively low payment at a single checkpoint along each route, greatly facilitating movement across clan territories.[35] Transporters interviewed in 2023 still recall this period as the golden age of the transport sector, underscoring the ease of movement and the 50 per cent drop in transport costs for the few months that the ICU ruled.

In March 2007, a US-backed and Ethiopia-led intervention brought the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to power. It brought together a number of the former leaders of clan militia, whose checkpoint predation had given rise to the ICU in the first place. Unsurprisingly, wherever TFG-allied militia took over territory, the number of checkpoints quickly increased again, with 238 checkpoints recorded six months after the TFG took over and 336 checkpoints across Somalia in the following year (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).[36] UN Logistics Cluster reports from the time describe that basically every locality along a road operated a checkpoint. In contrast, villages and localities away from roads were relatively calm and safe because militia were attracted by money and there was no money in villages; currency circulated along Somali roads.[37]

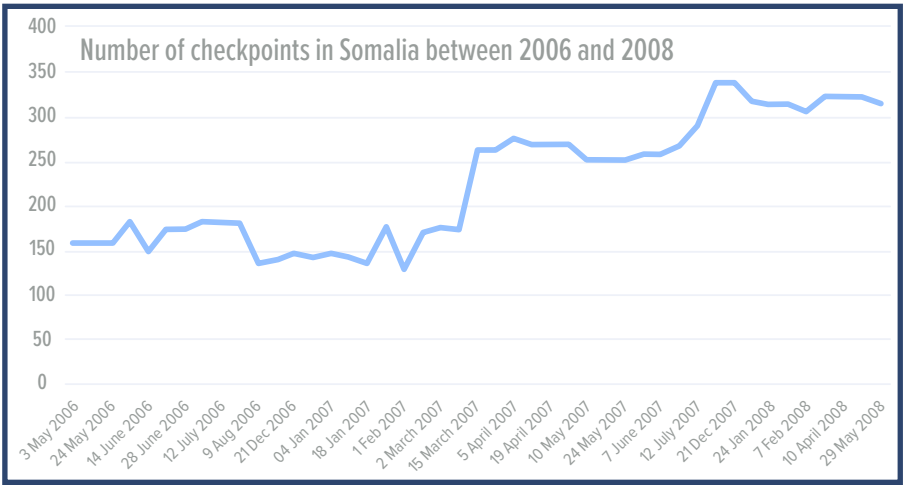
34 See: United Nations, Security Council, 'Final report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia submitted in accordance with resolution 1676 (2006)', 22 November 2006, S/2006/913, 161–162, 171; Marcel Djama, 'Political economics of war and peace in Somalia, Paris: *Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement*, 2007, 12-13. This squares with observations made by Ahmed and by Hansen that Mogadishu business people (men) began funding local Shari'a courts in the capital in the early 2000s as they produced more standardized and reliable protection compared to more predatory and undisciplined clan militia. See Ahmad, 'The Security Bazaar'; Stig J Hansen, 'Civil War Economies, the Hunt for Profit and the Incentives for Peace: the case of Somalia', AE Working Paper 1, Bath: Department of Economics and International Development, University of Bath, 2007.

35 M Skjelderup, M Ainashe and AM Abdulle ('Qare'), 'Militant Islamism and local clan dynamics in Somalia: the expansion of the Islamic Courts Union in Lower Jubba province', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14/3 (2020), 553–571.

36 David Henek, 'Somalia's fragmentation', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 13 August 2007. Accessed 11 September 2023, https://www.csis.org/analysis/somalias-fragmentation; Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Humanitarian Situation in Somalia Monthly Analysis—1 November–15 December 2007', Nairobi: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 15 December 2007.

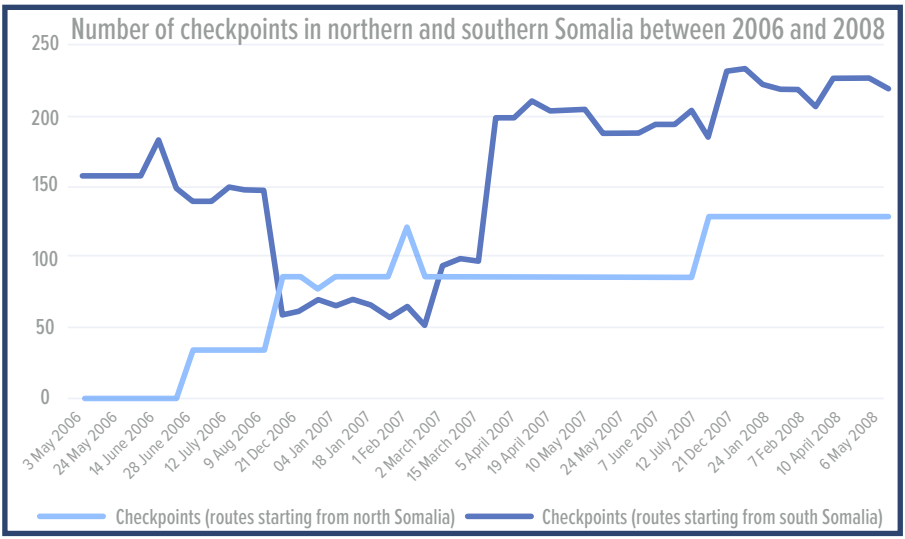
37 Country of Origin Information Service, 'Report of fact-finding mission 11–15 June 2007. Somalia', Croydon: Home Office, Border & Immigration Agency, 20 July 2007, 2.09.

FIGURE 1. Number of checkpoints in Somalia between 2006 and 2008



Source: Author analysis of WFP/UN Logcluster weekly Somalia road condition updates.

FIGURE 2. Number of checkpoints in northern and southern Somalia between 2006 and 2008[38]



Source: Author analysis of WFP/UN Logcluster weekly Somalia road condition updates.

38 As Figure 2 shows, the slump in checkpoints is most notable among transport routes in southern Somalia.

CHECKPOINTS CHANGING HANDS: EXAMPLE OF EX-CONTROL AFGOYE

Ex-Control is a checkpoint at a junction that forms a key entry and exit point for Mogadishu on the road to Afgoye. Because of this, it has been an attractive target in conflict for actors seeking to expand their revenues. As a result, over the years, it has been under control of a number of different actors.

Satellite Imagery – Pleiades © CNES 2023, Distribution Airbus DS.

- **Up to 1990: Government checkpoint**
- **1991–late 1990s: Freelance militias from the Duduble sub-clan of the Hawiye**
- **Late 1990s–2006: Sa'ad clan militia, sub-clan of the Habar Gidir, led by warlord Osman Hassan Ali (Atto)[39]**
- **Mid-2006–December 2006: ICU takes over**
- **2007 (after the TFG repels ICU): Police force, commanded by former warlord Abdi Qeybdiid, at the time an enemy of Osman Atto**
- **Early 2009 (brief): al-Shabaab, which also controls other Mogadishu checkpoints**
- **May 2009: Somali National Army (SNA) takes over during the battle of Mogadishu[40]**
- **Since May 2009: SNA, with clan militia from the Habar Gedir sub-clan of the Hawiye; in 2018, it was Brigade 7 (formerly Brigade 6)[41]**
- **2011, 2016 and 2019: Repeatedly attacked by al-Shabaab**

39 IRIN News, 'New President visits Mogadishu', *The New Humanitarian*, 30 August 2000. Accessed 11 September 2023, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2000/08/30/new-president-visits-mogadishu.

40 Shabelle Media Network, 'Somalia: Banadir Administration Says They Took Control Over Key Checkpoint', *allAfrica*, 11 May 2009. Accessed 11 September 2023, https://allafrica.com/stories/200905111052.html.

41 Personal communication with security expert who preferred to stay anonymous, 22 May 2023. Also see: Mohamed Shiil, 'Checkpoints Source of Extortion, Kickbacks – "Taxes" Vary at Checkpoints Controlled by TFG, al-Shabaab and Local Clans', *PiracyReport*, 29 August 2011. Accessed 11 September 2023, https://piracyreport.com/index.php/post/1472/Checkpoints_Source_of_Extortion_Kickbacks.

The defeat of the ICU and enmity for the foreign-supported offensive prompted the rise of al-Shabaab in 2008, which initially controlled portions of the capital and other big towns such as Kismayo. In the areas under its control, al-Shabaab established a checkpoint regime modelled on that of the ICU: a relatively moderate one-time tax per journey. At the time, one observer explains:

> 'As al-Shabaab has gained territory, they have removed most checkpoints, easing the movement of both aid and trade; livestock traders in Kenya report that transaction costs have diminished because of fewer checkpoints.'[42]

This contrasted to the decentralized financing strategies of different government-affiliated regional and local administrations. At the time that al-Shabaab was clearing checkpoints elsewhere, a 2008 report noted that in January 2008 checkpoints across south-central Somalia had more than doubled as compared to the previous year.[43] Freelance militia complemented competing local authorities that intensified their reliance on checkpoints. The Lower Shabelle administration, for instance, relied entirely for its revenues on a series of checkpoints between Marka and Afgoye.[44] As one contemporary report noted about checkpoints in Mogadishu: 'Freelance checkpoints are often temporary, and extort pedestrians and vehicles for smaller amounts of money, sometimes only seeking to generate enough income during the morning so that the militia can purchase *qat* [*khat*] for consumption in the afternoon.'[45]

Whereas the kind of looting and human rights abuses that marked checkpoints in the 1990s was rare, checkpoint operators would still add to the insecurity of road users, occasionally committing holdups a short distance away from their posts. As a result, al-Shabaab—just like the ICU before it—'enjoyed local support at the beginning because of their strong administration that was fair in administering justice in the eyes of the public. They also fought those militias who erected checkpoints to extort money from the road users.'[46]

Between 2011–2014, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) retook most towns controlled by al-Shabaab, aided by clan militias and the SNA, delivering a blow to the finances

42 Mark Bradbury, 'State-building, Counterterrorism, and Licensing Humanitarianism in Somalia', Tufts Feinstein Center Briefing Paper, 2010, 9.

43 Robert Maletta, 'Somalia: an accountability-free zone?', *Humanitarian Exchange* 40/6 (2008), 6.

44 United Nations, Security Council, 'Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1811 (2008)', 10 December 2008, S/2008/769, 91, 205.

45 Yann-Cédric Quero, Mireille Widmer and Lindsey Peterson, 'Safety and Security Baseline Report: Mogadishu', Hargeisa: Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention, December 2011, 27.

46 'Somali perspectives on Al Shabaab, international involvement and counterterrorism', Saferworld. Accessed 11 September 2023, https://www.saferworld.org.uk/long-reads/when-the-elephants-fight-the-grass-gets-trampled-somali-perspectives-on-al-shabaab-international.

of the group. In response, al-Shabaab intensified its checkpoint taxes,[47] which resulted in an overlapping checkpoint geography of government-linked checkpoints around major towns and al-Shabaab checkpoints on the rural stretches of road in between them. Along the way, many independent militia checkpoints disappeared, either overtaken by al-Shabaab or allied (even if in name only) to government forces. Many clan militia checkpoints have never really gone away, yet many of them are now affiliated (however loosely) to or absorbed by a district, federal member state or the federal government.[48]

47 Al-Shabaab taxed some 4,000 businesses in Bakara market, including transport of goods to and from the market, accounting for some 40 per cent of its revenue in the early 2010s. See: Tom Keatinge, 'The Role of Finance in Defeating Al-Shabab', Whitehall Report 2–13, London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, December 2014.

48 See: Khalif Abdirahman, 'Contested Commerce', 27.

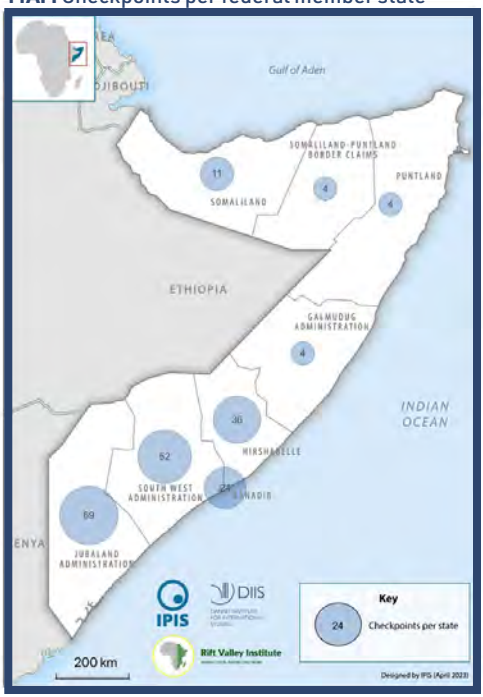
CHECKPOINTS: WHERE ARE THEY IN SOMALIA AND WHO OPERATES THEM?

This research identifies a total of 204 checkpoints in Somalia in 2023. This contrasts with around 336 checkpoints that OCHA reports to have existed in 2007 and the 142 that the UN reports it found in 2019.[49] As with the 2019 UN figures, the data collected for this research primarily focuses on south-central Somalia. It is only fragmentary for other parts of Somalia. It is likely, then, that the total number of checkpoints in Somalia is much higher than 204.

Checkpoints are heavily concentrated in south-central Somalia. When the number of checkpoints is broken down to federal member state level, more than 50 per cent of them are located in Jubaland (34 per cent) and South West State (26 per cent). Hirshabelle is third, with 18 per cent of all checkpoints (see map of check points per federal member state).

Within these federal entities, checkpoints are markedly concentrated in specific

MAP. Checkpoints per federal member state



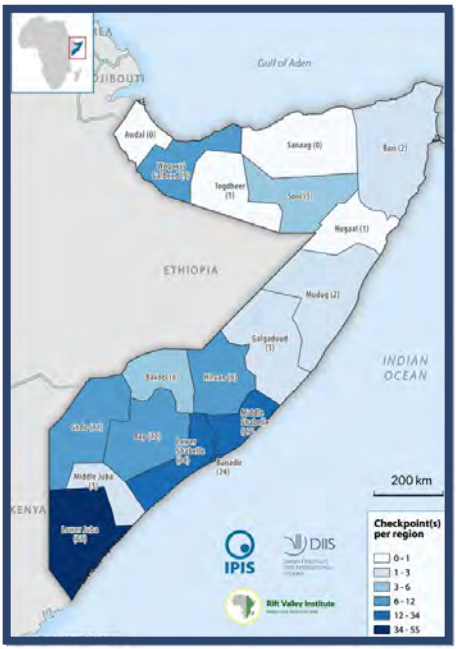
Checkpoint density per administrative unit

49 See: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Humanitarian Situation in Somalia'; United Nations, Security Council, 'Report of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator', 7 October 2019, S/2019/799, 24. A 2017 assessment of main transit routes in central and southern Somalia by one humanitarian organization identifies 82 fee-paying checkpoints, 20 of which controlled by al-Shabaab but this is likely a geographically limited assessment. See: United Nations, Security Council, 'Somalia report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea submitted in accordance with resolution 2317 (2016)', 8 November 2017, S/2017/924, 167.

administrative regions (*gobollo*). For example, 80 per cent of the checkpoints in Jubaland state—and 27 per cent of all checkpoints identified—are located in the Lower Juba region. The remaining 20 per cent of Jubaland checkpoints is divided between Gedo and Middle Juba. In South West state, a similar pattern is visible, with 66 per cent of all checkpoints in this federal member state found in the Lower Shabelle region and the remaining 34 per cent divided between Bay and Bakool. Similarly, checkpoints in Hirshabelle state are predominantly concentrates (76 per cent) in the Middle Shabelle region, with the remaining 24 per cent in Hiran (see map of checkpoint density per administrative region).

However, the density of checkpoints is highest compared to geographical size in the Banadir region, which encompasses the capital Mogadishu. We identified 22 checkpoints here—or 11 per cent of total. Additionally, we have only mapped some of the most important checkpoints sitting along key access roads to the capital; according to other sources, there are dozens if not hundreds more checkpoints in Banadir.[50]

MAP. Checkpoint density per administrative region (*gobol*)



Source: IPIS.

Put another way, in total, 58 per cent of all checkpoints are clustered in the administrative regions of Lower Juba, Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle. If the Banadir region of the capital city, Mogadishu, is also included, this rises to 69 per cent of all checkpoints. As has long been the case, these areas are also home to high levels of competition and conflict between al-Shabaab and government forces, as well as different decentralized political entities, which are all driving factors in the density of checkpoints.

Finally, when where checkpoints are placed in the landscape is examined, it appears that the majority of these are located in towns or villages. Typically, major towns have permanent checkpoints at each of their entry points, often marking the limits of government influence. In smaller villages, checkpoints may not have a fixed location: Upon hearing a vehicle approach, checkpoint

50 See: Finnish Immigration Service, 'Somalia: Fact-finding mission'. This should not come as a surprise: the capital is home to federal government institutions and international organizations, which require heightened security measures, given the constant threat of al-Shabaab attacks.

operators rush to the main road to intercept it.[51] Other typical locations for checkpoints are bridges, junctions, wells, watering points and boreholes.

CHECKPOINT DENSITY PER TRADE ROUTE

The question of checkpoint prevalence can also be approached in a different way; namely, by looking at the number of checkpoints per trade route. Table 2 offers the number of checkpoints along a number of key trade routes. The third column shows the average distance in kilometres between checkpoints along the route and the final column indicates how many checkpoints there are on average for each 100 km of said route.

Table 2 shows that most routes have a checkpoint roughly each 15–20 km, which translates to an average of around 5 checkpoints per 100 km travelled.[52] More generally, this can probably be taken as a good average for Somali roads. Clear outliers are the Bosaso–Beledweyne route, where checkpoints are much further apart: Travellers only encounter a checkpoint once every 160 km. It is important to note, however, that checkpoints along this route are likely slightly under-reported, with data supplied only for major checkpoints.[53]

TABLE 2. Average number of checkpoints along main routes in Somalia

Transport route	Total checkpoints	Total km	Average distance between checkpoints (km)	Average checkpoint per 100 km
Bulo Mareer–Mogadishu	24	116	5	20
Jamaame–Kismayo	16	66	4	24
Mogadishu–Adale	12	171	14	7
Mogadishu–Beledweyne	26	381	15	7
Kismayo–Jilib–Bardera	22	370	17	6
Mogadishu–Bula Hawa	23	487	21	5
Kismayo–Afmadow–Dhobley	10	260	26	4
Berbera–Wajale	8	250	31	3
Bosaso–Galkayo–Beledweyne	10	1,600	160	0.6

Source: author calculations

51 Focus group discussion with transporters, Garissa, 22 November 2022.

52 This is roughly equal to averages in South Sudan, and about half less than in the Democratic Republic of Congo. See: Schouten, Matthysen and Muller, 'Checkpoint economy'; Schouten, Murairi and Kubuya, '"Everything that moves will be taxed".

53 Khalif Abdirahman, 'Contested Commerce', 28, mentions 15 checkpoints between Bosaso and Galkayo levying informal taxes.

Notable outliers in the other direction are the routes from Bulo Mareer to Mogadishu and from Jamaame to Kismayo.[54] Along these routes, checkpoints are much more frequent: They occur about every 5 or 4 km, translating into a stunning average of 20 and 24 per 100 km, respectively.

WHO OPERATES THE CHECKPOINTS?

The majority of the checkpoints are operated by government-affiliated actors. Out of 204 checkpoints, 45 checkpoints (23 per cent) are controlled by al-Shabaab, and the remaining 159 (77 per cent) are operated by government forces and/or government-allied militia.[55] This broad category is overall the most useful to maintain, as most checkpoints not controlled by al-Shabaab are operated by a combination of government soldiers (from the Somali National Army [SNA]), local clan militia (also known as *ma'awisley*) and representatives of local, district or federal member state authorities.

Some of the government-controlled or affiliated checkpoints are more formal than others. Somali transporters easily point out more formal customs points, often one for each federal member state. These are also frequently complemented by additional customs points for each administrative region. These more formal checkpoints tend to issue receipts, although the amount of tax that is levied may be higher than what is documented on the receipt. They are distinguished from more informal checkpoints, where checkpoint operators demand *birqaad* (a checkpoint opening fee)[56] and do not issue receipts. Less formal checkpoints are often non-static structures, with armed men rushing to the road when a vehicle approaches.[57]

For road users confronted by the amalgam of often armed individuals at the checkpoints, the finer distinctions between these affiliations may be less meaningful than the amount they demand for passing them. These finer distinctions matter greatly, however, for the kind of political settlement that can be financed with checkpoint taxes (see section 6 below).

Al-Shabaab checkpoints are heavily concentrated in Jubaland, where 33 out of 45 (72 per cent) of all the checkpoints controlled by the group are located. These make up 48 per cent of the 69 checkpoints in total that are mapped in Jubaland. This means that al-Shabaab controls nearly half of all checkpoints in this federal member state. In Jubaland, al-Shabaab checkpoints are concentrated in the Middle Juba region, where there are three al-Shabaab checkpoints (and no government checkpoints) and in the Lower Juba region, where al-Shabaab controls one out

54 This last stretch of road is actually part of the Kismayo–Jilib–Bardera route, thus considerably heightening the average number of checkpoints along that route.

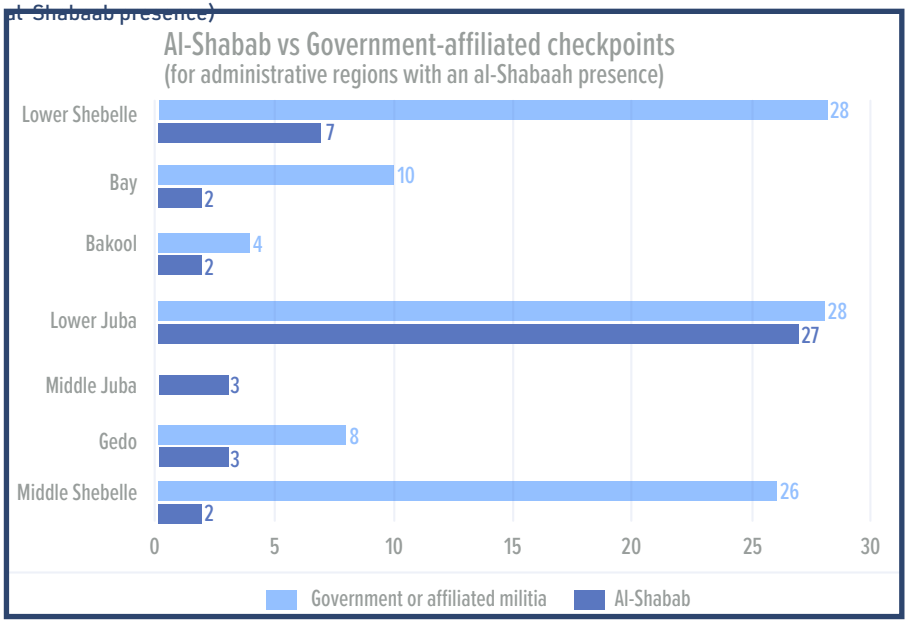
55 This is consistent with the ratio that the UN group of Experts found in 2017. See: United Nations Security Council, S/2017/924, 167.

56 Another term is '*xadhig fur*' (rope lifting fee). See: Musa, 'Lasanod'; Hagmann and Stepputat, 'Tilly in the Tropics'; and Ahmed M Musa, Kirstine Strøh Varming and Finn Stepputat, 'Raising Fiscal Revenues: The Political Economy of Somali Trade Taxation', in *Trade Makes States*, eds. Tobias Hagmann and Finn Stepputat.

57 In part, this may be because traffic is irregular. It has also been suggested, that this is to avoid periodic operations aimed at clearing them. See: European Asylum Support Office, 'Somalia Security Situation', 42.

of every two checkpoints. In other words, al-Shabaab controls 27 checkpoints versus the 28 controlled by the Jubaland security forces. This is likely not a reflection of revenue generation imperatives but rather of the need to employ soldiers in areas where the group has many adherents.[58] Figure 3 provides an overview of who controls what in the administrative regions where al-Shabaab has a presence.

FIGURE 3. Al-Shabaab vs government-affiliated checkpoints (for administrative regions with an al-Shabaab presence)



Source: author.

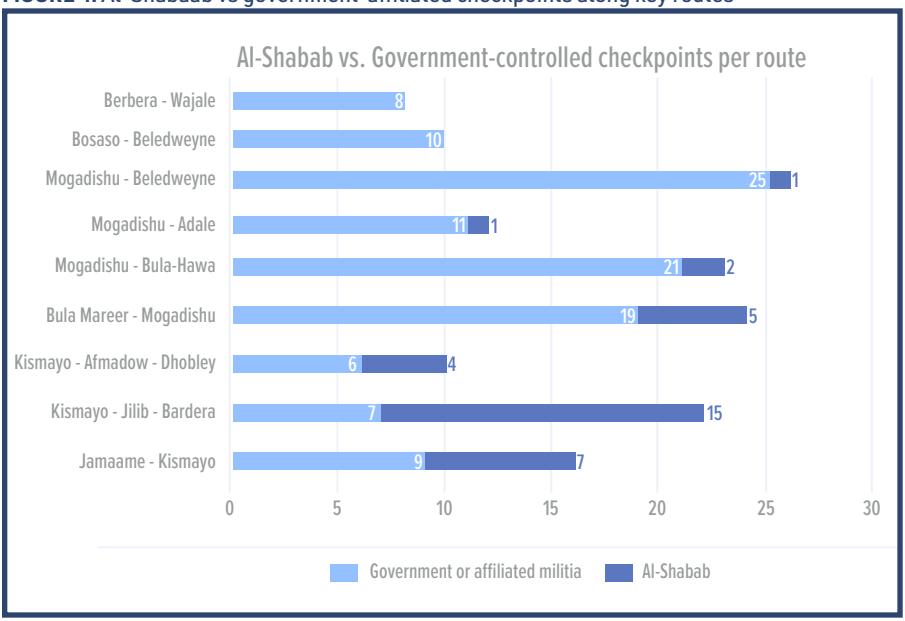
In most other federal member states and administrative regions, the percentage of al-Shabaab-operated checkpoints is much lower. In South West state, for instance, where there are 53 checkpoints, of these 42 (80 per cent) are operated by South West state forces or militia allied to them and 11 checkpoints (20 per cent) are operated by al-Shabaab. None of the checkpoints in Puntland and Somaliland are operated by al-Shabaab.

It is to be noted, however, that for al-Shabaab, checkpoints are not a numbers game in terms of revenue generation: Because the group levies transit taxes only once for a given route, it only needs checkpoints at a few strategic points along each major corridor. This leads to a different

58 Personal communication with Somali security expert, Nairobi, 23 February 2023.

way of approaching the question of control; namely, by exploring the relative presence of actors along different key routes. In Figure 4, the overall figures provided in Figure 3 are broken down according to who operates the checkpoints.

FIGURE 4. Al-Shabaab vs government-affiliated checkpoints along key routes



Source: author.

If on average, al-Shabaab is present at 23 per cent of all checkpoints in Somalia, then the route between Mogadishu and Bulo Mareer approximates this national average, with al-Shabaab present at 21 per cent of the checkpoints along this route. Outliers upwards are three routes in Jubaland, forking out from Kismayo, where al-Shabaab is present at 40 per cent or more of the checkpoints. Along the stretch of road between Kismayo and Bardera, al-Shabaab controls more checkpoints than the Jubaland forces do.

WHAT DO CHECKPOINTS COST?

THE DISTRIBUTION OF CHECKPOINT TAXES ALONG ROUTES

To understand the financial impact of checkpoints on trade, it is necessary to measure the impact of checkpoints along the routes that commodities typically take. Across all routes, transporters agree that checkpoint taxes make up either the most important transport cost or the second most important one, after fuel. As one cargo transporter explains:

> A trip from Mogadishu to Bula Hawa fetches USD 11,000 in income but at the end of the journey, the maximum profit I can make is usually USD 1,000. The vast majority of the income, around 60 per cent (USD 6,000) goes to *isbaaro* and the second most expensive expenditure is fuel, then truck maintenance and repair.[59]

Calculations from road users using other types of vehicles confirm this overall impression. A Land Cruiser transporting passengers from Mogadishu to Bula Hawa spends USD 200 on checkpoint taxes compared to USD 80 on fuel; a minibus, USD 400 in checkpoint taxes and USD 220 for fuel.[60]

Table 3 provides an overview of the checkpoint tax burden along different key trade routes in Somalia. It provides the total amount in checkpoint taxes and breaks it down into averages per checkpoint, per tonne carried, and per tonne/100 km. It shows that in absolute terms long-distance routes connecting to the ports of Kismayo and Mogadishu are more expensive than other routes, with Mogadishu–Baidoa–Bula Hawa standing out. These high checkpoint costs have significant implications for trade flows and for business opportunities for traders working out of ports in southern Somalia. As members of the Somali transport association committee in Mogadishu put it:

> Kismayo and Mogadishu ports have lighter tax regimes but are heavily affected by inland checkpoints that inflate the prices of goods imported through them. The checkpoint costs usually override the official government taxes, making sourcing from Berbera, Bosaso and Djibouti ports cheaper than Mogadishu and Kismayo.[61]

It is to be noted here that for traders in Baidoa deciding on where to source their products, the

59 Interview with cargo transporter, Mogadishu, 11 December 2022.

60 Interview with passenger transporters, Mogadishu, 22 November 2022.

61 Interview with members of the Somali transport association, Mogadishu, 11 December 2022.

key indicator is the absolute amount of checkpoint costs that will be incorporated in the price per volume purchased. So, if a tonne of rice is around 50 per cent cheaper in terms of checkpoint costs when bought in Bosaso, the decision is quickly made. In this way, checkpoints along the Mogadishu–Baidoa route entail a major distortion of market prices.

TABLE 3. Average costs of checkpoints along key routes

Transport route	Total number of checkpoints	Total USD cost (vehicle carrying capacity)	Total km	Average USD cost per checkpoint	Average USD cost per tonne	Average USD cost per tonne per 100 km
Long-distance routes						
Mogadishu–Bula Hawa	23	5,200 (75 tonnes)	487	226	69	14
Mogadishu–Beled-weyne	26	2,055 (35 tonnes)	381	79	59	15
Kismayo–Afmadow–Dhobley	10	1,825 (75 tonnes)	260	183	24	9
Bosaso–Beledweyne	10	1,200 (35 tonnes)	1,600	120	34	2
Short-distance routes						
Genale–Mogadishu	14	92 (2 tonnes)	95	7	46	48
Jamaame–Kismayo	14	58 (2 tonnes)	66	4	29	44

Source: Data for checkpoint taxes for typical vehicles using each route, as provided by transporters. Note that amounts may vary, depending on vehicle size and type of cargo.

As the Baidoa corridor case study indicates, the result of these high checkpoint taxes is that trade is redirected to the traditional hinterland of the port of Mogadishu, towards Bosaso and Berbera, despite being more than 1,000 km further away. According to transporters in Mogadishu, 'About 70 per cent of our trade in the direction of Ethiopia and Kenya, and even Baidoa and Beledweyne, has been captured by traders based in Puntland or Somaliland.'[62] Because traders in the ports of Berbera and Bosaso are in competition to capture the hinterland markets in south-central Somalia, traders in Bosaso allegedly give buyers from Beledweyne, Baidoa and the border area around Bula Hawa steep discounts, amounting to hundreds of dollars, to subsidize an increasing share in the market.[63] In addition, transporters along that route are able to further reduce transport costs by circumventing a significant number of Somali checkpoints by travelling through Ethiopia. As a result, only a few items are still sourced from Mogadishu.[64] This once again confirms that checkpoint taxes have a stronger impact on

62 Focus group discussion with transporters, Mogadishu, 12 October 2022.

63 Interview with market broker, Mogadishu, 21 November 2022.

64 See Ali, 'Baidoa corridor case study' for details; also see Mustafe M Abdi, 'Regularly Irregular: Varieties of informal trading in the Ethiopia-Somaliland borderlands', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2021.

transport costs than road conditions, distance and fuel costs combined.

Goods in a shop in Baidoa—where they're from and what they cost depends on checkpoint taxes. © Abdirahman Ali, 2022

While checkpoint costs appear lower in absolute terms for the short-distance routes (typically used by smaller vehicles shuttling fresh agricultural produce to population centres), the average cost in checkpoints per tonne of goods is relatively high, and very high for the short distance covered. Indeed, as Table 3 shows, the price per tonne per 100 km is around three times as high for agricultural produce as for the commodities typically carried over longer distances. Given the comparatively lower value of agricultural produce, checkpoint taxes in Somalia appear to discriminate against farming.

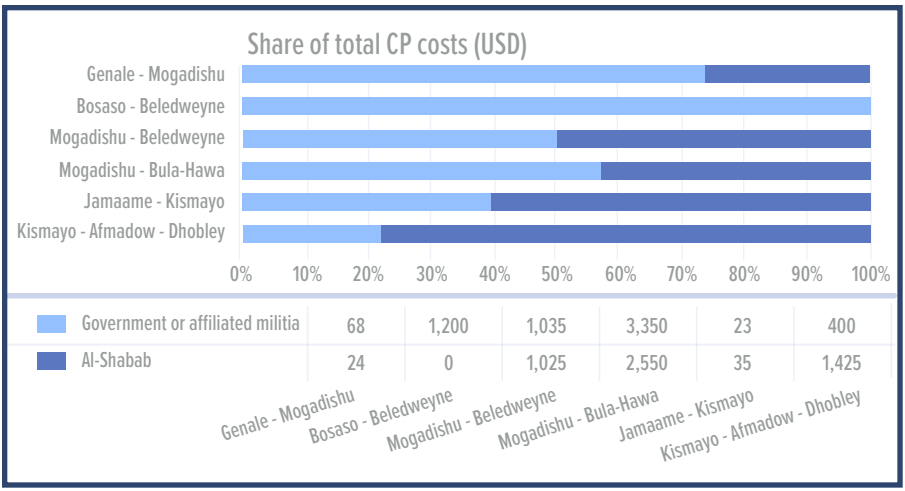
GOVERNMENT VS AL-SHABAAB: WHICH CHARGES MOST?

Based on our data, it is possible to assess whether most of these transport costs are due to checkpoints in government-controlled areas or al-Shabaab checkpoints. While al-Shabaab checkpoints are more expensive individually, along whole of the supply chains and trade routes, the picture is different (see Figure 5). Only along routes in Jubaland (the Kismayo–Dhobley corridor and the Jamaame–Kismayo route) do al-Shabaab checkpoint costs exceed government

checkpoints. Along all other routes, the proportion of checkpoint taxes levied in government-controlled areas exceeds al-Shabaab checkpoints. This is a significant finding. It implies that along most typical trade routes, checkpoint taxes in areas purportedly under government control are a heavier burden on trade than those levied by al-Shabaab.[65]

Some of this has to do with the length of routes under consideration: a truck travelling from Mogadishu towards Jameeco would pay the same in al-Shabaab taxes as when travelling to Bula Hawa but significantly fewer government checkpoint taxes. As such, the fiscal regime of al-Shabaab discriminates against short-distance transport, while the more decentralized situation in government-held territory discriminates against long-distance transport because the level of checkpoint taxes increases with distance. This is an effect of the multiplication of administrative entities that rely on decentralized taxation as well as the for-profit objectives of checkpoint operators. As a result, the accrual of checkpoints with distance impacts the marketability of low-value bulk cargo such as farming produce further away from urban markets. As one farmer in Gedo region comments, 'I literally cannot get anything from my farm in Garbahaarey to a port city to export because of all the isbaaro.'[66]

FIGURE 5. Cost of government vs al-Shabaab checkpoints along key routes



Source: Data for checkpoint taxes for typical vehicles using each route, as provided by road users. Note that amounts may vary according to vehicle size and cargo type, which are detailed in Table 3.

65 For instance, this contradicts a recent Somali government report that states, 'It is presumed that the combined FGS and FMS road taxes are lower than AS [al-Shabaab] taxes'. See: Federal Government of Somalia, 'National Risk Assessment on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing', Mogadishu: Federal Government of Somalia, 2022, 99.

66 Phone interview with farmer, 15 March 2023.

It is, however, the cumulative impact of adding al-Shabaab transport taxes to the taxes levied by government authorities—or vice versa—that ultimately makes or breaks the competitiveness of specific trade routes. As Table 4 shows, the difference between the cost of transporting goods from the port of Bosaso to southern Somalia and sourcing the same goods from the port of Mogadishu—despite the 1,000 KM difference—is not exclusively due to government checkpoint taxation. Each route has the same number of government administrative units levying transit taxes. The difference is due to the addition of al-Shabaab to the mix along the route.

TABLE 4. Price differences for transport to Beledweyne from Bosaso and Mogadishu

Bosaso–Beledweyne		*Mogadishu–Beledweyne*	
Puntland	USD 200	Banadir	USD 480
Galmudug	USD 465	al-Shabaab	USD 1,025
Hirshabelle	USD 530	Gajla'el	USD 150
		Beledweyne	USD 400
Total	***USD 1,195***	***Total***	***USD 2,055***

Source: Data from Abdirahman Ali, 'Brokering Trade Routes', September 2023, 29 and World Bank, 'Somalia Urbanization Review', 2020, 95.

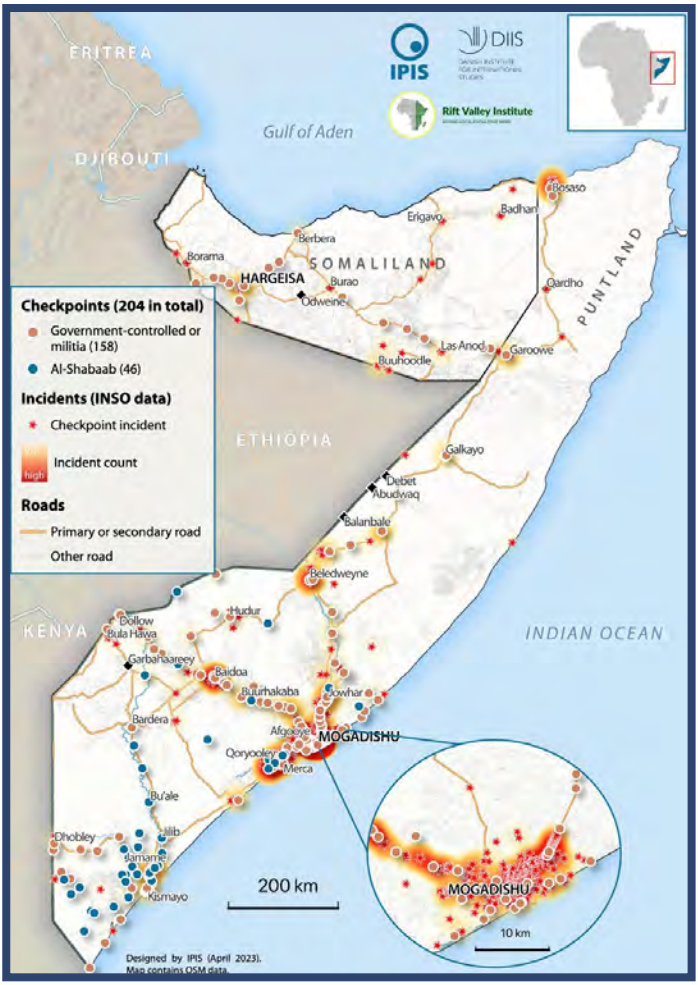
THE COST IN HUMAN LIVES OF CHECKPOINTS

The ultimate cost of checkpoints is the cost in human lives resulting from the violent conflict they cause. Ever since the early 1990s, checkpoints have been a magnet for violence in Somalia.[67] The International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO), for example, identifies 1,237 violent checkpoint-related incidents between 2020 and early 2023. While this number constitutes just 10 per cent of the total violent incidents recorded by the organization for that period,[68] it means that on average, one or two checkpoint- related violent incidents take place every day in Somalia (see map showing the distribution of these incidents).

67 Justin Schon, 'The centrality of checkpoints for civilians during conflict', *Civil Wars* 18 (2016): 281–310.

68 Clarification from INSO, March 2023. For insight in their methodology and data sources, see https://ngosafety.org/terms-and-definitions/.

MAP. Distribution of violent checkpoint-related incidents (2020-2023)



Source: INSO data processed by IPIS

Checkpoints are epicentres of violence for tactical and strategic reasons, both of which derive from the fact that they are a primary manifestation of authority and a key revenue generation mechanism in Somalia. They are tactically targeted in conflict because checkpoints are often static, exposed and symbolic deployments of enemy forces. Indeed, a large share of al-Shabaab attacks against government targets involves attacks against checkpoints, which attests to

the capacity of the group to stage sophisticated lethal attacks against symbols of the Somali state. Especially in the capital Mogadishu and the Banadir region surrounding it, al-Shabaab consistently mounts attacks against checkpoints—whether suicide attacks, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or conventional attacks—to sustain its siege against the federal government. Consequently, this makes the job of checkpoint operator in this geographical area a high-risk occupation and turns the congestion that occurs at checkpoints into a liability for passers-by.

The Somali National Army (SNA) dismantle a militia checkpoint in Wanlaweyne, 2021. © Study participant

Checkpoints are also strategically targeted for purposes of disrupting the flow of finance for opponents and/or overtaking points at which revenue is easily generated. Such competition exists between the federal member states (FMS) and the federal government of Somalia (FGS) as well as between FGS and al-Shabaab in central Somalia. These tensions and conflicts are centred on seeking more power through territorial expansion, which is mostly exhibited in control of checkpoints at the entry and exit points of strategic localities. In part, the ongoing government offensive against al-Shabaab has been conceived as an effort to disrupt al-Shabaab finance, based on research that identifies checkpoints as a key revenue generation mechanism

and one that is easier to disrupt than more de-territorialized revenue strategies.[69] Drone strikes frequently target al-Shabaab checkpoints, and the US uses surveillance of al-Shabaab checkpoints to identify targets.[70] Conversely, there are legion examples of violent incidents in which al-Shabaab takes over checkpoints controlled by clan militia or government entities. The incidence of violence around checkpoints disrupts traffic and may increase food prices at markets that depend on supplies along affected roads.[71]

Finally, there is a gendered dimension to the security dynamics at checkpoints. Checkpoints are predominantly staffed by men—particularly outside urban areas—while much small-scale trade is conducted by women. Women, especially those without clan connections, are vulnerable to harassment at checkpoints, where they may be subjected to gender-based violence. They can, however, also be at an advantage in the male-focused security culture in Somalia. Tightened government security measures at checkpoints mean that male operatives of al-Shabaab have a harder time passing government checkpoints. Because women are traditionally not seen as a security threat in Somali society, they are rarely searched at security checkpoints. Evidence suggests that al-Shabaab increasingly relies on women to smuggle ammunition and weaponry past government checkpoints—and that the government is responding by deploying more female security personnel at urban checkpoints.[72]

69 Exchange with diplomatic source, Nairobi, 22 February 2023. For context, also see: Nisar Majid and Khalif Abdirahman, 'The Offensive & Gatekeeping: Reflections from Somalia', PeaceRep, 1 March 2023. Accessed 11 September 2023, https://peacerep.org/2023/03/01/the-offensive-and-gatekeeping-reflections-from-somalia/.

70 See: https://www.africom.mil/what-we-do/airstrikes/2022-airstrikes.

71 See Marco Alfano and Thomas Cornelissen, 'Spatial Spillovers of Conflict in Somalia', Bonn: Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper No. 1576, 2022.

72 International Crisis Group, 'Women and al-Shabaab's Insurgency', Africa Briefing No 145, Nairobi/Brussels, 27 June 2019, 12.

WHO PAYS FOR CHECKPOINT TAXES?

Checkpoint taxes are what economists call 'indirect taxes'. While traders and transporters directly interface with al-Shabaab and other checkpoint operators, they ultimately do not pay the required transit taxes themselves. Instead, they discharge the ensuing costs on others—essentially the consumers, who foot the final bill of checkpoint taxes incorporated into the sales price. In essence, those ultimately paying for checkpoint fees are powerless to intervene in their predicament because they are geographically, socially, and politically removed from where it takes place. Instead, checkpoint payments are brokered by traders and their representatives (*kaxeeye*), transporters and professional transport brokers, who invoice the checkpoint costs onwards to others without harming their profits. Thus profits systematically accrue to business operators and their counterparts who operate checkpoints, while the ensuing costs are borne by people who rely on the market for their subsistence—including some of the most vulnerable groups in Somalia. In other words, checkpoint costs are essentially diffused across large territories and populations, while revenue generation is spatially concentrated at checkpoints.[73]

In short, the more people rely on markets for their subsistence, the more they finance checkpoints. Because of decades of conflict, Somalia has one of the highest urbanization rates in the region. As of 2020, 45 per cent of the population now live in urban areas, with many of these people displaced from rural areas such that one in every four, or a quarter of urban inhabitants, is an internally displaced person (IDP).[74] As a result, urban hubs such as Baidoa, Beledweyne, Mogadishu and Kismayo are vast areas where people rely on the market to satisfy their daily needs. At the same time, these urban hubs constitute major growth markets for traders. In turn, this increases the traffic volumes of consumption goods that can be taxed by checkpoint operators, compared to the scattered populations in rural hinterlands, who often rely on less commodified livelihoods that are more difficult to tax.

The indirect nature of checkpoint taxes also has implications for international aid. Over recent years, aid has progressively concentrated in the urban hubs under federal government control, thanks to AMISOM/ATMIS (African Union Mission in Somalia/African Union Transition Mission

73 Thus, rising prices in urban markets are spatial spillovers from localized checkpoints, to adopt the terms of Alfano and Cornelissen in 'Spatial Spillovers of Conflict in Somalia'.

74 World Bank, 'Somalia Urbanization Review: Fostering Cities as Anchors of Development', Washington DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and The World Bank, 2020, 36.

in Somalia) military support. Both as part of a global shift towards cash-based assistance, to bypass the widespread diversion of food aid, checkpoint taxation and an al-Shabaab blockade on in-kind aid, aid organizations have reverted to sending vouchers and cash to IDPs/beneficiaries instead, which has generated a new market for small-scale retailers in urban hubs such as Baidoa.[75] Nonetheless, al-Shabaab and government-affiliated checkpoint operators still benefit (albeit indirectly) from this new aid modality. That is, they tax the commodities purchased with humanitarian money as they transit along their checkpoints, inflating consumer good prices charged to IDPs in government-held towns. In reality, what has changed is simply the degree of distance between checkpoint operators and aid money. Before, the logistics contractors of aid organizations would directly pay checkpoint taxes, whereas now checkpoint taxes are paid for indirectly by the beneficiaries who use cash aid to purchase goods at checkpoint-inflated prices. In the end, however, aid organizations, and ultimately western donors, still pay checkpoint fees—but more intermediaries are involved in the process.

In areas under government control, the impact of checkpoint taxes is also unequally distributed between low-value bulk cargo and high-value cargo. This is because in contrast to al-Shabaab, checkpoints in government-controlled areas typically tax vehicles based on their size and not based on the value of the cargo.[76] In this way, a truck carrying sand, stones and fresh agricultural produce—which have a low value compared to the space they occupy on a truck—pays as much or more in checkpoint taxes as does a similar sized truck carrying electronics, sesame seeds or other high-value commodities. This means that, comparatively, the sales price of low-value bulk items is inflated more drastically because of checkpoint taxes than that of high-value commodities.[77]

This can be illustrated with construction materials. The beachy area around Ceel Macaan, located approximately 25 km from Mogadishu, is a source of sand, gravel and stones for construction in the capital. As a regular transporter along the route explains:

> My UD [medium-sized car brand] truck can carry 24 tonnes of sand or gravel. A truckload of sand I sell for USD 115 in Mogadishu and a truckload of gravel for USD 180. But for either of both, I pay USD 62 along the five checkpoints on my route. I make three trips a day, so the checkpoint operators make USD 186 every day with me, while my profit margin is only USD 10–15 per trip. And most of the money they don't put in the government account but in their own pockets. So sometimes I ask, am I working for these checkpoint operators or for myself?[78]

75 Jaspars, Adan and Majid, 'Food and Power'.

76 There are important exceptions for the case of fuel, livestock and sometimes agricultural goods at some major customs points but these exceptions are not consistently applied.

77 See Ali, 'Baidoa corridor case study' for details. For a discussion of the political economic intricacies of high and low value commodities in the Horn of Africa, see Fana Gebresenbet, 'Perishable state-making: Vegetable trade between self-governance and ethnic entitlement in Jigjiga, Ethiopia', DIIS Working Paper 2018:1, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2018; and Hagmann and Stepputat, *Trade Makes States*.

78 Interview with sand trader, Mogadishu, 7 January 2023.

In the end, however, the transporter of sand and gravel does not pay the checkpoint taxes. Although the transporter interfaces with the checkpoint operators, the resulting costs (fuel, maintenance and transit taxes) are absorbed in the sales price paid by those who purchase the materials.

Additionally, checkpoint taxes negatively affect producers and traders of goods that compete with imports. One trader in Mogadishu explains that a sack of maize imported from Southeast Asia pays USD 0.50 in customs duties at Mogadishu port before being offered in the market, while a bag of locally produced maize pays USD 1.50 in checkpoint taxes before reaching the market, thus reducing the competitiveness of local producers in a globalized market.[79]

Finally, there is also an important gendered dimension to checkpoint taxation. While trade in Somalia used to be a male-dominated sector, decades of conflict has meant that women have taken over many traditionally male activities. Key economic sectors such as livestock, agriculture and retail are now dominated by women, even if men still occupy the most profitable positions in these value chains.[80] The fact that checkpoints are predominantly staffed by men, and women dominate sectors that rely on mobility for profits, means that a systematic gendered wealth transfer is built into the political economy of checkpoints in Somalia. Additionally, checkpoints disadvantage poorer and weaker social groups, which are both disproportionately targeted by roadblock authorities and cannot incorporate checkpoint fees into their sales price. This includes informal hawkers, donkey cart drivers and other small-scale vendors, who don't have the power to change prices in response to the elasticity of checkpoint costs.[81]

Al-Shabaab refrains from taxing petty traders because they have not reached the *nisab* (threshold) for *zakat* (alms) and also manages to tax high-wealth businesses and individuals. In contrast, government actors do not manage to tax wealthy and powerful Somali individuals and business people (mostly men) but its taxation is instead enforced on small vendors and hawkers. This accentuates the profile of the government as a dishonest broker and a predatory actor on the less powerful.[82] The effect of checkpoints on local producers in Somalia is even more subtle yet, as is illustrated in how checkpoints interact with the broader dynamics of marginalization of farming communities.

79 Interview with farmer, Mogadishu, 14 March 2023

80 See Sahra Ahmed Koshin, 'Galkayo's Khat Economy: the role of women traders in Puntland, Somalia', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2021; International Crisis Group, 'Women and al-Shabaab's Insurgency', 10–11.

81 See Mohammed, 'Garissa corridor case study' for details.

82 Abshir, Abdirahman and Stogdon, 'Tax and the State', 5–6.

CHECKPOINTS ALONG THE BANANA SUPPLY CHAIN

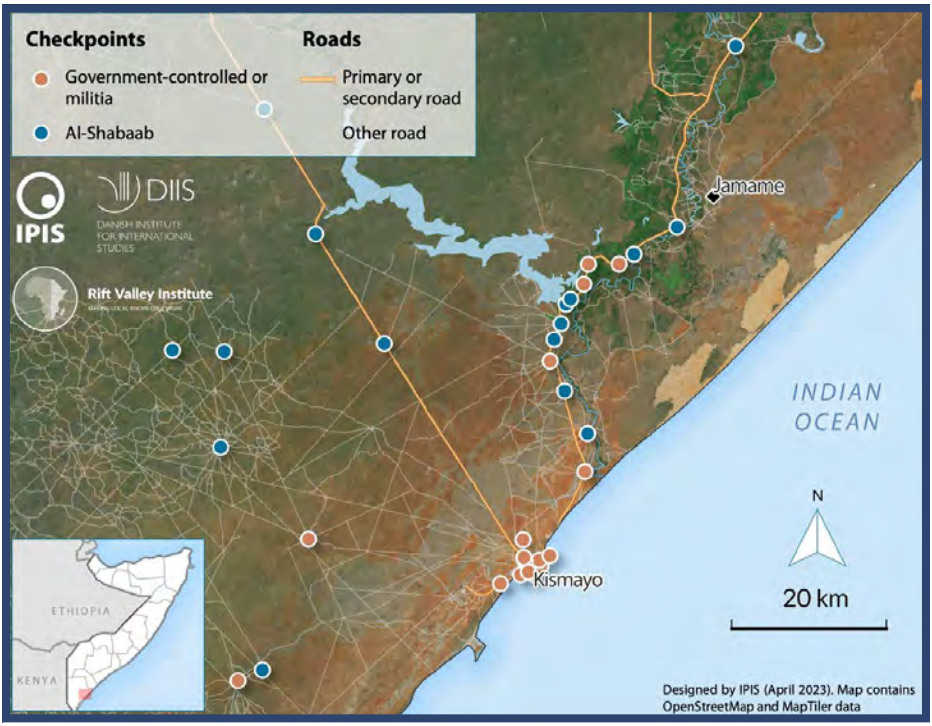
A man readies bananas for sale during the holy month of Ramadan at a market in Mogadishu. © AMISOM/Ilyas Ahmed (public domain)

The large population centres of Mogadishu and Kismayo lie close to the fertile agricultural areas of the Shabelle and Juba Rivers, respectively. These agricultural areas supply these consumption hubs with fresh vegetables and fruits—including a Somali staple, the banana. The small distance between farm and market—often no more than 100 km—is a battleground over the profits that can be made from marketing agricultural produce. It is also home to frequent battles between al-Shabaab and government-allied militias for a share of the surplus value that accrues along the banana supply chain.

This can be illustrated with fresh data on the checkpoints along two routes of the banana supply chain that connect the farming areas where they are produced to urban areas where they are consumed: the Jamaame–Kismayo route in Lower Juba and the Genale (or Janaale)–Mogadishu route in Lower Shabelle. In Jamaame and Genale, around 3,000 ha are currently under banana cultivation, providing a year-round local supply. This fertile agricultural area is also home to many of the most marginalized populations in Somalia, and where al-Shabaab heavily concentrates its

presence.[83] Farming areas are home to Bantu Somalis and agropastoralist Reewin communities not affiliated to more powerful clan lineages that dominate the political economy of Somali clan federalism. They are thus at risk of economic exploitation and political marginalization.[84] In the course of years of conflict, many of the minority communities inhabiting this fertile area have been forced to flee or sell their land and resettled into IDP camps, from where they are employed in the farming areas as day labourers in large plantations of export crops and exploited by dominant clans.[85]

MAP. Checkpoints surrounding Kismayo, including along the banana supply chain from Jamaame to Kismayo



83 European Asylum Support Office, 'Somalia Security Situation'.

84 Nisar Majid and Stephen McDowell, 'Hidden dimensions of the Somalia famine', *Global Food Security* 1 (2012): 36–42.

85 Jaspars, Adan and Majid, 'Food and Power'.

Based on the data collected for this study, it is possible to explore how checkpoints figure in the political economy of marginalization of these farming communities by examining how they interact with the supply chain of bananas, an important product travelling along these routes. As Table 5 shows, between Genale and Mogadishu there are 15 checkpoints and between Jamaame and Kismayo there are 16 checkpoints. Along each route, transporters first meet an al-Shabaab checkpoint (these farming areas are important territories for the group), at which they are levied with the one-time al-Shabaab fee, comprised of gadiid (transit fee) for the vehicle (USD 9) and the remaining amount a dalag, or charge for the cargo of farming produce. The subsequent al-Shabaab checkpoints that a vehicle encounters are for verification purposes only.

IMAGE. Al-Shabaab receipts for dalag (top) and gadiid (bottom) for a vehicle carrying bananas. © Jay Badahur

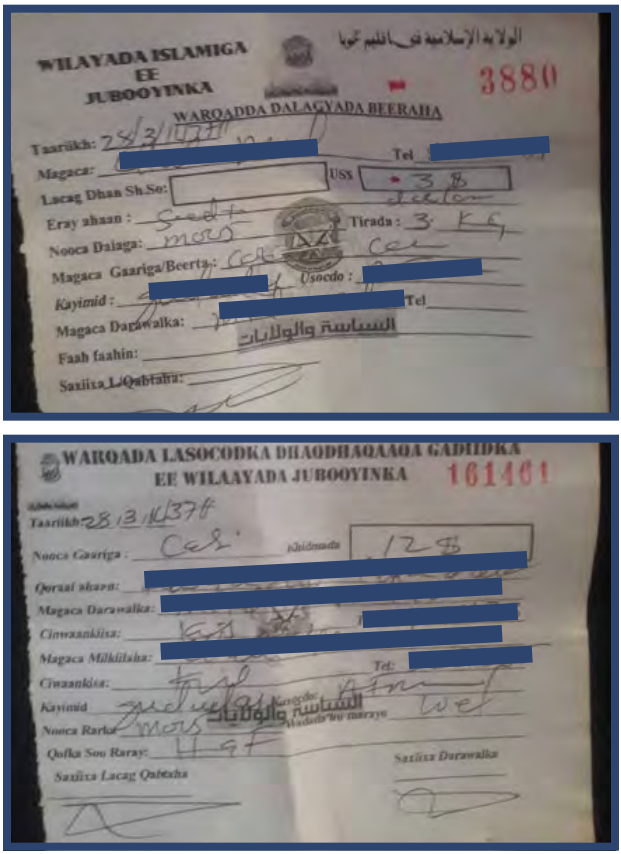


TABLE 5. CHECKPOINTS ALONG TWO BANANA SUPPLY CHAINS

From Genale to Bakara market (Mogadishu)				From Jamaame to Kismayo		
Checkpoint	**Amount (USD)**	**Operator**		**Checkpoint**	**Operator**	**Amount (USD)**
Laabaas	24.00	al-Shabaab		Jamaame	al-Shabaab	35.00
Bulo Bur Buriye		al-Shabaab		Bangeeni	al-Shabaab	
Buulo–Yerow		al-Shabaab		Qaamqaam	al-Shabaab/Jubaland Authorities	2.00
KM50 (Lambar 50)	15.00	clan militia		Sanguuni	al-Shabaab	0.30
Laantabuur (Muuri)	6.00	clan militia		Kobon	al-Shabaab	
Hero–Agoon	6.00	SNA		Baar Sanguuni	al-Shabaab/SNA	4.00
Bar Ismael/ Baar Ismaaciil	2.00	South West State, SNA		Fargagow	al-Shabaab/SNA	
Bodboodka	6.00	South West State, SNA		Singaleer	Jubaland Authorities	0.10
Lafoole	6.00	South West State, SNA		Far Wamo	Jubaland Authorities	0.10
Calamada (Xaawo-Cabdi)	4.00	Somali National Police		Bulo Gadud	Jubaland Authorities	2.00
Sinka Dheere/ Siinka Dheer	10.00	SNA, Somali National Police, Banadir Regional Administration		Bunda Mashqul	Jubaland Authorities	0.10
Weedo/Wey-dow	1.00			Yoontoy	Jubaland Authorities	0.10
Ex-Control Afgoye	10.00	Banadir Regional Administration and FGS Ministry of Finance		Xaaji Weyne	Jubaland Authorities	
Kuliyada	2.00	Banadir Regional Administration		Ceejlaale	Jubaland Authorities	0.50
Sinai	?	Somali National Police		Gobweyn	Jubaland Authorities	4.00
				Via Afmadow	Jubaland Authorities	10.00
Total (USD)	92.00					58.00

Source: Compiled by author based on input from study participants.

CHECKPOINTS JOINTLY OPERATED BY GOVERNMENT AND AL-SHABAAB

Aerial view of the river crossing at Qaamqaam, with an al-Shabaab checkpoint on the right bank facing a checkpoint by the Jubaland Security Forces on the left bank. Satellite Imagery – Pleiades © CNES 2023, Distribution Airbus DS.

Along the Jamaame–Kismayo route, some checkpoints are operated either in turn or at close proximity by Jubaland authorities (comprising Ras Kamboni/Ogaden forces, loyal to Madobe) and al-Shabaab. Qaamqaam is a river crossing where minibuses can take a shortcut to Kismayo, circumventing a share of the checkpoints. Coming from Jamaame, there is an al-Shabaab checkpoint on the river bank and less than 30 meters away, on the other river bank, a checkpoint operated by the Jubaland authorities. As one local trader explains: 'The minibus offloads its goods and small locally fabricated boats carry them to the other side, where they are loaded on another minibus that takes the goods to Kismayo over a bush route that joins the main road at Gobweyn'.[86] By local agreement, the checkpoints at Baar Sanguuni and Fargagow, which mark the border between al-Shabaab and government-controlled territory along the main route, are controlled by al-Shabaab for 15 days and then by the Jubaland forces for 15 days, thus sharing revenue collection in rotation.[87] As such, competition over the margins associated with taxing the transit of bananas also gives way to local accommodation to ensure a mutually beneficial status quo of wealth extraction from the banana trade.

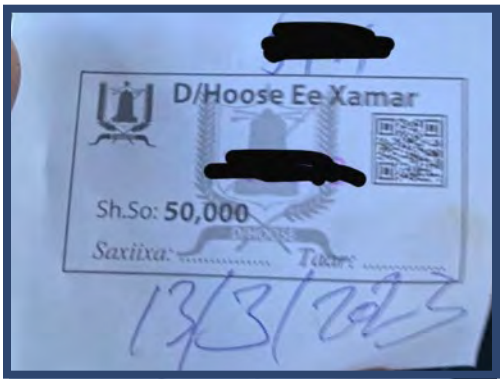
86 Interview with trader, Kismayo, 22 March 2023.

87 Interview with confidential source, Kismayo, 19 March 2023.

After leaving the area under the control of al-Shabaab, checkpoints are operated by a variety of different checkpoint operators. While there is a lack of detail on checkpoint operators in Jubaland— beyond their affiliation to the Jubaland Security Forces—the checkpoints from Genale to Mogadishu are operated by a diverse range of actors (see Table 5). The formal affiliations of the checkpoint actors offer some indication of the actors involved, with clan affiliation a significant political-economic factor along this route. All the checkpoints affiliated to various government entities are operated by various major clan lineages.

The checkpoint at KM (Lambar) 50 is operated by the Biyomaal sub-clan of the Dir, marking the end of their territory, which extends all the way to Merca, including the farming area around Jamaame. From there onward, checkpoints are most often operated by a mix of the Abgal and Habir Gedir (Sa'ad and Ayr) sub-clans, with some presence of the Garre sub-clan of the Digil-Rahanweyn. During the banana wars of the early 1990s, many of these sub-clans fought one another for control over points at which to tax the banana supply chain,[88] but the current status quo is that everyone taxes the banana trade.

IMAGE. Receipts from checkpoints at Ex-Control Afgoye (left) and Lafoole (right).[89]



Previous research expresses concern over discriminatory taxes on farming communities, pointing out that checkpoint operators are typically from dominant clans, while farming is done by marginalized communities, and that checkpoint taxes thus amount to a predatory form

88 In the 1980s, bananas produced in this region alone constituted 30 per cent of total export earnings in Somalia. After 1991, the margin of profit along the international banana supply chain has been at the epicentre of what are in hindsight often called the Somali 'banana wars,' which pitted small-scale farmers and plantation owners, warlords, sub-clans and multinational companies against one another in a series of complex and deadly conflicts. They competed for control over passage points along the routes to evacuate agricultural produce because of the high profit margins involved. See: Christian Webersik, 'Fighting for the Plenty: The Banana Trade in Southern Somalia', *Oxford Development Studies* 33 (2005).

89 Study participants indicate that the actual amounts paid are three to five times the amount stated on the receipt.

of wealth transfer from already politically marginalized populations towards politically well-connected clans.[90] The intensity of checkpoints and their implications for the cost of transport bears this out. As recapped in Table 6, the density of checkpoints is relatively higher on routes that connect farming areas to urban consumption centres. Along these routes, checkpoints appear at a rate of one per each 5 km travelled, translating into an average of 20 checkpoints per 100 km, compared to an average of 5 checkpoints on roads connecting major urban hubs. While checkpoint taxes for smaller vehicles carrying farming products are much lower than those charged for the large trucks used for other types of cargo, the transit taxes nonetheless weigh heavier on farming produce because of the relatively low value of farming products. As one banana farmer from Lower Shabelle puts it: 'Today's banana price is USD 24 for 100 kg. This van can carry 2 tonnes worth USD 480. Before we even make the sale, we pay USD 105 to isbaaro only in government-controlled area.'[91] This excludes transit taxes levied by al-Shabaab.

Importantly, this discrimination against local farming produce affects women more so. In rural households, women most often produce for local markets, while men produce for export[92], which is taxed at a different rate.

TABLE 6. Comparison of checkpoints along farm routes and inter-urban routes

	Farm routes	Inter-urban routes
Checkpoints per 100 km	20	5
Distance between checkpoints	5 km	20 km
Cost per tonne per 100 km	USD 46	USD 10

Source: Summary of data from Table 2 and Table 3.

Because agricultural products have such low value, checkpoint taxes and transport costs more broadly constitute a significant portion of the retail price. For example, a female trader selling fruits in the Bakara market in Mogadishu explains: 'It costs us USD 20 in checkpoint taxes to transport our fruit the 30 km from Afgoye to town. On average, we pay just as much to the farmers as to these bloody checkpoint operators!'[93]

Nonetheless, as a fruit trader, she is also implicated in benefiting from the marginalization of farming communities. Farming communities themselves are unable to travel to the market—and reap the associated profits—because of their lack of clan connections. One farmer in Lower Shabelle elaborates:

90 Jaspars, Adan and Majid, 'Food and Power'.

91 Interview with banana farmer, Mogadishu, 16 January 2023.

92 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 'National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods: Somalia', Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2021, xv.

93 Interview with trader, Mogadishu, 16 December 2022.

> To be able to pass all these checkpoints operated by the Abgal and other Hawiye, it is automatically the case that you also need to be Hawiye as the driver and owner of the goods. People from the farming areas would be harassed too much at the checkpoints for not having significant connections.[94]

In this way, transporters and traders who act as intermediaries between farm and market are also implicated in the wealth transfer from marginalized communities towards dominant clans. This is corroborated by a recent report that argues checkpoints leading into the capital city 'are maintained by detachments of security forces that are members of certain clans. … Members of marginal groups moving by car have been prevented from passing through checkpoints, even if they carry the required identity certificate.'[95] In other words, feeder roads are politicized spaces where identity politics determine who gets to partake in the wealth that accrues from putting things in motion. In this space, checkpoints form literal trade barriers, blocking marginalized communities from participating in and benefiting from trade.

As a result, the margin of profit associated with transporting and marketing bananas is withheld from those who produce bananas. Instead, the system operates in favour of traders and transporters who have the right kind of clan connections. In turn, this implies that traders and transporters are from the same clan background as the checkpoint operators, who equally partake in skimming off what would otherwise be profits resulting from the relatively short distance between farm and market. Large-scale farmers, who acquired concessions through land grabbing under Siad Barre before 1991 or by collaborating with warlords after 1991, are often from dominant clan lineages and can therefore pass the checkpoints without problem. They may absorb part of the profits from small-scale farmers by purchasing their produce at farm-level prices and then selling it at profit in urban areas. Small-scale farmers who wish to remain independent of large-scale farmers must rent vehicles from professional transporters from majority clans, who also absorb a margin of profit.[96] At the same time, those farmers who have abandoned (or have been forced to abandon) subsistence farming and work on plantations also rely on buying food sold by traders from majority clans in local markets at rates inflated by checkpoint taxes. According to a local source who prefers to remain anonymous:

> It is no surprise that many small-scale farmers in my area abandon their fields and instead go try their luck producing charcoal. While it is also taxed along the road—USD 75 for al-Shabaab and USD 80 for government checkpoints—it has a much more stable rate of profit, given that it is not vulnerable to climate variation and irrigation demands.[97]

94 Interview with farmer, Mogadishu, 15 February 2023.

95 Finnish Immigration Service, 'Somalia: Fact-finding mission', 22–23.

96 Interviews with farmers, Mogadishu, 14 December 2022. Renting a two tonne vehicle costs USD 40; large-scale farmers often own their vehicles, thus constituting an important margin of profit.

97 Interview with farmer, Genale, 15 November 2022.

HOW DO TRANSPORTERS NAVIGATE CHECKPOINTS?

How do Somali transporters and traders navigate the complex checkpoint geographies along trade routes? When asked about their strategies, they reveal three main ways of coping. The first strategy—the most widely adopted one—consists of the pragmatic option of simply paying whoever controls the checkpoint.[98] The terms of passage matter, however: Transporters strongly prefer the tax regime offered by al-Shabaab to government checkpoints. The second way of navigating the multiplicity of checkpoints consists of working through checkpoint brokers, who rely on their clan connections to smooth the way and render checkpoint expenses more predictable. A third way of navigating checkpoint geographies is by physically circumventing checkpoints, a strategy that is risky and only available on a season basis.

PAY TO PASS: THE PRAGMATICS OF THE ROAD

Checkpoint taxes are indirect taxes, meaning that the transporters and traders who pay them to checkpoint operators are able to transfer these costs to their clients or consumers. By extension, Somali transporters are more directly concerned with the impact of checkpoints on their business than the political aspirations of those controlling the road. As one expert observes in a 2021 report, 'Within certain limits … transporters [red] are willing to pay whoever they think is the dominant security provider in the area to get their stuff through.'[99] This pragmatic stance among transporters—the foot soldiers of the Somali trade economy—makes it possible for a variety of armed actors to lay claim to transit taxes and favours those who offer the least encumbrance in the process. The fact is that al-Shabaab has consistently offered the most straightforward terms of passage, which explains the popularity of their approach among transporters, compared to other checkpoint operators.[100] This is verified in a report from the Hiraal Institute, which states:

The only taxpayers based in the cities that saw al-Shabaab taxes as legitimate were cargo truck operators. This is because they received services in return for the taxes they paid to the group: security and safe passage in all areas controlled by the group. All the other businessmen [sic]

98 Also see: Musa, Varming and Stepputat, 'Raising Fiscal Revenues'.

99 European Asylum Support Office, 'Somalia Security Situation', 42.

100 For cattle traders, see Nisar Majid et al., 'Somalia's Politics: The Usual Business? A Synthesis Paper of the Conflict Research Programme', London: London School of Economics, 2021, 26.

considered al-Shabaab taxes to be illegitimate.[101]

Among transporters, predictability is perhaps the most important factor in determining the relative popularity of the al-Shabaab checkpoint regime compared to that of the government. Professional transporters want to reduce business risks by reliably calculating transport costs before they depart. Given that checkpoint costs make up the bulk of transport costs, standardized taxation is key to manufacturing predictability.[102] This is exceedingly important in a marginal economy in which minor price differences are often decisive in making or breaking deals. As one transporter puts it about checkpoints in government-controlled areas:

Where al-Shabaab taxes are predictable and fixed, government and militia CPs [checkpoints] are not predictable and they keep on fluctuating. Negotiating with each and every isbaaro is difficult. The worst to handle are soo boodoo [pop-up] checkpoints because these are not budgeted.'[103]

TABLE 7. Main contrasts attributed to checkpoints (government-controlled and al-Shabaab areas)

	Government	al-Shabaab
Tax amount	*Negotiated at checkpoint*	*Standardized*
Tax base	Based on vehicle size	Based on origin/destination, cargo type and vehicle size
Checkpoint revenue distribution	Decentralized	Centralized
Recurrence of payment	Multiple payments per journey	One payment per journey
Checkpoint operators	Self-financed through checkpoint	Salaried by group
Receipt	Sometimes	Yes

Source: Compiled by authors based on input from study participants.

CHECKPOINT BROKERAGE

To reduce the friction introduced by endless negotiations at checkpoints and to increase the predictability of transit taxes, traders and transporters in some areas rely on clan connections to navigate checkpoints. Invoking the ancient practice of relying on influential clan members to broker safe passage through territories of affiliated lineages (abaan), transporters currently rely on checkpoint brokers, intermediaries to whom they pay a fee to negotiate checkpoint fees on

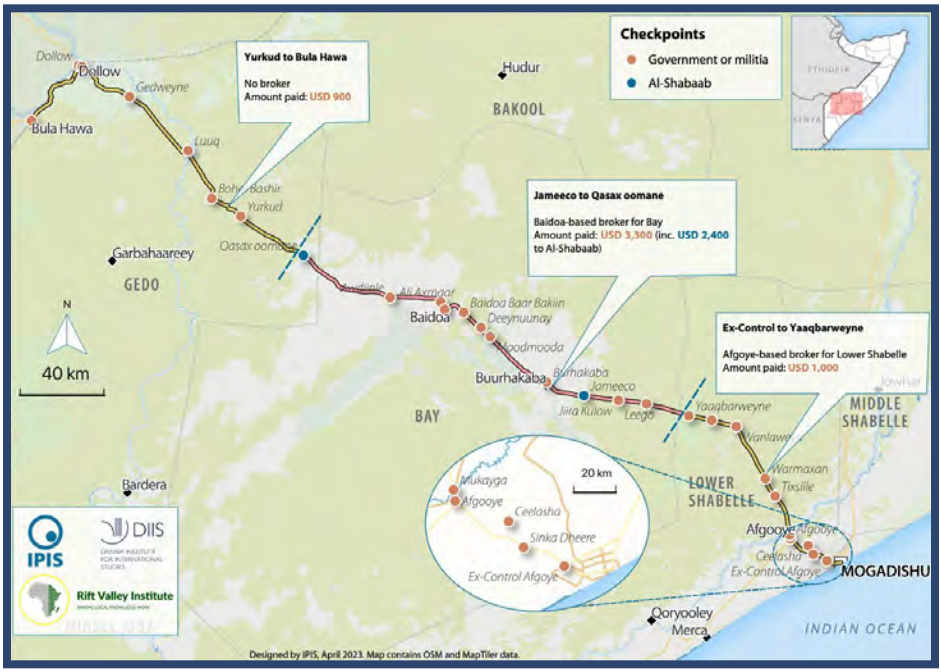
101 Hiraal Institute, 'A Losing Game', 10.

102 Hagmann, 'Trade, taxes and tensions', 19. Also see: Ahmad, Bandula-Irwin and Ibrahim, 'Who governs?'.

103 Interview with transporter, Mogadishu, 29 December 2022.

their behalf before they take to the road.[104] When transporters subsequently meet checkpoints along the road, they are asked to identify their broker, who is then asked to confirm by phone and pay through a mobile money transfer for the truck to be released.[105] Checkpoint brokers are informal actors but they are not small scale. In order to be able to negotiate and guarantee passage along armed checkpoint operators, they need to dispose of substantial economic and social capital. These brokers (called dilaal in Somali and maqalas in Arabic) are persons who dispose of significant, and known, economic capital to warrant possible payment defaults among their clients.

MAP. Checkpoints and checkpoint brokers along the Baidoa corridor



104 It is unknown as to exactly when checkpoint brokers first emerged along the corridor but other sources indicate that the phenomenon existed as early as 2003. See: Transparency Solutions, 'Beyond isbaaro: Reclaiming Somalia's haunted roads', Hargeisa: IAAAP (Somali Accountability Programme), 2016, 17, 19–20. It was already a widespread practice for cattle trade; see Philemon Ng'asike, Tobias Hagmann and Oliver Vivian Wasonga, 'Brokerage in the borderlands: the political economy of livestock intermediaries in northern Kenya', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 15/3 (2020): 1–21. The association to *abaan* is made by a security expert in a phone interview, Nairobi, 16 October 2022.

105 Significantly, at present checkpoint taxes by and large seem to be settled through EVC (mobile money transfers) instead of cash. In contrast, al-Shabaab seems to prefer cash payments in Jubaland to avoid anti-money laundering and tracking mechanisms.

Brokers essentially rely on their standing among the (sub)clans that are found along the transport route. As is evidenced in the Baidoa corridor case study report, the brokers mediating checkpoint passage in Lower Shabelle need to be from locally dominant clans, which operate the majority of government checkpoints in this region. However great their influence and standing among the checkpoint brokers from their own clan family, brokers would have little leverage over checkpoint operators from another clan family. This is why transporters who move goods from Lower Shabelle to neighbouring Bay region need to rely on a checkpoint broker from the clan that is dominant there. Checkpoint brokerage is a widespread phenomenon and can even occur at the level of individual checkpoints. As this informant explains:

> Our trucks use this one particular road every week, so eventually we get to know the guys at the checkpoint. So at this one Biyomaal clan checkpoint, we established a connection with one of the checkpoint operators. Even when he's not there, our drivers mention his name at the checkpoint and we get waved through. We pay him directly and then it's cheaper for us and he makes some extra. In 2021, when the Biyomaal had four checkpoints because of a conflict, he saved us a tonne of money![106]

Because checkpoint brokerage relies on clan connections, this phenomenon reinforces the importance of clan affiliations in stitching together traders and checkpoint operators. Given that checkpoint taxes are negotiated beforehand, checkpoint brokerage increases the predictability of transit taxes and the speed of passage. An additional advantage is that it creates another layer of distance between traders and al-Shabaab, which is a sanctioned checkpoint operator. In effect, in streamlining checkpoint payments into a single payment, checkpoint brokerage mimics and extends the system of single-payment transit taxes prevalent along trade routes under al-Shabaab control. In contrast, at present it is only possible speculate how checkpoint brokerage might displace power and money from the local level (at the checkpoint) to select checkpoint commanders, who interface with brokers and are able to negotiate for multiple checkpoints. As such, checkpoint brokerage may also inadvertently aid and abet the centralizing impetus of state-building, gradually weakening decentralized power over transit taxes.

Checkpoint brokers are but one way in which checkpoint taxes are embedded in social relations and subject to constant negotiations. When transit taxes get out of hand, transporters and traders combine to engage in more or less formal negotiations with the responsible authorities—whether they be clan-based, government or al-Shabaab—to try and influence transit taxes.[107] As the Baidoa corridor case study indicates, in 2022, when severe drought combined with exceptionally high fuel prices, a Mogadishu-based transport association managed to negotiate significantly lower checkpoint taxes. The collective bargaining power of transporters vis-à-vis checkpoint operators has its limits, however, proving unable to reduce the burden of checkpoints on the competitiveness of trade from Mogadishu vis-à-vis Bosaso and Berbera.

106 Phone interview with large-scale farmer and trader, 5 April 2023.

107 Abdirahman, 'Contested Commerce', 29.

ALTERNATIVE TRADE ROUTES AND TRADE MODALITIES

Because checkpoint taxes accumulate in government areas because transporters must pass through more of them, they make a sport of trying to bypass them.[108] Given that checkpoint costs outweigh the costs of fuel and distance, 'some will prefer a longer route via al-Shabaab areas rather than a shorter one through government areas'.[109] According to one driver: 'Instead of following the main corridor from Mogadishu to Baidoa, one can divert and pay a single checkpoint tax to al-Shabaab at Tortoorow. After that, it's free passage until one re-joins the main route, which is littered with government checkpoints.'[110] In the past, however, government actors have also retaliated against avoidance of their checkpoints. In April 2017, for instance, 60 trucks were blockaded at Wanlaweyne in Lower Shabelle when federal government security forces attempted to force transporters to pay arrears for having used the alternative al-Shabaab-controlled route to Baidoa.[111]

This strategy is most feasible during the dry seasons, when the hard packed soil allows avoiding main roads and cutting tracks through the bush. When they opt for this approach, transporters take a bush route to bypass the main checkpoints on the route from Kismayo to Dhobley via Afmadow. This route leaves the main road after the al-Shabaab checkpoint at Berhani and passes into Kenya at Deg-Ilima. By taking this route, at least four government checkpoints are bypassed.[112] It is important to note, however, that the reliance on checkpoint brokers along the Mogadishu–Baidoa corridor implies it is of little use to physically circumvent government checkpoints, as payments are settled beforehand anyway.

Donkey carts are used to circumvent static checkpoints. © Jamal Mohammed

Circumventing al-Shabaab checkpoints is very risky. Most transporters do not attempt to do so, as they risk losing their vehicle and their life. In response to past evasions, al-

108 Hagmann and Stepputat, *Trade Makes States*, Musa, 'Lasanod', 18–19; European Asylum Support Office, 'Somalia Security Situation'.

109 Jaspars, Adan and Majid, 'Food and Power', 27–28

110 Interview with driver, Mogadishu, 5 February 2023.

111 United Nations Security Council, S/2017/924, 168.

112 The route has since been mined by al-Shabaab, forcing transporters to risk their lives or stick to the main road.

Shabaab monitors secondary roads and mines tracks that it does not directly control. The only possibility to circumvent al-Shabaab checkpoints is by relying on small-scale non-motorized transport. Towns under al-Shabaab blockade are often supplied by using donkey carts, which are more difficult to keep track of as they are able to take footpaths away from the presence of the group.[113] Similarly, cattle traders have found ways to circumvent al-Shabaab blockades on cattle that is traded in the direction of Kismayo from the rich government-controlled pasture lands around Afmadow. They drive cattle by hoof from Afmadow along bush routes towards zones under al-Shabaab control, from whence it is loaded onto trucks and exported to Kismayo, as if it the cattle has been sourced from al-Shabaab territory.[114]

In sum, transporters and traders have developed a broad repertoire of tactics to smooth the cross-border experience of navigating checkpoints. Some of these tactics have a substantial impact on the political economy of checkpoints per se. In particular, the use of checkpoint brokers can have stabilizing and centralizing effects on the politics of passage, while reinforcing the importance of clan connections. This is in contrast to affiliation with the competing state-building projects of government administrations and al-Shabaab along the transport route.

113 This is not always effective and donkey carts are singled out as suspect in areas under al-Shabaab control. For example, see: Harun Maruf, 'Somalia's Al-Shabab Militants Shoot Donkeys as Part of Economic War', *VOA*, 1 March 2018. Accessed 14 September 2023, https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-al-shabab-donkeys-killed/4275777.html; 'Donkey carts build resilience in Southern Somalia', IOM News Global, 5 February 2016. Accessed 14 September 2023, https://www.iom.int/news/donkey-carts-build-resilience-southern-somalia.

114 Focus group discussion with traders and brokers, Garissa, 11 November 2022.

HOW DO CHECKPOINTS FIGURE IN COMPETING STATE-BUILDING PROJECTS?

It is important to explore how checkpoints feature in the competing political projects and state-building efforts by al-Shabaab and the Federal Government of Somalia. Arguably, checkpoints are an expression of state-building efforts rather than the absence of such efforts. In contrast to the past, it has become nearly impossible for warlords or clan militia to operate freelance checkpoints without at least nominally allying with a government administration or being destroyed or absorbed by al-Shabaab. Yet, the 'state effects'[115] of checkpoints are variable and have mixed results.

AL-SHABAAB: CHECKPOINT GOVERNMENT

Checkpoints are key to al-Shabaab state-building efforts. This study maps a total of 45 al-Shabaab-controlled checkpoints in south-central Somalia, which form the backbone of a sophisticated and efficient administration. Al-Shabaab effectively steers checkpoints to generate a centrally controlled revenue stream. Consequently, the group is able to project a predictable and standardized interface of public authority to Somali citizens, with some semblance of a fiscal contract with the Somalis that directly interface with its checkpoints. Because of this, the al-Shabaab taxation system has been likened to a rudimentary form of state-building, in the sense of a mafia-type protection racket.[116]

The al-Shabaab checkpoint taxation regime is complicated but standardized. Instead of charging a uniform checkpoint fee, the amount a given road user pays depends on different elements. First of all, al-Shabaab levies separate taxes: a transit tax for the vehicle (gadiid) and for its cargo.[117] Vehicle transit fees are standardized per vehicle type (increasing with size and carrying capacity). Cargo taxes increase progressively, in keeping with vehicle carrying capacity, and according to the nature of the cargo (see Table 8). Separate receipts are issued for both vehicle transit and its cargo, to be shown when passing other al-Shabaab checkpoints later on,

115 Timothy Mitchell, 'Society, Economy, and the State Effect', in *State/Culture: State Formation after the Cultural Turn*, ed. George Steinmetz, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.

116 See: Hagmann and Stepputat, 'Tilly in the Tropics'; Ahmad, 'Who governs?'.

117 *Gadiid* is also called '*steerso* fee' (steering fee) by transporters.

and for purposes of separate invoicing on the part of the transporter and trader who owns the merchandize, respectively.

IMAGE. Al-Shabaab receipts for gadiid (left) and badeeco (right) issued in Jubaland in 2021. © Jay Bahadur

The cargo loaded onto vehicles is then subject to a number of differentiations. The overarching differentiation is between agricultural produce (*dalag*), livestock (*xoolo*) and merchandize (*badeeco*). Each of these are taxed differently.

Livestock (*xoolo*) is not taxed under transportation but only at the moment of sale at cattle markets. Transporters only pay gadiid for the vehicle carrying the livestock and are issued with a livestock travel document that they subsequently need to be able to show.[118] Farm products are also subject to a differentiated cross-border taxation regime. Fresh agricultural produce (*dalag*) is taxed at a very low rate of between USD 2–10 per vehicle.[119] It appears that this low rate is reserved for farm products that are consumed locally such as bananas, mangos and tomatoes. In contrast, al-Shabaab tax agricultural produce that is commercially imported or destined for export as merchandize (*badeeco*) at much higher rates. Sesame seeds (a major Somali export product) and potatoes (a major import from Kenya) are primary examples.

Badeeco also comprises other kinds of cargo. That is, al-Shabaab checkpoint operators differentiate between generic food items (*raashin*) and general cargo (*bagaash*), demanding about three times as much in taxes for the latter.[120] Table 8 illustrates the al-Shabaab system

118 Bahadur, 'Terror and Taxes', 8–9.

119 Bahadur, 'Terror and Taxes', 7. It is to be noted, however, that *dalag* also comprises other forms of agricultural taxes levied on farmers. It also constitutes a substantive revenue stream for al-Shabaab. For example, see: UN Security Council, S/2018/1002, 101.

120 For a full overview of different categories found in a batch of al-Shabaab checkpoint receipts, see Badahur, 'Terror and Taxes', 10.

with typical amounts of tax that transporters report paying to al-Shabaab along the Kismayo–Garissa corridor in late 2022.

TABLE 8. Al-Shabaab vehicle transit and cargo taxes, by vehicle type (levied at Jubaland checkpoints)

	Transit and cargo fees levied by al-Shabaab	
Vehicle type	*Transit (gadiid)*	*Cargo (badeeco)*
Taxi	30	-
Minibus (Homey/Caasi)	35	-
Medium-duty truck (Dyno/Atlas)	90	180
Truck (UD/Canter)	180	300
Trailer (22-tyre truck)	450	975

Source: Mohammed, 'Garissa corridor case study'.

Al-Shabaab levies taxes only once, providing free passage along subsequent al-Shabaab checkpoints. Therefore, al-Shabaab checkpoints located close to ports and national borders, where transporters typically first encounter the group, are likely to collect much more revenue than checkpoints in the middle of a trade route. As is already clear, Al-Shabaab operates checkpoints along a number of key trade routes in Somalia. Although these checkpoints are far outnumbered by government checkpoints, the revenue streams they generate tend to exceed government revenues (also see the Baidoa and Garissa corridor case studies).

The Kismayo–Dhobley corridor

Based on a traffic count and triangulation through interviews with transporters in Garissa and Kismayo, it is feasible to estimate al-Shabaab checkpoint revenues along one of the key arteries between Somalia and Kenya, the Kismayo–Garissa corridor. Al-Shabaab operates checkpoints along each of the entry and exit points to Kismayo; namely, Labikuus, Berhani and Janay Abdallah. This allows the group to tax all outgoing and incoming traffic from this key port city, which supplies Kenya with an significant quantity of imported goods. Table 9 presents a calculation of daily, monthly and annual revenues along this key corridor. As traffic comes to a standstill during rainy periods, these checkpoint revenues are only based on the transit taxes collected during the dry months of the year. Based on a conservative estimation of seven dry months,[121] al-Shabaab makes an estimated USD 12.7 million in checkpoint revenues from trade

121 Traffic practically comes to a standstill along this corridor during the two rainy seasons (*gu* and *deyr*). These seasons are, however, far from stable due to increasing climate variation. It is likely that the road network is usable for longer periods throughout the year, yielding higher annual checkpoint revenues. It is also important to note that previous calculations of checkpoint revenues use a 12-month baseline for checkpoint taxes, thus likely overestimating al-Shabaab revenues.

along the Garissa corridor.[122]

TABLE 9. Al-Shabaab checkpoint revenue (USD), Kismayo–Dhobley corridor

	*Standard al-Shabaab rate (USD)**	*Average daily traffic (number of vehicles)*		*Daily tax revenues al-Shabaab (USD)*	
Type of vehicle		Kenya to Kismayo	Kismayo to Kenya	Kenya to Kismayo	Kismayo to Kenya
Trailer (22- tyre)	1,425	15	14	21,375	19,950
UD/Canter	480	10	25	4,800	12,000
Minibus	35	8	15	280	525
Taxi	30	37	22	1,110	660
Sub-total				*27,565*	*33,135*
Daily total				*60,700*	
Monthly total				*1,821,000*	
*Annual total***				*12,747,000*	

**Al-Shabaab checkpoint tax rates used here are for a typical fully loaded vehicle of each type. Actual amounts may vary substantially because of the complex al-Shabaab complex taxation system.*
*** Based on 7 months of dry-season traffic; monthly total based on 30-day month*

Source: Mohammed, 'Garissa corridor case study'.

The Mogadishu–Baidoa–Dollow corridor

The paved road from Mogadishu through Baidoa to Ethiopia (through Dollow) and Kenya (through Bula Hawa) is one of the most important commercial arteries in Somalia. Since at least 2018, al-Shabaab operates only two checkpoints along this route: the Jameeco checkpoint in Bay region and the Qasax oomane (or Qansax Homane) checkpoint in Gedo region. [123] As already indicated, al-Shabaab taxes vehicles only once. This means that Jameeco taxes traffic entering the corridor from Mogadishu while Qasax oomane taxes traffic coming from Kenya (the Bula Hawa border post) or Ethiopia (the Dollow border post). Of the two, Jameeco—often referred to as 'Checkpoint X' by transporters—is apparently where most revenues are raised, reflective of the predominance of trade from Mogadishu compared to trade from Kenya and Ethiopia.

As detailed in the Baidoa corridor case study, Jameeco is much more expensive than al-Shabaab checkpoints in Jubaland. A fully loaded reinforced Fiat truck carrying 60 tonnes typically pays USD 2,100 in checkpoint taxes while an even larger Iveco 22-tyre truck, capable of handling 75

122 This seems to match the figures provided in Badahur, 'Terror and taxes', 21, for one of the three checkpoints along the Garissa corridor but is much higher than the checkpoint revenue al-Shabaab is thought to have raised in Jubaland in 2016. According to the Hiraal Institute, in 2016 al-Shabaab made about USD 3.6 million from checkpoint taxes in Jubaland (Hiraal Institute, 'AS Finance System', 4). In contrast, the estimation in this report is based on constant taxation rates in both directions, while it is likely that products travelling from Kenya to Kismayo are charged at a slightly lower rate than in the other direction, as this often concerns goods for consumption, not manufactured products.

123 UN Security Council, S/2018/1002, 110.

tonnes, pays USD 2,500.[124] These amounts combine gadiid and badeeco and are paid beforehand by mobile money transfer to a broker, who handles checkpoint taxes for all checkpoint operators in South West state. They exclude a USD 50 fee for discharging and reloading all cargo from the truck for inspection at Jameeco checkpoint, a procedure that is said to take a lot of time. Given a traffic count of between 40 to 50 vehicles of different sizes and types, in 2018 Jameeco is estimated to yield between USD 30,000 and 70,000 per day in checkpoint taxes,[125] which translates to between USD 11 and USD 25 million per year.[126]

While the study did not collect first-hand information on the amounts of these tax revenues, earlier research suggests that the al-Shabaab checkpoint taxes along another key cross-border corridor, the Mogadishu–Beledweyne–Ferfer route, may also yield the group around USD 5 million annually.[127] Taken together, this means that al-Shabaab taxation of these three key cross-border trade routes nets a conservative USD 25 million a year in checkpoint revenues—enough to cover the USD 23.7 million in total annual expenses that the group is estimated to have.[128] If this (conservative) figure seems high, bear in mind that it is only a small portion of al-Shabaab total income. According to the Hiraal Institute, the group may be able to levy USD 15 million in taxes per month from all its different revenue streams, more than half of which is alleged to come from taxation of businesses and imports in Mogadishu.[129] Checkpoints are therefore a key cog in generating and enforcing collection of these taxes.

Al-Shabaab checkpoint governance

Earlier research based on interviews with former al-Shabaab operatives provides insights into the meticulous administration of checkpoint revenues.[130] It suggests that checkpoint operators are called at the end of each day to provide the serial numbers of the receipts they have issued that day. Where payments are made in cash, an accountant comes and collects the money regularly, taking it to the district office, from where it is either deposited in banks or transferred by mobile money transfer (EVC) to the main al-Shabaab finance department (Maktabka Maaliyada) in Jilib.[131]

124 This seems a remarkable jump in checkpoint taxes compared to 2018, when going rates for similar sized vehicles were about half as low. See: UN Security Council, S/2018/1002, annex 2.4.2.

125 UN Security Council, S/2018/1002, 109–110.

126 These calculations are based on 360 days a year. Although the route is partly paved, it is important to expect that traffic is significantly reduced during the rainy seasons, when trucks refrain from travelling if road conditions upwards from Baidoa would make onward travel impossible. Annual checkpoint revenues are thus likely to be significantly lower.

127 UN Security Council, S/2018/1002, annex 2.4.4.

128 Hiraal Institute, 'AS Finance System', 7.

129 Hiraal Institute, 'AS Finance System', 5.

130 'Al-Shabaab's financial system in Hiran demonstrates a systematic and committed approach to record keeping and financial accounting.' UN Security Council, S/2018/1002, 107.

131 UN Security Council, S/2018/1002, 25–26 and Hiraal Institute, 'AS Finance System', 3.

While most reports assert that al-Shabaab checkpoint operators receive fixed monthly salaries, some study participants suggest that al-Shabaab checkpoint operators are instead paid on performance basis, receiving a percentage of checkpoint revenues rather than a salary.[132] Al-Shabaab members who handle collection from checkpoints receive a fixed monthly base salary of USD 300 but may receive bonuses at the end of the Islamic year based on good performance. Checkpoint operators and collectors are rotated after two months to avoid corruption but within the district where they are familiar with local populations.[133]

While in the past it has been argued that taxes levied at checkpoints form the most important source of revenues for al-Shabaab,[134] it is important to note that al-Shabaab also uses checkpoints to increase other revenue streams. First, a vehicle that has never before passed through an al-Shabaab checkpoint is registered, including the identity of the driver and the owner, and required to pay a one-time registration fee of between USD 100 and USD 500.[135]

> Second, each time a vehicle embarking on a journey passes its first checkpoint and is taxed, al-Shabaab checkpoint operators ascertain who the owner of the goods is and ensure that he or she is registered and known. Unknown traders are later contacted by phone by the al-Shabaab finance department and interrogated about their business and its size to ensure the accuracy of subsequent annual levy of *zakawat*,[136] which corresponds to 2.5 per cent of the value in inventory of a business.[137] This is how al-Shabaab manages to complement transit taxation at checkpoints with the de-territorial taxation of most Somali businesses. The Hiraal Institute writes, 'All the major companies in southern Somalia pay the annual zakawat to al-Shabaab; only very small-scale businesses such as street hawkers that have not reached the *zakawat* requirement are untaxed by the group.'[138]

Conversely, transit taxes levied at checkpoints are but one of the ways in which al-Shabaab taxes the heavily trade-based economy in Somalia. Perhaps the best way to understand how the group benefits from trade is by adopting a supply chain perspective, which appreciates how

132 Confidential report, 2020.

133 UN Security Council, S/2018/1002, 114.

134 Hiraal Institute, 'AS Finance System'.

135 UN Security Council, S/2018/1002, 95.

136 *Zakawat* is the Somali pronunciation of zakat, annual Islamic alms or charitable contributions that al-Shabaab has appropriated.

137 Hiraal Institute, 'AS Finance System', 3–4.

138 Hiraal Institute, 'A Losing Game', 3. It is important to note, however, that many businesses are able to minimize al-Shabaab *zakat* by understating their business value. As one trader reveals, 'We are compelled to register with AS [al-Shabaab] for us to transport our goods in the roads they control. This database is used to track us annually in demanding annual *zakat*. However, they can never tell exactly how much we are worth and we usually manipulate the figures to give them small amount and to distribute the rest of the *zakat* payable to the right people. If the total *zakat* payable [2.5 per cent of capital] is USD 2,000, I pay them USD 250 annually as the *zakat* and pay the remaining amount to poor people in my kinship network and neighbourhood.' Interview with shopkeeper, Dollow town, 11 November 2022.

commodities are forced through obligatory control points under al-Shabaab control. The Hiraal Institute report elaborates: 'Businesses are taxed at the port; their cargo is taxed in transit, with the cargo truck being taxed separately; they are also taxed annually 2.5 per cent of their accumulated wealth; agricultural produce is taxed at harvest time and again when being sold.'[139]

This system also features a broader cross-border strategy, in which (agricultural) products imported or destined for export are taxed more heavily than domestic agricultural products. For instance, one transporter explains that al-Shabaab taxes vegetables farmed in Kenya at much heavier rates at its checkpoints than similar farming products from the Gedo region, to encourage local production.[140] According to interviewees, al-Shabaab has recently established a monopoly over the transport and export of lemons with one single company through Mogadishu port, discouraging suppliers to work with other traders. Farmers, too, are required to pay zakat based on their holdings, although little detail is available on the amounts involved.[141] It is unclear whether al-Shabaab also taxes exports at the port of Mogadishu.

CHECKPOINTS IN GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED AREAS

What explains the high number of checkpoints in government-controlled areas, and how do checkpoints figure in state-building efforts? To answer these questions, it is necessary to explore: 1) how checkpoints are key devices to fold clan militia into state administrations; 2) the overbearing reliance on indirect taxes or taxes levied on markets in motion (the transport sector) for government revenues; and 3) the competition between different administrative levels for transit taxes levied at checkpoints. The role of clan affiliation and the pursuit of private profit in driving checkpoint dynamics in government-controlled areas is also an important part of this narrative.

Checkpoints and hierarchies

Seventy-seven percent of all checkpoints encountered during this research can be labelled as 'government forces or government-allied militias'. Checkpoints in government-controlled areas are often staffed by a combination of local clan militia who operate the checkpoint on behalf of, or alongside, civilian agents from the local administration or uniformed Somali soldiers. In fact, individual SNA fighters frequently juggle these multiple roles at once.[142] The number of checkpoints in government-controlled areas, by extension, reflects not only official government revenue priorities but also the need to appease local power configurations. Along the Mogadishu–Beledweyne route, for instance, local clan militia are deployed at 19 of

139 Hiraal Institute, 'A Losing Game', 3.

140 Interview with transporter, Mogadishu, 15 November 2022.

141 Interviews with farmers, Lower Shabelle, 6 December 2022. Also see: Bahadur, 'Terror and Taxes'.

142 One security sector expert puts it starkly, positing that 'besides Danab forces [Brigade 16] and Gorgor special forces, all brigades of the Somali National Army are clan militia operating for clan purposes, using federal government resources, although sometimes they do things for the federal government.' Personal exchange with security expert, May 27, 2023.

the 25 checkpoints encountered.[143] Sometimes they staff the checkpoints alone but sometimes they operate alongside or are indistinguishable from SNA soldiers or district officials. A percentage of transit tax revenues collected goes to local militia, another share to government soldiers and finally a share to the political power broker or administrative structure overseeing them.[144] Such revenue-sharing agreements around checkpoint revenues are relatively standardized but vary from checkpoint to checkpoint, adapted in function of political needs, the local balance of power and ongoing negotiations.

Ma'awisley checkpoint at Beledweyne bridge, June 2023. © Study participant

At the same time, however, this checkpoint-based expansion of state influence also has disadvantages. First, it can lead to a proliferation of checkpoints and an unbearable burden for trade. In particular, along the Mogadishu–Baidoa and Mogadishu–Beledweyne corridor, it seems impossible for any administrative authority to reduce the number of overall checkpoints. This raises a question for road users: What are they getting in return for their taxes? Additionally, it is a recurring phenomenon that government campaigns, against the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and then against al-Shabaab, rely heavily on mobilizing and arming militias without providing them with a stable or adequate salary. As a result, in the wake of successful operations to dislodge a single al-Shabaab checkpoint, a flurry of ma'awisley (clan militia) checkpoints pop up along re-taken stretches of road, where birqaad (informal roadblock fees) often increases to levels that make the government unpopular among road users.[145] As recently as 15 June 2023, for instance, ma'awisley set up checkpoints along major roads in Beledweyne, levying transit taxes under the pretext of not being materially supported

143 Confidential report, 2020.

144 For an example, see: Jutta Bakonyi, 'Authority and administration beyond the state: local governance in southern Somalia, 1995–2006', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7 (2013): 283.

145 This is reported to occur in early 2023, in particular in the Shabelles and along the Mogadishu–Balad road.

by the Hirshabelle authorities.[146]

Second, state building via local power brokers being allowed to share in checkpoint revenues can also have centrifugal effects. Because the resulting revenues boost the local political footing of those who dispose of it, this strengthens their bargaining position vis-à-vis other centres of power.[147] This includes clan militia, local administrations wishing to make a claim to territoriality[148] and also checkpoint operators. In early May and June 2023, for example, security forces deployed at checkpoints in Garowe, Galkayo and at the checkpoint at Fagah junction in Mogadishu blocked the road to demand that their salaries be paid.[149]

An overbearing reliance on taxing markets in motion

While most federal member states (FMS) and administrative regions have a long list of taxes, their administrations are embryonic. The corresponding inability to control their entire territory, combined with political infighting in the state, or between its centre and periphery, often circumscribes taxation to the easiest option—taxing markets in motion, focusing on extracting wealth from long-distance exchange at ports and checkpoints.[150] Whereas port revenues in Somalia are typically captured by a select political elite, other government officials (especially administrations that do not have ports under their control) rely disproportionately on transit taxes levied at checkpoints.[151]

As the first dedicated study on checkpoints in 2016 observes, local and FMS authorities are 'dependent on the revenue roadblocks generate'.[152] As a legacy of colonial rule, around 60 per cent of all tax revenues in Somalia result from indirect taxes, which refers to customs and trade taxes typically levied at checkpoints and other customs points, such as ports.[153] Only Puntland and Somaliland have slightly more diversified taxation regimes but even they rely disproportionately on trade taxes.[154] In the sense that the FMS and local administrations rely disproportionately on transit taxes levied at a single checkpoints, these administrative entities

146 Phone interview with security expert, June 26, 2023.

147 See Majid et al., 'Somalia's Politics', 26.

148 Markus Virgil Hoehne, 'The Rupture of Territoriality and the Diminishing Relevance of Cross-cutting Ties in Somalia after 1990', *Development and Change* 47/6 (2016).

149 Phone interview with reporter, Mogadishu,, 6 June 2023.

150 Somali Public Agenda, 'Fiscal Federalism', 20.

151 Transparency Solutions, 'Beyond isbaaro', 5. They should receive USD 150,000 a month, however, to make up for the lack of port. See: Somali Public Agenda, 'Fiscal Federalism', 25.

152 Transparency Solutions, 'Beyond isbaaro', 5. A more recent report reiterates the same point: 'Virtually every local/district administration … [is] reliant on revenue from checkpoints to fund [its] activities.' European Asylum Support Office, 'Somalia Security Situation', 43.

153 Raballand and Knebelmann, 'Domestic Resource Mobilization', 8, 21.

154 Musa, 'Lasanod'.

can be characterized as 'checkpoint polities'.[155]

Confusion and competition over tax prerogatives

In 2008, a reporter describes the confusion over transit taxes as follows:

> According to the government, some roadblocks are legal while others are illegal. If the collected money goes to the government, that roadblock is considered to be legal. Otherwise it is considered to be illegal but it is impossible for road users to tell which is which.[156]

In 2023, the problem is slightly more complicated, as the creation of new administrative entities that have to find their own sources of revenue is an important dynamic in the evolution of Somali checkpoints. The existence of different administrative entities with overlapping geographical scope entails a multiplication of the number of government bodies that can authorize checkpoints along a given stretch of road. In part, this is reflected in the provisional 2012 constitution, which states that, 'The responsibility for the raising of revenue shall be given to the level of government where it is likely to be most effectively exercised.'[157] There is continuous ongoing disagreement between Somalis over what this exactly entails, with large-scale implications for who gets to tax what, as well as for the tax burden on trade. Before the civil war, when Somalia was considered a single fiscal unit, customs taxes could be levied once at ports or overland border crossings. With the progressive proliferation of subnational administrative units—the FMS, administrative regions, district administrations and local government—the number of customs or transit taxes has also increased as part of the imperative for local administrations to fund themselves. Because taxation systems are set up in decentralized fashion, there is no unified system of checkpoint taxation in government-held areas.[158]

In the past, competition over roadblock revenues played out between and among government institutions competing over roadblock fees, including between regional administrations (FMS) and district authorities but also between the FMS and federal security forces (SNA). Revenues from the strategic Kalabayr checkpoint, for instance, have been subject to long-standing conflict between the Hiran regional administration and the Hirshabelle FMS administration.[159] Such conflicts frequently result in the duplication of checkpoints and overlapping of taxation, as in the case of Baidoa, where goods entering the town are taxed separately at checkpoints operated by South West state and the Baidoa municipality. This becomes a serious problem in the case of

155 For the overbearing reliance of the Galmudug and Hirshabelle administrations on transit taxes levied at single checkpoints, see: Abdirahman, 'Contested Commerce', 26.

156 Mohamed Mukhtar, 'The boom in Somalia's roadblocks', *Hiraan Online*, 21 February 2008. Accessed 11 September 2023, https://www.hiiraan.com/op4/2008/feb/5857/the_boom_in_somalia_s_roadblocks.aspx.

157 Raballand and Knebelmann, 'Domestic Resource Mobilization', 5.

158 The National Consultative Council meeting in Baidoa in March 2023 is supposed to harmonize some of these issues.

159 Interview with political expert, Nairobi, 13 April 2023.

long-distance trade that cuts across multiple administrative entities.

This is the case along the Mogadishu–Bula Hawa corridor, where Banadir Regional Administration and the Federal Government of Somalia charge heavy taxes at the Ex-Control checkpoint in Mogadishu; the Lower Shabelle administration in Afgoye; South West state in Baidoa and the Gedo administration in Luuq. In the same way, trucks carrying goods from the port of Bosaso to Beledweyne pay transit taxes to the FMS administrations of Puntland, Galmudug and Hirshabelle. This is in line with GOVSEA (Governing Economic Hubs And Flows in Somali East Africa) project findings in Somaliland, which indicate that the more administrative units that are created, the more political actors emerge, the more they tax and the more traders and transporters have to pay.[160]

Confusions over taxation prerogatives can also be used to deny responsibility for checkpoints. For instance, in response to accusations by the public regarding the burden of checkpoints, the state president of Hirshabelle recently denied the existence of checkpoints operated by his administration, retorting that all checkpoints and illegal taxes are the responsibility of the national army.[161]

Checkpoint in Buloburde, jointly operated by local clan militia and the Somali National Army. © Study participant

160 Musa, Stepputat and Hagmann, 'Revenues on the hoof'.

161 See: 'Somalia: Hirshabelle President Debunks Somali President's Checkpoint Accusations', Garowe Online, 5 April 2023. Accessed 14 September 2023, https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-hirshabelle-president-debunks-somali-president-s-checkpoint-accusations.

Clan connections

It is widely accepted that fiscal federalism is also clan federalism, in which major clan lineages each dominate specific FMS administrations, a structure that is reproduced with nuances on the level of administrative regions and districts. Federalism in Somalia has largely come to mean that leadership and security forces are drawn from the region concerned; in other words, 'Federalism in Somalia is a strictly clan-based system.'[162] This means that operators of the most important checkpoint in any given region are likely from locally dominant clan lineages, with revenues circulating accordingly.[163] This is perhaps most clearly visible in Galkayo, a city partitioned by the boundary between two FMS: Galmudug in the south and Puntland in the north, associated to the Hawiye and the Darod clan families, respectively. As a result, Galkayo has two major checkpoints on each side of town, operated by communities associated to each of the two state administrations, both levying hefty transit taxes. As one observer puts it:

Galkayo checkpoints operate like private enterprises owned by the local Cumar Maxamuud (Galkayo North) and Habar Gedir (Galkayo South) clans. Even though the Puntland and Galmudug administrations formally run these checkpoints, the clans still benefit from the taxes generated there. This is because a considerable proportion of the revenue generated isn't declared to the government. It is kept by the men at the checkpoints who are normally from the same clan that erected the checkpoint.'[164]

By extension, struggles over the administrative prerogative to levy checkpoint taxes often reflect, or become accentuated as, clan struggles. An example of this can be found in Beledweyne, where struggles over the distribution of checkpoint taxes assumed clan lines and led to the formation of a split-off FMS by an excluded clan, which started levying its own customs taxes. In this important urban hub, the Hirshabelle FMS and security forces are dominated by the Hawadle sub-clan of the Hawiye, with other clans avoiding joining because all benefits go to this one clan-based grouping. The checkpoints on the north side of town make the local checkpoint operators from the Hirshabelle state government around USD 300,000 in taxes, mostly from taxing each truck to and from Ethiopia USD 100. Feeling excluded from this tax regime, in 2014, the Jajelle sub-clan of the Hawiye formed the Westland administration (including their own flag) and their militia opened their own checkpoint on the south side of Beledweyne. The checkpoint benefited the Westland administration until it was disbanded in 2018. After 2018, however, the checkpoint kept operating—officially as part of the Hiran/Hirshabelle administration, but with checkpoint revenues still exclusively for the Jajelle sub-clan.[165]

162 Rift Valley Institute, 'Forging Jubaland: Community perspectives on federalism, governance and reconciliation', RVI meeting report, Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, April 2016, 4.

163 Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, 'From Pre-Colonial Past to the Post-Colonial Present: The Contemporary Clan-Based Configurations of Statebuilding in Somalia', *African Studies Review* 61 (2018): 55–77. Most army units would, by extension, have severe problems operating away from the home areas of their sub-clan, argues Colin D Robinson, 'The Somali National Army: an assessment', *Defense & Security Analysis* 35 (2019): 211–221.

164 Abdirahman, 'Contested Commerce', 27.

165 Source: confidential report, 2018, 23, 27; phone interview with that report's author, November 25, 2022

In a similar way, the Baidoa corridor case study documents how the four checkpoints in Gedo region are controlled by the Marehan—but not without internal struggles between different sub-clans. In Yurkud, for example, the Macalin Weyne sub-clan opened a new checkpoint to raise their own revenues as they felt excluded from the checkpoint revenues that another Marehan sub-clan (the Rer Hassan) levied in Luuq for the Gedo region, which both inhabit. A transporter in Mogadishu explains the consequences: 'Until the transport association committee intervened, trucks were piling up in the outskirts of Luuq for two weeks, refusing to pay the additional taxes.'[166]

Privatizing checkpoint revenues

It is widely known that individual commanders and politicians use their power to operate checkpoints in the name of a shared political projects but privatize the profits. In large part, the checkpoint economy boils down to a decentralized taxation prerogative that is often used by checkpoint commanders to enrich themselves and maintain the loyalty of their troops, rather than to finance their respective administrations. In order to obfuscate the privatization of revenues, the amounts generated at roadblocks often go undocumented as either no receipt or false (lower than amount paid) receipts are issued in return for payment of transit taxes.

Examples are myriad. Before he was replaced, General Nuur Hayir tightly controlled revenues from key checkpoints between Mogadishu and Afgoye, deploying army units from his own Habar Gedir sub-clan. The deputy chief of the land forces, General Hussein Hoosh, controlled most of the checkpoints from Afgoye to Wanlaweyne, deploying a mix of clan militia and SNA soldiers from the Habar Gedir sub-clan from which he hails.[167] Member of Parliament Colonel Osman Mohamed Muhamud Hadole (Xildhibaan Cusmaan Xaadoole) still controls revenues from two of a series of profitable checkpoints on the east side of Mogadishu. Although the people deployed at the two checkpoints are officially soldiers, interlocutors explain they should be considered his personal clan-based militia because all revenues accrue to him.[168] One female fruit trader vents her frustration with checkpoint operators along her route:

> You would not be surprised to see checkpoint operators sitting with two bags full of Somali shillings by 10 a.m. in the morning, all extorted from road users. How do you want to convince such youths to abandon this lucrative endeavour in a country where there are no other employment opportunities? Did God forget these guys committing atrocities against poor people while they are happily filling sacks of money without any effort?[169]

Given that these are individual examples of a widespread practice, it should come as no surprise

166 Interview with transporter, Mogadishu, 23 November 2022.

167 Confidential report, 2020.

168 Interview with transporters, Mogadishu, 12 February 2023.

169 Interview with fruit vendor, Mogadishu, 28 December 2022.

that recent studies on taxation in Somalia point out that most Somalis hold government taxation in low esteem. This is largely because they are unlikely to receive any of the benefits accruing from checkpoint taxes—either through a form of fiscal compact, whereby checkpoint taxes are reciprocated by public goods and services or through patronage-based forms of redistribution.[170] As a 2020 Rift Valley Institute study puts it:

> While government soldiers technically work for the federal government, they seldom collect these revenues on its behalf, or that of the federal member states. Rather, they collect money for themselves and the government has been largely powerless to stop them from doing so. This creates significant resentment from the civilian population.[171]

170 van den Boogaard and Santoro, 'Financing governance'; Raballand and Knebelmann, 'Domestic Resource Mobilization'; Somali Public Agenda, 'Fiscal Federalism', 26.

171 Abshir, Abdirahman and Stogdon, 'Tax and the State', 5.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Over a period of 30 years, checkpoints have become a defining feature of Somalia's trade-based economy. Checkpoints not only fulfil security roles but also constitute key revenue generation mechanisms, especially for aspiring authorities without access to port revenues or other income streams. Because they articulate jurisdiction over passage, checkpoints also reflect symbolic claims to territorial control.[172] For all these reasons, checkpoints are magnets of conflict and constant bargaining between competing armed actors in Somalia. The proliferation of competing checkpoint authorities means that even small domestic displacements are fundamentally cross-border movements.

To appreciate the centrality of checkpoints and other taxable chokepoints in the Somali experience requires acknowledging transport, logistics and trade as central drivers of state formation in the Horn of Africa.[173] Policymakers need to recognize that checkpoints are not an expression of anarchy but rather form an intricate part of competing claims to authority, however contested and tentative. To support trade harmonization and inclusive political settlements, policymakers and conflict, governance and economic advisors should focus on five interrelated issues.

1. Recognize the dynamic role of checkpoints in state-building efforts

Policymakers need to appreciate that checkpoints play an ambivalent role in ongoing state-building efforts in Somalia. At some times and in some places, informal arrangements around checkpoints help bolster the authority of formal administrations, buying loyalty from clan militia and other local power holders. In other situations, checkpoints undercut state-building efforts by providing local power holders with revenues that are autonomous from the centre (thus potentially enhancing their bargaining positions relative to the latter). In a context where few other revenue streams are feasible, the federal government, federal member states and regional administrations are torn between the imperatives to generate revenues, to strike fiscal bargains with local power holders on whom they

172 See Hoehne, 'Rupture of Territoriality'.

173 See Hagmann and Stepputat, *Trade Makes States*.

depend, and to attract trade.[174]

Shifting power relations make the politics of checkpoints dynamic and subject to constant bargaining. This renders the contribution of checkpoints to state-building efforts as an empirical question in need of constant reassessment. As such shifts can turn into flashpoints of conflict, policymakers and analysts should invest in collecting more fine grained and up-to-date data on the evolving political settlements along trade routes.[175] For instance, if ongoing offensives against al-Shabaab are accompanied by a proliferation of government and ma'awisley checkpoints (as appears to be the case in some areas), short-term military gains may quickly transform into wavering support among local populations.

2. Adopt a holistic approach to checkpoints

The policy discussion around checkpoints in Somalia is heavily focused on the crucial role that checkpoints play as a source of financing for al-Shabaab, with the intent of disrupting this flow of resources. If policy discussion is instead centred on the effect of checkpoints on ordinary Somalis, it turns out that checkpoints in government-controlled areas are often a heavier cost burden than al-Shabaab checkpoints. In a context where famine is always looming, checkpoints in areas nominally under government control play at least as large a role in inflating consumer prices.

Because checkpoints are indirect taxes, the real costs are paid elsewhere. The bill for checkpoint taxes is not paid by the transporters interfacing with checkpoints. Rather, the proliferation of checkpoints ultimately entails a systematic wealth transfer from ordinary Somalis—including women, minorities and other vulnerable populations—towards armed actors and elites, mediated by transport operators. Civilians receive little in return in terms of services. At best, checkpoints may only be preferable to less predictable and more violent forms of wealth extraction such as kidnapping and looting. It is necessary to broaden policy approaches to taxation that address concerns affecting the well-being of the entire Somali population, not just the political class. This entails facilitating informed discussion about the multiple impacts of checkpoints on ordinary Somalis, with close attention to vulnerable segments of society.

3. Promote fiscal policies that ensure food security and protect vulnerable populations

In a context where famine is a persistent risk, it is crucial to attune fiscal policies to encourage food security and resilience, particularly for already vulnerable populations. Existing fiscal policies, through checkpoints, intersect with dynamics of marginalization and food insecurity in subtle but deeply structural ways. It appears that Somali agricultural producers—often from marginalized communities—are disproportionately taxed and

174 See Kasper Hoffmann, Koen Vlassenroot and Gauthier Marchais, 'Taxation, Stateness and Armed Groups: Public Authority and Resource Extraction in Eastern Congo', *Development and Change* 47/6 (2016): 1434–1456.

175 Tobias Hagmann, 'Stabilization, extraversion and political settlements in Somalia', Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2016.

excluded from participation in adding value through marketing through clan discrimination at checkpoints. In the context of a globalized economy, checkpoint taxes along routes connecting farmlands to markets seem to further weaken the competitiveness of local producers vis-à-vis importers of the same foodstuffs, who are subject to comparatively lower import duties.

More research is needed on the linkages between checkpoints, resilience and marginalization in the farming sector, which is as critical for vulnerable livelihoods as it is for food security. This should begin with analysis of how the burden of checkpoints is distributed along crucial agricultural value chains. There is also a genuine opportunity to have an impact on market prices in Somalia by encouraging Somali government stakeholders to adopt more diversified indirect tax practices that do not discriminate against farming produce. This is because checkpoints form the largest component of transport costs, and checkpoints in government-held territories generally cost more than al-Shabaab checkpoints. Federal and subnational governments should be encouraged to promote fiscal policies that ensure food security and increase the resilience of vulnerable populations.

4. Develop checkpoint-sensitive aid programming

It appears that checkpoints interact with questions of food security, market prices, livelihood strategies of vulnerable populations and climate variability. More data is needed, however, on the precise mechanisms of these linkages. Aid organizations have the opportunity to contribute to more resilient livelihoods by assessing these linkages and developing checkpoint-sensitive programming. This includes the question of how cash programmes by aid organizations indirectly finance checkpoints, including those operated by al-Shabaab. Because checkpoint taxes are ultimately paid by consumers in markets, internally displaced persons (IDPs) who receive cash or voucher support rely for their subsistence on purchasing products in markets at checkpoint-inflated prices.

5. Support informal coping mechanisms

To promote much-needed economic development in Somalia, it is imperative to recognize that informal practical norms govern how traders navigate the evolving configurations of the formal and informal borders between competing authorities along trade routes.176 Instead of a narrow focus on trade formalization, policymakers should attempt to understand and, when possible, support effective mechanisms that traders have developed to mitigate the burden of checkpoints. Informal checkpoint brokers and transporter associations may provide collective goods by reducing transaction costs and providing predictability, which facilitate trade. Formalizing trade should occur in conversation with these stakeholder initiatives and, when possible, support home-grown coping mechanisms.

176 Hagmann, 'Trade, taxes and tensions', 26.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS IN BRIEF

- Policymakers should acknowledge the informal roles that checkpoints play in expanding government influence. While checkpoint operators in government-held areas may only be loosely connected to formal hierarchies and revenues fail to reach administrative coffers, checkpoints in government-held areas nonetheless fulfil meaningful roles in political settlements by tying clan militias to government projects—at least on a nominal basis.
- Policymakers would do well to approach checkpoints not solely from a counter-terrorism perspective (that is, narrowly focusing on the role of checkpoints in financing al-Shabaab) but to broaden this to consider the developmental impacts of checkpoints.
- Traders and transporters prefer checkpoint operators that offer predictability and standardization—a model offered by al-Shabaab. This is also emulated by checkpoint brokers, who rely on clan connections to smooth transactions across competing de facto checkpoint jurisdictions. This brokerage system may form a point of departure for scaling up and harmonizing checkpoint regimes.
- Policymakers need to understand how the costs of checkpoints are distributed in society. Checkpoints have crucial impacts beyond the transporters and traders who directly interface with roadblock authorities, affecting the prices that Somalis, including vulnerable groups, pay in markets.
- While no centre of power steers all Somali checkpoints, they have the structural effect of a systematic transfer of wealth from farming communities and people that rely for their subsistence on markets to dominant elites.
- As checkpoints in government-held areas form a heavier burden on long-distance trade than do al-Shabaab checkpoints, fiscal harmonization within and between government administrations can potentially have a meaningful impact on Somali livelihoods. Such harmonization should be actively pursued.
- In a context of endemic hunger and the regular threat of famines, more emphasis needs to be placed on how checkpoints act as force multipliers for other aspects of vulnerability, diminishing the resilience of already marginal and displaced populations.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS, WORDS AND PHRASES

abaan	(*Somali*) affiliated clan lineages
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
badeeco	(*Somali*) cargo charge for merchandize
birqaad	(*Somali*) informal fee to open a checkpoint
dalag	(*Somali*) cargo charge for locally produced agricultural products
DIIS	Danish Institute for International Studies
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
FMS	Federal Member State(s)
gadiid	(*Somali*) transit fee for a vehicle
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
INSO	International NGO Safety Organisation
IPIS	International Peace Information Service
isbaaro	(*Somali*) checkpoint
isbaaro soo booda	(*Somali*) pop-up checkpoint
ma'awisley	(*Somali*) local clan militia
mooryaan	(*Somali*) bandits or armed men
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN)

RVI	Rift Valley Institute
SNA	Somali National Army
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
WFP	World Food Programme
xoolo	(*Somali*) tax on livestock at sale
zakat	(*Arabic*) alms; also *zakawat* or *zakah* (Somali)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abdi, Mustafe M. 'Regularly Irregular: Varieties of informal trading in the Ethiopia–Somaliland borderlands'. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2021.

Abdirahman, Khalif. 'Contested Commerce: Revenue and state-making in the Galkayo borderlands'. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2021.

Abshir, S, K Abdirahman and H Stogdon. 'Tax and the State in Somalia: understanding domestic revenue mobilization. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2020.

Ahmad, Aisha, Tanya Bandula-Irwin and Mohamed Ibrahim (2022). 'Who governs? State versus jihadist political order in Somalia'. *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 16/1 (2022): 68–91.

Ahmad, Aisha. 'The Security Bazaar: Business Interests and Islamist Power in Civil War Somalia'. *International Security*, 39 (2014): 89–117.

Ahmed, Sahra Koshin. 'Galkayo's Khat Economy: the role of women traders in Puntland, Somalia'. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2021.

Alfano, Marco and Thomas Cornelissen. 'Spatial Spillovers of Conflict in Somalia'. Discussion Paper No. 1576. Bonn: Institute of Labor Economics.

Ali, Abdirahman. 'Brokering Trade Routes: The political economy of checkpoints along Somalia's Baidoa corridor'. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, September 2023.

Asylum and Immigration Tribunal. 'HH & others (Mogadishu: armed conflict: risk) Somalia CG' [2008] UKAIT 00022, section 4.27. London: Crown Copyright, 2007.

Badahur, Jay. 'Terror and Taxes: Inside al-Shabaab's revenue-collection machine'. Geneva: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, 2022.

Bakonyi, Jutta. 'Authority and administration beyond the state: local governance in southern Somalia, 1995–2006'. *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7 (2013): 272–290.

Bakonyi, Jutta. 'Moral Economies of Mass Violence: Somalia 1988–1991'. Civil Wars 11/4 (2009): 434–454.

van den Boogaard, V and F Santoro. 'Financing governance beyond the state: Informal revenue generation in south-central Somalia'. *African Affairs* 121/485 (2022): 569–594.

Bradbury, Mark. 'State-building, Counterterrorism, and Licensing Humanitarianism in Somalia'. Briefing paper. Boston: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2010.

Cassanelli, Lee. *The shaping of Somali society: reconstructing the history of a pastoral people, 1600–1900*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

Compagnon, Daniel. 'State-sponsored violence and conflict under Mahamed Siyad Barre: the emergence of path dependent patterns of violence'. World Peace Foundation. 22 October 2013. Accessed 11 September 2023. (https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2013/10/22/state-sponsored-violence-and-conflict-under-mahamed-siyad-barre-the-emergence-of-path-dependent-patterns-of-violence/)

Country of Origin Information Service. 'Report of fact-finding mission 11–15 June 2007. Somalia'. Croydon: Home Office, Border & Immigration Agency, 20 July 2007.

Djama, Marcel. 'Political economics of war and peace in Somalia'. Paris: *Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement*, 2007.

European Asylum Support Office. 'Somalia Security Situation: Country of Origin Information Report'. Brussels: European Asylum Support Office, 2021.

Federal Government of Somalia. 'National Risk Assessment on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing'. Mogadishu: Federal Government of Somalia, 2022.

Finnish Immigration Service. 'Somalia: Fact-finding mission to Mogadishu in March 2020; Security situation and humanitarian conditions in Mogadishu'. Vienna: European Country of Origin Information Network, March 2020.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 'National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods: Somalia'. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2021.

Garowe Online. 'Somalia: Hirshabelle President Debunks Somali President's Checkpoint Accusations'. 5 April 2023. Accessed 14 September 2023. (https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-hirshabelle-president-debunks-somali-president-s-checkpoint-accusations)

Gebresenbet, Fana. 'Perishable state-making: Vegetable trade between self-governance and ethnic entitlement in Jigjiga, Ethiopia'. DIIS Working Paper 2018:1. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2018.

Gundel, J. 'Humanitarianism and spoils politics in Somalia'. In *Eroding local capacity: international humanitarian action in Africa*, edited by Monica Kathina Juma and Astri Suhrke, 134–156. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2002.

Hagmann, Tobias. 'Trade, taxes and tensions in the Somali borderlands'. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2021.

Hagmann, Tobias. 'Stabilization, extraversion and political settlements in Somalia'. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2016.

Hagmann, Tobias. 'From state collapse to duty free shop: Somalia's path to modernity'. *African Affairs* 104/416 (2005): 525–535.

Hagmann, Tobias and Finn Stepputat, eds. *Trade Makes States: Governing the Greater Somali Economy*. London: Hurst/International African Institute, May 2023.

Hagmann, Tobias and Finn Stepputat. 'Tilly in the Tropics: Trade and Somali State-Making'. In *Trade Makes States: Governing the Greater Somali Economy*, edited by Tobias Hagmann and Finn Stepputat, 171–200. London: Hurst/International African Institute, May 2023.

Hagmann, Tobias and Finn Stepputat. 'Corridors of trade and power: economy and state formation in Somali East Africa'. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2016.

Hansen, Stig J. 'Civil War Economies, the Hunt for Profit and the Incentives for Peace: the case of Somalia', AE Working Paper 1, Bath: Department of Economics and International Development, University of Bath, 2007.

Henek, David. 'Somalia's fragmentation'. Center for Strategic and International Studies. 13 August 2007. Accessed 11 September 2023 (https://www.csis.org/analysis/somalias-fragmentation)

Hiraal Institute. 'The AS Finance System'. Mogadishu: Hiraal Institute, July 2018.

Hiraal Institute. 'A Losing Game: Countering Al-Shabab's Financial System'. Mogadishu: Hiraal Institute, October 2020.

Hoehne, Markus Virgil. 'The Rupture of Territoriality and the Diminishing Relevance of Cross-cutting Ties in Somalia after 1990', *Development and Change* 47/6 (2016): 1379–1411.

Hoffmann, Kasper, Koen Vlassenroot and Gauthier Marchais. 'Taxation, Stateness and Armed Groups: Public Authority and Resource Extraction in Eastern Congo', *Development and Change*, 47/6 (2016): 1434–1456.

Human Rights Watch. 'Somalia: A Government at War with its Own People: Testimonies About the Killings and the Conflict in the North: An Africa Watch Report, January 1990'. New York, Human Rights Watch, June 1990.

Ingiriis, Mohamed Haji. 'From Pre-Colonial Past to the Post-Colonial Present: The Contemporary Clan-Based Configurations of Statebuilding in Somalia'. *African Studies Review* 61 (2018): 55–77.

International Crisis Group. 'Women and al-Shabaab's Insurgency'. Africa Briefing N° 145. Nairobi/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 27 June 2019.

International Crisis Group. 'Somalia: Countering Terrorism in a Failed State'. Africa Report N°45.
Nairobi/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 23 May 2002.

IOL. 'Somali warlord in bid to catch bandits'. 14 March 2002. Accessed 15 January 2023. (https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/somali-warlord-in-bid-to-catch-bandits-31607)

IOM News Global. 'Donkey carts build resilience in Southern Somalia'. 5 February 2016. Accessed 14 September 2023. (https://www.iom.int/news/donkey-carts-build-resilience-southern-somalia)

IRIN News. 'New President visits Mogadishu'. *The New Humanitarian*. 30 August 2000. Accessed 11 September 2023 (https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2000/08/30/new-president-visits-mogadishu)

Jaspars, Susanne, Guhad M Adan and Nisar Majid. 'Food and Power in Somalia: Business as Usual? A scoping study on the political economy of food following shifts in food assistance and in governance'. London: London School of Economics, 2020.

Keatinge, Tom. 'The Role of Finance in Defeating Al-Shabab'. Whitehall Report 2–13. London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, December 2014.

LandInfo. 'Somalia: Practical issues and security challenges associated with travels in Southern Somalia'. Oslo: Country of Origin Information Centre, 2017.

Little, Peter D. *Somalia: Economy Without State*. Oxford/Bloomington IN: James Currey/Indiana University Press, 2003.

Majid, Nasir and Khalif Abdirahman. 'The Offensive & Gatekeeping: Reflections from Somalia'. PeaceRep. 1 March 2023. Accessed 11 September 2023. (https://peacerep.org/2023/03/01/the-offensive-and-gatekeeping-reflections-from-somalia/)

Majid, Nisar, Aditya Sarkar, Claire Elder, Khalif Abdirahman, Sarah Detzner, Jared Miller and Alex de Waal. 'Somalia's Politics: The Usual Business? A Synthesis Paper of the Conflict Research Programme'. London: London School of Economics, 2021.

Majid, Nasir, S Hassan and Khalif Abdirahman. 'Maritime and Overland Transport Costs and Dynamics'. Washington: World Bank, 2020.

Majid, Nisar and Stephen McDowell. 'Hidden dimensions of the Somalia famine', *Global Food Security* 1 (2012): 36–42.

Maletta, Robert. 'Somalia: an accountability-free zone?'. *Humanitarian Exchange* 40/6 (2008). Accessed 11 September 2023 (https://odihpn.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/humanitarianexchange040.pdf)

Maruf, Harun. 'Somalia's Al-Shabab Militants Shoot Donkeys as Part of Economic War'. *VOA*. 1 March 2018. Accessed 14 September 2023. (https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-al-shabab-donkeys-killed/4275777.html)

Mitchell, Timothy. 'Society, Economy, and the State Effect.' In *State/Culture: State Formation after the Cultural Turn*, edited by George Steinmetz, 169–186. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.

Mohammed, Jamal. 'Navigating Trade Controls: The political economy of checkpoints along Somalia's Garissa corridor'. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, September 2023.

Mohamed-Abdi, Mohamed. 'De gaashaanqaad à mooryaan: quelle place pour les jeunes en Somalie?'. *Autrepart* 18/2 (2001): 69–84.

Mukhtar, Mohamed. 'The boom in Somalia's roadblocks'. *Hiraan Online*. 21 February 2008. Accessed 11 September 2023. (https://www.hiiraan.com/op4/2008/feb/5857/the_boom_in_somalia_s_roadblocks.aspx)

Musa, Ahmed M. 'Lasanod: City at the margins. The politics of borderland trade between Somaliland and Puntland'. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2021.

Musa, Ahmed M, Kirstine Strøh Varming and Finn Stepputat. 'Raising Fiscal Revenues: The Political Economy of Somali Trade Taxation'. In *Trade Makes States: Governing the Greater Somali Economy*, edited by Tobias Hagmann and Finn Stepputat, 145–176 London: Hurst/International African Institute, May 2023.

Musa, Ahmed M, Finn Stepputat and Tobias Hagmann. 'Revenues on the hoof: livestock trade, taxation and state-making in the Somali territories'. *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 15/1 (2021): 108–127.

Ng'asike, Philemon, Tobias Hagmann and Oliver Vivian Wasonga. 'Brokerage in the borderlands: the political economy of livestock intermediaries in northern Kenya'. Journal of Eastern African Studies 15/3 (2020): 1–21.

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 'Humanitarian Situation in Somalia Monthly Analysis—1 November–15 December 2007'. Nairobi: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 15 December 2007.

Quero, Yann-Cédric, Mireille Widmer and Lindsey Peterson. 'Safety and Security Baseline Report: Mogadishu'. Hargeisa: Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention, December 2011.

Raballand, Gael and Justine Knebelmann. 'Domestic Resource Mobilization in Somalia'. Washington: World Bank, 2021.

Radio Risaala. 'Howlgal Isbaaro qaadis ah oo laga sameeyay Shabeellaha Hoose'. 22 October 2021. Accessed 14 September 2023. (https://radiorisaala.com/howlgal-isbaaro-qaadis-ah-oo-laga-sameeyay-shabeellaha-hoose/)

Rift Valley Institute. 'Forging Jubaland: Community perspectives on federalism, governance and reconciliation'. RVI Meeting report. Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, April 2016.

Robinson, Colin D. 'The Somali National Army: an assessment'. *Defense & Security Analysis* 35 (2019): 211–221.

Saferworld. 'Somali perspectives on Al Shabaab, international involvement and counterterrorism'. Accessed 11 September 2023 (https://www.saferworld.org.uk/long-reads/when-the-elephants-fight-the-grass-gets-trampled-somali-perspectives-on-al-shabaab-international)

Schon, Justin. 'The centrality of checkpoints for civilians during conflict', *Civil Wars* 18 (2016): 281–310.

Schouten, P, K Matthysen and T Muller. 'Checkpoint economy: the political economy of checkpoints in South Sudan, ten years after independence'. Copenhagen/Antwerp: Danish Institute for International Studies/International Peace Information Service, 2021.

Schouten, Peer and Soleil-Parfait Kalessopo. 'The Politics of Pillage: the political economy of roadblocks in the Central African Republic'. Copenhagen/Antwerp: Danish Institute for International Studies/International Peace Information Service, 2017.

Schouten, P, J Murairi and S Kubuya, S. '"Everything that moves will be taxed": the political economy of roadblocks in North and South Kivu'. Copenhagen/Antwerp: Danish Institute for International Studies/International Peace Information Service, 2017.

Shabelle Media Network. 'Somalia: Banadir Administration Says They Took Control Over Key Checkpoint'. *allAfrica*. 11 May 2009. Accessed 11 September 2023. (https://allafrica.com/stories/200905111052.html)

Shiil, Mohamed. 'Checkpoints Source of Extortion, Kickbacks – "Taxes" Vary at Checkpoints Controlled by TFG, al-Shabaab and Local Clans'. *PiracyReport*. 29 August 2011. Accessed 11 September 2023. (https://piracyreport.com/index.php/post/1472/Checkpoints_Source_of_Extortion_Kickbacks)

Shirwa, A H. 'The role of agriculture in the origins and solutions of Somali problems'. Paper presented at the European Association of Somali Studies conference 1993, London, 23–25 September 1993.

Skjelderup, M, M Ainashe and AM Abdulle ('Qare'). 'Militant Islamism and local clan dynamics in Somalia: the expansion of the Islamic Courts Union in Lower Jubba province'. *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14/3 (2020): 553–571.

Somali Public Agenda. 'Fiscal Federalism in Somalia: Constitutional Ambiguity, Political Economy and Options for a Workable Arrangement'. Mogadishu: Somali Public Agenda, July 2021.

Transparency Solutions. 'Beyond isbaaro: Reclaiming Somalia's haunted roads'. Hargeisa: IAAAP (Somali Accountability Programme), 2016.

United Nations, Security Council. 'Report of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator'. 15 October 2020. S/2020/1004.

United Nations, Security Council. 'Report of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator'. 7 October 2019. S/2019/799.

United Nations, Security Council. 'Somalia report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea submitted in accordance with resolution 2385 (2017)'. 9 November 2018. S/2018/1002.

United Nations, Security Council. 'Somalia report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea submitted in accordance with resolution 2317 (2016)'. 8 November 2017. S/2017/924.

United Nations, Security Council. 'Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1811 (2008)'. 10 December 2008. S/2008/769.

United Nations, Security Council. 'Final report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia submitted in accordance with resolution 1676 (2006)'. 22 November 2006. S/2006/913.

United Nations, Security Council. 'Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1630 (2005)'. 4 May 2006. S/2006/229.

United Nations, Security Council. 'Report of the Panel of Experts on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1474 (2003). 4 November 2003. S/2003/1035.

Webersik, Christian. 'Fighting for the Plenty: The Banana Trade in Southern Somalia'. *Oxford Development Studies* 33 (2005): 81–97.

WFP/UN Logcluster. 'Weekly Somalia road conditions updates' (May 2006 to June 2008) from https://logcluster.org/ (accessed March 2023).

World Bank. 'Somalia Urbanization Review: Fostering Cities as Anchors of Development'. Washington DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and The World Bank, 2020.