

State, Insurgency and Terrorism

The State's solidity and the terrorist's liquidity

The State, as we know it, is the result of the constant human desire to organise themselves socially and politically. It is a political organisation of an institutional and permanent nature, in which its administrative apparatus successfully asserts authority over resources and competencies¹. It is the peace administrator and it will use even war to maintain it. To this end, it will exercise governance, understood as “the set of tactical institutions and reflections that take the population as their primary objective, as a means of understanding political economy, and that consider security devices as an essential technical instrument”². The integrity of the state project, will depend on its capacity to exercise force, despite the resistance and, above all, its ability to legitimise it and making it acceptable.

As states mature, governability replaces brute force with discipline, a less visible form of control, training and normalization. This invites us “to stop describing power in negative terms, as something that excludes, represses, rejects, censors, abstracts, conceals, hides [...] power produces: it produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truths³”. To that end, it will draw on discourses, the place where power rests and is a source of its legitimisation. The legitimisation of a state, depends on its ability to generate reliable social discourses, in favour of its nature, form and maintenance. Otherwise, a door will open for new actors that aim to make violence a legitimate tool, generating a pendular relationship, in which the legitimisation of the rebel provokes the delegitimisation of the state.

In this scenario, the weapon is the narrative and the bullet is the truth, which relocates the seat of power, shifting the battlefield to the realm of human cognition. This is the centre of gravity of human behaviour, and a target under constant attack⁴. As violence

¹ MARTINEZ-FERRO. «Legitimidad, dominación y derecho en la teoría sociológica del Estado de Max Weber», Revista de Estudios Socio-Jurídicos. 2010. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=3268087>

² LÓPEZ. «Biopolítica, liberalismo y neoliberalismo», Docta Complutense. 2010. pp,2. Disponible en: <https://docta.ucm.es/rest/api/core/bitstreams/b493deb0-5584-4813-b561-1f64a383b4b8/content>

³ FOUCAULT. «Vigilar y castigar», Siglo XXI de España. 1978. pp,180.

⁴ INNOVATION HUB, visto en GIORGI & WALKER. «Guerra cognitiva», CEFA DIGITAL. 01/12/2022. Disponible en:

becomes deregulated, actors like insurgents and terrorists emerge and question the state, the first of them challenging its structure and the second one undermining its social legitimisation. The political legitimisation is the ultimate objective of the conflict, since whoever succeeds in convincing will have the ability to legitimise their force or violence. The victor will have the capacity to impose the political parameters, that will define the social organisation and the form of the state.

The construction of the threat: Securitization theory

States have to deal with difference, since whenever there is power, there is resistance. Power is a more or less closed market, very interesting for both individuals and groups. The globalization era, radicalised modernity and its advances, have provoked more complex and interconnected challenges, that increasingly escape the control of states, specially from those that are weak. In this new society of risk, the concern for security has invaded personal and social life, positioning it as a fundamental axis of state policy. When there is risk but no danger, we speak of security understood as a situation free from threats to noble values⁵.

The securitization theory (1983) developed by Barry Buzan and its successors, deepens the notion of security and recognise that a threat is also a consensus between political leaders. This highlights the subjectivity of security and its process of construction, since for a social problem to be securitised, it must be convincingly presented to society by elites and policymakers as an existential or significant threat⁶. In this way, only when the social labelling succeeds across the whole of society is the defensive mobilisation of resources legitimised. Once again, this capacity depends on the strength of the discursive power of the state, and above all, the strength of social trust.

The interpretation of security is a contested domain. The insurgent groups, acting as cells, mutate in states with weak immune systems and use terrorism and their propaganda

<https://cefadigital.edu.ar/handle/1847939/2316?locale=en>

⁵ AFRIYIE. «What fuels terrorism in Somalia? Perspectives from the jihadist group Al-Shabaab», Taylor & Francis Online. 24/10/2025. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ref/10.1080/23311886.2025.2576151?scroll=top>

⁶ idem

apparatus to convince a few who are angry and are afraid, that the true enemy, the one who causes their misery, is the state. Those actors are capable of mending any social tear in their favour, using an enemy narrative, utilising warlike language, instrumentalising religion and appealing to historical conflicts and heroic figures as an ideological claim⁷. This activity is, and it will be, exploited both by whoever wants to use terrorism and by whoever wishes to neutralise it.

The conflicts in Africa: The insurgent strategy and the terrorist tool

In order to understand the African conflictivity we must go back to the birth of its states. From the late 1950's and early 1960's, a wave of independences swept through Africa, and the new states started to develop their armies as a symbol of sovereignty, status and honour in the international system⁸. However, due to the nature of the emergence of the majority of the African states, which occurred through decolonisation and not through a process of war [...] African armies were less by nature, much less developed⁹. This wave of independences "granted de facto to the decolonised states, legitimised international frontiers, even when these states did not exercise the *Weberian* monopoly of violence over their territories"¹⁰. The weakness of their states, the absence of control and the identity crisis, provoked the proliferation of internal threats in search of the colonisation of power.

During the 1970s and 1980s, over the course of the Cold War, the institutionalised military dictatorships took sides and defended their sovereignty, through irregular forces, blurring the boundaries between civilian and military life. These forces were either loyal or competent, but rarely both¹¹. As soon as the bipolar world order collapsed, after the disappearance of the Soviet Union in 1991, the abandonment of the continent of both

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⁸ WARNER & THALER. «Dynamique et diversité des armées africaines: État des connaissances», Afrique contemporaine. 2016. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7295068>

⁹ ídem

¹⁰ WARNER & THALER. «Dynamique et diversité des armées africaines: État des connaissances», Afrique contemporaine. 2016. pp,3. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7295068>

¹¹ HOWE visto en WARNER & THALER. «Dynamique et diversité des armées africaines: État des connaissances», Afrique contemporaine. 2016. pp,3. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7295068>

superpowers created a security void”¹². This highlighted the dependency relationship, that those armies had with their donors. This decade of anarchy and abandonment of the African continent unleashed violence, affecting the armies of the young states now “in decline and weakened by the budget cuts, the international pressure to reduce and demobilise personnel and the absence of military assistance”¹³. The state vulnerability and the security void shaped a deregulated political ecosystem mediated by violence.

Insurgency and terrorism are part of a wide catalogue of asymmetrical threats that are institutionalised in the region. Insurgency is mainly used in isolated and poor rural areas, through direct confrontation and harassment, until taking over part of the territory. Terrorism on the other hand, is used in cities, where violence is more visible, and therefore more effective in terms of propaganda¹⁴. While the first aims to achieve political and territorial control, the second seeks to force political changes. In weak states, the political and territorial control is more feasible, which facilitates choosing a general strategy that includes terrorism as another tool in the toolbox. To do so, they will have to force part of the population into believing that attempting to reshape their own society and state, is the only rightful way solution to end their suffering.

Society and Radicalisation

The unravelling of the social fabric: The professionalisation of rebellion

Humans are social beings, that require collectivity to their development and as they develop, they become more collectivised. In order to do so, we experience a process of socialisation. This is a mechanism of cultural modelling, throughout conduct, norms and values that guide them. A process that stems from childhood and which continues over an entire life in constant development. As we do not live in such a symmetrical society, the interruption of the social harmony and the violation of the rules, are inseparable parts

¹² WARNER & THALER. «Dynamique et diversité des armées africaines: État des connaissances», Afrique contemporaine. 2016. pp,3. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7295068>

¹³ ídem

¹⁴ AZNAR. «Terrorismo y estrategia asimétrica», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (IEEE). 2011. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7268007>

of the society itself.

The interest in understanding this social tear, led to the birth of criminology, a stereotyped science and, therefore, unknown. The theories of the anomie held that antisocial behaviour originates from the weakness of the social norms. In the recesses of society, where social trust has not yet solidified and conditions are unfavourable, violence reigns. Violence is “a space of anomie, as it tends to elude all limitations and restrictions placed upon its development”¹⁵. Among its consequences we observe the fragmentation of social relations, the dissipation of the social trust and the loss of collective sense. This is a fertile ground for the flourishing of extremist ideas, since these are comforting, as at least their vision of the future is clearly articulated¹⁶.

In order to understand why someone would break social norms and even would act against their own society, we should first analyse how the individual perceives society. According to the theories of social identity, society is organised through a network of relationships based on social identities, which help people to define who they are, who others are, and how can they distinguish them¹⁷. An individual who “feels aggrieved because his expectations regarding how his life should be are not being fulfilled, may feel attracted to those who pledge to change the social order”¹⁸.

The mismatch between cultural goals and institutionalised means, is considered by Robert K.Merton as the explanation of antisocial behaviour¹⁹. When this occurs, individuals seek alternatives such as: innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion. Insurgency and terrorism will, therefore, represent the highest expression of rebellion, since they seek the imposition of new political objectives via the least legitimate methods: violence. Those who inhabit this grievance will feel attracted to social identities that attempt to explain their misery.

¹⁵ AZNAR. «Terrorismo y estrategia asimétrica», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (IEEE). 2011. pp,1. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7268007>

¹⁶ KFIR «Al-Shabaab, Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism», Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. 10/09/2016. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1236569>

¹⁷ idem

¹⁸ KFIR «Al-Shabaab, Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism», Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. 10/09/2016. pp,3. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1236569>

¹⁹ MERTON. «Social Structure and Anomie», American Sociological Review. 1938. Disponible en: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2084686>

	CULTURAL GOALS	INSTITUTIONALISED MEANS
CONFORMITY	ACCEPTED	ACCEPTED
INNOVATION	ACCEPTED	DENIED
RITUALISM	DENIED	ACCEPTED
RETREATISM	DENIED	DENIED
REBELLION	NEW	NEW

Illustration 1. Cultural patterns. Source Robert K. Merton, 1938 and own elaboration.

The terrorist groups and insurgents will present an agenda as a hook that inspires anger and grievance, linking the individual to the group and turning them into the very essence of the individual's life²⁰. They will also provide employment, means of subsistence, moral, spiritual and physical support, which will cause them to live within the group and fully commit to it²¹. The individual will adopt that group identity as a part of their own self-perception, which results in the construction of a collective identity²². Through social networks, whether physical or not, it is undertaken an identitarian migratory journey from normativity to extremism, in which feelings such as frustration, humiliation, indignation, anger and guilt cause the first movement. I have termed this process of exploitation, which combines environmental and personal conditions, the professionalisation of rebellion.

²⁰ KFIR «Al-Shabaab, Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism», *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. 10/09/2016. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1236569>

²¹ ídem

²² BOTHA & ABDILE. «Radicalisation and al-Shabaab Recruitment in Somalia», *Institute for Security Studies*. 2014. Disponible en: <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/radicalisation-al-shabaab-recruitment-somalia/>

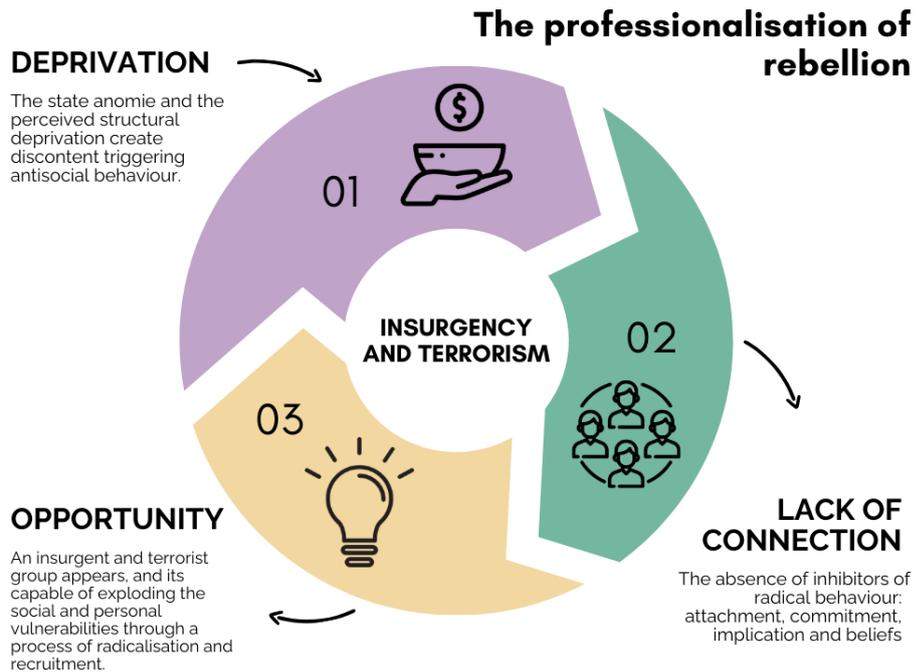


Illustration 2. The professionalisation of rebellion. Original source and elaboration.

The Al-Shabaab Case in Somalia

The birth of Al-Shabaab: The fragility of the Somali State

In 1960 Somalia achieves independence after a controversial process of unification of the former protectorate of the British Somaliland and the Italian Somalia, leaving a bittersweet aftertaste. In this new distribution of the map, part of the former territories of the Great Somalia, where the majority of the Somali ethnic group resides, ended up within the borders of Ethiopia, Kenya, and the modern Djibouti. This new state began with an thorn, it could not remove. However, this new state also began its sovereignty, “with the best social conditions to become a strong and united state: a single ethnic (Somali), a single language (Somali) and a single religion (Muslim)”²³. A first democratic period lasted until 1969, and it was replaced by a *coup d’etat* led by Mohamed Siad Barre, which ended up the democratic experiment and initiated the beginning of the national collapse. At the end of the 1980s, the clan-based conflicts provoked the disintegration of the central government in 1991, leaving an open wound and a split: the independence of Somaliland.

²³ DÍEZ. «Somalia: la complejidad de construir estado», Dimensiones de la seguridad en la política europea y global. 2021. pp, 143. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7965136>

The first Islamist cells awakened in the territory, such as the extremist movement *al-Ittihad al-Islami* (IAIA), linked with Al-Qaeda, which was then beginning to weave networks in Somali soil.

This anomic space of power made way for war, and it compromised the immunity of a young state like Somalia, provoking the beginning of a long period of state anaemia. This war hosted a bloody struggle to impose a fratricide peace, “which sank Somalia in absolute chaos and misgovernance, in which warlords strove for power in a “non-country territory” totally fragmented and violent”²⁴. This disarticulation of the state provoked the emergence, through the fissures, of a complex ecosystem of actors interested in occupying the vacuum of power. Specifically its capital, Mogadishu, was one of the most affected areas because of the fierce struggle between warlords, for the control of its neighbourhoods. The generalised absence of law during a decade, was exploited by local Islamic courts that used Islamic law (sharia) to impose order. Although the majority of Somalis were Sufis (moderate Islamic branch), they accepted these courts because they fill the gap that the dismantling of the police and judicial system had caused²⁵.

In 2004, the principal warlords and political leaders, supported the fourteenth initiative since 1991 to establish a government and a parliamentary system destined to procure the national reconciliation²⁶. As a consequence, emerging from Kenya, and with the support of Ethiopia, while swaying the clan representatives, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was established. At the same time, eleven Islamic courts merged into the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), notably increasing its influence in Mogadishu. The most radical factions of the ICU, took advantage of its partial control of the city, to impose an even more strict vision of sharia. In the neighbourhoods under its domination, women were forced to be fully covered from head to toe, football was banned and those perceived as non-Muslim were brutally punished²⁷. One of those factions was Al-Shabaab “The youngsters”, which independently emerged in 2000, and succeeded the former Islamist

²⁴ DÍEZ. «Somalia: la complejidad de construir estado», Dimensiones de la seguridad en la política europea y global. 2021. pp, 144. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7965136>

²⁵ WISE. «Al-Shabaab», Center for Strategic & International Studies. 15/07/2011. Disponible en: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/al-shabaab>

²⁶ DE LA CORTE. «Al Shabaab en el Cuerno de África», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. 2015. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7685751>

²⁷ LACY visto en WISE. «Al-Shabaab», Center for Strategic & International Studies. 15/07/2011. Disponible en: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/al-shabaab>

organisation, AIAI.

In 2006, the ICU summoned sufficient strength to settle in the capital and to expand its influence through the countryside. An increase in the group's power, caused concern in its Ethiopian neighbour, and as a reaction to the approach of the group to Baidoa, where the TFG had its headquarters, the Ethiopian army launched a strong intervention in Somali soil. This intervention was carried out with the support of the United Nations (RES 1757) and the African Union (AU), quickly returning the control of Mogadishu to the TFG²⁸. As a result, the ICU was defeated yet not dissolved, only fragmented in two branches: The alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia and another one, more belligerent and radical, driven by the guerrilla faction of Al-Shabaab. During the invasion, Al-Shabaab, pointed out as a maximum priority, the expulsion of every foreign invader and the unification of Somalia under a unified state. This worked as an effective claim to increase the ranks and gain local support²⁹.

The transformation of Al-Shabaab: The anarchy of the chameleon

Al-Shabaab experienced its golden years during the years 2008-2011, becoming an important power centre. The Ethiopian troops were retired in 2009, when the opposition forces were still weak and poorly coordinated. During 2010, Al-Shabaab was a dominant insurgent force, and by then “they had come to control the vast majority of South Somalia and an important part of the centre, with Kismayo as its first urban stronghold”³⁰. They took advantage of the absence of governance, using chaos as their fuel. From 2011, a severe drought and famine ravaged Somalia and along with it, the offensive of AMISON (AU, supported by United Nations) TFG and other militias, finally brought about the beginning of the insurgent decline and the progressive loss of territory. Military defeats forced the group to change, making them less insurgent and more asymmetric, thereby increasing the intensity of terrorists attacks and consolidating their position in the rural

²⁸ DE LA CORTE. «Al Shabaab en el Cuerno de África», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. 2015. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7685751>

²⁹ ídem

³⁰ DE LA CORTE. «Al Shabaab en el Cuerno de África», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. 2015. pp,8. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7685751>

areas, where the government rules only in theory.

This twist is part of the intrinsic ability held by asymmetric actors, called the anarchy of the chameleon³¹, which ensures the almost constant strategic adaptation and tactical innovation. This produced intra-group tensions, from which Ahmed Abdi Godane emerged, and who instigated Al-Shabaab's terrorist turn. The group adopted a global jihadist agenda, and swore allegiance to Al-Qaeda the 9th of February 2012. This led to the transformation into a hybrid actor, which acted at the same time, as national insurgent and as terrorist group affiliated to Al-Qaeda. The group started to utilise strategies as bomb suicides, improvised explosives, hit-and-run attacks, murder, threats and grenade attacks, which would allow them to use fewer fighters and provoke more chaos, destruction and terror³².

In 2012, presidential elections were held in order to stabilise the situation. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, leader of the Peace and Development Party (PDP) was elected by internal vote by the Federal Parliament. The institutionalisation attempts, the additional military interventions of the United States, Kenya and the European Union, and the loss in 2014 of its charismatic and the relentless leader, Godane, forced the group onto the defensive³³. In 2017 and 2022, indirect elections were held again. These efforts, although far from neutralising Al-Shabaab, were sufficient to securitise and present the group as a menace to regional stability, thereby justifying exceptional military operations and financial sanctions³⁴. Nevertheless, in 2024, Somalia ranked seventh among the countries most affected by terrorism³⁵.

³¹ STOCKHAMMER. «The Case of Hybrid Terrorism» en Routledge Handbook of Transnational Terrorism. 2023. Disponible en: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003326373-9/case-hybrid-terrorism-nicolas-stockhammer>

³² KFIR «Al-Shabaab, Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism», Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. 10/09/2016. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1236569>

³³ DE LA CORTE. «Al Shabaab en el Cuerno de África», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. 2015. Disponible en: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7685751>

³⁴ AFRIYIE. «What fuels terrorism in Somalia? Perspectives from the jihadist group Al-Shabaab», Taylor & Francis Online. 24/10/2025. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ref/10.1080/23311886.2025.2576151?scroll=top>

³⁵ INSTITUTE FOR ECONOMICS AND PEACE visto en AFRIYIE. «What fuels terrorism in Somalia? Perspectives from the jihadist group Al-Shabaab», Taylor & Francis Online. 24/10/2025. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ref/10.1080/23311886.2025.2576151?scroll=top>

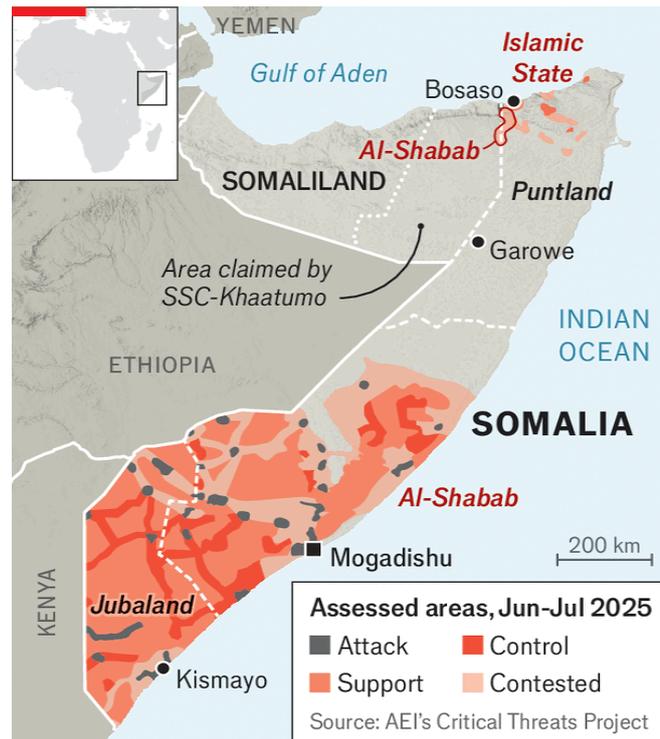


Illustration 3. Influence of Al-Shabaab. Source and elaboration: Critical Threats Project (2025)

During this process of national reconstruction, Al-Shabaab continued to be part of the political life of Somalia, playing an important role as a parallel power mechanism³⁶. Despite advances in the national project, a solid structure of central government failed to gain a foothold in Somalia. It “lacks the institutional channels necessary to meet the demands of a decentralised society and is therefore perceived as an entity imposed from the exterior, ineffective in providing basic services”³⁷. The Somali political soil is cultivated by a clan-based society, it is a fallow land, incapable of carrying out a government that harmonizes centralised modern governance with clan-based administration. Other structural factors such as the partisan contradictions between clans and the terrorist activity of Al-Shabaab, hinder its flourishing.

³⁶ CONTRERAS. «Somalia y la insurgencia de Al-Shabaab: análisis de poder paralelo en un Estado fragmentado», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (IEEE). 19/06/2025. Disponible en: https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/ieeee/somalia_y_la_insurgencia_de_al-shabaab_2025_dieeee50

³⁷ CONTRERAS. «Somalia y la insurgencia de Al-Shabaab: análisis de poder paralelo en un Estado fragmentado», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (IEEE). 19/06/2025. pp,7. Disponible en: https://www.defensa.gob.es/ceseden/-/ieeee/somalia_y_la_insurgencia_de_al-shabaab_2025_dieeee50

Joining Al-Shabaab: The side of the marginalised

A state can create realities, and when it cannot, society panics because nature abhors a vacuum. Somalia has suffered, during decades, from the absence of an effective legal system and a solid central government, which has resulted in chaos. Where violence prevails, so does deviation, in other words, the discontent and attraction to antisocial behaviour. Al-Shabaab took that opportunity and promoted, since its affiliation to Al-Qaeda, a particular narrative which has as its cornerstone, the victimization and the idea that Islam and the Muslims are victims of a Western campaign that oppresses the *umma* and poor people³⁸. In other words, Al-Shabaab, has taken and continues to take advantage of the anger, alienation, and identity crisis of young Somalis, who seek explanations and answers.

When a state is incapable of securitising its competitors for the sake of power, the latter have the opportunity to present themselves as a political alternative, culminating in the privatisation of the legitimate use of force. Al-Shabaab, has developed an inverse securitisation strategy, presenting itself as a guarantor against the foreign intervention and the apostate political authority, and portraying the state and their sponsors in an existential way³⁹. The recruitment structure of Al-Shabaab is responsible for reaping the rewards of its partial social legitimation. This unfolds in two spheres: the first one focused on the Horn of Africa, while the other, centred on the global level, through the cyberspace, targeting the Somalis who live in the West⁴⁰. A refined system with access to enormous funds, which vary between the \$70 and \$100 million, and are gained through taxation, extortion, sugar, contraband and charcoal⁴¹.

The effectiveness of the system depends on the push and pull factors. While the former explains the vital conditions that draw individuals to radical ideology, the latter describes

³⁸ KFIR «Al-Shabaab, Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism», Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. 10/09/2016. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1236569>

³⁹ INGIRIIS visto en KFIR «Al-Shabaab, Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism», Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. 10/09/2016. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1236569>

⁴⁰ KFIR «Al-Shabaab, Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism», Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. 10/09/2016. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1236569>

⁴¹ UNITED NATIONS visto en KFIR «Al-Shabaab, Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism», Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. 10/09/2016. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1236569>

the personal incentives which culminate in recruitment. On one hand, the push factors are: poverty and economic privation, weak governance, social marginalisation, insecurity and conflict, abuse of human rights and systematic violations⁴². On the other hand, the pull factors are: ideological appeal, sense of belonging, economic incentives, effective propaganda and territorial control⁴³.

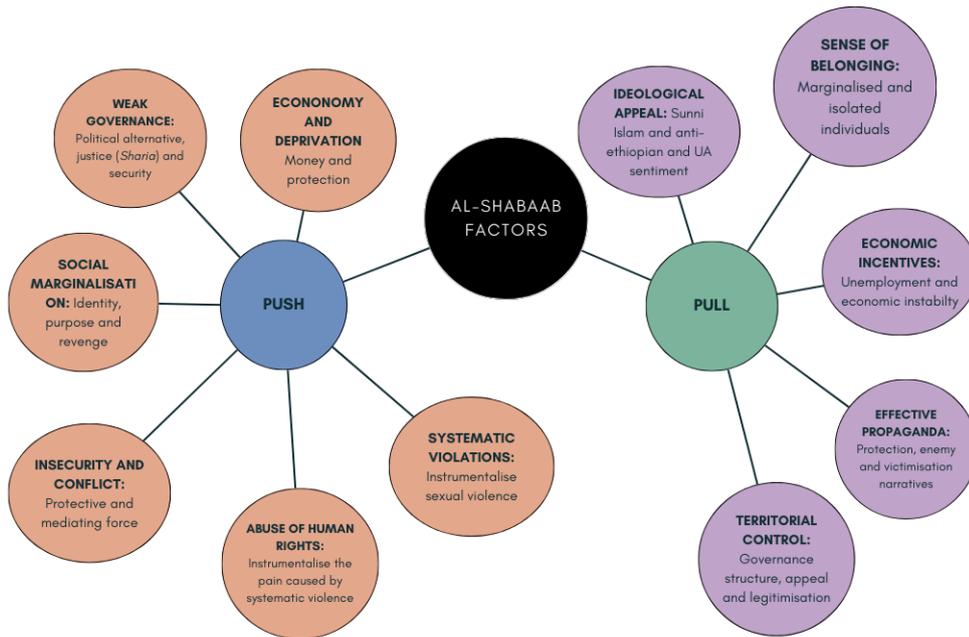


Illustration 2. Push and pull factors Al-Shabaab. Source: Appiah (2025); own elaboration.

This structure of recruitment aims to spring up the seed of radicalisation. Over the course between 14 and 28 April 2014 a series of interviews were carried out, in Mogadishu of 88 members of Al-Shabaab, with the aim of generating information about the causes of radicalisation and recruitment. The published results⁴⁴, reflect the profile of the recruited, and reveal radicalisation as a process of exploiting human vulnerability.

⁴² AFRIYIE. «What fuels terrorism in Somalia? Perspectives from the jihadist group Al-Shabaab», Taylor & Francis Online. 24/10/2025. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ref/10.1080/23311886.2025.2576151?scroll=top>

⁴³ ídem

⁴⁴ BOTHA & ABDILE. «Radicalisation and al-Shabaab Recruitment in Somalia», Institute for Security Studies. 2014. Disponible en: <https://www.peacemakersnetwork.org/radicalisation-al-shabaab-recruitment-somalia/>

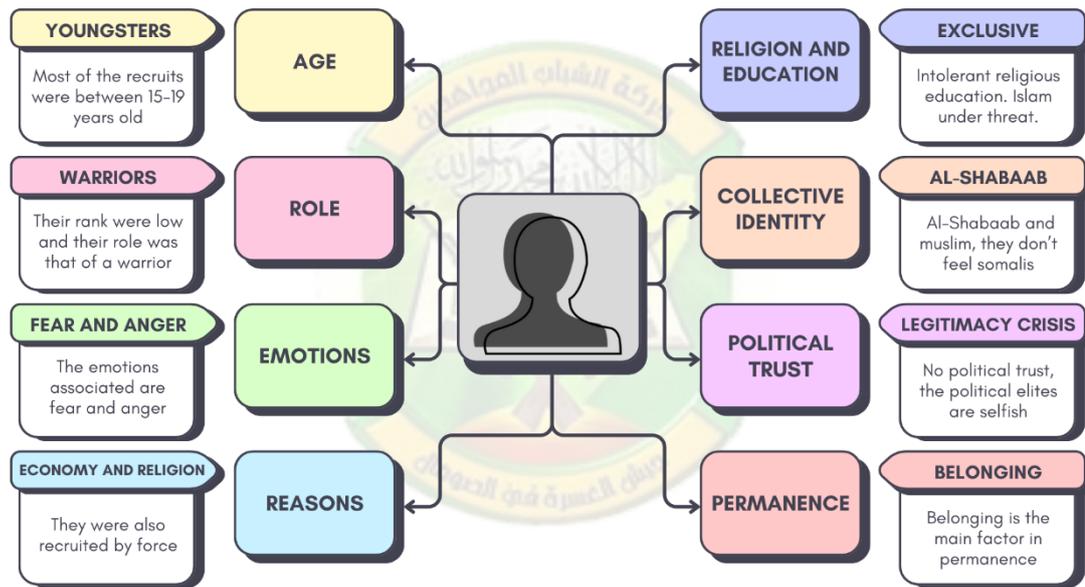


Illustration 3. Al-Shabaab recruitment. Source: Botha (2014); own elaboration.

Ultimately, the success of Al-Shabaab depends on its capacity to promote a formation campaign, through which it professionalises the rebellion of a part of the Somali society, both within and beyond its borders, which suffers. As the governance weakens, the pace of professionalisation and the intensity of the push and pull factors will increase. The discontent of the youngsters, the lack of community and state trust, and the existence of an attractive political and terrorist group, culminate a cruel process, causing an incessant haemorrhage on one side of the Somali state, and splintering the ribs of the Horn of Africa.

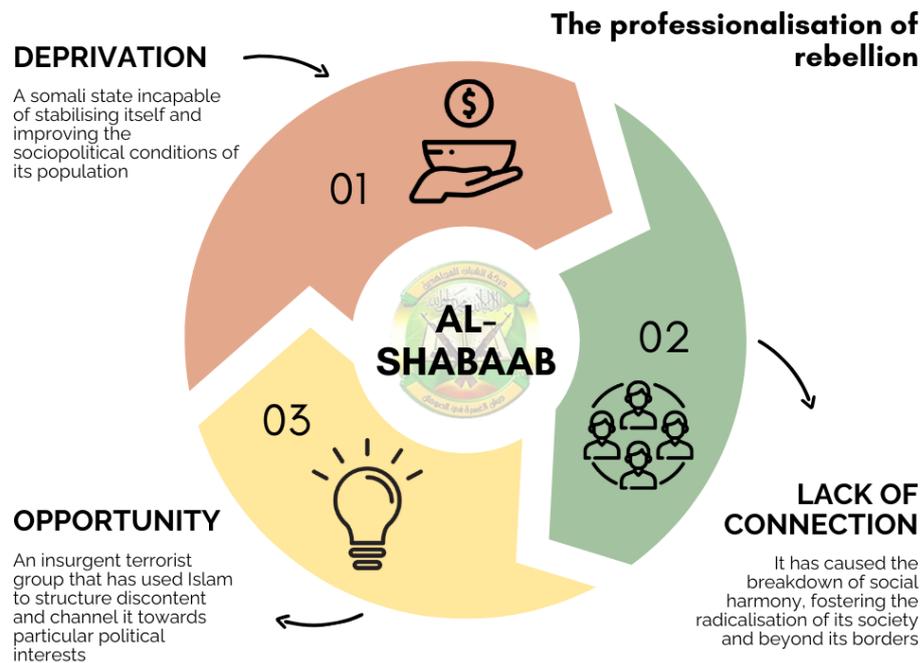


Illustration 4. Al-Shabaab Rebellion. Own source and elaboration (2025).

The consequences of Al-Shabaab: A leech of the governance

Al-Shabaab is so destructive that its impact goes far beyond the visible consequences. Other less visible consequences are: geopolitical instability, economic impact, destruction of the community and erosion of the healthcare and educational sector. Firstly, the geopolitical instability, Al-Shabaab has formed alliances with the group Ansar Allah, using Somali ports to traffic weapons, thus compromising the maritime security of the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea⁴⁵. In addition, it has displaced around 2.9 million people, impacting neighbouring countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia, which have welcomed thousands of Somali refugees⁴⁶. In the economic sphere, Al-Shabaab's parallel system of government, financed through economic exploitation, undermines the government and its ability to provide services⁴⁷, as well as the stability of both family and national economy.

The socio-community impact lies in the indiscriminate attacks and massacres, which target people such as: political activists, officers, journalists, civilians, with a particular

⁴⁵ AFRIYIE. «What fuels terrorism in Somalia? Perspectives from the jihadist group Al-Shabaab», Taylor & Francis Online. 24/10/2025. Disponible en: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ref/10.1080/23311886.2025.2576151?scroll=top>

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impact on children and women, who are doubly victimised by gender violence. Other sectors such as healthcare have also been affected, which has prevented the Somali society access to primary healthcare services⁴⁸. The educational sector has been attacked systematically by imposing in some schools, restrictive curricula, which at times have functioned as a part of the recruitment machinery. All these constrictive effects are projected as an ignored resonant shout in a world with ears but without hearing.

Conclusions

Between the cracks of a fragmented state, new competitors for governance emerge. Insurgency and terrorism are asymmetrical threats that arise from society and erode it. A blight that feeds on social vulnerabilities and capitalises fragile bodies, as a part of a strategy that seeks power and the imposition of particular political objectives. These threats establish roots when some environmental conditions converge, leading to a kind of greenhouse effect. War is a chameleon that is in constant adaptation and mutation, ensuring its subsistence, at the expense of those who trusted the same project that would abandon them. The centre of gravity of those who use force instead of violence, resides in the will of millions of people oriented to a collaborative political project, which under certain circumstances, has enough capacity to manage victory.

The case of Al-Shabaab is paradigmatic. Firstly, because it evidences that insurgency and terrorism capitalise on withered states, contributing to their own instability. Secondly, because it seems that violence may be attractive, as political means, to those that suffer. The success of the group evidences a two-way relationship with the state: the weakness of governance in Somalia explains the resilience of the group, and the latter explains its inability to govern. The future of Somalia is uncertain, but will undoubtedly have to work on the construction of a national project, firstly capable of harmonising state and clan-based culture, and secondly, able to mitigate the sociopolitical conditions that lead to extremism.

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