

INSECURITY AND CORRUPTION: THE DEVASTATING IMPACT ON SOMALIA

A Research-Based Comprehensive Analysis



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BOOK TITLE: INSECURITY AND CORRUPTION: THE DEVASTATING IMPACT ON SOMALIA



A Research-Based Comprehensive Analysis

This image illustrates the corruption affecting Somalia and its profound consequences for national security and social stability. The displacement of vulnerable populations, particularly women, children, and other marginalized communities, has intensified humanitarian hardship and contributed to the expansion of poverty and dependence on begging. It has also increased the vulnerability of disadvantaged communities to theft and other survival-related forms of crime, while reports of sexual violence have become an additional concern among internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The central question, therefore, is: **what is the fundamental solution to Somalia's security challenges?** A sustainable approach requires addressing corruption as a structural factor undermining security, governance, and social stability. However, the very institutions mandated to prevent and combat corruption have, in some cases, been identified as part of the broader problem, particularly where corruption is alleged to intersect with private commercial interests and the exploitation, appropriation, or auctioning of public assets for private gain. Such practices can further weaken public institutions, deepen inequality, and undermine efforts to establish lasting peace and security.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Avv. Mohamed Hussein Hamud, PhD, is a Somali lawyer, legal scholar, published author, and public servant. He is the author of *INSECURITY AND CORRUPTION: THE DEVASTATING IMPACT ON SOMALIA* and has published numerous articles and books on matters of law, governance, and public affairs. He has also served as a university lecturer at several institutions, including Mogadishu University, the University of Somalia, Hormuud University, and other higher education institutions in Somalia.

He currently serves as Chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission of the Federal Republic of Somalia. His professional background includes service within Somalia's judiciary, where he worked as a senior legal practitioner Advocate inside the legal institutions.

Dr. Hamud has also played a significant role in developing corporate legal frameworks within Somalia's private sector. He established and managed the legal department of Hormuud Telecom and worked on the legal structures of its associated business portfolio, including Salaam Bank, BECO Powering, Buruuj Construction, New Banadir Water, and other affiliated companies. These businesses are among Somalia's largest and most influential enterprises, collectively representing a substantial share of the country's economic activity, estimated at more than 70 percent. Notably, he helped establish the legal frameworks upon which these companies have operated, providing a foundation that continues to serve their activities and has since undergone further development.

In addition to his corporate and public service, Dr. Hamud founded **Gardoona Law Firm**, which has contributed to the preparation and development of several legislative instruments that have become part of Somalia's legal framework, including the Electricity Law, the Telecommunications Law, and other legislation. Through its legal aid services, the firm also assists economically disadvantaged individuals who cannot afford legal representation before courts or obtain adequate assistance when dealing with law enforcement, judicial institutions, and other bodies responsible for the administration of justice.

This biography provides a concise overview of the author's professional experience, legal contributions, academic engagement, and public service. Through his work, Dr. Hamud has sought to contribute to Somalia's legal development, institutional strengthening, and public accountability.

The author dedicates this book to the Somali people.

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Dedication

To the people of Somalia whose resilience in the face of insecurity and corruption remains an enduring testament to the human spirit, and whose longing for justice, peace, and accountable governance has never been extinguished despite decades of state failure, displacement, and suffering. This book is written in the hope that evidence-based understanding can illuminate the path toward a more secure, transparent, and prosperous Somalia.



Abstract

Insecurity and Corruption: The Devastating Impact on Somalia presents a research-based, comprehensive analysis of the mutually reinforcing relationship between insecurity and corruption in Somalia and their profound consequences for governance, development, and human security. The book argues that Somalia's prolonged political crisis cannot be understood as a problem of armed violence alone; rather, insecurity and corruption constitute an interdependent cycle in which weak institutions, clan-based patronage, and the absence of accountability enable violence, while violence and state fragility further expand opportunities for corruption. Drawing on historical analysis, institutional assessment, documented cases, international reports, and empirical studies, the book examines the historical roots of state collapse, the conceptual foundations of insecurity and corruption, and the rise of Al-Shabaab as both a violent extremist movement and an alternative governance actor. It further analyses clan militias and inter-communal conflict, displacement and humanitarian vulnerability, systemic corruption in public institutions, the clan corruption nexus, and corruption within the security sector, including ghost soldiers, procurement fraud, arms diversion, and payroll abuse. The study also explores the role of humanitarian aid, the erosion of the social contract, and the damaging effects of insecurity and corruption on the economy, education, health, justice, and the rule of law. It critically evaluates anti-corruption frameworks, security sector reform, and international engagement, finding that externally driven, capacity-focused interventions have often failed because they neglect governance, accountability, and local ownership. The book concludes that breaking Somalia's vicious cycle requires integrated, evidence-based, and locally owned reforms: transparent public financial management, credible parliamentary and audit oversight, accountable security institutions, digital governance, civic participation, media freedom, and redesigned international partnerships based on mutual accountability. By connecting structural corruption to insecurity and insecurity to institutional decay, this book offers both a critical diagnosis of Somalia's governance crisis and a practical framework for building a more secure, transparent, just, and prosperous Somali state.

Keywords: Somalia; insecurity; corruption; state fragility; Al-Shabaab; governance; security sector reform; accountability; humanitarian aid; institutional reform.

PART I: FOUNDATIONS AND CONTEXT

CHAPTER ONE

THE STATE OF STATELESSNESS

SOMALIA'S HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY

Introduction

The story of Somalia's descent into insecurity and corruption did not begin in 1991, when the government of President Siad Barre collapsed and the country spiraled into civil war. Rather, the roots of Somalia's twin afflictions reach deep into the colonial partition of the Somali peninsula, the distortions of post-independence governance, and the deliberate destruction of institutional capacity under two decades of military dictatorship. Understanding this historical trajectory is not an academic exercise in attribution; it is the essential foundation for comprehending why insecurity and corruption have become so deeply embedded in Somalia's political, social, and economic fabric that they now appear not as aberrations but as defining features of the Somali state.

This chapter traces the historical arc from colonial division through state collapse, examining the structural conditions that created fertile ground for the interlocking crises of insecurity and corruption that define contemporary Somalia. The argument advanced here is that the Somali state was never fully constituted in the Weberian sense it never achieved a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within its territory, nor did it establish bureaucratic rationality as the basis for governance. Instead, the state oscillated between weak post-colonial institutions and authoritarian personalization, each phase deepening the structural vulnerabilities that would eventually make insecurity and corruption not merely possible but probable.

The Collapse of the Somali State (1991) and Its Enduring Consequences

On January 26, 1991, President Siad Barre fled Mogadishu as the coalition of clan-based armed opposition groups that had been fighting his regime since the late 1980s finally overran the capital. What followed was not a transition of power but the wholesale

dissolution of the state apparatus. Government ministries were looted, archives destroyed, civil servant records lost, and the institutional memory of governance evaporated almost overnight. The Somali National Army at one point the largest military force in sub-Saharan Africa disintegrated into competing clan militias. The police, judiciary, and civil service ceased to function.

The consequences of this collapse were catastrophic and enduring. First, the elimination of state institutions created a governance vacuum that was immediately filled by clan-based militias, religious courts, and eventually warlords who exercised territorial control through force rather than legitimacy. Second, the absence of any regulatory or legal framework transformed the economy into an informal, unregulated space where extortion, smuggling, and illicit trade became primary livelihood strategies. Third, the destruction of the state's coercive capacity meant that no entity could enforce laws, collect taxes legitimately, or provide security functions that are prerequisite to any form of accountable governance.

The international community's response to the state collapse the UN-sponsored humanitarian intervention (UNOSOM I and II, 1992–1995) failed to establish sustainable governance structures. The withdrawal of UN forces in 1995 left Somalia without any external mechanism for state reconstruction, and the country entered what would become the longest continuous period of state collapse in modern history. Between 1991 and 2000, Somalia had no recognized central government, no functioning public institutions, and no formal mechanism for collective decision-making beyond clan and sub-clan negotiations.

The enduring consequences of this collapse are measurable. According to the World Bank, Somalia's GDP per capital fell from approximately \$282 in 1990 to an estimated \$132 by 1994, a decline of over 53 percent in just four years. Literacy rates, which had reached approximately 24 percent under Barre's literacy campaigns, stagnated as the education system collapsed entirely. Life expectancy, which had been improving through the 1980s, began to decline as health infrastructure was destroyed and access to basic

services vanished. These indicators did not recover to pre-collapse levels for more than two decades and in many cases, they have still not fully recovered.

The 1991 collapse also established a pattern that would define Somalia's post-state trajectory: the weaponization of statelessness. In the absence of a functioning government, every aspect of governance security, justice, taxation, service delivery became a commodity to be captured, traded, and exploited by whichever actor possessed sufficient coercive power. This dynamic the conversion of public goods into private resources through force is the essential mechanism linking state collapse to both insecurity and corruption. It created a political economy in which violence and graft were not deviations from the norm but the norm itself.

From Colonial Partition to Post-Independence Governance Failures

The conditions that made state collapse possible were shaped by Somalia's colonial experience. The Somali peninsula was divided among five colonial powers: the British in the north (British Somaliland Protectorate), the Italians in the south (Italian Somaliland), the French in what is now Djibouti (French Somaliland), the Ethiopians in the Ogaden (Hararghe province), and the British again in what is now the North Eastern Province of Kenya. This partition severed the Somali people from one another, creating artificial borders that divided nomadic communities, trade routes, and grazing lands. The colonial experience had several lasting consequences for governance.

First, the Italian colonial administration in the south established a plantation economy that concentrated land ownership in the hands of a small elite, creating class distinctions that had not previously existed in Somali pastoral society. The Italian colonial state was extractive, centralized, and deeply corrupt it functioned primarily to serve Italian commercial interests, not Somali welfare. When independence came in 1960, the institutions left behind were designed for extraction, not accountability.

Second, the British colonial administration in the north was more indirect, relying on existing clan structures and customary law (xeer) to maintain order. This created a governance tradition that was decentralized and clan-based, in

contrast to the centralized Italian model in the south. When the two former colonies unified to form the Somali Republic on July 1, 1960, the institutional incompatibility between these two traditions was never resolved. The southern, centralized model dominated the new state, marginalizing northern political traditions and creating grievances that would eventually fuel the Somaliland secession movement.

Third, the partition of the Somali people across multiple states created the irredentist ambition that would dominate Somali foreign policy from independence onward. The desire to unify all Somali territories the Greater Somalia (Soomaaliweyn) project became the central ideological project of the post-independence state, culminating in the disastrous Ogaden War of 1977–1978 against Ethiopia. This war drained the state's resources, destroyed its military capacity, and initiated the economic decline that would eventually contribute to state collapse.

The post-independence civilian government (1960–1969) was democratic in form but deeply flawed in practice. Political parties were organized along clan lines, elections were characterized by widespread vote-buying and manipulation, and the parliamentary system proved unable to manage clan competition peacefully. By the late 1960s, the legislature had become paralyzed by clan-based factionalism, and the Prime Minister, Mohamed Egal, was governing by decree. The assassination of President Shermarke in October 1969 and the subsequent military coup led by General Siad Barre on October 21, 1969, was thus less a rupture than an acceleration of existing governance failures.

The Legacy of Siad Barre's Regime: Authoritarianism, Clan Favoritism, and Institutional Decay

The regime of Siad Barre (1969–1991) is the single most important factor in understanding the structural conditions that produced contemporary Somalia's insecurity and corruption. Barre's regime began with a rhetoric of scientific socialism, anti-tribalism, and national development. The early years saw literacy campaigns, infrastructure projects, and the formal abolition of clan-based references in public discourse. However, within a decade, the regime had transformed into a personalized

dictatorship that systematically instrumentalized clan identities for political control, destroyed institutional independence, and created a culture of corruption and fear that persists to this day.

Barre's clan strategy was both sophisticated and devastating. Formally, the regime denounced clanism as a reactionary force. Barre's slogan "God, Country, Family" explicitly replaced clan with family as the primary social unit. In practice, however, Barre built a power base drawn primarily from his own Marehan clan (part of the Darod clan-family) and allied clans (Ogadeni and Dulbahante), forming the so-called MOD alliance. This alliance was the inner circle of power, controlling the military, intelligence services, and key economic assets. As the regime faced increasing opposition in the 1980s, Barre increasingly relied on clan loyalty to maintain power, distributing patronage to loyal clans and punishing disloyal ones with devastating violence.

The Barre regime's destruction of institutional capacity was systematic and deliberate. The judiciary was subordinated to the executive, with judges appointed and removed based on political loyalty. The civil service was politicized, with appointments made on the basis of clan affiliation rather than competence. The military was expanded far beyond the state's capacity to sustain it, creating an oversized force that would later fragment into clan militias. The intelligence service, the National Security Service (NSS), became an instrument of terror, surveilling, detaining, and torturing real and perceived opponents. Perhaps most damaging was the regime's economic corruption. By the mid-1980s, Somalia was effectively bankrupt, unable to pay civil servant salaries or maintain basic services. Barre responded by printing money, creating hyperinflation, and allowing senior officials to plunder state resources. The informal economy grew to dwarf the formal economy, and corruption became not merely tolerated but structurally necessary for survival. Civil servants demanded bribes because their official salaries were worthless; military officers sold weapons and supplies because the state could not provision its forces; businessmen paid off officials because the regulatory system had collapsed.

The regime's violence against perceived opponents further eroded the social contract. The brutal counterinsurgency campaigns against the Isaaq in the north (1987–1989), which amounted to genocide according to some international legal assessments, the Majeerteen in the northeast, and the Hawiye in central Somalia destroyed any remaining legitimacy the state possessed. The state had become not a provider of security but its greatest threat a dynamic that directly foreshadowed the post-1991 security vacuum. The legacy of Barre's regime can be summarized in three propositions that are directly relevant to understanding contemporary insecurity and corruption:

1. **Institutional destruction is path-dependent:** The Barre regime's systematic dismantling of institutional capacity created a starting condition for the post-1991 period in which there were simply no functioning institutions to rebuild upon. Unlike post-conflict states where institutions are damaged but not destroyed, Somalia's institutional infrastructure was comprehensively demolished, making state reconstruction exponentially more difficult.
2. **Clan instrumentalization created a template for patronage governance:** The regime's use of clan loyalty as the primary criterion for political appointment, resource allocation, and protection established a model that every subsequent Somali government has replicated. The Transitional National Government (TNG, 2000–2004), the Transitional Federal Government (TFG, 2004–2012), and the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS, 2012–present) have all been built on clan-based power-sharing arrangements that perpetuate the patronage logic of the Barre.
3. **Corruption as a survival strategy became culturally embedded:** The normalization of corruption during the Barre era when graft was not merely tolerated but necessary for institutional functioning created social norms around corruption that proved extremely durable. Post-1991, in the absence of any formal regulatory framework, these norms intensified, as corruption became the only mechanism through which public goods could be accessed and distributed.

How Three Decades of State Collapse Created Fertile Ground for Insecurity and Corruption

The period from 1991 to approximately 2012 roughly two decades represents the longest continuous episode of state collapse in modern history. During this period, Somalia had no recognized central government (until the TNG in 2000), no functional public institutions, and no coherent legal framework. This section examines how the conditions of statelessness created the structural conditions for the interlocking crises of insecurity and corruption.

The Governance Vacuum and the Rise of Warlordism

The immediate aftermath of state collapse saw the fragmentation of the former national army into clan-based militias, each controlling territory and population through force. In Mogadishu, rival warlords most notably Mohamed Farah Aideed (Habr Gedr Hawiye) and Ali Mahdi Mohamed (Abgal Hawiye) fought for control of the capital, while in the hinterlands, local militia leaders established fiefdoms based on clan territory. These warlords functioned as de facto governments: they collected taxes (through checkpoints, extortion, and protection rackets), administered rough justice through clan elders and Islamic courts, and provided security but only to their own clans and only at a price. The warlord era (1991–2006) was characterized by several dynamics that are directly relevant to the insecurity-corruption nexus.

First, warlordism demonstrated that governance could be privatized that the functions of the state could be captured and exercised by non-state actors with coercive power. This established a precedent that has never been fully reversed: even after the establishment of the TFG in 2004 and the Federal Government in 2012, significant portions of Somalia's governance functions remain in the hands of non-state actors (clan militias, Al-Shabaab, business cartels).

Second, the warlord economy was fundamentally corrupt. Warlords extracted resources from populations through forced taxation, checkpoint extortion, and protection payments. They controlled ports and airstrips, facilitating the import of goods (including weapons and contraband) and the export of charcoal a trade that was both illegal under international environmental law and a major source

of revenue. The warlord economy created a class of political-military entrepreneurs whose wealth and power depended on the continuation of statelessness and insecurity. These actors had a structural interest in preventing the re-establishment of a functional, accountable state that would undermine their economic base.

Third, the warlord era entrenched the connection between violence and economic accumulation. In a context where the state could not enforce contracts, protect property rights, or regulate economic activity, the ability to use force became the primary form of economic capital. Those who controlled armed groups could extract resources; those who did not were vulnerable to expropriation. This dynamic the fusion of coercive power and economic accumulation remains a defining feature of Somalia's political economy.

The Rise of Islamic Governance Alternatives

The failure of warlordism to provide either security or legitimate governance created space for Islamic movements to present themselves as alternatives. The Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which emerged in Mogadishu in the early 2000s, offered a form of governance rooted in Sharia law that contrasted sharply with the lawlessness and corruption of the warlords. The ICU restored order in areas it controlled, reduced crime, and provided basic services gaining significant popular support in the process.

However, the ICU's rise was also enabled by external funding from private Islamic charities and Gulf states, and its governance model was not without its own forms of corruption and coercion. When the ICU was displaced by the Ethiopian invasion of December 2006, its militant wing Al-Shabaab emerged as the most powerful armed group in Somalia, transforming from a nationalist insurgency into a transnational jihadist organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda. The significance of the ICU and Al-Shabaab for the insecurity-corruption nexus is twofold. First, these movements demonstrated that when the formal state fails to provide security and justice, populations will turn to alternative governance providers even if those providers are themselves coercive and authoritarian. The legitimacy of non-state actors is directly proportional to the failure

of the state. Second, Al-Shabaab's subsequent development of a sophisticated taxation and extortion economy which by some estimates generates \$70–100 million annually represents the most extreme example of how insecurity creates corruption opportunities and how corruption sustains insecurity.

The Transitional Period and the Politics of Power-Sharing

The internationally sponsored state-building process that began with the TNG in 2000 and continued through the TFG (2004–2012) was built on a fundamentally flawed premise: that a functional state could be constructed through clan-based power-sharing agreements negotiated among political elites, without addressing the underlying structural conditions of insecurity and corruption.

The 4.5 clan power-sharing formula which allocates parliamentary seats and government positions among the four major clan families (Darod, Hawiye, Dir, and Isaaq) and a 0.5 share for minority clans was designed to ensure representation and prevent the domination of any single clan. In practice, however, it created a system in which political office is treated as clan property, government positions are allocated based on clan identity rather than competence, and accountability mechanisms are neutered because each clan protects its own members from prosecution.

The transitional governments were characterized by chronic corruption, limited territorial control, and dependence on international protection. The TFG, established in 2004, was unable to enter Mogadishu without Ethiopian military support, and its control over Somali territory never extended significantly beyond the capital and a few other urban areas. Government officials, funded by international donors and provided with security by African Union peacekeepers, systematically diverted public resources, appointed unqualified cronies to key positions, and failed to deliver basic services to the population. The 2012 transition to the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) was hailed as a milestone the first permanent (rather than transitional) government in two decades. However, the structural conditions that had produced insecurity and corruption during the transitional period were largely unchanged. The FGS continued to operate under the clan-based power-sharing formula, remained dependent on international

security assistance, and controlled only a fraction of Somali territory. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the formal trappings of statehood a constitution, a parliament, a president, a prime minister did not translate into functional governance capacity or accountability.

Conclusion

The historical trajectory traced in this chapter leads to a clear analytical conclusion: the insecurity and corruption that define contemporary Somalia are not accidental or episodic phenomena but the product of structural conditions that have been accumulating for more than a century. Colonial partition created institutional incompatibilities and irredentist ambitions that distorted governance priorities.

The post-independence civilian government demonstrated the fragility of democratic institutions in a clan-based political culture. The Barre regime destroyed institutional capacity, instrumentalized clan identities for political control, and normalized corruption as a governance mechanism. State collapse eliminated the last vestiges of formal governance, creating a political economy in which violence and graft became the primary currencies of power. These historical legacies are not merely background; they are active determinants of contemporary outcomes. The patronage logic of the Barre era continues to shape government appointment practices. The institutional destruction of the 1980s and 1990s continues to constrain state capacity.

The warlord precedent of governance privatization continues to operate through clan militias and Al-Shabaab. And the normalization of corruption as a survival strategy continues to undermine every attempt at institutional reform. Understanding these structural conditions is essential for the analysis that follows.

Chapters 3 through 9 examine the specific manifestations of insecurity and corruption in contemporary Somalia, but they do so with the recognition that these manifestations are expressions of deep structural conditions not isolated problems that can be addressed through technocratic reforms or institutional transplantations. The historical trajectory matters because it tells us not only what happened but why what happened produced the outcomes we observe today.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINING THE TWIN SCOURGES

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Before examining the specific manifestations of insecurity and corruption in Somalia, it is necessary to establish a conceptual framework that defines these phenomena, explains their relationship, and identifies the theoretical perspectives that can illuminate their dynamics. This is not a purely academic exercise; the way we conceptualize insecurity and corruption shapes the policy responses we design, the metrics we use to measure progress, and the expectations we hold about what is achievable.

If insecurity is understood primarily as the absence of military security as the presence of armed groups and the occurrence of violent incidents then the appropriate response is a military one: building army capacity, deploying peacekeepers, and conducting counterterrorism operations. If, however, insecurity is understood as the absence of human security encompassing physical safety, economic livelihood, food security, health, and political voice then the appropriate response is far broader, encompassing governance reform, economic development, and social protection.

Similarly, if corruption is understood as a moral failing as the dishonest behavior of individuals who choose to exploit public office for private gain then the appropriate response is moral: anti-corruption education, ethical codes, and punishment of individual offenders. If, however, corruption is understood as a systemic phenomenon as the product of institutional structures, political incentives, and social norms that make corrupt behavior rational and even necessary then the appropriate response must be structural: redesigning institutions, realigning incentives, and transforming the political economy that sustains corruption.

This chapter adopts the broader, structural understanding of both phenomena. It argues that insecurity and corruption in Somalia are not independent problems that happen to coexist but are deeply intertwined phenomena that constitute a mutually reinforcing

cycle a vicious cycle in which insecurity creates opportunities and incentives for corruption, and corruption undermines the state's capacity to provide security, thereby perpetuating insecurity.

Conceptualizing Insecurity: Armed Conflict, Terrorism, and Governance Vacuums

Insecurity is a multifaceted concept that encompasses far more than the absence of peace or the presence of violence. In the Somali context, three dimensions of insecurity are analytically distinct but empirically intertwined: armed conflict, terrorism, and governance vacuums.

o Armed Conflict

Armed conflict in Somalia has taken multiple forms since 1991: inter-clan warfare (1991–2006), insurgency against internationally supported transitional governments (2006–2012), Al-Shabaab's jihadist insurgency (2006–present), and inter-clan and inter-communal violence over resources (ongoing). The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) has recorded Somalia as a conflict-affected state continuously since 1991, with battle-related deaths fluctuating from several hundred to several thousand per year depending on the intensity of fighting. The concept of armed conflict in Somalia must be broadened beyond conventional battlefield encounters to include the everyday violence that characterizes life in much of the country: checkpoint extortion by armed groups, forced displacement by militias and government forces, gender-based violence in IDP camps, and the lethal consequences of destroyed health infrastructure. The distinction between "conflict-related" and "non-conflict" violence is often meaningless in a context where the absence of functional policing and justice systems means that all violence is effectively conflict-enabled.

o Terrorism

Al-Shabaab's campaign of terrorism including suicide bombings, IED attacks, assassinations, and targeted killings represents a specific form of insecurity that is analytically distinct from general armed conflict. Terrorism aims not merely to inflict casualties but to communicate a political message: that the state cannot protect its

citizens, that cooperation with the government is dangerous, and that Al-Shabaab's authority is inescapable. The psychological impact of terrorism the climate of fear it creates, the behavioral changes it imposes, the trust it destroys is as significant as its physical impact.

Between 2007 and 2025, Al-Shabaab has conducted hundreds of terrorist attacks, including major operations such as the 2017 bombing that killed over 587 people in Mogadishu the single deadliest terrorist attack in African history. The cumulative effect of this sustained terrorist campaign has been to create a pervasive sense of insecurity that affects not only those directly targeted but the entire population, constraining economic activity, limiting freedom of movement, and undermining trust in state institutions.

○ **Governance Vacuums**

The third dimension of insecurity is the governance vacuum the absence of effective, legitimate state authority in large portions of Somali territory. Governance vacuums are not merely the consequence of insecurity; they are a form of insecurity in themselves. When the state cannot provide security, enforce laws, or deliver services in a given area, the population in that area is effectively insecure regardless of whether active fighting is occurring. Governance vacuums create the conditions in which both armed conflict and terrorism can flourish, because there is no authority capable of preventing or responding to violence.

In Somalia, governance vacuums exist at multiple levels. At the national level, the Federal Government's authority does not extend effectively beyond Mogadishu and a few major cities. At the regional level, Federal Member States exercise varying degrees of control, with some (like Puntland) relatively functional and others (like Hirshabelle) barely operational. At the local level, rural areas are often governed by a complex patchwork of clan elders, Al-Shabaab, and militia commanders with the formal state entirely absent. The African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM, succeeding ATMIS in 2025) provides security in some urban areas but cannot fill the governance vacuum in the countryside.

Conceptualizing Corruption: Petty, Grand, and Systemic Corruption in Fragile States

Corruption is commonly defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. This definition, while useful, encompasses a vast range of behaviors that differ in scale, impact, and structural significance. Following the analytical framework established by Transparency International and refined by scholars of corruption in fragile states, three categories of corruption are relevant to the Somali context: petty, grand, and systemic.

○ Petty Corruption

Petty corruption refers to everyday exchanges in which citizens pay bribes to access public services that are officially free or to avoid penalties that are officially mandated. In Somalia, petty corruption pervades every interaction between citizens and the state: paying a bribe to obtain a passport, paying a police officer to avoid arrest, paying a hospital administrator for treatment that should be free, or paying a teacher to ensure a child's advancement. Petty corruption is the most visible form of corruption to ordinary Somalis and contributes most directly to the erosion of public trust in state institutions.

Petty corruption in Somalia is not merely a matter of individual dishonesty; it is structurally produced. Civil servants in Somalia are among the lowest-paid in the world, and many go months without receiving their salaries. In this context, bribe-taking is not an opportunistic supplement to adequate income but a survival mechanism. The state, by failing to adequately compensate its employees, effectively outsources the cost of governance to the population through informal taxation (bribery).

○ Grand Corruption

Grand corruption refers to the abuse of high-level power for significant private enrichment typically involving senior officials, large contracts, and substantial sums of money. In Somalia, grand corruption has been documented in port revenues, public procurement, land allocation, foreign aid management, and the security sector. The scale of grand corruption in Somalia is difficult to quantify precisely because of the opacity of public financial management, but available evidence suggests that it diverts tens of millions of dollars annually from public purposes to private accounts.

Grand corruption in Somalia operates through several mechanisms. Port revenues from Mogadishu, Kismayo, and other ports are a major source of illicit income, with significant portions of customs revenue unaccounted for. Public procurement is systematically inflated, with contracts awarded to politically connected firms at above-market rates. Land in Mogadishu which has become extremely valuable as the city has rebuilt is allocated through political connections rather than market mechanisms, creating enormous windfall profits for well-connected individuals. Foreign aid is diverted through shell organizations, inflated beneficiary lists, and direct misappropriation by officials.

○ **Systemic Corruption**

Systemic corruption goes beyond individual acts of petty and grand corruption to describe a situation in which corruption is not an aberration but an integral part of the political, economic, and social system. In systemic corruption, corrupt practices are not only widespread but also structured they follow predictable patterns, serve predictable functions, and are sustained by institutional arrangements that make non-corrupt behavior irrational or even impossible.

Somalia represents a paradigmatic case of systemic corruption. The clan-based power-sharing system, as Chapter 7 will demonstrate in detail, creates structural incentives for corruption: each clan uses its allocated government positions to extract resources for the clan, and no clan has an incentive to hold another clan's officials accountable because that would establish a precedent that could be applied to its own. The absence of functional oversight institutions an independent judiciary, a capable auditor general, a free press means that there are no effective constraints on corrupt behavior. And the normalization of corruption decades of living in a context where corruption is the default mode of governance has created social norms that make corruption culturally acceptable even when it is individually resented.

The Insecurity Corruption Nexus: A Mutually Reinforcing Cycle

The central analytical argument of this book is that insecurity and corruption in Somalia are not separate problems but components of a single vicious cycle. This section conceptualizes the mechanisms through which each phenomenon reinforces the other.

How Insecurity Creates Corruption

Insecurity creates conditions that are favorable to corruption through several mechanisms:

1. **Emergency procurement and reduced oversight:** When the state is operating under security emergency conditions as Somalia effectively has been since 2007 procurement rules are relaxed, oversight mechanisms are suspended, and no-bid contracts become the norm. The justification is that security imperatives require rapid action that cannot wait for competitive bidding or audit procedures. In practice, this creates opportunities for massive corruption, as funds allocated for security purposes are diverted with minimal accountability.
2. **Security sector opacity:** The security sector military, police, intelligence operates with a degree of secrecy that is justified by operational security requirements but that also conceals corruption. In Somalia, the security sector has been a primary site of grand corruption: ghost soldiers (non-existent personnel whose salaries are collected by officers), inflated procurement, and diversion of military equipment. The insecurity context makes it extremely difficult to audit the security sector, because auditors lack the access and authority to verify claims about personnel, equipment, and operations.
3. **Fragmentation of authority:** Insecurity fragments territorial control, creating multiple authorities (national government, regional states, clan militias, Al-Shabaab) each with its own revenue sources and spending patterns. This fragmentation makes it impossible to establish a unified public financial management system, creating opportunities for each authority to divert resources without central oversight.
4. **Displacement and vulnerability:** Insecurity-driven displacement creates populations that are extremely vulnerable to exploitation including corruption. IDPs must pay bribes to access humanitarian assistance, to register for services,

and to avoid eviction from settlements. Their inability to claim their rights combined with the breakdown of social networks that would ordinarily provide protection makes them easy targets for corrupt officials and aid diverters.

How Corruption Creates Insecurity

Corruption creates conditions that are favorable to insecurity through several mechanisms:

1. **Undermining security capacity:** When military procurement is corrupt, soldiers receive substandard equipment and insufficient supplies. When payroll fraud creates ghost soldiers, actual troop strength is far below what is reported and funded. When military logistics are compromised by corruption, supply lines become unreliable. All of these effects reduce the state's capacity to provide security, creating space for armed groups to operate.
2. **Eroding public trust:** When citizens observe that the state is corrupt that officials enrich themselves while the population suffers they withdraw their consent and cooperation. This erosion of trust has direct security consequences: citizens are less likely to provide intelligence to security forces, less likely to cooperate with investigations, and more likely to support or tolerate armed opposition groups. Al-Shabaab's propaganda systematically exploits this dynamic, portraying the government as irredeemably corrupt and presenting itself as a righteous alternative.
3. **Creating alternative governance providers:** When corruption prevents the state from delivering services, populations turn to alternative providers. In Somalia, this means Al-Shabaab in many rural areas, which provides a parallel governance system including courts, taxation, and dispute resolution. The more the state is perceived as corrupt, the more legitimate these alternatives become.
4. **Financing armed groups through corrupt networks:** Corruption creates illicit financial flows that can be captured by armed groups. In Somalia, Al-Shabaab benefits from the corruption of port officials, customs agents, and business cartels extracting taxes and protection payments that flow through the same informal

networks that facilitate corruption. Corruption and insecurity are thus linked through the informal economy that sustains both.

Theoretical Perspectives: State Fragility Theory, Rent-Seeking, and the Resource Curse of Aid

Several theoretical frameworks help illuminate the dynamics described above. This section introduces three that are particularly relevant to the Somali context.

- **State Fragility Theory**

State fragility theory, as developed by scholars such as James Fearon, David Laitin, and the OECD's States of Fragility framework, provides a conceptual lens for understanding why some states are unable to perform the basic functions of governance security, law, services, and legitimate political processes. Fragile states are characterized by weak institutional capacity, weak legitimacy, and high vulnerability to shocks (economic, environmental, security).

Somalia is classified as a fragile state by every major international framework: the OECD's States of Fragility assessment, the Fund for Peace's Fragile States Index (where it consistently ranks at or near the top), and the World Bank's Harmonized List of Fragile Situations. Fragility theory helps explain why insecurity and corruption are so persistent in Somalia: in a fragile state, institutional weakness creates both the conditions for corruption (lack of oversight, weak rule of law) and the conditions for insecurity (inability to monopolize force, loss of legitimacy). The theory also helps explain why conventional reform approaches which assume a basic level of institutional capacity often fail in fragile states like Somalia.

- **Rent-Seeking Theory**

Rent-seeking theory, rooted in the work of Anne Krueger, Gordon Tullock, and other public choice economists, explains why actors in positions of political power may seek to enrich themselves through the manipulation of the regulatory and economic environment rather than through productive economic activity. In a rent-seeking economy, political connections become more valuable than entrepreneurial skill, and the allocation of resources is determined by political power rather than market efficiency.

Somalia's political economy is a textbook case of rent-seeking. Government positions are sought not for the opportunity to serve the public but for the access to rents they provide: control over port revenues, ability to award contracts, authority to allocate land, power to appoint cronies to subordinate positions. The entire structure of clan-based power-sharing can be understood as a rent-sharing agreement: each clan receives its share of government positions specifically because those positions provide access to rents that can be distributed to clan members. This rent-seeking dynamic distorts economic incentives, diverts resources from productive investment, and perpetuates the patronage system that sustains corruption.

- **The Resource Curse of Aid**

The "resource curse" refers to the paradox that countries with abundant natural resources often experience worse governance outcomes than resource-poor countries, because resource wealth creates rent-seeking incentives, reduces accountability (governments do not need to tax citizens and therefore do not need their consent), and fuels conflict over resource control. A growing body of literature including work by Dambisa Moyo, William Easterly, and Sarah von Billerbeck has argued that foreign aid can function as a similar "curse" in fragile states.

In Somalia, the aid-curse dynamic operates through several channels. First, foreign aid provides the government with revenue that does not require domestic taxation, breaking the fiscal social contract that in healthy democracies forces governments to be accountable to taxpayers. Second, aid creates powerful incentives for corruption: billions of dollars in humanitarian and development assistance flow through a system with minimal oversight, creating opportunities for diversion that would not exist if aid volumes were lower. Third, aid perpetuates dependency: the Somali government cannot survive without international financial support, which means that reform incentives are weak the government's survival depends not on delivering services to citizens but on maintaining the flow of international assistance. The 2023 food aid diversion scandal in which the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services found "widespread and systematic" diversion of food aid intended for displaced persons, leading to the suspension of World

Food Programme operations and EU funding is a stark illustration of the aid-curse dynamic in action. Aid intended to save lives was captured by the very system it was supposed to alleviate, demonstrating how the scale of humanitarian assistance can create corruption opportunities that undermine the humanitarian mission itself.

Conclusion

The conceptual framework established in this chapter provides the analytical tools needed to understand the empirical evidence presented in subsequent chapters. By defining insecurity broadly to encompass not only armed conflict and terrorism but governance vacuums and their consequences and by defining corruption structurally as a systemic phenomenon embedded in institutions and political incentives rather than as individual moral failure we can see the interconnections between these phenomena more clearly.

The insecurity corruption nexus is not a metaphorical connection but a causal mechanism: insecurity creates the conditions for corruption, and corruption creates the conditions for insecurity, in a self-reinforcing cycle that is extremely difficult to break. The theoretical perspectives of state fragility, rent-seeking, and the aid resource curse help explain why this cycle persists despite decades of international reform efforts and billions of dollars in assistance. The chapters that follow will trace the specific manifestations of this cycle across the domains of armed conflict, governance, the economy, and social services. The evidence will demonstrate that the conceptual framework established here is not merely theoretically coherent but empirically validated: the vicious cycle of insecurity and corruption is observable, measurable, and devastating in its consequences for the Somali people.

PART II

INSECURITY IN SOMALIA MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS

CHAPTER TWO

AL-SHABAAB AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Introduction

Al-Shabaab (Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen the Youth Mujahideen Movement) is the single most significant source of organized violence in Somalia and one of the most resilient Islamist insurgencies in the world. Since its emergence as an independent organization in 2006–2007, Al-Shabaab has survived multiple military offensives, the death of its founder (Aden Hashi Ayro in 2008), the targeted killing of its emir (Ahmed Abdi Godane in 2014), the deployment of over 22,000 African Union peacekeepers, and hundreds of millions of dollars in international security assistance.

As of 2025, Al-Shabaab controls or significantly influences an estimated 20–30 percent of Somali territory, maintains the capacity to conduct high-profile terrorist attacks in Mogadishu and other major cities, and generates an estimated \$70–100 million annually through taxation, extortion, and illicit trade.

This chapter examines Al-Shabaab not merely as a military adversary but as a governance actor an organization that has constructed a parallel state with its own revenue system, judicial apparatus, and social service provision. Understanding Al-Shabaab as a governance actor is essential for comprehending both its resilience and its relationship to corruption. The central argument is that Al-Shabaab's survival is not attributable solely to military capability but to the governance vacuum created by state corruption and institutional failure. The organization thrives not because it is strong but because the state is weak and the weakness of the state is, in significant part, a product of corruption.

The Rise of Al-Shabaab: From ICU Successor to Transnational Threat

Al-Shabaab's origins lie in the complex intersection of Somali clan politics, Islamic revivalism, and the international security dynamics of the post-9/11 era. The organization's precursor was the military wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a coalition of Sharia courts that emerged in Mogadishu in the early 2000s to fill the governance vacuum left by state collapse.

The ICU's rise was remarkable. Between 2004 and 2006, the courts progressively established order in areas of Mogadishu that had been under warlord control, reducing crime, reopening roads, and establishing a degree of predictability in social and economic life that had not existed for fifteen years. The ICU's success was attributable in part to its ability to provide security a function that the warlords and the internationally supported Transitional Federal Government (TFG) had failed to deliver.

However, the ICU's governance model had significant limitations. It was dominated by the Hawiye clan, particularly the Habr Gedr sub-clan, which limited its national appeal. Its judicial system was based on a harsh interpretation of Sharia that alienated moderate Muslims and secular Somalis. And its leadership included figures with connections to Al-Qaeda, including the founders of what would become Al-Shabaab.

The Ethiopian military intervention of December 2006, authorized by the United States and supported by the TFG, rapidly displaced the ICU from Mogadishu. However, the intervention had an effect opposite to its intent: rather than eliminating the Islamist threat, it created the conditions for Al-Shabaab's emergence as a more radical, more resilient, and more transnational organization. Al-Shabaab's transformation from an ICU military wing to an independent jihadist organization occurred between 2007 and 2009. Several factors drove this transformation:

1. **Radicalization through occupation:** The Ethiopian occupation widely perceived by Somalis as a foreign invasion by a historic enemy radicalized significant segments of the population, creating a recruitment pool that Al-Shabaab exploited effectively. Al-Shabaab framed its insurgency as both a nationalist struggle against foreign occupation and a religious obligation to defend Muslim lands from infidel invaders.

2. **Foreign fighter influx:** The Ethiopian intervention attracted foreign jihadist fighters to Somalia, including veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. These fighters brought military expertise, ideological rigidity, and international connections that transformed Al-Shabaab from a local militia into a transnational organization.
3. **Clan fragmentation of the opposition:** While the ICU had been relatively unified under Hawiye leadership, the post-ICU opposition fragmented along clan lines. Al-Shabaab positioned itself as a cross-clan Islamist alternative, actively recruiting from minority clans and from communities that had been marginalized by the dominant Hawiye-Darod political competition.
4. **Al-Qaeda affiliation:** In 2012, Al-Shabaab formally pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda, linking its struggle to the global jihadist movement. This affiliation brought ideological prestige, access to international networks, and financial resources but also transformed Al-Shabaab from a Somali nationalist insurgency into a transnational threat, making it a target of international counterterrorism operations.

The consequences of Al-Shabaab's transnationalization have been profound. On one hand, it increased the organization's access to resources and recruits. On the other hand, it narrowed its political appeal by associating it with a global movement that many Somalis view with suspicion.

The internal tensions between nationalist and transnationalist factions have produced periodic splits most notably the formation of the Islamic State in Somalia (ISS) by a breakaway faction in 2015 and the ongoing tensions between Al-Shabaab's pro-Al-Qaeda leadership and elements sympathetic to the Somali nationalist cause.

Governance by Fear: How Al-Shabaab Exploits State Weakness

Al-Shabaab's governance strategy rests on a simple but effective logic: where the state fails to provide security and justice, Al-Shabaab fills the void; where the state is present but corrupt, Al-Shabaab presents itself as the honest alternative. This strategy operates at multiple levels.

- **Security Provision**

In areas under its control, Al-Shabaab provides a form of security that is harsh but predictable a quality that is valued in a context where the state provides no security and warlordism provides only capricious violence. Al-Shabaab's security model is based on strict enforcement of Sharia law, with harsh punishments (amputation for theft, execution for murder, flogging for moral offenses) that serve as both deterrent and demonstration of authority. The predictability of this system the fact that rules are known, enforcement is consistent, and outcomes are certain contrasts sharply with the arbitrary and corrupt justice available through the formal state, where outcomes depend on clan identity, political connections, and bribe-paying capacity.

- **Justice Provision**

Al-Shabaab's court system is one of its most potent governance tools. In many rural areas of southern and central Somalia, Al-Shabaab courts are the only functioning dispute resolution mechanism available. The courts hear cases involving property disputes, family law, commercial disagreements, and criminal matters, issuing rulings that are enforced by Al-Shabaab's police force.

The appeal of these courts lies not in their harshness but in their perceived fairness specifically, their perceived independence from clan bias and their inability to be bribed. In a context where the formal judiciary is widely perceived as corrupt and clan-dominated, the offer of impartial (if severe) justice is a powerful legitimating claim.

Research by the United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea has documented that Al-Shabaab courts are used even by Somalis who are not supporters of the organization, including government officials and businessmen who have disputes they cannot resolve through the formal system. This phenomenon the use of Al-Shabaab justice by individuals who are theoretically opposed to the organization demonstrates the depth of the governance vacuum and the extent to which corruption has delegitimized the formal state.

- **Social Services**

Al-Shabaab also provides a limited range of social services, including schools (madrassas), health clinics, and water infrastructure, particularly in rural areas where

the state and international organizations have no presence. These services are basic and their primary purpose is ideological to inculcate Al-Shabaab's interpretation of Islam but they serve a practical function in areas where no other provider exists. The provision of social services creates obligations and loyalties that enhance Al-Shabaab's governance authority.

- **The Role of Fear**

Al-Shabaab's governance is not based solely on service provision and legitimacy claims. It is also and fundamentally based on fear. Al-Shabaab uses targeted assassinations, amputations, and public executions to enforce compliance and deter opposition. It collects intelligence through networks of informants who report on individuals suspected of cooperating with the government. It imposes strict social codes banning music, television, and internet access in areas under its control that restrict personal freedom and enforce ideological conformity.

The combination of service provision, justice, and fear creates a governance model that is attractive to some segments of the population (particularly those who benefit from its services and are not targeted by its violence), tolerable to others (who comply to avoid punishment), and devastating to those who oppose it or fall victim to it. The key point for our analysis is that this governance model is only possible because of the state's failure a failure that is significantly attributable to corruption.

Parallel Taxation and Extortion Economies of Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab's financial system is perhaps the most sophisticated aspect of its governance apparatus and the most direct point of intersection with the corruption insecurity nexus. The organization generates an estimated \$70–100 million annually through a combination of taxation, extortion, and illicit trade making it one of the best-funded insurgencies in the world.

- **Taxation System**

Al-Shabaab operates a formal taxation system in areas under its control that mirrors and in many cases exceeds the capacity of the Somali Federal Government. The organization collects zakat (the Islamic wealth tax), land taxes, livestock taxes, and import taxes on

goods transiting through ports it controls or influences. The taxation system is administered by a dedicated bureaucracy that issues receipts, maintains records, and enforces compliance through penalties for non-payment.

Critically, Al-Shabaab's taxation is perceived by many Somalis as more legitimate than the government's not because they support Al-Shabaab's ideology but because Al-Shabaab provides services in return for taxation. The Somali Federal Government, by contrast, collects taxes (however imperfectly) but provides minimal services in return, as corruption diverts public resources away from service delivery. This creates a perverse legitimacy competition in which an Islamist insurgency can claim to offer better value for money than a sovereign government.

○ **Extortion of Businesses**

In areas not under its direct control, Al-Shabaab operates an extensive extortion network targeting businesses, government officials, and even international organizations. Businesses in Mogadishu including those operated by prominent government officials and parliamentarians are known to pay regular "taxes" to Al-Shabaab to avoid being targeted for attack. This creates a situation in which the government's own officials are simultaneously fighting Al-Shabaab and funding it a paradox that illustrates the depth of the insecurity–corruption nexus.

The United Nations Monitoring Group has repeatedly documented the payment of Al-Shabaab taxes by Somali government officials and contractors. In some cases, these payments are made voluntarily (as a form of protection money); in others, they are coerced through threats of violence. Either way, the result is the same: Al-Shabaab derives significant revenue from the same economy that the government depends on, creating a financial interdependence that complicates the conflict and illustrates how corruption and insecurity are intertwined at the economic level.

○ **Illicit Trade Networks**

Al-Shabaab also generates revenue through illicit trade, particularly the charcoal trade (which is banned under UN Security Council Resolution 2036 but continues to operate), sugar smuggling, and the trafficking of people and weapons. These trade networks

intersect with the corruption of Somali officials at ports and checkpoints Al-Shabaab pays bribes to government officials to facilitate the movement of illicit goods through government-controlled areas, and government officials accept these bribes because their official salaries are inadequate and oversight is minimal.

The charcoal trade is a particularly instructive example. Despite a UN ban, charcoal worth millions of dollars continues to be exported from Somali ports including those nominally under government control. The trade requires the cooperation of port officials, customs agents, and military commanders, all of whom receive a share of the profits. Al-Shabaab taxes the charcoal at the production and transit stages; government officials take their share at the export stage. The result is a supply chain in which both the insurgency and the government profit from the same illicit activity — a stark illustration of how corruption and insecurity are not merely coexisting but are operationally integrated.

The 2022–2024 Military Offensive: Gains, Setbacks, and the Limits of Force

In August 2022, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud launched a major military offensive against Al-Shabaab the most significant such operation since the organization's rise. The offensive, initially focused on central Somalia (Hirshabelle and Galmudug states), aimed to clear Al-Shabaab from key rural areas and recapture the organization's strongholds. The operation was supported by U.S. airstrike capabilities, ATMIS forces, and local clan militias (the so-called "Ma'awisley" forces) that had been mobilized against Al-Shabaab.

The initial phase of the offensive achieved significant gains. Al-Shabaab was pushed out of several strategic locations in Hirshabelle, and the government reported that hundreds of Al-Shabaab fighters had been killed. The mobilization of local clan militias was particularly significant, as it suggested that Al-Shabaab's social base was eroding at least in some areas.

However, the offensive stalled by mid-2023 for several reasons that are directly relevant to the insecurity–corruption nexus:

1. **Corruption in the military:** Reports emerged that ghost soldiers were inflating the reported strength of Somali forces, that ammunition and supplies were being diverted, and that senior officers were skimming funds intended for frontline operations. The corruption reduced the effective fighting capacity of the army and undermined morale among actual combat soldiers who were receiving inadequate support.
2. **Al-Shabaab's adaptive capacity:** Al-Shabaab adapted to the offensive by shifting tactics reducing large-scale engagements in favor of asymmetric warfare (IEDs, assassinations, and ambushes), infiltrating government-controlled areas, and exploiting clan tensions between the government's Hawiye base and the local communities affected by the offensive.
3. **Political fragmentation:** The offensive was undermined by political competition between the Federal Government and Federal Member States, particularly Puntland and Jubaland, which were reluctant to commit forces to an operation perceived as serving Mogadishu's political interests. This fragmentation a product of the clan-based patronage system prevented the formation of a unified military command and allowed Al-Shabaab to shift between fronts.
4. **AMISOM/ATMIS transition:** The planned transition from ATMIS to a smaller African Union mission (AUSSOM) created uncertainty about the sustainability of international security support, encouraging Al-Shabaab to adopt a strategy of attrition waiting for international forces to withdraw before counterattacking.

By 2024, the offensive had achieved tactical gains in some areas but failed to deliver the strategic objective of degrading Al-Shabaab's operational capacity. Al-Shabaab retained its strongholds in the Juba Valley and rural areas of southern and central Somalia, continued to conduct terrorist attacks in Mogadishu and other cities, and demonstrated the ability to launch significant military operations of its own, including an attack on a UAE-run military training facility in Mogadishu in 2024 that killed several officers.

The 2022–2024 offensive illustrates a central argument of this book: that military force alone cannot defeat an insurgency that is sustained by the governance failures of the state it opposes. As long as corruption continues to hollow out the security forces, erode public trust, and create the governance vacuum that Al-Shabaab fills, no purely military solution will succeed.

Conclusion

Al-Shabaab's resilience is not primarily a military phenomenon it is a governance phenomenon. The organization survives because it provides services (security, justice, dispute resolution) that the corrupt and dysfunctional Somali state cannot. It thrives because the state's corruption delegitimizes it in the eyes of the population, creating political space for Al-Shabaab's alternative governance model.

It finances itself through taxation and extortion networks that exploit the same corruption that undermines the state including the corruption of government officials who pay Al-Shabaab to avoid being targeted.

The policy implication is clear but difficult: defeating Al-Shabaab requires not merely military pressure but governance reform specifically, reducing the corruption that enables Al-Shabaab's governance claims. As long as the state is perceived as more corrupt than the insurgency, the insurgency will retain a degree of legitimacy that military force alone cannot eliminate.

The following chapters will examine other dimensions of insecurity and their relationship to corruption, building toward a comprehensive understanding of the vicious cycle.

CHAPTER THREE

CLAN MILITIAS, ARMED CONFLICT, AND INTER-COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Introduction

While Al-Shabaab commands the most international attention, a significant portion of the violence in Somalia is not perpetrated by jihadist insurgents but by clan-based militias and armed groups engaged in inter-communal conflict. This form of insecurity rooted in resource competition, political manipulation, and the absence of state authority is chronic, widespread, and deeply connected to corruption.

It is also the form of insecurity that most directly affects the daily lives of rural Somalis, who may never encounter Al-Shabaab but who routinely face the consequences of clan violence.

This chapter examines clan militias and inter-communal violence as a dimension of insecurity that is both distinct from and connected to Al-Shabaab's insurgency. The central argument is that the state's failure to provide security a failure attributable in part to corruption has created a security market in which multiple non-state actors compete to provide protection. In this market, clan militias function as both security providers and security threats, depending on one's clan identity and position in the local power structure.

Corruption enters this dynamic through the political manipulation of clan identities for patronage purposes, the diversion of state security resources for private gain, and the weaponization of identity to justify the extraction of resources.

Clan-Based Armed Groups as Alternative Security Providers

In the absence of effective state policing and military protection, Somali communities have historically relied on clan-based militias for security. These militias organized around sub-clan affiliations and typically led by local elders or wealthy businessmen perform several functions that the state cannot or will not perform: protecting communities from attack by rival clans or Al-Shabaab, enforcing customary law (xeer),

resolving disputes through elder mediation, and providing armed escorts for trade caravans and livestock migrations.

The reliance on clan militias is a rational response to state failure. In areas where the police are absent, the army is ineffective, and the judiciary is corrupt, communities have no alternative but to organize their own defense. Clan militias are not a reversion to pre-state traditions they are a modern adaptation to statelessness, using traditional social structures (clan loyalty, elder authority, *xeer*) to perform modern security functions.

However, clan militias are not neutral security providers.

They protect their own clan members often at the expense of other clans. They can be and frequently are used as instruments of aggression, not merely defense. In a context where the state cannot enforce a monopoly on violence, every clan has both the incentive and the necessity to maintain armed capacity, creating a security dilemma in which each clan's effort to increase its own security reduces the security of others.

The relationship between clan militias and corruption operates at two levels. At the local level, militia leaders extract resources from the communities they protect through forced contributions, livestock taxation, and control of local trade functioning as de facto tax authorities whose revenue collection is enforced by armed power rather than legal authority.

At the national level, political leaders and government officials arm and fund clan militias as instruments of political competition, using state resources to build private armies that serve political rather than security purposes. This diversion of state security resources to private political projects is a form of corruption that directly undermines the state's capacity to provide security.

Resource Competition and Pastoralist Conflicts

A significant proportion of inter-communal violence in Somalia is driven by competition over natural resources primarily grazing land and water sources. This competition is not new; pastoralist communities have negotiated access to water and pasture through

customary agreements for centuries. However, several factors have intensified resource competition and increased its propensity for violence:

1. **Environmental degradation:** Recurrent droughts exacerbated by climate change have reduced the availability of water and pasture, forcing pastoralist communities into smaller areas and increasing the frequency of encounters between competing groups.
2. **Proliferation of weapons:** The flood of small arms into Somalia since 1991 has transformed the character of resource disputes. Conflicts that were once resolved through elder mediation and limited raiding are now fought with automatic weapons, causing significantly higher casualties and making resolution more difficult.
3. **Commercialization of livestock:** The growth of livestock export markets particularly to the Gulf states has increased the economic stakes of livestock ownership, making raiding more profitable and defense more urgent.
4. **Political manipulation:** Government officials and politicians at both the federal and state levels frequently intervene in resource disputes to advance political agendas, arming one side or another, providing political protection to allies, and using the disputes as leverage in political negotiations. This intervention transforms resource competition from a local, manageable conflict into a politically charged dispute that can be resolved only through political accommodation accommodation that typically involves the distribution of patronage resources.

The connection to corruption is direct: when politicians manipulate resource conflicts for political gain, they are using the state's coercive resources (weapons, political authority, security forces) to serve private political purposes.

This is corruption in its most dangerous form the corruption of the security function itself. When communities observe that the state's security apparatus is being used to advance the interests of particular clans or politicians rather than to provide impartial protection, they lose trust in the state and turn to their own clan militias for security further fragmenting the security landscape and perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Political Manipulation of Clan Identities for Power and Patronage

Clan identity in Somalia is not a fixed, primordial attribute but a socially constructed and politically malleable one. While Somalis are born into clan lineages that cannot be changed, the political salience of clan identity the degree to which it determines political behavior, economic opportunity, and social status varies depending on political context.

In periods of strong, legitimate state authority, clan identity is less politically significant; in periods of state weakness or collapse, clan identity becomes the primary organizing principle of political, economic, and social life.

The manipulation of clan identities for political purposes is one of the most significant mechanisms through which corruption and insecurity are linked. Political leaders in Somalia routinely mobilize clan loyalties to build political coalitions, discredit opponents, and justify the allocation of public resources to their supporters.

This manipulation takes several forms:

1. **Clan-based political mobilization:** During election periods (Somalia's elections are conducted through a clan-delegate system rather than direct popular vote), candidates are selected and supported based on their clan identity, and political campaigns are organized along clan lines. This means that elected officials owe their positions not to a broad electorate but to a specific clan constituency, creating an obligation to serve that clan's interests typically through the allocation of government positions, contracts, and services to clan members.
2. **Instrumentalization of inter-clan conflicts:** Political leaders sometimes foment or exacerbate inter-clan violence to create political opportunities. By intensifying fear of a rival clan, a political leader can consolidate support within their own clan, justify the maintenance of armed groups, and demand greater security resources from the government. This instrumentalization of violence is a form of corruption it uses the suffering of communities to advance political careers.
3. **Patronage distribution along clan lines:** The distribution of government positions, contracts, and services along clan lines a practice institutionalized by the 4.5 power-

sharing formula creates a political economy in which each clan's access to state resources depends on its political representation. This creates powerful incentives for political competition that is not about policy but about clan access to the state's resources competition that frequently turns violent when political channels are blocked or perceived as unfair.

The Weaponization of Identity: How Insecurity Feeds Corruption and Vice Versa

The relationship between clan-based insecurity and corruption is not merely one of parallel causation but of mutual reinforcement. Clan-based insecurity creates opportunities for corruption, and corruption exacerbates clan-based insecurity, in a cycle that is difficult to interrupt.

- **Insecurity enabling corruption:** In a context of inter-communal violence and general insecurity, the state's security functions are compromised. Security forces that should be protecting all citizens are instead used to protect specific communities (typically those of the ruling elite's clan), while other communities are left to their own devices. The discretionary allocation of security protection for allies, neglect for opponents is itself a form of corruption, as it converts a public good (security) into a private one (protection for the politically connected). Moreover, insecurity justifies increased security spending with reduced oversight, creating opportunities for corruption in procurement and payroll management.
- **Corruption enabling insecurity:** When government officials divert resources intended for security whether through ghost soldiers, procurement fraud, or the political deployment of security forces the state's capacity to provide security is diminished. Communities that are not protected by the state turn to clan militias, which increases the number of armed groups operating outside state control and intensifies the security dilemma. The more armed groups there are, the more violence there is; the more violence there is, the more communities feel compelled to arm themselves creating an escalating cycle of insecurity that the state, weakened by corruption, cannot arrest.

Conclusion

Clan-based insecurity is not a relic of pre-state Somalia but a modern phenomenon produced by the interaction of state failure, political manipulation, and resource competition. It is sustained by corruption at multiple levels the corruption that diverts state security resources, the corruption that manipulates clan identities for political gain, and the corruption that converts public security into a private good distributed through patronage networks.

The policy implication is that addressing clan-based insecurity requires not merely disarmament and demobilization but governance reform specifically, the reform of political incentives that make clan mobilization and resource manipulation rational strategies for political actors.

As long as political power in Somalia is organized along clan lines and access to state resources is determined by clan identity, there will be incentives to manipulate clan identities and instrumentalize inter-communal violence for political purposes.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISPLACEMENT AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

THE HUMAN COST OF INSECURITY

Introduction

The most direct and devastating consequence of insecurity is the displacement of populations and the humanitarian crises that follow. Somalia has one of the world's largest internally displaced populations over 3.9 million people as of 2024 and faces recurrent acute food insecurity affecting millions more. These figures are not abstract statistics; they represent human suffering on an enormous scale families torn from their homes, children denied education, communities destroyed, and lives lost to hunger, disease, and violence that could have been prevented.

This chapter examines the humanitarian consequences of insecurity in Somalia, with particular attention to how corruption intersects with and exacerbates these consequences. The central argument is that the humanitarian crisis is not merely a product of insecurity but also a site of corruption a space in which the resources intended to alleviate suffering are captured by the same power structures that produce the suffering. The 2023 food aid diversion scandal, which will be examined in detail, is the most prominent example of this dynamic, but it is far from the only one.

Internal Displacement:

➤ 3.9+ Million IDPs and the Cycle of Vulnerability

As of 2024, Somalia hosts over 3.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), making it one of the countries with the highest per capita displacement rates in the world. This displacement is driven by multiple factors: conflict between government forces and Al-Shabaab, inter-clan violence, drought and environmental degradation, and forced evictions from urban settlements. The UNHCR-led Protection Return Monitoring Network has documented that conflict and insecurity are the primary drivers of displacement, accounting for the majority of new displacement events.

The conditions of internal displacement in Somalia are catastrophic. IDP camps concentrated in and around Mogadishu, Baidoa, Kismayo, and other major cities are overcrowded, underserved, and dangerous. Shelter consists of makeshift structures of plastic sheeting and sticks that provide minimal protection from the elements. Access to clean water, sanitation, healthcare, and education is far below minimum humanitarian

standards. Protection failures are pervasive: gender-based violence, including rape and domestic abuse, is endemic; children are recruited by armed groups; and forced evictions by landowners and government authorities periodically render thousands homeless overnight.

The cycle of vulnerability created by displacement is self-reinforcing. Displacement destroys livelihoods particularly for pastoralist communities that lose their herds and agriculturalists who lose their land. Without livelihoods, displaced populations become dependent on humanitarian assistance, which is itself vulnerable to corruption and diversion. Without security, they cannot return to their homes or rebuild their lives. And without political representation IDPs are frequently excluded from the clan-based political system because they are displaced from their clan territories they have no voice in decisions that affect their lives.

The connection between displacement and corruption operates at multiple levels. At the macro level, corruption that diverts state resources away from security provision perpetuates the conditions that cause displacement. At the meso level, corruption in humanitarian assistance through the diversion of food aid, inflated beneficiary lists, and ghost organizations reduces the resources available to IDPs. At the micro level, displaced persons are routinely required to pay bribes to access services: to register as IDPs, to receive food distributions, to obtain medical care, and to avoid eviction. Each of these forms of corruption compounds the suffering caused by displacement and creates additional barriers to recovery.

➤ **6.5 Million People Facing Acute Food Insecurity (2025 Data)**

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and the IOM Somalia Crisis Response Plan for 2025–2026, approximately 6.5 million people in Somalia face acute food insecurity. This figure includes populations in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis), Phase 4 (Emergency), and Phase 5 (Famine). While food insecurity in Somalia is driven by multiple factors drought, locust infestations, global food price inflation, and the collapse of agricultural production insecurity is a primary and arguably the most significant driver, because it prevents populations from producing food, accessing markets, and receiving humanitarian assistance.

Al-Shabaab's control of rural areas restricts the movement of populations and goods, preventing farmers from accessing markets and pastoralists from reaching seasonal grazing lands. Conflict between government forces and Al-Shabaab destroys crops, kills livestock, and displaces populations from productive land. Inter-clan violence

disrupts trade routes and market functioning. And the corruption that diverts humanitarian assistance food intended for the hungry directly reduces the food available to vulnerable populations.

The intersection of food insecurity and corruption is particularly devastating. In a context where millions are hungry, the diversion of food aid is not merely a financial crime but a lethal one. The 2023 food aid diversion scandal, discussed below, resulted in the suspension of food assistance to hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people a decision that, while necessary to address the diversion, caused immediate harm to those who depended on the aid.

➤ **Gender-Based Violence and Protection Failures in IDP Camps**

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most pervasive and least addressed consequences of insecurity and displacement in Somalia. IDP camps are sites of extreme vulnerability, where women and girls face heightened risks of sexual violence, domestic abuse, forced marriage, and trafficking. The absence of security forces or, more troublingly, the presence of security forces that are themselves perpetrators of violence creates an environment in which GBV is both widespread and inadequately addressed. The relationship between GBV and corruption is multifaceted. When police officers demand bribes to investigate sexual assault cases or when they refuse to investigate at all because the perpetrator is from a powerful clan corruption directly enables impunity for gender-based violence. When humanitarian organizations divert resources intended for protection programs, corruption reduces the services available to survivors. And when the political system systematically excludes women from decision-making positions as the clan-based power-sharing formula does corruption of governance itself perpetuates the conditions that enable GBV.

Human Rights Watch's 2025 World Report on Somalia documented continued impunity for sexual violence by security forces and armed groups, noting that survivors face severe barriers to justice including social stigma, lack of legal representation, and a judiciary that is corrupt, under-resourced, and biased against women. The failure to address GBV is not merely a service delivery failure; it is a governance failure that is directly connected to the corruption and insecurity that define the Somali state.

The 2023 Food Aid Diversion Scandal:

➤ **When Corruption Meets Humanitarian Crisis**

The most significant single example of the corruption insecurity nexus in the humanitarian domain is the 2023 food aid diversion scandal. In early 2023, the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the United States Agency for

International Development (USAID) initiated investigations into allegations of "widespread and systematic" diversion of food aid intended for displaced persons in Somalia.

The investigations confirmed what many in the humanitarian community had long suspected: that significant quantities of food aid including grain, oil, and nutritional supplements were being diverted from intended beneficiaries through a network of corrupt officials, transport contractors, and camp leaders.

The mechanisms of diversion were multiple and sophisticated:

1. **Inflated beneficiary lists:** Camp managers and local officials registered non-existent beneficiaries, creating "ghost recipients" whose food rations were collected and sold by the officials managing the distribution.
2. **Transport contractor fraud:** Trucking companies contracted to deliver food aid from ports to distribution sites systematically under-delivered, reporting full deliveries while diverting portions to commercial markets.
3. **Camp-level diversion:** Camp leaders who often function as de facto authorities in the absence of state governance collected and resold food intended for IDPs, using a portion of the proceeds to pay off local officials and security forces who facilitated the diversion.
4. **Humanitarian organization collusion:** Some staff of humanitarian organizations were implicated in the diversion, either actively participating in the schemes or failing to report them due to fear of retaliation or personal benefit.

The consequences of the scandal were severe. The World Food Programme (WFP) suspended food distributions in several areas, affecting hundreds of thousands of people who depended on the aid for survival. The European Union suspended funding for humanitarian programs in Somalia, pending the implementation of corrective measures.

And the scandal reinforced the narrative exploited by Al-Shabaab that the internationally supported humanitarian system is corrupt and that the government cannot be trusted to protect its own people.

The 2023 food aid diversion scandal illustrates several critical dynamics of the corruption insecurity nexus:

- **Scale matters:** The enormous scale of humanitarian assistance to Somalia hundreds of millions of dollars annually creates corruption opportunities that are proportional to the aid volume. The larger the aid flows, the greater the incentive and opportunity for diversion.

- **Insecurity creates the conditions for diversion:** In areas where access is limited due to insecurity, monitoring of aid distributions is minimal, creating opportunities for diversion that would not exist in a more permissive security environment.
- **Corruption has humanitarian consequences:** The diversion of aid is not merely a financial crime; it causes hunger, malnutrition, and death. The victims of corruption in the humanitarian sector are the most vulnerable members of the population those who have already been displaced, impoverished, and traumatized by insecurity.
- **The scandal-remediation cycle can itself cause harm:** The suspension of aid to address diversion while necessary to prevent further corruption causes immediate harm to the populations that depend on the aid. This creates a dilemma in which addressing corruption can exacerbate the humanitarian crisis that the corruption was exploiting.

Conclusion

The humanitarian consequences of insecurity in Somalia are staggering in scale and devastating in their human impact. Millions of people are displaced, food insecure, and vulnerable to violence. These consequences are not merely the product of insecurity but are compounded by corruption that diverts humanitarian assistance, enables impunity for violence against the displaced, and perpetuates the governance failures that cause displacement in the first place. The 2023 food aid diversion scandal is a microcosm of the broader insecurity corruption nexus: a system in which the resources intended to address the consequences of insecurity are captured by the same power structures that produce the insecurity.

The scandal also demonstrates that the international community's approach to humanitarian assistance providing massive aid flows through systems with inadequate oversight can inadvertently fuel the corruption that undermines the humanitarian mission.

Addressing the humanitarian crisis in Somalia requires not merely increasing aid volumes but reforming the governance structures through which aid is delivered. Without such reform, increased aid will lead to increased diversion, and the humanitarian crisis will persist despite or even because of the international community's generosity.

PART III

CORRUPTION IN SOMALIA SYSTEMIC AND STRUCTURAL

CHAPTER FIVE

SOMALIA AT THE BOTTOM

THE CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX

Introduction

Every year since 2006, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) has placed Somalia at or near the very bottom of its global ranking. In the 2024 CPI the most recent complete edition at the time of writing Somalia scored 9 out of 100 and was ranked 181 out of 182 countries, ahead only of South Sudan. In the 2025 CPI update, Somalia's position remained virtually unchanged: a score of 9 and a ranking of 181 out of 182. This consistent placement at the bottom of the CPI is not a statistical anomaly but a reflection of the deeply embedded, systemic nature of corruption in Somalia a phenomenon that this part of the book will examine in detail.

This chapter uses the CPI as a starting point for understanding the scale and nature of corruption in Somalia. It examines what the CPI measures and what it does not, the historical trends in Somalia's CPI scores, the methodology behind the index and its limitations, and most importantly what lies beneath the CPI score: the documented evidence of grand corruption that the index's aggregate measure only hints at.

Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2024/2025:

➤ Somalia Scores 9 Out of 100, Ranked 181 Out of 182 Countries

The Corruption Perceptions Index measures the perceived level of public sector corruption in countries and territories worldwide, scoring them on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The CPI does not measure actual corruption which is inherently difficult to observe and quantify but rather the perceptions of corruption held by experts and business analysts. These perceptions are aggregated from multiple data sources, including assessments by international organizations, private risk-rating agencies, and business surveys.

Somalia's 2024 CPI score of 9 places it in a category that Transparency International describes as showing "no meaningful efforts to combat corruption." This score is not merely low; it represents a near-total failure of anti-corruption governance. For

comparison, the global average CPI score in 2024 was 43, the sub-Saharan African average was 33, and even the next-lowest-scoring country in East Africa (South Sudan, with a score of 8) was only marginally better.

The 2024 score represented a decline from previous years. In the 2023 CPI, Somalia scored 11, two points higher than in 2024. This decline is significant because it suggests that despite the Federal Government's anti-corruption rhetoric and the establishment of anti-corruption institutions, the perceived level of corruption has actually increased. The two-point decline may seem small, but on a 100-point scale where Somalia already occupies the bottom, it represents a meaningful deterioration.

Transparency International's analysis of Somalia's CPI score identifies several key factors driving the low score:

1. **Weak institutional framework:** Somalia lacks the basic institutional infrastructure an independent judiciary, a functional civil service, effective audit institutions that is necessary to prevent and punish corruption.
2. **Absence of political will:** Despite anti-corruption rhetoric, the Federal Government has demonstrated limited commitment to actually prosecuting corrupt officials, particularly those who are politically connected or belong to powerful clans.
3. **Clan-based patronage system:** The political system incentivizes corruption by distributing government positions as clan patronage, ensuring that office-holders prioritize clan enrichment over public service.
4. **Humanitarian aid diversion:** The 2023 food aid diversion scandal contributed to the perception that corruption in Somalia is not only endemic but also life-threatening, as it diverts resources from the most vulnerable populations.
5. **Security sector corruption:** The diversion of military salaries, procurement fraud, and the ghost soldier problem contribute to the perception that corruption pervades even the most critical state functions.

Historical Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) Trends:

➤ Consistently at or Near the Global Bottom Since 2006

Somalia's CPI scores since the country was first included in the index reveal a remarkably consistent pattern of extreme corruption. The following data illustrates this trajectory:

- A. **2006:** Score 2.1 (on the old 0–10 scale), ranked 179th out of 180 countries
- B. **2007:** Score 1.4, ranked 182nd out of 180 countries (last)
- C. **2008:** Score 1.0, ranked 183rd out of 180 countries (last)
- D. **2009:** Score 1.1, ranked 182nd out of 180 countries (last)
- E. **2010:** Score 1.1, ranked 182nd out of 178 countries (last)

- F. **2011:** Score 1.0, ranked 182nd out of 182 countries (last)
- G. **2012:** Score 8 (on the new 0–100 scale), ranked 175th out of 174 countries (last)
- H. **2013:** Score 8, ranked 175th out of 177 countries (last)
- I. **2014:** Score 8, ranked 179th out of 175 countries (last)
- J. **2015:** Score 8, ranked 176th out of 168 countries (last)
- K. **2016:** Score 10, ranked 176th out of 176 countries (last)
- L. **2017:** Score 9, ranked 179th out of 180 countries
- M. **2018:** Score 10, ranked 180th out of 180 countries (last)
- N. **2019:** Score 9, ranked 182nd out of 180 countries (last)
- O. **2020:** Score 9, ranked 182nd out of 180 countries (last)
- P. **2021:** Score 13, ranked 182nd out of 180 countries
- Q. **2022:** Score 12, ranked 180th out of 180 countries (last)
- R. **2023:** Score 11, ranked 177th out of 180 countries
- S. **2024:** Score 9, ranked 181st out of 182 countries
- T. **2025:** Score 9, ranked 181st out of 182 countries

This nearly two-decade record of being at or near the very bottom of the CPI is extraordinary. No other country in the world has maintained such a consistently low position for such an extended period. Even countries that are commonly associated with severe corruption such as Afghanistan, North Korea, or Venezuela have occasionally shown score fluctuations that suggest some anti-corruption activity.

Somalia's CPI trajectory shows no such fluctuations; it is essentially flat at the bottom of the scale, with only minor variations that fall well within the margin of measurement error. The consistency of Somalia's CPI position tells us something important about the nature of corruption in the country. It is not episodic it does not rise and fall with changes in government, anti-corruption campaigns, or international pressure.

It is structural embedded in the political system, the institutional framework, and the social norms in ways that make it resistant to reform. This structural quality is what distinguishes systemic corruption (as defined in Chapter 2) from more episodic or individual forms of corruption.

What the CPI Reveals and Conceals: Methodology, Limitations, and Local Realities

While the CPI is a valuable tool for cross-country comparison and longitudinal tracking, it has significant limitations that must be understood when interpreting Somalia's score.

Methodology

The CPI aggregates data from multiple external sources that assess corruption in the public sector. For the 2024 index, 13 data sources were used, including assessments from the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, the Economist Intelligence Unit, and private risk-rating agencies. Each source's assessment is standardized and averaged to produce the composite CPI score.

The reliance on multiple sources is intended to increase reliability by reducing the influence of any single source's bias. However, the sources all measure perceptions rather than actual corruption, which introduces two potential biases.

First, perception may not correspond to reality a country may be perceived as more corrupt than it actually is due to media attention, cultural biases, or the visibility of particular scandals.

Second, perception may be influenced by factors other than corruption such as general state weakness, poverty, or conflict that are correlated with but not identical to corruption.

Limitations in the Somali Context

In Somalia's case, the CPI faces several specific limitations:

1. **Data scarcity:** Because Somalia has been a conflict-affected state with limited international engagement for much of the period covered by the CPI, some of the standard data sources have limited or no coverage of Somalia. This means that the CPI score is based on fewer sources than for most other countries, potentially increasing measurement error.
2. **Perception bias toward conflict states:** International experts and business analysts may rate conflict-affected states as more corrupt than they actually are, because the visible consequences of corruption (state failure, insecurity, poverty) are more evident in conflict contexts. This "conflict bias" could inflate the perceived level of corruption beyond the actual level.
3. **Focus on formal public sector:** The CPI measures corruption in the formal public sector government ministries, state-owned enterprises, and public officials. In Somalia, much of the corruption occurs outside the formal public sector in clan-based patronage networks, in the humanitarian sector, in the informal economy, and in the relationship between the state and non-state actors (including Al-Shabaab). The CPI does not capture these forms of corruption, which means that it may actually underestimate the total scale of corruption in Somalia.

4. **Aggregation obscures variation:** The CPI provides a single national score, but corruption in Somalia varies significantly by region, sector, and level of government. Puntland, for example, has developed somewhat more effective governance institutions than the Federal Government and may have lower levels of perceived corruption. Somaliland, which has maintained a separate governance system since 1991, has consistently outperformed the rest of Somalia on governance indicators. The national CPI score obscures this regional variation.

Local Realities Beyond the CPI

Despite its limitations, the CPI score accurately reflects a local reality that is well documented by qualitative research, investigative journalism, and institutional assessments: corruption in Somalia is pervasive, structural, and deeply resistant to reform. The CPI score of 9 is not an artifact of measurement bias but a reasonable approximation of the degree to which public sector corruption pervades Somali governance.

Moreover, the CPI may actually understate certain forms of corruption that are particularly significant in the Somali context. The humanitarian sector where corruption has life-threatening consequences is not fully captured by the CPI's focus on the public sector. The security sector where corruption directly enables insurgency is only partially captured. And the clan-based patronage system which is the structural foundation of Somali corruption is not measured at all by an index that focuses on formal institutional corruption.

Beyond Perceptions: Documented Cases of Grand Corruption

While the CPI measures perceptions, there is abundant documentary evidence of actual corruption in Somalia that confirms and extends the CPI's findings. This section examines several categories of documented grand corruption.

Port Revenue Diversion

Somalia's ports particularly Mogadishu and Kismayo are among the most significant sources of government revenue and among the most significant sites of corruption. Port revenues include customs duties, port fees, and charges for warehousing and other services. According to the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea and the World Bank, a substantial proportion of port revenues are unaccounted for they are collected but do not reach the treasury.

The mechanisms of port revenue diversion are multiple. Customs agents under-report the value of imports or classify high-duty goods as low-duty categories, in exchange for payments from importers. Port managers divert fee revenue to private accounts.

Military and security commanders control access to port areas and extract payments for the movement of goods. And the management of port contracts including the awarding of port operating concessions has been characterized by opaque processes that suggest large-scale corruption.

Public Procurement Fraud

Public procurement in Somalia is systematically inflated and corrupt. Contracts are awarded through non-competitive processes to politically connected firms, goods and services are delivered at above-market prices, and kickbacks to officials are routine. The Federal Government's public procurement system while nominally governed by a legal framework that requires competitive bidding operates in practice as a patronage distribution mechanism, with contracts allocated based on political connections rather than value for money.

Specific documented cases include the procurement of military equipment at inflated prices, the awarding of infrastructure contracts to firms with no construction capacity, and the payment of consultancy fees to individuals with no relevant expertise all of which are mechanisms for transferring public funds to private accounts through the guise of legitimate transactions.

Land Grabbing and Allocation

Land in Mogadishu which has experienced a property boom since 2012 as the city has rebuilt is a major source of illicit enrichment. Government-owned land and public property including military bases, school grounds, and hospital land have been allocated to private developers and politically connected individuals at below-market prices or for free, in transactions that constitute direct transfers of public wealth to private hands. The absence of a functioning land registry and the politicization of land disputes make this form of corruption particularly difficult to detect and prosecute.

Aid Diversion

As documented in Chapter 5, the 2023 food aid diversion scandal represents the most prominent case of humanitarian corruption in Somalia. However, aid diversion has been a persistent feature of the humanitarian system in Somalia for decades. The UN Monitoring Group has reported on systematic diversion in every annual report since 2010, documenting the involvement of government officials, contractors, camp managers, and humanitarian staff in schemes that divert resources from intended beneficiaries.

The 2023 scandal was significant not because it revealed a new phenomenon but because it was the first time the scale of diversion was publicly acknowledged and resulted in programmatic suspensions.

Conclusion

Somalia's CPI score of 9 is not a random outcome but an accurate reflection of a governance system in which corruption is structural, pervasive, and deeply resistant to reform. The historical consistency of this score nearly two decades at or near the global bottom demonstrates that corruption in Somalia is not a function of particular governments or particular officials but of the political system itself.

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), while limited in what it captures, provides a reliable signal of the severity of Somalia's corruption problem. And the documentary evidence of grand corruption in port revenues, procurement, land allocation, and aid diversion confirms that the CPI score reflects a reality that is at least as bad as the index suggests, and possibly worse.

The following chapters will examine the structural foundations of this corruption the clan–corruption nexus, the hollowing of public institutions, and the corruption of the security sector in order to understand why Somalia's corruption is so persistent and what might be done about it.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CLAN CORRUPTION NEXUS

PATRONAGE AS GOVERNANCE

Introduction

If the CPI score tells us that Somalia is among the world's most corrupt countries, the clan–corruption nexus tells us why. The central argument of this chapter is that corruption in Somalia is not primarily a failure of individual morality or institutional design but a rational outcome of a political system in which power is organized, distributed, and exercised through clan-based patronage networks.

In this system, corruption is not an aberration it is the mechanism through which the political system functions. Government positions are not public service opportunities but access points to state resources that can be extracted and distributed to clan constituencies. Accountability mechanisms are not absent by accident but by design because accountability would threaten the patronage flows that sustain the political elite.

Understanding the clan–corruption nexus is essential for any attempt to address corruption in Somalia, because reforms that do not account for the structural role of clan patronage will inevitably be captured or neutralized by the system they are intended to change. This chapter examines the mechanisms through which clan politics produces corruption, the institutionalization of this corruption through the 4.5 power-sharing formula, and the resulting culture of impunity that makes accountability nearly impossible.

Clan Loyalty as the Primary Currency of Political Power

In Somalia's political culture, clan loyalty functions as the primary currency of political power more important than ideology, policy positions, competence, or public service. This is not because Somalis are inherently clan-oriented as the anti-tribalism rhetoric of the Barre era demonstrated, Somalis are capable of organizing politically on non-clan bases. Rather, clan loyalty dominates because the political system is structured to reward it.

The logic operates as follows. In a clan-based power-sharing system, a politician's access to government positions depends on their clan identity. Their clan identity is a given it cannot be changed, earned, or lost. Therefore, the politician's primary obligation is to their clan to ensure that the clan receives its share of government positions, contracts, and services. If the politician fails to deliver for their clan, they will be replaced by another member of the same clan who will. If the politician succeeds in delivering for their clan, they will be rewarded with continued political support regardless of their competence, integrity, or policy positions.

This logic creates a system in which the rational strategy for any politician is to maximize the extraction of state resources for their clan which means, in practice, maximizing corruption. A politician who is honest who does not use their position to extract resources for their clan will be perceived by their clan as failing in their primary obligation.

A politician who is corrupt who extracts resources for their clan will be perceived as successful. The system thus selects for corruption and selects against integrity.

The 4.5 Clan Power-Sharing Model and Its Corruption Incentives

The 4.5 clan power-sharing formula is the institutional expression of clan-based governance in Somalia. Under this formula, parliamentary seats and government positions are allocated among the four major clan families Darod, Hawiye, Dir, and Isaaq with the remaining 0.5 share allocated to minority clans (the Digil-Mirifle/Rahanweyn, Bantu, and other groups).

The formula was originally designed as a temporary mechanism to ensure inclusive representation during the transitional period (2000–2012) but has become a permanent feature of Somali governance that is now embedded in the Provisional Constitution and the electoral system.

The 4.5 formula creates several corruption incentives:

1. **Positions as clan property:** When government positions are allocated by clan, they are effectively owned by the clan that receives the allocation. The office-holder is understood to be the clan's representative in the government, not the government's representative to the clan. This means that the office-holder's primary obligation is to the clan, not to the public and that using the position to extract resources for the clan is fulfilling, not violating, the office-holder's understood role.
2. **Protection of corrupt officials:** Because each clan's political power depends on maintaining its allocated positions, clans have a strong incentive to protect their

officials from accountability. If a clan's minister is accused of corruption and removed, the clan loses not only a government position but also access to the rents that position provides. Therefore, clans systematically defend their officials against corruption allegations, regardless of the evidence creating a culture of impunity in which corrupt officials know they will be protected by their clan.

3. **No cross-clan accountability:** The clan protection mechanism means that no clan has an incentive to hold another clan's officials accountable for corruption, because doing so would establish a precedent that could be applied to their own officials. This creates a mutual non-aggression pact on corruption an implicit agreement among the political elite that corruption will not be prosecuted because prosecution would threaten the patronage system that sustains all elites.
4. **Competition for access to rents, not policy:** Because political power is allocated by clan rather than earned through elections, political competition in Somalia is not about policy but about access to rents. Different clans and sub-clans compete for government positions not because they have different visions for the country but because they want access to the resources those positions provide. This competition which frequently turns violent is the engine of the corruption system, as each faction seeks to maximize its extraction of state resources.

Political Patronage Networks:

➤ How Public Office Becomes Private Enrichment

The patronage system in Somalia operates through networks that link political patrons (office-holders) with their clients (clan members, supporters, and employees) through the distribution of state resources. These networks are hierarchical flowing from the top (the president and prime minister) through ministers, directors general, and regional officials down to local-level distributors and they are pervasive, touching every sector and level of government.

The mechanisms through which public office is converted into private enrichment include:

1. **Employment patronage:** Government positions from ministerial posts to clerical jobs are allocated based on clan identity and political loyalty rather than competence. This creates a civil service that is bloated (because each clan demands its quota of positions), incompetent (because positions are filled by political appointees rather than qualified professionals), and loyal to its patron (because employees owe their positions to the politician who appointed them, not to the institution they serve). The bloated civil service is itself a form of corruption: it diverts public resources

- (salaries) to individuals who were hired for political rather than functional reasons.
2. **Contract patronage:** Government contracts are awarded to politically connected firms and individuals often without competitive bidding as a mechanism for distributing resources to political supporters. The inflated value of these contracts (which frequently exceed market rates by significant margins) represents a direct transfer of public wealth to private individuals. The kickback system in which a percentage of the contract value is returned to the official who awarded the contract is the standard operating procedure for government procurement in Somalia.
 3. **Regulatory patronage:** Government officials use their regulatory authority the power to grant licenses, approve permits, and enforce regulations as a source of patronage. Businesses that support the official's political faction receive favorable regulatory treatment; those that do not face harassment, delays, and selective enforcement. This regulatory corruption distorts the business environment, favors politically connected firms over more efficient competitors, and deters investment by businesses that are not part of the patronage network.
 4. **Humanitarian patronage:** As documented in Chapters 5 and 10, humanitarian assistance in Somalia is also subject to patronage distribution. Officials who control access to aid by determining which camps receive assistance, which contractors deliver it, and which organizations are registered to operate use this control to build political support. Humanitarian resources become political resources, distributed to supporters and withheld from opponents.

Cash, Clan, and Connections:

➤ The Three Currencies of Somali Governance

The phrase "cash, clan, and connections" frequently used by analysts and observers to describe how governance operates in Somalia captures the three currencies through which power is exercised and resources are allocated. In a functional governance system, the currency of power is legal authority: officials exercise power because they hold a legitimate position within a legal framework, and they are constrained by laws and oversight mechanisms. In Somalia, the currency of power is not legal authority but the combination of financial resources (cash), social identity (clan), and personal relationships (connections).

- I. **Cash:** The ability to distribute financial resources whether through salaries, contracts, or direct payments is the most immediate form of political power in Somalia. Politicians who can pay their supporters, fund their militias, and distribute cash to their communities maintain political loyalty. Politicians who

cannot because they are honest or because their position does not provide access to rents lose support. The requirement to generate cash creates an imperative for corruption: a politician who cannot extract resources from the state cannot maintain their political position.

- II. **Clan:** As discussed above, clan identity determines access to political positions and the obligations that come with them. A politician's clan identity defines their constituency, their allies, and their opponents. It also determines their access to protection the ability to rely on one's clan for defense against accountability or prosecution.
- III. **Connections:** Personal relationships forged through shared clan identity, business partnerships, educational backgrounds, or political alliances are the third currency of power. Connections determine who gets access to contracts, who is appointed to positions, who receives information about opportunities, and who is protected from accountability. The network of connections is the infrastructure through which cash and clan identity are translated into political power.

Case Study:

➤ **The Clan Protection Mechanism and Impunity for Corrupt Officials**

The clan protection mechanism is the most powerful obstacle to anti-corruption accountability in Somalia. It operates through a simple logic: a clan will not permit one of its members to be held accountable for corruption, because doing so would reduce the clan's access to state resources and establish a precedent that could be applied to other clan members.

This mechanism has been documented in numerous cases:

1. When a minister from a particular clan is accused of corruption, the clan's parliamentary bloc mobilizes to block investigations, prevent votes of no confidence, and defend the minister in public statements.
2. When a judicial official attempts to prosecute a corrupt official, they face pressure from the official's clan including threats, political interference, and the mobilization of clan elders to intervene on the official's behalf.
3. When anti-corruption commissions produce reports documenting corruption, the reports are suppressed, ignored, or dismissed as politically motivated with the political support organized along clan lines.
4. When international donors demand accountability for the misuse of funds, the government responds by conducting investigations that are deliberately designed to

fail appointing investigators from the accused official's clan, limiting the scope of inquiry, and failing to follow through on recommendations.

The result is a system of virtually total impunity for corrupt officials. No senior government official in Somalia has ever been successfully prosecuted for corruption not because corruption does not occur (the CPI score of 9 confirms that it does) but because the clan protection mechanism makes prosecution politically impossible.

Conclusion

The clan–corruption nexus is the structural foundation of corruption in Somalia. It is not an incidental feature of Somali politics but the operating system of governance the mechanism through which power is exercised, resources are distributed, and accountability is prevented. The 4.5 power-sharing formula institutionalizes this nexus, creating a political system that selects for corruption and selects against integrity.

The patronage networks that flow from this system ensure that public office is converted into private enrichment. And the clan protection mechanism guarantees impunity for corrupt officials.

Any anti-corruption strategy that does not address the clan–corruption nexus will fail, because the system it is trying to reform will capture or neutralize the reform. The following chapters examine how this structural corruption manifests in specific institutions public institutions and the security sector and what the failure of existing anti-corruption efforts reveals about the challenges of reform.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

THE HOLLOW STATE

Introduction

The concept of the "hollow state" describes a state that has the formal attributes of governance ministries, departments, legal frameworks, and international recognition but lacks the substantive capacity to perform the functions of governance. Somalia is a paradigmatic case of a hollow state: it has a president, a prime minister, a parliament, a judiciary, and a civil service, but these institutions are unable to deliver security, enforce laws, manage public finances, or provide services in any meaningful sense. The hollowing of these institutions is not accidental; it is a direct consequence of corruption, which diverts resources, distorts incentives, and prevents the development of institutional capacity.

This chapter examines corruption in Somalia's public institutions, with particular attention to the mechanisms through which corruption hollows out the state and the consequences of this hollowing for governance and development. The chapter draws on research evidence including quantitative studies conducted in Mogadishu to demonstrate that corruption is not merely a perception but a measurable reality with measurable consequences for institutional performance.

Weak Institutional Capacity and the Absence of Rule of Law

Somalia's public institutions operate at a fraction of their nominal capacity. Ministries are understaffed not because there are no employees (the civil service is bloated with political appointees) but because few employees have the skills, motivation, or resources to perform their functions effectively.

Information systems are rudimentary or non-existent, making it impossible to track expenditures, monitor program implementation, or evaluate outcomes. Physical infrastructure offices, computers, archives is inadequate. And the institutional memory that should guide decision-making has been destroyed by decades of conflict and staff turnover.

The absence of rule of law compounds these capacity problems. Laws exist on paper. Somalia has a Provisional Constitution, a penal code, a civil code, and sectoral legislation but they are not enforced. The judiciary is under-resourced, under-trained, and subject

to political and clan interference. The police are unable to investigate crimes effectively, and when they do, the courts often fail to deliver justice.

The prosecution service is weak and politicized. The result is a governance environment in which laws are aspirational rather than operational they describe how the state should function but do not determine how it actually functions.

In the absence of rule of law, the state operates not through legal authority but through patronage and coercion. Officials exercise power not because they are authorized by law but because they have clan backing, financial resources, and personal connections.

Citizens comply not because they recognize the legitimacy of the state but because they fear the consequences of non-compliance or because they hope to receive benefits from compliant behavior. This is not governance in any meaningful sense it is a protection racket operated through state structures.

Graft in Revenue Collection: Ports, Airports, Customs, and Taxation

Revenue collection is one of the most critical functions of any state and one of the most corrupt sectors in Somalia. The Federal Government's revenue comes primarily from customs duties (port revenues), taxes on a small number of formal-sector businesses, and international budget support. Domestic revenue collection is estimated at only 3–4 percent of GDP one of the lowest ratios in the world reflecting both the narrowness of the tax base and the massive leakage of collected revenues through corruption.

○ Port Revenues

As noted in Chapter 6, port revenues are a major source of corruption. Mogadishu port the country's largest generates an estimated \$60–80 million in annual revenue, but only a fraction of this reaches the treasury. Customs agents systematically under-collect duties, either by under-valuing imports or by classifying high-duty goods as low-duty categories, in exchange for payments from importers. The resulting gap between potential and actual revenue is difficult to quantify precisely, but the World Bank has estimated that Somalia collects only 30–40 percent of its potential customs revenue, with the remainder lost to corruption and inefficiency.

○ Tax Administration

Somalia's tax administration is rudimentary and deeply corrupt. The formal tax base is extremely narrow consisting primarily of large businesses in Mogadishu and most potential taxpayers operate in the informal economy, beyond the reach of tax authorities. Within the formal sector, tax compliance is low because taxpayers perceive (correctly) that collected taxes will not be used for public services but will be diverted through

corruption. Tax officials, for their part, are willing to reduce tax obligations in exchange for bribes because their official salaries are inadequate and oversight is minimal.

Revenue Sharing and Federalism

The federal system adds another layer of revenue corruption. The constitutional framework for revenue sharing between the Federal Government and Federal Member States is unclear and contested, creating disputes over which entity has the right to collect and retain revenues from particular sources.

These disputes often driven by clan-based political competition create opportunities for both levels of government to divert revenues outside of any agreed framework, with neither level accountable for the total revenue collected.

Budget Opacity and Mismanagement of Public Finances

Somalia's public financial management (PFM) system is one of the weakest in the world, ranked in the bottom decile of the World Bank's Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) assessments. Key weaknesses include:

1. **Budget credibility:** The budget bears little relation to actual expenditure. Budget allocations are routinely over-ridden by executive decisions, and significant expenditures occur outside the budget framework including security expenditures, which are often classified and therefore not subject to parliamentary scrutiny.
2. **Expenditure tracking:** The government cannot reliably track how much money is spent on what purposes. Expenditure records are incomplete, and the chart of accounts is inadequate. The absence of functional financial management information systems means that the government cannot produce timely and reliable financial reports.
3. **Audit capacity:** The Office of the Auditor General exists but is severely under-resourced and unable to conduct comprehensive audits of government expenditures. Audit reports are produced late (if at all), their recommendations are not implemented, and there are no consequences for entities that are found to have mismanaged funds.
4. **Procurement:** Public procurement is governed by a legal framework that requires competitive bidding, but this framework is routinely circumvented through emergency provisions, direct contracting, and political interference. The result is a procurement system that systematically overpays for goods and services, enriching politically connected contractors and the officials who award them contracts.

The opacity of the budget process creates corruption opportunities at every stage from the formulation of the budget (where line items are inflated to create slush funds)

through execution (where expenditures are diverted from intended purposes) to reporting (where actual expenditures are misreported or not reported at all). Without transparency, there can be no accountability; and without accountability, corruption is unchecked.

The Federal Government's Accountability Deficit

The Federal Government of Somalia suffers from a profound accountability deficit a gap between the formal accountability mechanisms that exist on paper and the actual accountability that is exercised in practice. This deficit operates at several levels:

1. **Parliamentary oversight:** The Federal Parliament has the constitutional authority to oversee the executive, approve the budget, and hold ministers accountable. In practice, parliamentary oversight is weak because parliamentarians are selected through a clan-delegate system rather than elected by citizens, making them accountable to clan elders (who selected them) rather than to the public. Moreover, parliamentarians themselves benefit from the patronage system, reducing their incentive to scrutinize government expenditures that fund their own positions.
2. **Judicial oversight:** The judiciary should provide a check on executive power through judicial review and the prosecution of corrupt officials. In practice, the judiciary is compromised by clan interference, inadequate resources, and political pressure, as discussed in Chapter 15.
3. **Civil society oversight:** Civil society organizations and the media should provide an independent check on government power through research, reporting, and advocacy. In practice, civil society operates in a restricted environment, with journalists facing harassment, detention, and violence for reporting on corruption. Somalia is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, with several killed each year for their reporting.
4. **International oversight:** International donors and organizations provide some oversight through conditions on budget support and project funding. However, the effectiveness of international oversight is limited by the donors' own political interests (which sometimes prioritize stability over accountability) and by the government's ability to circumvent conditions through creative accounting and political maneuvering.

Research Evidence:

➤ Quantitative Studies on Corruption's Impact on Government Institutions in Mogadishu

Several quantitative studies have been conducted on corruption's impact on government institutions in Mogadishu, providing empirical evidence that supplements the qualitative assessments discussed above.

A study published by a researcher at the African Center for Governance and Development Research examined the effect of corruption on federal government institutions in Mogadishu, using a quantitative survey methodology.

The study surveyed 150 government employees across several ministries and found that:

1. **78%** of respondents reported that corruption was "very high" in their institution
2. **65%** reported that corruption had "significantly reduced" the institution's capacity to deliver services
3. **72%** reported that promotions and appointments were based on clan identity rather than competence
4. **58%** reported that they had personally been asked to pay a bribe to receive a service from another government institution
5. **89%** reported that corrupt officials were not held accountable

Another study, published by a researcher at Kampala International University (KIU), examined the impact of insecurity on education service delivery in secondary schools in Mogadishu. The study found a statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.67$, $p < .001$) between perceived insecurity and the quality of education service delivery, with insecurity reducing school attendance, teacher availability, and the delivery of educational materials.

A third study, published in the Emerald Journal of Financial Crime in 2024, examined corruption's impediment to good governance in Somalia's public sector. The study found that the level of corruption in Somalia is "high and complex" because of weak governance, poverty, inadequate legal frameworks, and the clan-based political culture.

The study concluded that corruption "significantly hampers good governance" in the public sector and that existing anti-corruption measures are "largely ineffective."

These quantitative findings confirm what the CPI and qualitative assessments suggest: corruption is not merely perceived but is experienced and documented as a major obstacle to institutional performance in Somalia. The research evidence demonstrates

that corruption reduces institutional capacity, distorts personnel decisions, erodes public trust, and creates a culture of impunity all of which contribute to the hollowing of the state.

Conclusion

Somalia's public institutions are hollow they have the form but not the substance of governance. This hollowing is not a natural condition but a product of corruption that diverts resources, distorts incentives, and prevents the development of institutional capacity. Revenue collection is deeply corrupt, with a large proportion of potential government revenue lost to graft.

Budget management is opaque, creating opportunities for expenditure diversion at every stage. Accountability mechanisms exist on paper but are neutralized by the clan protection mechanism and the political economy of patronage.

The research evidence confirms that the consequences of this hollowing are real and measurable: institutions that cannot deliver services, employees who are appointed for political rather than functional reasons, and a public that has lost faith in the state's ability or willingness to serve its interests.

The hollow state is not merely a metaphor it is a diagnosis of a governance system that has been systematically emptied of its substance by corruption.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CORRUPTION IN THE SECURITY SECTOR

WHEN PROTECTORS BECOME PREDATORS

Introduction

The corruption of the security sector the military, police, and intelligence services is perhaps the most consequential form of corruption in Somalia, because it directly undermines the state's capacity to provide the most fundamental public good: security. When the military is weakened by ghost soldiers and procurement fraud, it cannot defeat Al-Shabaab.

When the police are compromised by corruption, they cannot protect citizens from crime. When the intelligence service is penetrated by clan and political interests, it cannot provide reliable information for security operations. And when all of these institutions are characterized by corruption, the state's claim to a monopoly on the legitimate use of force the defining attribute of sovereignty becomes hollow.

This chapter examines corruption in Somalia's security sector, drawing on documentary evidence from the UN Monitoring Group, research on security sector reform, and comparative analysis of security sector corruption in other conflict-affected states. The central argument is that security sector corruption is not merely a governance problem but a strategic vulnerability one that directly enables Al-Shabaab's resilience and perpetuates the insecurity that corrupts the security sector in the first place.

Ghost Soldiers, Payroll Fraud, and Desertion Crises

The "ghost soldier" phenomenon is one of the most well-documented forms of security sector corruption in Somalia. Ghost soldiers are non-existent personnel who are carried on the military payroll, with their salaries collected by the officers or officials who created them. The practice serves two functions: it enriches the officers who collect the ghost salaries, and it inflates the reported strength of the military, creating the appearance of greater capacity than actually exists.

The UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea has reported on the ghost soldier problem in virtually every annual report since 2010. In its 2023 report, the Monitoring

Group estimated that up to 30% of the reported strength of the Somali National Army (SNA) consisted of ghost soldiers meaning that the actual fighting force may be only 70% of its reported size. This estimate is consistent with earlier assessments by the Monitoring Group and by international security sector advisors.

The consequences of the ghost soldier problem are severe:

1. **Reduced combat effectiveness:** When the reported strength of a unit is inflated by ghost soldiers, the unit's actual combat power is proportionally reduced. A battalion that reports 500 soldiers but actually has 350 cannot hold the ground that military planners expect it to hold, leading to operational failures that cost lives and territory.
2. **Wasted resources:** Ghost soldiers consume salaries, equipment, and supplies that could be used for actual combat soldiers. The financial cost of ghost soldiers runs into millions of dollars annually resources that are effectively stolen from the security budget.
3. **Undermined morale:** Soldiers who are actually fighting often under-resourced and under-supported know that their officers are collecting salaries for non-existent colleagues. This knowledge corrodes morale, reduces motivation, and contributes to the high desertion rates that plague the SNA.
4. **Operational planning failures:** Military planners who base operational decisions on inflated personnel numbers make decisions that are mismatched to actual force strength, leading to failed operations, unnecessary casualties, and the loss of territory to Al-Shabaab.

The desertion crisis is a related but distinct problem. The Somali National Army experiences extremely high rates of desertion, with estimates suggesting that 10–20% of trained soldiers desert each year. Desertion is driven by several factors: inadequate pay (soldiers' salaries are low and often paid late), poor living conditions, the absence of support for families, the trauma of combat without adequate psychological support, and the knowledge that officers are enriching themselves through corruption while frontline soldiers bear the risks.

Corruption in Military Procurement and Logistics

Military procurement in Somalia is a major site of grand corruption. The procurement of weapons, ammunition, vehicles, uniforms, food, and other supplies for the military is characterized by inflated prices, substandard equipment, and systematic diversion of supplies to the commercial market.

The UN Monitoring Group has documented numerous cases of procurement corruption, including:

- **Inflated procurement prices:** Contracts for military supplies are awarded at prices significantly above market rates, with the difference pocketed by officials and contractors. In one documented case, the price of ammunition was inflated by over 200% compared to international market prices.
- **Substandard equipment:** Military equipment that is purchased through corrupt procurement processes is often substandard weapons that do not function properly, vehicles that break down immediately, and protective equipment that does not provide the protection claimed. The delivery of substandard equipment directly endangers the soldiers who must use it.
- **Diversion of military supplies:** Military supplies including food, fuel, and ammunition are routinely diverted from military stocks to the commercial market, where they are sold for profit. This diversion reduces the resources available to frontline soldiers and, in some cases, directly benefits Al-Shabaab, which purchases weapons and ammunition from corrupt military officials.
- **Fictitious contracts:** In some cases, contracts are awarded for goods and services that are never delivered. The contract value is paid, and the proceeds are divided among the officials and contractors involved. These fictitious contracts represent direct theft from the security budget.

How Security Sector Corruption Directly Enables Al-Shabaab's Resilience

The connection between security sector corruption and Al-Shabaab's resilience is direct and measurable. Several mechanisms link the two:

1. **Reduced military effectiveness:** As discussed above, ghost soldiers, procurement fraud, and desertion reduce the SNA's actual combat capacity far below its reported strength. This means that military operations that are planned based on reported force levels frequently fail because the actual forces available are insufficient creating opportunities for Al-Shabaab to exploit these failures.
2. **Arms leakage:** The diversion of military weapons and ammunition to the commercial market a direct result of procurement and logistics corruption means that Al-Shabaab can obtain weapons through corrupt military channels. The UN Monitoring Group has documented cases where weapons supplied to the SNA by international donors were subsequently found in Al-Shabaab's possession, having been sold by corrupt military officials.
3. **Intelligence compromise:** When military and intelligence officials are corrupt selling information, providing advance warning of operations, or concealing Al-Shabaab activities in exchange for payments the state's intelligence capacity is compromised. Al-Shabaab has demonstrated an ability to anticipate government

operations, suggesting that it receives advance intelligence from within the security forces.

4. **Erosion of public confidence:** When the population observes that the military is corrupt that officers are enriching themselves while soldiers die, that supplies are being sold instead of distributed, that the army's actual strength is far below its reported strength they lose confidence in the state's ability to protect them. This loss of confidence drives communities toward Al-Shabaab, which offers a seemingly honest alternative to a corrupt security sector.

A 2025 study published in the African Journal of Political Science and Administrative Studies examined the influence of corruption on the increased prevalence of terrorism in Somalia and concluded that corruption is a "structural enabler" of terrorism. The study found that "the resilience of Al-Shabaab is rooted not only in its military capability but in the corruption of the state security apparatus that opposes it." This finding is consistent with the broader literature on the corruption–terrorism nexus, which demonstrates that corruption reduces the state's capacity to prevent and respond to terrorism while simultaneously increasing the legitimacy of anti-state armed groups.

The Failed Security Sector Reform: Prioritizing Capacity Over Governance

International security sector reform (SSR) efforts in Somalia have focused overwhelmingly on building military capacity training soldiers, providing equipment, and constructing bases while largely neglecting governance and accountability. This approach reflects a broader pattern in international SSR in fragile states, where the urgency of building security capacity leads donors to prioritize tangible outputs (trained soldiers, delivered equipment) over intangible governance reforms (oversight mechanisms, accountability systems, transparent financial management).

The result has been a security sector that is larger but not more effective, better-equipped but not better-governed. The training of soldiers who then desert (because conditions are poor and morale is low), the provision of equipment that is subsequently diverted (because procurement and logistics are corrupt), and the building of institutional capacity that is then hollowed out by patronage and corruption represent an enormous waste of international resources and a strategic failure of SSR.

The lessons from Afghanistan where a similarly capacity-focused SSR approach produced a large but fundamentally weak security apparatus that collapsed within days of the international withdrawal in 2021 are directly relevant to Somalia. In both cases,

the international community built security forces that were numerically impressive but institutionally hollow, because the governance and accountability dimensions of SSR were neglected in favor of the more visible and politically saleable capacity-building dimension.

The ISS (Institute for Security Studies) analysis of security sector reform in Somalia has argued that "SSR in Somalia has been characterized by a fundamental imbalance between capacity building and governance reform, with the former consistently prioritized over the latter." This imbalance has produced a security sector that appears functional on the surface with trained soldiers, delivered equipment, and organizational charts but is fundamentally corrupt and ineffective at its core.

Conclusion

Corruption in the security sector is not merely a governance problem; it is a strategic vulnerability that directly enables Al-Shabaab's resilience and perpetuates the cycle of insecurity.

Ghost soldiers reduce combat effectiveness, procurement corruption delivers substandard equipment, arms leakage supplies Al-Shabaab, and the erosion of public confidence drives communities toward the insurgency. The international community's SSR approach has exacerbated this problem by prioritizing capacity over governance building a larger but not more effective security force.

The implication is clear: until security sector corruption is addressed, military operations against Al-Shabaab will continue to underperform, and the insurgency will continue to exploit the gap between the state's reported and actual security capacity.

Security sector reform must be reoriented from capacity-building to governance-building from training soldiers to building accountability systems that prevent ghost soldiers, procurement fraud, and arms diversion. Without this reorientation, the billions of dollars invested in Somalia's security sector will continue to produce diminishing returns.

PART IV:

**THE CONVERGENCE WHERE INSECURITY AND
CORRUPTION MEET**

CHAPTER NINE

**THE AID COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
AS A SITE OF CONTESTATION**

Introduction

Somalia is one of the world's largest recipients of humanitarian and development assistance, with billions of dollars in aid flowing into the country since the early 1990s. This assistance has saved millions of lives providing food, water, shelter, healthcare, and education to populations that would otherwise have been entirely without support.

At the same time, the humanitarian apparatus in Somalia has become one of the most significant sites of corruption and contestation a space in which the resources intended to alleviate suffering are captured, diverted, and instrumentalized by the very power structures that produce the suffering.

This chapter examines the aid complex in Somalia the interconnected system of international donors, UN agencies, NGOs, government entities, and local power brokers through which humanitarian assistance flows as a site where insecurity and corruption converge. The central argument is that the humanitarian system in Somalia, while life-saving, has inadvertently become part of the political economy of insecurity and corruption.

The enormous scale of aid flows, the weak oversight environment created by insecurity, and the political manipulation of humanitarian resources by both government and non-state actors have created a system in which aid simultaneously alleviates and perpetuates the conditions that make it necessary.

The Scale of Aid to Somalia: Billions In, Billions Diverted

Humanitarian and development assistance to Somalia has been substantial and sustained. Between 2011 and 2023, international donors provided over \$10 billion in humanitarian assistance to Somalia, including major emergency responses during the 2011 famine (which killed an estimated 258,000 people), the 2016–2017 drought, and the 2021–

2023 drought. Development assistance including budget support to the Federal Government, infrastructure projects, and capacity-building programs adds several billion more to the total.

In 2023, the UN's Humanitarian Response Plan for Somalia requested \$2.6 billion to assist 7.6 million people. While the plan was not fully funded, it illustrates the enormous scale of the humanitarian apparatus in Somalia an apparatus that involves dozens of UN agencies, international NGOs, local organizations, and government entities, all operating in a complex and often opaque coordination system.

The problem is not that aid is insufficient but that a significant proportion of it is diverted from its intended purposes. The 2023 food aid diversion scandal examined in Chapter 5 and discussed further below revealed that the diversion of aid was not occasional or individual but "widespread and systematic," according to the UN's own investigation. The scandal represented a particularly visible instance of a broader pattern: the capture of humanitarian resources by the same patronage networks and corrupt officials that the aid system is intended to bypass.

The scale of diversion is difficult to quantify precisely by definition, diverted funds are not tracked through official channels. However, the UN Monitoring Group, the OIOS investigation, and independent assessments by organizations such as the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre have estimated that between 10% and 30% of humanitarian assistance in Somalia is diverted, depending on the sector, location, and delivery mechanism. This means that hundreds of millions of dollars in aid resources intended to save lives and alleviate suffering are captured annually by corrupt officials, contractors, and power brokers.

Systematic Food Aid Diversion: The 2023 UN Investigation and Its Fallout

The 2023 food aid diversion scandal was the most significant corruption event in the humanitarian sector in Somalia in recent years. The scandal came to public attention in early 2023, when the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and USAID launched investigations into allegations that food aid intended for displaced persons was being systematically diverted.

The investigation revealed a multi-layered diversion scheme operating across the entire aid delivery chain:

- **At the port and transport level:** Food commodities arriving at Mogadishu port were loaded onto trucks contracted to deliver them to distribution sites. Transport contractors many of whom were politically connected systematically under-delivered, reporting full deliveries while diverting significant portions to

commercial markets. The absence of GPS tracking on transport vehicles and the limited ability of humanitarian organizations to monitor deliveries in insecure areas made this form of diversion extremely difficult to detect.

- **At the distribution site level:** Camp managers and local officials responsible for distributing food to registered beneficiaries maintained inflated beneficiary lists that included "ghost recipients" non-existent individuals whose food rations were collected and sold by the managers. The registration process itself was corrupt, with individuals paying to be included on beneficiary lists or to increase their allocated ration size.
- **At the institutional level:** Some staff of humanitarian organizations including both international and local NGOs were implicated in the diversion, either actively participating in diversion schemes or failing to report them due to personal benefit or fear of retaliation. The UN investigation found that organizational oversight mechanisms were inadequate and that the pressure to deliver aid quickly in a crisis environment led to shortcuts in accountability.

The fallout from the scandal was significant:

- The World Food Programme suspended food distributions in several regions of Somalia, pending the implementation of corrective measures. This suspension affected an estimated 500,000 people who depended on WFP food assistance.
- The European Union suspended funding for humanitarian programs in Somalia, pending the results of investigations and the adoption of reforms.
- The United States, through USAID, suspended food aid to Somalia while conducting its own investigation. The suspension which affected the single largest source of food aid to the country created immediate concerns about a renewed food crisis.
- Multiple international NGOs reviewed their operations in Somalia, with some suspending programs in areas where diversion was most severe.

The corrective measures implemented in response to the scandal included enhanced monitoring mechanisms (including GPS tracking of food deliveries), biometric registration of beneficiaries, and the establishment of independent complaint mechanisms. However, these measures address the symptoms of the problem the specific mechanisms through which diversion occurs rather than the structural conditions that make diversion possible: the governance vacuum, the clan-based patronage system, and the insecurity that limits monitoring and oversight.

How Al-Shabaab Taxes and Extorts Humanitarian Convoys

Al-Shabaab's relationship with the humanitarian system is one of the most complex and least understood aspects of the aid complex. The organization does not merely oppose humanitarian assistance it actively extracts resources from it, taxing humanitarian convoys, extorting NGOs, and imposing "registration fees" on organizations that wish to operate in areas under its influence.

The UN Monitoring Group has documented Al-Shabaab's taxation of humanitarian operations in multiple reports. The organization's Office for Foreign Relations and Citizenship its de facto foreign ministry requires international and local NGOs to register and pay fees to operate in areas under Al-Shabaab's control. These fees are essentially taxes on humanitarian assistance, paid by organizations that have no choice but to comply if they wish to reach populations in need.

Al-Shabaab also imposes checkpoint taxes on humanitarian convoys transiting through areas it controls or influences. Each checkpoint along a delivery route extracts a payment, with the total cost of checkpoint taxes adding significantly to the cost of humanitarian delivery. These payments are sometimes made directly to Al-Shabaab and sometimes through intermediaries including corrupt government officials who control checkpoints in government-controlled areas and share the proceeds with Al-Shabaab.

The relationship between Al-Shabaab's extortion of humanitarian operations and the corruption of government officials is a direct illustration of the insecurity–corruption nexus. Humanitarian organizations operating in Somalia face demands for payment from both Al-Shabaab (which taxes them for access) and government officials (who demand bribes for registration, customs clearance, and movement permits). These dual demands create a system in which humanitarian resources are extracted by both sides of the conflict resources that are then used to sustain the conflict itself.

Aid as Political Currency: Patronage, Gatekeeping, and Elite Capture

Beyond direct diversion, humanitarian assistance in Somalia functions as political currency a resource that can be used to build and maintain political power. This function operates through several mechanisms:

1. **Gatekeeping:** Government officials and local authorities control access to humanitarian operations determining which organizations can register, which areas they can access, and which camps receive assistance. This gatekeeping power is used to reward political supporters and punish opponents, converting humanitarian access into a political tool.

2. **Employment distribution:** Humanitarian organizations employ significant numbers of local staff, and these positions are highly valued in a context of extreme unemployment. The allocation of humanitarian jobs frequently follows clan lines, with local authorities pressuring organizations to hire from particular clans or communities in exchange for cooperation.
3. **Contract allocation:** Humanitarian organizations contract local businesses for transport, construction, and other services. The awarding of these contracts is a major source of patronage, with politically connected firms receiving contracts at inflated prices. In some cases, the contracts are awarded to firms owned by government officials or their relatives a direct conflict of interest that constitutes a form of corruption.
4. **Camp governance:** In IDP camps, the selection of camp leaders and the distribution of assistance within the camp are frequently controlled by local power brokers who use their control over aid to maintain authority. Camp leaders who cooperate with officials and NGOs receive resources that they can distribute to their followers; those who resist are marginalized and their camps are neglected.

The Paradox of Aid: Sustaining Life While Perpetuating Corruption

The most troubling aspect of the aid complex in Somalia is the paradox it presents: humanitarian assistance saves lives and alleviates suffering but it also perpetuates the conditions that make it necessary. This paradox operates through several channels:

1. **Fiscal dependency:** The Somali government depends on international budget support for a significant portion of its revenue. This dependency reduces the government's incentive to build domestic revenue collection capacity because doing so would require tackling corruption in revenue agencies, which would threaten the patronage system. As long as the international community continues to fill the fiscal gap, the government has no fiscal incentive to reform.
2. **Service delivery substitution:** International organizations deliver many of the services healthcare, education, water, sanitation that the state should provide. This substitution relieves the government of the obligation to develop service delivery capacity and creates a dependency cycle in which the population looks to international organizations rather than the state for essential services.
3. **Legitimacy effects:** When international organizations provide services that the state cannot, they unintentionally reinforce the perception that the state is incapable a perception that Al-Shabaab exploits to argue that the government is illegitimate. Conversely, when the government claims credit for services that are actually delivered by international organizations, it gains unearned legitimacy.

4. **Corruption feedback loops:** The enormous scale of aid flows creates corruption opportunities that are proportional to the volume of aid. The corruption that results from these opportunities undermines the effectiveness of aid and erodes public trust in both the government and the international community. The resulting distrust makes it more difficult to mobilize public support for anti-corruption reforms, perpetuating the cycle.

Conclusion

The aid complex in Somalia is not merely a humanitarian system but a political economy in which insecurity and corruption are deeply intertwined. Humanitarian assistance saves lives, but it also creates corruption opportunities, sustains dependency, and is instrumentalized by both state and non-state actors for political purposes.

The 2023 food aid diversion scandal revealed the depth and systematic nature of this problem, but the underlying conditions the governance vacuum, the clan-based patronage system, and the insecurity that limits oversight remain largely unchanged.

Addressing the corruption in the aid complex requires not merely enhanced monitoring and accountability mechanisms though these are necessary but a fundamental rethinking of how humanitarian assistance is delivered in contexts of weak governance and active conflict.

Without this rethinking, the paradox of aid will persist: the more aid is provided, the more opportunities for corruption are created, and the more the cycle of insecurity and corruption is perpetuated.

CHAPTER TEN

THE VICIOUS CYCLE HOW CORRUPTION FUELS INSECURITY AND INSECURITY FUELS CORRUPTION

Introduction

The preceding chapters have examined insecurity and corruption as distinct but related phenomena tracing the specific manifestations of each and identifying the mechanisms through which they interact. This chapter synthesizes these findings into a unified analysis of the insecurity–corruption vicious cycle, examining how the two phenomena reinforce each other in a self-perpetuating dynamic that has proven extremely resistant to intervention.

The concept of a vicious cycle is not merely a metaphor but an analytical description of a causal feedback loop: insecurity creates the conditions for corruption, and corruption creates the conditions for insecurity, in a dynamic that is self-amplifying and self-perpetuating. This cycle has been operating in Somalia for over three decades, and understanding its mechanics is essential for any attempt to break it.

Corruption as a Structural Enabler of Terrorism

The research evidence on the corruption–terrorism nexus has grown significantly in recent years, and the case of Somalia provides one of the most compelling illustrations of this relationship. A 2025 study published in the *African Journal of Political Science and Administrative Studies* (AJPAS) examined the influence of corruption on the increased prevalence of terrorism in Somalia and concluded that corruption functions as a "structural enabler" of terrorism not merely a contributing factor but a fundamental condition that makes terrorism possible.

The study identified several causal pathways through which corruption enables terrorism:

1. **Weakening of counterterrorism capacity:** Corruption in the security sector ghost soldiers, procurement fraud, arms diversion directly reduces the state's capacity to prevent and respond to terrorist attacks. When the army is at 70% of its reported strength due to ghost soldiers, it cannot effectively patrol territory, secure population centers, or conduct offensive operations against terrorist bases.
2. **Erosion of state legitimacy:** When the population perceives the government as irredeemably corrupt, it withdraws consent and cooperation the two resources that are most essential for effective counterterrorism. Citizens who do not trust the government do not report suspicious activities, do not cooperate with investigations, and may actively support or tolerate armed opposition groups.

3. **Creation of alternative governance providers:** Corruption prevents the state from delivering services and justice, creating a governance vacuum that is filled by non-state actors. Al-Shabaab's provision of courts, taxation, and dispute resolution is a direct response to the state's corruption-driven failure to perform these functions.
4. **Financing of terrorist operations:** Corruption creates illicit financial flows that can be captured by terrorist organizations. Al-Shabaab's ability to tax and extort businesses including businesses owned by government officials is facilitated by the same informal networks that enable corruption.
5. **Recruitment through grievance:** Corruption creates grievances perceptions of injustice, exclusion, and exploitation that terrorist organizations exploit for recruitment. Young Somalis who observe government officials enriching themselves while the population suffers are susceptible to Al-Shabaab's narrative that the government is corrupt and illegitimate and that violent opposition is justified.

Al-Shabaab's Resilience Rooted in State Corruption and Public Distrust

The resilience of Al-Shabaab its ability to survive military offensives, leadership losses, and international pressure cannot be understood without reference to the state's corruption. The argument is not that Al-Shabaab is popular it is not, by most measures. Rather, the argument is that Al-Shabaab's survival depends not on active support from the population but on the population's distrust of the state, which creates permissive conditions for the organization's operations.

In a context where the population trusts the state, insurgent organizations face hostile communities that report their activities, deny them shelter and supplies, and cooperate with security forces. In a context where the population distrusts the state, communities are passive they neither support the insurgency nor actively oppose it. This passivity sometimes described as "neutrality" or "ambivalence" provides sufficient operational space for the insurgency to survive.

The corrosive effect of corruption on public trust has been documented in multiple surveys and studies. A 2023 survey by the Somali Institute for Research and Development found that only 12% of respondents expressed confidence in the government's ability to address corruption, while 78% believed that government officials were primarily motivated by personal enrichment. This erosion of trust creates the permissive environment in which Al-Shabaab operates an environment of passive non-cooperation with the state that reduces the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations.

Al-Shabaab's propaganda systematically exploits this distrust. The organization's media output including radio broadcasts, online videos, and pamphlets repeatedly highlights

government corruption, contrasting the wealth of officials with the poverty of the population, and presenting Al-Shabaab's governance as an honest, if harsh, alternative.

The effectiveness of this propaganda depends not on its sophistication but on the truth of its premises: the government is corrupt, officials do enrich themselves, and the state does fail to deliver services. As long as these premises remain true, Al-Shabaab's narrative will retain its persuasive power.

Insecurity Creating Corruption Opportunities

The reverse causal pathway from insecurity to corruption operates through several mechanisms that have been identified in the preceding chapters but are worth synthesizing here:

1. **Emergency procurement and reduced oversight:** Security emergencies justify relaxed procurement rules, no-bid contracts, and reduced audit requirements. In Somalia, where the government has been operating under emergency conditions since 2007, these relaxed standards have become the norm, creating opportunities for corruption that are normalized by the security context.
2. **Security sector opacity:** The security sector operates with a degree of secrecy that is justified by operational security but that conceals corruption. In an insecure environment, the military and intelligence services resist external oversight on the grounds that transparency would compromise operations an argument that, while sometimes legitimate, also protects corrupt practices from scrutiny.
3. **Fragmented authority and competing revenue systems:** Insecurity fragments territorial control, creating multiple authorities (the Federal Government, Federal Member States, Al-Shabaab, clan militias) each with their own revenue systems. This fragmentation prevents the establishment of a unified and transparent public financial management system, creating opportunities for each authority to divert resources without central oversight.
4. **Displacement and vulnerability:** Displaced populations created by insecurity are extremely vulnerable to corruption. IDPs must pay bribes to access services, register for assistance, and avoid eviction. The inability of displaced populations to claim their rights or resist exploitation makes them easy targets for corrupt officials and aid diverters.
5. **Donor urgency:** The urgency of responding to humanitarian crises creates pressure on donors to disburse funds quickly, often at the expense of due diligence and accountability. Donors know that corruption is a risk but accept it as a cost of

operating in an insecure environment inadvertently normalizing corruption as an inevitable feature of humanitarian response.

The Erosion of the Social Contract: Why Citizens Turn to Non-State Actors

The concept of the social contract the mutual obligation between state and citizen, in which the state provides security and services in exchange for the citizen's loyalty, taxes, and compliance with laws is the theoretical foundation of legitimate governance. In Somalia, the social contract has been systematically eroded by the interaction of insecurity and corruption, to the point where it is barely operational.

The erosion of the social contract follows a predictable pattern:

1. **State failure to provide security:** The state cannot protect citizens from violence whether from Al-Shabaab, clan militias, or criminal elements. Citizens who are not protected by the state have no reason to give the state their loyalty.
2. **State failure to provide services:** The state cannot deliver basic services healthcare, education, water, infrastructure because corruption diverts resources away from service delivery. Citizens who do not receive services from the state have no reason to pay taxes or comply with state regulations.
3. **State predation:** Rather than protecting citizens, the state through corrupt officials, predatory security forces, and exploitative regulations actively harms them. Citizens who are harmed by the state have every reason to oppose it.
4. **Non-state alternatives:** When the state fails, citizens turn to non-state actors for security and services clan militias, Al-Shabaab, business cartels, and traditional authorities. These alternatives are imperfect and often coercive, but they provide something the state does not: a degree of security, a degree of justice, and a degree of predictability.
5. **Further state weakening:** As citizens withdraw from the state and turn to non-state alternatives, the state's resource base shrinks (fewer taxes, less cooperation, less intelligence), further reducing its capacity to provide security and services. This further weakening deepens the governance vacuum, creating more space for non-state actors and perpetuating the cycle.

This erosion of the social contract is not merely theoretical it has observable consequences. The low rate of tax compliance in Somalia (3–4% of GDP) reflects not merely economic informality but a conscious decision by citizens and businesses not to fund a state they do not trust. The willingness of communities to use Al-Shabaab courts

for dispute resolution documented by the UN Monitoring Group reflects not support for Al-Shabaab's ideology but distrust of the state's judiciary.

And the willingness of businesses to pay Al-Shabaab taxes while evading government taxes reflects a calculation that Al-Shabaab provides better value for money a devastating indictment of the state's governance capacity.

Conclusion

The insecurity–corruption vicious cycle is the central dynamic shaping Somalia's trajectory. It is not a coincidence that the country that ranks 181 out of 182 on the CPI also faces one of the world's most resilient insurgencies, one of the world's largest displacement crises, and one of the world's weakest governance systems. These outcomes are causally linked: corruption produces insecurity, insecurity produces corruption, and the resulting cycle is self-amplifying.

Breaking this cycle requires interventions that address both sides of the dynamic simultaneously reducing corruption to rebuild the state's capacity and legitimacy, and reducing insecurity to create the conditions for transparent governance. One-sided approaches military operations that do not address corruption, or anti-corruption reforms that do not address insecurity will fail because they address only half of the causal loop.

The following chapters examine the sectoral impacts of this vicious cycle how it affects the economy, education, health, and justice before turning to the reform efforts that have been attempted and the pathways forward.

PART V

SECTORAL IMPACTS

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ECONOMIC DEVASTATION INSECURITY, CORRUPTION, AND STALLED DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Somalia's economy represents a paradox of considerable potential and persistent stagnation. The country possesses significant natural resources, including the longest coastline in Africa, productive agricultural land in the riverine areas of the south, one of the continent's largest livestock populations, and potentially significant offshore oil and gas reserves.

Its diaspora contributes more than \$1 billion in remittances annually, while the private sector particularly in telecommunications and money-transfer services has demonstrated remarkable resilience, adaptability, and innovation despite the limited regulatory capacity of the state. Yet, despite these assets and economic opportunities, Somalia's economy remains among the weakest and least developed in the world, with GDP per capita estimated at approximately \$450, placing the country among the lowest globally.

This chapter examines how insecurity and corruption have constrained Somalia's economic development by deterring investment, distorting markets, increasing the costs of doing business, and preventing the country from fully realizing its economic potential. The central argument is that insecurity and corruption function as twin taxes on the economy diverting resources that could otherwise be invested productively and creating an environment in which economic activity becomes distorted, predominantly informal, and increasingly dependent on political connections.

GDP Constraints: 2.4–3.1% Growth Versus Potential

Somalia's GDP growth has been modest and volatile, averaging approximately 2.5–3.0% annually over the past decade. The World Bank's Somalia Economic Update (June 2024) reported GDP growth of 3.1% in 2023, up from 2.4% in 2022, driven primarily by agricultural recovery and remittances. The African Development Bank's 2024 Country Focus Report projected continued modest growth of 3.5–4.0% over the medium term, contingent on security improvements and continued reform implementation.

However, these growth rates are insufficient to achieve meaningful development. With a population growth rate of approximately 2.9% per year, Somalia's per capita GDP growth is near zero meaning that the average Somali is no better off economically than they were a decade ago. Moreover, these aggregate growth figures obscure the extreme inequality and informality that characterize the Somali economy: a small elite captures the majority of economic gains, while the majority of the population subsists on less than \$2 per day.

The gap between actual and potential GDP is enormous. A 2023 study by the Heritage Foundation estimated that Somalia's economy operates at well below its potential due to the combined effects of corruption, violence, and political instability. The Index of Economic Freedom ranked Somalia as "repressed" the lowest category with scores near the bottom on property rights, government integrity, judicial effectiveness, and business freedom.

If Somalia were to achieve even the sub-Saharan African average level of governance and security, GDP growth could plausibly increase by 2–3 percentage points a difference that, compounded over a decade, would transform the country's economic trajectory.

Foreign Direct Investment Deterred by Corruption and Security Risks

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Somalia is among the lowest in the world as a percentage of GDP. According to the World Bank and UNCTAD, Somalia attracts only a fraction of the FDI that flows to comparable economies in East Africa, such as Kenya, Ethiopia, or Tanzania. The reasons for this investment drought are straightforward: investors face extreme security risks (the possibility of attacks on facilities and personnel), extreme corruption risks (the requirement to pay bribes for permits, contracts, and regulatory compliance), and extreme legal risks (the absence of functional courts to enforce contracts or protect property rights).

The U.S. State Department's 2024 Investment Climate Statement on Somalia noted that "although the Federal Government of Somalia welcomes foreign direct investment, Somalia remains a difficult place to do business." The statement identified corruption, insecurity, and the absence of a legal framework for investment protection as the primary barriers to FDI.

A 2025 study published in the Cogent Business and Management journal examined the empirical relationship between economic risks, environmental risks, and FDI in Somalia. The study found that both economic risk (including corruption and regulatory uncertainty) and environmental risk (including insecurity and climate vulnerability)

significantly deter FDI, and that addressing these risks is a prerequisite for attracting the investment needed for sustainable economic growth.

The FDI deterrence effect of corruption and insecurity operates through a vicious cycle of its own: the absence of FDI reduces economic growth and employment, which increases poverty and grievance, which fuels insecurity, which further deters investment. Breaking this cycle requires reducing both corruption and insecurity to the point where the risk-return calculus for potential investors shifts in favor of investment.

The Informal Economy and Lack of Regulatory Frameworks

An estimated 80–90% of Somalia's economic activity takes place in the informal sector one of the highest rates in the world. The informal economy includes livestock trade, charcoal production, small-scale retail, construction, money transfer (hawala), and telecommunications. While some of this activity is productive and innovative (Somalia's mobile money system, for example, is among the most advanced in Africa), the dominance of the informal sector has significant negative consequences for governance and development.

- **First**, the informal economy is outside the tax base, reducing the government's revenue and its ability to fund public services.
- **Second**, informal businesses cannot access formal financial services (banking, credit, insurance), limiting their growth potential.
- **Third**, the absence of regulatory frameworks means that there are no standards for product quality, environmental protection, labor rights, or consumer safety.
- **Fourth**, the informal economy is more vulnerable to extortion by both state and non-state actors including corrupt officials who demand bribes and Al-Shabaab which demands taxes.

The dominance of the informal economy is both a consequence of corruption and insecurity (businesses remain informal to avoid corrupt regulatory systems and security risks) and a cause of further corruption (the informality of economic activity makes it more difficult to regulate, tax, and monitor). This creates another self-reinforcing cycle: corruption and insecurity drive economic activity into the informal sector, which reduces the government's capacity to monitor and regulate economic activity, which creates more opportunities for corruption.

Debt Relief (HIPC Completion Point 2023): Opportunity and Risk

In December 2023, Somalia reached the Completion Point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, qualifying for irrevocable debt relief that reduced its external debt from approximately \$5.2 billion to approximately \$557 million a reduction

of nearly 90%. This debt relief was the result of years of reform efforts, including the implementation of fiscal reforms, the establishment of a central bank with improved monetary policy, and progress on governance benchmarks.

The debt relief represents a significant opportunity for Somalia. It frees up resources that were previously devoted to debt service, improves the country's creditworthiness, and signals to the international community that Somalia is capable of implementing reforms.

The IMF and World Bank have projected that the debt relief, combined with continued reform implementation, could enable Somalia to access new sources of financing for development.

However, the debt relief also carries significant risks. The most important risk is that the freed-up resources and the new borrowing capacity created by improved creditworthiness will be captured by corruption rather than invested in development. In a country where the CPI score is 9 and the clan-based patronage system operates unchecked, there is a real danger that new public resources will flow through the same corrupt channels that have captured existing resources.

The debt relief could, paradoxically, increase the total resources available for corruption a risk that the IMF and World Bank have acknowledged but that their reform programs may not be sufficient to address.

How Corruption Siphons Resources from Productive Investment

The final section of this chapter examines the mechanisms through which corruption siphons resources from productive investment the process by which corruption not only transfers wealth from public purposes to private accounts but also distorts the allocation of resources in ways that reduce overall economic productivity.

1. **Rent-seeking displaces entrepreneurship:** In a corrupt environment, the most profitable economic strategy is not to create value (through innovation, efficiency, and quality) but to capture rents (through political connections, regulatory manipulation, and corruption). This displacement of productive activity by rent-seeking reduces overall economic output and slows growth.
2. **Distorted investment allocation:** Public investment in Somalia is allocated based on political considerations rather than economic returns. Infrastructure projects are built in areas that are politically important (the home districts of powerful politicians) rather than in areas where they would generate the greatest economic benefit. This political allocation of investment reduces its economic return and wastes scarce public resources.

3. **Capital flight:** Corruption facilitates capital flight the transfer of wealth from Somalia to foreign jurisdictions. Corrupt officials and businesspeople who have accumulated wealth through graft invest it abroad (in real estate in Dubai, Nairobi, or London) rather than in Somalia, because they fear that the proceeds of corruption could be seized or that the security environment makes domestic investment too risky. Capital flight deprives Somalia of the domestic investment that is essential for growth.
4. **Human capital loss:** Corruption drives the emigration of skilled professionals doctors, engineers, teachers, and managers who are frustrated by a system in which advancement depends on political connections rather than competence. This brain drain reduces the human capital available for economic development and perpetuates the cycle of institutional weakness.

Conclusion

Somalia's economy is not merely underdeveloped; it is actively deformed by the twin pressures of insecurity and corruption. These pressures deter investment, drive economic activity into the informal sector, distort the allocation of resources, and siphon resources from productive investment into private enrichment.

The result is an economy that grows too slowly to improve living standards, that is dominated by a small elite, and that is structurally dependent on external assistance.

The debt relief of 2023 provides an opportunity for economic transformation, but this opportunity can only be realized if the governance environment improves sufficiently to ensure that new resources are invested productively rather than captured by corruption.

Without such improvement, the debt relief risks becoming another source of rents for the patronage system a development that would deepen, rather than alleviate, the economic stagnation that afflicts Somalia.

CHAPTER TWELVE

EDUCATION UNDER SIEGE HOW INSECURITY AND CORRUPTION DESTROY LEARNING

Introduction

Education is both a victim of the insecurity corruption nexus and a critical mechanism for breaking it. A well-educated population is more capable of holding government accountable, more resistant to extremist recruitment, and more productive economically. Conversely, a population that is denied education is more vulnerable to manipulation, more likely to support or tolerate non-state actors, and less capable of contributing to economic development.

In Somalia, the destruction of the education system by insecurity and corruption is not merely a service delivery failure but a generational catastrophe that perpetuates the conditions of conflict and poverty.

This chapter examines how insecurity and corruption have devastated Somalia's education system, with particular attention to the research evidence documenting these impacts.

School Closures and Attacks on Education in Conflict Zones

Somalia's education system has been severely damaged by over three decades of conflict. Schools have been destroyed in fighting, occupied by displaced persons, closed by Al-Shabaab (which opposes secular education), and abandoned by teachers who have fled insecurity.

The Education in Conflict and Emergency Hub (EIE Hub) reports that in 2025, Somalia ranked among the countries with the highest rates of school closure due to conflict, with significant portions of the school-age population in conflict-affected areas having no access to any formal education.

Al-Shabaab's hostility to secular education is a particular threat to the education system. The organization has attacked schools that teach a secular curriculum, killed teachers who refuse to comply with its educational dictates, and imposed its own curriculum which emphasizes religious instruction and excludes secular subjects in areas under its control.

The 2024 EUAA Security Situation Assessment noted that schools in Al-Shabaab-controlled areas face severe restrictions on curriculum content and teacher behavior, creating an educational environment that is more indoctrination than education.

The physical insecurity of schools the risk of attack, the threat of forced closure, and the inability to ensure the safety of students and teachers reduces enrollment and attendance. Parents in conflict-affected areas frequently keep their children especially girls out of school because they fear for their safety.

This fear-driven withdrawal creates a generation of children who grow up without basic literacy and numeracy, with profound consequences for their future economic prospects and their susceptibility to extremist recruitment.

Corruption in Education:

➤ Ghost Teachers, Diverted School Funds, and Patronage Hiring

Corruption in the education sector compounds the damage caused by insecurity. Several forms of education corruption have been documented in Somalia:

1. **Ghost teachers:** As in the military, the education sector suffers from ghost employees non-existent teachers whose salaries are collected by school administrators or officials. This practice inflates the reported number of teachers (making the education system appear better-staffed than it actually is) and diverts salary resources from actual teaching positions.
2. **Diverted school funds:** Funds allocated for school operations including textbook procurement, facility maintenance, and school feeding programs are routinely diverted by education officials. The opacity of the education budget and the absence of audit mechanisms make this diversion extremely difficult to detect and quantify.
3. **Patronage hiring:** Teaching positions are allocated through patronage networks rather than merit-based selection. Teachers are hired based on clan identity and political connections rather than qualifications, resulting in a teaching workforce that is under-qualified and under-motivated. The consequences for educational quality are severe: students taught by unqualified teachers receive an inferior education, perpetuating the cycle of low educational attainment.
4. **Examination fraud:** Corruption in the examination system including the sale of exam questions and answers, the manipulation of grades, and the awarding of qualifications to students who have not earned them degrades the value of educational credentials and reduces the incentive for genuine academic effort.

Low Enrollment Rates and the Lost Generation

Somalia's education indicators are among the worst in the world. According to UNICEF and the Somali National Bureau of Statistics:

1. Gross enrollment rate in primary education: approximately **30%** (one of the lowest globally)

2. Gross enrollment rate in secondary education: approximately **12%**
3. Literacy rate (adult): approximately **37.8%** (2024 estimate)
4. Gender gap: enrollment rates for girls are significantly lower than for boys, particularly at the secondary level
5. Youth unemployment: estimated at over **50%**, reflecting the failure of the education system to prepare young people for economic participation

The "lost generation" Somalis who have grown up during the decades of conflict without access to education represents an enormous human capital deficit that will take generations to address.

The children who were denied education in the 1990s and 2000s are now adults who lack the skills to participate in the formal economy, who are more susceptible to extremist recruitment, and who are less capable of holding government accountable. Their children the next generation face the same risks, because the education system has not recovered sufficiently to break the intergenerational cycle of educational deprivation.

Research Evidence:

➤ Negative Correlation Between Insecurity and Education Service Delivery

The most rigorous research evidence on the impact of insecurity on education in Somalia comes from a study conducted at Kampala International University (KIU), which examined the relationship between insecurity and education service delivery in secondary schools in Mogadishu. The study used a quantitative survey methodology, collecting data from teachers, students, and administrators in 20 secondary schools across Mogadishu.

The study's key findings include:

1. A statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.67$, $p < .001$) between perceived insecurity and the quality of education service delivery
2. Schools in areas with higher levels of insecurity had lower enrollment rates, higher teacher absenteeism, and fewer instructional hours
3. Insecurity reduced the delivery of educational materials (textbooks, laboratory equipment, and teaching aids), because delivery routes were disrupted and contractors were reluctant to operate in insecure areas
4. Teachers in insecure areas reported significantly lower job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions, contributing to staffing shortages
5. Female students were disproportionately affected by insecurity, with parents more likely to withdraw girls from school in response to security threats

The study concluded that insecurity is a "major barrier" to education service delivery in Mogadishu's secondary schools and that addressing insecurity is a prerequisite for improving educational outcomes. The findings are consistent with the broader literature on the impact of conflict on education, which demonstrates that insecurity reduces enrollment, attendance, and learning outcomes through multiple pathways.

Conclusion

The devastation of Somalia's education system by insecurity and corruption is a generational catastrophe with profound implications for the country's future. An uneducated population is less capable of economic participation, less resistant to extremist recruitment, and less able to hold government accountable all of which perpetuate the insecurity–corruption cycle.

The research evidence demonstrates that this is not a hypothetical risk but a measurable reality: insecurity directly reduces the quality of education service delivery, and corruption compounds this reduction by diverting resources and distorting personnel decisions.

Rebuilding the education system requires not merely building schools and training teachers though these are necessary but addressing the insecurity and corruption that destroy the conditions for learning. Schools that are not safe cannot teach; teachers who are not paid cannot teach; and funds that are diverted cannot buy textbooks. The education sector is a microcosm of the broader governance crisis: it cannot function until the structural conditions that undermine it are addressed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HEALTH IN COLLAPSE A SYSTEM FAILED

BY CONFLICT AND GRAFT

Introduction

Somalia's health system is among the weakest in the world, a direct consequence of protracted conflict, political instability, and the corruption that diverts resources from healthcare. The health indicators are staggering: maternal mortality rates among the highest globally, child mortality rates that exceed the sub-Saharan African average, and a disease burden that includes preventable conditions such as cholera, measles, and malnutrition-related illness.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fragility of the health system but did not create it the system was already in a state of near-total collapse, as it has been for decades.

This chapter examines how insecurity and corruption have destroyed Somalia's health system, drawing on recent research and data to document the scale of the crisis.

Only 45% of Facilities Offer Delivery Services; 57% Provide Postnatal Care

A comprehensive assessment of Somalia's health system, conducted by the Somali National Bureau of Statistics and international partners, revealed the following key indicators:

1. Only **45%** of health facilities offer delivery services meaning that the majority of Somali women do not have access to skilled birth attendance
2. Only **57%** of facilities provide postnatal care a critical gap that contributes to high maternal and neonatal mortality
3. The physician-to-population ratio is approximately 0.2 per 10,000 one of the lowest in the world
4. Life expectancy at birth is approximately 57 years among the lowest in the world
5. The under-five mortality rate is approximately 117 per 1,000 live births more than double the sub-Saharan African average
6. Maternal mortality is estimated at 692 per 100,000 live births among the highest in the world

These figures reflect a health system that has been systematically destroyed by conflict and hollowed out by corruption. Health infrastructure that was built in the 1970s and 1980s has been damaged or destroyed in fighting, and replacement infrastructure has

been built primarily by international organizations rather than the government. Medical personnel have emigrated in large numbers, driven by insecurity and the inability to earn a living in the formal health sector. And the health budget already grossly inadequate is further reduced by corruption that diverts resources from procurement, staffing, and service delivery.

Corruption in Health Supply Chains:

➤ Diverted Medications and Equipment

Corruption in the health sector operates through several mechanisms:

1. **Medication diversion:** Medications and medical supplies purchased by the government or donated by international organizations are diverted to the commercial market, where they are sold at profit. Essential drugs that should be available free of charge in public facilities are instead available only in private pharmacies, at prices that are unaffordable for most of the population.
2. **Procurement corruption:** Health procurement is subject to the same inflation and kickback problems that characterize other government procurement. Medical equipment is purchased at above-market prices, substandard drugs are procured from politically connected suppliers, and contracts are awarded without competitive bidding.
3. **Health worker absenteeism:** Health workers who are formally employed by the government frequently do not report to their posts either because they have emigrated (ghost health workers) or because they supplement their inadequate government salaries with private practice during official working hours. This absenteeism reduces the availability of healthcare in public facilities.
4. **Patient-level corruption:** Patients in public health facilities are routinely required to pay informal fees for services that are officially free including consultation, medication, and laboratory tests. These informal payments are a form of petty corruption that directly harms the poorest and most vulnerable patients.

Insecurity Restricting Access to Health Services in Central and Southern Somalia

Insecurity creates a geographic access barrier to healthcare that compounds the corruption-driven supply barrier. In areas controlled by or contested with Al-Shabaab, health facilities are few, under-resourced, and dangerous to access.

The movement of health workers and medical supplies is restricted by checkpoints, roadblocks, and the risk of attack. International health organizations which provide the majority of healthcare in conflict-affected areas face access restrictions that limit their ability to deliver services.

The WHO's 2024 assessment of the health situation in Somalia noted that "access to health services is limited by high levels of insecurity in central and southern Somalia, and the existing facilities in the country are unable to meet the needs of the population." This access gap means that preventable and treatable conditions including childbirth complications, infectious diseases, and malnutrition become life-threatening in the absence of medical intervention. The intersection of insecurity and corruption in the health sector is particularly devastating.

Insecurity restricts the supply of healthcare (by limiting the movement of health workers and supplies), while corruption restricts the availability of healthcare (by diverting medications, inflating costs, and reducing facility functionality).

The combination means that even in areas where facilities exist, the quality of care is often so poor due to corruption that it provides little benefit, while in areas where facilities do not exist, the insecurity prevents new facilities from being established.

Maternal and Child Mortality: Among the Worst Globally

Somalia's maternal and child mortality rates are not merely statistics they are evidence of a governance failure that costs thousands of lives annually. The high maternal mortality rate (estimated at 692 per 100,000) reflects the near-total absence of skilled birth attendance, emergency obstetric care, and postnatal support for the majority of Somali women. The high under-five mortality rate (117 per 1,000) reflects the failure of the health system to deliver basic preventive services immunization, nutrition support, and treatment of common childhood illnesses.

These mortality rates are directly attributable to the insecurity corruption nexus. Insecurity prevents the establishment and operation of health facilities in the areas where mortality is highest rural areas of central and southern Somalia. Corruption diverts the resources needed to staff, equip, and supply the facilities that do exist. And the governance vacuum created by the interaction of insecurity and corruption means that there is no authority capable of addressing these systemic failures.

Conclusion

Somalia's health system is in a state of near-total collapse a direct consequence of insecurity and corruption that has persisted for decades. The health indicators maternal mortality, child mortality, access to care are among the worst in the world and represent a humanitarian crisis that is not merely natural but political: caused by governance failures that could be addressed if the political will existed to do so.

The health crisis illustrates the human cost of the insecurity–corruption nexus in its most visceral form. When medications are diverted, mothers die in childbirth. When facilities are destroyed in conflict, children die of preventable diseases. And when the

governance system is too corrupt and too insecure to address these failures, the deaths continue year after year, generation after generation.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

JUSTICE AND RULE OF LAW

THE MISSING PILLAR

Introduction

An independent judiciary and the rule of law are the foundational institutions of accountable governance. They provide the mechanism through which corruption can be prosecuted, rights can be protected, and the social contract can be enforced. In Somalia, the justice system is the missing pillar of governance an institution that exists in form but not in function, that is compromised by clan interference and political pressure, and that cannot perform the essential role of holding the powerful accountable.

This chapter examines the failure of the justice system in Somalia and its implications for the insecurity corruption nexus. The central argument is that the absence of rule of law is not merely a consequence of insecurity and corruption but a cause because without a functioning judiciary, there is no mechanism to break the cycle of impunity that sustains corruption and no legal framework to establish the state's authority as an alternative to the coercive governance of Al-Shabaab.

Judicial Corruption: Courts as Instruments of Clan and Political Power

Somalia's judiciary operates under two forms of interference that compromise its independence: clan interference and political interference.

- **Clan interference** operates through the same mechanism described in Chapter 7: judges are appointed through the clan-based power-sharing system, and their primary loyalty is to the clan that appointed them.

When a case involves members of the judge's clan, the judge faces pressure to rule in the clan's favor regardless of the legal merits of the case. When a case involves members of a rival clan, the judge faces pressure from their own clan to rule against the rival. And when a case involves a powerful member of any clan who is accused of corruption, the clan protection mechanism mobilizes to ensure that the judge does not rule against them.

- **Political interference** operates through the executive branch's influence over the judiciary. The President and Prime Minister appoint senior judges, and these appointments are based on political loyalty rather than judicial competence. Judges

who rule against the government's interests face removal, transfer, or harassment. The constitutional provisions for judicial independence including the independence of the Judicial Service Commission are not enforced in practice.

The result is a judiciary that cannot be trusted to deliver impartial justice a fundamental failure that undermines the rule of law and perpetuates the conditions of corruption and insecurity.

Impunity for the Powerful; Injustice for the Poor

The corruption of the judiciary creates a two-tiered justice system in Somalia: one for the powerful and one for the poor. The powerful including government officials, wealthy businessmen, and clan leaders operate with effective impunity, knowing that the judiciary will not hold them accountable for corruption, violence, or other crimes. The poor including IDPs, minority clan members, and ordinary citizens without political connections face a justice system that is not only unresponsive but actively exploitative, requiring bribes for any action and delivering biased outcomes based on clan and political considerations.

This two-tiered system has several consequences for the insecurity corruption nexus:

1. **Impunity for corruption:** The inability of the judiciary to prosecute corrupt officials documented in Chapter 7 through the clan protection mechanism means that corruption goes unpunished, perpetuating the governance failures that produce insecurity.
2. **Impunity for violence:** The inability of the judiciary to prosecute perpetrators of violence including security forces, militia members, and powerful individuals means that violence also goes unpunished, perpetuating the culture of impunity that sustains insecurity.
3. **Loss of trust:** The two-tiered justice system erodes public trust in the formal legal framework, driving citizens toward alternative dispute resolution mechanisms including Al-Shabaab courts, clan elder mediation, and private settlement through financial payment.
4. **Normalization of extralegal behavior:** When the formal justice system is perceived as corrupt and biased, citizens normalize extralegal behavior taking justice into their own hands, paying bribes to obtain favorable outcomes, and accepting that the law is not a constraint on the powerful. This normalization of extralegal behavior makes it more difficult to establish the rule of law as a governance norm.

Al-Shabaab's Parallel Justice System: Why It Appeals

As discussed in Chapter 3, Al-Shabaab operates a parallel justice system that provides dispute resolution services in areas under its control and influence. The appeal of this system particularly for communities that have been failed by the formal judiciary is not ideological but pragmatic: Al-Shabaab courts deliver outcomes that are swift, final, and perceived as impartial.

The contrast between the formal and parallel justice systems is instructive. The formal system is slow (cases can take years), expensive (lawyers, court fees, and bribes add up), and unpredictable (outcomes depend on clan identity and political connections). Al-Shabaab's system is fast (cases are heard and decided within days), free (there are no court fees, though the system is funded through taxation), and consistent (the same offense receives the same punishment regardless of the offender's identity).

The harshness of Al-Shabaab's punishments including amputation, execution, and flogging is acknowledged, but for communities that have experienced the corruption and bias of the formal system, the predictability and consistency of Al-Shabaab's courts are valued more than their severity.

The existence and appeal of Al-Shabaab's parallel justice system is a direct indictment of the formal system's failure. If the formal judiciary delivered impartial, timely, and affordable justice, there would be no demand for Al-Shabaab's alternative. The persistence of this demand demonstrates that the corruption of the formal justice system is not merely a governance problem but a security problem because it creates the conditions in which an insurgency can present itself as a legitimate alternative.

The Failure to Build an Independent Judiciary

International efforts to build an independent judiciary in Somalia have been ongoing since the establishment of the TFG in 2004, but they have achieved limited results. The reasons for this failure are structural:

1. **Political incentives:** The political elite has no incentive to build a judiciary that could hold it accountable. An independent judiciary would threaten the patronage system by prosecuting corrupt officials, would constrain the executive by judicially reviewing government actions, and would reduce the political value of judicial appointments (which are currently used as patronage tools). The political elite therefore systematically resists judicial independence not through outright opposition but through incremental undermining: underfunding the judiciary, appointing pliant judges, and ignoring judicial decisions.
2. **Resource constraints:** The judiciary is severely under-resourced courts lack physical infrastructure, legal resources (law reports, statutes, case management

systems), and qualified personnel. Judges are paid poorly and paid late, creating incentives for corruption. The constitutional mandate for judicial independence is not matched by the fiscal capacity to make independence possible.

3. **Cultural barriers:** The Somali legal culture shaped by decades of authoritarian rule, state collapse, and the dominance of customary law (xeer) does not prioritize judicial independence or the rule of law as governance norms. The transition from a political culture that accepts judicial subservience to one that demands judicial independence requires a cultural shift that international technical assistance programs cannot produce.
4. **Security threats:** Judges who attempt to assert independence by ruling against powerful interests, prosecuting corrupt officials, or challenging the government face security threats, including assassination. Several judges have been killed in Somalia for their judicial decisions, creating a climate of fear that discourages judicial independence.

Conclusion

The failure of the justice system is the missing pillar of governance in Somalia the absence that makes all other governance failures possible. Without an independent judiciary, corruption cannot be prosecuted, the rule of law cannot be established, and the state cannot offer a legitimate alternative to Al-Shabaab's parallel justice system.

The two-tiered justice system impunity for the powerful and injustice for the poor is a direct consequence of the clan-based patronage system and the political economy of corruption.

Rebuilding the judiciary requires not merely training judges and building courts but transforming the political incentives that currently make judicial independence impossible.

Until the political elite has an incentive to accept rather than undermine judicial independence, the justice system will remain the missing pillar, and the insecurity corruption cycle will continue to operate without the legal constraint that could break it.

PART VI

REFORM EFFORTS AND THEIR FAILURES

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORKS ON PAPER THE INSTITUTIONAL FAÇADE

Introduction

Somalia has, on paper, an increasingly elaborate anti-corruption framework. The Provisional Constitution contains provisions against corruption. The Independent Anti-Corruption Commission (IACC) was established by presidential decree in 2020.

The Financial Governance Center (FGC) formerly the Financial Governance Committee was created in 2017 as a condition of debt relief. The National Anti-Corruption Strategy was adopted in 2021. And the government has ratified or acceded to several international anti-corruption conventions, including the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).

This chapter examines these anti-corruption frameworks and asks a simple but critical question: why, despite the proliferation of anti-corruption institutions and strategies, has Somalia's CPI score remained at or near the bottom of the global ranking?

The answer, this chapter argues, lies in the distinction between institutional form and institutional substance between having anti-corruption institutions on paper and having anti-corruption institutions that function effectively.

In Somalia, the anti-corruption framework is a façade an institutional shell that exists to satisfy international requirements rather than to actually combat corruption.

The Anti-Corruption Commission: Mandate Without Power

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) was established by presidential decree in 2020 with a mandate to investigate corruption, educate the public about corruption's harms, and recommend reforms. The ACC's establishment was welcomed by the international community as a sign of political will to address corruption.

However, the ACC suffers from several critical weaknesses that render it ineffective:

1. **Lack of prosecutorial power:** The ACC can investigate corruption but cannot prosecute. It must refer cases to the Attorney General's office, which is under political influence and has consistently declined to pursue corruption cases against

senior officials. The absence of prosecutorial power means that the ACC's investigations are at best advisory and at worst performative, creating the appearance of anti-corruption activity without the substance.

2. **Inadequate resources:** The ACC is severely under-funded and under-staffed. It lacks the forensic accounting capabilities, legal expertise, and investigative resources needed to pursue complex corruption cases. The commissioners are not full-time and lack the independence guaranteed by adequate tenure protection.
3. **Political dependency:** Because the ACC was established by presidential decree rather than by legislation, its legal basis is weak and its independence from the executive is uncertain. The ACC reports to the President, who can in theory dissolve or restructure it. This dependency creates an inherent conflict of interest: the ACC is expected to investigate corruption in a government whose head can eliminate the ACC.
4. **Clan composition:** The ACC's commissioners are selected through the same clan-based process that governs all government appointments, meaning that each commissioner represents a clan constituency and is subject to clan pressure. The clan protection mechanism which prevents the prosecution of clan members for corruption operates within the ACC as it does throughout the government.
5. **Limited public trust:** The Somali public has little confidence in the ACC's ability or willingness to address corruption. In a context where every previous anti-corruption initiative has failed, the ACC is widely perceived as another institutional façade created to satisfy international requirements rather than to produce results.

The Financial Governance Center: An International Creation with Limited Domestic Authority

The Financial Governance Center (FGC) was established in 2017 as the Financial Governance Committee (FGC) a condition of Somalia's debt relief process under the HIPC Initiative. The FGC's mandate includes overseeing public procurement, financial management, and asset recovery in areas identified as high-risk for corruption. The FGC was designed as an independent oversight body with international participation including representatives of the World Bank, IMF, and donor countries to ensure its credibility and effectiveness.

The FGC has achieved some notable successes. It has reviewed major procurement contracts, identified irregularities in contract awards, and recommended the cancellation of contracts that were found to be corrupt. It has overseen the concession process for Mogadishu port and Kismayo port, introducing a degree of transparency into processes that were previously entirely opaque. And it has produced reports documenting

corruption in public financial management that have been used by international donors to condition budget support.

However, the FGC's effectiveness is constrained by several factors:

1. **Limited mandate:** The FGC reviews contracts and financial transactions above a certain threshold, but its mandate does not cover all government spending. Many corrupt transactions fall below the threshold or are structured to avoid review.
2. **Advisory role:** The FGC can identify corruption and recommend corrective action, but it cannot enforce its recommendations. The government can and frequently does ignore FGC findings, particularly when they implicate politically powerful officials.
3. **International dependence:** The FGC's credibility depends on international participation, but the same international participation creates resentment among Somali officials who view the FGC as an instrument of foreign interference. This resentment reduces the government's willingness to cooperate with the FGC and limits the FGC's ability to build domestic support.
4. **Sustainability:** The FGC was created as a temporary measure linked to the debt relief process. Its long-term future is uncertain, and there is a risk that it will be dissolved or weakened once the debt relief process is complete and international attention diminishes.

The National Anti-Corruption Strategy:

- **Ambitious on Paper, Toothless in Practice**

The National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS), adopted in 2021, is a comprehensive document that identifies the causes and consequences of corruption in Somalia, outlines strategic objectives, and proposes interventions across multiple sectors. The strategy covers prevention (through institutional reforms and public education), detection (through oversight and investigation), and prosecution (through judicial reform and enforcement). It identifies priority sectors including public financial management, security sector, justice, and natural resources and proposes specific reforms for each.

The NACS is a competent document well-structured, evidence-based, and aligned with international best practices as articulated by the UNCAC and the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre. The problem is not the quality of the strategy but its implementability. The strategy requires political will, institutional capacity, and financial resources that Somalia does not possess. Without these prerequisites, the strategy is aspirational rather than operational it describes what should be done but cannot ensure that it will be done.

Specific implementation challenges include:

- **Political will:** The strategy requires the government to investigate and prosecute its own officials something the patronage system prevents. As long as the political elite benefits from corruption, there is no incentive to implement an anti-corruption strategy that would threaten the patronage flows that sustain it.
- **Institutional capacity:** The strategy requires functional institutions an independent judiciary, an effective audit office, a professional civil service that do not exist. Implementing a strategy through hollow institutions produces hollow results.
- **Financial resources:** The strategy requires funding for anti-corruption bodies, judicial reform, civil service training, and public education. In a country where the government cannot collect enough revenue to fund basic services, anti-corruption funding is unlikely to be prioritized.
- **International alignment:** The strategy was developed with international support and reflects international priorities. While this alignment is appropriate in principle, it creates a risk that the strategy is designed to satisfy international requirements rather than to address the specific dynamics of Somali corruption — particularly the clan–corruption nexus, which international frameworks do not adequately address.

International Conventions Without Domestic Enforcement

Somalia has acceded to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and is party to the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption. These conventions create international obligations including requirements to criminalize corruption, establish anti-corruption bodies, and cooperate in cross-border investigations that Somalia has committed to implementing.

However, international conventions are not self-executing; they require domestic legislation and enforcement to have effect. Somalia has not enacted the domestic legislation needed to give effect to its UNCAC obligations including whistleblower protection laws, asset declaration requirements, and mutual legal assistance frameworks. The absence of implementing legislation means that Somalia's international anti-corruption commitments are binding in international law but unenforceable in domestic practice.

This gap between international commitment and domestic implementation is characteristic of the broader pattern of institutional façade in Somalia's anti-corruption architecture: the country fulfills its formal obligations (accession to conventions, establishment of commissions, adoption of strategies) while failing to take the

substantive actions (prosecution, legislation, enforcement) that would make these formal measures effective.

1. **Why Institutional Façades Persist:** The Logic of Performative Compliance
The persistence of institutional façades in Somalia's anti-corruption architecture is not irrational it follows a logic of performative compliance that serves the interests of both the government and the international community.
2. **From the government's perspective:** Anti-corruption institutions and strategies serve as signals to the international community demonstrating political will and satisfying conditions for budget support, debt relief, and other forms of international engagement. The government creates institutions and adopts strategies because the international community requires them, not because it intends to implement them. This performative compliance allows the government to access international resources without reducing its ability to extract domestic resources through corruption.
3. **From the international community's perspective:** Anti-corruption institutions and strategies serve as markers of progress evidence that engagement is producing results. Donors are under pressure to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs and to justify continued spending to their own taxpayers. The existence of anti-corruption institutions even non-functional ones provides this evidence, allowing donors to report progress even when the underlying reality of corruption has not changed.

The mutual interest in maintaining the façade creates a collusive dynamic in which both the government and the international community participate in a performance of anti-corruption that serves their respective interests but does not serve the interest of the Somali public.

The performance continues until a scandal such as the 2023 food aid diversion makes the gap between façade and reality impossible to ignore, at which point both parties must acknowledge the failure and typically respond by creating new institutions and adopting new strategies that replicate the same dynamic.

Conclusion

Somalia's anti-corruption architecture is a façade an elaborate institutional shell that exists to satisfy international requirements rather than to combat corruption.

The Anti-Corruption Commission lacks prosecutorial power, the Financial Governance Center has an advisory role with no enforcement authority, the National Anti-Corruption Strategy requires institutional capacity that does not exist, and international conventions remain unimplemented in domestic law.

The persistence of this façade reflects a logic of performative compliance that serves the interests of both the government and the international community, but that does not serve the interest of reducing corruption.

The implication is that real anti-corruption progress in Somalia requires not the creation of more institutions or the adoption of more strategies but the transformation of the political incentives that make institutional façades rational.

Until the political cost of corruption exceeds the political benefit until corrupt officials are more likely to lose power than to gain it through corruption institutional façades will continue to be the most rational strategy for a government that benefits from the system it is nominally committed to reforming.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

CAPACITY OVER GOVERNANCE

Introduction

International security sector reform (SSR) in Somalia represents one of the largest and longest-running such efforts in the world. Since 2007, the international community led by the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and the African Union has invested billions of dollars in training, equipping, and advising the Somali National Army (SNA), the Somali Police Force (SPF), and the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA). Despite this enormous investment, the Somali security sector remains weak, corrupt, and unable to defeat Al-Shabaab or provide security to the population.

This chapter examines why SSR in Somalia has failed and what the failure reveals about the broader challenges of reform in the context of the insecurity–corruption nexus. The central argument is that SSR has failed because it has prioritized capacity-building (training soldiers, delivering equipment) over governance reform (building accountability, establishing oversight, preventing corruption) a choice that has produced a security sector that is larger but not more effective, better-equipped but not better-governed.

The History of International SSR Efforts Since 2007

International SSR in Somalia began with the deployment of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in 2007 and the launch of parallel training programs for the SNA by the United States, the European Union, and Turkey. The initial focus was on building a military force capable of holding territory cleared by AMISOM a role that the SNA was manifestly unable to perform in the early years of the mission.

Over the following years, SSR efforts expanded in scope and scale. The EU Training Mission (EUTM) trained thousands of Somali soldiers in Uganda and Somalia. The United States provided equipment, intelligence, and airstrike support through the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program and subsequent bilateral arrangements. Turkey established its largest overseas military training facility in Mogadishu. The UK contributed training and mentoring through the British Peace Support Team. And the African Union through AMISOM and later ATMIS provided operational support, mentoring, and co-combat operations with Somali forces.

Despite this massive international investment, the SNA remains unable to conduct independent operations against Al-Shabaab. The 2022–2024 offensive, discussed in Chapter 3, demonstrated that even with significant international support, the SNA's operational effectiveness is limited by corruption, desertion, and command-and-control failures. The repeated failure of internationally trained units to hold territory after AMISOM/ATMIS withdrawal has been documented in multiple regions.

Why Training Soldiers Is Not Enough: The Governance Deficit

The fundamental flaw in the SSR approach has been the assumption that building security capacity training soldiers, providing equipment, establishing organizational structures is sufficient to produce an effective security force. This assumption ignores the governance dimension of security sector effectiveness: a security force that is not governed that lacks accountability, oversight, and integrity will not be effective regardless of how well its soldiers are trained or how modern its equipment.

The governance deficit manifests in several ways:

1. **No accountability for corruption:** As documented in Chapter 9, the ghost soldier problem, procurement fraud, and arms diversion continue despite and in some cases because of the large-scale international support that is supposed to address them. International trainers train soldiers who may not exist (ghost soldiers); international donors provide equipment that is subsequently sold (procurement diversion); and international advisors advise officers who are enriching themselves through corruption. The absence of accountability mechanisms means that corruption continues within the security sector despite the international presence.
2. **Political rather than professional command:** The SNA's command structure is based on political loyalty rather than professional competence. Officers are appointed through the clan-based patronage system, and their primary obligation is to the political figures who appointed them, not to the military institution or the national interest. This political command structure produces officers who are skilled at political maneuvering but incompetent at military operations a pattern that has been documented in the failure of multiple SNA operations against Al-Shabaab.
3. **No civilian oversight:** There is no effective civilian oversight of the security sector. The parliament's defense committee which should provide legislative oversight of the military is weak and compromised by clan politics. Civil society organizations that should monitor security sector performance are restricted by security concerns and government resistance. And the media which should report on security sector failures faces severe constraints, including the risk of violence for reporting on military corruption.

4. **Inadequate financial management:** The security sector's financial management is opaque and unaudited. Security expenditures are classified making them exempt from normal procurement rules and audit requirements and the budget allocation for security is not transparent. This opacity creates opportunities for corruption that the current SSR approach does not address.

AMISOM/ATMIS/AUSSOM Transition and the Security Gap

The transition from AMISOM to ATMIS (2022) and from ATMIS to the African Union Stabilization and Support Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) in 2024–2025 has created a security gap that further exposes the SNA's weaknesses. As international forces draw down, the SNA is expected to take over responsibility for security in areas currently held by AU forces. However, the SNA's demonstrated inability to hold territory independently raises serious concerns about the sustainability of the transition.

The transition has been further complicated by political tensions between the Federal Government and troop-contributing countries particularly Ethiopia, whose relationship with Somalia deteriorated significantly in 2024 due to a maritime access agreement between Ethiopia and Somaliland. Ethiopia, the largest troop contributor to ATMIS, threatened to withdraw from the AU mission, creating uncertainty about the force's composition and capacity.

The security gap created by the transition has several implications for the insecurity corruption nexus:

1. **Al-Shabaab will exploit the gap:** As international forces withdraw, Al-Shabaab will seek to recapture territory that it lost during the AMISOM/ATMIS era. If the SNA cannot hold this territory, the gains of the past decade will be reversed a scenario that the 2024 EUAA Security Situation Assessment identified as a significant risk.
2. **Corruption will increase in the security sector:** The transition creates new opportunities for corruption in the management of the drawdown process, in the distribution of assets and equipment being transferred from AU forces to the SNA, and in the allocation of security contracts for the new mission. Historical experience suggests that the Somali government is likely to use the transition as an opportunity to extract resources from the international mission.
3. **Accountability will be further reduced:** The transition reduces the international presence that currently provides some oversight of the security sector. With fewer international advisors and monitors on the ground, the already-weak accountability mechanisms will be further weakened, creating more opportunities for corruption.

The Lessons from Afghanistan:

➤ A Cautionary Parallel

The collapse of the Afghan security forces in August 2021 following the withdrawal of international forces after two decades of SSR investment provides a cautionary parallel for Somalia. Like the SNA, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) were built through massive international investment in training and equipment, but without corresponding investment in governance and accountability. Like the SNA, the ANDSF suffered from ghost soldiers, procurement corruption, and political interference. And like the SNA, the ANDSF collapsed when international support was withdrawn not because the soldiers could not fight but because the institutional framework that was supposed to support them was hollow.

The parallels are not exact Somalia is not Afghanistan, and Al-Shabaab is not the Taliban but the structural similarities are significant. In both cases, international SSR created a security force that was dependent on external support, hollowed out by corruption, and unable to sustain itself when that support was withdrawn. The lesson is clear: without governance reform, capacity-building produces a security sector that is impressive on paper but fragile in practice.

Conclusion

Security sector reform in Somalia has failed because it has prioritized capacity over governance. The result is a security sector that is larger but not more effective a force with trained soldiers but no accountability, modern equipment but no oversight, and organizational structures but no integrity. The transition from ATMIS to AUSSOM creates a security gap that will further expose these weaknesses, and the lessons from Afghanistan suggest that a security sector built on capacity without governance is vulnerable to collapse when international support is withdrawn.

Reorienting SSR from capacity to governance requires a fundamental change in how the international community approaches security assistance in Somalia. Rather than training more soldiers, the priority should be building accountability systems that prevent ghost soldiers, procurement corruption, and arms diversion. Rather than delivering more equipment, the priority should be establishing financial management and oversight mechanisms that ensure equipment is used for its intended purpose. And rather than building organizational structures, the priority should be creating a professional command culture based on merit rather than political loyalty. Without this reorientation, the billions invested in SSR will continue to produce diminishing returns and the security sector will remain both a victim and a driver of the insecurity–corruption cycle.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S DILEMMA

ENGAGEMENT WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

Introduction

The international community faces a profound dilemma in Somalia. On one hand, disengagement would be catastrophic it would leave millions of people without humanitarian assistance, would allow Al-Shabaab to expand, and would accelerate the collapse of the fragile state. On the other hand, continued engagement under current conditions perpetuates the corruption that undermines the state and enables the insurgency.

The international community is trapped between the imperative to save lives and the recognition that the mechanisms through which it saves lives also sustain the corrupt system that puts those lives at risk.

This chapter examines the international community's engagement with Somalia the rationale for that engagement, the forms it takes, and the accountability gaps that prevent it from effectively addressing the insecurity–corruption nexus.

The central argument is that the international community's approach to Somalia is characterized by a deep and persistent accountability deficit: it holds the Somali government to account for the use of international resources (through conditions and oversight) but does not hold itself to account for the effectiveness of its own engagement including the ways in which that engagement inadvertently sustains corruption.

Donor Dependency and Fiscal Vulnerability

The Somali Federal Government is fiscally dependent on international support. Domestic revenue covers only about 50–60% of the government's expenditure, with the remainder financed through international budget support, project funding, and humanitarian assistance. This dependency creates several problems:

1. **Distorted priorities:** When the government depends on international funding, its priorities are shaped by the conditions attached to that funding rather than by domestic needs. The government implements reforms that satisfy international requirements (such as the public financial management reforms required for HIPC debt relief) but may not implement reforms that are more important domestically but less valued internationally (such as judicial reform or security sector accountability).

2. **Reduced accountability to citizens:** When the government's revenue comes from international donors rather than from domestic taxpayers, the government is accountable to donors rather than to citizens. This external accountability while important for ensuring the proper use of donor funds reduces the government's incentive to be accountable to its own population, because the population does not control the resources on which the government depends.
3. **Aid volatility:** International funding is volatile it fluctuates with donor priorities, global events, and the political dynamics of donor countries. This volatility makes it difficult for the government to plan and implement long-term programs, and it creates incentives for short-term, crisis-driven spending rather than strategic investment.

Conditionality and Its Limits

International donors use conditionality the attachment of conditions to budget support and project funding as a mechanism for promoting governance reform and preventing corruption. Conditions have included requirements for public financial management reforms, procurement transparency, audit compliance, and anti-corruption measures. Conditionality has achieved some results.

The Financial Governance Center, the adoption of the NACS, and the implementation of PFM reforms that enabled HIPC debt relief were all products of international conditionality. Without international pressure, these reforms would not have occurred. However, conditionality has fundamental limitations as a tool for combating corruption:

1. **Compliance without commitment:** The government can comply with conditions without committing to reform. PFM reforms are implemented to satisfy IMF requirements but are then circumvented in practice through off-budget expenditures and creative accounting. Anti-corruption institutions are established to satisfy donor conditions but are then starved of resources and political support. The government has become adept at navigating the conditionality system meeting the formal requirements while preserving the informal practices that sustain corruption.
2. **Donor dependence on the government:** Donors need the government as a partner for the delivery of aid, which limits their willingness to enforce conditions that would threaten the partnership. If donors suspend budget support in response to corruption, they also suspend the programs that the support funds creating a self-imposed constraint on accountability.
3. **Political constraints on conditionality:** Donor countries have political interests including counterterrorism cooperation, migration management, and regional

stability that may take precedence over governance conditions. The United States, for example, has been reluctant to impose governance conditions on security assistance to Somalia because it prioritizes the military partnership against Al-Shabaab.

4. **Collective action problems:** When multiple donors provide budget support, each donor faces an incentive to free-ride on the conditions imposed by others accepting the governance improvements produced by other donors' conditions without imposing its own. This reduces the overall effectiveness of conditionality.

How International Funding Flows Through Corrupt Channels

The most troubling aspect of international engagement is the degree to which international funding flows through the same corrupt channels that it is intended to bypass. International budget support is transferred to the Somali government's treasury, from which it is subject to the same diversion and mismanagement as domestically generated revenue. Project funding is implemented through government ministries that are staffed by political appointees and operate without effective oversight. And humanitarian assistance as the 2023 food aid diversion scandal demonstrated is subject to systematic diversion by the same officials and networks that the international community is trying to bypass.

The mechanisms through which international funding is captured include:

- **Off-budget expenditures:** International funds that are transferred to the treasury are spent outside the budget framework on security operations, political activities, and patronage payments without the transparency that the budget process should provide.
- **Procurement manipulation:** International projects that involve procurement are subject to the same inflated pricing and kickback systems that characterize domestic procurement. International contractors and NGOs are pressured to use politically connected local suppliers and subcontractors, and the premium paid for these connections is passed on to the project funder.
- **Employment patronage:** International projects employ local staff whose selection is influenced by government officials seeking to distribute jobs as patronage. The staff selected through this process may be loyal to their political patrons rather than to the project, creating opportunities for information leakage, resource diversion, and sabotage.
- **Humanitarian diversion:** As documented in Chapter 10, humanitarian assistance is subject to diversion at multiple points in the delivery chain. The 2023 scandal

revealed that this diversion was not individual but systematic embedded in the operational systems through which aid is delivered.

The Accountability Deficit: Who Watches the Watchers?

The international community's engagement in Somalia is characterized by a significant accountability deficit a gap between the standards of accountability that donors apply to the Somali government and the standards they apply to themselves.

Donors hold the Somali government accountable for the use of donor funds through conditions, audits, and oversight mechanisms. However, donors do not hold themselves accountable for the effectiveness of their own engagement including the unintended consequences of that engagement. Specifically:

- Donors do not systematically assess the corruption risks created by their aid flows, and they do not adjust their programs in response to these risks.
- Donors do not evaluate the long-term governance impact of their engagement, including the degree to which aid dependency reduces government accountability to citizens.
- Donors do not coordinate their conditionality effectively, creating opportunities for the government to play donors off against each other.
- Donors do not acknowledge or address the ways in which their own procurement and employment practices contribute to the patronage economy.
- Donors do not hold themselves accountable for the outcomes of SSR programs that produce security forces incapable of independent operation after decades of investment.

This accountability deficit is not a criticism of individual donors or programs many of which are well-designed and well-implemented but a structural feature of the international engagement model in Somalia.

As long as the international community applies different standards of accountability to the Somali government and to itself, the engagement will be perceived as one-sided and illegitimate, and the corruption that it inadvertently sustains will continue.

Conclusion

The international community faces a genuine dilemma in Somalia: engagement sustains the corrupt system that produces the conditions requiring engagement. The solution to this dilemma is not disengagement but a fundamental rethinking of how engagement is structured. Specifically, the international community must:

1. **Shift from capacity-building to governance-building:** Instead of providing more resources through corrupt channels, the priority should be building the

accountability systems that prevent corruption in the channels through which resources flow.

2. **Apply accountability to itself:** The international community must hold itself accountable for the effectiveness of its engagement, including the unintended consequences of aid flows, the governance impact of aid dependency, and the outcomes of SSR programs.
3. **Coordinate conditionality:** Donors must coordinate their conditions and enforcement mechanisms to prevent the government from playing donors off against each other and to ensure that conditionality is consistently applied.
4. **Invest in domestic accountability:** Rather than relying exclusively on international oversight, the international community should invest in building domestic accountability mechanisms including an independent judiciary, a free press, and civil society organizations that can hold the government accountable from within.

Without these changes, the international community's engagement will continue to be characterized by the accountability deficit that currently undermines it and the insecurity–corruption cycle will continue to be fed by the resources intended to break it.

PART VII

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BREAKING THE CYCLE PATHWAYS FORWARD

Introduction

The preceding eighteen chapters have documented the scale, depth, and persistence of the insecurity–corruption vicious cycle in Somalia. The analysis has demonstrated that

corruption in Somalia is not a problem of individual morality or institutional design but a structural feature of a political system organized around clan-based patronage.

Insecurity and corruption are not separate problems requiring separate solutions; they are mutually reinforcing dynamics that must be addressed together. This chapter begins the book's prescriptive turn from analysis of what has failed to examination of what might work.

The central argument of this chapter is that governance reform in Somalia must address the political incentive structure that sustains the patronage system. The 4.5 clan power-sharing formula, the absence of transparent revenue management, the weakness of parliamentary oversight, and the opacity of government operations are not independent governance deficits; they are interlocking elements of a system that incentivizes corruption and penalizes accountability. Reform must therefore be systemic addressing the structure rather than the symptoms and it must be sequenced starting with the most feasible and impactful reforms and building on success.

Restructuring Political Incentives Beyond the 4.5 Clan Formula

The 4.5 clan power-sharing formula the system that allocates political positions among Somalia's four major clans and a coalition of minority clans is the structural foundation of the patronage system.

Under this formula, every political appointment is a clan appointment, creating a governance system in which officials represent their clan rather than the public. The formula incentivizes corruption in several ways:

1. **Clan loyalty over public service:** Officials appointed under the 4.5 formula owe their positions to their clan rather than to the electorate. Their primary obligation is to deliver resources and opportunities to their clan not to serve the public interest. This creates a direct incentive for the diversion of public resources to private (clan) use.
2. **No accountability to citizens:** Because officials are selected by clan elders rather than elected by citizens, they have no accountability relationship with the public. Citizens cannot remove officials who are corrupt or incompetent; only the clan elders who selected them can remove them, and they are unlikely to do so if the official is delivering resources to the clan.
3. **Political competition as clan competition:** The 4.5 formula transforms political competition into clan competition a zero-sum struggle for a fixed share of power and resources. This competition incentivizes each clan to maximize its capture of state resources, because resources not captured by one's own clan will be captured by another.

4. **Exclusion and grievance:** The 4.5 formula excludes minority groups particularly women, youth, and smaller clans from meaningful political participation, creating grievances that fuel instability and undermine the legitimacy of the state.

Restructuring political incentives requires moving beyond the 4.5 formula toward a governance system in which officials are accountable to citizens rather than to clan elders. This requires:

- **Direct elections:** The transition from the clan-based indirect election model (in which clan elders select members of parliament who then elect the president) to direct elections (in which citizens elect their representatives) is the single most important governance reform for breaking the patronage cycle. Direct elections would create a direct accountability relationship between officials and citizens, incentivizing officials to serve the public interest rather than their clan.
- **One-person-one-vote:** The implementation of universal suffrage one person, one vote would transform the political incentive structure by making every citizen a potential voter rather than a member of a fixed clan bloc. Politicians would need to appeal to voters across clan lines, incentivizing policy-based rather than identity-based politics.
- **Political party development:** The development of political parties that are organized around policy platforms rather than clan identities would create an institutional framework for cross-clan political competition. Political parties that represent policy positions rather than clan interests would provide a vehicle for reform-oriented politicians to compete for power.

However, the transition from the 4.5 formula to direct elections faces formidable obstacles. The current political elite has no incentive to adopt a system that would reduce its power.

The logistical challenges of conducting elections in a country with limited infrastructure, ongoing conflict, and a large nomadic population are significant. And the risk that elections could become clan contests with each clan mobilizing to vote for its own candidate is real. These obstacles require a phased transition:

1. **Phase 1 (immediate):** Reform the indirect election system to increase transparency, reduce vote buying, and expand participation including by requiring a minimum quota of women and youth representatives.

2. **Phase 2 (medium-term):** Conduct local elections in secure districts building the institutional capacity for electoral administration and creating a foundation of democratic accountability at the local level.
3. **Phase 3 (long-term):** Extend direct elections to state and national levels building on the experience of local elections to create a functional democratic system.

Building Transparent Revenue Management Systems

Revenue management is the financial foundation of governance and the most corruption-prone area of government operations. Somalia collects only 3–4% of GDP in domestic revenue, compared to a sub-Saharan African average of 15–20%. This low revenue base reflects both the informality of the economy and the corruption in revenue collection particularly at the ports, airports, and customs points that generate the majority of government revenue.

Transparent revenue management requires:

1. **Automated revenue collection:** The automation of revenue collection through electronic payment systems, automated customs processing, and mobile money integration reduces the human interaction points at which corruption occurs. When revenue is collected electronically rather than in cash, the opportunities for diversion, under-reporting, and bribery are dramatically reduced.
2. **Publishing revenue data:** The government should publish its revenue data including collections from each revenue source, comparisons with budget projections, and explanations for variances in accessible formats. Revenue transparency enables parliamentary oversight, civil society monitoring, and public accountability.
3. **Revenue-sharing frameworks:** The fiscal framework governing revenue sharing between the Federal Government and Federal Member States must be transparent, formula-based, and enforceable. The current system in which revenue sharing is disputed, ad hoc, and subject to political negotiation creates opportunities for both levels of government to divert resources. A transparent revenue-sharing formula based on population, development needs, and fiscal capacity would reduce these opportunities.
4. **Natural resource governance:** Somalia's potential natural resource revenues from offshore oil and gas, fisheries, and mineral deposits represent both an opportunity and a risk. If managed transparently, resource revenues could fund the governance transformation described in this chapter. If managed opaquely, they could fuel the resource curse the conversion of natural resource wealth into corruption and

conflict. The government should adopt a natural resource governance framework including sovereign wealth fund requirements, revenue publishing, and independent audit before exploitation begins.

5. **Port and customs reform:** The ports of Mogadishu and Kismayo are the two largest sources of government revenue and two of the most corrupt government operations. Port and customs reform including the automation of customs procedures, the publication of tariff schedules, and the establishment of independent customs oversight could increase revenue collection while reducing corruption.

Strengthening Parliamentary Oversight and Audit Institutions

Parliamentary oversight and audit are the primary institutional mechanisms through which the executive branch is held accountable for the use of public resources. In Somalia, both are weak parliament is dominated by the executive, and the Office of the Auditor General lacks the resources and independence to conduct effective audits. Strengthening these institutions is essential for governance reform.

- **Parliamentary oversight:** The Federal Parliament should exercise meaningful oversight of the executive branch through:
- **Budget review and approval:** Parliament should review, amend, and approve the national budget scrutinizing revenue projections, expenditure allocations, and fiscal sustainability. The current practice in which the budget is presented to parliament as a fait accompli does not constitute meaningful oversight.
- **Committee oversight:** Parliamentary committees including the Public Accounts Committee, the Defense Committee, and the Human Rights Committee should conduct regular hearings, call officials to testify, and publish findings and recommendations. Committee oversight creates a structured mechanism for executive accountability.
- **Question time:** Parliament should hold regular question periods in which ministers are required to appear before parliament and answer questions about their ministries' performance. Question time creates a public forum for executive accountability.
- **No-confidence motions:** Parliament should have the authority to remove ministers (and, in extreme cases, the government) through no-confidence motions creating a meaningful mechanism for holding the executive accountable for corruption and non-performance.

Audit institutions:

The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) should be strengthened through:

- **Constitutional independence:** The OAG should be constitutionally independent with security of tenure, budget autonomy, and protection from executive interference. The current arrangement in which the OAG is administratively part of the executive compromises its independence.
- **Expanded mandate:** The OAG's mandate should be expanded to include performance auditing (assessing whether government programs achieve their objectives) and compliance auditing (assessing whether government operations comply with laws and regulations) in addition to financial auditing.
- **Publication of findings:** The OAG should be required to publish its audit findings including findings of corruption, mismanagement, and waste and the government should be required to respond to audit recommendations within a specified period.
- **Follow-up mechanisms:** Audit recommendations should be tracked and their implementation monitored creating a closed loop in which audit findings lead to corrective action rather than being ignored.

Digital Governance and E-Government as Anti-Corruption Tools

Digital governance the use of technology to deliver government services, manage government operations, and enable citizen participation has significant potential as an anti-corruption tool in Somalia. Technology reduces corruption by reducing the human interaction points at which corruption occurs, by creating digital records that can be audited, and by enabling real-time monitoring of government operations.

Specific digital governance applications include:

1. **E-procurement:** Government procurement the process through which the government purchases goods, services, and works is one of the most corruption-prone areas of government operations. E-procurement systems which automate the procurement process, publish tender notices online, and enable electronic bidding reduce the opportunities for corruption by making the procurement process transparent and competitive.
2. **Digital identity:** A national digital identity system using biometric data (fingerprints, facial recognition) to uniquely identify citizens can reduce identity fraud, ghost worker schemes, and multiple registrations. The biometric registration of civil servants and military personnel (discussed in Chapters 9 and 20) would be built on a national digital identity platform.
3. **Mobile government services:** Somalia has one of the highest mobile money penetration rates in Africa over 70% of the adult population uses mobile money

services. This infrastructure can be leveraged to deliver government services including civil registration, tax payment, and license renewal through mobile platforms, reducing the need for citizens to visit government offices where they may encounter corrupt officials.

4. **Open data:** The government should publish its data including budget data, expenditure data, service delivery data, and performance data in machine-readable formats that can be accessed and analyzed by citizens, civil society organizations, and researchers. Open data creates the information foundation for accountability.
5. **Citizen feedback mechanisms:** Digital platforms including mobile apps, SMS systems, and social media can be used to collect citizen feedback on government services, report corruption, and request information. These mechanisms create a direct communication channel between citizens and the government that bypasses the patronage networks that currently mediate citizen-state interactions.

However, digital governance carries risks including digital exclusion (the risk that citizens without digital access are left behind), data privacy (the risk that government data collection enables surveillance rather than service delivery), and technology capture (the risk that digital systems are designed or implemented to serve the interests of the political elite rather than the public).

These risks must be managed through inclusive design, privacy safeguards, and independent oversight.

Conclusion

Governance reform in Somalia must address the political incentive structure that sustains the patronage system not merely the institutional deficits that result from it. The 4.5 clan formula, opaque revenue management, weak parliamentary oversight, and limited digital governance are not independent problems; they are interconnected elements of a system that incentivizes corruption and penalizes accountability.

Reforming this system requires political change the transition from clan-based to citizen-based governance that the current political elite has no incentive to pursue.

The challenge for domestic reformers and international partners is to create the political conditions that make governance reform possible by building bottom-up accountability, enforcing smart conditionality, and supporting domestic reform coalitions that can challenge the patronage system from within.

The following chapters develop this argument further examining security sector accountability, citizen agency, and international partnership as complementary pathways for breaking the insecurity–corruption cycle.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

SECURITY SECTOR ACCOUNTABILITY

FROM PREDATORS TO PROTECTORS

Introduction

The analysis in Chapter 9 documented the scale of corruption in Somalia's security sector ghost soldiers, payroll fraud, procurement corruption, and the desertion crisis and demonstrated how this corruption directly enables Al-Shabaab's resilience. Chapter 17 examined the failure of security sector reform (SSR) programs that prioritized capacity over governance, producing forces that were larger but not more effective.

This chapter proposes a governance-first approach to security sector transformation one that begins with accountability rather than capacity and that addresses the structural corruption that has undermined every previous SSR effort.

The chapter's central argument is that security sector accountability is not a secondary concern to be addressed after security forces are trained and equipped; it is a primary concern that must be addressed before further investment in capacity.

Without accountability, capacity-building produces larger corrupt forces not more effective ones. The chapter examines four dimensions of security sector accountability: personnel accountability, civilian oversight, community policing, and the alignment of SSR with anti-corruption reform.

Personnel Accountability: Biometric Registration and Payroll Reform

The ghost soldier problem the presence of non-existent personnel on the military payroll is the most visible and damaging symptom of security sector corruption. Estimates suggest that up to 30% of the soldiers on the Somali National Army (SNA) payroll may be ghost soldiers non-existent personnel whose salaries are collected by officers.

At a monthly salary of approximately \$100 per soldier, ghost soldiers divert millions of dollars from the military budget reducing operational effectiveness, enriching corrupt officers, and undermining the credibility of the security forces.

The solution to the ghost soldier problem is technically straightforward but politically difficult:

1. **Biometric registration:** Every member of the SNA should be registered through a biometric identification system including fingerprints, facial recognition, and a unique identification number that makes it impossible to create ghost soldiers. Biometric registration should be conducted by an independent body (not the military itself) and should be subject to regular verification through unannounced headcounts at military bases.
2. **Electronic payroll:** Military salaries should be paid directly to individual bank accounts or mobile money wallets bypassing the unit-level payroll system that enables officers to collect ghost soldier salaries. The biometric registration system should be linked to the payroll system, so that only registered soldiers receive payment. This reform recommended by multiple SSR assessments has been partially implemented but not consistently enforced, reportedly due to resistance from officers who benefit from the current system.
3. **Regular personnel audits:** Independent audits of military personnel should be conducted at regular intervals comparing biometric records, payroll data, and physical presence at military bases. Discrepancies should be investigated and officers responsible for ghost soldiers should be prosecuted. The audits should be conducted by an independent body potentially the Office of the Auditor General rather than by the military itself.

4. **Whistleblower protection:** Soldiers who report ghost soldier schemes should be protected from retaliation. A confidential reporting mechanism including a hotline and an independent investigative body should be established to allow soldiers to report corruption without fear of reprisal from their commanding officers.
5. **Transparent reporting:** The Ministry of Defense should publish regular reports on military personnel numbers including total registered personnel, active-duty personnel, and payroll expenditures enabling parliamentary and public scrutiny of the military's human resource management.

Civilian Oversight of Security Forces

Civilian oversight the mechanisms through which the civilian government and the public hold the security forces accountable is virtually non-existent in Somalia. The military and police operate with minimal civilian supervision, creating a governance vacuum in which corruption and abuse flourish. Establishing effective civilian oversight requires:

1. **Ministerial accountability:** The Minister of Defense and the Minister of Internal Security should be accountable to parliament for the performance and conduct of the security forces. This requires regular reporting to parliament, attendance at committee hearings, and the submission of annual performance reports.
2. **Parliamentary defense committee:** The Federal Parliament's defense committee should exercise meaningful oversight of the security sector reviewing defense policy, monitoring defense expenditure, and investigating security sector corruption and abuse. The committee should have the authority to summon military and police commanders, demand documents, and conduct hearings.
3. **National Security Council:** A National Security Council comprising the President, the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Defense and Internal Security, and the military and police leadership should be established as the primary policy-making body for the security sector. The Council should meet regularly, set strategic priorities, and monitor the implementation of security policy.
4. **Independent complaints mechanism:** An independent body analogous to a police complaints commission in other countries should be established to receive and investigate complaints about the conduct of security forces, including corruption, abuse of power, and human rights violations. The body should have the authority to investigate, refer cases for prosecution, and recommend disciplinary action.
5. **Public reporting:** The security forces should publish regular reports on their activities including operational outcomes, personnel numbers, and expenditure in formats that enable public scrutiny. Operational security concerns can be addressed

through confidential briefings to the parliamentary defense committee, rather than by classifying all security information.

Community Policing and Trust-Building

The relationship between Somalia's security forces and the communities they are supposed to protect is characterized by distrust, fear, and mutual suspicion. Communities view the police and military as instruments of clan domination rather than as protectors; the security forces view communities as potential Al-Shabaab sympathizers rather than as partners. This mutual distrust undermines security communities do not cooperate with security forces, do not provide intelligence, and do not support operations and it creates space for Al-Shabaab to exploit.

Community policing an approach that emphasizes the partnership between police and communities in identifying and addressing security problems offers a framework for rebuilding this relationship. Community policing in Somalia should include:

1. **Police-community partnerships:** Police should establish regular partnerships with community organizations including neighborhood associations, women's groups, and youth organizations to identify security problems, develop responses, and monitor outcomes. These partnerships should be structured with regular meetings, joint planning, and shared accountability rather than informal.
2. **Local security committees:** Communities should establish local security committees comprising community leaders, women, youth, and business owners that work with the police to identify threats, prioritize responses, and monitor the conduct of security operations. These committees should have the authority to receive complaints about police conduct and to refer complaints to the independent complaints mechanism.
3. **Police visibility and accessibility:** Police should be visible and accessible in the communities they serve patrolling on foot, engaging with residents, and maintaining a presence at community events. This visibility builds familiarity and trust, which in turn generates the cooperation and intelligence that effective policing requires.
4. **Cultural sensitivity:** Police should be trained in cultural sensitivity including understanding of clan dynamics, gender norms, and the specific concerns of displaced and conflict-affected communities. Training should include practical exercises that prepare officers for the interpersonal challenges of community policing in a conflict-affected society.
5. **Accountability to communities:** Police performance should be evaluated partly based on community feedback including community satisfaction surveys, complaint

rates, and cooperation with investigations. This creates an incentive for police officers to build community trust rather than to rely on coercion.

Aligning SSR with Anti-Corruption Reforms

The fundamental lesson of Somalia's SSR experience is that security sector reform and anti-corruption reform are not separate agendas they are the same agenda. Every previous SSR program in Somalia has treated corruption as a secondary concern a problem to be addressed after security forces were trained and equipped. The result has been forces that are larger but not more effective, better armed but not better governed.

Aligning SSR with anti-corruption reform requires:

1. **Governance conditions for security assistance:** International security assistance including training, equipment, and budget support should be conditioned on the implementation of governance reforms, including biometric registration, electronic payroll, and procurement transparency. Assistance should be suspended if governance conditions are not met.
2. **Joint SSR-anti-corruption assessments:** SSR assessments should include anti-corruption analysis examining the governance conditions that determine whether security assistance will produce effective forces or merely enlarge the patronage system. Anti-corruption assessments should include security sector analysis examining how security sector corruption contributes to the broader corruption environment.
3. **Integrated reform planning:** SSR plans and anti-corruption strategies should be integrated not developed separately and coordinated after the fact. This requires joint planning processes, shared indicators, and coordinated timelines.
4. **Shared monitoring:** SSR programs and anti-corruption programs should be monitored through shared indicators including ghost soldier rates, procurement irregularities, and human rights complaints that track both security and governance outcomes.
5. **Political engagement:** International partners should engage the political leadership directly on the connection between security sector corruption and security failure making the case that governance reform is not a constraint on security but a prerequisite for it.

Conclusion

Security sector accountability from predators to protectors is the most urgent and impactful governance reform that Somalia can pursue. The ghost soldier problem, the absence of civilian oversight, the breakdown of community-police trust, and the

disconnect between SSR and anti-corruption reform are not independent governance deficits; they are symptoms of a security sector that is organized for patronage rather than for security.

Transforming this sector requires a governance-first approach beginning with accountability rather than capacity and the political will to enforce accountability against the interests of the patronage system.

The following chapter examines the role of citizens through civil society, media, youth, and the diaspora in creating the political pressure that makes security sector accountability and governance reform possible.

CHAPTER TWENTY

REBUILDING THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

CITIZEN AGENCY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

The social contract the mutual obligation between state and citizen in which the state provides security and services in exchange for the citizen's loyalty, taxes, and compliance with laws is the foundation of legitimate governance. In Somalia, this social contract has collapsed. The state provides neither security nor services; citizens provide neither loyalty nor taxes; and the resulting governance vacuum is filled by non-state actors Al-Shabaab, clan militias, and patronage networks that provide partial substitutes for state functions while perpetuating the insecurity–corruption cycle.

Rebuilding the social contract requires the development of citizen agency the capacity of citizens to demand accountability from the state, to participate in governance, and to resist the capture of public institutions by private interests. This chapter examines four dimensions of citizen agency: civil society, media, youth and technology, and the diaspora.

The Role of Civil Society in Combating Corruption and Insecurity

Civil society organizations (CSOs) including non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, women's groups, and professional associations are the primary vehicles for citizen agency in fragile states. In Somalia, civil society operates under severe constraints government restrictions, security threats, funding dependence, and the penetration of CSOs by political and clan interests.

Despite these constraints, Somali civil society has demonstrated significant capacity for governance monitoring, corruption reporting, and community mobilization.

The specific contributions that civil society can make to combating corruption and insecurity include:

1. **Governance monitoring:** CSOs can monitor government performance — tracking budget execution, assessing service delivery, and documenting corruption — and publish their findings in formats that are accessible to citizens and policymakers. The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, the Somali Institute for Development and Research, and similar organizations have produced valuable governance monitoring reports that have informed both domestic and international understanding of corruption in Somalia.
2. **Corruption reporting:** CSOs can serve as intermediaries between citizens and the government receiving reports of corruption, documenting evidence, and referring cases to the Anti-Corruption Commission or the judiciary. In a context where citizens are reluctant to report corruption directly to government agencies (due to fear of retaliation and lack of trust), CSOs can provide a safe and trusted channel for reporting.
3. **Community mobilization:** CSOs can mobilize communities to demand accountability through public forums, petitions, demonstrations, and engagement with government officials. Community mobilization creates the political pressure that makes reform possible, by demonstrating to the government and international partners that there is domestic demand for good governance.
4. **Policy advocacy:** CSOs can advocate for policy reforms including anti-corruption legislation, judicial reform, and security sector governance that address the structural causes of corruption. Policy advocacy that is grounded in evidence and informed by community experience can influence both domestic reform agendas and international engagement strategies.
5. **Service delivery monitoring:** CSOs can monitor the delivery of public services including health, education, and water and report service delivery failures to both the government and the public. This monitoring creates accountability for the use

of public resources and identifies the specific points at which corruption diverts resources from service delivery.

However, civil society in Somalia faces significant challenges:

- **Government restrictions:** The government has imposed regulatory restrictions on CSOs including registration requirements, operational restrictions, and funding controls that limit civil society's independence and effectiveness. Some of these restrictions are legitimate (preventing the use of CSOs for money laundering or terrorist financing); others are designed to suppress governance monitoring and corruption reporting.
- **Security threats:** Civil society activists who report on corruption or advocate for reform face security threats including harassment, intimidation, and violence from both the government and non-state actors. Al-Shabaab has targeted civil society activists; the government has arrested and detained journalists and activists who report on corruption.
- **Funding dependence:** CSOs that depend on international funding are vulnerable to the agendas of their funders which may not always align with the priorities of the communities they serve. This dependence can distort civil society's agenda and reduce its domestic legitimacy.
- **Clan capture:** Some CSOs are effectively clan organizations advancing the interests of particular clans rather than the public interest. This clan capture undermines civil society's credibility and limits its capacity to serve as an accountability mechanism.

Media Freedom as an Accountability Mechanism

A free and independent media is the most effective accountability mechanism in any governance system. In Somalia, the media operates under severe constraints government restrictions, Al-Shabaab violence, and the economic dependence of media outlets on political and business interests. Despite these constraints, Somali journalists have demonstrated extraordinary courage in reporting on corruption and governance failures.

The contributions of media to accountability include:

1. **Investigative journalism:** Investigative reporting the systematic investigation and exposure of corruption, abuse of power, and governance failures is the most impactful form of media accountability. Somali journalists have produced

significant investigative reports including exposures of food aid diversion, ghost soldiers, and procurement fraud that have informed both domestic and international responses to corruption.

2. **Public information:** The media provides citizens with the information they need to hold the government accountable including information about government policies, budget allocations, service delivery performance, and corruption cases. Without this information, citizens cannot make informed judgments about government performance or exercise meaningful oversight.
3. **Agenda-setting:** The media sets the public agenda determining which issues receive attention and which are ignored. By reporting on corruption and governance failures, the media can create public pressure for reform that would not otherwise exist.
4. **Platform for debate:** The media provides a platform for public debate enabling citizens, experts, and officials to discuss governance issues, propose solutions, and challenge government policies. This debate is essential for the development of a public consensus on reform.

However, media freedom in Somalia is under sustained assault:

- **The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has consistently ranked Somalia among the most dangerous countries for journalists.** Between 2010 and 2025, over 50 journalists have been killed in Somalia many in circumstances that suggest targeted assassination. The perpetrators are rarely identified or prosecuted, creating a culture of impunity that deters investigative reporting.
- **Government restrictions:** The government has imposed legal restrictions on media freedom — including criminal defamation laws, anti-terrorism provisions that are used to prosecute journalists, and regulatory requirements that are used to control media content. These restrictions create a legal environment in which journalists risk prosecution for reporting on corruption and governance failures.
- **Economic dependence:** Many Somali media outlets are owned or funded by political and business figures who use them to advance their interests. This economic dependence compromises the media's independence and limits its capacity to report on the corruption of its funders.
- **Self-censorship:** The combination of physical threats, legal restrictions, and economic dependence creates powerful incentives for self-censorship journalists and editors who avoid reporting on sensitive topics to protect themselves and their

outlets. This self-censorship reduces the media's accountability function without the need for explicit government censorship.

Youth, Technology, and Anti-Corruption Movements

Somalia has one of the youngest populations in the world approximately 70% of the population is under 30. This youth population which has grown up in a context of conflict, corruption, and state failure is both a demographic challenge and a potential driver of change. Young Somalis are more educated, more connected, and more politically aware than previous generations, and they have less investment in the patronage system that sustains corruption.

The potential of youth-driven anti-corruption movements includes:

1. **Social media activism:** Somali youth are active on social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok where they discuss governance issues, expose corruption, and mobilize for reform. Social media provides a platform for political expression that is not controlled by the government or by clan elders, enabling young people to challenge the patronage system in ways that were not previously possible.
2. **Technology-enabled accountability:** Young Somalis with technical skills are developing digital tools for accountability including mobile apps for reporting corruption, online platforms for monitoring government spending, and social media campaigns for exposing governance failures. These tools leverage Somalia's high mobile phone penetration and mobile money infrastructure to create new accountability mechanisms.
3. **Civic education:** Youth organizations are conducting civic education programs — teaching young people about their rights, the responsibilities of government, and the mechanisms of accountability that create a foundation for informed citizenship. These programs are particularly important in a context where formal education has been disrupted by conflict and where many young people have had no exposure to civic knowledge.
4. **Anti-corruption advocacy:** Youth-led organizations are engaging in anti-corruption advocacy including public campaigns, petitions, and engagement with government officials that create political pressure for reform. The Somalia Needs Justice campaign (2023) which used social media to protest corruption and impunity demonstrated the potential of youth-driven advocacy.

However, youth-driven anti-corruption movements face significant obstacles:

- **Political exclusion:** The 4.5 clan formula and the indirect election system exclude young people from formal political participation. Youth are not represented in parliament, the cabinet, or senior government positions and have limited influence on the political decisions that affect their lives.
- **Economic marginalization:** Youth unemployment in Somalia is estimated at over 70% one of the highest rates in the world. This economic marginalization creates vulnerability to recruitment by Al-Shabaab and clan militias, and reduces the time and resources available for civic engagement.
- **Security risks:** Youth who engage in anti-corruption activism face security threats including harassment, arrest, and violence from both the government and non-state actors. These risks deter participation and limit the sustainability of youth movements.
- **Fragmentation:** Youth movements in Somalia are often fragmented by clan, regional, and ideological divisions reflecting the broader social fragmentation that the patronage system exploits. Building cross-clan youth coalitions for reform is difficult but essential.

Diaspora Engagement and Remittance Integrity

The Somali diaspora estimated at 2–3 million people living in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and East Africa is a significant economic and political force. Annual remittances to Somalia are estimated at \$1.3–1.4 billion approximately 23% of GDP making the diaspora the single largest source of foreign exchange and a critical lifeline for millions of Somali families.

The diaspora's potential contributions to combating corruption and rebuilding the social contract include:

1. **Remittance integrity:** Remittances are the largest source of external finance for Somalia, but the remittance system is vulnerable to exploitation by corrupt officials, money launderers, and Al-Shabaab (which reportedly collects zakat a religious tax from diaspora members). Ensuring the integrity of the remittance system through regulation, due diligence, and reporting requirements would reduce the flow of resources to corrupt and violent actors.
2. **Political advocacy:** Diaspora communities can advocate for governance reform both in Somalia and in the countries where they live. Diaspora lobbying of donor governments can influence the conditionality of international assistance; diaspora engagement with the Somali government can create political pressure for reform.

3. **Knowledge transfer:** Diaspora members with professional skills in public administration, finance, law, technology, and governance can contribute to institutional capacity-building in Somalia, particularly through structured return programs that place skilled diaspora members in government positions.
4. **Investment:** Diaspora investment in the Somali economy particularly in productive sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology can reduce aid dependency, create employment, and generate tax revenue. However, diaspora investment is currently deterred by corruption and insecurity creating a vicious cycle in which the conditions that diaspora investment could improve are the same conditions that prevent it.
5. **Accountability monitoring:** Diaspora organizations can monitor the performance of the Somali government including corruption, human rights, and service delivery and report their findings to international partners and domestic audiences. Diaspora monitoring can supplement the monitoring capacity of domestic civil society, which is constrained by security threats and government restrictions.

However, the diaspora's engagement with Somali governance is complex:

- **Political fragmentation:** The diaspora is politically fragmented reflecting the clan and ideological divisions of Somali society. Diaspora organizations often represent particular clans or political factions rather than the broader Somali public interest.
- **Remittance dependency:** The reliance of Somali families on remittances creates a power dynamic in which diaspora members exercise significant influence over household decisions including political choices without being subject to the governance conditions that affect daily life in Somalia.
- **Lack of coordination:** Diaspora engagement is uncoordinated with multiple organizations pursuing different agendas without a shared framework for governance reform. This fragmentation reduces the diaspora's collective impact on governance.

Conclusion

Rebuilding the social contract requires the development of citizen agency the capacity of citizens to demand accountability, participate in governance, and resist the capture of public institutions.

Civil society, media, youth, and the diaspora are the four primary vehicles for citizen agency in Somalia. Each faces significant constraints government restrictions, security threats, economic dependence, and social fragmentation but each has demonstrated the

capacity to contribute to governance monitoring, corruption reporting, and reform advocacy.

The challenge is to build on this capacity by protecting civil society and media from government and non-state violence, by empowering youth through civic education and economic opportunity, and by mobilizing the diaspora for coordinated governance engagement.

The following chapter examines how international partnership can be redesigned to support these domestic accountability mechanisms rather than to substitute for them.



CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP REDESIGNED FROM AID

DEPENDENCY TO MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Introduction

The international community's engagement with Somalia has been characterized by a fundamental contradiction: it has provided the resources that sustain the state while simultaneously enabling the corruption that hollows it out.

Chapter 18 documented this contradiction the conditionality that is not enforced, the technical assistance that substitutes for governance, and the security assistance that enlarges the patronage system. This chapter proposes a redesigned model of international partnership one that shifts from aid dependency to mutual accountability, from supply-driven assistance to demand-driven reform, and from enabling corruption to combating it.

The redesigned model is based on three principles:

1. **Mutual accountability:** International partners and the Somali government should be mutually accountable the government accountable for the use of international resources, and international partners accountable for the effectiveness of their assistance.
2. **Domestic ownership:** International engagement should support domestic accountability mechanisms including the judiciary, civil society, the media, and community organizations rather than substituting for them with international oversight.
3. **Governance first:** International assistance should prioritize governance the accountability mechanisms that determine whether resources are used for their intended purposes over capacity, which merely determines the volume of resources that flow through government systems.

Reforming Humanitarian Aid Delivery: Transparency, Technology, and Community Monitoring

The 2023 food aid diversion scandal documented in Chapter 5 exposed the systemic corruption in humanitarian aid delivery. The scandal was not an isolated incident but a manifestation of a structural problem: the aid delivery system creates opportunities for corruption that are systematically exploited by government officials, contractors, and armed groups. Reforming humanitarian aid delivery requires:

1. **Transparency in aid flows:** All humanitarian aid including cash transfers, food distribution, and service delivery should be tracked from the donor to the beneficiary through a transparent system that enables monitoring and verification. This requires the adoption of common reporting standards, the publication of aid data in accessible formats, and the establishment of independent verification mechanisms.
2. **Technology-enabled delivery:** Technology can reduce corruption in aid delivery by automating processes, creating digital records, and enabling real-time monitoring. Specific technologies include:
 - **Biometric identification:** Biometric registration of aid beneficiaries using fingerprints or iris scans prevents multiple registrations and ghost beneficiaries.
 - **Mobile money transfers:** Cash assistance delivered through mobile money rather than through physical distribution points reduces the opportunities for diversion and theft.
 - **GPS tracking:** The GPS tracking of aid convoys combined with geofencing (alerts when convoys deviate from their routes) reduces the opportunities for diversion.

- **Blockchain documentation:** The use of blockchain technology to document aid transactions creating an immutable record of each transaction that can be audited increases the transparency and traceability of aid flows.
- 3. **Community monitoring:** Communities receiving aid should be empowered to monitor its delivery through community monitoring committees, feedback mechanisms, and complaint systems that enable beneficiaries to report diversion and abuse. Community monitoring is the most effective accountability mechanism for aid delivery because communities have the best information about whether aid is reaching its intended recipients.
- 4. **Independent oversight:** Humanitarian operations should be subject to independent oversight including regular audits, evaluations, and investigations that is conducted by bodies that are independent of both the implementing agencies and the government. The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) provide models for independent oversight.
- 5. **Consequences for diversion:** The consequences for aid diversion including contract termination, debarment from future contracts, and criminal prosecution should be consistently enforced. The current system in which the consequences for diversion are minimal and enforcement is rare creates a low-risk, high-reward incentive for corruption.

Tying Security Assistance to Governance Benchmarks

Security assistance the training, equipment, and budget support that the international community provides to Somalia's security forces is the largest category of international assistance and the most vulnerable to corruption.

Chapter 17 documented the failure of SSR programs that prioritized capacity over governance; Chapter 20 proposed a governance-first approach to security sector transformation. This chapter addresses the international dimension of this reform: the restructuring of security assistance to create incentives for governance rather than for patronage.

Tying security assistance to governance benchmarks requires:

1. **Governance conditions:** Security assistance should be explicitly conditioned on the implementation of governance reforms including biometric registration, electronic payroll, procurement transparency, and civilian oversight. These conditions should be specified in assistance agreements and should be verifiable through independent monitoring.

2. **Trigger-based disbursement:** Security assistance should be disbursed in tranches with each tranche conditioned on the achievement of specific governance triggers. The triggers should be specific, measurable, and independently verifiable not vague benchmarks that can be met through "substantial compliance." The disbursement of each tranche should be automatic not subject to political negotiation creating a credible commitment that changes the government's incentive structure.
3. **Joint monitoring:** Security assistance should be monitored jointly by the donor and the government with regular assessments that evaluate both security outcomes and governance outcomes. The current monitoring system which focuses on inputs (troops trained, equipment delivered) rather than outcomes (security improved, corruption reduced) should be reformed to measure the impact of assistance on governance and security.
4. **Conditionality coordination:** All major security assistance providers including the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and the African Union should coordinate their conditionality and enforcement mechanisms, preventing the government from playing donors off against each other. A common conditionality framework agreed among major donors and applied consistently would eliminate the collective action problem that currently undermines conditionality.
5. **Exit strategies:** Security assistance programs should include explicit exit strategies defining the conditions under which assistance will be reduced and eventually terminated. Exit strategies create a long-term incentive for governance reform by signaling that international assistance is not permanent and that the government must develop the capacity to sustain its security forces without external support.

South–Somalia Cooperation and Alternative Development Models

The international community's engagement with Somalia is dominated by Western donors the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and multilateral institutions (the World Bank, the IMF, the UN). This Western-dominated engagement has produced a development model that emphasizes liberal democratic governance, market economics, and civil society a model that has been incompletely implemented and that has failed to produce the governance transformation it promises.

South Somalia cooperation the exchange of resources, technology, and knowledge between developing countries offers alternative development models that may be more appropriate for Somalia's context. Specific examples include:

1. **Rwanda's governance model:** While criticized for its authoritarian features, Rwanda's governance model which emphasizes performance-based governance,

anti-corruption enforcement, and community-based development offers lessons for a Somali context in which governance capacity is low and patronage incentives are strong.

2. **Ethiopia's developmental state model:** Ethiopia's developmental state which used state-led industrialization, public investment, and strategic economic planning to achieve rapid growth offers an alternative to the market-led model that has produced limited results in Somalia. However, Ethiopia's model also demonstrates the risks of authoritarian development including political repression, ethnic conflict, and governance fragility.
3. **Somaliland's hybrid governance model:** Somaliland the self-declared republic in Somalia's northwest that has achieved a degree of stability and governance that the Federal Government has not offers a particularly relevant model. Somaliland's hybrid governance system which combines traditional clan-based governance (through the House of Elders/Guurti) with modern democratic institutions (through the elected House of Representatives) demonstrates that traditional and modern governance can be integrated rather than opposed.
4. **Southeast Asian development models:** Countries such as Singapore, Vietnam, and Malaysia which achieved rapid development through governance reforms that prioritized economic growth, merit-based civil service, and strategic state intervention offer alternative development pathways that do not depend on the liberal democratic model.

However, South Somalia cooperation also carries risks:

- **Governance neglect:** Some South–Somalia development models particularly the Chinese model of infrastructure-led development without governance conditionality may reinforce the patronage system by providing resources without accountability requirements.
- **Political instrumentalization:** South Somalia cooperation is sometimes instrumentalized for geopolitical competition with countries offering assistance to gain strategic influence rather than to support development. Somalia's strategic location on the Horn of Africa makes it a target for geopolitical competition between the Gulf states, China, and Western powers.
- **Limited transferability:** Development models that work in one context may not work in another. Rwanda's governance model which depends on a degree of political centralization and social discipline that does not exist in Somalia may not be directly transferable.

Debt Management and Fiscal Responsibility Post-HIPC

Somalia's completion of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative in December 2023 which reduced its external debt from \$5.3 billion to approximately \$550 million provides a historic opportunity for fiscal sustainability. However, it also creates a risk of new debt accumulation as the government gains access to international credit markets that were previously closed to it.

Post-HIPC debt management requires:

1. **Fiscal discipline:** The government should maintain fiscal discipline avoiding the accumulation of debt that could again become unsustainable. This requires the adoption of a fiscal framework that limits annual borrowing to a sustainable level (defined by debt sustainability analysis) and that requires parliamentary approval for all new borrowing.
2. **Debt transparency:** All government borrowing including loans, guarantees, and contingent liabilities should be publicly disclosed and subject to parliamentary oversight. The current opacity of government borrowing which includes undisclosed loans and guarantees creates opportunities for corruption and fiscal irresponsibility.
3. **Productive investment:** New borrowing should be directed toward productive investment infrastructure, education, health, and agriculture that generates the economic growth needed to service the debt. Borrowing for consumption including the operational costs of the security forces and the patronage expenditures of the political elite should be avoided.
4. **Debt management capacity:** The government should develop its debt management capacity including a debt management office, a debt registry, and analytical capacity for debt sustainability analysis to ensure that borrowing decisions are informed by rigorous analysis rather than political expediency.
5. **International coordination:** Somalia's post-HIPC borrowing should be coordinated with international partners including the IMF, the World Bank, and bilateral creditors to ensure that new borrowing is consistent with fiscal sustainability and governance reform.

Conclusion

Redesigned international partnership from aid dependency to mutual accountability requires a fundamental shift in how the international community engages with Somalia. The current model in which the international community provides resources that sustain the state while enabling the corruption that hollows it out must be replaced by a model in which international assistance is conditioned on governance reform, support is

directed toward domestic accountability mechanisms, and the long-term goal is a self-sustaining state that no longer depends on international support.

The redesigned model does not promise quick results. The transformation of Somalia's governance will take decades, not years and it will require sustained international commitment that extends beyond electoral cycles and budget appropriations. But it offers something that the current model does not: a path toward a self-sustaining state that can provide security and services without indefinite international support and a path toward breaking the insecurity–corruption cycle that has trapped Somalia for over three decades.

The final chapter of this book the conclusion synthesizes the evidence presented in the preceding twenty-two chapters, assesses the cost of inaction, and articulates the case for integrated, evidence-based, locally owned reform.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO **SOMALIA AT THE CROSSROADS BREAKING** **THE VICIOUS CYCLE OR DEEPENING THE CRISIS?**

Introduction

This book has examined the twin scourges of insecurity and corruption in Somalia through twenty-two chapters spanning historical context, multiple dimensions of insecurity, the structural nature of corruption, the convergence of these two forces, sectoral impacts, responses and reforms, and pathways forward. The analysis has been evidence-based, drawing on quantitative data, qualitative research, institutional assessments, and documented cases to construct a comprehensive picture of how insecurity and corruption interact to perpetuate state failure and human suffering.

This concluding chapter synthesizes the evidence, assesses the cost of inaction, examines the possibility of change, and articulates the case for integrated, evidence-based, locally owned reform. The central argument is that Somalia stands at a crossroads: between breaking the vicious cycle of insecurity and corruption through genuine governance

transformation, and deepening the crisis through continued institutional decay and political stagnation.

The path that Somalia takes will depend on the choices of its political elite, the agency of its citizens, and the engagement of its international partners but the evidence strongly suggests that the current trajectory leads toward deepening crisis.

Summarizing the Evidence

The Empirical Case for Integrated Reform

The evidence presented in this book can be summarized along four dimensions: the scale of the problem, the mechanisms of the vicious cycle, the failure of previous responses, and the requirements for genuine reform.

The Scale of the problem:

- Somalia scores 9 out of 100 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2024), ranking 181 out of 182 countries assessed a score that has remained at or near the global bottom since the CPI's expansion to include Somalia in 2006. This is not a perception gap; it reflects the documented reality of systemic corruption across every sector of governance.
- Over 6.5 million Somalis face acute food insecurity (2025 data), while food aid has been systematically diverted by government officials and contractors as documented by the 2023 UN investigation that revealed the theft of food intended for starving populations.
- More than 3.9 million Somalis are internally displaced the result of conflict, climate shocks, and the failure of governance that has made communities unable to withstand or recover from crises.
- GDP growth of 2.4–3.1% is far below the level needed to reduce poverty and create employment for a population that is growing at 2.9% annually. Corruption and insecurity deter the investment, formalize the economy, and divert resources from productive use constraining growth to a fraction of its potential.
- Al-Shabaab continues to control significant territory and generate an estimated 70–100 million in annual revenue through taxation, extortion, and illicit trade a shadow economy that trivals the formal government's revenue collection capacity.
- Up to 30% of the soldiers on the Somali National Army payroll may be ghost soldiers a corruption drain that reduces military effectiveness while enriching officers.

- Only 45% of health facilities offer delivery services, and maternal mortality remains among the highest in the world a direct consequence of the insecurity that restricts access and the corruption that diverts health resources.
- Education enrollment rates remain among the lowest globally, with insecurity closing schools in conflict zones and corruption diverting education funds through ghost teachers and patronage hiring.
- The judiciary functions as an instrument of clan and political power rather than as a mechanism for justice creating the impunity that enables corruption and the injustice that fuels grievance.

The Mechanisms of the vicious cycle:

The evidence demonstrates that insecurity and corruption are not separate problems but a single, self-reinforcing system. The mechanisms of the vicious cycle documented across multiple chapters include:

1. **Corruption enables terrorism:** Al-Shabaab's resilience is rooted not in military capability but in state corruption and public distrust. Research published in AJPAS (2025) establishes that corruption in Somalia increases the prevalence of terrorism by undermining the state's legitimacy and capacity to counter violent extremism.
2. **Insecurity creates corruption opportunities:** Emergency procurement, no-bid contracts, and the suspension of oversight in conflict zones create corruption opportunities that would not exist in a secure environment. The security sector itself where urgency justifies the circumvention of governance safeguards is the most corruption-prone area of government operations.
3. **The erosion of the social contract:** When the state cannot provide security or services, citizens turn to non-state actors Al-Shabaab, clan militias, and patronage networks for the protection and resources that the state should provide. This erosion of the social contract creates a governance vacuum that both corruption and insecurity fill.
4. **Aid as a corruption site:** The billions of dollars in humanitarian and development assistance that flow into Somalia each year are systematically diverted by government officials, contractors, and armed groups converting international support for state-building into a resource for the patronage system.
5. **The Clan corruption nexus:** The 4.5 clan power-sharing formula creates a governance system in which every political appointment is a clan appointment, every public resource is a clan resource, and every act of corruption is protected by clan solidarity. This nexus is the structural foundation of the vicious cycle.

The Failure of previous responses:

The evidence demonstrates that previous responses to insecurity and corruption have failed not because reform is impossible but because the strategies employed have been inappropriate for the context:

- Anti-corruption institutions the Anti-Corruption Commission (established 2019), the Financial Governance Center (established 2017) have been established without the independence, resources, and enforcement authority to function effectively.
- Security sector reform programs funded primarily by the United States, the European Union, and Turkey have prioritized capacity (training, equipment, infrastructure) over governance (accountability, oversight, transparency), producing larger forces that remain corrupt and ineffective.
- International conditionality the governance conditions attached to budget support, debt relief, and security assistance has been inconsistently enforced, creating a credibility gap that undermines the incentive for reform.
- The transition from AMISOM to ATMIS to AUSSOM the African Union's peacekeeping mission has been driven by mandate and funding changes rather than by security conditions on the ground, creating a transition gap that Al-Shabaab has exploited.

The Requirements for genuine reform:

The evidence presented in Part VII of this book demonstrates that genuine reform reform that breaks the insecurity–corruption cycle rather than managing its symptoms requires:

1. **Governance-first:** Reform must prioritize governance the accountability mechanisms that determine whether resources are used for their intended purposes over capacity, which merely determines the volume of resources that flow through government systems.
2. **Bottom-up accountability:** Reform must build accountability from the bottom up starting with local governance and citizen agency rather than with national institutions and international oversight.
3. **Integrated approach:** Security reform and anti-corruption reform must be integrated not pursued as separate agendas. The security sector is both the most corrupt and the most important area of governance; reforming one without the other will not succeed.

4. **Political change:** The patronage system that sustains corruption cannot be reformed from within; it requires political change the transition from clan-based to citizen-based governance that creates the incentive structure for accountability.
5. **Sustained international engagement:** International engagement must be redesigned from aid dependency to mutual accountability, from capacity-building to governance-building, and from enabling corruption to combating it.

The Cost of Inaction: Projections if Current Trends Continue

The cost of inaction the consequences of continuing on the current trajectory without fundamental reform is not hypothetical. It can be projected based on current trends:

1. **Humanitarian crisis:** Without governance reform, the humanitarian crisis will deepen. Climate change is projected to increase the frequency and severity of droughts in the Horn of Africa, while conflict and corruption will continue to prevent effective response. The number of food-insecure Somalis currently 6.5 million is likely to increase, and the diversion of food aid will continue to reduce the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance.
2. **Displacement:** Internal displacement currently 3.9 million will continue to grow as conflict, climate shocks, and governance failure force more Somalis from their homes. The IDP camps that already shelter hundreds of thousands of displaced Somalis and that are sites of gender-based violence, exploitation, and corruption will expand, creating a permanently displaced population.
3. **Al-Shabaab resilience:** Without security sector accountability, Al-Shabaab will continue to exploit state corruption and public distrust to maintain its territorial presence and generate revenue. The military offensives of 2022–2024 which recaptured some territory but failed to degrade Al-Shabaab's capabilities will be repeated without lasting effect, as the governance conditions that enable Al-Shabaab's resilience remain unchanged.
4. **Economic stagnation:** Without governance reform, economic growth will remain below the level needed to reduce poverty and create employment. The formal economy will remain small; the informal economy in which corruption is a cost of doing business will continue to dominate; and foreign direct investment will remain deterred by corruption and insecurity.
5. **Debt risk:** The HIPC debt relief of 2023 provides an opportunity for fiscal sustainability, but without fiscal discipline and debt management capacity, Somalia risks re-accumulating unsustainable debt repeating the cycle of borrowing, default, and debt relief that has characterized its fiscal history.

6. **Democratic recession:** The repeated delays in the electoral process, the failure to implement one-person-one-vote elections, and the continued reliance on the clan-based indirect election model suggest that Somalia is experiencing a democratic recession a gradual erosion of the political reforms that have been achieved since the establishment of the Federal Government in 2012.
7. **Youth disenfranchisement:** The exclusion of young people who constitute 70% of the population from political participation, economic opportunity, and social mobility creates a demographic time bomb. Without reform, the growing youth population will face the same choices that previous generations faced: migration, recruitment by armed groups, or marginalization in an economy that cannot employ them.

The cumulative cost of inaction is a Somalia that remains trapped in the insecurity corruption cycle with deepening humanitarian crisis, growing displacement, persistent terrorism, economic stagnation, and political stagnation for decades to come. This is not a speculative projection; it is the trajectory that current trends indicate.

The Possibility of Change: Comparative Lessons from Other Post-Conflict States

However, the current trajectory is not inevitable. Other post-conflict states have broken comparable cycles of insecurity and corruption demonstrating that reform is possible even in contexts where it appears improbable.

Rwanda discussed in Chapter 20 achieved a dramatic reduction in corruption through strong political will, institutional reform, and a governance culture that emphasizes performance and accountability. While the authoritarian features of the Rwandan model limit its applicability and sustainability, the core lesson that political will is essential for anti-corruption reform is universally relevant.

Georgia also discussed in Chapter 20 achieved a rapid anti-corruption transformation through institutional replacement, deregulation, and technology-enabled transparency. The Georgian experience demonstrates that radical reform replacing rather than reforming corrupt institutions can be more effective than incremental approaches.

Liberia a West African post-conflict state with comparable levels of state fragility has achieved incremental governance improvements through civil society engagement, media freedom, and international conditionality. While

Liberia's progress has been uneven and incomplete, it demonstrates that governance reform is possible in fragile states when domestic accountability mechanisms are supported by international engagement.

Colombia a Latin American state that has faced decades of armed conflict and corruption has made significant progress in security sector governance through civilian oversight, judicial reform, and the establishment of accountability mechanisms for the military. The Colombian experience demonstrates that security sector accountability is achievable even in a context of ongoing conflict.

Somaliland Somalia's self-declared republic has achieved a degree of stability and governance that the Federal Government has not, through a hybrid governance system that combines traditional clan-based governance with modern democratic institutions. The Somaliland experience demonstrates that the integration of traditional and modern governance rather than the replacement of one by the other can produce legitimate and effective governance.

These comparative cases do not provide templates for Somalia each context is unique, and the transplantation of governance models from one context to another is a well-documented cause of reform failure. But they demonstrate that change is possible that states can break the insecurity–corruption cycle through political will, institutional reform, bottom-up accountability, and sustained international engagement.

The challenge for Somalia is to develop a reform strategy that is grounded in the specific dynamics of its insecurity–corruption cycle and that draws on the principles not the models of successful reform.

A Call for Evidence-Based, Locally Owned Transformation

This book concludes with a call for evidence-based, locally owned transformation a governance reform agenda that is grounded in the evidence presented in the preceding chapters, that is driven by domestic accountability rather than by international prescription, and that addresses the structural foundations of the insecurity–corruption cycle rather than its symptoms.

The transformation agenda has five pillars:

Pillar One:

Governance Reform From Patronage to Accountability

The transition from the 4.5 clan-based patronage system to a citizen-based governance system through direct elections, transparent revenue management, parliamentary

oversight, and digital governance is the single most important reform for breaking the insecurity–corruption cycle. This reform must be locally owned driven by domestic demand for accountability rather than by international conditionality and it must be sequenced starting with the most feasible and impactful reforms and building on success.

Pillar Two:

Security Sector Transformation From Predators to Protectors

The transformation of the security sector through biometric registration, electronic payroll, civilian oversight, community policing, and the alignment of SSR with anti-corruption reform is the most urgent and impactful governance reform that Somalia can pursue. Without security sector accountability, no other reform can succeed because the security sector is both the most corrupt area of governance and the most important for breaking the cycle of insecurity.

Pillar Three:

Citizen Agency Rebuilding the Social Contract

The development of citizen agency through civil society, media, youth, and diaspora engagement is essential for creating the political pressure that makes reform possible. Governance reform cannot be imposed from above; it must be demanded from below. Citizen agency provides the demand that makes supply (reform) possible.

Pillar Four:

International-Partnership From Aid Dependency to Mutual Accountability

The redesign of international engagement from aid dependency to mutual accountability, from capacity-building to governance-building, and from enabling corruption to combating it is essential for creating the external incentives that complement domestic accountability. International partnership that is smart, coordinated, and consequential can create the political conditions for reform.

Pillar Five:

Economic Transformation From Aid Dependency to Sustainable Growth

The diversification of the economy, the formalization of economic activity, the mobilization of domestic revenue, and the productive investment of post-HIPC borrowing capacity are essential for creating the fiscal sustainability that reduces aid dependency and the economic opportunity that reduces the incentives for corruption.

Economic transformation is not a substitute for governance reform but it is a necessary complement.

These five pillars are not independent; they are interdependent. Governance reform creates the institutional framework for security sector transformation; security sector transformation creates the security conditions for economic transformation; economic transformation creates the fiscal resources for governance reform; citizen agency creates the political pressure for reform; and international partnership creates the external incentives for reform. Each pillar reinforces the others, creating a virtuous cycle of reform that mirrors the vicious cycle of insecurity and corruption.

Final Reflection

Somalia has been trapped in the insecurity–corruption cycle for over three decades since the collapse of the state in 1991. The evidence presented in this book demonstrates that this cycle is not inevitable; it is the product of governance choices by Somalia's political elite, by its international partners, and by its citizens that have prioritized short-term gain over long-term transformation.

Breaking the cycle requires a fundamental change in these governance choices from patronage to accountability, from capacity to governance, from aid dependency to fiscal sustainability, and from elite capture to citizen agency.

This change will not happen quickly or easily; the patronage system has powerful defenders and the reform agenda faces formidable obstacles. But the cost of inaction deepening humanitarian crisis, growing displacement, persistent terrorism, economic stagnation, and political stagnation is far greater than the cost of reform.

Somalia stands at a crossroads. The path of inaction leads toward deepening crisis a future in which insecurity and corruption continue to trap millions of Somalis in poverty, displacement, and fear.

The path of reform leads toward transformation a future in which accountable governance, effective security, citizen agency, and sustainable growth break the vicious cycle and create the conditions for a stable, prosperous, and just Somalia.

The choice is Somalia's to make. But it is a choice that the evidence presented in the preceding twenty-two chapters of this book makes clear. The time for half-measures, performative compliance, and capacity-building without governance is over.

What Somalia needs and what the evidence supports is genuine, integrated, locally owned transformation that addresses the structural foundations of the insecurity–corruption cycle. The Somali people who have endured over three decades of state failure, conflict, and deprivation deserve no less.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Key Data Tables

Table A.1: Somalia Corruption Perceptions Index Scores, 2006–2024

Year	CPI Score (0–100)	Global Rank	Countries Assessed
2006	24	165/163	163
2007	17	179/180	180
2008	12	178/180	180
2009	12	178/180	180
2010	10	178/178	178
2011	10	182/183	183
2012	8	174/176	176
2013	8	175/177	177
2014	8	174/175	175
2015	8	167/168	168
2016	10	176/176	176
2017	9	180/180	180
2018	10 	180/180	180
2019	9 	179/180	180
2020	12 	178/180	180

2021	13	↑	178/178	178
2022	12	↓	178/180	180
2023	11	↓	177/180	180
2024	9	↓	181/182	182
2025	9	↓	181/182	182

Source: Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index, annual reports 2006–2024.

Notes:

The CPI scale is 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). Somalia has never scored above 24 and has ranked at or near the bottom of the index throughout the assessment period. The score of 9 in 2024 places Somalia 181st out of 182 countries, ahead only of countries with comparable or worse governance conditions.

Table A.2: Internal Displacement in Somalia, 2017–2025

Year	Total IDPs (millions)	New Displacements (annual)	Primary Drivers
2017	1.5	1.2	Drought, conflict
2018	2.6	1.1	Drought, conflict
2019	2.6	0.5	Conflict, flooding
2020	2.9	1.2	Flooding, conflict, COVID-19
2021	3.2	0.9	Drought, conflict
2022	3.5	1.3	Drought (2021–2023), conflict
2023	3.8	1.4	Drought, conflict, flooding
2024	3.9	0.8	Conflict, flooding, drought recovery
2025	3.9+	Ongoing	Conflict, climate shocks

Sources: UNHCR Protection Return Monitoring Framework (PRMF); IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM); OCHA Somalia Humanitarian Reports.

Notes: The figures represent cumulative IDP estimates as of the end of each year. New displacements reflect individuals displaced during the calendar year, some of whom may have been displaced multiple times. The primary drivers vary by year, but conflict and climate shocks (drought, flooding) are consistently the two main causes.

Table A.3: Somalia GDP Growth and Key Economic Indicators, 2018–2025

Year	GDP Growth (%)	GDP per Capita (USD)	Inflation (%)	Domestic Revenue (% of GDP)	Current Account Balance (% of GDP)
2018	2.8	447	3.2	2.2	-8.9
2019	3.1	461	3.4	2.5	-9.1

2020	-1.5	434	4.1	2.1	-10.2
2021	2.4	447	4.8	2.6	-8.5
2022	2.6	460	6.9	3.0	-7.8
2023	2.8	472	5.4	3.2	-6.9
2024	3.1	488	4.8	3.5	-6.2
2025 (est.)	3.0	498	4.5	3.8	-5.8

Sources: World Bank Somalia Economic Update (2024, 2025); African Development Bank Country Focus Report (2024); IMF Article IV Consultations.

Notes: GDP per capita estimates are approximate and subject to significant uncertainty due to data limitations in Somalia. Domestic revenue collection has improved gradually but remains far below the sub-Saharan African average of 15–20% of GDP. The current account deficit reflects Somalia's structural dependence on imports, remittances, and international assistance.

Table A.4: Food Insecurity in Somalia, 2020–2025

Year	Acute Food Insecure (millions)	IPC Phase 4 (Emergency, millions)	IPC Phase 5 (Famine, millions)
2020	4.6	1.2	0
2021	5.2	1.6	0
2022	5.9	2.1	0.3 (projected, localized)
2023	6.3	1.9	0
2024	6.5	2.0	0
2025	6.5+	2.1	0

Sources: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Technical Working Group Somalia; FSNAU; OCHA Somalia.

Notes: IPC Phase classifications range from Phase 1 (Minimal) to Phase 5 (Famine/Catastrophe). The figures represent the estimated number of people in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) or above during the peak assessment period each year. The 2022 localized famine projection was avoided through scaled-up humanitarian response, though mortality remained elevated.

Table A.5: Health and Education Indicators

Indicator	Somalia	Sub-Saharan Africa Average	Global Average
Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 100,000 live births)	692	536	223
Under-5 Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)	101	72	37

Life Expectancy at Birth (years)	57.4	61.8	72.6
Primary School Enrollment (%)	32	99	89
Secondary School Enrollment (%)	12	42	66
Literacy Rate, Adult (%)	40	67	86
Health Facilities Offering Delivery Services (%)	45	85+	95+
Physicians per 10,000 Population	0.4	1.9	16.0

Sources:

WHO/UNICEF; World Bank World Development Indicators; UNDP Human Development Report; Somalia Health and Demographic Survey (2020); PMC/NCBI: State of Public Health in Somalia.

Notes:

Somalia's health and education indicators are among the worst globally, reflecting decades of conflict, governance failure, and under-investment. The gap between Somalia and both regional and global averages has persisted over time, indicating that improvements in Somalia have not kept pace with improvements elsewhere.

Table A.6: Al-Shabaab Revenue Estimates

Revenue Source	Estimated Annual Revenue (USD millions)	Assessment Method
Checkpoint taxation and road tolls	15–25	Monitoring reports, defector accounts
Port and trade taxation (controlled areas)	10–20	Trade flow analysis, UN monitoring
Zakat and Islamic taxation	10–15	Community reports, defector accounts
Extortion of businesses and contractors	15–25	Business surveys, UN monitoring
Illicit charcoal trade	5–10	UN Monitoring Group estimates
Illicit sugar and khat trade	5–10	Trade flow analysis
International funding (historical)	5–10	Intelligence estimates (declining)
Total Estimated Revenue	70–100	Composite estimate

Sources:

UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea (various reports); Financial Action Task Force (FATF) mutual evaluation; Horn of Africa reports; Expert interviews and open-source intelligence.

Notes:

These are estimates based on multiple sources and carry significant uncertainty. Al-Shabaab's revenue has proven resilient despite military pressure and international sanctions, reflecting the group's adaptation to loss of territory and its continued ability to extract revenue from populations and economic activity in both controlled and contested areas.

Table A.7: International Assistance to Somalia, Selected Years

Year	Humanitarian Assistance (\$ billions)	Development Assistance (\$ billions)	Security Assistance (\$ billions)	Total (USD billions)
2018	1.2	0.6	0.5	2.3
2019	1.1	0.7	0.6	2.4
2020	1.4	0.6	0.7	2.7
2021	1.5	0.7	0.8	3.0
2022	1.8	0.8	0.9	3.5
2023	1.7	0.9	1.0	3.6
2024	1.6	0.9	1.1	3.6

Sources:

OCHA Financial Tracking Service; OECD DAC; USAID; EU; bilateral donor reports.

Notes:

Figures are approximate and represent commitments rather than disbursements. Actual disbursements are typically lower than commitments. Security assistance includes support to the SNA, the Somali Police Force, and the ATMIS/AUSSOM mission. The total does not include remittances (\$1.3–1.4 billion annually), which are private flows.

Appendix B: Methodology Notes and Research Sources

Methodology

This book employs a mixed-methods approach combining:

1. **Quantitative analysis:** Statistical data from international organizations (World Bank, IMF, UN, WHO, Transparency International) is used to establish the scale

and trends of insecurity and corruption in Somalia. Where possible, trend analysis and comparative analysis are employed to contextualize Somalia's performance relative to regional and global benchmarks.

2. **Qualitative analysis:** Case studies, institutional assessments, and documentary evidence are used to understand the mechanisms and dynamics of the insecurity corruption cycle. Qualitative evidence is drawn from UN Monitoring Group reports, Human Rights Watch reports, academic research, and journalistic investigations.
3. **Comparative analysis:** The experiences of other post-conflict and fragile states including Rwanda, Georgia, Botswana, Liberia, Colombia, and Somaliland are used to identify principles and lessons for governance reform. Comparative analysis focuses on identifying generalizable principles rather than transferable models, acknowledging the unique features of each context.
4. **Policy analysis:** Existing reform initiatives including anti-corruption institutions, security sector reform programs, and international conditionality frameworks are assessed against the evidence of their effectiveness, using implementation data, evaluation reports, and outcome indicators.

Data Limitations

The analysis faces significant data limitations:

- **Data scarcity:** Somalia's statistical infrastructure is among the weakest in the world. The Somalia National Bureau of Statistics (SNBS), established in 2015, has limited capacity and coverage. Many indicators cited in this book are based on estimates rather than census or survey data, and carry significant margins of error.
- **Security access:** Conflict-affected areas particularly Al-Shabaab controlled and contested territories are largely inaccessible to researchers and data collectors, creating a systematic bias in favor of more secure and accessible areas (primarily Mogadishu and the Federal Member State capitals).
- **Corruption measurement:** The Corruption Perceptions Index measures perceptions of corruption rather than actual corruption, and is based on expert assessments that may not capture the lived experience of ordinary Somalis. Experience-based corruption measures such as household surveys and business surveys are limited in Somalia due to security and access constraints.
- **Attribution challenges:** The causal relationship between insecurity and corruption is well-established at the theoretical level but difficult to demonstrate empirically. The evidence presented in this book establishes correlation and plausibility rather than definitive causation.

- **Source reliability:** Some of the evidence cited in this book particularly estimates of Al-Shabaab revenue, ghost soldier numbers, and food aid diversion is based on intelligence assessments, monitoring reports, and journalistic investigations that carry inherent uncertainty. Where estimates are cited, ranges are provided to reflect this uncertainty.

Research Sources

The primary research sources used in this book include:

1. **International organizations:** World Bank, IMF, UN (including OCHA, UNHCR, IOM, UNSOM, UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea), WHO, UNICEF, African Development Bank.
2. **Governance and anti-corruption organizations:** Transparency International, U4 Anti-Corruption Helpdesk, Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Open Government Partnership.
3. **Human rights organizations:** Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).
4. **Academic research:** Peer-reviewed journals including African Journal of Political Science and Administrative Studies (AJPAS), Cogent Business and Management, Journal of Eastern African Studies, African Security Review, and others cited in the References.
5. **Policy research institutes:** Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS), Somali Institute for Development and Research (SIDR), International Crisis Group (ICG), Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Chatham House, Brookings Institution.
6. **Government documents:** Federal Government of Somalia official publications, including the National Development Plan, the Anti-Corruption Commission annual reports, the Financial Governance Center reports, and the Somalia National Bureau of Statistics publications.
7. **Media:** International media (BBC, Al Jazeera, Reuters, AP) and Somali media (Garowe Online, Hiiraan Online, Horseed Media, Goobjoog News) used for reporting of specific events and cases rather than for systematic data.

Appendix C: List of Key Interviews and Expert Consultations

This book draws on consultations with a range of experts, practitioners, and stakeholders, including:

- **International officials:** Current and former officials of UN agencies (UNSOM, OCHA, UNDP), the World Bank, the African Union, and bilateral donors operating in Somalia.

- **Somali government officials:** Current and former officials of the Federal Government of Somalia, including members of the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Financial Governance Center, the Office of the Auditor General, and line ministries.
- **Security sector personnel:** Current and former officers of the Somali National Army, the Somali Police Force, and the National Intelligence and Security Agency.
- **Civil society representatives:** Leaders of Somali civil society organizations, women's groups, youth organizations, and media associations.
- **Academic researchers:** Scholars specializing in Somali governance, conflict, and political economy from universities in Somalia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Kenya.
- **Diaspora representatives:** Members of the Somali diaspora community engaged in governance, development, and advocacy.

Note: Due to the sensitivity of the topics discussed, most interviews were conducted on a confidential basis. Specific individuals are not identified in this appendix unless they have explicitly consented to public attribution.

Appendix D: Glossary of Key Terms (Somali and English)

Somali Term	English Translation	Definition in Context
Laaluush	Bribery/corruption	The giving or receiving of something of value to influence official action
Musuqmaasq	Corruption	The abuse of entrusted power for private gain
Qabiil	Clan	The primary unit of social and political organization in Somali society
Jufo	Clan/sub-clan	A subdivision of a clan; the primary unit of political mobilization
4.5 Hab-Qabiil Qeybsi	4.5 clan formula	The power-sharing arrangement that allocates political positions among four major clans (Hawiye, Darod, Dir, Isaaq) and a coalition of minority clans (0.5)
Xeer	Customary law	The traditional Somali legal system based on clan norms and customary practices
Diyo	Blood compensation	The traditional system of compensation for homicide and injury, paid by the offender's clan to the victim's clan
Isbitaal	Hospital	
Dugsiga	School	

Guurti	House of Elders	The upper house of the Somaliland legislature, representing traditional clan governance
Baarlamaanka	Parliament	The Federal Parliament of Somalia, comprising the House of the People and the Upper House
Xisbi Siyaasi	Political party	
Midnimo	Unity	A core principle of Somali nationalism; also invoked in political rhetoric
Dowladda	Government	
Ciidanka	Military/forces	National Armed Forces
Booliska	Police	
Garsoorka	Judiciary/courts	
Askari aan jirin	Ghost soldier	A non-existent soldier whose salary is collected by an officer or official
Caawinta	Aid/assistance	International humanitarian or development assistance
Qaxooti	Refugee	
Barakacayaal	Internally displaced person (IDP)	A person displaced within Somalia's borders
Shabaab (Al-Shabaab)	The Youth (Al-Shabaab)	The Islamist militant group aligned with Al-Qaeda; also a term meaning "youth"
Zakaat (Zako)	Islamic tax/charity	The religious obligation of Muslims to give a portion of their wealth to charity; Al-Shabaab uses this as a taxation mechanism
Xawaala	Money transfer	The informal value transfer system used for remittances; also the formal money transfer businesses operating in Somalia
Hufnaan	Transparency	
Dastuurka	Constitution	The Provisional Federal Constitution of Somalia (2012, revised 2024)
Xisbiga dowladda	Ruling party	
Xisbiga Mucarad	Opposition party	
Wada tashi	Consultation	The principle of inclusive decision-making in Somali governance tradition
Shir	Assembly/meeting	A traditional gathering for discussion and decision-making
Garta	Justice	
Cadaalad	Justice/fairness	
Xornimo	Freedom	
Caqli-gal	Accountability	

Wakiil	Representative	An elected or appointed Repre; also agent
Ra'iisul wasaaraha	Prime Minister	
Madaxweynaha	President	
Wasiir	Minister	
Gud. Baarlaman	Speaker	Speaker (of Parliament)
Guddiga	Committee	
Lacagaha dibada kasoo xarodo	Remittance	Money sent by diaspora members to families in Somalia

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