# CONFLICT ANALYSIS, GAROWE AND GALKAYO

**Research report**

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**ABOUT THE AGENCY FOR PEACEBUILDING**

*The Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) is a think-and-do organisation committed to bridging the gap between research and practice in peacebuilding. AP aims to contribute to more peaceful and just societies by preventing and transforming violent conflict and creating spaces for dialogue and cooperation across sectors and divides. AP's vision is of a world where conflicts can be transformed without violence and where peace can be promoted through inclusive, innovative and sustainable means.*

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

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*Cover photo description: Participants in a reconciliation event (Credit: Puntland Development Reearch Centre, 2017).*

**IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present conflict analysis has been produced with the main purpose of providing information necessary for the successful implementation of the "Building Reconciliation and Peace through Inclusive Dialogue, Gender Equality, Sport and Protection of Cultural Heritage" (BRIDGES) project, which CEFA Onlus, the Galkayo Center for Peace and Development (GECPD) and the Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) are implementing in and around the Somali cities of Garowe and Galkayo. Conflict in these cities, and their respective states (Puntland and Galmudug), is the consequence of myriad actors, interacting at different levels, and in a context affected by a multitude of forces. Promoting peace and reconciliation requires, as such, an understanding of the roles of the different actors engaged in conflict, and of their interactions.

The analysis was guided by two specific objectives: first, to empower young Somali men and women to identify, directly and without intermediaries, the problems that they want to resolve, and the solutions to address them; and, secondly, to create a shared body of knowledge, on the basis of which project implementers can design and implement activities that are most relevant and truly reflective of communities' needs, concerns and priorities. The study was thus designed and implemented using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. This is "an approach to research that prioritises the value of experiential knowledge for tackling problems caused by unequal and harmful social systems, and for envisioning and implementing alternatives"[1]. This means that the research was effectively co-designed with six Somali researchers, half from Garowe and half from Galkayo, who also led data collection activities, including in-depth interviews with local authorities and government representatives, youth and women leaders; focus group discussions with women civil society representatives, students, parents and elders; and an extensive review of existing literature.

The information collected confirmed a lot of what similar works have identified in the past. The participatory approach, however, also allowed the discovery of important nuances and original perspectives, which were based on the knowledge and privileged access (to people and places) of the Somali researchers. It is these nuances that give the report its added value, which is hopefully reflected in the analysis. Findings are discussed by location and then in relation to three themes (migration, the role of women, and of media).

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[1] "Participatory action research", Cornish, F., Breton, N., Moreno-Tabarez, U. et al., *Nat Rev Methods Primers*, 3, 34, 2023.

**Conflict in Garowe and Puntland.** Society in Puntland, and therefore also in Garowe, is clan-based, and inter-clan grievances, recent and historical alike, are seen as the key causes of conflict in the state. Furthermore, mobilisation happens primarily through clans, and clan affiliation determines parties and coalitions to a conflict. Clans can fight for many reasons, but the analysis suggests that today, clashes happen mostly because of competition over land, and also over water and pastures. This type of conflict is, in the eyes of many, particularly malicious as it has the interdependent effects of dispossessing powerless groups and engendering poverty—which is, on its own, a cause of conflict, especially outside of Garowe. When large-scale, social conflict happens, this is usually caused by political competition, and political elites are actors known to escalate conflict. Yet, Puntland and Garowe have largely avoided the levels of violence seen in Southern and Central Somalia, a result largely credited to elders, who have, over the years since the fall Siad Barre, been the driving force behind several peace agreements. On the other hand, the dominant narrative around young people, who are the largest demographic group in the state, is that they are the ones usually responsible for violence.

**Conflict in Galkayo and Galmudug.** Galmudug's and Galkayo's conflicts are most often over land, and also clan-related. The lack of ownership documents and demarcation leads to overlapping claims and border disputes, normally involving individuals or families. When conflicts take place, clans are regularly mobilised (as they also are in the case of revenge killings) and this leads to conflict escalation and inter-clan violence. The same dynamics apply to competition over water and pastures, which are particularly important in a society that is traditionally nomadic and reliant on livestock. Poverty and unemployment are also drivers of conflict, with unemployment among young people representing a significant problem. Climate-induced disasters are also known to have multiplied instances of confrontation. Overall, Galkayo has historically been the object of intense contention, and has been effectively divided since 1993. A heterogenous clan make-up, and greater intervention by national politicians and forces have made violent conflict a regular occurrence in and around the city. Linked to this, non-state armed groups, including Al-Shabaab, Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a (ASWJ) and Ma'awisley militias, all have a strong presence. This has negatively shaped the narratives around young people's roles, as they are often associated with violence. In truth, young people see few options for themselves, and many choose to migrate.

**Migration and conflict.** Because of the everyday ramification of conflict, young people are often left with a choice: either commit to take part in clan structures, which provide safety but also demand a commitment to protecting clan members and interests, including through violence; or flee. Many choose the latter, and migration is indeed thought to affect nearly all households in Galkayo. The decision can be linked to several push factors and pull factors. The main push factors are insecurity and unemployment. The pull factors are the expectation of better opportunities and improved living conditions. Important

elements that determine the expectations of young people are the peers who already migrated, and their parents. In the end, the departure of large numbers young people has huge economic, cultural and social consequences—usually negative. The effects on conflict and peace are also significant: those who leave do not take part in violent conflicts, but they also do not contribute to reconciliation. Once part of the diaspora, successful migrants can also influence others, usually through social media. This dynamic is, however, perceived as having an additional negative impact on society, as it influences young people's habits and expectations in ways that increase social tension.

**Women and conflict.** Needless to say, the decades of violent conflict have had a terrible impact on women. This is measurable not just in direct violence, the levels of which have been staggering, but also in indirect violence stemming from women's inability to access basic services and economic opportunities. At the same time, Somali women have not been just victims: against great odds, they have managed to play important roles in bringing about peace and reconciliation, with examples from both Puntland and Galmudug. Similarly, there are, today, several women's organisations, across Somalia and in Garowe and Galkayo specifically, which are active in communities and continue to engage different levels of government to improve the safety and participation of women in society. Importantly, in 2023 the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) finally adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security, with commitments to strengthen the role of women in decision-making processes related to peace and security. As part of the NAP, a commitment was also made to launch localisation efforts in all Federal Member States (FMS).

**Media and conflict.** The role of Somali media in the country's political processes, including dynamics of conflict and peace, is complex: they can make both negative and positive contributions, but, overall, their potential for positively impacting narratives around conflict—and peacebuilding—remains, today, largely untapped. The challenges are significant: Somali journalists face many dangers, they have very limited professional development opportunities, while the sector as a whole has scant financial resources. At the same time, Somalia's media landscape is undergoing epochal changes and the country can boast, presently, a vibrant, even if fragmented, media culture. Somali media, today, is very diversified in terms of formats: radio still plays a dominant role, but television is also widely seen. Importantly, there has been a recent boom in the use of social media, in particular among young people and in urban areas. Overall, the media space in Somalia is a contested space, and media outlets can all too often be marginalising and exclusionary. This is certainly the case of how migration is often covered, for instance, and also of how young people are depicted.

The analysis of the causes and dynamics of conflict in Garowe and Galkayo is ultimately meant to inform how to effectively engage stakeholders and increase their positive contributions to peace and security. CSOs, youth and women, authorities and the media can, in fact, play significant roles in peacebuilding, while positive dynamics also exist, which, if effectively leveraged, can support the achievement of the expected results under the BRIDGES project. Based on the analysis, here are indications for how these stakeholders could be engaged:

- To begin with, CSOs and NGOs in all locations are deeply trusted. This is not a surprise, as these are often the only organisations that regularly deliver basic services. Somalis' trust extends to both local organisations and international ones. Any success, in terms of promoting peacebuilding, should therefore go through—and ultimately support—such organisations.

- Young people, for their part, are the largest demographic groups in both Puntland and Galmudug. Perceptions of the role they play on matters of peace and security vary, but it is undeniable that youth have their own agency, and actively exercise it, usually looking to shape a better future. Peacebuilding initiatives should therefore consider this desire, and provide concrete opportunities for personal and professional growth. At the same time, the specific situation of young women should be recognised, and any interventions should seek to address head-on the barriers limiting their participation.

- The proactive engagement of authorities—elected or appointed, official and traditional—will also be fundamental, give that they are the actors who contribute the most to conflict. Authorities must be engaged first and foremost to ensure that they do not block peacebuilding efforts, and particular efforts should be made to engage clan elders, as they are, ultimately, the most important institution for effective conflict resolution in both Garowe and Galkayo.

- Lastly, for peacebuilding efforts to be successful, engagement of the media is also important. Media play a role in conflict prevention, by influencing narratives around youth participation, for instance, or migration. To do this, however, it will be important to address the knowledge gaps that exist in the media sector.

In conclusion, while violent conflict remains a fact of life in both Garowe and Galkayo, much is changing in those cities, their respective states, and in Somalia, which create both challenges and opportunities for building peace and promoting reconciliation. Initiatives like the BRIDGES project are, therefore, undoubtedly relevant, and the project's focus on youth is particularly important: this is a group that faces a particular set of challenges, but is also equipped with high potential for promoting positive change.

Insecurity remains rampant, however, and spaces for effective youth participation are limited because of lack of resources, low capacity and phenomena such as migration.

Based on the analysis provided in this report, the following recommendations are offered in order to guide the implementation of peacebuilding activities under the BRIDGES project, and also beyond it:

1. **Focus on high-consensus conflict issues.** The analysis has identified issues—land conflict in Garowe and migration in Galkayo—on which there appears to be a general consensus, or at least a willingness for engagement by multiple stakeholder groups. These issues represent entry points for important conversations, which could increase social cohesion.

2. **Work on youth narratives.** Young people can either be victims of violent conflict, or they can perpetrate it. The difference appears to be in the narratives people have, and often impose, on youth. Changing these narratives will be important, and it will require working with young people as well as elders and the media.

3. **Engage elders proactively.** Like young people, clan elders can have a dual role: they can foment conflict, or they can resolve it. For this reason, a project like BIRDGES should invest in engaging elders, and engage them proactively.

4. **Build spaces for effective women empowerment.** Women face specific challenges and barriers to participation, which should be addressed head-on. Women empowerment should be promoted through direct and indirect strategies—that is, by providing support to women participants, while also engaging men and authorities.

5. **Find and promote synergies with other NGOs.** Because the needs of young people are varied and complex, connections should be established with other NGOs working on development and humanitarian assistance. Such connections could help to share information about additional opportunities for personal or professional growth, and for participation.

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| AP | Agency for Peacebuilding |
| ASWJ | Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a |
| BRIDGES | Building Reconciliation and Peace through Inclusive Dialogue, Gender Equality, Sport and Protection of Cultural Heritage |
| CSO | Civil society organisation |
| EU | European Union |
| FGS | Federal Government of Somalia |
| FMS | Federal Member State |
| GECPD | Galkayo Centre for Peace and Development |
| IDP | Internally displaced person |
| LPI | Life & Peace Institute |
| NAP | National Action Plan |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| PAR | Participatory Action Research |
| PDRC | Puntland Development Research Centre |
| SOLJA | Somaliland Journalists Association |
| UN | United Nations |
| WPS | Women, Peace and Security |

# INTRODUCTION

The present conflict analysis has been produced with the main objective of providing information necessary for the successful implementation of the "Building Reconciliation and Peace through Inclusive Dialogue, Gender Equality, Sport and Protection of Cultural Heritage" (BRIDGES) project, which CEFA Onlus, the Galkayo Center for Peace and Development (GECPD) and the Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) are implementing in and around the Somali cities of Garowe and Galkayo.

These locations, like nearly all of present-day Somalia, have witnessed high levels of armed conflict since the fall of long-time dictator Siad Barre, in 1991, and violence continues to affect the everyday lives of Somalis living there. Yet, who is affected, and how, can change significantly depending on one's clan, gender, age, wealth and occupation. Some groups—women chief among them—suffer from both structural and political violence. Others, like elders, can both drive violent conflict, and also resolve it. Military and security actors are those usually credited with the responsibility for either promoting or undermining peace and security. But important roles can also be played by young people, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the media. And if Somalia's history is generally associated with violence and extremism, it is also true that many peacebuilding efforts have been launched over the last 30 years, which point to parallel efforts, no less intense than those driving conflict, but aimed at building social cohesion and reconciliation.

Conflict in Garowe and Galkayo, and their respective states—Puntland and Galmudug—is the consequence of myriad actors, interacting at different levels, and in a context affected by a multitude of forces. Promoting peace and reconciliation among the people living in the two cities requires, as such, an understanding of the roles of the different actors engaged in conflict, and of their interactions. This is the present analysis' first and main objective.

The analysis had, however, also a second objective—of almost equal importance to the first. As the first activity under the project, the analysis has, in fact, served as an opportunity to empower a group of Somali researchers, who are based in the two cities. This is, indeed, one of the most crucial and unique aspects of the BRIDGES project: not only that its implementation will be based on sound analysis, but also, and most importantly, that this analysis was generated by Somali researchers who co-designed the scope and questions of the research, and co-led data collection and analysis.

This is a participatory conflict analysis, in other words, which truly reflects the priorities, challenges, concerns and opportunities of the people living in Garowe and Galkayo. As such, while the broad focus is on conflict, peacebuilding and reconciliation, the researchers who co-designed and co-led the study chose to investigate more specific topics: the causes and effects of inter-clan conflict in Garowe, and the interlinkages between conflict and migration in Galkayo. Their findings, which come from interviews and focus groups discussions, and from their individual knowledge, have then been complemented by additional data from research conducted by AP.

The report's first sections are on the BRIDGES project and the methodology. The report then turns to the causes, actors and types and trends in conflict—first for Garowe (and Puntland) and then for Galkayo (and Galmudug). Several thematic sections are then included: the first on the interlinkages between migration and conflict, the second on role of women in conflict, and the last one on the role of media in conflict. Finally, there is a section on stakeholder engagement, before conclusions and recommendations are offered.



*Photo description: Participants to event celebrating violence against women (Credit: GECPD, 2023).*

# PROJECT SUMMARY

The "Building Reconciliation and Peace through Inclusive Dialogue, Gender Equality, Sport and Protection of Cultural Heritage" (BRIDGES) project is an initiative funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by a consortium of civil society organisations (CSOs) led by CEFA Onlus and including the Galkayo Education Center for Peace and Development (GECPD) and the Agency for Peacebuilding (AP).

The overarching objective of the BRIDGES project is to empower, strengthen and mobilise Somali civic society actors in Garowe (in Puntland State) and Galkayo (in Galmudug State) to lead peace and reconciliation processes, foster freedom of expression, and promote a human rights culture in the two cities and their respective states. In particular, the project focuses on empowering women and youth to lead peacebuilding efforts and advocate for human rights and inclusion. It emphasises dialogue, gender equality, sports and Somali cultural heritage to foster reconciliation and peace among communities that have been affected and divided by violent conflict.

The BRIDGES project has two expected outcomes:

- A strengthened role for civil society actors, especially women and youth, as lead actors in the promotion of peace and reconciliation processes, and in the dissemination of a culture of human rights, inclusion, and freedom of expression; and
- The launch of community-driven and owned initiatives to support reconciliation efforts and social cohesion through sport and arts, and create an enabling environment for the development of safe spaces for democratic debate and free artistic expression.

To achieve these outcomes, the implementation of the project includes the following four components:

1. Developing knowledge and awareness for grassroot CSOs and youth to play an active role in building a more peaceful society;
2. Strengthening capacities of youth in particular to become agents of positive change within their communities;
3. Practicing peacebuilding by creating new community-led opportunities of dialogues that contribute to peace and reconciliation; and
4. Celebrating and advocating for peace, Somalia's cultural heritage and social cohesion.

# METHODOLOGY

The conflict analysis had a two-fold purpose: first, to empower young Somali men and women to identify, directly and without intermediaries, the problems that they want to resolve, and the solutions to address them; and, secondly, to create a shared body of knowledge, on the basis of which project implementers can design and implement activities that are most relevant and truly reflective of communities' needs, concerns and priorities.

In line with this purpose, the study was designed and implemented using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. This can be defined as "an approach to research that prioritises the value of experiential knowledge for tackling problems caused by unequal and harmful social systems, and for envisioning and implementing alternatives"[2]. The PAR approach is based on four grounding principles:

1. The authority of direct experience,
2. Knowledge in action,
3. Research as a transformative process, and
4. Collaboration through dialogue.

Broadly speaking, the PAR approach seeks to create knowledge based on, and for the benefit of, those who are usually too powerless or marginalised to be the focus of more traditional research initiatives. This process, according to the PAR approach, should not only produce new insights, which are more rooted in the daily experiences of people, but also influence power relationships.

Its participatory nature is what sets the PAR approach apart from other, more traditional approaches. For this reason, the study was designed to integrate three different levels of participation, and thus also of analysis. The first level included the staff from AP, GECPD and CEFA, who contributed to a first iteration of the research design. The second level then included a group of six Somali researchers, who were trained on participatory research methods and assisted in developing the second and final iteration of the research design. This made the design process effectively co-led. A third level of participation included peers of the Somali researchers as well as community stakeholders, who were engaged in the research through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

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[2] "Participatory action research", Cornish, F., Breton, N., Moreno-Tabarez, U. et al., *Nat Rev Methods Primers* 3, 34 (2023).

The analysis focused on dynamics specific to peace and conflict in Garowe and Galkayo. The starting point was given by a limited set of research questions, focusing on violent conflict. and its causes From here, participants were assisted—through a PAR workshop and mentoring by AP, GECPD and CEFA—in defining the research's scope and guiding questions. The researchers from Garowe thus identified inter-clan conflict as the issue they wanted to investigate. The researchers from Galkayo chose to focus on the interlinkages between migration and conflict. The following table shows the final questions chosen by the Somali researchers in each location.

*Table 1. Research questions*

| Guiding questions for the Garowe team: | Guiding questions for the Galkayo team: |
|---|---|
| • What are the main conflicts in Garowe?<br>• What are the root causes?<br>• How does the competition over scarce resources, such as land and water, influence inter-clan conflicts in Garowe?<br>• What are the primary drivers of violence and escalation in inter-clan conflicts in Garowe?<br>• What are the effects and consequences of these conflicts on communities and especially on youth? | • What are the main push factors that drive youth migration in Galkayo?<br>• How does conflict and violence within a community influence the decision-making process of youth migration?<br>• How does youth migration impact the peace and reconciliation processes in Galkayo?<br>• What are the challenges faced by Somali civic society actors in addressing youth migration and its consequences?<br>• What are the social, economic, and cultural impacts of youth migration on Galkayo?<br>• What are the specific challenges and barriers faced by young migrants during their journey? |

Data collection by the Somali researchers included in-depth interviews with local authorities and government representatives, youth and women leaders; and focus group discussions with women civil society representatives, students, parents and elders. Overall, a total of 16 interviews were conducted (7 in Garowe and 9 in Galkayo) and 6 focus groups (three in each location). Additionally, an extensive review of existing literature was conducted both by the Somali researchers and by AP.

The participation of the Somali researchers was one of the most positive results of the implementation of the research. Their enthusiasm far exceeded initial expectations, and effectively translated into a higher-than-anticipated number of completed interviews and focus groups. Equally important was the

researchers' perspective and knowledge of the specific issues they chose to investigate, which gave them truly unique and important insight into the conflict dynamics of both locations.

The research also faced some limitations. A first one was encountered with the third level of participation expected under the PAR approach. In its original conception, this would have included the mobilisation of an additional group of potential researchers, through the focus group discussions. This did not happen, however, and the participants who were invited to join such groups remained passive informants, rather than active contributors to the conflict analysis. In hindsight, there was little time to allow for the activation of this third level of participation: activities by the researchers had to be completed within five weeks of the first PAR workshop, which gave them little time to engage and effectively empower their peers.

There was a second limitation, however, that might have also contributed to this missed opportunity: the transfer of information within the research team. Producing the analysis in this report required, first, that information about the PAR approach flowed from AP to the Somali researchers, and, secondly, that data collected by the latter flowed back to AP. The physical distance between the teams involved in this process, and the fact that they all were working together for the first time, meant that some information did not flow as expected: there were delays, and some details were certainly lost. It is also on account of the delays that it was difficult to activate the third level of participation.

This said, the completion of the research was ultimately effective, in no small part thanks to the intermediary role played by CEFA and GECPD representatives in Somalia, and by the PAR workshop facilitator. The information gathered was insightful, confirming known dynamics, but also revealing additional details.

# CONFLICT IN PUNTLAND AND GAROWE

After the fall of Siad Barre's regime, Puntland escaped most of the violence that affected the Southern and Central parts of Somalia. The region declared its autonomy in 1998, following a homegrown and community-driven state-building process. It did not, however, sever ties with the Somali state (as the other breakaway entity in the country's North, Somaliland, did). Politics and society in Puntland are closely intertwined with those of Southern and Central Somalia, and politicians from Puntland have been playing an important role in the federalisation process even before the birth of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in 2012.

While Puntland has now become a Federal Member State (FMS), it retains a high level of autonomy, and is able to rely on a somewhat advanced administrative structure compared to other Somali states. Recently, it even experimented with direct voting, based on universal suffrage. This said, the latest state elections, held in January 2024, were run on the traditional indirect voting system: members of the State Parliament were chosen by clan elders. In early 2024, Puntland leaders also threatened to withdraw recognition of the FGS because of a dispute over the country's federal constitution and the amount of power that it would give the federal government. This said, Puntland remains stable and unaffected by large-scale armed conflict, with the exception of the regions bordering Somaliland—specifically Sool and Sanaag—whose control is contested.

## Causes of conflict

The following are the main identified causes of violent conflict in Puntland and Garowe:

**Clan-based grievances.** Society in Puntland, and therefore also in Garowe, is clan-based, and inter-clan grievances, recent and historical alike, are key causes of conflict in the state. Recent grievances are often borne out of land disputes or competition over natural resources (see below), but clan mobilisation can just as much be determined by historical perceptions of injustice. For instance, a conflict mapping conducted by the Puntland Development and Research Center (PDRC) estimated that of all violent conflicts it categorised in Puntland, 45% were clan conflicts[3]. And the causes of these conflicts can sometimes go back to the civil war, when many revenge killings took place, as did looting of properties, including camel rustling. Such grievances are common across the state, and in Garowe.

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[3] "Puntland Conflict Mapping 1990 - 2020", Puntland Development and Research Center (2021).

**Poverty.** The lack of livelihoods has routinely been mentioned as a key cause driving conflict. Poverty levels continue to be very high across Somalia, and in Puntland also. For instance, one assessment found that nearly half of all households in Puntland reported poor food consumption[4]. Available data and anecdotal evidence all point to the same conclusion: people across the state face a very difficult economic outlook. Furthermore, given how reliant the state's economy is on livestock, this outlook is constantly at risk of worsening because of environmental shocks, such as draughts. This said, there are important differences between urban and rural areas, with the former being "wealthier than rural and nomadic areas", according to Puntland's 2020 Somali Health and Demographic Survey[5]. This suggests that poverty indicators are likely to be better in Garowe than elsewhere. Overall, however, the city is affected by the same challenges as the rest of the state. For instance, by some estimates, youth unemployment in Garowe stands at 39%[6].

**Land ownership and demarcation.** Competition over land is a primary driver of conflict in Puntland and Garowe. People interviewed during the research consistently discussed examples of such conflicts, making particular reference to the problem of land grabbing. In their view, land grabbing has the interdependent effects of dispossessing powerless groups from their holdings, creating animosity, and engendering poverty. These acts, which are enabled by a combination of corrupt government officials and a dysfunctional land tenure system, have been key factors in shaping the way that conflict has evolved in the city and across the state, during and after the civil war. Conflicts over land have been resilient, and resistant to effective intervention. Traditional conflict resolution practices, usually led by clan elders, have been unable to handle disputes that often involve interests outside of the city (or the state). And the resolution capacity of communities and institutions has been weakened by shifting demographics and population movement, as well as the desire of foreign investors and members of the Somali diaspora to invest in land and land-based properties.

**Competition for, and access to, natural resources (land and water).** Resources like pastures and water are scarce in Puntland and in Garowe, and controlling them spurs regular conflicts and clashes between individuals, communities and, eventually, also clans. Water resources are a constant source of conflict in Garowe in particular. Land grabbing also regularly happens, as discussed just above. Conflicts over resources often start between individuals, but can quickly escalate into clan conflicts—control over land being an important source of economic and political power. Furthermore, competition over natural

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[4] "Somalia Initial Rapid Needs Assessment", REACH (2016), page 17.
[5] "The Puntland Health and Demographic Survey 2020", Puntland Statistics Department, Puntland State of Somalia (2020), page 26.
[6] "Garowe: Urban Profile", UN Urban Settlements Programme (2019).

resources, and therefore conflict, can increase because of natural calamities, like draughts. And these events are becoming more common, and more intense, because of climate change. According to one report, climate change increases the likelihood of conflict in three ways: first, by impacting livelihoods so harshly that those affected start feeling like they will never be able to recover; secondly, revenue from livestock exports, a key source of income for state authorities, decreases, compromising key services; and thirdly, trust in state institutions is eroded[7].

**Terrorism and crime.** Puntland has been affected by the violence perpetrated by armed non-state groups, like Al-Shabaab. The group, however, operates largely out of remote locations, in the Galgala Mountains close to the city of Bosaso on the coast, and has never been able to mount operations on the scale it did in Southern and Central Somalia[8]. Efforts by Puntland's security forces have contributed to eradicating the group from the state, not entirely, but significantly reducing it as a threat to stability. However, if radicalised groups have not been prominent causes of conflict in Puntland, crime has. For many years, Puntland was one of the epicentres of Somalia's piracy crisis—with the city port of Bosaso being an important base—although in the last 10 years state authorities have effectively curbed the phenomenon. Crime remains a problem, however, and in Garowe many of the people interviewed saw illegal trafficking and drug and alcohol consumption as a cause of violent conflict. Wine smuggling was mentioned as a cause of particular concern, according to many of those interviewed. While Puntland is predominantly Muslim, and the consumption of alcohol is forbidden in Islam, wine smuggling introduces an element that is culturally and religiously sensitive, fuelling criminal activities that potentially lead to clashes between police and armed smugglers. Where such incidents happen, they can exacerbate existing conflict and contribute to unrest.

**Political competition (within the state and with the FGS).** Political elites across the state and in Garowe vie for power, building up tensions that regularly erupt in violence. The history of political confrontation in Puntland is less violent than in other parts of Somalia, but it is nevertheless there. It is also tied to the federalisation process, which political leaders in the state have historically supported, but also opposed whenever it appeared to go against their interests. Very recently, for example, authorities in Garowe have threatened to withdraw recognition of the FGS over the approval of a permanent constitution, which they saw as diminishing Puntland's authority (and limiting its access to aid)[9]. Another division, internal to Puntland, has focused on the introduction of direct voting to replace the clan-based voting system the state has been using since declaring autonomy in 1998. The conflict has pitted the present government,

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[7] "Climate Change and Violent Conflict: A Case Study of Puntland State of Somalia (2008-2020); Dek Abdi Farah (2021).
[8] "Alternatives for Conflict Transformation in Somalia", Life & Peace Institute (2014).
[9] "Somalia: Puntland refuses to recognise federal government after disputed constitutional changes", Africanews.com (2 April 2024).

led by State President Said Abdullahi Deni, against various opposition groups, among them clan elders, and it has resulted in violence[10].

**Tensions with other entities.** Puntland has historically contested control of the regions of Sool and Sanaag from Somaliland, based on the ties it shares with some of the clans who reside in those areas. For this reason, tensions between Puntland and Somaliland have been high, dating back to even before the civil war. And they regularly lead to violence. In fact, armed clashes erupted in and around Las Anod, the main town in Sool, starting at the end of 2022 and into 2023, leaving, according to some reports, more than 80 people dead and around 400 injured[11]. The clashes did not involve Puntland forces: clashes took place between local clan militias and Somaliland forces. However, Puntland continues to maintain a claim on the region, which it controlled between 2003 and 2007. There is a history of violence between Puntland and Somaliland, and the issue has not been settled[12]. Similarly, Puntland and political leaders in Garowe have at times opposed the state-formation process in Galmudug, seeing it as a threat to their own authority.

## Actors

The autonomy that Puntland, and by extension Garowe, has achieved since the start of the civil war means that the conflict landscape in the state is less fragmented than in the rest of Southern and Central Somalia. Below is a brief description of the actors who are seen as those mainly involved in armed conflict and conflict-related violence.

**Clans.** Mobilisation in Puntland, as in all of Somalia, happens primarily through clans, and clan affiliation determines parties and coalitions to a conflict. Compared to Southern and Central Somalia, Puntland is considered more homogenous in terms of clan composition, however, with several analyses suggesting this to be a cause for the state's post-Barre stability[13]. Still, it features different clans, whose relations shape conflict and cooperation in the region. Darood is main clan family in Puntland, and Harti is the main sub-clan family. Within this, there are four further divisions: the Majerteen, Dhulbahante, Warsangeli and Deshiishe. Of these sub-clans, the Majerteen are the largest, but different clans can be a majority in different regions. Lastly, under the Majerteen there are four sub-clans: Mohamed Suleiman (the most populous within the Majerteen family), Omar Mohamed, Issa Mohamed and Osman Mohamed. Minority

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[10] "Dozens killed in Somalia's Puntland after parliament debate", Al-Jazeera, (20 June 2023).
[11] "What's driving conflict in the disputed Somali city of Las Anod?", Al-Jazeera (20 February 2023).
[12] For a more extensive overview of this conflict, see: "Dealing with Las Anod amidst Somalia's protracted state crisis", ISPI (2023).
[13] "The Puntland Experience: A Bottom-up Approach to Peace and State Building", Interpeace and Puntland Development Research Centre (2007).

clans are also present in the region, having come as internally displaced people (IDPs) from other parts of Somalia. As will be discussed below, clan competition is the cause of constant tension and occasional conflict, from revenge killings to land disputes and political violence.

**Political elites.** While political competition in Puntland and Garowe has not led to large-scale conflict, political elites in the state and in the capital are actors known to escalate conflict. Indeed, as in other parts of the country, politicians have repeatedly been mentioned as one of the key actors in conflict. They are also often seen as using clans to purse their own political objectives. The most recent clashes involving government and opposition groups, on the issue of direct voting, can be seen as an example of political actors inciting violence. The history of the state includes other examples of political tensions undermining social cohesion and leading to violence, although in most cases agreements were reached before major incidents could occur.

**Elders.** Elders in Puntland have considerable authority, which they can use to foment conflict as well as to promote peace. For now, elders are primarily credited with the latter, as they have been the driving force behind the organisation of several peace conferences where agreements between leaders and clans were reached—preserving the state's post-civil war stability. These included, for instance, the *Shir Beleed* in 1998, otherwise known as the Garowe Community Constitutional Conference, which is seen as the moment when Puntland State was officially created[14]. Elders in Puntland play a particularly important role also because of the state's governance system, whereby it is the elders themselves who come together to select the members of the State Parliament, which in turn nominates and elects the State President. At the same time, elders can also sow divisions, if and when they see their authority threatened.

**Youth.** Young people are the largest demographic group in Puntland and Garowe. For this reason alone, they are an important bloc in terms of peace and conflict. Perceptions about the role youth play in the state vary. Young people are generally associated with violence. Youth gangs started to form in the political and security vacuum created by the fall of the Barre regime, including across Northeast Somalia[15]. And young men are usually the ones who mobilise to defend clan interests when inter-clan disputes over land or water arise. Young men are also the ones usually thought to be most susceptible to extremist propaganda and recruitment[16]. On the other hand, many point instead to the contributions young people make to social cohesion and reconciliation[17], and others are more concerned about youth migration. Regardless of what one might think of young's people role in peace and security, there is a

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[14] *Ibid.*, page 25.
[15] *Ibid.*, page 13.
[16] "Peace in Puntland: Mapping the Progress", Interpeace and the Puntland Development Research Centre (2015).
[17] See, for example: "Youth as Agents of Peace – Somalia", World Bank (2018).

general agreement that, as one report notes, "poverty, high unemployment and lack of youth development programmes alienate young Somalis[18]".

**Extremist groups.** Both Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State are present in Puntland, but their presence remains limited to remote areas—the Galgala mountains and the Al Miskad mountains respectively. This said, the groups remain active and capable of attacking authorities. The Islamic State in particular appears to have grown in recent years, also daring to attack Al-Shabaab forces[19]. The threat of these groups therefore remains, as does the effects of the violence they perpetrate, however limited this may be.

## Conflict types and trends

As the analysis presented thus far should make clear, Puntland and Garowe have largely avoided the level of violence that has engulfed Southern and Central Somalia since the start of the civil war in the early 1990's. This, however, should not be equalled with a lack of conflict, which remains all too common in the state as in the rest of the country. These conflicts can be said to belong to four different categories: political conflicts, resource conflicts, extremism-related conflicts, and crime-related conflicts.

Political conflicts are those involving leaders from the state, as well as leaders in Somalia's federal government. Anytime the state has teetered on the threshold of instability, this has usually happened because of the actions and ambitions of leaders. For instance, one of the state's worst crises happened in 2001, when then President Abdulahi Yusuf sought to remain in power even though his term had ended. In line with the State's constitution, the one adopted when Puntland declared its autonomy in 1998, elders elected a new executive, and a new president, and a civil struggle effectively took place between the forces of the old and newly appointed presidents. Following a lengthy mediation process, led by a diverse group of clan elders, a peace agreement was eventually reached in 2003, averting all-out war. The two recent conflicts involving political elites should be seen in the same light. The first is the constitutional crisis between Puntland authorities on the one side and federal leaders on the other, which is about power and the resources that come from the FGS. The second is the voting crisis between Puntland's current President and opposition groups. Indeed, these types of conflict regularly occur in Garowe and across Puntland, sometimes leading to violence. Since the State's declaration of autonomy, this violence has, however, been contained.

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[18] *Ibid.,* page 18.
[19] "The looming threat: A resurgence of Islamic State and inter-clan fighting in Somalia", ACLED (2024).

Resource-based conflicts are those over land and water. Land disputes are very common in Garowe, and largely due to poor governance—hereby intended as both the lack of adequate and clear laws about land ownership and demarcation, and the lack of enforcement. Conflicts over land tend to be different depending on whether they happen in rural or urban areas. In rural areas, people, families or communities compete for land because they need it for their livelihood—whether this revolves around livestock or farming. In urban areas, conflicts occur over ownership. In both cases, conflicts fester because there are multiple rules determining claims: there is state law, there is Sharia law, and there is *xeer* (Somali customary law). This means that there are in effect "multiple institutions which share mandates over land issues"[20]. These institutions—including municipal administrations, courts and elders—might compete for authority. All of them usually have weak or no capacity for enforcing agreements. Conflicts over land and natural resources are also the ones that tend to assume an intern-clan dimension. As one report notes, "regardless of where conflicts start (urban or rural), they have the potential to escalate as clan loyalties and identities are mobilised on either side of the conflict"[21].

Extremism-related conflicts are those involving Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State. As noted, these conflicts are not a concern at present: the two groups have a limited presence in Puntland, and have therefore not been capable of mounting the kind of operations and attacks seen in Southern and Central Somalia. The lack of success of these groups can in part be traced to Puntland's ability to maintain social cohesion, including a high degree of political consensus among the state's clans. This consensus has, in turn, contributed to the establishment of administrative and governance systems effective for promoting stability and peace (hereby intended as the absence of violent confrontations). However, these governance systems are still weak, in both the city and across the state—hence the high incidence of conflicts over resources. Assessments of the state's security sector, for instance, highlight low capacity, insufficient oversight and the poor quality of infrastructures used by official police and armed forces[22].

Extremist groups continue, as such, to pose a threat to stability in Puntland and Garowe. The appeal of extremism groups remains that they are seen as capable of providing security and justice, beyond the clan system: if state institutions lose consensus, the standing of these groups might therefore improve in people's eyes. The other reason for these groups' continued presence can also be found in people's poverty and unemployment. Extremist groups are known to be able to give people, including young men, a stable source of income. If the state appears unable to provide livelihood opportunities, Somalis might again re-evaluate the role of those groups.

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[20] "Land conflict in Somalia", Somalia Stability Fund (2022), page 31.
[21] *Ibid.*, page 27.
[22] "Peace in Puntland: Mapping the Progress", Interpeace and the Puntland Development Research Centre (2015), pages 15-16.

Lastly, there are crime-related conflicts. In the recent past, the State has seen very high levels of piracy. The causes of this phenomenon have been contested, however. Some believe that they can be found in poverty and unemployment—which drove people to become pirates. Others suggest that people engaged in piracy were also driven by a desire to resist what they saw as the plunder of national resources by foreign actors. Regardless of the motivations, young men have been known to turn to piracy in large numbers[23]. Presently, however, the phenomenon continues to remain limited, in large part thanks to the campaigns that the Puntland authorities and security forces conducted in the early and mid-2010's. This said, as opportunities for people in rural areas continue to remain very limited, or even decrease because of natural calamities, a resurgence in piracy might slowly be happening[24].



*Photo description: Consultation on the Somali youth peace charter (Credit: Puntland Youth Association Network, 2023).*

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[23] "Puntland Youth: Challenges, Prospects and Opportunities", Puntland Development Research Centre (2013), page 33.
[24] "The Roots of Somalia's Slow Piracy Resurgence", International Crisis Group (2024).

# CONFLICT IN GALMUDUG AND GALKAYO

Modern Galmudug has faced intense political rivalries and frequent clan conflicts as various groups have vied for territorial control. Similarly, the city of Galkayo has historically been the object of competition and contention by different clans and political and military forces. In fact, the city has been effectively divided since 1993, when the signing of the Mudug Peace Agreement divided the city in two parts—North and South Galkayo—on the basis of clan lines[25]. Presently, Galkayo remains split between two administrative regions: North Galkayo is in Puntland State, and South Galkayo in Galmudug State. Galmudug itself was initially formed in 2006[26] from parts of Galguduud and South Mudug, with South Galkayo as its capital. At that time, however, the creation of a new administrative unit proceeded unevenly, and only in 2012, with the adoption of the interim federal constitution, did the efforts to unify the two regions gain momentum. In 2014, regional representatives and the FGS formalised the creation of the state-level administration[27]. Despite challenges, major clans supported the initiative, and the so-called Adaado conference, held in April 2015, led to the creation of a State constitution and parliament. Abdikarim Guled was elected State president, and, in July 2015, Galmudug State was established with Adaado as its provisional capital.

## Causes of conflict

The following are the main identified causes of violent conflict in Galmudug:

**Land ownership and demarcation.** The lack of proper ownership documents and land demarcation leads to overlapping claims, territorial expansion, and border disputes, which normally involve individuals or families, but usually also spark clan-related violence. These conflicts are driven by the belief that more land ownership equates to greater power in power-sharing negotiations, making land competition a prevalent issue across Galmudug[28].

**Competition for scarce natural resources.** Communities in the state, including in Galkayo and surrounding areas, are traditionally nomadic and reliant on livestock, and they frequently move in search of water and pasture, especially during droughts. When individuals, families or communities move, seeking access

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[25] "Galkayo and Somalia's Dangerous Fault-lines", International Crisis Group (2015).
[26] "Clans, consensus and contention: federalism and inclusion in Galmudug", Saferworld (2020).
[27] *Ibid.*
[28] "Conflict Assessment, Galmudug State", Berghof Foundation (2019).

to scarce resources like water and pastures, they often settle in land that has been claimed by others. This creates the conditions for regular clashes, and such resource-based conflicts remain prevalent across Galmudug. Often, these conflicts arise when one clan allows another clan the temporary use of their resources, but the visiting clan then settles permanently by drilling a water well, signalling a desire to stay[29]. This breach of agreement typically leads to violent clashes and the eviction of the visiting clan. Conflicts over natural resources are also made worse by climate-induced crises, like droughts (see below).

**Revenge killings.** Revenge attacks are a chronic cause of conflict in Galkayo and in Galmudug[30] more generally. A report by the Berghof Foundation, for example, found that most people in the state reported that revenge-motivated conflict was common in their areas. People interviewed for this research all agreed that deep-seated grievances from past incidents drive individuals, especially sons and brothers of victims, to seek revenge, perpetuating cycles of violence. In some cases, "value killing" occurs, where an innocent person of equal value is targeted. To most people, these attacks are a serious, urgent problem, as they restrict people's freedom and ability to work due to fear of retaliation. Revenge killings also fuel inter-clan conflict, as they are one of the main legitimate causes for mobilising support from clan members.

**Relationship with federal authorities.** Violent conflict in Galkayo can happen because of the relations between the city, Galmudug State and the FGS. To begin with, there can be interference by authorities and politicians in Mogadishu. Many of Somalia's political elite, including current and former presidents and prime ministers, hail from Galmudug, creating a close connection with Mogadishu, whose interventions can often complicate stability in the state[31]. Galkayo, as a city, and Galmudug as a state, also have very limited financial resources on their own, which hinder their administrative development and increase their dependency on Mogadishu. This is especially true for security, with communities and authorities in Galmudug having to rely heavily on Somali federal armed forces, unlike in Puntland. Galmudug's weak resource base drives its dependence on Mogadishu, reducing the State's leverage with Mogadishu and allowing politicians in the capital to play an outsized role in state affairs[32]. Despite many of Somalia's elite coming from the state, there is, in fact, a common complaint that the federal government neglects investing in the state except for political meddling[33]. For instance, while the state's economy relies on livestock and commerce, Galmudug still lacks a major port, and its infrastructure is significantly underdeveloped. For this, many people blame the federal government[34]. At the same time, the closeness

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[29] *Ibid.*
[30] "Conflict Assessment, Galmudug State", Berghof Foundation (2019).
[31] "Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War", International Crisis Group (2014), page 7.
[32] According to one report, "Some analysts argue that Galmudug was a platform contested by rival political actors based in Mogadishu rather than a genuine reconciliation process for local communities. As a result, local ownership and involvement were weak ("Galmudug: Governance, State Formation, Conflict Dynamics, and Reconciliation", Heritage Institute, 2024, page 11).
[33] "Governance, state formation, conflict dynamics and reconciliation", Heritage Institute (2024).
[34] "Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War", International Crisis Group (2014), page 7.

between Galmudug and the FGS has also sowed tension between the former and Puntland, which controls the Northern half of Galkayo, and has been wary of the state-formation process in Galmudug.

**Poor governance.** All efforts to analyse the causes of conflict in the Galmudug, including in Galkayo, point to the role of poor governance. Since government institutions were destroyed during the civil war, Somalia has lacked the institutional capacity necessary to deliver basic services to its communities, let alone to resolve conflicts and manage their effects. Poor governance—hereby intended as both the lack of effective laws (on health, justice, commerce, natural resources, etc.) and the lack of capacity to fairly implement existing regulations—is one of the causes behind many of the conflicts occurring in the city and across the state, including those around land ownership, and those around the use of natural resources like water. Poor governance is often also cited as a reason why conflicts endure, as most of the local actors, including religious leaders, community elders, and government representatives themselves, regularly highlight the government's inability to implement agreements reached during mediation processes[35].

**Poverty and unemployment.** Poverty and unemployment are significant drivers of conflict not just in Galkayo, but also in all the major cities and towns across the state, including Dhusamareb and Adado. Unemployment among young people has been cited as a particularly significant problem, and a driving force for violence in Galkayo. With no prospects, young people are left with what amount to two options: mobilise to support claims made by their clans, including taking up arms and committing violence (for example in response to revenge killings), or else they can migrate. In both cases, the lack of livelihoods is a driving force. Available economic data shows that growth in Somalia has so far failed to create the jobs necessary to alleviate unemployment and poverty. From 2019 to 2023, growth averaged a mere 2% annually, while real GDP per capita decreased by an average of 0,8%. Labour force participation rates remain exceptionally low, with significant gender disparities: only one-third of men and 12% of women are active in the labour market. Poverty is widespread and persistent, with recurrent climate-related or conflict-related shocks raising the risk of more individuals falling into poverty[36].

**Natural calamities and climate change.** The entire Horn of Africa region is suffering from the worst drought in decades, with Somalia being the most affected after three consecutive failed rainy seasons. Thousands of rural and pastoralist communities, reliant on natural resources for their survival, are facing hunger as wells dry up. The severity of the drought is a contributing factor to violent conflicts between communities. This happens in two ways. First, natural calamities, made worse by climate change, reduce

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[35] See, for example: "Conflict Assessment, Galmudug State", Berghof Foundation (2019).
[36] "Somalia", World Bank (2021).

the availability of natural resources, thus increasing competition among those reliant on them. Secondly, calamities fuel displacement: over 700,000 people have been forced from their homes in search of food, water, and pasture for their animals, adding to the nearly three million already internally displaced within the country[37]. As people move, land conflicts increase.  Overall, the escalating frequency and severity of droughts, which perpetuate cycles of famine and humanitarian crises, are among Somalia's most urgent challenges. The situation is particularly acute in Galmudug broadly, and Galkayo specifically, given how livelihoods are linked to pastoralism. Mobility patterns can thus result in clan mobilisation, all factors with the potential to instigate conflicts[38].

## Actors

As with the rest of Somalia, Galmudug and Galkayo are also characterised by the presence of numerous state and non-state armed actors[39]. Below is a brief description of those actors who are seen to be mainly involved in armed conflict and conflict-related violence.

**Clans (and clan-based militias).** Galmudug's clan structures shape the social and political systems of the state. The state is inhabited by many different clans, with additional ones having settled in it through displacement (see below). This makes the state, including Galkayo, heterogenous. Galmudug is predominantly inhabited by clans of the Hawiye family, notably the Hawiye-Habar Gidir (centred in Galkayo), Suliman (centred in Adaado) and Air, or Cayr, (centred in Dhuusamareeb) sub-clans[40]. Among other sub-clans, the Hawiye-Murasade, Hawiye-Abgaal, Hawiye-Habar Gidir-Duduble and Saruur, as well as smaller enclaves of Darood Marehan and Dir are also present[41]. The Mudug region of the state is *de facto* split into two entities, with Puntland controlling the Northern half, including half of the city of Galkayo, along the so-called Tomaselli line. This divide, which was established by Italian authorities during Italy's colonial rule[42], mirrors clan divisions between two rival clan families: the Darood (specifically the Majeerteen and Omar Mahmood sub-clan) who dominate Galkayo's Puntland-administered North, and the Hawiye (specifically Habar Gidir-Saad sub-clan) who dominate the South of the city. Many of the conflicts described in the previous section, including around land ownership or access to natural resources, are conflicts between clans, as well as within clans. These happen regularly[43], often resulting in small-

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37 "In Pictures: Devastation of Drought Felt by Communities in Galmudug, Somalia", IOM (2022).
38 "Scarcity, Mobility, and Conflict in Somalia: Climate Change and the Future of Transhumance in Galmudug and Hirshabelle States", Geneva Graduate Institute (2023).
39 "Somalia: Security situation", EUAA (2023).
40 "Avoiding a New Cycle of Conflict in Somalia's Galmudug State", International Crisis Group (2023).
41 "Clans, consensus and contention: federalism and inclusion in Galmudug", Saferworld (2020).
42 According to at least one source, this has been the "most contentious" boundary established by Italian authorities (See: "A short Note on the Administrative Order introduced in Somalia by the Italian Trusteeship Authorities (1950-1960)", Mohamed I. Trunji, Hiraan Online).
43 "Somalia: Security situation", EUAA (2023).

scale, but deadly clashes[44]. For this reason, clans usually have militias, which they mobilise as necessary in order to defend their members.

**Political elites.** Politicians are repeatedly mentioned as one of the key drivers of conflict in the state. In order to gain political influence and recognition, some have been known to fund armed conflicts and mobilise their respective clans. Many are seen as corrupt individuals who chase their own interests and the interests of their clans only, rather than the interests of the entire community[45].

**Business community.** The business community in the state is seen as the second-biggest driver of conflict in Galmudug after the politicians[46]. Many people, especially youth and political representatives throughout the region, mentioned that some businesspeople ignite conflicts in order to profit financially from them, be it through the selling of weapons and food items or because general food prices increase during times of conflict.

**Elders and religious leaders.** These individuals are seen by most societal groups as moral authorities, holding significant power and influence, which can be used to promote either conflict or peace. They are often mentioned as key figures in conflict resolution and reconciliation: for instance, many analyses highlighted the important role of elders in Somali's traditional legal system (*xeer*). However, traditional elders can also escalate conflicts by encouraging their clan members to fight. They are also not always seen as symbols of social cohesion: youth groups, in particular, are sceptical of the moral authority of some traditional elders and frequently identify them as potential conflict drivers.

**Youth.** Young people, and young men in particular, are often blamed as primary actors in conflict, as they are the ones who mainly do the fighting. Approximately two-thirds of Galmudug's population are under 20 years old, and more than three-quarters (79%) are under 30. Youth aged 15-to-29 years old make up 22% of household members, while older individuals (65 years and above) constitute only 4%. The working-age population (15-to-64 years old) accounts for 40% of household members, underscoring the importance of job creation and ensuring that training and education meet the labour market's needs[47]. This said, youth unemployment is said to be very high, and the assumption many studies make is that unemployed youth can be easily persuaded to take up arms against each other. Conversely, many analysts also talk about the youth's potential in conflict resolution and reconciliation.

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[44] "Avoiding a New Cycle of Conflict in Somalia's Galmudug State", International Crisis Group (2023).
[45] "Conflict Assessment, Galmudug State", Berghof Foundation (2019).
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] "Somali Health and Demographic Survey", Government of Somalia (2021).

**Federal Government of Somalia (FGS).** As already mentioned, a significant portion of Somalia's political elite at federal level hails from Galmudug, including current President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, his predecessor Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo," and three recent prime ministers (Abdi Farah Shirdon, Hassan Ali Khaire, and Mohamed Hussein Roble). This creates a close connection between political dynamics in Galmudug and Mogadishu. With limited revenue streams, Galmudug relies heavily on subsidies from the Somali capital, which has a strong interest and influence in the state[48].

**Security forces.** Several government-sponsored armed groups are active in the state and in the city of Galkayo. Federal security forces, including the Somali National Army (SNA), the Special Forces, the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), the Police Force, and the Prison Forces, are all present and conduct regular operations. State-level forces are also present.

**Non-state armed groups.** These have a strong presence in the State, with a significant role in conflict. The main non-state armed groups in the state are Al-Shabaab, the multi-clan militia group Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a (ASWJ) and, more recently, Ma'awisley militias.

Al-Shabaab is the Islamist Sunni Salafi jihadist armed group based in South-Central Somalia, which was formed in the early 2000's. The group seeks to establish an Islamic caliphate state in Somalia.[49] Al-Shabaab stages fewer and smaller attacks in Galmudug than in other parts of Southern Somalia, like Southwest State or Jubaland, where its raids are daily occurrences.[50] But its operations in Galmudug are nonetheless substantial – both in resisting the federal government's offensive and in targeting civilians opposing the expansion of its rule.

ASWJ is a militia group formed in 1991 by Sunni Sufi Muslims to oppose jihadist groups predating al-Shabaab.[51] Operating mainly in Galmudug and the Hiraan region of Hirshabelle, ASWJ emerged as a loose ally of Somalia's transitional governments, boasting at least 5,000 fighters by 2017.[52] ASWJ managed to liberate areas held by Al-Shabaab, in Galmudug, and also in Puntland and Somaliland, and restore some level of stability. In doing so, the group enjoyed close support from Ethiopia for many years, leading to divisions with politicians in Mogadishu. The group's military successes also translated into political ambitions, with ASWJ evolving from a religious-clan militia into a potent political actor. Opinions about ASWJ's role in conflict vary[53]. In Galkayo, for instance, ASWJ is frequently identified as a major

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[48] "Avoiding a New Cycle of Conflict in Somalia's Galmudug State", International Crisis Group (2023).
[49] *Ibid.*
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] "Clans, consensus and contention: federalism and inclusion in Galmudug", Saferworld (2020).
[52] "Somalia: Security situation", EUAA (2023).
[53] "Conflict Assessment, Galmudug State", Berghof Foundation (2019).

spoiler, driving violent conflict[54]. Elsewhere, the group is seen as a bastion against Al-Shabaab's extremism. This said, the group has faced accusations of human rights abuses[55].

Ma'awisley (the wearers of "*ma'awis*", a traditional sarong worn by Somali farmers) are non-state militias that have recently emerged as an important actor[56]. The formation of the militia group started in Hirshabelle State, when farmers opted to oppose the attempts by al-Shabaab to force them to donate money, weapons and boys to fight against the Somali government. Since then, the militias have contributed to mobilise men against Al-Shabaab, claiming various successes[57]. By one estimate, one in four households (26%) are involved in Ma'awisley militias, mainly in the Northern Mudug region[58].

**Internally Displaced People (IDPs).** Galmudug has one of the highest concentrations of IDPs in the country, who initially fled from protracted clan conflicts in Southern Somalia, and later from areas controlled by Al-Shabaab[59]. The estimated number of IDPs in Dhusamareb is 31.000 and in Cadaado it is 11.000[60]. In Galkayo in general the number is estimated at 122.000, with 72.000 in South Galkayo alone[61]. IDPs are not seen as political stakeholders since they are not from local clans. For this reason, they are usually allowed to live peacefully in any area. Yet, they are also not recognised as citizens of the state[62], leaving them with little to no power. Some of these IDPs have lived in the region for over 20 years, but their different clan identities have meant they lack political and clan representation[63]. There are also cases where their presence, coupled with the absence of clear land demarcation and effective conflict resolution mechanisms, exacerbated competition for limited resources, and fuelled tensions[64].

## Conflict types and trends

Conflict remains an everyday occurrence in Galmudug and in Galkayo specifically, affecting the lives of nearly all its residents. In general, the conflicts that occur across the state can be said to belong to four different categories: clan-based conflicts, political conflicts, resource-based conflicts, and terrorism-related conflicts.

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[54] *Ibid.*
[55] "Clans, consensus and contention: federalism and inclusion in Galmudug", Saferworld (2020).
[56] "Somali actors: Country of origin information report", EASO (2021), page 98.
[57] Governance, state formation, conflict dynamics and reconciliation", Heritage Institute (2024).
[58] "Galmudug district profiling", IOM (2023).
[59] "Clans, consensus and contention: federalism and inclusion in Galmudug", Saferworld (2020).
[60] "CCCM Cluster Somalia", UNHCR (2022).
[61] "Verified IDP sites in South Galkayo as of March 2024", UNHCR, 2024.
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] "Scarcity, Mobility, and Conflict in Somalia: Climate Change and the Future of Transhumance in Galmudug and Hirshabelle States", Geneva Graduate Institute (2023).

Clan-based conflicts refer to conflicts that pit one clan against another. Clan affiliation being a key feature of Somali society, in Galmudug as much as across the country, most conflicts tend to have, at one point or another, a clan dimension. Relationships between clans are, however, determined by many different factors, including long-held or historical grievances about past conflicts. These grievances can shape how clans react and respond to each other's claims. Land ownership disputes, for instance, may start as a conflict between individuals, around whom clans might then mobilise, and this effectively brings an escalation that regularly generates violence.

Political conflicts are those involving local, state-level and federal politicians. Political power in Galmudug is often associated with control over resources. Political elites regularly clash for such control, at multiple levels: political leaders might interfere in local disputes, to gain access to resources such as land and water; they may fight at the federal level, to claim financial resources; they may also mobilise their own clans, turning political into clan-based conflicts. Such conflicts contribute to the state's poor governance, favouring corruption and lack of accountability.

Resource-based conflicts are a different type of conflict, which are neither clan-based nor political, at least not at first. Access to water and pastures are crucial for pastoralist and nomadic (or semi-nomadic) communities, who represent an important demographic group in the state, and who are particularly vulnerable to climate-induced shocks[65]. In this context, such conflicts are likely structural—or unavoidable, in other words. Whether they become violent, however, depends on a process of escalation, which usually happens through clan mobilisation or political interference, in which case they can become clan-based or political conflicts.

Lastly, there are terrorism-related conflicts—in particular those pitting Al-Shabaab against government authorities or against communities. The causes of this type of conflicts are among those already identified: poverty and lack of opportunities on the one side, and poor governance on the other, which feeds perceptions of unfair treatment and injustice. The patterns differ, however, to the extent that the objectives are generally more political than it is the case in clan-based conflicts like revenge killings or resource-based conflicts over land and water.

Ultimately, conflicts in Galmudug and in Galkayo are often overlapping and intertwined, and can find their origin in several of the causes described in the previous section. This can explain the uneven record

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[65] See: "Galmudug District Profiling", IOM Somalia, 2023.

of the state in addressing and resolving violent conflict, which shows considerable progress on the one side, but also continuous challenges on the other.

Large territories of Galmudug have, in fact, recently been liberated from al-Shabaab. Inter-clan conflicts have also been known to decrease in number and intensity. Developments like these ones should contribute to greater stability in the state, but they often do not last. Because of poor governance, as well as poverty and unemployment, communities rarely see the benefits from peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. For example, recent attempts at forming district councils, which were meant to create a responsive layer of local governance, did not succeed because of the lack of effective reconciliation and governance mechanisms[66]. Clan-based conflicts therefore persist and then flare up, as do natural resources-based conflicts. And when they do, political interference risks escalating conflicts and triggering violence. Ultimately, Galmudug remains a focal point of confrontation in Somalia, particularly due to the concentration of heavily armed clans.

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[66] Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War", International Crisis Group (2014).

# MIGRATION AND CONFLICT

Because of the everyday ramification of conflict in Galkayo, young people are often left with a choice: either commit to take part in clan structures, which provide safety but also demand a commitment to protecting clan members and interests, including through violence, whenever necessary; or flee from the city[67]. The links between conflict and migration are ultimately profound, and they affect nearly everyone in the city. It is for this reason that migration, as an issue, was deemed important enough to be investigated on its own.

Migration is thought to affect nearly all households in Galkayo. Anecdotally, with households in the city usually comprising between 6 and 10 children, it is estimated that at least two or three of them will migrate when they grow up. Everyone interviewed for the research knew someone who had migrated, and many had experienced migration directly. As a parent in one of the focus groups discussions said, "I am suffering because of migration", adding that one of his kids had migrated and that he still did not know where he went. The dimension of the phenomenon is very huge, and its impact is not narrow. Yet, while the numbers of Somalis who migrate from the city is large, it cannot be adequately assessed. People who decide to migrate can use legal and illegal routes: those who migrate illegally cannot be counted because there is no system for it; those who migrate legally are not counted because that is not considered important. Once they migrate, people's destinations can vary: many migrate internally, to larger cities such as Garowe or Mogadishu. According to many community representatives interviewed, educated people are particularly prone to migrate to other Somali cities, like Garowe, where a lot of young people from Galkayo live. Others leave the country, aiming to reach Europe or North America, or settling in other African countries.

Both young men and women migrate, though for different reasons and in different ways. Usually, young men and boys migrate when they are younger and they are driven, as will be discussed later, by insecurity and unemployment. Young women and girls usually work in the house, and their mobility is severely restricted by patriarchal and traditional norms. When the migrate, they do so at older ages, compared to male migrants, and often when they are already married. Overall, however, the general sense is that young men and boys make up most of the migrants leaving the city. This is also because of the fact that young men and boys can leave the house at a younger age, and are thus able to share information with

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[67] The analysis in this section is focused on Galkayo. This is because the team of researchers based in the city chose to focus on the theme of migration and its relation with conflict.

each other more freely, they are more exposed to examples or role models, and can plan together with their peers.

## Push and pull factors

Young people chose to migrate for a combination of push factors (reasons related to one's current situation, which compel him or her to consider leaving the country) and pull factors (reasons related to one's expectations about his or her destination, which make migrating desirable). The main push factors that drive youth migration from Galkayo appear to be insecurity and unemployment.

The role of inter-clan conflicts has already been discussed. Such conflicts are omnipresent in Somalia, and in Galkayo, and they affect young people's lives, if not every day, then definitely in relation to key developmental milestones, like finding a job or marrying and starting a family. For both young men and women, clans are seen as demanding a commitment with significant risks: with young men in particular, the expectation is that they must be ready to fight to defend clan members and interests. And such fights, in Galkayo, happen regularly, likely contributing to young people's feelings of insecurity. In this regard, clan-based conflicts are definitely the main push factor, among young generations. Inter-clan clashes create an unstable environment, and since clashes are often linked to historical grievances, they are likely seen to affect one's entire adult life. This violence represents a threat that forces people to move to safer places.

Insecurity is compounded by the lack of employment opportunities for young people, which is the other main factor pushing young people to migrate. Poverty and unemployment have already been described as among the causes of conflict, and they are among the causes of migration, too. Economic prospects are felt to be particularly dire in Galkayo compared to other cities, driving some people to migrate within Somalia, to cities, like Garowe or Mogadishu, which are seen as places where people have more employment opportunities and, at least in Garowe, also more physical security. In interviews and focus groups, people also confessed to having the sense that finding jobs is often a battle, that most often ends in defeat. The perception is that young people tend to remain jobless.

In this context, clan dynamics can play a very important role. Because of the competition over resources and the constant conflict between clans—from land ownership disputes to revenge killings—young people, and men in particular, are regularly told to "soldier up" and join the fight. But young people do not want to do this. They want to find better jobs, and for this reason many choose to flee, to seek safer places to live.

The pull factors are straightforward: the expectation of better opportunities, safety and improved living conditions. Young people who chose to migrate simply seek a better life in foreign countries—or, if they can't reach them, then at least in larger cities like Garowe or Mogadishu. This said, there are two important elements that determine the expectations of young people: their peers who already migrated, and their parents.

Everyone interviewed for the research made clear that young people facing the decision to migrate are influenced by the youth who have already migrated to developed countries. In this regard, an important role is played by social media, which young Somalis are using more and more. And on social media, influencers are starting to appear, who have the power to shape the expectations young people have about the journey to another country. Indeed, the media plays an important role in shaping people's reactions to migration, and also in shaping the reactions to conflict and reconciliation. Media are a key group, and many believe that they should be engaged accordingly. Influencers in particular could use guidance: the way they talk about conflict and migration can sway people's minds in negative ways. If they are engaged, however, they could positively change the perspective of many young people.

Lastly, there are the parents. Parents themselves regularly recommend their children to flee, and to find safety. Youth migrate through legal and illegal routes. When they take the legal route, their parents spend large amounts of money: they often have to sell land or get loans, and end up in debt. They do this because many of them are supportive of their children's decisions: they really want to help their sons or daughters. At the same time, the economic impact of this decision affects the families and their lives become more difficult as a result. With the illegal route, young people often do not even tell their parents. Within illegal routes, young migrants are regularly held hostage by traffickers; then the parents get called and are asked to pay a ransom. At this point, the same dynamic seen with the legal route takes place. Parents continue to support their children in spite of these risks, and the costs linked to them. Ultimately, they, too, want the same thing that their children are seeking: better opportunities and more security.

## Consequences of youth migration

The main impact of youth migration is economic, but there are also cultural and social consequences. Economically, youth are a resource for Galkayo, and for Somalia more broadly. They go through schools, learn trades, and when they decide to migrate, the city and the country lose an important resource. The

capacity of those people, and their knowledge, they are effectively lost. In Galkayo, this is a problem affecting the availability of teachers, for example. Communities are losing those who can help educate future generations. There is a direct link between youth migration and the lack of a skilled labour force in the city, which is only in part mitigated by the remittances generated by those who successfully complete their journey.

Youth migration also has negative social and cultural impacts. Socially, youth migration leaves gaps—emotional and economic ones, as was discussed. Ultimately, when families go through the sacrifices of helping young people migrate, this affects all of the community. Culturally, young Somalis living abroad can have a strong influence on how those who stay behind behave, including what they like. Because of social media, youth who stay in Galkayo are already dressing differently, and have expectations that clash with the realities of the city and of Somalia, because of the model that they see from those who successfully migrated. The latter often also change their ways, which is seen as a rebellious act by parents and elders. And this creates pushback from the communities.

The effects on conflict and peace are also significant. Those who leave do not take part in the violent conflicts affecting the city, the state or the country—yet, they also do not contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation. According to those interviewed for the research, some migrants might come back with more skills and experience, but very few actually do. Those who leave do not contribute much, at least not directly (by taking part in peacebuilding initiatives, for example).

Rather, young people who migrated can influence others as part of the diaspora, a process that happens mainly through the media. And this influence can be as positive just as much as it can be negative. The diaspora can be a big contributor to peace, through the remittances they send back, for example. The diaspora is felt as a backbone of the community, especially in Galkayo, where there are no big factories to provide jobs. Many families get financial support from diaspora members, who are also known to promote meetings on reconciliation. Diaspora members can, in however, also have strong ties with political elites still in Somalia, and ultimately promote clannism. There are also many media messages produced and disseminated by the Somali diaspora, and many report in a way that foments divisions rather than promote reconciliation[68].

The effect of this type of programming, when spread through social media, is perceived as having a significantly greater negative impact on young people. It is the youth in Somalia who use social media,

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[68] See, for example: "Media and Peacebuilding in Somalia", Agency for Peacebuilding (2023).

and young people, and young men in particular, can be particularly susceptible to social media influencers, and the messages they share. Young people can look to these individuals as models, and through them be led to believe not only that migration is the only option left for them, but also that peace is not important. This makes young people less active and willing to mobilise in support of reconciliation, in Galkayo as much as in the diaspora.

It is for this reason that, perhaps, those who remain in Galkayo appear more willing and ready to take part in reconciliation processes. Among those who stay there is, in the view of many of those interviewed, a higher percentage of young people who decide to become involved in civil society, and fund youth organisations. This is a positive side-effect, which can contribute to prevent and resolve violent conflicts in the city, and across Somalia. There are some CSOs that indeed work on the issue of migration, and others that are essentially linked to it, like education and livelihoods.

Yet, CSOs in Galkayo and Galmudug face many challenges that limit their work. First among these is the lack of resources. When CSO representatives were interviewed for the research, all of them said that they did not have sufficient financial resources to perform their duties. They also said that they often do not have the capacity to target specific groups, like young people. For instance, many indicated that they have problems disseminating information. Youth everywhere use media, traditional and social, and if CSOs could get relevant information to them—about migration, or about conflict—this could help make better decisions. But that information is not there, and CSOs even get pushback from youth, who might not see any point in CSOs if these organisations cannot offer anything better. And CSOs face regular interference, with authorities putting pressure on what organisations can and cannot do. Lastly, coordination among CSOs, not to mention between CSOs and authorities, can be poor.

# WOMEN AND CONFLICT

Needless to say, the decades of violent conflict have had a terrible impact on women. This is measurable not just in direct violence, the levels of which have been staggering, but also in indirect violence stemming from women's inability to access even the most basic health facilities, the dire lack of educational opportunities and their systematic economic marginalisation. Somalia ranks among the worst countries for women's rights, as women experience violence at alarming rates and perpetrators can act with impunity. Not only is Somali society patriarchal and male-dominated, but these aspects have been reinforced by the decades of conflict. It is also important to note that patriarchal aspects are deeply entrenched in the clan-based structure of governance in all three regions. Specific human rights violations that exist impact women especially negatively with weak judicial infrastructure and uneven legal systems that on paper protect women's rights, but are not enforceable in practice.

The data paint a very difficult, uncompromising picture: only 25% of Somali girls attend primary school, and 65% of Somali young women (20-to-24 years old) do not receive a full education[69]. Gender-based violence remains a tragic fact of everyday life for all Somali women and girls, regardless of where they live[70]. The country ranks fourth to last in the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index[71].

At the same time, the plethora of negative statistics should not be taken to claim that Somali women are simple victims in their own country, with little to no agency. Against great odds, women have, in fact, managed to play important roles in bringing about peace and reconciliation[72].

In Puntland, for example, during the process that led to the 1993 Galkayo peace accord, CSOs largely comprised of women rallied between the warring clans and their militias to convince them to lay down their arms and come to a peace agreement. Women were also responsible for the so-called Hufan Initiative in 1994: when rampart violence broke in Bosaso, which included instances of rape by opposing militia groups, a movement led by Hufan Artan, a peace activist, brought together women's groups to bring these crimes to the attention of the political leaders of the city. The women protested their treatment

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[69] "The everyday challenges faced by Somali women and girls", Concern Worldwide USA (2023).
[70] See: "Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Somalia", United Nations Population Fund (2021).
[71] "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment", United Nations Development Programme (2022).
[72] Women may also support conflict, usually through less visible roles, compared to men. Such roles, for instance, include providing logistical support to fighters, gathering intelligence, or encouraging male relatives to participate in the conflict. Women's engagement in conflict can be driven by loyalty to the clan, in the context of clan-based conflicts. Linked to this, women in Puntland and Garowe have been known to incite or demand revenge for the killing or harming of their male relatives, which has contributed to the perpetuation of cycles of violence and retaliation.

by laying their bodies across the docking areas where ships unloaded their cargo, and effectively halted all activities. They lay there for an entire day until negotiations began to bolster the security of women doing business at the port. Eventually, the women of this movement established an *ad hoc* policing service to patrol the streets, also with young men, disarming those that carried weapons. And in 1996, Puntland women held the largest peace rallies in the region, calling for continued dialogue and an end to fighting between clans where poetry also became an effective tool to convey grievances and rally for peace.

As the space for women to exercise any authority has been, and continues to be, very limited, they have time and again sought to use the little leverage they had to increase their participation. Many of the better-known examples of these strategies come from Somaliland. There, following the region's declaration of independence in 1991, women composed poems to express their frustration at the ongoing conflict between related clans and also gave indications of the exclusion that women faced. And while their participation was limited to more traditional roles, including providing food for the conference attendees, women also sought to exercise more formal agency and expressed their political views. Indeed, the kinds of subjectivities women drew upon to claim their rights in the formal peace discussions drew heavily on these traditional roles. They stressed the vulnerability of their position in society by referencing gender norms present in Somali customary law (*xeer*).

Women have been known to play active roles also in Central and Southern Somalia, in spite of the war. During the years of conflict several Somali women—both in Somalia and the diaspora—provided humanitarian assistance for displaced family members and society in general. These included, for instance, Asha Haji Elmi Amin, who established the NGO Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) in 1992. As a peace activist she is credited with creating the notion of a 'sixth clan', which was made up of women with different affiliations. Asha used the 'sixth clan' as a platform for women to participate to various peace conferences that took place during the 2000's[73]. In this sense, how women in Southern and Central Somalia sought to utilise their cross-clan affiliations to facilitate dialogue was very similar to what their counterparts in in Somaliland and Puntland did.

Another important achievement made by Somali women happened during the Somalia National Peace Conference held in 2000 in Arta, Djibouti. Considered at the time as one of the main initiatives to bring peace to post-civil war Somalia, Somali women activists used the opportunity (and the visibility generated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which had just then been passed) to successfully convince Djiboutian President Omar Guelleh to secure a position for women

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[73] "Somali Solutions: Creating conditions for a gender-just peace", Rayale, S. et al., Oxfam (2015).

in the talks and to propose a quota of 25 seats for women in the 245-member transitional parliament, which was being discussed. The achievement was undermined, however, when it was decided that women should selected by men on the same clan basis as male members of parliament—using the so-called "4.5 formula"[74]—a decision that ultimately penalised them.

Another positive feature is the fact that several women's organisation exist in Somalia generally, and in Garowe and Galkayo specifically, which are active in communities and continue to engage different levels of government. Their activities include advocating for women leadership; trainings for women-run businesses; educational services for underserved communities, including IDPs; health-services through water, sanitation and hygiene programmes; and lobbying efforts for gender-sensitive legislation. In Puntland, an interesting phenomenon also is the rise of occupational and informal associations that work to support women's participation in the labour market[75]. And while the activities of these organisations cannot be defined as peacebuilding, their contribution to peace and reconciliation can nevertheless be important.

Then, in 2023, the FGS finally adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security. The NAP will allow the FGS to pursue efforts to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and also the Somali Women's Charter, launched in 2019, thus contributing to giving Somali women a stronger role in decision-making processes related to peace and security. The process of adopting the NAP has also been accompanied by the creation of women leaders' networks and the development of localized action plans in five FMS, including Puntland and Galmudug[76]. Support from the NAP continues to come mainly, if not exclusively, from international donors. Yet, its existence represents a notable achievement, which could potentially lead to resources dedicated to specifically strengthening the role of women in peace and security.

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[74] This is a power-sharing formula, which grants Somalia's four major clans a full share of seats in Parliament, with half a share going to minority clans (see, for reference: "The role of 4.5 in democratization and governance in Somalia", Somali Dialogue Platform, 2023).
[75] See: "Strengthening Women's Business Associations in Somalia", United Nations Women and International Labour Organization (2016).
[76] "Growing Momentum for Women's Leadership in Somalia's Peace Efforts", United Nations (2024).

# MEDIA AND CONFLICT

The strength of Somalia's media sector has also been heavily impacted by the violent conflict. At the same time, and similarly to what has been noted about women, the role of media in the country's political processes, including dynamics of conflict and peace, is complex: Somali media make both negative and positive contributions. Their potential for positively impacting narratives around conflict—and reconciliation—remains, today, largely untapped[77].

Somalia's media landscape is undergoing epochal changes and today the country can boast a vibrant, even if fragmented, media culture. This said, the sector's development remains affected by insecurity and heavily influenced by the unstable political environment and the complex history of the country.

During Barre's regime, all media was state controlled and it was only after 1991 that privately owned outlets emerged. During this time, new media outlets (mainly radio) were created as business ventures, and some as channels for political propaganda. Several outlets were set up also by the Somali diaspora, which has in general been a crucial force for promoting a more independent and professional media sector. In more recent years, there have been also been small and incremental efforts to regulate the sector. Nevertheless, to this day reliable information about Somalia's media sector, including its reach, remains difficult to gather.

What is evident is that the media sector has grown and improved significantly in the last 10 years. Somali media, today, is very diversified in terms of formats. Radio still plays a dominant role. Television is, on the other hand, a largely urban phenomenon. And print media are fading in most areas. The last decade has also seen the emergence of the Internet, whose use has been driven by the importance of mobile phones—about two thirds of households own a mobile phone (including 75% of women aged 15 to 49 years old in Puntland[78], and 80% of women aged 15 to 49 years old in Galmudug[79]). This has also meant a boom in the use of social media, in particular among young people. This said, Somalis with access to the Internet remain very few and are mostly based in urban areas.

The relative importance of media outlets changes depending on location. Across federal states in Southern and Central Somalia, including Galmudug, radio stations and television channels have a consolidated

[77] "Media and Peacebuilding in Somali", Agency for Peacebuilding (2023).
[78] "Somali Health and Demographic Survey - Puntland Report 2020", Department of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning, Economic Development and International cooperation, Puntland State (2020).
[79] "Somali Health and Demographic Survey - Galmudug Report 2020", Somalia National Bureau of Statistics (2021).

presence. All media organisations are private, and while the FGS has a Ministry of Communications and Technology, state regulation is essentially absent. Here, Islamist militias have as much influence on the media as formal legislation. In Puntland, radio is the dominant media, but there are also various television channels. Lastly, it is important to note that information sharing still happens through word-of-mouth and non-media channels, like mosques.

The evolution of the media sector is affected by important challenges. To being with, Somali journalists continue to face many dangers, ranging from intimidation and harassment, to arrest, to sexual assault against female reporters and also murder. Financial resources in the sector are scant, forcing many journalists to abandon the profession. Lastly, media professionals have very limited professional capacities because of a lack of training and capacity building opportunities available to them. In the face of this, journalists have organised and formed several professional associations, which are very active, but whose work is also hindered by the above-mentioned challenges.

All of this translates into very limited contributions to peacebuilding. Somali media in both Puntland and Galmudug allow very little to no space for voices focused on peace, dialogue or reconciliation. As such, the overall narrative framework, in relation to the country's transition, remains focused on violence and insecurity. Undoubtedly, the challenges that limit Somali media's contributions to peacebuilding are in part the same as those affecting the sector more generally, like journalists' insecurity. This said, what is also true is that the media space in Somalia is a contested space, and that media can all too often be marginalising and exclusionary.

This is certainly the case when it comes to migration—as already discussed. Young people who are deciding whether to migrate or not make significant use of social media, where they are exposed to the narratives created by peers who already migrated. Influencers are starting to appear, who have the power to shape the expectations young people have about what they will find in another country, and about the challenges of their journey there. Indeed, migration is one issue where media plays an important role: it can deeply affect and shape people's perspectives and reactions. For this reason, media should be considered a key group in shaping how Somalis understand, and therefore approach, migration. In particular, influencers active on social media could use guidance.

The role of media is just as important in regards to broader issues of conflict and peacebuilding. As already mentioned, media tend to magnify the negative narratives related to Somalia's transition. This is a phenomenon seen nationally, but it is likely occurring also at state-level. There have been improvements in recent years, mostly on account of a recent increase in formal support for media development. Thanks

to donor support, for example, some new outlets have emerged, which are all-women or women-led. This might be a harbinger of more support to come, but it remains, so far, limited in scope and duration, often uncoordinated and *ad hoc*.



*Photo description: A Somali journalist (Credit: United Nations Development Programme, 2023).*

# HOW TO ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

Conflict dynamics in Garowe and Galkayo are the result of the interplay of different actors and dynamics, as the report has just described. Some of these actors, however, can play significant roles in peacebuilding, and positive dynamics also exist, which, if effectively leveraged, can support the achievement of the expected results of the BRIDGES project. To have this, it will be important to build up the engagement of specific stakeholder groups, including CSOs, youth and women, authorities and the media.

## Civil society

CSOs in all locations are deeply trusted. This is not a surprise, as CSOs and NGOs are often the only organisations that regularly deliver basic services. NGOs are also the ones responsible for delivering humanitarian aid, which remains for many people, in both Puntland and Galmudug, an important source of livelihood support. Importantly, the goodwill towards civil society is high for both local and international CSOs.

Some standouts were identified. Horncenter Dialogue was mentioned in several reports as an organisation that acts as a peace connector in Galmudug State. The organisation has recently implemented a project entitled "Mapping the Foundations of Peace", which aimed to tackle the root causes of conflicts and foster an environment conducive to sustainable development. Under the project, for example, a research report was produced that sought to provide recommendations for improving reconciliation, security, the rule of law, state-building, democratisation and decentralization in Galmudug State[80]. In Puntland, the efforts of the Puntland Development and Research Center (PDRC) are worth highlighting. Active since the late 1990's, the organisation has done research on many different topics, including peace and security, and represents a credible source for policy analysis on peacebuilding and development[81]. Similarly, GECPD, which is one of the implementing partners under the BRIDGES project, is one of the most well-known and well respected CSOs working on peace and development. Based in Galkayo, the organisation is active both in Puntland and in Galmudug.

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[80] "Strengthening Peace Connectors: A Step Towards Sustainable Peace in Galmudug", Horndialogue Centre (2024).
[81] See: https://pdrcsomalia.org/.

Among international NGOs, the Berghof Foundation has done considerable work to support peacebuilding in Galmudug. The Foundation has produced one of the most comprehensive conflict analyses for the State. More recently, it has looked at the intersection of climate change and conflict, through a project entitled "Infrastructures for Peace and Environmental Peacebuilding in Hirshabelle and Galmudug State". This initiative is part of the Peace Pillars Consortium, which Berghof implements together with the research centre Adelphi and with the financial support of the German Federal Foreign Office[82]. Still ongoing, the project supports local mediation activities, holds large-scale dialogue assemblies (*shirarka*), and produces monthly radio shows. There is, lastly, Interpeace, the Geneva-based peacebuilding NGO, which has over 20 years of experience working in Somalia, and in Puntland specifically. Interpeace also has a programme called "Pillars of Peace", through which it seeks to strengthen the ability of grassroots communities to connect and provide input to their evolving governance structures, in both Puntland and Galmudug[83].

These are just some of the organisations working in the two states: many more are present, which work on supporting development and providing humanitarian assistance. The overall capacity of the civil society sector should therefore be considered as strong and extensive, and its reach capillary, extending to remote and difficult-to-access areas. Any success, in terms of promoting peacebuilding, must therefore go through CSOs and NGOs.

## Youth and women

As discussed in the previous sections, young people are the largest demographic groups in both Puntland and Galmudug—and therefore also in Garowe and Galkayo. Perceptions of the role they play on matters of peace and security vary. There are many cases—historical and recent—that suggest that when violence occurs, young people, and young men in particular, are involved. Indeed, their mobilisation is crucial to support clan interests, including in situations of confrontation and competition. Young people can also be manipulated by political leaders, in similar dynamics. And they are often one of the main target groups of propaganda activities by extremist groups. In these cases, too, the focus is usually on young men.

Young people have their own agency, and they actively exercise it. This can best be seen in relation to migration. The decision to flee is one that is often taken by young people alone, with information that

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[82] "Infrastructures for peace and environmental peacebuilding in Galmudug and Hirshabelle State, Somalia", Berghof Foundation (2024).
[83] See: https://www.interpeace.org/programme/somali-region/.

comes primarily from their peers. Young people play important roles also in promoting peace and reconciliation, and this is true of young men as it is of young women. The activism of young women is particularly important and significant, given the challenges that they otherwise face in carving an active role in a society that remains largely shaped by patriarchal and traditional norms.

At the same time, it is important to highlight that the mobilisation of young people, including their efforts on peacebuilding, are driven by their desire for a better future. This means, for young people, better security and also better livelihood opportunities. Peacebuilding initiatives seeking to activate young people's interests and enthusiasm should therefore consider this desire, providing concrete opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Lastly, the specific situation of young women should be recognised, and any interventions should seek to address head-on the barriers limiting their participation. This implies the engagement of groups of young women who can support each other and thus offset—or at least mitigate—any pressures coming from other groups—parent, traditional authorities. It also implies the engagement of men in support of these initiatives: the involvement of authorities, as will be discussed below, is particularly important to ensure that, where women participate in peacebuilding efforts, they can do so without compromising their personal safety.

## Authorities

Authorities—elected or appointed, official and traditional—are the actors who contribute the most to conflict. The cases where politicians, including those who are elected or appointed, have fomented conflict or incited violence are many and well documented. Elders, too, have played an active role in creating conflict: as representatives of their clans' interests, it is usually through them that collective decisions to escalate conflict are taken. At the same time, elders are also those to whom conflicts are regularly referred for resolution. In this regard, the stability Puntland and Garowe have enjoyed over the last 20 years must be attributed to the efforts of elders to settle differences through dialogue and peaceful agreements.

Authorities must be engaged first and foremost to ensure that they do not block peacebuilding efforts. Their formal support is necessary to make sure that activities can take place safely. The engagement of government authorities can also contribute to increasing the trust between Somalis and their representatives, by creating a context where both groups are working on the same effort.

Particular efforts should be made to engage clan elders, as they are, ultimately, the most important institution for effective conflict resolution, in both Garowe and Galkayo. This is because elders are the ones who can still generate legitimacy over collective decisions. Yet, by most accounts, elders do not always have all the necessary competencies to address specific conflicts, like those over land. They are also not an inclusive institution, as elders are almost exclusively older men. In recent years, some efforts have been made to address these gaps, for example through the creation of district peace committees[84]. Such committees can include both elders and representatives from other groups, thus serving as a more inclusive forum in which to discuss peace and security issues. The involvement of elders, and of religious leaders, is also crucial to ensure the safe participation of women.

## Media

Lastly, for peacebuilding efforts to be successful, engagement of the media is also important. Not only can media play a role in conflict prevention: the country's media sector is also rapidly changing, and there are opportunities to harness these changes in a way that supports the country's transition from war to peace. The challenges are stark, however: there is, first, a knowledge gap in the media sector that needs to be filled in order for it to fully contribute to peace and reconciliation. Within the sector there is also a problem with inclusivity, as female journalists continue to lack training and professional advancement opportunities. If involving media is important, then the first step should be to work on their understanding and awareness of peacebuilding and reconciliation: journalists and media professionals should know when and how reporting can contribute to creating conflict, and when and how it can help to address it non-violently. Secondly, more opportunities should be given to women working in the sector. Thirdly, specific attention should be given to engaging influencers: those people, in other words, who can impact the way that young people in particular gather information and develop opinions about conflict and peace. Here, some attention should be paid to the increasing role of social media. At the same time, the focus should remain on the media outlets that remain predominant in Garowe and Galkayo, which tend to be radio and TV.

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[84] See, for example: "Sustainable community approaches to peacebuilding in securitised environments: case study of Somalia", Saferworld, 2020.
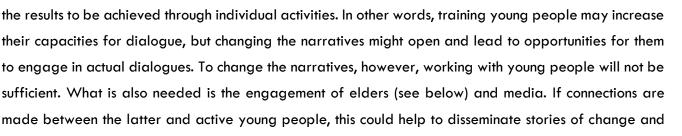
# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While violent conflict remains a fact of life in both Garowe and Galkayo, much is changing in those cities, their respective states, and in Somalia, which create both challenges and opportunities for building peace and promoting reconciliation. Initiatives like the BRIDGES project are, therefore, undoubtedly relevant. The project's focus on youth is particularly important, as this is a group that faces a set of particularly difficult challenges, but is also equipped with high potential for promoting positive change. Young men and women are also the largest demographic group in Somalia: affecting how they participate has, as such, the potential for huge ripple effects in society.

Insecurity remains rampant, however, and spaces for effective youth participation are limited because of lack of resources, low capacity and phenomena such as migration. Yet, important positive results have been recently achieved, such the 2023 local elections in Puntland, and continuous military gains against extremist groups. In urban areas, social media has also created a new pathway in which young people can express themselves. These represent opportunities, which if leveraged effectively, can make measurable contributions to changing people's lives for the better.

Based on the analysis provided in this report, the following recommendations are offered in order to guide the implementation of peacebuilding activities under the BRIDGES project, and also beyond it:

**Focus on high-consensus conflict issues.** The analysis has identified issues on which there appears to be a general consensus, or at least a willingness for engagement by multiple stakeholder groups. This is the case of land conflicts in Garowe, which happen often, with negative consequences for all those involved, and city residents as well. Land grabbing and subsequent reprisals mine security and undermine trust among communities and between communities and institutions. All those engaged for the research found it to be an issue worth addressing. A similar case can be made for migration in Galkayo, which has been similarly denounced by authorities, parents, elders and young people. Land conflict and migration could, as such, represent issues on which important conversations—unifying conversations—could be had, increasing social dialogue.

**Work on youth narratives.** Young people can either be victims of violent conflict, or they can perpetrate it. The difference appears to be in the narratives people have, and often impose, on youth. Such narratives are also inherently gendered: agency belong to young men, whereas women are generally described as passive victims. If existing narratives contribute to the status quo, changing them can have impact beyond

the results to be achieved through individual activities. In other words, training young people may increase their capacities for dialogue, but changing the narratives might open and lead to opportunities for them to engage in actual dialogues. To change the narratives, however, working with young people will not be sufficient. What is also needed is the engagement of elders (see below) and media. If connections are made between the latter and active young people, this could help to disseminate stories of change and models, which can then start challenging the assumptions behind the negative perceptions of young people.

**Engage elders proactively.** Like young people, clan elders can have a dual role: they can foment conflict, or they can resolve it. Unlike young people, clan elders are consensually seen as the most important group for promoting peace, in both locations. For this reason, a project like BIRDGES should invest in engaging elders, and engage the proactively. This means that efforts should move beyond the simple sharing of information. Instead, elders should be invited to events to be organized under the project and, where and if relevant, invited also to inform the planning of some activities. What could have additional impact could also be the organisation of intergenerational dialogues, where young people and elders are brought together to discuss, with each other, the causes of violent conflict, and possible solutions.

**Build spaces for effective women empowerment.** Women face specific challenges and barriers to participation, which should be addressed head-on. Women empowerment should be promoted through direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are those providing support to women: all activities should strive for gender balance, and some should even go beyond and try to involve more young women and men. Indirect strategies are those through which men should be engaged to ensure support for women's participation. Both young men, as peers, and elders, as gatekeepers, should be involved in these activities, with the aim of finding the right ways in which women can be allowed to take part in activities.

**Find and promote synergies with other NGOs.** Because the needs of young people are varied and complex, efforts to empower young people are likely to be more effective if connections are established with other NGOs working on development, as well as humanitarian assistance. Such connections could help, in fact, to share information about additional opportunities for personal or professional growth, or for participation, which could serve to give young people more confidence in themselves and in their abilities to change their lives for the better.

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