Query response

Somalia: Violence, fatalities, perpetrators and victims in Mogadishu

- What is the number of fatalities in Mogadishu?

- Who is behind the violence?

- Who are the victims?

- To what extent are civilians targets?

Introduction

This response provides information on violence, fatalities, perpetrators and victims in Mogadishu in 2016. Violence here includes use of intentional power to kill others (attacks). To what extent civilians are targets is a central question in the response. The term «civilian», by contrast to «military», refers to unarmed persons who are neither members of armed groups nor participating in hostilities.

Sources and limitations

In Somalia, there are no institutions that register and keep statistics on murders and other violent incidents. International organisations have a limited opportunity to obtain such information, as the country presents major security challenges for such actors. The UN periodic reports on Somalia record the number of killed and injured persons in the country as a whole. However, the reports do not disclose where the figures have been obtained from (see for example UN Secretary-General 2016a). In Landinfo's understanding, information on violent incidents in Somalia is largely based on information from Somali media and organisations.

The organisation Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) collects information from, in particular, media and local organisations about incidents of violence in Somalia in a database.[1] The database is publicly available and is continuously updated (ACLED 2017; Raleigh & Dowd 2017). Unlike the UN, ACLED provides information about

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[1]   ACLED consists of a research team run from the University of Sussex (ACLED n.d.).

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where in Somalia the violent incidents have taken place. This makes it possible to extract information for Mogadishu. ACLED also provides information on actors, course of events and number of fatalities.

According to ACLED (n.d.) the database only includes politically motivated violence. The database does record, however, violent incidents committed by unknown perpetrators. Landinfo considers that there is no basis to conclude that violence is politically motivated when the perpetrators are unknown. Hence Landinfo considers that the database also contains events that are not necessarily politically motivated.

The extent to which local media and organisations, including ACLED, pick up on violent incidents, probably varies in Somalia as a whole. Local power structures are important in this regard. In Mogadishu freedom of movement for Somalis is good (sources B, D, E, F, G and H, meetings in Mogadishu, January 2016). In addition, more local and international organisations are represented here than elsewhere in the country. This means that serious violent incidents are largely recognized.[2]

A recording in ACLED is not necessarily based on more than one source, and ACLED does not verify the information (ACLED, email 2015). This is problematic, as Somali media and organisations sometimes give conflicting information. Given the challenges associated with obtaining information, and the fact that there is no adequate overview of violence in Somalia, Landinfo nevertheless considers that ACLEDs information provides an *indication* of the number of fatalities in Mogadishu, who are responsible for violence and who are victims of violence. Although ACLED provides exact figures, and they are reproduced in this response, the figures should be seen as *estimates.* Note also that ACLED reports a significantly higher death toll than that provided by the UN.[3] ACLED also contains some duplicate registrations.[4]

The response is also based on information obtained during Landinfo's travels to Mogadishu in the period 2012-2016. The findings from these travels correspond to ACLEDs indications. Landinfo's sources are largely anonymised for reasons of their safety and/or work situation.

Number of fatalities

ACLED (2017) recorded 681 fatalities as a result of 510 violent incidents in Mogadishu in 2016.[5] The number of fatalities includes both civilian and military fatalities, including perpetrators.[6]

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[2] An exception to this is sexual violence, which is rarely spoken of and often kept hidden (source K, meeting in Nairobi, February 2015). Sexual violence is generally prevalent in Somalia (source J, meeting in Nairobi, in February 2015; Sperber 2016). IDPs in settlements outside their clan's home area are particularly vulnerable. The vast majority of victims are women and girls, but boys and men are also affected. Perpetrators are mainly armed men.

[3] According to the UN, 600 civilians were killed in *all of* Somalia in 2016 (UN Secretary-General 2016a, p. 10; 2016b, p. 10; 2017, p. 10). ACLED (2017) does not distinguish explicitly between military and civilian victims, but points out that attacks against civilians («violence against civilians») resulted in 771 fatalities and that «remote violence» against civilians resulted in 849 fatalities. It is reasonable to assume that the overall majority of these 1620 were civilians.

[4] The attack on the Ambassador Hotel in June 2016, for example, is recorded four times.

[5] ACLED (2017) also recorded 17 demonstrations («riots/protests»), which did not cause any fatalities. These events are omitted from this query response.

According to ACLED (2017), the number of recorded fatalities in Mogadishu during the period 2012-2016 has varied between 500 and 750.[7] In 2010 and 2011 the figure was considerably higher.[8]

Nature of the violence and proliferation

ACLED (2017) has divided the recorded events into different categories, which gives an impression of how the violence manifests itself (Landinfo's earlier comments about the uncertainty of the data, and thus to consider the concrete figures as relevant *estimates,* apply here):[9]

- 374 fatalities were recorded as a result of 240 skirmishes between military actors («battles»). The incidents mainly consist of short-term hit-and-run attacks in terms of shooting and/or throwing of hand grenades at military patrols, control posts and bases.

- 215 fatalities were recorded as a result of 144 incidents in which military actors attacked civilians («violence against civilians»). The incidents mainly include shooting at individual persons, but also attacks on hotels and restaurants.

- 88 fatalities were recorded as a result of 95 cases of «remote violence» against military and civilian targets. «Remote violence» refers to «events in which the tool for engaging in conflict did not require the physical presence of the perpetrator» (Raleigh & Dowd 2017). The incidents mainly include bomb attacks, but also a number of mortar attacks.[10]

- 4 fatalities were recorded as a result of 31 other incidents («strategic development»). The incidents include, among other incidents, unsuccessful attacks.

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[6] There are no accurate figures on how many persons live in Mogadishu, but a population survey from 2015, carried out by the Somali authorities, with support from the UN Population Fund, gave an estimate of 1,65 million (UNFPA 2015, p. 31). The estimate includes IDPs in the city.

[7] In 2012 ACLED recorded 537 killed. In 2013 ACLED recorded 717 killed. In 2014 ACLED recorded 603 killed. In 2015 ACLED recorded 562 killed.

[8] In 2010 ACLED recorded 2 423 killed. In 2011 ACLED recorded 959 killed. One should not rule out that there may be a significant number of unrecorded incidents, as the media and organisations in Mogadishu at this time were fewer and had lower mobility. The high number of fatalities in 2010 and 2011 is due to the fact that Mogadishu at this time was a war zone with trenches and ground offensives. The front line between AMISOM/government forces and al-Shabaab cut across the city, and fighting was partly conducted with artillery, bulldozers and tanks (see for example Human Rights Watch 2010, IRIN News 2010 and Ibrahim & Gettleman 2011). The battle of Mogadishu ended in August 2011, when al-Shabaab pulled its army out of the city.

[9] ACLEDs (2017) categorisation appears somewhat inconsistent. For example, some hand grenade attacks are categorised as «strategic development». Some events, which Landinfo clearly considers to constitute attacks against civilians, including the attacks against the restaurant Beach View in January 2016 and SYL Hotel in February 2016, are categorised by ACLED as «battle». This is probably because these attacks resulted in prolonged battles between the attackers and government forces.

[10] A number of incidents categorised as «battles» includes the use of bombs, but then in the form of suicide attacks or in combination with shooting.


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All areas of Mogadishu are affected by the violence.[11] According to ACLED the area Heliwa is the worst affected, with 61 events, of which 50 were clashes between military actors. This corresponds to the impression Landinfo have obtained from sources that live in Mogadishu (sources B, C and D, meetings in Mogadishu, January 2016).[12]

Who are behind the violence?

Unknown actors

More than half of the violent incidents recorded in ACLEDs database involved unknown perpetrators (ACLED 2017) (see Figure 1). These incidents resulted in approximately 1/3 of the total number of recorded fatalities (see Table 1). To a large extent, the incidents include violence against individual civilians, but also attacks against government forces. Actors such as al-Shabaab, militias[13] and/or individual persons may be behind one or several of the events.

Figure 1: Who is behind the violence?
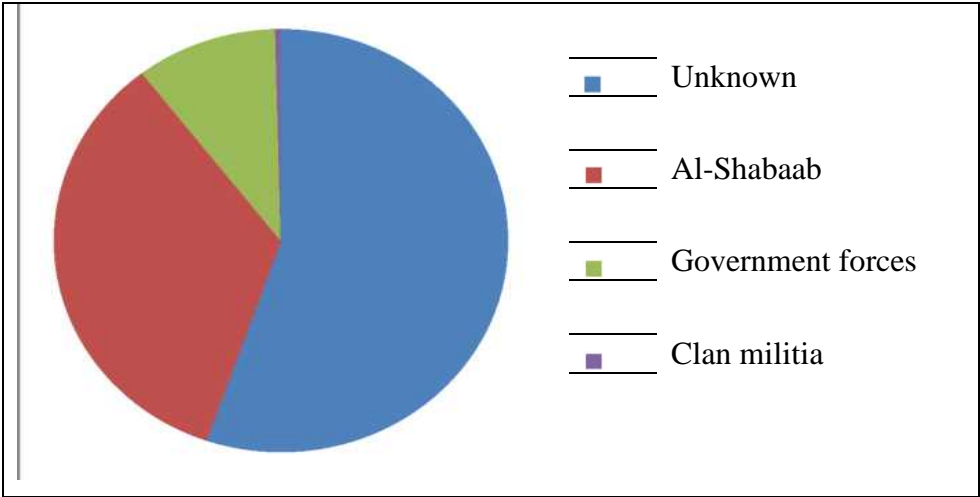
The figure has been prepared by Landinfo based on data from ACLEDs dataset *Version 7 (1997-2016)* (ACLED 2017).

Table 1: Recorded violent incidents and recorded fatalities

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[11] ACLED (2017) connects most, but not all, violent incidents to neighbourhoods. Some events are, however, misplaced. The attack against Nasa-Hablod Hotel, located by KM4 in southern Mogadishu, in June 2016, is for example located in the northern outskirt area Heliwa.

[12] When Landinfo visited Heliwa in February 2015, local sources referred to Heliwa as the area most often affected by skirmishes between military actors.

[13] Clans, businessmen and district commissioners have their own militias in the city (Menkhaus 2016, pp. 21-32). The militias include members who simultaneously are members of the army or police. This overlap of roles means that violence which government forces are involved in does not necessarily relate to the conflict between the government and al-Shabaab. The background for an attack against government forces may also, for example, be a clan conflict.

Perpetrators	Recorded incidents	Recorded fatalities
Unknown	282	186
Al-Shabaab	173	399
Government forces	53	94
Clan militia	2	2
Total	**510**	**681**

The table has been prepared by Landinfo based on data from ACLEDs dataset *Version 7 (1997-2016)* (ACLED 2017).

Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab withdrew its army from Mogadishu in August 2011, but is still conducting attacks in the city. In the period 2012-2016, Landinfo have met with a number of representatives of international organisations in Mogadishu who claimed able to verify that al-Shabaab is behind a given number of violent incidents and/or killings in the city. When asked to give a detailed account, however, the sources have always moderated their comments, and admitted that there is great uncertainty about the figures. According to ACLED al-Shabaab is believed to be involved in approximately 1/3 of violent incidents in Mogadishu in 2016.[14] These events resulted in 399 killed, i.e. about 60% of the total number recorded killed. Events comprise attacks against both government forces and civilians.

Government forces

According to ACLED (2017) the government forces are behind about 10% of the recorded violent incidents. The events mainly include clashes between government forces, but also attacks against civilians. The reasons for the internal fighting are somewhat unclear, but include disagreement about roadblocks. Government forces receive irregular remuneration and therefore use roadblocks to extract revenue from travellers (see Landinfo 2016, p. 10). Since the government forces are often clan-based, clashes between government forces can also be caused by clan conflicts. ACLEDs recordings show that many such incidents were the result of disputes between different Hawiye clans, which are the dominant clans in Mogadishu, about land rights.

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[14] Al-Shabaab accepts responsibility for some attacks, but it is unclear who is behind the others. ACLED also records violent incidents which al-Shabaab is suspected of being behind, as al-Shabaab attacks.

Clan militias

Two of the violent incidents recorded by ACLED (2017) concern fighting between clan militias. One incident was between two sub-clans of the Hawiye-Abgal, while the second incident was between Hawiye Haber Gedir and Dir Biimaal.[15]

To what extent are civilians targets?

As shown in Table 2 below, ACLED (2017) recorded 204 attacks against civilians.[16] This amounts to about 40% of all the recorded violent incidents in Mogadishu in 2016. The 204 attacks resulted in 256 fatalities, of which the majority was probably civilians.

Civilians are also victims of firefights between military actors or in other attacks against military targets. It is unclear how many civilians were among the 425 who according to ACLED were killed in connection with attacks against military targets, but they probably form a minority. Here the civilians are not directly targeted, but become victims as a result of chance by being «in the wrong place at the wrong time».

Table 2: Violence against civilians

Perpetrators	Registered attacks against civilians	Registered killed
Unknown	134	108
Al-Shabaab	51	130
Government forces	19	18
Total	**204**	**256**

The table has been compiled by Landinfo based on data from the ACLED dataset *Version 7 (1997-2016)* (ACLED 2017).

Unknown actors

Table 2 shows that nearly 2/3 of the recorded attacks against civilians were committed by unknown perpetrators. The recorded events mainly appear as assassinations in the form of drive-by shootings, throwing of hand grenades and bombs attached under the victim's car. The attacks mainly targeted business people, clan leaders and civil servants. Because the perpetrators of these events are unknown, the motives also remain unclear. According to

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[15] The skirmish between Haber Gedir and Biimaal took place in the southern outskirts of Mogadishu (ACLED 2017). These clans came into conflict in the 1990s (Landinfo 2013, p. 11). The clan conflict is still present and occasionally flares up. The conflict is primarily related to the area in and around the city of Merka, south of Mogadishu, where the Biimaal clan is traditionally resident.

[16] Attacks against civilians here include not only events that ACLED categorises as «violence against civilians», but also «remote violence» inflicted on civilians, and unsuccessful attacks against civilians in the category «strategic development».

source G (meeting in Mogadishu, January 2016) violence against individual civilians is often financially motivated or a consequence of personal disputes.

Al-Shabaab

Despite the fact that there is uncertainty as to which violent incidents al-Shabaab is involved in, there is still broad agreement among Landinfo's sources that al-Shabaab does not intend to attack civilians in general (e.g. sources A, B, C, D, E and F, meetings in Mogadishu in January 2016; Williams & Hashi 2016, p. 30). According to the sources, al-Shabaab mainly targets its attacks against the authorities, and primarily against the government's military forces. These assessments are supported by information from ACLED (2017).

As seen from the tables above, less than 30% of the attacks that al-Shabaab is believed to have been involved in were attacks against civilians. These attacks amounted to 1/4 of the total number of recorded attacks against civilians, but resulted in approximately half of the total number of recorded fatalities linked to such attacks (see Table 2).[17] The attacks were mainly aimed at individuals (assassinations), but also at selected hotels and restaurants (ACLED 2017). The high number of fatalities compared with the number of attacks is due to the latter factor. These are attacks that al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for (see for example Dalsoor 2017a; 2017b).

The recorded attacks which al-Shabaab is believed to be behind, were according to ACLED (2017) directed mainly at civilian officials, including parliamentarians, ministers and personnel of the parliament and ministries. The victims also include, however, some clan leaders and a journalist who worked for Radio Mogadishu, which is affiliated to the authorities. The hotels and restaurants that were attacked by al-Shabaab,[18] are places that are often frequented by dignitaries. Unlike most hotels and restaurants in Mogadishu, the attacked hotels and restaurants take extensive security measures, including physical barriers and armed guards. As the picture below illustrates, some of these places resemble regular fortresses. Many ministers, parliamentarians and other high-profile dignitaries seek out such places to stay, eat and/or meet just because of the security measures they offer (see Harper 2015). Some hotels have been attacked several times.[19] Al-Shabaab spokesman, Sheikh Ali Dheere, underlined this recently by saying that al-Shabaab only attacks hotels where dignitaries are staying (Dalsoor 2017a; 2017b). The spokesman justified the attacks by pointing out that many government institutions in practice operate from these hotels.

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[17] UN Secretary-General refers to the comparison that al-Shabaab *and* unknown perpetrators killed 310 civilians in *all* Somalia in 2016 (UN Ashraf 2016a, p. 10; 2016b, pp. 10; 2017, p. 10).

[18] In January 2016, the restaurant Beachview, a popular meeting place for parliamentarians and foreign diplomats, was attacked by al-Shabaab (Ibrahim & Gettleman 2016; Source I, meeting in Nairobi, January 2016). Other attacks in 2016 include SYL Hotel in February (BBC 2016b), Ambassador Hotel in June (BBC 2016c), Hotel Nasa Hablod in June (BBC 2016d), Benadir Beach Restaurant in August (BBC 2016e), SYL Hotel in August (BBC 2016f), the restaurant Blue Sky in October (Maruf 2016) and Village Restaurant in December (Shabelle Media News 2016). As recently as January 2017 Dayah Hotel was attacked (Al Jazeera in 2017). The attacks against hotels and restaurants have been largely suicide bombings and have occurred in the form of car bombs, or a combination of car bombs and gunmen.

[19] SYL Hotel was for example attacked both in January 2015, February 2016 and August 2016 (BBC 2015; BBC 2016b; BBC 2016f). Jazeera Hotel was attacked in September 2012, January 2014 and July 2015 (Al Jazeera in 2012, Al Jazeera in 2014, Al Jazeera 2015).

Jazeera Palace Hotel is one of several fortified hotels in the southern part of Mogadishu. The hotel is popular with dignitaries and foreign diplomats and was attacked by al-Shabaab in both September 2012, January 2014 and July 2015 (Photo: Landinfo, February 2015).

The fact that the general population are not the target of al-Shabaab's attacks is underscored by the fact that al-Shabaab warns people to stay away from places frequented by dignitaries and their supporters (sources A and D, meetings in Mogadishu in January 2016; Monitoring Group on Eritrea and Somalia in 2015, p. 226). However, once they do attack, al-Shabaab shows no consideration to incidental victims (sources A, C and D meetings in Mogadishu, January 2016). In December 2016, for example, several civilian passersby were killed when al-Shabaab attacked a police station at the entrance to the port with a suicide car bomb (Al Jazeera in 2016). Another example of this is al-Shabaab's attempt to blow up a passenger airline departing from the airport in Mogadishu in February 2016 (BBC 2016a). The attack was directed against the representatives of the Turkish government, who are allies of the government in Mogadishu (Kriel & Capelouto 2016), but would also have hit incidental victims, had it been successful. Al-Shabaab also occasionally attacks targets in Mogadishu with mortars from Daynile and other outlying areas.[20] Mortar attacks normally consists of «a few» grenades, and are typically aimed at the presidential palace Villa Somalia or the AMISOM base/UN base at the airport (source B, meeting in Mogadishu, January

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[20]   According to ACLED (2017) al-Shabaab is thought to be behind 17 of a total of 23 such mortar attacks in 2016. ACLED recorded 23 fatalities as a result of these attacks.

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2016).[21] The targeting is often imprecise, and also affects incidental civilians.

Government forces

Table 2 shows that slightly under 10% of the recorded attacks against civilians were committed by government forces.

The motives behind these events are unclear, but seem largely to be financially based. According to ACLED (2017) several of the events involved government forces shooting at travelers in minibuses, because they refused to give them money.

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[21] ACLED (2017) refers to mortar attacks consisting of up to seven grenades. According to source B (meeting in Mogadishu, January 2016) mortar attacks are carried out by al-Shabaab, who unloads mortars from minibuses, fires a few random shots, and then leaves the area before the government forces and/or AMISOM can react.

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- Source B, local resource person, meeting in Mogadishu, 19 January 2016.

- Source C, local resource person, meeting in Mogadishu, 19 January 2016.

- Source D, local resource person, meeting in Mogadishu, 19 January 2016.

- Source E, local representative of international organisation, meeting in Mogadishu, 20 January 2016.

- Source F, representative of local organisation, meeting in Mogadishu, 20 January 2016.

- Source G, local representative of international organisation, meeting in Mogadishu, 21 January 2016.

- Source H, local resource person, meeting in Mogadishu, 21 January 2016.

- Source I, diplomat, meeting in Nairobi, 22 January 2016.

- Source J, representative of international organisation, meeting in Nairobi, 9 February 2015.

- Source K, representative of international organisation, meeting in Nairobi, 17 February 2015.