

# NAVIGATING TRADE CONTROLS

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CHECKPOINTS  
ALONG SOMALIA'S GARISSA CORRIDOR

Jamal Mohammed



**Rift Valley Institute**  
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## DESIGN

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# SUMMARY

- The Garissa corridor is an essential artery for trade and exchange between Kismayo in Somalia's Jubaland state, and the Kenyan city of Garissa. Checkpoints along this route were originally a militia phenomenon, with each sub-clan operating its own roadblocks. They proliferated during the clan militia period (1990–2006) with checkpoints controlled by warlords from various clans and sub-clans. Since 2007, after the short-lived Islamic Courts Union (ICU) period, al-Shabaab became a key player in the control of checkpoints along the corridor.
- Today, all checkpoints along the corridor are either controlled by al-Shabaab or soldiers representing the Somalia National Army or the Jubaland Security Forces, also known as the Darwish, which control entry and exit points to Kismayo itself. On the Kenyan side of the corridor, several security and customs agencies operate checkpoints.
- Checkpoints are versatile tools of government. Along the Garissa corridor, they serve primarily as revenue collection tools, allowing armed actors to extract wealth from cross-border trade flows. But they are also deployed to project symbolic authority and to deprive opponents of income through discriminatory taxation policies.
- Competing taxation regimes co-exist along the corridor. Transporters pay at each checkpoint under control of government-allied forces, while al-Shabaab only taxes vehicles once, yielding a receipt that gives free passage at subsequent checkpoints it controls. Al-Shabaab nonetheless charges and benefits more: the group generates approximately two million US dollars per month in checkpoint revenues, compared to five hundred thousand US dollars generated by government-controlled checkpoints.
- The presence of competing checkpoint taxation regimes increases transport costs, affecting the overall cost of goods flowing along the route, and ultimately inflating consumer prices. To ease the burden of checkpoints on cross-border trade, transport entrepreneurs may attempt to skirt government checkpoints by taking 'bush routes' during the dry season. To smooth their passage through al-Shabaab checkpoints and those put in place by Kenyan authorities, they often use brokers (dilaal) who negotiate the terms of passage and settle payments remotely.
- Checkpoint taxes weigh comparatively more heavily on agricultural goods and therefore disproportionately affect small-scale traders—typically marginalized groups, including women, vulnerable displaced persons, and people from minority clans.
- There is no evidence to suggest that checkpoint revenues are reciprocated by public goods or services to citizens, whether by al-Shabaab or the Jubaland authorities. In addition, taxes collected from checkpoints are not allocated equitably in the departmental budget allocations within the administration, and the lack of resource sharing by dominant clans entails the marginalization of weak clans in society.

# MAP: CHECKPOINTS ALONG THE GARISSA CORRIDOR



# INTRODUCTION

Based on studies of the cross-border livestock trade between Jubaland in southern Somalia and north-eastern Kenya in 2003, Somalia has been likened to an ‘economy without a state’.<sup>1</sup> This description reflects a fascination with the apparently thriving nature of the economy in a country that by most measures was stateless. Since the collapse of the central government in the 1990s, a rapidly shifting variety of militia has held sway across southern Somalia. The proliferation of checkpoints controlled by a combination of clan militia, freelance bandits and roaming soldiers is often taken to epitomize this statelessness.

By exploring the political economy of checkpoints along the Garissa corridor, this report argues that it is now necessary to move on from this oft-cited portrayal of the Somali economy as ungoverned. Twenty years later, cross-border trade relies on political brokerage and is subject to relatively standardized, if competing, taxation regimes at roadside checkpoints.

The Garissa corridor is a case in point. It connects Kismayo, a major port city on the Indian Ocean coast of Somalia, to the border town of Dhobley and into northern Kenya. Goods and people move in huge numbers across the border at Dhobley, making it an essential cross-border node between Somalia and Kenya.<sup>2</sup> The route serves as an essential conduit for consumer goods imported to Kenya through Kismayo and is a busy livestock marketing route in both directions. This makes the route an attractive target for aspiring authorities to extract wealth from the various mobile economies, and a plurality of formal and informal armed actors operate checkpoints along the Garissa corridor. On the Somali side this includes al-Shabaab and the forces of the relatively autonomous Jubaland state. On the Kenyan side, several agencies are deployed at checkpoints, including the Border Control Unit, Rapid Deployment Unit, Kenya Defense Forces and various police units.

Checkpoints have implications for different forms of trade that exist in Jubaland state and between Jubaland and Kenya. They are not only devices to generate revenue but also governing devices to promote some forms of trade and block others. In the context of the conflict between al-Shabaab and the government, checkpoint taxes are used to implement economic sanctions by blockading specific forms of exchange between enemy-held locations.

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1 Peter Little, *Somalia: Economy Without State*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003.

2 European Asylum Support Office, ‘Somalia Security Situation: Country of Origin Information Report’, September 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/easo-country-origin-information-report-somalia-security-situation-september-2021>.

This study investigates the dynamics and impact of checkpoints operated by different armed groups along the corridor, including the tax burden, security implications and competing interests. The report begins with background on how checkpoints evolved in Somalia, focusing on Jubaland. It then discusses current dynamics along the route, examining the differential impact on markets and security, as well as the strategies used by transporters to mitigate the burden of cross-border checkpoints. It goes on to analyze implications for security and competing state-making projects before providing conclusions and recommendations.



# HOW CONTROL OVER CHECKPOINTS HAS EVOLVED

Checkpoints along the Garissa corridor are probably as old as the corridor itself. The corridor likely found its current form when the British colonial administration built the road from Kismayo to Garissa in the 1940s to expand its control over the Somali territories.<sup>3</sup> Colonial authorities often maintained control posts to monitor the movement of people and livestock and impose the indirect taxes on which they largely relied. Key checkpoints, such as those at Afmadow and Saa Moja, probably originated as colonial control posts, despite changing hands frequently throughout the turbulent history of the area.

While the number of checkpoints appears to have been relatively stable under the Siad Barre regime (1969–1991),<sup>4</sup> they rapidly multiplied when widespread strife and armed conflict broke out between clan militias. When Somalia descended into civil war and contested statehood in the 1990s, strategic nodes along trade routes (ports, airports and checkpoints) became key focal points of conflict between competing armed factions. Control over checkpoints was vital as they were sites where transit taxes were easily collected on the wealth concentrated in high-density trade flows.<sup>5</sup> Consequent to armed conflict between various groups, the corridor has also served as an escape route for Somalis fleeing the country to settle in refugee camps in Kenya, such as Dadaab and Dagahaley.

As Table 1 shows, checkpoints along the Garissa corridor have evolved in three main phases. First, clan militia mostly operated checkpoints between 1991 and 2006. Second, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) briefly took control over roads from February to August 2006. Third, control over checkpoints has been split between al-Shabaab and the Jubaland State of Somalia (JSS) since 2006.<sup>6</sup>

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- 3 A. Makina, *The Northern Frontier District – The Struggle of Deghow Maalin Sambul*, Nairobi: DR AUDI Publishing, 2023.
  - 4 See Peer Schouten, ‘Paying the Price: The political economy of checkpoints in Somalia’, Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, October 2023. See also: <https://ipisresearch.be/mapping/webmapping/somalia/v1/>
  - 5 Tobias Hagmann and Finn Stepputat, ‘Corridors of trade and power: Power, economy and state formation in Somali east Africa’, Working Paper 8, Copenhagen: Danish Institute International Studies, 2016; Ahmed M Musa, Finn Stepputat, and Tobias Hagmann, ‘Revenues on the hoof: Livestock trade, taxation and state-making in the Somali territories’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 15/1 (2021).
  - 6 Interview with a clan elder, Kismayo, 29 October 2022.

**TABLE 1.** The evolution of checkpoints along the Garissa corridor

Actors	Total checkpoint costs (USD)	Number of checkpoints	Locations (main checkpoints)	Restricted goods
Phase 1: Clan militia (1990–2006)	~ USD 500	50	Via Afmadow, <sup>7</sup> Janay Abdallah, Bibi, Afmadow, Qoqani and Dhobley	None
Phase 2: Islamic Courts Union (February–August 2006)	USD 100	3	Via Afmadow, Afmadow and Dhobley	Haram (unclean) goods: alcohol and drugs <sup>8</sup>
Phase 3: Al-Shabaab (2007 to present)	270	4	Berhani, Janay Abdallah, Bibi, and Mido	Livestock from government-controlled areas, haram goods: alcohol and drugs
Phase 3: Jubaland State of Somalia (2013 to present)	USD 110	5	Via Afmadow, Afmadow, Qoqani, Tabto and Dhobley	Haram goods: alcohol and drugs, although sometimes these goods are smuggled through government checkpoints

Source: Compiled by author based on interviews.

During the clan militia period (1990–2006), checkpoints in Jubaland were controlled and coveted by warlords from various clans and sub-clans – the value concentrated in long-distance trade made for a relatively easy and attractive source of cash. Control of the port of Kismayo and associated checkpoints, which were vital to financing the militias, frequently changed hands in the power struggle between the major Darod clans: Ogaden, Majerteen and Marehan.<sup>9</sup> For example, the UN Monitoring Group reports that the warlord Bare Hiiraale, extorted approximately USD 362,000 in annual revenues from control of the checkpoint at Kismayo airport during this period.<sup>10</sup>

Initially, the prominent clans were organized into various armed militias. This included: the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) for the Majerteen clan; the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) for the Ogaden clan; the Somali Democratic Movement (SDM) for the Raxanweyne; and the Somalia National Front (SNF) for the Marehan. During the civil war, these larger units split into alliances led by General Aidid and his Somali National Alliance (SNA), and Ali Mahdi and his Somali Salvation Alliance (SSA).<sup>11</sup> None of these alliances and formations proved to be stable, however, as they regularly split to form new alliances cutting across clans and clan families. A truck driver in Garissa explained: ‘From the Somalia side, checkpoints

7 Via Afmadow (Italian: ‘the Afmadow road’) is the checkpoint at the entry/exit point for Kismayo.

8 Both the ICU and al-Shabaab use (and have used) checkpoints to enforce prohibitions against *haram* (unclean) goods—such as alcohol and drugs—as well as to enforce other trade restrictions.

9 Marcel Djama, ‘Political economies of war and peace in Somalia’, Montpellier: Agropolis International, October 2007.

10 UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, ‘Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 2182 (2014): Somalia’, October 2015.

11 Virginia Luling, ‘Come back Somalia? Questioning a collapsed state’, *Third World Quarterly* 18/2 (1997).

were controlled by warlords from clan militias, while on the Kenya side roving bandits held sway. Taxes at clan militia checkpoints were flexible and more amenable to negotiations, if you had ties with those staffing them.<sup>12</sup> Yet moving along the corridor meant passing through a multitude of checkpoints, with each local faction opportunistically claiming a transit tax for passage through ‘their’ area.

The number of checkpoints and the cost of passing them, however, have drastically fallen over time, starting from when the ICU temporarily took over control of the corridor. During the six short months that the group held sway, it eliminated most checkpoints and reduced taxes from about USD 500 to 100 USD. During this brief period, there was a sense of relief from the dominance of clan militia, which was characterized by looting, unlawful killing and a decentralized system of taxation. Road users still recall with nostalgia how the ICU instituted a system whereby transit taxes were only paid at the first checkpoint, yielding a receipt that gave free passage along subsequent checkpoints, a system that has been maintained by al-Shabaab.<sup>13</sup>

After the ICU was defeated, checkpoints once again proliferated, and their locations on the road from Kismayo to Dhobley have remained relatively static ever since. Over time, checkpoints have become more closely linked to various competing administrations. Since 2007, al-Shabaab has continuously maintained checkpoints along the Garissa corridor, despite frequent attempts to oust them. In 2012, Ahmed Madobe’s militia wrested control over Kismayo from Al-Shabaab. Since then, the checkpoints at the entry/exit point for Kismayo (called ‘Via Afmadow’), the town of Afmadow and at Dhobley have been more or less permanently under the control of Jubaland forces. In 2015, there were five checkpoints between Kismayo and Dhobley: two operated by al-Shabaab and the remaining three by JSS forces.<sup>14</sup> In 2023, nine checkpoints are found along the route (discussed in detail below). While checkpoint taxes have never fallen back to the level during the ICU period, the route has remained less expensive than during the clan militia period. A Land Cruiser driver compares costs: ‘The cumulative fee paid for a medium duty truck’s [Dyno] one way journey during the militia period was USD 500 as compared to the current amount of USD 270 [USD 90 for transit plus goods taxes of USD 180] collected by al-Shabaab and USD 110 for the JSS.’<sup>15</sup>

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12 Interview with a truck driver, Kismayo, 30 October 2022.

13 Interview with land cruiser driver, Kismayo, 9 November 2022.

14 Danish Immigration Service, ‘South Central Somalia: Country of Origin Information for Use in the Asylum Determination Process’, Copenhagen: Danish Immigration Service, September 2015.

15 Interview with truck driver, Kismayo, 18 January 2023.

# FLOWS OF TRADE ALONG THE CORRIDOR

Although described as a corridor, which suggests a single route between two points, the Garissa corridor is best understood as a direction or flow of trade between different points. The actual routes used to travel between these vary substantially, depending on the season and the type of goods that are being transported. Nonetheless, the backbone of the Garissa corridor is the highway connecting Kismayo, Afmadow and Dhobley, which then continues across the Kenyan border to Garissa (see overview map).

While this is a heavily used route, it is also seasonal. During the two rainy seasons (April–June and October–November) traffic along the corridor comes to a near standstill.<sup>16</sup> After heavy rains, the road becomes so muddy that the trip from Dhobley or Afmadow to Kismayo, which usually takes 24 and 72 hours (about three days) in the dry season, can take over a week. This means that transportation is limited to manufactured goods as perishable goods become impossible to move because they are likely to spoil before they arrive at their destination. This leads to a market price increase in Kismayo for fresh agricultural produce during the rainy seasons. A trader interviewed in Kismayo confirms this: “The prices are relatively low in the dry seasons compared to the rainy seasons, and perishable goods like potatoes are affected by road conditions and checkpoint taxation along the route.”<sup>17</sup>

During the dry seasons (July–September and December–March), an average of 30 heavy, medium and light trucks a day travel from Kenya to Kismayo, along with a roughly equal number in the opposite direction (see Table 2). Most truck drivers stay on the main corridor but some also take alternative overland routes, improvising a journey over the hard-baked earth. They do so mainly to save money by skirting checkpoints. While it is possible to bypass government checkpoints in this way, transporters always pay al-Shabaab, because the group severely punishes transporters attempting to elude their taxes.

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16 Somalis recognize four seasons: two rainy seasons (*gu* and *dayr*) and two dry seasons (*hagaa* and *jiilaal*). The *gu* rains begin in April and last until June. This is followed by the *hagaa* dry season from July to September. Then comes *dayr*, the next rainy season, from October to November. Finally, *jiilaal* is the dry season from December to March, which is the harshest season for pastoralists and their herds. Given the increasing effects of climate change, however, these seasons are far from stable.

17 Interview with a trader in Kismayo, Kismayo, 18 November 2022.

**TABLE 2.** Variation in seasonal traffic counts along the corridor

Type of vehicle	Rainy seasons (April–June; October–November) number of vehicles per day		Dry seasons (July–September; December–March) number of vehicles per day	
	Kenya–Kismayo	Kismayo–Kenya	Kenya–Kismayo	Kismayo–Kenya
Heavy-duty truck (22 tires, with trailer and a weight of 28 tons)	10	0	15	10 to 18
Medium or light-duty truck (10 tires and weight of 7.5 tons)	3 to 6	0	10	25
Minibus	0	0	8	15
Taxi	15	0	30 to 45	15 to 30

Source: Compiled by author based on interviews with transporters.

On the route from Kenya to Kismayo, the main cargo includes potatoes, white flour, bottled water, cement and other construction materials, such as timber, iron sheets, nails, water containers, plastic sheets and tools. Trade in the other direction is more controversial. As a port close to Kenya but not under Kenyan jurisdiction, Kismayo has become a vital import hub for black market goods intended for retail in Kenya. While officially prohibited, large quantities of imported sugar and other consumer goods make their way from Kismayo into Kenya, which complement insufficient domestic supplies or are sought after because they are cheaper. Besides sugar, items travelling from Kismayo to Dhobley and into Kenya include powdered milk, rice, pasta, vegetable oil, electronics, perfumes and vehicle parts. Because they are illegal, these goods are often repackaged in Dhobley or the Dadaab refugee complex to conceal their Somali origins.<sup>18</sup> As one sugar transporter in Garissa explains: ‘During the dry season, on any given day, you can find 15 trucks on the road carrying sugar heading from Kismayo to Kenya. We make sure to offload and repack it before it reaches the market of Garissa.’<sup>19</sup>

While the Kenyan government does not license this trade, the profits attract the involvement of Kenyan political elites and well-capitalized entrepreneurs. Despite being heavily taxed at checkpoints along the way, these cumulative costs along the route are still far lower than the very high official duties that would have to be paid for the legal import of similar items.<sup>20</sup> As one trucker transporting sugar from Kismayo to Garissa observes:

You must be well-connected to be in this business. As a transporter, I await a call from the buyer in Garissa, who will tell me that the shipment is ready at the port in Kismayo. It is all agreed on in advance. They approach the authorities on both sides of the border to alert them in advance

18 Interviews with transporters, Garissa, 19 November 2022. Also see: ‘Dobley Cross-border Market Profile Report’, FEWSNET, February 2011, 2. Accessed 13 July 2023, [https://fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/EA\\_Crossborder\\_Profile\\_Dobley.pdf](https://fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/EA_Crossborder_Profile_Dobley.pdf).

19 Six FGD participants, Garissa, 6 December 2022.

20 See Jay Badahur, ‘Terror and Taxes: Inside al-Shabaab’s revenue-collection machine’, Geneva: Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2022, 27–8.

and settle payments whenever possible.<sup>21</sup>

To broker the cross-border trade of contraband along routes that include many different checkpoint authorities, clan connections are essential. Most traders and transporters operating along this road are ostensibly people who know one another through clan ties and have a good rapport with authorities and political elites on both sides of the border. The Ogaden clan is dominant both in Jubaland and north-eastern Kenya, including in Garissa. Their clan connections help negotiate the payment of checkpoint taxes and facilitate trading opportunities along the corridor. Traders in Garissa also hint at the deep involvement of al-Shabaab in the supply chain of contraband products into Kenya. This occurs through the ability of the group to facilitate the import process of goods arriving at the port of Kismayo and checkpoint taxation along the corridor.<sup>22</sup>

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21 Five FGD participants, Garissa, 6 December 2022.

22 Four FGD participants, Garissa, 6 December 2022.

# COMPETING TAXATION REGIMES

The Garissa corridor constitutes a fractured political terrain, comprising competing authorities that enforce their power and transit levies. Along the corridor, three different authorities can be identified. On the Somali side of the border, there is the overlapping authority of the federal member state government (Jubaland State of Somalia, or JSS) and al-Shabaab, while on the Kenyan side, officials from several security and customs agencies are deployed at different points along the road. Checkpoints play different roles in these various competing projects of authority operating along the route.

The overview map (page 6) details the main checkpoints currently operating along the Somali portion of the corridor. The distance from Kismayo to Dhobley is around 240 km and there are nine checkpoints along the route—on average, a checkpoint every 27 km. Five of the checkpoints are under control of governmental security forces (Via Afmadow, Afmadow, Qoqani, Tabto and Dhobley) while Al-Shabaab controls four (Berhani, Janay Abdallah, Bibi and Mido).

As mentioned, there is also a shortcut that truckers resort to in the dry season to skirt government checkpoints along the main road. This route cuts away from the main route after Berhani and then passes through checkpoints at Qudus (al-Shabaab), Biya Qabobe (Al-Shabaab), Hoosingo (Jubaland Security Forces), and then passes the border checkpoint at Degcaday (Jubaland Security Forces) or Deg-Ilima (Jubaland Security Forces) close to Dhobley.

**TABLE 3.** Checkpoints along the Somali portion of the Garissa corridor and alternative routes (early 2023)

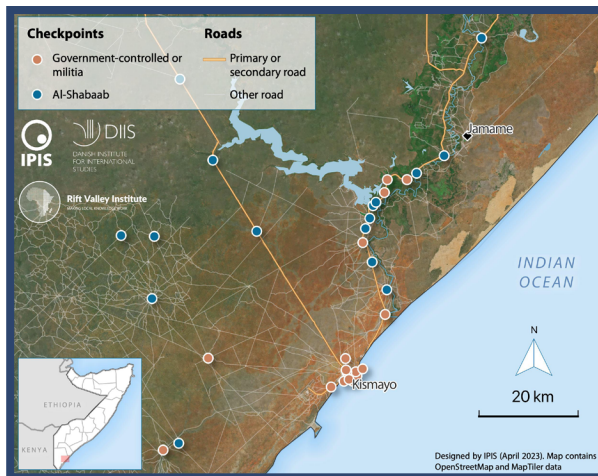
Name of checkpoint	Description	Controlled by
<i>Main corridor</i>		
Via Afmadow	The exit point to Kismayo town	JSS
Berhani	Al-Shabaab-controlled checkpoint - it lies between Via Afmadow and Janay Abdallah	Al-Shabaab
Janay Abdallah	This is the main al-Shabaab checkpoint along the route after leaving Kismayo, where most trucks exiting get registered and taxed. This checkpoint is where al-Shabaab enforces its economic isolation by taxing traders going in and out of Kismayo.	Al-Shabaab
Bibi	Al-Shabaab controls this checkpoint.	Al-Shabaab
Mido	This is the al-Shabaab checkpoint closest to Afmadow town	Al-Shabaab
Afmadow	Important government-held area for taxes on cattle trade.	JSS

Qoqani	The government operates this checkpoint between Afmadow and Dhobley.	JSS
Tabto	This is a government-controlled area, and ATMIS soldiers have a military base.	JSS
Dhobley	This is the border crossing into Kenya and the government controls checkpoints.	JSS
<b>Alternative route</b>		
Qudus	This is an al-Shabaab checkpoint for checking and verifications	Al-Shabaab
Biya Qabobe	This is an al-Shabaab checkpoint for checking and verifications	Al-Shabaab
Hosingo	This is an al-Shabaab checkpoint for checking and verifications	JSS
Deg-ilima	This is the border crossing into Kenya; an area of Dhobley	JSS
Degcadeey	This is the JSS checkpoint on the border crossing into Kenya	JSS

Source: Compiled by author based on interviews.

The Jubaland State Forces, supported by the Kenyan Defence Forces as part of the Africa Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), control Kismayo and operates several checkpoints at main road junctions and the principal entry and exit points to the town. Because the Jubaland authorities have not received official financial assistance from actors under the United Nations framework, taxes levied at the port and along roads are pivotal revenues for this federal member state.<sup>23</sup> All around, however, al-Shabaab operates checkpoints on access roads to the town, in effect turning Kismayo into a besieged government-controlled enclave (see map below).

### MAP: Checkpoints around Kismayo



23 Vanda Felbab-Brown, 'The Problem with Militias in Somalia: Almost everyone wants them despite their dangers', Brookings, 14 April 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-problem-with-militias-in-somalia-almost-everyone-wants-them-despite-their-dangers/>.



In a typical journey from Kismayo to Garissa, payments begin at the port, where the Jubaland authorities who answer to president Madobe levy import charges on commodities brought in by ship.<sup>24</sup> After cargo is transhipped onto a truck in Kismayo, the first payment to Jubaland forces is at the Via Afmadow checkpoint, an old colonial control post that became a government checkpoint.

**IMAGE:** Satellite image of the checkpoint at the junction Via Afmadow which marks the entry point to Kismayo. Airbus DS image provided by Catapult, courtesy of XCept.



From here on, the road is substantially under Al-Shabaab control, and the next four checkpoints are operated by this group. The first al-Shabaab checkpoint a truck encounters is Berhani (or Beerxani in Somali spelling), 35 km from Via Afmadow. Yet it is fifteen kilometers further at Janay Abdallah (Somali: Jana Cabdalle) that al-Shabaab has its main tax collection checkpoint. This is an obligatory passage point for all traffic from the coast that wishes to exit in the direction

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24 Interview with trader, Kismayo, 16 November 2022.

of Kenya, save vehicles who take the shortcut in the dry season. Al-Shabaab requires all trucks to submit to a thorough check at Janay Abdallah, often involving offloading all cargo to inspect it and establish the tax rate. The truck driver and handler are interrogated, and the trader who owns the cargo is registered for future remote taxation. After payment, al-Shabaab issues two receipts—one for transit (*gadiid*) and one for the goods carried (*badeeco*)—that ensure free passage at subsequent checkpoints under its control.<sup>25</sup> When continuing along the corridor, vehicles will pass the Bibi checkpoint, which is also under al-Shabaab control.<sup>26</sup> It typically suffices for the driver to show the two receipts to be waved through.

**TABLE 4.** Al-Shabaab and JSS checkpoint tax rates for different vehicle types for a trip between Kismayo and Dhobley

Vehicle type	Al-Shabaab transit and cargo taxes (USD)			JSS checkpoint taxes (USD)	Total checkpoint costs (USD)
	Transit ( <i>gadiid</i> )	Cargo ( <i>badeeco</i> )	Total AS taxes	Transit ( <i>gadiid</i> )	
Taxi	30	-	30	11	41
Minibus	35	-	35	15	50
Dyno	90	180	270	110	380
Medium-duty truck (UD/Canter)	180	300	480	110	590
Heavy-duty truck (22 tyres, with trailer)	450	975	1,425	400	1,825

Source: Compiled by author from numerous sources.<sup>27</sup>

Based on the standard tax rates levied by al-Shabaab and the JSS listed in Table 4, as well as factoring in the average traffic counts listed in Table 2, it is possible to make an approximate calculation of periodic checkpoint revenues that accrue to both entities. Table 5 calculates al-Shabaab and JSS checkpoint revenues along the corridor based on dry-season traffic intensities.

25 Note that *badeeco* is but one kind of cargo tax (for bulk commodities) and that the group taxes agricultural produce (*dalag*) and the passage of livestock (*xoolo*) according to different tax rates. See: Bahadur, ‘Terror and Taxes’.

26 The name of this checkpoint is an adaptation of ‘*Vibi*’, allegedly a reference to the V-shape of the junction where it is located.

27 This table is derived from the following sources: United Nations Security Council, ‘Letter dated 2 October 2018 from the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea’, 2 October 2018, S/2019/1002, 95. Accessed 13 July 2023, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/s20181002.php>; United Nations Security Council, ‘Letter dated 1 September 2022 from the Panel of Experts on Somalia addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Somalia’, 1 September 2022, S/2022/754, 45. Accessed 13 July 2023, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/638/44/PDF/N2263844.pdf?OpenElement>; Bahadur, ‘Terror and taxes’; and interviews with various transporters and traders.

**Table 5.** Checkpoint revenues for al-Shabaab and the JSS, Garissa corridor during the dry season (USD)<sup>28</sup>

Type of vehicle	Standard al-Shabaab rate (USD)	Standard JSS rate (USD)	Average daily dry-season traffic (number of vehicles)		Al-Shabaab daily tax revenues (USD)		JSS daily tax revenues (USD)	
			Kenya-Kismayo	Kismayo-Kenya	Kenya-Kismayo	Kismayo-Kenya	Kenya-Kismayo	Kismayo-Kenya
Heavy-duty truck (22 tyres, with trailer)	1,425	400	15	14	21,375.00	19,950.00	6,000.00	5,600.00
Medium-duty truck (UD/ Canter)	480	110	10	25	4,800.00	12,000.00	1,100.00	2,750.00
Minibus	35	15	8	15	280.00	525.00	120.00	1,225.00
Taxi	30	11	37	22	1,110.00	660.00	407.00	242.00
Subtotal					27,565.00	33,135.00	7,627.00	9,817.00
Daily total						60,700.00		17,444.00
Monthly total						1,821,000.00		523,320.00
Annual total						12,747,000.00		3,663,240.00

Source: Compiled by author based on study data.

Table 5 shows that al-Shabaab collects roughly three and a half times as much in transit taxes than the JSS and thus benefits much more from its checkpoints, despite controlling only three of the eight checkpoints along the route. It is notable that the al-Shabaab checkpoint system only requires one checkpoint per route to be effective. Extrapolating from daily traffic counts at average checkpoint taxes, approximate monthly checkpoint revenue for al-Shabaab is nearly USD 2 million, in contrast to half a million USD for JSS-controlled checkpoints.

As traffic comes to a standstill during rainy periods, these checkpoint revenues are largely valid for the dry months of the year. Based on a conservative estimation of seven dry months,<sup>29</sup> al-Shabaab makes an estimated USD 12.7 million in checkpoint revenues from the route compared to Jubaland authorities, which collect just around USD 3.7 million in checkpoint revenues. It is, however, essential to approach these figures with a measure of caution. First, transporters indicate that government taxation at checkpoints is more flexible and can involve reduced tax rates on a case-by-case basis. Second, many of the trucks carrying manufactured items from Kismayo into Kenya either return empty or carry agricultural produce or *khat*.<sup>30</sup> In these cases,

28 Note that information for light-duty trucks (Dyno-type vehicles) is missing because of a lack of specific traffic information. Some of the information provided on checkpoint taxation is based on approximate figures.

29 The rains have fallen irregularly in the last few years. As a result, the road network has been usable for longer periods of time throughout the year, yielding higher annual checkpoint revenues.

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

transporters may be taxed at substantially lower rates or even in small in-kind donations, by checkpoint operators. As one interlocutor puts it:

Instead of taxing such vehicles, they demand a portion of the *khat* or the vegetables as the vehicle passes through without long stopovers. Formal authorities and informal groups along the route attach value to these commodities and hence respect the perishability of *khat* and vegetables.<sup>31</sup>

Previous research confirms that al-Shabaab maintains a much lower tax rate for agricultural produce (*dalag*) than for goods (*badeego*), levying as little as USD 2–10 for such cargo.<sup>32</sup> This would imply that checkpoint revenues for return trips carrying agricultural produce are substantially lower than outward trips from Kismayo to Kenya, severely reducing the revenues collected periodically at checkpoints.

## MAKING PAYMENTS

Transit taxes at Somali checkpoints, however informal, are typically paid by mobile money transfer. Along the Garissa corridor in contrast, al-Shabaab only collects checkpoint taxes in cash. This is to circumvent government efforts to track transactions that finance the group.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, there are specific situations in which al-Shabaab accepts other forms of payment. According to one transporter:

There are instances when more than 50 trucks pass through the checkpoint together. If each one is charged tax at USD 1,150, the total collected is more than USD 57,500. In such a scenario, al-Shabaab instigates the use of brokers, who collect the money remotely and remit the funds to them.<sup>34</sup>

Brokers (*dilaal*) are Somali business people (typically men), who use their standing in the community to facilitate transactions among trading partners who may not benefit from the trust of shared lineage. Brokerage has developed from the livestock trade, where *dilaal* match sellers with potential buyers in the market, collecting a percentage of each transaction. Most negotiations in the livestock trade are casual, with clan-based relationships maintaining the social fabric that facilitates trade opportunities and protection.<sup>35</sup> As cattle began to be transported by vehicle, brokers ventured into negotiating the checkpoint taxes in the livestock

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31 Interview with truck driver, Garissa, 15 December 2022.

32 Bahadur, 'Terror and Taxes'.

33 Interview with a trader, Dhobley, 15 November 2022.

34 Interview with a transporter, Kismayo, 18 November 2022.

35 Hussein Abdullahi Mahmoud, 'Risky trade, resilient traders: Trust and livestock marketing in Northern Kenya', *Africa* 78/4 (2011).

trade along politically contested roads in the region.<sup>36</sup> As a result, some brokers have even emerged who specialize in negotiating the passage of trucks carrying all kinds of commodities past checkpoints.<sup>37</sup>

The work of a broker is based on trust, ensuring all taxes are negotiated and paid along the route. The increase in cross-border brokerage after Somali state collapse in 1991 is seen as a survival mechanism by traders relying on informal means to conduct their business without a single overarching state with which to interact.<sup>38</sup> A broker who was interviewed confirms that they usually make arrangements with the driver to pay all the taxes along the route, and at the same time, a guarantor (often a clan elder who has a good rapport with al-Shabaab) is assigned to mediate and facilitate the passage of goods and the taxes paid at al-Shabaab checkpoints.<sup>39</sup>

The al-Shabaab tax system is centralized and fixed. All transporters are taxed equally, irrespective of their clan. At the same time, the receipts issued by al-Shabaab provide road users with leeway to travel past subsequent checkpoints along the stated route, without requiring them to make additional payments (see image below). One trader verifies this: ‘The permit issued in Jubaland along the Garissa corridor will allow us to transport goods without fear of paying extra money on al-Shabaab operated checkpoints.’<sup>40</sup>

**IMAGE:** Checkpoint receipts (redacted) issued by the JSS (left) and al-Shabaab (right), at Dhobley and Janay Abdullah, respectively.



36 Fana Gebresenbet, Kirstine Stroh Varming and Philemon Ong’ao Ng’asike, ‘Governing Marketplaces: Self-regulation, Stateness and materialities’, in *Trade Makes States: Governing the Greater Somali Economy*, eds. Tobias Hagmann and Finn Stepputat, London: Hurst/International African Institute, 2023, 117.

37 See: Abdirahman Ali, ‘Brokering Trade Routes: The Political Economy of Checkpoints Along Somalia’s Baidoa Corridor’, Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, September 2023.

38 Philemon O’Ngasike, ‘Fusing Formal and Informal Trading: Emerging Practices in the livestock value chains between Kenya and Somalia’, Working Paper 12, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2019.

39 Interview with a camel trader and broker, Kismayo, 14 November 2022.

40 Interview with a truck driver, Kismayo, 15 November 2022.

This in turn makes al-Shabaab taxation different from the JSS checkpoints or those that were operated during the clan militia period but similar to the practices developed during the brief ICU period.<sup>41</sup> Each encounter at a checkpoint under control of the Jubaland Security Forces entails a possible negotiation of the amount to be paid. Al-Shabaab does, however, impose different levels of tax on vehicles, depending on whether the goods are imports or exports, and whether the goods may benefit government-controlled areas. Another trader explains: ‘Suppose that animals are transported from areas controlled by the government. In that case, al-Shabaab will not allow traders to go through their checkpoints. Sometimes road users are threatened with death or paying double the regular tax.’<sup>42</sup> According to this trader, al-Shabaab regards livestock trading in government-controlled areas, such as Afmadow, as supporting a governance system that contradicts Islamic Shari’a law.<sup>43</sup>

Historically, checkpoints are a phenomenon associated with militias, with each sub-clan running its own checkpoints in its territory along the route. Most of the checkpoints in government-controlled territory are operated on behalf of the JSS by the Jubaland Security Forces (also known as *Darwish*) and are staffed by soldiers who may or may not belong to the clan residing where the checkpoints are located.<sup>44</sup> A truck driver in Kismayo explains: ‘The clan of the current [Jubaland] president dominates the Jubaland administration. Therefore, it’s fair to believe that his clan dominates the Jubaland security forces. Hence government checkpoints will, in turn, mainly be dominated by members of his clan.’<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the local revenue base constituted by transit taxes has been crucial for the relative fiscal and political autonomy of the Jubaland state vis-à-vis the federal government.

These dynamics could quickly change in the event that a civil war erupts, with each clan or sub-clan potentially scrambling for control over the checkpoints located in their territorial land, as occurred during the 2000s.<sup>46</sup> There is also no evidence that the JSS distributes revenues equitably—either among government agencies or in terms of providing public goods in exchange for checkpoint taxes. In addition, it is suggested that checkpoint profiteers who work in the JSS government consume most of the checkpoint revenues.<sup>47</sup>

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41 Interview with a trader, Garissa, 7 November 2022.

42 Interview with a small trader, Garissa, 7 November 2022.

43 Interview with a small trader, Garissa, 7 November 2022. For a detailed discussion of al-Shabaab tax brackets see: Badahur, ‘Terror and taxes’.

44 Interview with a truck driver, Kismayo, 15 November 2022.

45 Interview with a truck driver, Kismayo, 15 November 2022. For discussion of this issue see Colin D. Robinson and Jahara Matisek, ‘Assistance to Locally Appropriate Military Forces in Southern Somalia’, *The RUSI Journal* 165 (2020): 68-78.

46 Many of those who participated in this study make this point.

47 Felbab-Brown, ‘The Problem with Militias in Somalia’.

## CHECKPOINTS IN KENYA

The final checkpoint authorities along the Garissa corridor are the Kenyan security and government forces, which operate between five and seven control posts and checkpoints from the border at Liboi to Garissa. These checkpoints are operated by Kenyan police units, Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) and their Rapid Deployment Unit (RDU), as well as border patrol units and the Kenya Bureau of Standards for Counterfeit Goods (KEBS). As transporters in Garissa explain during a focus group discussion (FGD), the total cost of these checkpoints can be greater than the cumulative cost of those passed in Somalia. One FGD participant explains:

The checkpoint fees we pay along the road are higher on the Kenyan side than on the Somalia side. We spend around KSH 300,000 [USD 2,300] in total during the whole trip but only 25 per cent on the Somalia militia and al-Shabaab. The rest we lose to the Kenyan authorities.<sup>48</sup>

Basically, checkpoint charges are so high in Kenya because the goods moving along the route are labelled contraband. The alleged involvement of the Kenyan army in sugar smuggling and government crackdowns against corruption have raised the stakes of covert collaboration with Somali traders.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, this has increased the premiums involved in facilitating cross-border transport (smuggling) from Kismayo. To streamline the flow of goods, the bulk of the fees on the Kenyan side is not paid to the soldiers at the checkpoint but directly to their superiors by the client receiving the goods. Another FGD participant elaborates:

When we arrive at a checkpoint, we usually stop at a safe distance before the barrier. As a driver, I stay in the cabin. The handler goes out and walks towards the checkpoint guys. If they demand an additional USD 200 of pocket money, we try to pay USD 150 and promise them the rest on the way back. That way, they become invested in your safe passage because you still owe them something.<sup>50</sup>

Checkpoints are key to competing projects of authority but the way they figure in such projects, varies radically. For the Kenyan security forces, checkpoints are devices principally to generate illicit revenue by facilitating the smuggling of contraband from Somalia. For the JSS authorities, while checkpoint fees should support the regular budget, it appears that these revenues serve to support those in power.<sup>51</sup> For al-Shabaab, checkpoints seem to be a key revenue generation tool—and one that is very successful—to bolster its rule. Checkpoints can serve such disparate governance efforts because they are multifunctional. They can be deployed to facilitate contraband and they can support both centralized and decentralized political projects.

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48 Trader FGD participant, Garissa, 5 November 2022.

49 See J. Rasmussen, 'Sweet secrets: Sugar smuggling and state formation in the Kenya-Somalia borderlands', Working Paper No 11, DIIS, 2017.

50 Trader FGD participant, Garissa, 5 November 2022.

51 Felbab-Brown, 'The Problem with Militias in Somalia'.

# THE IMPACT OF CHECKPOINTS ON MARKETS

Checkpoints affect the commodities that are traded along the Garissa corridor in different ways. In general, checkpoints are obstacles to commercial trading along the route. Both al-Shabaab and JSS forces charge checkpoint levies without consideration of the other charges that transporters incur. This leads to the duplication of transit taxes. For contraband destined for Kenya, which is then subject to charges imposed by the Kenyan security forces, this becomes a tripling of taxes. These cost implications are then passed on to the market price of products, thus affecting both traders and consumers alike. This can be illustrated with a focus on the trade in vegetables.

## IMPACT OF CHECKPOINTS ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

Kismayo is a large population centre that lies close to the fertile agricultural areas of the Juba River, which supplies the city and its environs with fresh vegetables and fruits. The relatively small distance between farm and market—often no more than 100 km—is a battleground for the profits that can be made from marketing agricultural produce. In particular, it is home to frequent skirmishes between al-Shabaab and government-allied militias. Both groups compete for control over passage points along the transport routes to export agricultural produce rather than for control over farming areas because the margins are higher for transport and marketing compared to those for production. The checkpoints along the route from Jamaame to Kismayo are listed in Table 6 (also see map on page 16). This provides insight into the double taxation of agricultural produce and the resulting marginalization of small-scale farmers.

**IMAGE:** Areal view of the checkpoint at Baar Sanguuni. Airbus DS image provided by Catapult, courtesy of XCept.





**TABLE 6.** Checkpoints from Jamaame to Kismayo

Checkpoint	Operator	Amount (USD)
Jamaame	Al-Shabaab	35.00
Bangeeni	Al-Shabaab	No charge (verification only)
Qaamqaam	Al-Shabaab and JSS authorities	2.00
Sanguuni	Al-Shabaab	0.30
Kobon	Al-Shabaab	
Baar Sanguuni	Al-Shabaab and Somali National Alliance (SNA)	4.00
Fargagow	Al-Shabaab and SNA	
Singaleer	JSS authorities	0.10
Far Wamo	JSS authorities	0.10
Bulo Gadud	JSS authorities	2.00
Bunda Mashqul	JSS authorities	0.10
Yoontoy	JSS authorities	0.10
Xaaji Weyne	JSS authorities	
Ceejlaale	JSS authorities	0.50
Gobweyn	JSS authorities	4.00
Via Afmadow	JSS authorities	10.00
Total taxes		58.20

Source: Compiled by author based on information from local informants.

Jamaame and Kismayo are separated by a distance of 70 km and 16 checkpoints. Along the route, transporters first meet an al-Shabaab checkpoint in Jamaame, where a one-time fee is levied. This is comprised of a transit tax (*gadiid*) of USD 9 for the vehicle and an agricultural produce tax (*dalag*) of USD 26, for a total of USD 35 in fees. The next al-Shabaab checkpoint that drivers encounter (in Bangeeni) is for verification purposes only. After passing out of the al-Shabaab-controlled area, checkpoints are controlled by the JSS or its affiliates.

The high costs of agricultural products in the Kismayo market are partly attributed to the effects of double taxation by state and non-state actors operating checkpoints. This inflates the market price of commodities, thus ultimately affecting traders and consumers. Checkpoints disproportionately disadvantage small-scale businesses. In turn, this disproportionately affects women, who make up the majority of this sector. This is a further challenge for women in building up their economic position. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and groups from marginalized clans are equally vulnerable to checkpoint-induced marginalization. These vulnerabilities can be compounded, as is the case for small-scale female banana traders, who are multiply discriminated against due to the burden of having numerous marginalized identities (poor, IDP, from a marginalized clan). As a small-scale trader notes: ‘We are often affected by the double taxation taxes along the route and this makes it hard for us operated profitably or

even in some cases to break even in the market'.<sup>52</sup>

Revealingly, market prices in Kismayo are often fixed informally among large-scale traders with better economies of scale, often from the powerful majority clans with connections to political elites in the government. In turn, this limits the influence of small-scale traders in market politics, especially on the pricing of commodities in response to checkpoint fees. One trader alludes to this fact: 'Due to fierce competition in the market, it is sometimes difficult to alter the market price of goods, particularly when the market rate is fixed. Most traders have incurred high operations costs resulting from increased taxation along the [Jamaame–Kismayo] corridor.'<sup>53</sup>

The price of bananas increases due to the high tax cost along the route. This is further affected by the increased transportation costs particularly in wet weather seasons.<sup>54</sup>

**TABLE 7.** The impact of taxation on banana trading in Kismayo

Price at the farm gate for one banana (USD)	Tax levied by al-Shabaab (USD)	Tax levied at JSS checkpoint (USD)	The selling price for one banana at Kismayo market (USD)
0.045	0.0216	0.0144	0.09

Source: Compiled by author based on interviews.

The fertile crest of the Juba Valley is home to many of the most marginalized populations in Somalia and has a heavy al-Shabaab presence.<sup>55</sup> Farming areas are home to Bantu Somalis and agro-pastoralist Reewin communities not affiliated to the major clan lineages that dominate the political economy of Somali clan federalism. They are therefore at risk of economic exploitation and political marginalization.<sup>56</sup> Previous research expresses concern over discriminatory taxes in farming communities, pointing out that checkpoint operators are typically from majority clans while farming is done by minority communities, with checkpoint taxes thus amounting to a predatory form of wealth transfer from already politically marginalized populations towards politically well-connected clans.<sup>57</sup> The rate of taxation for farming produce, while absolutely lower than for cross-border trade goods, is higher on a relative scale, making up half of the final

52 Interview with a small-scale trader, Kismayo, 19 November 2022.

53 Interview with a small-scale trader, Kismayo, 20 November 2022.

54 Table 7 shows that the profit made per banana is USD 0.009. This is calculated by subtracting the cost of the banana at the farm gate (USD 0.045) plus the combined tax costs (USD 0.0216 + 0.0144 = 0.036) from the price of one banana in Kismayo market.

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

56 Nisar Majid and Stephen McDowell, 'Hidden dimensions of the Somalia famine', *Global Food Security* 1/1 (October 2012).

57 Susanne Jaspars, Guhad M. Adan and Nisar Majid, 'Food and Power in Somalia: Business as Usual? A Scoping study on the political economy of food following shifts in food assistance and in governance, Conflict Research Programme, London School of Economics, 21 January 202.

sales price (see Table 7).

## IMPACT OF CHECKPOINTS ON LIVESTOCK TRADING

Livestock production and export is affected by checkpoints in a different way than agriculture is. The area around Afmadow is a vast fertile year-round grazing area, attracting a high concentration of herders with various kinds of livestock. When livestock is trekked, herders can, in theory, avoid the main roads. Nonetheless, they still often follow them as they connect to grazing and watering points. When livestock is trucked, it can be transported more quickly but only if passage is smooth. Given the high average temperatures, animal health and welfare can quickly deteriorate, particularly if a truck suffers long delays. This is a common problem due to bad road conditions or time spent held up at checkpoints.

Ultimately, the risk of animals perishing or losing value during transport from grazing areas in Afmadow to the port of Kismayo means that cattle traders prefer selling camels and cattle in Garissa. In contrast, goats, which are more resilient to long-distance travel, are still mostly transported to Kismayo, and then shipped to overseas markets in the United Arab Emirates and beyond.<sup>58</sup> Checkpoint taxes also add to the considerations that determine the direction of trade of different types of livestock. Traders transporting livestock upstream toward the Kismayo market incur heavy taxation along the way. For these reasons, the profit margins for livestock trading in Kismayo are relatively low compared to Garissa.<sup>59</sup>

Trucking is predominant in the dry season and livestock trekking is mainly done during the rainy season, enabling animals to access pasture and water resources. The movement of cattle is, however, also shaped by political factors. For example, al-Shabaab has blocked trade in specific directions from checkpoints, not permitting traders to go through government-controlled locations such as Afmadow and Qoqani, where checkpoints would result in payment of government taxes.<sup>60</sup> Livestock traders also prefer trekking animals from Afmadow to Garissa market because they may be able to skirt some [government] checkpoints and thereby increase their profits.

In the same vein, currency fluctuations between different markets in separate jurisdictions affect the profits earned from the livestock trade, depending on the location of transactions. This cost is in addition to the double taxation already incurred by traders along the route. Hence, traders in the Garissa and Dhobley markets strictly prefer transactions using the Kenya shilling (KES), while those in the Kismayo market use USD or Somali shillings (SOS). See Table 8 for a comparison of cattle prices in Garissa and Kismayo.

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58 Little, *Somalia: Economy Without State*; N'gasike, 'Fusing Formal and Informal Trading'.

59 N'gasike, 'Fusing Formal and Informal Trading'.

60 N'gasike, 'Fusing Formal and Informal Trading'.

Al-Shabaab seems to maintain a stronger grip on the livestock sector than the government. Anecdotal evidence suggest that al-Shabaab operates through proxies in different livestock markets in Somalia and across the border in Garissa.<sup>61</sup> It is suggested that the group monopolizes the export of goats from Kismayo port, liaising directly with traders to indicate the number of animals they can deliver, and at what price.<sup>62</sup> Al-Shabaab also issues travel permits for livestock at its checkpoints and ensures that livestock coming from government-controlled areas is stopped at its checkpoints. For example, as one livestock trader says, ‘I was arrested and penalized by al-Shabaab while transporting 400 goats from Afmadow to sell at the Kismayo market.’<sup>63</sup>

Towns in government-controlled areas with high growth potential and strategically located in reasonable proximity to the Kenyan border (for example, Kismayo and Qoqani for farming land), and Afmadow for livestock) have been economically constrained by al-Shabaab use of checkpoints. The objective of al-Shabaab checkpoints is to prevent (or at least constrain) government economic gains through increased tax revenues. As a cattle trader in Kismayo reveals, ‘Traders are forced to trade and buy cattle from al-Shabaab-controlled locations such as Bualle and Xagar.’<sup>64</sup> Livestock trading and the fees collected at checkpoints are, therefore, one of the primary ways that al-Shabaab manages to finance its insurgency against the government.<sup>65</sup>

**TABLE 8: Impact of checkpoint taxation on sale price of cattle per head in different locations (USD)**

Purchase price in Afmadow	Al-Shabaab tax at Janay Abdallah	JSS tax in Afmadow	Transport cost for traders going to Kismayo market <sup>66</sup>	Kismayo: sale price for (export market)	Garissa: sale price
410.00	8.00	8.00	80.00	700.00	661.60

Source: Compiled by author based on interviews.

As the transport in livestock indicates, checkpoints should be considered not simply as a form of wealth extraction from key livelihood sectors in Somalia. Rather, they are a key factor that determines the very shape these sectors have—limiting some forms of livelihoods and stimulating others. Across the board, checkpoints also determine which direction the trade of key commodities takes.

61 Interview with a clan elder, 20 November 2022.

62 Interview with a community leader, 20 November 2022.

63 Interview with a livestock trader, 18 November 2022.

64 Interview with cattle trader, Kismayo, 15 November 2022.

65 Katharine Petrich, ‘Cows, Charcoal and Cocaine: Al-Shabaab’s Criminal Activities in the Horn of Africa’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 45/5–6 (2022): 491.

66 This does not apply for cattle that are trekked to market ‘on the hoof’.

# CONCLUSION

The Garissa corridor began as a colonial trade route in the Somali regions. After independence in 1960, the country remained a vital artery for cross-border exchange between the Somali regions in Kenya and Jubaland. Government and al-Shabaab actors alike try to mould and shape the flows of trade along the Garissa corridor, often finding profitable accommodations in collusion with traders. Despite Kenyan law, there is an unceasing flow of contraband from Kismayo to Garissa, and then onward to consumers in Nairobi. Cattle is also trekked or transported from Afmadow to Kismayo, despite al-Shabaab efforts to restrict this trade.

The flow of commodities—licit and illicit—along the Garissa corridor forms the lifeblood of the regional economy and is an important source of revenue for those who control strategic points of passage along this route. Kenyan authorities appear to be pocketing significant bribes for facilitating the flow of contraband into the country. The governing authorities that control checkpoints along the Somali portion of the corridor seem to benefit in unequal measure, with al-Shabaab deriving about three times more revenue from checkpoint taxes than the Jubaland State of Somalia (JSS). These differences are not merely financial but also geopolitical, with taxes on cross-border trade flows informing the symbolic and material balance of power in a fractured political context. Although these authorities seem to offer little in the way of public services in exchange for the revenue they extract from cross-border trade, the relatively stable configuration and the predictability of checkpoint taxes that marks the corridor in 2023 is more beneficial to trade than the proliferation of clan militia checkpoints some decades back (1990–2006).

The burden of checkpoints on society is also unequally distributed. Checkpoints aid and abet the skewed political-economic structure in Jubaland, in which majority clans monopolize trade revenue and political positions. Large-scale traders who are well-connected socio-politically can reduce the burden of [government] checkpoints by skirting them or working through brokers. For small-scale traders, often women (especially in the agricultural sector), IDPs and farmers from minority clans, by contrast, checkpoints are literally trade barriers: They are either disproportionately taxed or unable to compensate for checkpoint taxes through economies of scale. Checkpoints also increase threats to resilience. Markets for perishable goods—farming products that provide important nutrients in a context in which famine always looms—are particularly vulnerable to the compounding burdens of checkpoint taxes and bad road conditions during rainy periods, to the point of pushing producers out of business.

# GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS, WORDS AND PHRASES

<b>ATMIS</b>	Africa Union Transition Mission in Somalia
<i>badeeco</i>	( <i>Somali</i> ) cargo
<i>dalag</i>	( <i>Somali</i> ) agricultural produce
<i>dayr</i>	( <i>Somali</i> ) rainy season between October and November
<i>dilaal</i>	( <i>Somali</i> ) checkpoint broker
<i>gadiid</i>	( <i>Somali</i> ) transit
<i>gu</i>	( <i>Somali</i> ) rainy season between April and June
<i>hagaa</i>	( <i>Somali</i> ) dry season between July and September
<b>ICU</b>	Islamic Courts Union
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person
<i>jiilaal</i>	( <i>Somali</i> ) dry season between December and March
<b>JSS</b>	Jubaland State of Somalia
<b>SNA</b>	Somali National Alliance

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