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To cite this article: Nisar Majid & Khalif Abidrahman (09 Jun 2026): Somalia's Fragmented Logics of Public Authority and Transnational Conflict, Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding, DOI: [10.1080/17502977.2026.2668214](https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2026.2668214)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2026.2668214>



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Published online: 09 Jun 2026.



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Somalia's Fragmented Logics of Public Authority and Transnational Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Somalia is frequently referred to for its fragmented political and territorial dispensation. The article examines the case of Jubbaland, presented as one of the fragments of public authority within the country's wider tapestry of political order. The article shows how Jubbaland is itself an ambiguous and fragmented political entity which can also be conceived as a 'transboundary formation', constituted by the transborder Ogaden clan linking Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. The article further examines the role of Jubbaland's dominant political entrepreneur and incumbent President, who has successfully navigated this volatile regional landscape and political marketplace.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 January 2025

Accepted 29 April 2026

KEYWORDS

Somalia; Jubbaland; fragmentation; diaspora; public authority; political marketplace

Introduction

Somalia, since the overthrow of the military junta in 1991, is frequently referred to for its fragmented political and territorial dispensation. Since the total collapse of the state, its evolution, over the last thirty years, has seen very distinct forms of sub-national state formation processes, some of which have persisted, others of which have soon dissolved. The two most distinct and persistent of these state-like polities have been the *de facto* state of Somaliland and the autonomous polity of Puntland, the latter now one of Somalia's Federal Member States (FMS). Amongst the other notable emergent forms of public authority have been the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) – itself an amalgamation of highly localized Islamic court authorities – and its successor, the militant Islamist group Al Shabaab, now in its second decade. The current Federal government, established in 2012, marked the beginning of a new period in these state formation processes, where an internationally sponsored state-building programme led to the creation of new sub-national polities – as Federal Member States – each with their own logic of statehood. This wider political-territorial condition has been described in the words of Alex De Waal (2020, 561) as a 'disassembled patchwork of public authorities and political entrepreneurs'.

Policy and scholarly analysis has been concerned with the logics and contours of these variegated forms of state collapse and re-assembly in Somalia, which have been driven by

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different combinations of sub-national, national, transnational, and international factors. Since early 2023, these state formation processes have gained renewed attention and controversy, with a new FMS, the SSC-Khatumo, in the process of being recognized by the Federal government, following a major conflict in the contested area between Somaliland and Puntland (Norman 2023). Most recently, the controversial MoU signed between Somaliland and Ethiopia that purports to see Ethiopia grant recognition to Somaliland has set in train further potential ruptures (Hoehne 2024).

In this article, we build upon De Waal's (2020) framing and analysis of Somalia and examine it in relation to the subnational polity of Jubbaland, one of the patchworks of public authority to which De Waal alludes. We ask the question of what the case of Jubbaland – neither a *de facto* state (such as Somaliland), an autonomous polity (such as Puntland), nor simply a vassal for central Somali patronage politics – can tell us about state fragmentation. Analyses by Benson (2025) on South Sudan and Gueudet (2026) on Bosnia–Herzegovina in this issue provide comparable perspectives on fragmenting political orders and the entanglement of global, regional, national, and subnational dynamics of peace and conflict. While there is a modest comparative literature on the political evolution of Somaliland and Puntland (Bryden 1999; De Waal 2015; Hagmann and Hoehne 2009; Hagmann and Stepputat 2023; Hoehne 2009, 2011), there is little in relation to the more recent polities such as Jubbaland.¹ Furthermore, whereas the two northern polities are located in the immediate aftermath of state collapse and are largely locally driven processes albeit with transnational aspects, Jubbaland emerged in a post-9/11 securitized context as an outcome of a 'liberal' statebuilding project (De Waal 2020; Menkhaus 2018). However, as our contribution outlines, the transborder (clan) lens we apply adds a powerful 'Somali' political agency at transcalar levels within this international securitized space. While there is a substantial critical literature on the failures of 'liberal' international statebuilding and security interventions (Lemay-Hébert 2013; Mac Ginty 2011), our article examines the alternative or emic political projects that are emergent from and embedded within this international interventionism.

In addition, the particular configuration of transborder political mobilization we outline is unlikely elsewhere in the Somali-speaking sub-region, given the political salience of the Ogaden identity within Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.² This characteristic highlights the highly variegated character of fragmentation and political settlements within the Somali political milieu, and the need to understand cases distinctly as well as comparatively. Finally, our examination of Jubbaland's only President to date, Ahmed Madobe, adds to the existing scholarship on the dynamics of the political marketplace in the Horn of Africa (De Waal 2015, 2020; Majid et al. 2021).

De Waal (2020) contends that Somalia's governance today has been shaped by two enduring processes, firstly, the way that the organization of violence has driven the formation of identities and polities, and secondly, the penetration of a market logic within political power which dismantles order-making and the establishment of public authority. In his analysis, these processes are applied historically, with the years 1987–92, the immediate period around the material collapse of the state, presented as the 'zenith' in violent identity construction, and which, he argues, has informed political processes ever since. The outcome of these processes has led to the establishment of ethno-political-territorial entities. De Waal primarily takes a national, historical framing, and while pointing to the 'patchwork' or fragmented outcome of political order in Somalia, does

not examine any sub-national polities in any detail. Rather, in his historical account, Somalia's contemporary predicament (2005 onwards, in his periodization) is presented as an arena of diverse actors that combine security, governance, and commercial roles, connecting the local, national, and transnational, framed as a contest between the Islamist group, Al Shabaab, and a global security assemblage (De Waal 2020, 563).

We take De Waal's analysis as our point of departure, focusing on Jubbaland as our subnational case study. We add to his analysis in three main ways: firstly, and most significantly, by elaborating in detail the particular multi-layered 'transboundary formation' that is Jubbaland, as a form of public authority constituted within this arena of diverse actors. We thus reveal the transborder 'clan project' that is Jubbaland and its intersection with the security and economic interests of Kenya and Ethiopia. In doing so, we bring attention to the agency of the 'near' or transborder diaspora, where scholarly focus on the diaspora in Somalia has emphasized the 'far' – typically Western-based – diaspora. From a methodological perspective, our case study approach inverts the analytical lens, looking at the state of Somalia (such as it is) from Jubbaland, one of its peripheries.

Secondly, we observe the limits and ambiguity of this state-like project, which is outwardly presented as a politically and territorially bounded unit with the legitimizing symbols of statehood, but on closer inspection has a 'twilight' status in terms of its institutional character, temporality, and spatiality, resonant of Lund's (2006) notion of public authority and as part of a disordered and disordering political marketplace (De Waal 2015).

Finally, we examine the role and positionality of Jubbaland President, Ahmed Mohamed Islaan 'Madobe', as a political entrepreneur par excellence, an actor-type who De Waal (2015) associates with the political marketplace, and who demonstrates a range of capacities and skills enabling him to survive and prosper in a monetized, violent, and turbulent environment.

The article and its particular case study – Jubbaland – draws on over ten years' collaboration by the authors. Its starting point, retrospectively speaking, began with doctoral research by one of the authors (2007–13) when we first met, and where one of the themes of our many discussions concerned political developments in Lower and Middle Juba of present-day Jubbaland, as well as Somali Regional State, Ethiopia (SRS). Since then, we have collaborated on numerous studies as well as formed the core research team on two multi-year university research programmes, both of which have maintained a transborder and transnational perspective and which have included other scholars with a similar expertise and background.³ One of us is originally from SRS, Ethiopia, and raised in Somalia, while the other has worked across the Somali-speaking sub-region for over twenty years. Both of us have lived in Kenya and have spent time in the major hubs relevant to the transborder space that we examine. Our long-standing collaboration and regional perspective have contributed significantly to the preparation of this article.

More specifically, data has been gathered through a variety of means over this time, including through interviews, informal discussions, and participant observation in multiple locations, including within Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, both remotely and in person. The sources upon which we draw include both published and unpublished material, particularly, but not only from the two research programmes on which we have collaborated.⁴ All told, our insights have been brought to bear herein on the subject of political and state fragmentation.

Ethical considerations have been crucial to the development of our empirical data, with attention particularly paid to minimizing the risk of harm to individual interviewees and in recognition of the importance of voluntary participation, integrity, and transparency in the research process (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983).

The article begins with a discussion of the core concepts drawn upon to frame the article, primarily those used by De Waal (2020) in his analysis of Somalia's modern history and Lund (2006) on public authority and the nature of the state. This is followed by a brief overview of the Somalia context, including the key dimensions relevant to state formation and political order in Somalia: clan, Islam, state, and core elements of globalization. Two vignettes, capturing elements of Somaliland and Puntland's evolution, are then presented briefly as examples of Somalia's fragmented dispensation prior to the primary subject of the article, the story of Jubbaland and its distinct genesis. A final section discusses the implications of our analysis for ideas of state fragmentation.

Logics of public authority and the political marketplace

In developing our analysis, we are particularly informed by the theories and concepts of public authority and the political marketplace, as outlined by De Waal (2020) in his analysis of Somalia, and from where we locate our case study, Jubbaland; one of the patchworks of public authority to which he refers; where 'patchwork' evokes the fragmentary character of political order in Somalia. De Waal (2015, 20–22) identifies and positions the political entrepreneur as a key actor within a political marketplace and therefore as part of this fragmentary political dispensation.

The meaning of the state in Africa has confounded and confused scholars and policy experts for some time. Following many years of 'pathological' accounts of state institutions in Africa, a large body of work has developed that provides a more nuanced and empirically grounded analysis of public and state authority (Hagmann and Peclard 2010; Lund 2006; Milliken and Kraus 2002). Hagmann and Hoehne (2009, 43) argue that such 'pathological' approaches were based on essentialist, teleological and instrumentalist conceptions of state and political authority.

Influential in the development of new thinking on the state in Africa has been the political scientist Christian Lund, who emphasized the need to investigate *how public authority actually works* (2006, 674, emphasis in original). Lund highlights that in exploring the political landscape in African contexts, many institutions have a 'twilight' character, that is they 'operate in the twilight between state and society, between public and private' (2006, 686). He further explains that public authority or 'stateness' can wax and wane, where state institutions are never definitively formed, but the idea of the state is always present and is in fact chimerical (2006). In this light, in the case of Somalia, an unusual case of complete and prolonged state collapse, the political sociologists Hagmann and Peclard (2010, 540) point to the '(re-)activation of informal, mostly clan-based, security and governance mechanisms' by Somalis as a response to state collapse, drawing on the work of the political scientist and Somali specialist, Ken Menkhaus (2007, 74).

Lund further emphasizes the importance of the idea of the state and its legitimizing symbols, or administrative regalia, which convey the authority and legitimacy of the state and are required to 'cognitively anchor new institutional and social arrangements'

(2006, 691). Such symbolry extends from the performative rituals of the state to the allocation of official positions in government, and the use of symbols such as official flags and other regalia.

A further complexity in the African political landscape is its ‘extraverted’ nature, a notion developed by the sociologist Jean-Francois Bayart, where state leaders are seen as ‘strategically disposed in relation to both their domestic spaces and their international realm’ (2000, 12). Bayart draws attention to the multi-scalar aspects of the study of power and politics in Africa, and to the entanglement and subaltern engagement of national elites in the international political economy. Bayart also coined the term ‘rhizome state’ to describe the informal institutions and hidden networks that underly and confound the rational-legal Weberian state, and to which Lund’s notion of public authority speaks (1993, 29). These informal institutions, such as the clan in the case of Somalia, comprise networks within which political power is exercised and material accumulation and exchange take place using the resources and authority of the state.

Hagmann (2016) applies Bayart’s framework persuasively to the case of Somalia, explaining how various ‘tactics’, such as mobilizing, appropriating, and redirecting foreign resources and agendas, have been at the core of failed international statebuilding efforts. He highlights how selective or partial recognition is a key foreign policy mechanism utilized by international policy makers, and that this recognition has ‘fueled political competition, rewarded abuse and ineffective governance’, describing Somalia’s federal member states as ‘brief case organizations’ (Hagmann 2016, 7).

Bayart’s work was influential amongst international relations theorists who were grappling with the notion of the state in Africa, in an early post-Cold War context of interventionism; through peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and humanitarianism (Latham, Kassimir, and Callaghy 2001). Emerging out of their cross-disciplinary collaboration, Latham et al. developed the notion of the ‘transboundary formation’; providing historical accounts and case studies that captured the interacting levels – global, regional, national and local – and the structures, networks and discourses that animate power (Latham, Kassimir, and Callaghy 2001, 1–20). These transboundary dimensions of public authority are pertinent to our case study.

De Waal (2020) positions the notion of public authority alongside that of the political marketplace, a framework developed from his experiences in the Horn of Africa, and which has gained currency in policy and academic circles since. A political marketplace is a framework for understanding the intersection of money, violence and the politics of identity. It concerns the commodification and trading of political relations, in particular, where public office, political allegiances and political services are bought and sold according to laws of supply and demand (De Waal 2015). This monetized, transactional politics is said to dominate and undermine institutionalized politics and therefore challenges policy driven statebuilding agendas.

De Waal further emphasizes that understanding the political marketplace requires an ‘appreciation of the skills and strategies required to succeed in it’, typically embodied by a successful political entrepreneur (2020, 20–22). Such actors, according to De Waal, operate as business managers, required to understand market dynamics, particularly when it comes to buying services and loyalty. They are also proficient in the instrumentalization of identity capital in order to frame and reframe political contests, including by evoking and mobilizing identity groups and enticing support from foreign sponsors

(2020). Developing a life history perspective of Jubbland's President and dominant political entrepreneur therefore provides insights on the operations of the political marketplace.

Finally, our focus on the political entrepreneur enables us to connect Lund's notion of public authority with De Waal's political marketplace, where we examine President Ahmed Madobe's capacity and skill to 'operate in the twilight', as Lund indicates, 'between state and society, between public and private', mobilizing money, violence and/or identity politics; in other words, navigating inter and intra-clan fissures and alliances, multiple state interests and bureaucracies, as well as the performative requirements of state leadership.

Somali overview – clan, Islam, state, and globalization

There are four dimensions relevant to state formation and political order in Somalia that we consider: clan, Islam, state, and processes of globalization (trade, diaspora/remittances and international intervention), which have all contributed to the organization of power and territory.

The Somali clan or lineage system is complex and contested but remains an important frame of reference and analytical lens for understanding political, economic and societal organization and norms. In its ideal type, the segmented lineage structure – an extended family tree – has been described as a 'total Somali genealogy' (Cassanelli 2010). This structure or system is recognized as a social construct and, as the anthropologist Virginia Luling put it, is a critical framework through which politics act, 'it is not only good to fight with (or play politics with or do business with) but it is good to think with' (2006, 471).

This fractal-like system is evoked through the mobilization of identities (and affiliations) by either ascending or descending the lineage tree, which may be carried out according to need and circumstances; an external threat or political project may involve evoking higher levels of the lineage tree in order to draw together different sub-groups while, on other occasions, those same sub-groups may compete – and fight – with each other over local power and resources (2006; Lewis 1961). It is important to note, however, that the clan or lineage system is not equally important as a social organizing system across Somali society.⁵ The militarization of clan identity, hardened in the period 1987–92, is described as a 'time of traumatic and accelerated identity formation' (De Waal 2020, 569) and a critical rupture in Somali society (Hoehne 2016; Kapteigns 2013), which has informed subsequent processes of state formation.

Historically and culturally, Somalis follow Sunni Islam and have been influenced by Sufism in their religious practices; although, since the 1990s, Salafism, as a global phenomenon, has become increasingly influential (Hoehne and Gaas 2022). A politicized Islam is associated with anti-colonial movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Adam 2010). The dominant leader of Somalia's independence era, Mohamed Siad Barre, attempted to repress clan and religion in social and political life as part of the development of a modernist nation-state; but Elmi argues that lineage and religion were always more 'powerful identifiers of belonging and security' than the state itself (2016, 13).

Following the collapse of the state in 1990/91, one of the features of Somalia's political and developmental trajectory has been its incorporation into processes of 'globalization'

in the absence of the state as a mediating actor (UNDP 2001). The rapid expansion of its diaspora population is one of these elements. This diaspora formation has taken place through a complex series of intra-regional and extra-regional displacements and migrations, creating both ‘near’ (or regional) and ‘far’ (mainly North America, Europe, and the U.K.) diasporas as well as processes of ongoing mobility (Horst 2006; Lindley 2010). These categories of mobility and displacement are important as they problematize definitions of diaspora vis-à-vis pan-regional identities, where Weitzberg points out that Africanist scholars tend to ‘focus on the construction of national and subnational identities at the expense of *regional* and extraterritorial forms of social and political affiliation’ (2017, 4; emphasis added). This regional form of identity is highly relevant to the Jubbaland (and Ogaden) case that we elaborate on below.

Furthermore, Hoehne (2016, 1393–1394) explains that the global dispersal of Somalis as well as the return of urban Somalis to clan-identified ‘homelands’, following the collapse of the state, has involved simultaneous processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. He highlights the role of diaspora populations, through their remittances, as being part of the formation of subnational state entities.

A further aspect of Somalia’s positionality has been its incorporation into regional and global trading systems reflecting its strategic land-sea nexus, manifest in its four major ports – Berbera, Bosasso, Mogadishu, Kismayo – and associated trade corridors that connect markets and traders between the East and Horn of Africa and the Middle East, Asia and beyond (Dua 2023; Dua, Warsame, and Shire 2020; Lewis 1982). The state-making effects of these trade networks and logistics infrastructure have been examined recently within the Somali territories by Hagmann and Stepputat (2023, 171–199) who evoke Charles Tilly’s lesser known argument of the role played by trade in European state formation. The geopolitical salience of maritime power in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden continues to be pertinent to Somalia’s political economy today (De Waal 2023; Musa and Horst 2019; Norman 2023).

International interventionism – peacemaking, statebuilding, humanitarianism – provides a further layer to Somalia’s internationalized political economy. For example, a series of national level peace processes that took place from 2000, involving Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya as well as Western powers, aimed at generating a political settlement between major warring parties. These interventions produced a series of transitional governments and eventually the current Federal Government of Somalia (Menkhaus 2018). These statebuilding processes, analysed by Hagmann (2016) for their extraverted character and tactics, have been contrasted with the more organic and Somali-driven early political evolution of Somaliland and Puntland.

While various internationally mediated (and funded) national peacebuilding processes were taking place, mainly outside the country, experiments in the generation of political order were evolving within southern and central Somalia, separate from the already established polities in the north (Somaliland and Puntland). The most powerful of these involved alliances of clan elders, Islamic/sharia’a courts, and businesspeople (Barnes and Hassan 2007; Le Sage 2004). These spatially distinct initiatives ultimately coalesced under the umbrella of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which, in 2006, rapidly expanded across much of southern and central Somalia, claiming the capital Mogadishu and the important seaport of Kismayo in present-day Jubbaland (Ahmad 2017; Menkhaus 2007, 2009).

The response to this political development and its more bellicose posturing was a military attack by Ethiopia (supported by the US), which shattered the ICU and led to the emergence of the militant Islamist group, Al Shabaab, from its remnants. The group has proven to be remarkably resilient and adaptable, oscillating between periods of territoriality and semi-territoriality over the years, and developing its own bureaucratic and governance structures (Hansen 2019, 163–184; Marchal 2009).

The evolution of Islamist political orders in Somalia, in the form of the ICU and then Al Shabaab, led to further international engagement and eventually to the establishment of a Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), in 2012. This Federal arrangement was described by Menkhaus as *‘principally a division of spoils that is held together by a combination of a common threat posed by Al-Shabaab, copious levels of security driven external aid, and protection afforded by AMISOM peacekeepers.’* (Menkhaus 2018, 5). Somalia thus became a paradigmatic case in the post-9/11 nexus between peace operations and counter-insurgency with AMISOM conceived as a mitigating factor in reducing the threat from Al Shabaab (Moe 2018).

Somaliland and Puntland

Two of Somalia’s most enduring fragments are the *de facto* state of Somaliland and the autonomous polity of Puntland, the latter, whose existence predates the federal government itself, but which later joined as one of its federal member states. The self-declared Republic of Somaliland emerged in the early 1990s as the first significant public authority post state-collapse, while the civil war was still ongoing in the south of the country, basing itself on its previous colonial boundaries (Bradbury 2008).⁶ The Somali National Movement (SNM), one of the militarized clan units identified by De Waal (2020), and which led the resistance to Siad Barre’s government in the late 1980s is most closely associated with the formation of Somaliland (De Waal 2020; Hoehne 2006, 2011). The SNM had strong links to traditional and intellectual figures and important connections to diaspora populations in the Middle East and the U.K. (Prunier 1996).

Puntland was established in early 1998 on the basis of a confederation of related clan identities (unlike Somaliland) – the Majerteen, Dhulbahante, and Warsangeli. These groups are part of the larger Harti and Darod genealogical family (Hoehne 2009). Its political formation was driven by the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), the north-eastern militia and another of the powerful clan units which fought the central state, primarily representing the Majerteen clan. Puntland envisaged itself as an autonomous area within a future federalist Somalia, based on Somalia’s national borders. In doing so it challenged the aspirations of secessionist Somaliland, with whom it has shared a contested border region (Hoehne 2009, 263).

These two polities have both similarities and differences. Accompanied by inter-clan violence and a series of local peace conferences for some years, Somaliland was lauded for many years as a multi-clan, democratic polity, holding peaceful, internationally monitored elections (Bradbury 2008). It operates as a hybrid political order in which state and non-state entities are intertwined in complex ways, including parliamentary and traditional houses, institutions of government, traditional structures and the private sector (Richards 2014). In contrast, Puntland has a less democratic character, described as a

‘clan dictatorship’ for many of its early years, under its first President and head of the SSDF, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed (Hagmann and Hoehne 2009, 50).

The political economy and state formation logic of both Somaliland and Puntland, in economic terms, has centred on their respective trading bases; both have major seaports – Berbera and Bosasso respectively – and trade corridors that connect markets in the Gulf and Asia with their respective Somali-populated hinterlands as well as neighbouring countries (Hagmann and Stepputat 2023). As such, the trading class was an important part of the elite bargain in their early days and their relative stability thereafter (De Waal 2015; Musa and Horst 2019). Both polities have since seen the development of other economic sectors, particularly telecommunications, banking, some industry and processing (particularly in the case of Somaliland). Puntland is associated with a much greater level of instability than its neighbour although the recent conflict in Somaliland’s eastern border area is a significant regression (Norman 2023). Puntland is also associated with the development of illicit activities (human trafficking, arms trafficking, piracy, fishing licences) (Bahadur 2019) as well as a growing Islamic State presence (Hasan 2025).

The Jubbaland project

While the establishment and early evolution of Somaliland and Puntland are located in the 1990s and early 2000s, Jubbaland is located more centrally in the Islamist turn in Somalia and in the resultant security-driven international state-building project; the global security assemblage that opposes Al Shabaab (De Waal 2020). This section examines Jubbaland as a public authority and transboundary formation, operating according to a political marketplace logic.

Regional mobility and transnational networks – the Ogaden in the Horn of Africa

While mobility, displacement and social connectivity are identifying characteristics across the Somali territories and in relation to its wider diaspora, there are geographical and identity-based particularities with implications for transborder political agency. The Ogaden clan is unusual in this respect, as they are territorially associated with significant geographical areas in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya; within central areas of the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia (SRS), and in a contiguous, cross-border region of southwest Somalia and northeast Kenya. Genealogical ties across and between these state defined boundaries have been laid down over the decades and longer. Furthermore, this geographic positionality is accompanied by a political salience for the Ogaden within each country as well as between them.

The Ogaden is considered to have expanded from the SRS in Ethiopia to its present-day position in the Somalia-Kenya border areas during the 18th and 19th centuries (Little 2003). There have been further migratory waves since, including from SRS to Somalia as a result of the 1977/78 Ethiopia-Somalia war (also known as the ‘Ogaden’ War) and from Somalia to Kenya as a result of the Somalia civil war and drought in the early 1990s; much of the population displaced from SRS to Somalia in the 1970s was part of the later displacement to Kenya (Majid 2013; Narbeth and McLean 2003). Dadaab refugee camp, a major urban centre attracting considerable resources, is located in

Garissa County, Kenya, and is identified with the Ogaden. It was created in response to the refugee influx from Somalia in the early 1990s and has been an important place of refuge and services (especially education) for many Somalis, as well as a hub for further migration. This is especially the case for Ogaden clan members, given its location (Horst 2006).⁷

Ogaden Somalis from the SRS (and Somalia) have benefitted enormously from these transborder connections as they have provided an outlet and escape from the oppression and violence associated with the counter-insurgency campaigns of the Ethiopian federal government, particularly in the period between 2007–18 (Hagmann 2012, 2020; Hagmann and Khalif 2006). Kinship ties between the Ogaden on either side of the Kenya-Somalia border have also been reinforced by the reconfiguration of trading patterns and cross-border mobility following state collapse in Somalia, which has made Garissa town a major livestock export market for animals from Somalia (Hagmann and Stepputat 2023; Little 2003; Mahmoud 2010)

This identity-based history of migration and displacement, we argue, has led to two processes of diaspora formation and transnationalism, salient to the evolution of Jubbaland. First, the Ogaden diaspora located in Western countries primarily originates in SRS, Ethiopia, and its politically active elites are most strongly connected with and sympathetic to the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), which represents a resistance to Ethiopian imperialism and state oppression. The lobbying and protests of the Ogaden diaspora in Washington, London, and elsewhere, in 2008/9, against the violent counter-insurgency efforts of the Ethiopian army attest to this (Lyons 2012, 141–156).

A second diaspora, much more important to the Jubbaland story, is a regional, transborder, or ‘near’ diaspora, primarily involving those who were displaced from SRS but have remained within the region. The current President of Jubbaland, Ahmed Madobe, as well as fellow Islamist leaders, such as Hassan al-Turki, and many of their militia are identified with this group. Madobe and Turki were both displaced during the Ethiopia-Somalia war to Somalia, but remained in Somalia and the Somalia-Kenya border area. Members of this group ultimately formed relationships and alliances with other Ogaden elites within the region. As Mercer, Page, and Evans (2008, x–xi) argue, Western diasporas are often reified while domestic or near diasporas are neglected, even though their influence can be as significant or more significant, with Weitzberg (2017, 4) highlighting the salience of regional identities and their under-analysis vis-a-vis national or sub-national identities. A practical manifestation of this identity-based regional organization and agency is the existence of transborder committees of the major lineages within the Ogaden, composed of prominent individuals who are influential at the local, national, and regional levels concerning matters that affect their lineages regardless of physical location.⁸

As we elaborate further below, the historical and ongoing threats faced by the Ogaden within the sub-region, as well as the economic opportunities offered by an emergent Ogaden-identified polity, with a major seaport and trade corridor, presented both elite and public appeal. Jubbaland was conceived as a public authority and order-making project, with the example of Puntland in mind, as much in the imagination as in practice. Jubbaland would also fall under the same Darod clan family identity as Puntland, a notable political and symbolic reference. As such, we emphasize the importance of paying attention to the historicity of regional, cross-border identities and their political agency.

Warlords and Islamists

The different militarized clan units that contributed to the overthrow of the Siad Barre government left their imprint in varied ways, as indicated previously. In Somaliland and Puntland for example, the SNM and SSDF relatively quickly transformed from insurgent groups to become part of their respective proto-state entities during the 1990s. Further south, in the Juba valley, the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) was the dominant insurgent movement against Siad Barre's government. It initially consisted of a broad Darod grouping – the Marehan, Majerteen and Ogaden – three of the dominant groups in Kismayo but was soon riven by factionalism. Rival warlords fought over the major assets of the Juba valley, particularly the seaport and airport of Kismayo; different alliances came and went, primarily drawn from the SPM. For nearly ten years, the Majerteen faction of the SPM was dominant but, in 1999, was ousted by a new alliance of Marehan and Habergedir clan elements, called the Juba Valley Alliance (JVA) (Skjelderup, Ainashe, and Abdulle 2020, 557–559). Notably, these two clan configurations did not include the Ogaden; the SPM-Ogaden faction had diminished as a force in Kismayo after 1993 (Skjelderup, Ainashe, and Abdulle 2020).⁹

However, while marginalized in Kismayo town, the Ogaden militia still controlled much of the surrounding countryside (Lower and Middle Juba regions) and remained a 'potential military threat to anyone who ruled Kismayo' (Skjelderup, Ainashe, and Abdulle 2020, 558). Kismayo was considered extremely unstable due to the combination of different clans, and the 'fragile mix of political, militia, and business actors that share a common interest – generating and using income from the 'taxation' of port and airport activities.' (Narbeth and McLean 2003, 12).

The JVA would finally be ousted by the rise of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in 2006. The ICU emerged primarily through Hawiye business, clan and Islamic courts in different locations in southern Somalia, particularly Mogadishu and Lower Shabelle region (Ahmad 2017). In the Juba Valley, the little known Ogadeen militia, the *Mu'askar Ras Kamboni*, with connections to Al Itihad Al Islmia (AIAI), in Somalia and Ethiopia, forged an alliance with the ICU, particularly its militant wing. Current Jubbaland President, Ahmed Madobe, was the deputy leader of *Ras Kamboni* (Hassan Al-Turki was its leader) (Skjelderup, Ainashe, and Abdulle 2020, 562). Under the ICU umbrella, the JVA was ousted and Madobe was installed as the Governor of Kismayo.

As indicated previously, the brief rule of the ICU was ended by the Ethiopian invasion of late 2006, whereafter Al Shabaab emerged as the dominant Islamist actor, as it remains today. Initially, in 2008, Al Shabaab formed an alliance with Madobe and his *Ras Kamboni* forces to reclaim Kismayo, but this alliance weakened, and the group took full control of Kismayo and much of Lower Juba by 2010 (Skjelderup, Ainashe, and Abdulle 2020). The future President, Ahmed Madobe, had, however, made his first mark with military victory under the ICU in Kismayo, as both a clan and Islamist leader.

The Jubbaland project and the transborder Ogaden

The emergence of Al Shabaab as a powerful actor in Somalia, including in the border areas with neighbouring Kenya, led the Kenyan government to engage more seriously in Somalia, where it had previously been a relatively minor player, unlike Ethiopia, the

regional hegemon and a much more interventionist actor in Somalia's post-state political order. Kenya's interest in Somalia took place on two fronts, initially with the regional inter-governmental body, IGAD, involving the possibility of setting up a regional administration on the Somalia side of the Kenya-Somalia border (Olsen 2018). At the same time, it involved a military alliance between the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) and Madobe's *Ras Kamboni* group, charged with regaining Kismayo from Al Shabaab, in what became known as Operation *Linda Nchi* (ICG 2012).

Two of the key drivers of this initiative, at the state level, were the Kenyan Defence Minister, Yusuf Haji (2008–13) and Somalia's Minister of Defence, Mohamed Abdi Mohamed 'Gandhi' (2009–10), closely related by lineage. The influence of Ogaden-Somali elites within the Kenyan state has grown over the last ten years, although it has longer roots (Cowell 1982; Lochery 2012). Following Gandhi's short-lived ministerial position in Somalia's transition government, he became the initial leader of the Kenyan plan to support an administration of some kind, which was initially called Azania, but which would later become Jubbaland.

Olsen examined a number of explanatory factors in the decision of Kenya to invade Somalia in 2011, concluding that 'institutional and personal interests of core decision-makers merged with hard core national security interests and national economic concerns' (2018, 50). A common area of agreement within the Kenyan government was the need to create a more friendly Somali political order along its border with Somalia (Menkhaus 2012, 1). In addition, a small group of Somali-Kenyan individuals was identified with influencing the decision to invade Somalia, with defence minister Yusuf Haji being highlighted, including an interest to advance Ogaden clan interests in Jubbaland (Throup 2012, 2). The longevity of the KDF in Kismayo, described as 'remarkable' by Olsen (2018, 50), is specifically associated with its financial benefits – as rents from the seaport. Madobe, who ultimately controls Kismayo, utilizes this revenue source as part of his political budget in order to maintain a KDF presence and, we argue, is in turn a key mechanism by which Madobe maintains Kenyan support.

Ethiopian interests were also relevant to these developments where the political salience of the Ogaden is strongly related to the actions of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Initially a political party, it later became an insurgent group, as it was excluded from politics (Hagmann and Khalif 2006, 28–29). As the dominant clan-identified Somali population in Ethiopia and given the ONLF presence, Ogaden elites occupy a position of consequence in the country, although coercion and co-option have been two of the main strategies of control utilized by the Federal Government, in Addis Ababa over politics in the Somali region (Hagmann and Khalif 2006). A manifestation of this relationship at the time was the rise and dominance of the tyrannical President of SRS, Abdi Mohamed Omar 'Iley' (2010–2018). Initially installed by the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) with a mandate to eliminate the ONLF, he became a powerful political entrepreneur in his own right (Hagmann 2020, 2–3). Iley, from the Ogaden clan, was also influential in the rise of Madobe, including in his connections to Ethiopian security actors.

While Gandhi was initially in prime position to lead Jubbaland, and the leader favoured by Kenya, a number of factors contributed to Madobe ultimately taking this role. Although the Ras Kamboni militia under Al-Turki and Madobe initially had an alliance with Al Shabaab, this relationship was fluid as Al Shabaab itself was evolving and, as noted by

Kluijver, led to a ‘purge’ of certain groups and increasing ideological rigidity (2025, 571). Ras Kamboni was not part of this trajectory and fell out with Al Shabaab. In addition, Al-Turki had become ill, and after Madobe was brought back to Somalia from Ethiopia, organized by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, Somalia’s first President, he reclaimed his Ras Kamboni forces, many of whom had moved to Al Shabaab (Majid and Abdirahman 2021b, 5). Not only did he then turn against Al Shabaab but in his recapture of Doble from the group in 2009 he demonstrated his military capacity to the Kenyans. The discipline and effectiveness of Madobe’s *Ras Kamboni* militia were further recognized by the Kenya military and intelligence, at close quarters, through the success of operation *Linda Nchi* (CRP 2019a, 2019b), which would soon bring financial rewards to the KDF. In addition, key Ogaden elements, particularly in Ethiopia, favoured Madobe, especially those from Madobe’s influential Mohamed Zubhir sub-clan, considered to be the traditional leaders of the Ogaden. Ghandi is from the Tolomoge sub-clan (as is Yusuf Haji) of the Ogaden, a rival to the Mohamed Zubhir. Gandhi was portrayed as an ONLF sympathizer to the Ethiopian government, by these clan elites, encouraging the Ethiopians to strongly support Madobe (Majid and Abdirahman 2021b, 4–6).

Underlying competition within the Ogaden is useful for understanding in this regard. In Garissa District of Kenya, the Aulihan and Tolomoge subclans of the Ogaden compete for power, whereas in Lower and Middle Juba of Somalia, the Aulihan and Mohamed Zubhir are the main competitors. A dominant Aulihan position in Kenya potentially empowers the Aulihan in Jubbland, and vice versa. Therefore, a Tolomoge-Mohamed Zubhir alliance works for both sides, against their common competitor. While Yusuf Haji and Ghandi are both from the Tolomoge, the Mohamed Zubhir influence within the Ethiopian state, along with Madobe’s strong relationship with the elements of the security establishment in Kenya, contributed to his leadership advancement without undermining the underlying Tolomoge-Mohamed Zubhir alignment vis-à-vis the Aulihan.

The personal characteristics of Madobe and Ghandi are also interesting to explore and contrast, where the former is a proven warrior, in the spirit of Somali resistance heroes (Hoehne 2014). His personal mythology even reached a ‘true story’ award in the prominent French newspaper, Meyerfeld (2018), where he is described for his ‘cunning’ and ‘force’ and as ‘the only Somali politician to have fought, gun in hand’ (Meyerfeld 2018). Ghandi, on the other hand, was a renowned scholar whose very nickname contrasts with the image of Madobe (Makina 2021). These characteristics arguably further favoured Madobe as a popular leader for an emergent polity in a violent political landscape.

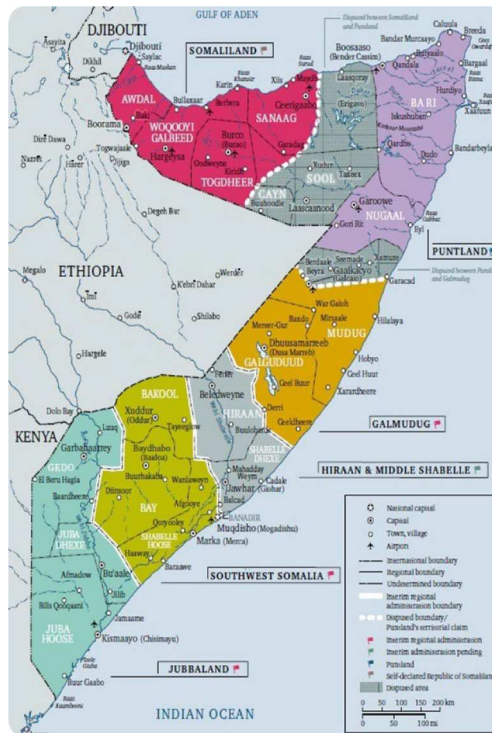
The Federal Government of Somalia, in Mogadishu, however, supported the JVA leader, Barre Hirale (from the competing Marehan clan), but was eventually forced to endorse Madobe, initially on a 2-year interim basis, through the Addis Ababa agreement (Thomas 2013).¹⁰

While we have argued that the majority of Ogaden diaspora in the West are more focused on developments in the SRS, lineage and clan affiliations are not limited by national borders, and a clan solidarity saw many members of the Ogaden diaspora celebrate the formation of Jubbland in 2011, reflecting a pan-Ogaden solidarity.¹¹ Weitzberg (2017, 162) notes an equivalent celebration by Isaaq populations in Kenya celebrating the emergence of Somaliland. However, whereas the Somali diaspora in North America, Europe, and the UK have been influential in state formation processes in other parts of

Somalia, a regional, transborder elite, with influence in Kenya and Ethiopia was instrumental and distinct to Jubbaland's political emergence and leadership.

Constructing Jubbaland ... a twilight polity

Administrative Map of Somalia.



Source: (Moseley 2015).¹²

President Ahmed Madobe's leadership in Jubbaland is understood as a 'victor's peace', based primarily on the coercive power of the President and his clan militia, initially backed by both Kenya and Ethiopia. However, Jubbaland was conceived as three regions, Gedo, Lower Juba and Middle Juba, the dominant clan of Gedo being the Marehan, while the Ogaden are dominant in Middle and Lower Juba. Across all three regions there are a significant number of other identity groups, although in political, security, and financial terms, the Ogaden and Marehan and their various sub-clans are the most powerful.

The incorporation of Gedo region (and therein the Marehan) was and is crucial to the at least notional presentation and performance of Jubbaland as a coherent federal member state and public authority. This incorporation was constructed, in its first years, by appointing prominent Marehan figures to the Jubbaland administration in Kismayo, the *de facto* capital of the state, and forging an alliance with the dominant security actor and local strongman in Gedo itself, Abdirashid Hassan Nuur 'Janaan'. Janaan's power was enabled to a significant degree by his relationship with Ethiopian security forces, who were based in northern Gedo, and his control of checkpoint revenues, later

supplemented by his capture of humanitarian aid (Majid, Abdirahman and Adan 2025). Janaan was the district commissioner in Dolo district, in Gedo, but became the Minister of Security for Jubbaland as part of the conjoining of Ogaden and Marehan identities and territories within the polity.

This alliance and its territorial reach were always limited; however. While Janaan was the dominant security figure in Gedo's three northern districts (Dolo, Luuq and Belet Hawa), in its other three districts (El Waq, Burdubo, and Garbaharey), arrangements were more tenuous, with different local sub-clans in power. Janaan himself was ousted in 2019 by the FGS in Mogadishu, who attempted to take control of the Gedo region and the Madobe-Janaan alliance, as tensions rocketed between Mogadishu and Kismayo in the lead-up to elections (see following section). Furthermore, Middle Juba has remained under Al Shabaab's control for the full lifetime of Jubbaland's formal existence within the current Federal arrangement. For many observers, Jubbaland is in fact 'code for Kismayo', its *de facto* capital (RVI 2013).

A key feature of Madobe's rise and continuity in Jubbaland has been his value as a counter-insurgency security actor vis-à-vis Al Shabaab.¹³ Moe argues that the support to Madobe reflects a 'pragmatic turn' in counter-insurgency and peacebuilding, where international and Kenyan interests coalesced with Madobe's Ras Kamboni militia (2018, 331). She also highlights this as a form of support for coercive, authoritarian intervention. Madobe's security value has enabled him to access security rents and related financial resources, some of which he reportedly directs back to key military figures in the KDF as well as within the Kenyan political system, to maintain their support (CRP 2019a).

In addition to security rents, Madobe's hold on Kismayo enables him to tap into trade revenues through Kismayo port. This seaport is the key hub in a significant trade corridor between Somalia and Kenya, linking external markets, through Kismayo, to Garissa (and other markets) in Kenya. It is associated with illicit and licit trade, particularly the import and re-export of sugar, to Kenya, and the export of charcoal to the Gulf (Journalists for Justice 2015; Rasmussen 2017). In its early years, the Jubbaland administration, the KDF, and Al Shabaab were exposed for colluding around the revenues and profits generated through Kismayo and its associated trade (Journalists for Justice 2015; Rasmussen 2017). Inevitably, many of the beneficiaries in these arrangements have an Ogaden hat, as Hagmann and Stepputat highlight, pointing out that Jubbaland's statemaking process draws on 'strong transnational business networks among Ogaden clan family members based in Kenya and Ethiopia' (2023, 180–181).

Jubbaland's twilight status includes its overlapping and alternating state-clan identity, with different identity groups (the Marehan in this case) moving in and out of alliance with its core Ogaden constituency. As a performative statelike entity, Jubbaland maintains official regalia and instruments such as its own flag, television station and even an ambassador to Kenya, its main patron.

Elections, identity politics and the political marketplace (2017–22)

The Jubbaland Parliamentary and Presidential elections in 2019 provide a lens with which to view the operations of the political marketplace. The election of Somalia's second national President, Mohamed Abdi 'Farmajo' (2017–22), shifted centre-periphery dynamics in the country with Farmajo quickly expressing an assertive power from the

centre (Majid and Abdirahman 2021a). Contributing to this was the fall of the EPRDF in Ethiopia and the emergence of a new prime minister, which soon included the development of a tripartite alliance between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia (Gebreluel 2021).

Evidence of these shifting dynamics was made starkly visible in the first of the FMS elections, in 2018, in Southwest State (SWS), several months prior to the Jubbaland elections. The ruling cabal in Mogadishu was able to install their preferred presidential candidate by employing a combination of financial and coercive means to remove the two major competitors, where Ethiopia's military presence in SWS was a crucial factor (ICG 2018). This development forewarned President Madobe whose election was due next.

Ex-national President Abdi 'Farmajo' has a Marehan identity, the same broad identity group that competes with the Ogaden for the leadership of Jubbaland. Having achieved his aims in SWS, Farmajo's known opposition to Madobe was ripe for politicization around Ogaden-Marehan clan fissures. Farmajo also had the support of the new leadership in Ethiopia, where the previous Ethiopian regime had supported Madobe. Given this context, Ogaden elites allied to Madobe framed the election as a Marehan threat and potential takeover of Kismayo (and therein Jubbaland). The politicization of identities remained a feature of the election buildup. However, when it came to the holding of elections, Madobe reverted to control of the Jubbaland Independent Electoral and Border Commission (JIBEC), bribing a majority of the MPs (to vote for him) and limiting access to those MPs by external parties (i.e., the FGS which had superior finances) (CRP 2019a, 2019b). The KDF provided additional security protection, further enabled by poor relations between Kenya and Somalia at the time (Kiruga 2021).

In political marketplace terms, Madobe's election success demonstrates his skills as a political entrepreneur, capitalizing on identity politics between the Ogaden and the Marehan, utilizing his political budget to maintain the support of Kenya and coercively managing the election process (Al Jazeera 2019).

Conclusions

This article has examined the evolution of Jubbaland as a sub-national polity within Somalia's federal system. As a notional federal member state, it carries the symbols of statehood, including a Jubbaland flag, a television station, and an Ambassador to Kenya. Its leader interacts with the national centre and other FMS as part of Somalia's federal system and sovereign status. This arrangement is located and maintained within a 'liberal' international interventionism. However, such a depiction disguises Jubbaland's alternative logic and territorialization, as a transboundary formation constituted by its transborder (Ogaden) clan constituency, ongoing relationship with Kenya, and rents from Kismayo and its trade corridor. This transboundary entanglement resonates with Gueudet's (2026) analysis in the Balkans in this issue, as well as the concept of a 'predatory peace' in South Sudan identified by Benson (2025), also in this issue.

Jubbaland's evolution and ambiguous institutional status fit with Lund's 'twilight' characterization of public authority, where state and clan identities and structures intersect and wax and wane in relative importance, and as an expression of public authority understood as 'the amalgamated result of the exercise of power by a variety of local institutions and the imposition of external institutions, conjugated with the idea of a state' (2006, 686). The ambiguous incorporation of the Gedo region and the persistence of Al

Shabaab in much of Jubbaland reflect its fluid political and territorial contours. As a trans-boundary formation, Jubbaland exists most persuasively and materially along the trade corridor that links Kismayo to Garissa as well as through the transborder social and political networks of the Ogaden.

Our focus on President Ahmed Madobe deepens our understanding of the political marketplace in the Horn of Africa; he remains the only leader of this regional state to date, a considerable achievement, given the various threats and challenges he has faced for over ten years, and is a testament to his skill and capacity; he is able to navigate the highly volatile and complex formal and informal institutions that constitute this transcalar arena.

The article contributes to the comparative understanding of Somalia's fragmented political order, including in relation to the liberal statebuilding interventionism in which it remains located. Furthermore, the Jubbaland case study and its transborder Ogaden constituency provide a unique configuration between Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia that is singular in the Somali-speaking sub-region.

The conceptual threads of public authority and the political marketplace are illuminated through the agency of its dominant political entrepreneur. In so doing, we highlight the challenge to policy and political engagement, which is based on the machinations of the Weberian bureaucratic state and which reify engagement with the (sovereign) centre and struggle to operate on a regional basis and with informal systems. The persistence of Al Shabaab, the evolution of Jubbaland and the emergence of SSC-Khatumo provide further argument and encouragement of the need for international policy makers to understand and engage with 'state-like' authorities in fragmented contexts in more meaningful ways.

Notes

1. Examples include: Majid and Abdirahman (2021b) and RVI (2013).
2. The Somali Isse, located in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somaliland are perhaps the only equivalent example.
3. LSE Conflict Research Programme (CRP) (<https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/projects/complete/conflict-research-programme/somalia>) and LSE Peace and Conflict Resolution and Evidence Platform (PeaceRep) (<https://peacerep.org/about/countries/somalia/>).
4. Ibid.
5. It is much stronger as a socio-political system central and northern areas and amongst pastoral identity groups than in other areas and groups (Helander 1986).
6. British Somaliland was actually declared independent for 5 days, in 1960, before it merged with Italian Somalia, as part of the current territory of Somalia.
7. Conversations by both authors over the years with informants from the border areas include observations of this phenomenon.
8. The authors interact with members of these committees.
9. The different clans fighting over Kismayo reflect the towns cosmopolitan history as well as value of such a strategic asset to competing groups Kismayo.
10. The ONLF leadership were not initially supportive of Madobe, due to his Islamist ties, where the ONLF and AIAI were antagonists, but also ultimately backed Madobe as an act of pan-Ogaden solidarity.
11. See: <https://youtu.be/KUZnL59Wupc>; <https://youtu.be/7ukliohef2s>; https://youtu.be/1ydlAKW_nTw; <https://youtu.be/ngjNcosYZAQ>; <https://youtu.be/Sxt7pGOSlt0>; <https://youtu.be/ZD0tFehNW7s>; <https://youtu.be/T5LMEQdGmSk>; <https://youtu.be/UxboiaKREGs>. These are dated between 2013 and 2015.

12. This is not an official administrative map and the boundaries and names shown and designations used on the map do not imply endorsement or acceptance by the authors.
13. Immediately evident in the President's words after his discredited election victory in 2019: 'We want to work with neighbouring countries on security. We will work with anyone to maintain the stability and development of the region. We want to work with them in the fight against al-Shabab.' (Al Jazeera 2019).

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Luke Cooper and Mateja Peter as well as the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on the article. Their various inputs contributed substantially to the finalization of the article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

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