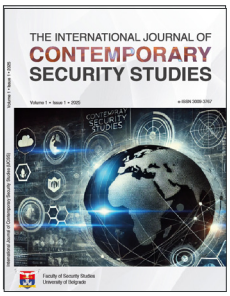
Volume 2 • Issue 2 • 2026

Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade

International Journal of Contemporary Security Studies (IJCSS)



Article

Clan Loyalty, Community Ties, and Counterinsurgency Challenges in Somalia: An Empirical Analysis of Al-Shabab's Resilience

Akaninyene O. Unaam[1]

[1] Department of Business Management, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria; unaamakan@gmail.com.

Received: 15 December 2025; Revised: 5 June 2026; Accepted: 20 September 2026; Published: 5 November.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of clan loyalty on the morale and operational effectiveness of Somali security forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations against Al-Shabab. Although Somalia's conflict has persisted for decades, empirical research has been scarce on how entrenched clan structures sustain insurgent resilience and undermine state institutions. Using a quantitative survey of 250 military, police, and intelligence personnel across Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Kismayo, this study explores relationships among clan loyalty, operational trust, and demoralization. Mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro indicates that operational trust partially mediates the relationship between clan loyalty and demoralization (indirect effect = 0.23, 95% CI [0.15, 0.32]; total effect = 0.58, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, multiple regression models controlling for rank, years of service, branch, and gender reveal a persistent association between clan loyalty and demoralization in this sample ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$), with all variance inflation factors below 2.1, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. The findings suggest that counterinsurgency efforts are critically constrained by social allegiances that can supersede institutional authority. Policy recommendations emphasize clan-neutral recruitment with transparent rotation policies, mixed-clan training cohorts, promotion boards with external oversight, and psychosocial support to restore morale and operational cohesion.

KEYWORDS

Clan loyalty; Al-Shabab; demoralization; counterinsurgency; Somalia; security forces; social identity.

ONLINE FIRST

1. Introduction

Somalia represents one of the most protracted conflict environments in Africa, characterized by fragmented governance, a resilient insurgency, and a society organized along patrilineal clan lines (Menkhaus, 2018; Hansen, 2019; Williams, 2018). Comparative insights from other fragile-state contexts show that insurgencies often exploit social fractures and governance deficits to sustain their operational longevity (Unaam, 2025a). Institutional weaknesses and inter-agency rivalries often exacerbate the persistence of such conflicts, mirroring the very divisions insurgents exploit (Unaam, 2025b). In examining counterinsurgency policy responses across fragile states, scholars have noted that the effectiveness of state security forces is critically shaped by the coherence and legitimacy of the policy frameworks they operate under (Onimisi & Chuka, 2025). Despite substantial international intervention through the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), Al-Shabab continues to demonstrate significant operational endurance and social embeddedness. A central, yet

Academic Editor:
Prof. Dr. Vladimir M. Cvetković
Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.

Unaam, A. (2026). Clan Loyalty, Community Ties, and Counterinsurgency Challenges in Somalia: An Empirical Analysis of Al-Shabab's Resilience. *International Journal of Contemporary Security Studies*, 2(2), 231-242.

under-measured, dynamic in this persistence is the dual loyalty of both insurgents and state security personnel to their respective clans, a factor that may profoundly influence operational behavior and institutional morale (Robinson, 2019; Hoehne, 2013).

Clan affiliation is central to Somali social and political life, shaping identity, customary justice, and access to resources (Gundel, 2006; Kapteijns, 2013). This creates a potential tension between kinship obligations and institutional allegiance within security forces, which have been described as fragmented by clan and political loyalties (Robinson & Matisek, 2020). Al-Shabab, in turn, has used relationships with clan elders to mobilize recruits and material resources (Hiraal Institute, 2018; Skjelderup, 2020). These findings motivate the present study's hypothesis that clan loyalty may weaken operational trust and morale, with potential implications for counterinsurgency effectiveness.

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence on how clan loyalty is associated with security force morale and operational trust. Focusing on urban Somali security contexts, the research investigates:

- The direct association between clan loyalty and operational trust within security forces.
- The relationship between clan loyalty and demoralization.
- The mediating role of operational trust in the pathway from clan loyalty to demoralization.
- The influence of key demographic and service-related variables on these relationships.

The findings aim to inform both the theoretical understanding of social identity in fragile states and practical counterinsurgency strategies that account for powerful local social structures.

1.1. Clan Structures and Political Dynamics in Somalia

Somalia's social and political order is intrinsically tied to its patrilineal clan system, which serves as the primary unit of identity, resource allocation, and security (Gundel, 2006; Lewis, 1998). Major clan families and groupings, such as Darod, Hawiye, Dir, Isaaq, and Digil-Mirifle (Rahanweyn), along with their numerous sub-clans, form networks that influence political legitimacy and social cohesion. The traditional xeer (customary law) regulates inter-clan relations, conflict resolution, and obligations of loyalty, often operating parallel to or superseding formal state laws (Hoehne, 2013; Kapteijns, 2013).

Post-1991 state-building has taken place alongside persistent forms of local and clan-based governance. Studies of Somalia therefore argue that rebuilding public authority requires engagement with existing local institutions, rather than assuming that the absence of a central government entails the absence of governance (Hagmann & Hoehne, 2009; Menkhaus, 2007). Other analyses show how clan affiliations continue to shape recruitment, local alliances, and the organization of armed forces during conflict (Marchal, 2011; Robinson & Matisek, 2020). These findings underscore the necessity for empirical research into the consequences of clan loyalty for the operational behavior of state security forces.

1.2. Clan Loyalty and Al-Shabab's Resilience

Al-Shabab's operational longevity is inextricably linked to its embeddedness within local clan networks (Hansen, 2019; Bryden, 2014). The group relies on clan elders for mediation and protection, skillfully exploiting inter-clan rivalries for recruitment and safe passage (Williams, 2018). This pattern is not unique to Somalia; across the Sahel and West Africa, insurgent groups similarly leverage localized social networks and governance deficits to embed themselves within communities and outmaneuver state security forces (Unaam, 2025a). The resulting dynamic—where state responses are fragmented by institutional rivalries and insufficient intelligence coordination—creates operational environments that favor non-state armed groups (Unaam, 2025b). Policy responses in such contexts often struggle to address the underlying social and political drivers of insurgency, with existing frameworks frequently failing to account for the adaptive strategies of armed groups (Onimisi

& Chuka, 2025). Research on Al-Shabab's engagement with clan elders shows that local authority structures can assist recruitment and governance, although cooperation also involves coercion and resistance (Hiraal Institute, 2018; Skjelderup, 2020). Clan elders have also mediated local negotiations with Al-Shabab, drawing on their credibility and legitimacy within their communities (Shire, 2021).

Clan embeddedness can provide Al-Shabab with recruits, resources, and a degree of local legitimacy (Skjelderup, 2020). However, these relationships are neither static nor uniformly cooperative: armed conflict has reshaped clan units and political authority (de Waal, 2020), while research in Lower Jubba shows insurgent governance combining coercion with pragmatic engagement with local institutions (Skjelderup, 2021). This interaction between kinship structures and competing forms of authority highlights the importance of quantitatively examining clan allegiance within the state's own security apparatus.

1.3. Security Force Morale and Operational Trust

Military cohesion includes bonds among peers and leaders as well as allegiance to the wider organization; trust and teamwork are central to these relationships (Siebold, 2007; Soeters et al., 2006). Research on Canadian peace operations in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia shows that strong loyalties to small military groups can undermine discipline and obligations to the wider organization (Winslow, 1998). In Somalia's own security sector, clan fragmentation and politicization have complicated efforts to build an effective national army (Robinson & Matisek, 2020). Research on hybrid security arrangements in other fragile states demonstrates that when formal security institutions are perceived as ineffective or biased, communities and even security personnel may revert to informal, identity-based networks for protection and advancement (Chukwunka, 2025). This phenomenon—wherein loyalty to kin or community groups supersedes institutional allegiance—represents a fundamental challenge to professionalizing security forces in contexts of state weakness (Onimisi & Chuka, 2025). Community-level security dynamics, including the role of informal actors and localized governance structures, further complicate state efforts to establish centralized control and institutional trust (Hanafi, 2025). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides a foundational lens, suggesting that individuals inherently prioritize in-group membership and perceived fairness over abstract institutional directives. In the Somali context, strong clan identification may undermine operational trust between colleagues from different clans, reduce willingness to enforce orders, and exacerbate overall demoralization. Related research on multidimensional security perceptions similarly shows that institutional trust and engagement are closely linked to how individuals assess security conditions and the legitimacy of security policies (Cvetković et al., 2025; Cvetković, 2026). Comparable evidence from peacekeeping research indicates that weak accountability, inconsistent enforcement, and limited engagement can undermine institutional credibility and trust in conflict-affected settings (Ahmed, 2025).

Justice Judgment Theory (Lind & Tyler, 1988) further posits that perceptions of procedural unfairness within institutions amplify disengagement and disloyalty. When security personnel perceive promotions, resources, or disciplinary actions as biased along clan lines, or fear kin-group retaliation for acting against co-clan insurgents, institutional morale may suffer. Prior studies in Iraq similarly document how sectarian and ethnic affiliations can weaken national military cohesion (Sharp, 2007). More broadly, research on community social resilience identifies social capital, shared beliefs, social mechanisms, and institutional conditions as interdependent dimensions of collective resilience (Cvetković & Šišović, 2024).

1.4. Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Integration

Building on these insights, this study proposes and empirically tests a conceptual model that positions clan loyalty as a primary factor associated with counterinsurgency outcomes, with operational trust and demoralization serving as critical mediating mechanisms. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study.

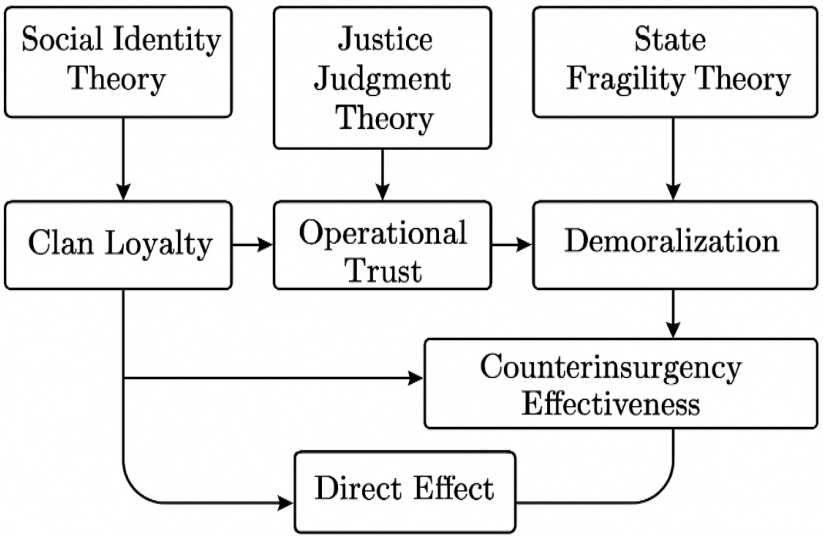


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: The Mediating Role of Operational Trust in the Relationship between Clan Loyalty and Counterinsurgency Outcomes

The model posits that clan loyalty is directly associated with demoralization and indirectly associated with it through operational trust. Consistent with Social Identity Theory, strong clan identification is expected to erode trust across clan lines. Drawing on Justice Judgment Theory, diminished operational trust is expected to exacerbate demoralization. Finally, demoralization is theorized to negatively shape perceptions of counterinsurgency effectiveness, reflecting the macro-level context of state fragility within which these micro-level processes operate.

Theoretical Integration: The study integrates three theoretical perspectives to explain this pathway:

- Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains the clan loyalty–operational trust link, where strong in-group (clan) identification may foster distrust of out-groups (members of other clans).
- Justice Judgment Theory (Lind & Tyler, 1988) illuminates the operational trust–demoralization pathway, as perceptions of unfairness and bias may erode moral commitment to the institution.
- State Fragility Theory (Rotberg, 2004) provides the macro-context, where a weak state's inability to provide security may make clan loyalty a rational survival strategy, potentially fueling the entire cycle.

By integrating these theories, the study examines how micro-level social allegiances may interact with macro-level institutional weakness to produce operationally significant outcomes.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the influence of clan loyalty on security force morale and operational effectiveness. A structured questionnaire was administered to 250 security personnel from the Somali National Army, police, and intelligence services in the strategically critical urban centers of Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Kismayo. These locations were selected for their high density of security forces and their central role in counterinsurgency operations, allowing for feasible and secure data collection.

2.2. Sampling and Participants

A stratified random sampling approach ensured proportional representation across service branches and ranks. Access was obtained through liaison with sector commanders, with strict assurances that participation would be voluntary and confidential. Researchers approached participants during routine non-operational gatherings and provided anonymous envelopes for survey return to minimize command influence. The approximate distribution across sites was: Mogadishu (n = 120), Baidoa (n = 70), and Kismayo (n = 60).

The participant profile was as follows:

- Gender: 84% Male (n = 210), 16% Female (n = 40), reflecting the actual gender composition of the forces.
- Rank: Constable/Private (26%), Sergeant/Corporal (30%), Inspector/Lieutenant (24%), Superintendent/Captain+ (20%).
- Years of Service: 0–5 (28%), 6–10 (34%), 11–15 (24%), 16+ (14%).

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee approved the study, and all participants provided informed consent. Confidentiality was protected through anonymous surveys (no names or identifiers collected), storing data on encrypted drives accessible only to the research team, and destroying physical copies after digitization.

2.3. Instrumentation

The survey instrument comprised 25 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Items were adapted from established scales, the Social Identity Scale (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the Military Morale Scale (Soeters et al., 2006), and modified for the Somali context following expert review by three Somali military scholars and a pilot test with 15 personnel.

Construct Definitions and Sample Items:

- Clan Loyalty (CL): Affective attachment and perceived obligation to prioritize clan interests over institutional directives. Sample item: "I feel a stronger sense of duty to my clan than to my unit."
- Operational Trust (OT): Confidence that colleagues from other clans will act reliably and cooperatively in operational settings. Sample item: "I trust soldiers from other clans to support me in combat."
- Demoralization (DM): Psychological disengagement and sense of futility regarding mission success. Sample item: "I feel our efforts against Al-Shabaab are pointless."
- Perceived Counterinsurgency Effectiveness (CE): Belief that security forces are making progress against the insurgency. Sample item: "Our operations are gradually weakening Al-Shabab."

All constructs demonstrated excellent internal consistency. Exploratory factor analysis indicated that all items loaded above 0.60 on their respective constructs with no cross-loadings above 0.30, supporting discriminant validity (Table 1).

Table 1. Internal Consistency of Survey Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's α
Clan Loyalty (CL)	8	.87
Operational Trust (OT)	6	.81
Demoralization (DM)	6	.89
Counterinsurgency Effectiveness (CE)	5	.83

Faculty of Security Studies
University of Belgrade

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 27. The analytical procedure involved:

- Descriptive Statistics: To summarize demographic characteristics and key variables.
- Pearson Correlation Analysis: To examine bivariate relationships among the primary variables.
- Multiple Regression: To test the direct associations of clan loyalty and operational trust with demoralization while controlling for demographic and service-related variables. Categorical variables were coded with reference categories (branch: military; rank: private/constable). Assumptions were checked through Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values and residual plots.
- Mediation Analysis: Using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap samples to test whether operational trust mediates the association between clan loyalty and demoralization. This provides estimates of direct, indirect, and total effects with bias-corrected confidence intervals. Unstandardized coefficients are reported consistent with Hayes (2018). Consistent with best practices for cross-sectional data, mediation is interpreted as supporting a theory-consistent pathway model rather than demonstrating causal proof.

Control Variables. To account for potential confounding effects, the analyses controlled for rank, years of service, branch (military, police, intelligence), and gender. This allows a more precise estimate of the unique association between clan loyalty and demoralization.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the key variables. In this sample, mean scores for Clan Loyalty ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.64$) and Demoralization ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.71$) indicate prevalent social allegiance and low morale among personnel. Conversely, mean scores for Operational Trust ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.79$) and Counterinsurgency Effectiveness ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 0.66$) suggest perceived institutional challenges.

Faculty of Security Studies

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Clan Loyalty (CL)	4.12	0.64
Operational Trust (OT)	2.48	0.79
Demoralization (DM)	4.03	0.71
Counterinsurgency Effectiveness (CE)	2.31	0.66

Pearson correlation analysis (Table 3) revealed significant relationships in the hypothesized directions. Clan loyalty was negatively correlated with operational trust ($r = -.54$, $p < .01$) and positively correlated with demoralization ($r = .58$, $p < .01$). Demoralization was strongly negatively correlated with perceived counterinsurgency effectiveness ($r = -.62$, $p < .01$).

Table 3. Correlation Matrix of Key Variables

Variables	CL	OT	DM	CE
Clan Loyalty (CL)	1			
Operational Trust (OT)	-0.54**	1		
Demoralization (DM)	0.58**	-0.51**	1	
Counterinsurgency Effectiveness (CE)	-0.49**	0.61**	-0.62**	1

Note: $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

3.2. Regression and Mediation Analysis

We conducted a multiple regression to predict demoralization, controlling for rank, years of service, branch, and gender (Table 4). The model was statistically significant, $F(6, 243) = 65.2$, $p < .001$, and explained 57% of the variance in demoralization ($R^2 = .57$). Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all predictors were below 2.1, indicating no multicollinearity concerns. Residual plots indicated approximate normality and homoscedasticity.

Clan loyalty was the strongest predictor in this model ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < .001$). In practical terms, a one-point increase in clan loyalty on the 1–5 scale corresponds to a 0.58-point increase in demoralization, holding other variables constant. Operational trust was also a significant predictor ($\beta = -0.39$, $p < .001$). None of the control variables (rank, years of service, branch, gender) were statistically significant in this model, suggesting that the association between clan loyalty and demoralization is observed across different demographics within this urban security apparatus sample. However, this does not imply these factors are unimportant; their non-significance may reflect limited variation or measurement in the current study.

Table 4. Regression Analysis Predicting Demoralization (Controlling for Rank, Years, Branch, Gender)

Predictor	β	t	Sig.	VIF
Clan Loyalty (CL)	0.58	8.92	< .001	1.89
Operational Trust (OT)	-0.39	-5.87	< .001	1.76
Rank	0.05	0.97	.332	1.42
Years of Service	-0.02	-0.41	.682	1.38
Branch	-0.03	-0.59	.556	1.21
Gender	0.01	0.21	.832	1.09

Model Fit: $R^2 = .57$, $F(6,243) = 65.2$, $p < .001$. Reference categories: Branch = Military; Rank = Private/Constable.

Faculty of Security Studies

The mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4) confirmed that operational trust partially mediates the effect. Unstandardized coefficients are reported.

- Total Effect: CL → DM = 0.58, $p < .001$
- Direct Effect: CL → DM = 0.35, $p < .001$
- Indirect Effect: CL → OT → DM = 0.23, 95% CI [0.15, 0.32]

The significant indirect effect, evidenced by a bootstrap confidence interval that does not cross zero, is consistent with the interpretation that part of clan loyalty's association with demoralization may be explained by its association with eroded operational trust. Because these are cross-sectional data, these findings are interpreted as consistent with the proposed pathway model rather than as definitive evidence of causation.

Supplementary Analysis. We also tested a serial mediation model (CL → OT → DM → CE) to examine the full theorized pathway to perceived counterinsurgency effectiveness. The indirect effect through the full chain was significant (0.11, 95% CI [0.05, 0.18]), consistent with the theoretical framework while maintaining the paper's primary focus on morale and trust as key outcomes.

4. Discussion

This study provides empirical evidence consistent with the view that clan loyalty is associated with security force demoralization in this sample of Somali personnel. The regression results ($\beta = 0.58$), which held even after controlling for key demographic variables, indicate that personnel re-

porting stronger clan identification also report significantly higher demoralization. Consistent with the proposed pathway, operational trust partially mediates this association: personnel who distrust colleagues from other clans report elevated demoralization, suggesting a psychological mechanism that may underpin the clan-cohesion problem.

4.1. Interpretation of Findings

- The Primacy of Clan Loyalty: The strong negative correlation between clan loyalty and operational trust (r = -.54) in this sample is consistent with Social Identity Theory and prior research indicating that Somali military institutions are fragmented by clan loyalties that can compete with allegiance to the central government (Robinson, 2019; Robinson & Matisek, 2020). The lack of a statistically significant association for service branch in this particular model is noteworthy, suggesting this may be a pervasive observation across the institutions studied rather than one confined to a specific force element.
- The Morale–Effectiveness Nexus: The strong correlation between high demoralization and low perceived effectiveness (r = -.62) is consistent with the presence of psychological defeatism among personnel. When security forces perceive Al-Shabab as invincible due to its entrenchment in clan networks, their motivation to engage actively in operations may diminish. This finding quantifies a dynamic often described qualitatively, providing evidence consistent with the view that social allegiances may erode operational will.
- The Mediating Role of Trust: The partial mediation observed is consistent with the interpretation that while clan loyalty has a direct association with morale, a significant portion of its association may be channeled through the degradation of trust within units. This finding may be relevant for policymakers, as it suggests that interventions aimed at building cross-clan trust, such as integrated training and clan-neutral leadership, could potentially mitigate some of the negative associations of entrenched clan allegiance. Because trust is also shaped by interpretation and communication, security messages that are perceived as hostile or threatening can reinforce mistrust rather than reduce it (Gbambu & Ibrahim, 2026).
- Theoretical Contribution: By integrating Social Identity Theory and Justice Judgment Theory, this study illustrates how individual allegiance to kin groups may shape behavior in ways that are associated with institutional norms in fragile states (Rotberg, 2004). These findings align with broader comparative research showing that security sector effectiveness in fragile states depends not only on material resources but also on the perceived legitimacy and fairness of institutional processes (Chukwunka, 2025). When personnel perceive that promotions, deployments, and disciplinary actions are influenced by identity-based affiliations rather than merit, institutional trust erodes and operational effectiveness declines (Onimisi & Chuka, 2025). The Somali case thus exemplifies a wider phenomenon observed across multiple fragile state contexts, where the interplay of identity, institutional weakness, and insurgent adaptation creates self-reinforcing cycles of conflict and state fragility (Unaam, 2025a, 2025b). Recent resilience research likewise highlights the interaction of social capital, institutional capacity, risk communication, and perceived preparedness as mutually reinforcing components of collective resilience (Cvetković et al., 2026).

4.2. Policy Implications

The findings suggest several actionable interventions, prioritized as near-term and long-term recommendations:

Near-Term Interventions (0–2 Years):

- Structured Trust-Building: Implement mandatory, structured team-building exercises and mixed-clan unit deployments to foster interpersonal relationships necessary to build oper-

ational trust. For example, rotate personnel through mixed-clan training cohorts and assign cross-clan mentorship pairs.

- Psychosocial Support Systems: Establish regular counseling services, confidential reporting mechanisms for clan-based grievances, and merit-based recognition programs to address demoralization and provide outlets for pressure.
- Complaint Channels: Create independent, confidential channels for reporting clan-based discrimination or pressure, with protections for whistleblowers.

Long-Term Structural Reforms (2–5 Years):

- Clan-Neutral Recruitment and Promotions: Design recruitment and advancement policies with transparent rotation schedules to prevent clan concentration. Implement promotion boards with external oversight to ensure decisions are perceived as merit-based rather than clan-driven.
- National Identity and Civic Education: Sustain civic education and leadership training emphasizing national citizenship and professional ethics to gradually reorient loyalty from clan to state. Integrate this training throughout career progression.
- Performance Incentives: Develop incentives for cross-clan cooperation, such as unit-level awards for diverse teams demonstrating operational effectiveness.

4.3. Limitations, Alternative Explanations, and Future Research

Urban Focus. The urban focus on Mogadishu, Kismayo, and Baidoa may actually underestimate the association of clan loyalty, as rural areas are often where traditional clan structures and Al-Shabab's parallel governance are most dominant. However, robustness checks indicated that excluding any single city did not substantially alter findings, and branch-level analyses (military, police, intelligence) showed consistent directional effects.

Cross-Sectional Design. The cross-sectional design means the model is consistent with the proposed pathway, but it cannot definitively establish causality. Longitudinal research is needed to track changes in loyalty and morale over time and to examine reciprocal relationships.

Gender Imbalance. The gender imbalance in the sample (84% male), while reflective of the security forces' composition, limits the precision of estimates for female personnel and the generalizability of findings to women's experiences. Future research should oversample female personnel to examine whether associations differ by gender.

Measurement Considerations. While the authors provide evidence of reliability and discriminant validity, the measures were adapted for this context and would benefit from further validation in future studies, including confirmatory factor analysis with larger samples.

Alternative Explanations. Several omitted variables could also contribute to demoralization and low trust. Corruption perceptions, chronic salary delays, inadequate unit resourcing, and inconsistent leadership quality are plausible alternative or complementary explanations. Future research should measure these factors directly and examine whether they interact with clan loyalty or operate independently. For example, poor leadership may exacerbate clan-based distrust, while reliable salary payments might mitigate it.

Robustness and Generalizability. While findings were consistent across branches and sites in this urban sample, future work should test generalizability to rural areas, special forces units, or other fragile state contexts.

5. Conclusions

Somalia's counterinsurgency challenge is as sociological as it is military. In this study, clan loyalty was associated with both cultural identity and perceptions of insurgent defense mechanisms, potentially sustaining Al-Shabaab's resilience while also being linked to systematic demoralization and reduced operational trust among state security forces. The findings of this study are consistent with the view that reducing demoralization and improving perceived effectiveness may require more than military hardware; it may demand long-term, nuanced state-building strategies that actively foster cross-clan cohesion, institutional legitimacy, and a unifying national identity.

Collectively, the evidence from Somalia and comparable contexts underscores that sustainable counterinsurgency requires addressing the institutional and social dimensions of conflict—not merely its military manifestations (Unaam, 2025a; Onimisi & Chuka, 2025). Hybrid security arrangements, while sometimes necessary in the short term, must be carefully managed to avoid institutionalizing the very divisions they seek to bridge (Chukwunka, 2025). Community-level engagement and integrating informal security actors into formal frameworks require careful calibration to ensure state legitimacy is enhanced rather than undermined (Hanafi, 2025). Ultimately, building effective security forces in clan-based societies demands a long-term commitment to fostering institutional legitimacy, cross-clan trust, and professional norms that transcend parochial loyalties (Unaam, 2025b).

By combining quantitative analysis with theoretical insight, this study provides evidence that may inform policymakers and contributes to scholarly debates on social identity, state fragility, and counterinsurgency in contested states.

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting this study's findings are not publicly available because they contain information that could compromise participant privacy. The corresponding author may make identified data available upon reasonable request, subject to institutional ethics approval.

Author Contributions: Akaninyene O. Unaam: Conceptualization, Methodology, Theoretical framework development, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Supervision and Visualization.

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency.

Acknowledgments: The author thanks the editors and anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback.

Informed Consent Statement: The author obtained informed consent from all participants involved in the study.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

AI Use Statement: During the preparation of this work, the author used the following AI tools: Grammarly – for language polishing, proofreading, and grammar correction. Claude (Anthropic) – for editorial feedback, structural suggestions, reference verification, and language refinement.

The author critically reviewed and edited all AI-assisted output and takes full responsibility for the content, accuracy, and integrity of the published article. AI tools were not used to generate or replace the author's original research, analysis, or scholarly judgment. The author is solely responsible for all substantive content, theoretical development, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and final editorial decisions.

Declaration: I confirm that I take full responsibility for the manuscript's scientific content, originality, accuracy, and integrity. All ideas, analyses, findings, and conclusions are my own. Any AI assistance was limited to editorial and formatting support and did not involve generating substantive intellectual content.

6. References

1. Ahmed, S. (2025). UN peacekeeping: Challenges and reforms for civilian protection and human rights. *International Journal of Contemporary Security Studies*, *1*(2), 245–254. https://doi.org/10.18485/fb_ijcss.2025.1.2.19
2. Bryden, M. (2014). *The reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A strategy of choice or necessity?* Center for Strategic and International Studies.
3. Chukwunka, C. A. C. (2025). Hybrid policing: The new structure of policing for crime control in contemporary Nigeria. *International Journal of Contemporary Security Studies*, *1*(2), 145–152. https://doi.org/10.18485/fb_ijcss.2025.1.2.10
4. Cvetković, V. M., & Šišović, V. (2024). Understanding the sustainable development of community (social) disaster resilience in Serbia: Demographic and socio-economic impacts. *Sustainability*, *16*(7), 2620. https://doi.org/10.3390/su16072620
5. Cvetković, V. M., Lipovac, M., Renner, R., Stanarević, S., & Raonić, Z. (2025). A predictive framework for understanding multidimensional security perceptions among students in Serbia: The role of institutional, socio-economic, and demographic determinants of sustainability. *Sustainability*, *17*(11), 5030. https://doi.org/10.3390/su17115030
6. Cvetković, V. M., Milenković, D., Bašić, J., Lukić, T., & Renner, R. (2026). Predictive model of community disaster resilience across Serbia: A BRIC–DROP composite index and spatial patterns. *Safety*, *12*(3), 59. https://doi.org/10.3390/safety12030059.
7. Cvetković, V. (2026). Disaster Risk Management: Theory, Concepts and Methods. Scientific-Professional Society for Disaster Risk Management, Belgrade.
8. de Waal, A. (2020). Somalia's disassembled state: Clan unit formation and the political marketplace. *Conflict, Security & Development*, *20*(5), 561–585. https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2020.1820160
9. Gbambu, A. R., & Ibrahim, M. G. (2026). Security communication and the security dilemma: Insights from the Iran-Israel rivalry. *International Journal of Contemporary Security Studies*, *2*(1), 17–28. https://doi.org/10.18485/fb_ijcss.2026.2.1.2
10. Gundel, J. (2006). *The predicament of the 'Oday': The role of traditional structures in security, rights, law and development in Somalia*. Danish Refugee Council & Novib/Oxfam. https://logcluster.org/sites/default/files/public/documents/gundelthe20role20of20traditional20structures.pdf
11. Hagmann, T., & Hoehne, M. V. (2009). Failures of the state failure debate: Evidence from the Somali territories. *Journal of International Development*, *21*(1), 42–57. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1482
12. Hanafi, R. O. (2025). Assessing the implications of scavengers' activities on the security of Kwara State. *International Journal of Contemporary Security Studies*, *1*(2), 67–82. https://doi.org/10.18485/fb_ijcss.2025.1.2.5
13. Hansen, S. J. (2019). *Horn, Sahel and Rift: Fault-lines of the African jihad*. Hurst & Company.
14. Hayes, A. F. (2018). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
15. Hiraal Institute. (2018). *Taming the clans: Al-Shabab's clan politics*. https://hiraalinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/AS-Clan-Politics.pdf
16. Hoehne, M. V. (2013). Limits of hybrid political orders: The case of Somaliland. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *7*(2), 199–217. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2013.776279
17. Kapteijns, L. (2013). *Clan cleansing in Somalia: The ruinous legacy of 1991*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
18. Lewis, I. M. (1998). *A pastoral democracy: A study of pastoralism and politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*. LIT Verlag. https://lit-verlag.de/isbn/978-3-8258-3084-5/
19. Lind, E. A., & Tyler, T. R. (1988). *The social psychology of procedural justice*. Plenum Press. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-2115-4

20. Marchal, R. (2011). *The rise of a jihadi movement in a country at war: Harakat Al-Shabaab Al Mujaheddin in Somalia*. Sciences Po, Centre d'études et de recherches internationales. https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr.ceri/files/art_RM2.pdf
21. Menkhaus, K. (2007). Governance without government in Somalia: Spoilers, state building, and the politics of coping. *International Security*, *31*(3), 74–106. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2007.31.3.74
22. Menkhaus, K. (2018). *Elite bargains and political deals project: Somalia case study*. UK Stabilisation Unit.
23. Onimisi, T., & Chuka, O. B. (2025). Insurgency and armed banditry in Central Nigeria: Dissecting the existing policy options. *International Journal of Contemporary Security Studies*, *1*(2), 153–164. https://doi.org/10.18485/fb_ijcss.2025.1.2.11
24. Robinson, C. D. (2019). The Somali National Army: An assessment. *Defense & Security Analysis*, *35*(2), 211–221. https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2019.1600805
25. Robinson, C. D., & Matisek, J. (2020). Assistance to locally appropriate military forces in Southern Somalia. *The RUSI Journal*, *165*(4), 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2020.1830711
26. Rotberg, R. I. (Ed.). (2004). *When states fail: Causes and consequences*. Princeton University Press.
27. Sharp, J. M. (2007). *The Iraqi security forces: The challenge of sectarian and ethnic influences* (CRS Report No. RS22093). Congressional Research Service.
28. Shire, M. I. (2021). Dialoguing and negotiating with Al-Shabaab: The role of clan elders as insider-partial mediators. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *15*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2020.1863099
29. Siebold, G. L. (2007). The essence of military group cohesion. *Armed Forces & Society*, *33*(2), 286–295. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X06294173
30. Skjelderup, M. W. (2020). Jihadi governance and traditional authority structures: Al-Shabaab and clan elders in Southern Somalia, 2008–2012. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, *31*(6), 1174–1195. https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2020.1780686
31. Skjelderup, M. W. (2021). Insurgent engagement with kinship group authorities: Production of order and governance in Somalia's Lower Jubba province. *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, *6*(1–3), 52–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2022.2130968
32. Soeters, J. L., Winslow, D. J., & Weibull, A. (2006). Military culture. In G. Caforio (Ed.), *Handbook of the sociology of the military* (pp. 237–254). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-34576-0_14
33. Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
34. Unaam, A. O. (2025a). Fueling the insurgency: Climate-resource scarcity and the persistence of terrorism in Northern Nigeria. *International Journal of Contemporary Security Studies*, *1*(2), 137–144. https://doi.org/10.18485/fb_ijcss.2025.1.2.9
35. Unaam, A. O. (2025b). Intelligence gaps and inter-agency rivalry in the Sahelian theatre: Evidence from the Lake Chad Basin and Northern Nigeria. *International Journal of Contemporary Security Studies*, *1*(2), 165–174. https://doi.org/10.18485/fb_ijcss.2025.1.2.12
36. Williams, P. D. (2018). *Fighting for peace in Somalia: A history and analysis of the African Union Mission (AMISOM), 2007–2017*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198724544.001.0001
37. Winslow, D. (1998). Misplaced loyalties: The role of military culture in the breakdown of discipline in peace operations. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, *35*(3), 345–367. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-618X.1998.tb00727.x