

Somalia

Ethnicity in Somalia

The Somalis “form an ethnic group because they share a common history, language, and religion” (⁴⁰⁸¹, 140). They are divided among six major “clans” which has resulted in almost permanent civil violence. According to EPR coding rules, clans are not coded as ethnic groups because they conceive of ancestry in genealogical terms.

⁴⁰⁸¹ [Forrest, 2004]

Up to state collapse in the early 1990s political factions in Somalia did not make relevant claims in the name of an ethnic group and did not experience state discrimination due to their ethnicity. The subsequent struggles and war between “clan-based armed factions” were also not rooted in ethnicity. Compagnon (⁴⁰⁸², 83) has argued that “political entrepreneurship” of intensely competing clan leaders was an important structural driver of state collapse that became more acute after the toppling of Barre’s regime in 1991.

⁴⁰⁸² [Compagnon, 2004]

If Somalia had a functioning state it could be one of the few African nation states. As pointed out by Forrest, there is the notion of a “Somali nation” on which such a state could have been based. However, Somali nationalism failed to transform into a sufficiently powerful movement during the 1950s and 1960s. It has been described as being rather instrumental and “superficial” since it was mainly designed by Somali elites to “oust foreigners from the south” (⁴⁰⁸³, 147). The degeneration of the movement due to personal and political rivalries in the 1970s and the civil war in the 1980s prevented Somalia from becoming a potentially successful nation-state in Africa.

⁴⁰⁸³ [Forrest, 2004]

Somalia remains a case that is difficult to work with in the EPR definition of ethnic group. There is no evidence to suggest that ethnic, regional or religious identities have become politically significant in recent years (EPR update 2014-2017), nor that the Somalian people have become more ethnically heterogenous. The dominance of islamic-extremist governance under Al-Shabab may threaten this state of affairs, should regions become more targeted than others in the rise in Islamic fundamentalism (⁴⁰⁸⁴). However, at the current time, it appears that the situation in Somalia is not affected by ethnic or religious division.

⁴⁰⁸⁴ [BBC, 2017]

Overall, ethnicity is judged to be politically irrelevant according to the EPR definition.

Bibliography

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Political status of ethnic groups in Somalia

From 1960 until 2017

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Somali	1.0	IRRELEVANT



Figure 819: Political status of ethnic groups in Somalia during 1960-2017.

Conflicts in Somalia

Starting on 1964-02-09

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Ethiopia	Government of Somalia		1964-02-09			

Starting on 1982-01-17

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Somalia	SSDF	Somali	1982-01-17		Yes, from EGIP	
Government of Somalia	SNM	Somali	1982-04-29		Yes, from EGIP	
Government of Somalia	SPM	Somali	1989-04-13		Yes, from EGIP	
Government of Somalia	USC/SSA	Somali	1990-07-27		Yes, from EGIP	
Government of Somalia	USC/SNA	Somali	1991-09-06		Yes, from EGIP	
Government of Somalia	SRRC	Somali	2001-05-11		Yes, from EGIP	
Government of Somalia	ARS/UIC	Somali	2006-09-17		Yes, from EGIP	
Government of Somalia	Al-Shabaab	Somali	2008-01-01		Yes, from EGIP	
Government of Somalia	Hizbul Islam	Somali	2009-03-16		Yes, from EGIP	