

Somalia

Ethnicity in Somalia

Group selection

The Somalis “form an ethnic group because they share a common history, language, and religion” (⁴⁷¹¹, 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. Hence, ethnicity is considered irrelevant in Somalia.

⁴⁷¹¹ [Forrest, 2004]

Power relations

1960-1990

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 (⁴⁷¹², 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.

⁴⁷¹² [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” (⁴⁷¹³, 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. Thus, the Somali are considered as politically irrelevant throughout the whole period, with the exception of the state collapse from the early 1990s to the mid-2000s.

⁴⁷¹³ [Forrest, 2004]

1991-2004

As a consequence of the civil war, Somalia entered a phase of state collapse in the early 1990s, which would last for roughly 15 years. One key date in the collapse of state structures was the toppling of Barre’s regime - or, at least, what was left of it, as at this point

Barre did not control much territory beyond the capita - by the rebels of the United Somali Congress. After this, rebel infighting and segmented territorial control threw Somalia into a period where no central state authority could be identified. Following standard definitions of state collapse, and the one that EPR follows, which refer to state collapse as a situation “where no authority is recognisable either internally to a country’s inhabitants or externally to the international community” (⁴⁷¹⁴), and “when the national government fails to enforce its authority in the absence of a rival claimant to sovereignty” (⁴⁷¹⁵), Somalia can be considered a clear case of state collapse from 1991.

⁴⁷¹⁴ [Call, 2008]

⁴⁷¹⁵ [Ulfelder, 2010]

State collapse is coded until the election of Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed as President of Somalia by the parliament of the Transitional National Government in October 2004. Thus, the period ends on January 1st, 2005. This date could be contested, however. Even if Yusuf Ahmed was head of the government and the internationally recognized leader of Somalia, the government did not have territorial control, even within Mogadishu. However, we adopt a strict definition and consciously restrict the collapse period.

2005-2021

Somalia remains a case that is difficult to work with in the EPR definition of ethnic groups. There is no evidence to suggest that ethnic, regional or religious identities have become politically significant in recent years (up to the time of writing the latest update in early 2021), nor that the Somalian people have become more ethnically heterogeneous. 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 (⁴⁷¹⁶). However, at the current time, it appears that the situation in Somalia is not affected by ethnic or religious division. Overall, ethnicity is judged to be politically irrelevant according to the EPR definition.

⁴⁷¹⁶ [BBC, 2017]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Somalia

From 1960 until 1990

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Somali	1.0	IRRELEVANT

From 1991 until 2004

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Somali	1.0	STATE COLLAPSE

From 2005 until 2021

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Somali	1.0	IRRELEVANT



Figure 933: Political status of ethnic groups in Somalia during 1960-1990.



Figure 934: Political status of ethnic groups in Somalia during 1991-2004.



Figure 935: Political status of ethnic groups in Somalia during 2005-2021.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Somalia

From 1991 until 2004



Figure 936: Map of ethnic groups in Somalia during 1991-2004.

Group name		Area in km ²	Type
■	Somali	636 245	Statewide

Table 345: List of ethnic groups in Somalia during 1991-2004.

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	

Starting on 2016-07-17

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Somalia	Republic of Somaliland		2016-07-17			

Starting on 2018-02-07

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Somalia	IS		2018-02-07			