EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE FIELD GUIDE



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About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the decisive cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success (Photo: A Somali Family, courtesy of IRIN/Moulid Hujale).



The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 introduces "Culture General," the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment.

Part 2 presents "Culture Specific" Somalia, focusing on unique cultural features of Somali society and is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location (Photo: Somali children at a primary school, courtesy of UNHCR/J. Ose).



For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at http://culture.af.mil/ or contact AFCLC's Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.



Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local

nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.



Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated

market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard.



As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Consequently, we assume that individuals falling into the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

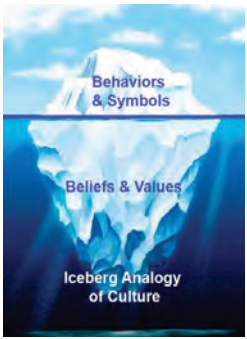


This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the

deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout the African Continent, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common among most African countries. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.



Africa has a history that spans the entire existence of humankind. In ancient times prior to the emergence of written languages, history and wisdom were preserved across generations and

ethnic boundaries through oral folk legends or myths. Most early human evolution began as hunting and gathering cultures in East and South Africa, with countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa renowned for their early human sites. In the last several millennia, the development of agriculture and pastoralism (animal herding) replaced hunting and gathering lifestyles (Photo: *Kutubiyya Mosque* courtesy of CultureGrams, ProQuest, 2013).

Ancient civilizations evolved in all corners of Africa, inspired in part by peoples from the Middle East bringing trade, beliefs, customs, language, and on occasion, colonization. Far from being isolated empires, the African civilizations were intimately connected by commerce and marriage throughout various regions of the continent, and when confronted by outsiders, managed to adapt to their influences. Eventually, Arab traders introduced Islam to Africa and also instituted the Trans-Saharan African slave trade that lasted from the 7th to 19th Centuries.

The “golden age” of European exploration, which lasted from the 18th to mid-20th century, prompted the wholesale exploitation of Africans resources – first human assets through slavery, followed by natural resources such as minerals, precious gems and metals, and wildlife, thereby diminishing most of what was traditional and African.



The introduction of the European Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade altered the slave trade through both the sheer number of Africans enslaved and through the cementing of a racist ideology of Black inferiority to legitimize the institution of slavery. Slavery decimated the African continent for over 400 years through the forced relocation of an estimated 25 to 30 million Africans worldwide. This figure does not include those Africans who died aboard ships or during capture. While abolition of the slave trade dissolved the institution of slavery, it

did not end the European presence on the African continent nor did it drastically alter their attitudes towards Africans.

Starting in the mid-19th century, European colonialism served to redefine African ethnic relations on a large scale; however, as African societies began to resist colonial rule and seek their independence, widespread ethnic conflict and genocide occurred. Sustained westernization and globalization continue to shape the continent through poverty, disease, and social reform. A history still to be recorded, Africa's future identity faces many challenges in critical areas such as environmental change, ethnic strife, women's health and security, and education.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Traditional African political organizations in the form of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms have existed for several millennia and continue to influence contemporary African governments. Uncommon in modern society, bands are limited to hunting and gathering economies, such as the ǃKung of the southern African Kalahari Desert and foragers of central African forests.



Tribes are still represented today across the African political landscape, although the use of the word "tribe" is sometimes misinterpreted due to its western notion of "primitiveness" and oftentimes substituted with the term "ethnic group." Lacking centralized authority, tribes are organized around segmented descent groups or in some cases age groups.

Everyday governance is discharged through councils of respected elders and sanctioned through ritual and other means. East African pastoralist groups such as the Maasai,

along with some West African tribes and the Berbers in North Africa, represent this type of organization.

Chiefdoms or kingdoms are ruled by kings or queens from a royal clan and generally incorporate millions of subjects. Kingdoms such as the Zulu or Swazi in southern Africa developed through conquest, while others like Ghana's Ashante developed through an association of related traditional states. However, colonialism eventually diluted the power and reach of these empires, whose leaders were often retained as indirect rulers or figureheads.



Today, all three of these political organizations still exist, although in the confines of modern African nation-states created by colonial powers who had little regard or understanding of African cultures. This juxtaposition of modernity with tradition has caused severe conflict throughout the continent.

Challenged to construct their respective "national" identities, regional leaders attempt to do so by diluting the traditionally cohesive power of ancestry. These national ruling elites, who derive their power from wealth and commerce rather than tribal affiliation, feel threatened by loyalty to these traditional organizations, labeling their rule as "tribalism."

This "class versus descent" scrimmage for power has resulted in conflicts across the continent and a dramatic divergence of interests. As a means to overcome these and other issues on the continent, a 53-nation federation, the African Union (AU), was formed in 2002. AU's charter is to promote "greater unity and solidarity between African countries and peoples" by building partnerships in all segments of "civil society."

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer

individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Prior to the arrival of Islam and Christianity, the African continent consisted of orally transmitted indigenous religious practices. As in many societies, African indigenous beliefs influenced diet, subsistence patterns, family structures, marriage practices, and healing and burial processes. In essence, Africans constructed their worldview through their indigenous religions.



Today, the African continent is primarily either Muslim or Christian. Other faiths such as Judaism and Hinduism exist as pockets in different regions of the continent, primarily in urban areas. The historical trajectories of Islamic and Christian expansion in Africa offer intriguing commonalities in how Africans across the continent initially reacted to the introduction of each of those religions. For example, it is common throughout the continent to find a blending of many elements of indigenous religious practices with local Islam and Christianity (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia).

Consequently, many African native religions share similarities with religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in their understanding of God as the creator and ruler of all life, although He is considered untouchable by humans.



However, unlike Christianity and Islam, many African indigenous religions believe that God is not directly involved in people's lives. To them there is a spirit world populated with former good and bad human beings. The good spirits intercede with God on behalf of their living families to whom they then relay God's will through dreams and acquired possessions. The bad spirits work to bring misfortune through sickness,

death, or natural disasters to those who behave inappropriately.

Many indigenous African religions revere "nature" spirits living in the sky, water, and forests. These impersonal spirits help protect people from harm and provide them with life's essential ingredients such as water, sun, and wildlife. This belief system is commonly referred to as animism.

Just as spirits mediate relations between God and humans, religious specialists act as mediators between spirits and humans to provide protection from harm.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin"). The traditional African family with respect to marriage, family structure, and descent is a much different arrangement than is found in most American families. Likewise, there are several components of the traditional African family that are common to all African cultures.



First, perhaps the most difficult feature to reconcile to Americans is that of polygyny – the practice of a husband having more than one wife. A benefit of this arrangement is that it promotes societal alliances through marriage, procreation, and family wealth through female labor.

Second, due to polygyny, the family in most African cultures has historically consisted of an expanded set of kin or relatives that extends well beyond the American notion of a nuclear family. This arrangement created a family environment where children considered all siblings as "brothers and sisters" and all of the wives/mothers as "mother."

Third, the extended African family traces descent through either the male or female side of the family, a practice which differs considerably from the American family. Patrilineal descent (through the male side of the family) is the more common approach and usually features polygyny. The matrilineal (through the female bloodline) marriage pattern is more uncommon and almost always features monogamy – it is rare to encounter a wife having more than one husband.

Lastly, it is common for two or more blood lines (lineages) to share a common ancestor and collectively form a clan, which is the largest social unit. Clans do not have formal leaders or organizational structures. Membership is transferred from father to child and cuts across ethnic and social boundaries.

The dramatic social changes in Africa during and after colonialism in the last 4 decades have obviously affected the traditional family, and variations on these 3 features can be found across the continent.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles. Gender roles in Africa follow no single model nor is there a generalized concept of sex and common standard of sexual behavior.

Prehistorically, gender role differentiation in Africa's hunting and gathering cultures was based on a division of labor featuring different, yet complementary, sets of responsibilities for males and females, adults and children. Females gathered over half the caloric needs from natural vegetation, while also reproducing and raising offspring. Males were primarily hunters but also assisted with gathering.



These gender patterns continued as agricultural practices advanced.

Females shared in farming while continuing to provide for the family's subsistence, and males produced the cash crops. Pastoralists like the Maasai of Kenya traditionally have featured males involved in cattle-raising and females in food production.

The 19th-century European colonial period introduced a cash economy into Africa, with female labor used to produce the cash crops. By inserting male authority over females, colonial administrators disrupted the distinct yet complementary male/female relationship that had been traditionally African.

More recently, western influence across the continent has dramatically altered the traditional gender roles. Educational and professional opportunities for females, along with increased family migrations to urban areas, have radically altered traditional male and female gender roles.

Likewise, the number of singles parents and even child- or other relative-led families has increased with the predominance of HIV/AIDS-related deaths and warfare, further altering traditional gender responsibilities. Additionally, ethnic conflicts involving abuse of women are prevalent in many unstable countries, and while the rubric of traditional African gender generally remains, the forces of change are gradually ripping it away.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. America is predominantly a monolingual society, where traditionally, fluency in a second language has been considered a luxury rather than a necessity. Conversely, national survival for many societies in Africa required them throughout their existence to adopt multilingual



practices, if for no other reason than to preserve their native heritage.

You may find it challenging to comprehend the scope of Africa's linguistic diversity. There are over 2,000 African languages (many spoken-only) from 6 major language families, and perhaps 100 of these languages are used to communicate among the more dominant ethnic groups such as Berber, Swahili, Yoruba, and others.

Official languages of African nation-states are few, yet the linguistic diversity expressed across the continent (Nigeria has 250 languages) has prompted an awareness of the value of Africa's linguistic traditions. While most areas of the continent speak the adopted language of their colonial past – such as French and Portuguese in West Africa, French and Arabic in Morocco, and English in Kenya and South Africa – the majority of people also speak one or more traditional "indigenous" languages of their and other ethnic groups. As African independence spread throughout the continent, ethnic groups continued to depend on their indigenous identifiers, such as language, to celebrate their "release" from colonial rule and to preserve a sense of indigenous identity.



While communication styles tend to vary by ethnic or social groups, Africans generally are friendly and outgoing people although they tend to communicate with reserve to avoid confrontation. As in most kin-based societies, Africans believe that saving face or protecting one's honor and dignity are of utmost importance; therefore, they avoid public criticism and controversial topics at all costs – even to the extent of withholding their honest opinion or modifying the truth.

Africans admire and even expect extended greetings and small talk, and to attempt to rush or avoid social graces is considered disrespectful. Similarly, Africans avoid direct eye contact when communicating with new acquaintances and people of status,

particularly elders. They also are fond of non-verbal gestures, and it is common throughout African societies for members of the same gender to hold hands or touch while conversing.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.



The contemporary African educational system hardly resembles the traditional pre-colonial structure, whereby community elders were primarily responsible for preparing youth for adulthood. Their instruction included fundamentals of ethnic ritual and ceremony, along with customary protocol for their distinctive gender roles. A rite-of-passage commemorating their successful journey from childhood to adulthood served as a form of graduation.

European colonialism brought a more structured, formal educational system that catered to a small group of African elite who demonstrated potential to administer expanding colonial territories. Following independence, many African nations adopted the European system because they believed it would prepare them to be more competitive in intra-continental and global marketplaces, thereby enhancing their quality of life.

However, progress in developing and maintaining reliable educational institutions has been slow for a variety of reasons. Since most Africans live in rural environments, they continue to rely heavily on child labor for family survival, resulting in decreased school enrollments or early withdrawals. Likewise, widespread HIV/AIDS epidemics, ethnic conflict, teacher and resource deficits, and inaccessibility to remote rural areas also hamper progress. According to 2005 statistics, only half of the

continent's children were enrolled in primary school, leaving over 40 million African children without any schooling at all.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In low-context western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Conversely, most African cultures are traditionally high-context societies, whereby people center their activities on socializing and establishing close associations, having little regard for the passage-of-time.

Only after establishing trust and honor will your typical African counterpart agreeably proceed with business. In his worldview, time is a precious commodity used to establish relationships and form alliances. Any attempt to accelerate the tempo at the expense of social pleasantries will likely result in deadlock.



To an African, close physical proximity between individuals encourages cooperative trust, and for centuries they have viewed human linkage as a core element to survival. This closeness is best represented in a traditional African village where strong kinship connections are evidenced by a display of close interpersonal relations among family members.

While conventional African concepts of time and space remain intact, throughout the continent western influence and globalization have stepped up the pace of African living, mostly in urban areas. Consequently, rural-to-urban migrations have reshaped traditional social and subsistence patterns.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Prior to 19th-century European colonization of Africa,

recreation served a vital subsistence role, whereby adolescents and adults alike participated in intellectually stimulating leisurely activities that concurrently served to develop essential hunting and pastoral skills.

Games of chance and skill were important to early childhood development, providing social outlets within and outside their community. Featuring wrestling, jumping and running; traditional African sport was steeped in religious ritual.



Along with colonialism came the introduction to Africa of western sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and track and field. This emphasis on western sport continued to thrive with African independence and globalization, as seen in sporting events such as the Olympics and the World Cup.

Leaders such as Nelson Mandela skillfully employed sport to promote a unified South African nation. Importing the predominantly "white" game of rugby, Mandela used it to fuse a racially divided country following his election in 1992. This event is the theme of the motion picture "Invictus," exemplifying how sport can serve to create national identities and overcome ethnic division. His efforts have inspired many other African nations to follow suit.



Likewise, East African countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia have produced the world's dominant male and female distance runners, and South Africa, Cameroon and Nigeria emerged as strong contenders in the 2010 World Cup. African nations are now competing in leagues such as the International Basketball Association (FIBA) World Championships, and there is also a

growing number of African basketball players on US college campuses and in the National Basketball Association (NBA).

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Despite having only 11% of the global population, Africa is a victim of many of the world's debilitating health disorders. According to the World Health Organization, 60% of the global HIV/AIDS cases and 90% of malarial diseases occur in Africa.



These and other medical conditions are attributed primarily to viral infection and widespread poverty caused by extreme climatic conditions and civil unrest, coupled with inadequate preventative measures. While extensive drought generates widespread famine, civil disturbances generate millions of displaced persons. Likewise, with only 58% of the Sub-Saharan African population having access to safe drinking water, water-born bacterial diseases such as cholera and schistosomiasis are common.



Many people in Africa lack access to western medicine, and as a result depend on traditional health practices to combat disease. In addition, some traditional beliefs run counter to western medical practice and perhaps discourage individuals from utilizing those services even when they are available. This problem is further intensified by lack of federal regulatory healthcare management.

While modern healthcare procedures are more common in urban areas, many rural people rely on traditional practitioners who use a variety of plants and herbs to treat patients. Similarly, many families have their own secret remedies. While in some cases traditional medicine proves effective with fewer side effects than modern drugs, traditional practices do not adequately treat many of the more serious conditions.

On a positive note, western influence has stimulated some progress in combating Africa's health crisis. More resources are devoted to achieving basic human security by assessing disease symptoms early and with scientific accuracy.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Traditionally having an agrarian-based economy, Africa today remains predominantly agricultural, featuring less industrialization than most other parts of the world. Post-colonial adversities such as civil war, disease, poverty, and unstable dictatorships posed unusual hardship on several young African nations; however, Africa currently stands at the cross-roads of economic development with many nations becoming some of fastest growing regions in the world.



Colonialism institutionalized the exploitation of Africa's mineral resources, resulting in today's oil industry dominating the economic market in several coastal regions. A surge in global oil prices; a growing African middle class; and reduction in civil wars, foreign aid, and inflation collectively promise a more positive outlook for the future.

Countries such as Botswana, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and South Africa are economically the wealthiest on the continent, with regions such as East Africa showing signs of economic stability. Despite the economic upswing, much of sub-Saharan

Africa's future economic prosperity is held hostage by devastating diseases such as AIDS, particularly in areas of southern Africa, and the growing effects of climate change and man-made environmental degradation throughout the subcontinent.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Africa lags far behind most of the world in manufacturing capacity and output. Even the more economically-developed nations such as South Africa are competitively weak when compared to non-African industrialized nations. During the 1970s and 1980s, Africa experienced some growth in raw exports although this increase did little to boost long-term manufacturing capacity.

Today, Africa is experiencing an actual decline in manufacturing capacity due primarily to a lull in the global economy, along with other indigenous issues such as environmental stress, poor physical and organizational infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled personnel. Likewise, African manufacturing capacity is no match against global powers such as China and significant Southeast Asian markets.



International aid from both governmental and non-governmental organizations has helped African nations establish preliminary economic footholds. For example, many of them have dedicated industrial developmental zones to attract foreign investment and increase export-related manufacturing capacity, although Africa is far removed from having a significant role in the global marketplace in the foreseeable future.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize African society at large, we will now focus on specific features of Somali society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Somalia is continental Africa's easternmost country, where shared ethnicity and religion have historically united otherwise autonomous Somali clans. Nevertheless, for much of their history, the Somali people have lived divided among distinct sultanates, colonial powers, and separate countries. After a brief period of democracy in the 1960s, Somalia endured military despotic rule until 1991. Since then, it has suffered from civil war, famine, and terrorism. While conflict currently continues, Somalia has shown signs of improvement with a peaceful transfer of power to a new central government in early 2017.

Early History



Somalia shares the Horn of Africa peninsula with Djibouti, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. As the source of some of the oldest and most complete early human remains ever found, the region is sometimes referred to as the cradle of humankind. For example, the oldest known hominid skeletons, "Lucy" (3.2 million years old) and "Ardi" (4.4 million year old), were found about 200 mi from Somalia in the Afar Region of Ethiopia. The earliest records (dating around 9000 BC) of human activity in the region of present-day Somalia are cave paintings depicting cows, giraffes, and domesticated dogs (pictured) in Laas Geel near Hargeisa in northwestern Somalia.

Punt: First mentioned in written records around 2450 BC, Punt was a region that for centuries traded with ancient Egypt. While historians still debate the precise location of Punt, it probably extended from a base in northern Ethiopia to coastal territories

in present-day Somalia. Early records portray the region's residents as similar in appearance to Egyptians, who described Punt as ***Ta netjer*** (God's Land), likely due to its sources of myrrh and frankincense resins (pictured) used by the Egyptians for religious practices.



In the 5th century BC, Greek historian Herodotus described the residents to the south of Egypt (whom he called Ethiopians but likely included Somalis) as peoples who primarily consumed meat and milk. Most regional residents were nomadic pastoralists who raised sheep, goats, and cattle for sustenance and trade. Other coastal residents traded myrrh, frankincense, ivory, gold, animal pelts, and other goods for products from Egypt, Arabia, Persia, and East Africa.

Samaal: Some Somalis trace their ancestry to a mythical forefather named Samaal (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*), whose descendants lived as herders on the plains of northern Kenya. Based on this premise, some historians believe early Somalis likely migrated north and east from Kenya and Ethiopia to present-day Somalia in search of new pastures and water. Some Somalis remained near the southern Jubba and Shebelle rivers, where they farmed crops and raised livestock. Others continued north to the mountains near the Gulf of Aden and subsisted as nomadic pastoralists. By the 1st century AD, the Somalis likely occupied much of the eastern regions of the Horn of Africa.

Coastal Trading Ports: Around the same time, Axum emerged as a thriving trade-based empire along the Red Sea coast of present-day Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. Meanwhile, other trading ports developed along the Gulf of Aden, such as Zeila (Saylac) in present-day northwestern Somalia, which specialized in the trade of coffee and slaves. In the 6th century, Arab, Persian, and East African traders began settling along the Somali coast. By the 7th century, Zeila became a regional,

commercial hub as it and other Somali ports along the Gulf of Aden grew increasingly wealthy.

The Arrival of Arabs and Origins of Somali Clans

While early converts from the Arabian Peninsula likely introduced Islam to the region even before Muhammad's death in 632 AD (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*), few Somalis adopted the religion until Muslim Arab ***sheikhs*** (tribal leaders) arrived centuries later. One such tribal leader, Sheikh Darod al-Jabarti of the Arab Banu Hashim tribe, fled Arabia for the Somali coast around the 10th century. There, he married the Somali Dir clan chief's daughter and started the Darod clan, still one of Somalia's largest and most influential clans today (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*). Around 2 centuries later, Sheikh Isaaq, a leader of the same Arab tribe, arrived in the region and married a Somali woman from Maydh. Their union marked the origin of another large and powerful clan, the Isaaq (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*).

The Rise of Islamic Sultanates: Meanwhile, increasing Arab immigration to the northern Somali coast facilitated the rapid spread and adoption of Islam among local Somalis. Likely due to rapid population growth, some residents migrated south and west, establishing small sultanates (Islamic kingdoms). Most prominent was the Ifat Sultanate, with its capital in Zeila, founded in 1285 by members of the Arab Walashma dynasty. As a small, trade-based sultanate initially aligned with the Christian kingdoms of the Ethiopian highlands, Ifat became moderately prosperous (Photo: 19th-century engraving of Zeila).



By the 14th century, animosity characterized the relations between the Christian highland Ethiopians and Muslim lowland Somalis. Conflicts between the Muslim sultanates and Christian kingdom of Abyssinia (in present-day northern Ethiopia) became more frequent. In 1415, Abyssinian King Yeshaq I sacked Zeila, burning its mosques and killing Ifat's Sultan Sa'ad ad-Din. The

remaining Walashma royal family fled across the Gulf of Aden to present-day Yemen. To mark his victory, Yeshaq I commissioned a celebration hymn that included the first written reference to the “Somali” people.

Within 5 years, the Walashmas returned to the Horn of Africa, establishing the Adal Sultanate near present-day Dakkar, Ethiopia. Around 1430, the Adal leaders, who were the sons of the murdered Ifat Sultan Sa’ad ad-Din, defeated Yeshaq I in battle, forced him to retreat, and burned Christian churches and settlements in revenge for their father’s death. Adal subsequently became a powerful sultanate, capturing most of the Ethiopian Abyssinian Empire by 1535 (Pictured: 15th-century painting of a battle between Adal and Abyssinia).



Gradually, the Adal Sultanate declined as the Ajuran Sultanate grew powerful from its base along the present-day south-central Somali coast. A thriving mercantile hub at its peak in the 16th century, Ajuran controlled much of the region, while trading with merchants from lands as distant as China and Portugal. Ajuran became well-known for its castles, mosques, limestone wells, and taxation system.

Portugal Attacks the Somali Coast

As Europe’s predominant sea power at the time, Portugal sought a foothold in East Africa to expand its regional commercial interests. In 1499, famed Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama sailed by the Ajuran-controlled city of Mogadishu (Somalia’s present-day capital), noting its impressive palaces and mosques. The Portuguese returned around 1540 to support the Christian Ethiopians in their continuing battles against Adal and Ajuran for control of the region. By 1543, the Ethiopians and Portuguese had defeated Adal but were unable to overcome the Ajuran defenses in Mogadishu.

The Ottomans Join the Ajurans: Meanwhile, the powerful Islamic Ottoman Empire based in present-day Istanbul, Turkey also sought to gain control of Indian Ocean trade routes. As Portuguese attacks on Somali ports continued, the Ajurans allied with the Ottomans, attacking Portuguese settlements in southeastern Africa in 1585. With the support of the Ottomans, Ajuran successfully withstood Portuguese attacks from the sea and ongoing Ethiopian incursions from the west.

In the 17th century, the Ajuran Sultanate faced additional challenges. First, thousands of Ethiopians began migrating east, likely due to violence, drought, and population pressures. The Ajurans engaged and successfully suppressed the migrants in fierce battles, thereby protecting their land. Then, internal revolts flared as residents objected to high taxes. While neither the Portuguese nor the Ethiopians could defeat the Ajurans, the combined stresses of these events caused the Ajuran Sultanate to decline (Pictured: 16th-century Turkish painting of the Ottomans defending their trade routes in the Gulf of Aden).



The Rise of New Sultanates

As the Ajuran Sultanate declined, other sultanates gained influence, such as the Geledi in the south, the Warsangali in the north, and the Majeerteen and Hobyo in the north-central region. These sultanates all prospered from a combination of trade and agriculture, extending their influence by requiring weaker groups to pay annual tribute. Nevertheless, most Somalis gave allegiance only to their own clans and extended family.

As Portugal's power declined in the 18th century, the Somali sultanates were able to increase their share of maritime trade. For example, the Geledi moved southward into the Swahili Coast of present-day Kenya, while the Majeerteen in the north-central region developed a relatively modern state with a centralized bureaucracy and a professional army.

These developments did not go unnoticed or unanswered. From its seat on the islands of Zanzibar in present-day Tanzania, the Omani Sultanate contested the Somalis' southern territorial claims. Throughout the 19th century, the Omanis and Somalis vied for control of these coastal regions, swapping influence and tribute. In the North, the Ottomans still exerted some control, demanding annual payments from local Somali leaders. Meanwhile, several European powers also sought territory and access to trade in the region.

European Colonization

In 1884, 13 major European powers and the US assembled to regulate colonization and trade in Africa. The subsequent "Scramble for Africa" eliminated or overrode most existing forms of government, dividing nearly the entire continent among 7 European countries. Most lands traditionally occupied by Somalis fell under the jurisdiction of Britain, France, and Italy. Of note, France established a colony in northwestern Somali lands from 1896-1977. Afterwards, this so-called French Territory of the Afars and the Issas won its independence as present-day Djibouti.



British Somaliland: The British negotiated treaties with the Warsangali and other northern sultanates to establish the British Somaliland Protectorate. Britain's primary interest in the region was to establish a stable supply base to support its ship-fueling station in Aden, Yemen, just across the Gulf of Aden. At first, Britain kept a presence only along the coast, primarily exporting livestock and meat to Aden. British colonial rule was indirect, overseen by its colonial government in India, and it initially had little effect on Somali residents (Photo: Warsangali Sultan Mohamoud Ali Shire).

Italian Somalia: In 1889, the Italians negotiated treaties with the Geledi, Hobyo, Majeerteen, and other north-central and southern sultanates to establish Italian Somalia. Though wary

of each other's intentions, the Majeerteen and Hobyo agreed to cede some land and wealth to the Italians in exchange for protection, arms, and some internal administrative autonomy (Photo: Hobyo Sultanate Cavalry).



In 1905, the Italian government implemented a comprehensive plan intended to enhance Italian prestige, encourage Italian settlement in the region, and offer "civilization" to the Somalis. As part of this plan, Italy invested in a significant administrative infrastructure to promote political and economic development, resulting in the establishment of large banana and sugarcane plantations.

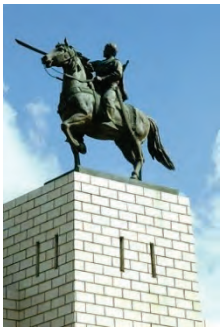
The Ethiopians in Ogaden

Meanwhile, in the late 1880s, Ethiopian forces occupied an arid inland region known as Ogaden that was largely inhabited by Somali nomads. Ethiopian raids in Ogaden were frequent and brutal, killing Somalis and much of their livestock. In 1896, Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II signed treaties with Italy, Britain, and France granting Ethiopia control over Ogaden and other nearby territories. Despite these agreements, Ethiopians' attacks on Somalis in Ogaden continued.

The 'Mad Mullah' Fights Back: In response to Somali suffering in Ogaden, Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, a leader of the ***Salihiyah tariqa***, a Sufi Muslim Order (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*), began to organize a Somali resistance. Because the British refused to provide arms to his cause, Hassan also targeted them in his declaration of war. Hassan's exceptional oratorical and poetic skills (see p. 4 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) won him thousands of followers, who united as an army known as the ***Dervishes*** (Sufi guides). In 1899, Hassan established the Dervish State on land claimed by Ethiopia, Britain, Italy, and several Somali sultans.

While the British initially dismissed Hassan as a fanatical "Mad Mullah," his movement became a 20-year war of resistance that led to the deaths of an estimated 1/3 of British Somaliland

residents and nearly destroyed the region's economy. The Dervish uprising continued until 1920, when Britain's Royal Air Force returned from World War I (WWI) to lead a 5th and final expedition against Hassan, destroying the Dervish State capital in Taleh, a northern inland city. Hassan then fled to Ogaden where he died of natural causes a few months later, ending the Dervish resistance. Nevertheless, Hassan remains a hero for many Somalis, who consider him a champion of the Somali people against foreign colonizers (Photo: Statue of Hassan in Mogadishu before it was destroyed).



British Somaliland Languishes

While focusing most of its efforts in Somalia on the Ogaden conflict, the British failed to introduce comprehensive economic or political development to British Somaliland. Moreover, the lack of arable land combined with the predominance of nomadic herding provided few money-making opportunities for Britain. As a result, British Somaliland was of relatively little importance as a colony except for its strategic location at the entrance to the Red Sea and across from Yemen. For years, the British focused solely on utilizing British Somaliland to provide livestock exports to Aden.

Italian Somalia Thrives

By contrast, Italian Somalia had some irrigable riverine land that was more conducive to agriculture. Before the 1920s, Italy focused most of its economic development efforts on coastal projects. In late 1922, Benito Mussolini became Italy's Prime Minister (PM), and by 1925, had consolidated a fascist dictatorship. That year, Britain ceded to Italy some territory in the northeastern part of British Kenya inhabited by Somalis as a reward for Italy's support of Britain in WWI.

Under Mussolini, Italy expanded development efforts in Italian Somalia, investing in farms, light manufacturing, schools, and hospitals. Investment in transport infrastructure, such as the Mogadishu port, a new airport, roads, and a railway, was

particularly significant. By 1930, about 22,000 Italians lived in the colony, comprising 2% of the total population. Meanwhile, Italy exiled the Hobyo and Majeerteen sultans to reduce local autonomy and tighten Italian control.

Italian East Africa

In 1935, a border dispute prompted Italy to invade Ethiopia from its colonies in Somalia and Eritrea. In the subsequent 8-month war, Italian, Somali, and Eritrean troops used modern weapons and tactics to defeat the Ethiopians. In May 1936, Ethiopian Emperor Selassie fled to Britain. Italy then divided Ethiopia into 4 new governorates that joined its Somali and Eritrean holdings as Italian East Africa.

From 1936-41, Italy invested heavily in the region. As a result, Italian Somalia had one of colonial Africa's highest standards of living. The colonists built additional hospitals, schools, and road infrastructure, such as the Imperial Road from Mogadishu to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In 1940, about 50,000 Italian colonists lived in Somalia. Of these Italians, around 20,000 lived in Mogadishu, where they comprised nearly 40% of the local population (Pictured: Mogadishu city center in 1936).



World War II (WWII)

Italy joined Germany and Japan against the Allies (Great Britain, France, the US, and others) during WWII. In August 1940, Italy invaded British Somaliland, forcing the British to evacuate, although the occupation was brief. In March 1941, Britain attacked the Italians in Somalia, swiftly capturing all of Italian East Africa and restoring Ethiopian Emperor Selassie to his throne. While some Italian troops continued to fight as part of a guerilla movement, they eventually ceased all resistance by the fall of 1943. The British then dissolved Italian East Africa, uniting former Italian Somalia, British Somaliland, and Ogaden under a military administration.

At war's end in 1945, Britain began to modestly invest in former British Somaliland, building clinics and wells, improving farming

practices, opening schools, and developing a court system that combined British, Islamic, and Somali law. Britain also devoted some resources to former Italian Somalia, improving primary schools, working conditions, and allowing Somalis to work in the emerging civil service.

Somali Independence Movements

Beginning in the 1930s, Somalis across the region developed a sense of nationalism. A common Somali identity emerged in nationalist poetry and art (see p. 4-6 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*), while new political organizations formed. For example, in 1935 the Somali National Society, later the Somali National League (SNL), organized in the North under the more tolerant British colonizers. After Italy's defeat, the Somali Youth Club, later the Somali Youth League (SYL), formed in 1943 in the South. After WWII, both organizations sought more rights for Somalis, the unification of all Somali regions, and a path to independence.



Meanwhile, Ogaden, like the 2 former Somali colonies, was still under British military rule. Seeking to gain favor in Ethiopia, the US and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR – Russia today) successfully pressured Britain to return Ogaden to Ethiopia in 1948. In response, Somalis across the region held massive protests (Photo: Herders near Danan, Ogaden, in present-day Ethiopia).

Trust Territory of Somalia: In 1949, the newly-formed United Nations (UN) stepped in. It designated former Italian Somalia a trust territory to be controlled by Italy for 10 years, with independence ensured by 1960. Further, the UN required Italy to help the trust territory prepare for independence by developing political institutions, expanding education, improving the economy, and providing Somalis with additional freedoms. Despite initial tensions between the SYL and the Italian administration, the situation in the trust territory improved.

In the 1956 elections, the SYL won 43 of 70 seats in the new legislative assembly, as Abdullahi Issa (pictured) became PM. While Italy continued to conduct all foreign relations and retained veto power over all political decisions, the assembly took charge of domestic affairs. In 1958, the Issa government gave women the right to vote and sought to promote a Somali national identity. Unsure of their future status in the trust territory, most Italian colonists returned to Italy. By 1960, exports had tripled, primary and secondary school enrollment doubled, and political institutions developed primarily through a Territorial Council, which gave some Somalis governing experience.



British Somaliland Lags Behind: Meanwhile, the UN had made no similar ruling regarding British Somaliland. Despite some investments, political and economic development in British Somaliland stagnated. In 1954, Britain ceded certain lands to Ethiopia. Although Ethiopia had traditionally claimed these areas, many Somali residents protested, increasing their demands for independence. In 1956, Britain responded by implementing a legislative council with native representation.

The Somali Republic

As the UN's 1960 deadline for independence in the trust territory drew near, Somalis in both protectorates increasingly called for unification. In the 1959 trust territory legislative elections, the SYL repressed rival groups to win 83 of the 90 legislative seats. Then, in the 1960 British Somaliland elections, the SNL and United Somali Party (USP) together won 32 of 33 seats. In April 1960, representatives from both regions met in Mogadishu to discuss unification. Given British Somaliland's relative underdevelopment, the trust territory had the advantage in the negotiations, successfully requiring the planned new country to adopt its capital, currency, and flag. Following Britain's approval, the 2 territories united as the independent Somali Republic on July 1, 1960.

The legislature appointed Aden Abdullah Osman Daar as the republic's first President. Daar then appointed Abdirashid Ali Shermarke as its first PM, who subsequently formed a coalition government composed of the SYL, the SNL, and the USP. In 1961, Somalis ratified Daar's presidential appointment in a national referendum, yet there was discord between the 2 regions. Many residents of the former British Somaliland region to the north rejected Daar, while just a minority of northerners voted to ratify the constitution. The measure passed only on the support of southerners.

Greater Somalia: Political disagreement was compounded by other differences. Despite union, the 2 regions retained their separate economic, administrative, education, legal, monetary, and taxation systems. Further, while nearly all residents spoke Somali, the regions used 2 different languages, Italian and English, for official purposes (see p. 2 of *Learning and Knowledge* and p. 1 of *Language and Communication*).



Nevertheless, residents in the 2 regions had some common ground. Islam, for one, was a strong unifying force (see p. 6-8 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Second, the 1962 rise of the Somali National Congress (SNC) party served to improve North-South relations. Finally, residents in both regions shared the desire to unite Somalis across the Horn of Africa, including those living in Kenya, Ethiopia, and present-day Djibouti as "Greater Somalia" (Map: The estimated extent of Somali populations in the region in pink).

While Somalia made no claim to territory in these countries, it advocated for the right of self-determination of Somalis in those areas, including brief support for a Somali secessionist uprising in northern Kenya. Somalia received little international support in this proposal. As colonizers of Kenya and Djibouti, Britain

and France rejected this proposition for their territories along with Ethiopia. Somalia received aid from other countries, particularly American police training and Soviet military training and support used to conduct guerilla warfare in the Somali-majority regions of Kenya and Ethiopia. Following a brief military conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia in 1963, other African leaders also rejected the idea of an expanded Greater Somalia.

In 1967, former PM Shermarke won the presidential election, primarily due to his strong support for the idea of Greater Somalia. Nevertheless, he appointed a PM who was more concerned with economic and social development than Somali integration. In 1968, Somalia and Ethiopia agreed to establish air and telecommunications links as relations between the 2 countries improved. Further, some Somali nomads returned to their traditional herding areas in the Ethiopian-held territory of Ogaden.



Shermarke Assassinated: In the 1969 parliamentary elections, President Shermarke's SYL won 109 of 123 seats. In coalition with the SNC, the SYL effectively controlled 120 seats, meaning there were few checks on its power. Many educated Somalis, particularly members of the military and police, condemned electoral fraud, widespread corruption, and nepotism. In late 1969, Shermarke was assassinated by a bodyguard, likely for personal reasons. Disapproving of the PM's choice of a presidential replacement, Army Major General Mohammed Siad Barre (pictured) and other army officers took power in a bloodless military coup.

The Barre Dictatorship

The coup leaders created a Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) with Barre as its President. The SRC arrested government officials, banned political parties, and suspended the constitution with the stated goal of freeing Somalia from corruption, misrule, and clan-based favoritism in politics.

Barre's government proclaimed adherence to "scientific socialism," an administrative system loosely based on the Qur'an (see p. 2, 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*) and Marxism. Besides nationalizing major companies, the SRC took control of the media. Further, it forcibly relocated unemployed youth and about 140,000 pastoral nomads into farming or fishing communities, claiming that such a move would erase clan allegiances (see p. 14-16 of *Political and Social Relations*) and encourage Somali nationalism. To further unite Somalis, the government adopted a Latin script for the largely spoken Somali language in 1972, also naming Somali as the country's official language for all administrative and government purposes (see p. 1-2 of *Language and Communication*).



Although Barre proclaimed a war against clan politics, he favored certain clans. Consequently, Somalis commonly referred to his government as "MOD," an acronym for the Barre family's 3 clans, all part of the larger Darod clan family (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*). As the self-proclaimed ***Guulwaadde*** (Victorious Leader), Barre cultivated his image as a messianic ruler, demanding all buildings display his picture. In 1976, Barre founded the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (SRSP) under Soviet guidance. He used the army and National Security Service (NSS) – trained by the brutal security services of the USSR, East Germany, and Romania – as tools for internal surveillance and repression. Meanwhile, Barre and his inner MOD circle continued to make all political decisions (Photo: A painting of Barre above smaller Barre posters on a wall in Mogadishu).

The Ogaden War: To garner additional support for the regime and retake territory traditionally occupied by Somalis, Barre took advantage of a Marxist revolution in Ethiopia and invaded Ethiopian-held Ogaden in mid-1977. The Somalis enjoyed quick victories, occupying about 90% of the territory by October. While the USSR had supplied Somalia with arms and

guidance for years, it quickly denounced the invasion, instead supporting the Ethiopian Marxist rebels with arms, advisors, and thousands of Cuban and Yemeni soldiers. With this massive Soviet support, the war's momentum changed. Somali troops suffered heavy casualties and were forced to withdraw. Fearing reprisal under Ethiopian rule, some 650,000 Somali and Ethiopian Oromo refugees fled Ogaden for Somalia. While some Somalis remained in Ogaden to engage the Ethiopians in guerilla warfare, they were almost entirely defeated by 1981. Meanwhile, the US began providing Somalia with limited arms in exchange for its use of the former Soviet base in Berbera.

Opposition Mounts

To deflect pressure following the Ogaden defeat, Barre called for elections in late 1979 for a "people's parliament." In reality, the people achieved no real representation, since all the candidates were SRSP members. In 1980, Barre tightened his grip on power, dismissing his Vice Presidents and alienating some of Somalia's largest clans. Denied access to power by the Barre regime, members of the Isaaq clan (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) received support from the Ethiopians in 1982 for guerrilla attacks against the Barre government. In response, the US increased its military aid to Barre to counter these attacks. Nevertheless, Barre largely used the American resources against his Somali enemies. As violence and repression increased, a devastating drought intensified residents' discontent and misery. Further, refugees from the Ogaden War placed a significant strain on resources (Photo: Somali troops march near Berbera in 1983).



Opposition to Barre was strongest in northern Somalia. In 1988, fighting was especially intense in the northern cities of Burao and Hargeisa. Barre's ***Duub Cas*** (Red Berets) special forces led a campaign of terror, massacring tens of thousands of civilians and members of opposition groups, primarily from

the Isaaq, Majeerteen, and Hawiye clans. At the same time, food scarcity and inflation provoked fears of famine.

The End of the Barre Regime and the Start of Civil War

By 1990, Barre had lost much of his Somali support base and was largely confined to his stronghold in Mogadishu. After about 2 months of violent conflict that destroyed much of the city, Barre fled in a tank to the southern city of Baidoa in early 1991, ending more than 21 years of violent and despotic rule. Enroute, his forces killed civilians and pillaged farms, contributing to a famine ravaging the entire country. With Barre on the run, the Hawiye-dominated United Somali Congress (USC) claimed to control Mogadishu, forming a provisional government and proposing peace talks. Nevertheless, infighting and opposition from other clans prevented progress and resulted in anarchy.

Meanwhile, the Isaaq-dominated Somali National Movement (SNM) refused to negotiate with the USC and secured control of most of former British Somaliland. In May 1991, the SNM declared the region the independent Republic of Somaliland. Since then, autonomous Somaliland has been relatively stable and somewhat prosperous, although its government has not received formal recognition from any other country (Photo: Somaliland license plate).



Finally, after more than a year of fighting, opposition groups forced Barre to retreat to Kenya in spring 1992. By mid-1992, some 2 million Somalis had fled to neighboring Somaliland or abroad, primarily to Kenya and Ethiopia, in order to avoid the persistent violence and famine. Thousands more were displaced internally. Local warlords took advantage of the lack of a central government and the prevalence of US and Soviet weapons to loot most cities. In many rural areas, local clan leaders filled the governance void.

Operation Restore Hope: As Somalia plunged into civil war and suffered a famine that claimed some 250,000 lives, the UN sought to provide humanitarian assistance and broker a

ceasefire through its first Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I), established in April 1992. By December, UNOSOM I had failed to halt the violence, and the US offered to lead a Unified Task Force (UNITAF) known as “Operation Restore Hope” to bring peace to Somalia. With UN approval, UNITAF called for US Marines and international forces to use “all necessary means” to restore stability and democratic institutions in Somalia.

In the first 3 months of its mandate, UNITAF deployed around 37,000 troops to Somalia. Despite achieving peace in some areas, widespread violence continued. The UN then transferred the UNITAF mandate to UNOSOM II, which took full control of the operation in May 1993 with mixed success. In October 1993, US troops engaged Somali fighters in the Battle of Mogadishu, resulting in 18 American deaths (see “Black Hawk Down” below). After footage of the horrific aftermath was publicly released, US President Clinton ordered US troops to evacuate. In March 1994, US troops left Somalia, followed by the UN’s withdrawal and the unsuccessful end of UNOSOM II just 1 year later (Photo: Former US President George Bush Sr. visits American forces in Somalia in early 1993).



Civil War Continues

Following the UN withdrawal, Somalia remained fractured as competing clans and warlords jostled for power. In 1998, primarily Darod leaders of the northeastern Puntland region declared autonomy from central and southern Somalia. Unlike the independence-minded leaders of Somaliland, those in Puntland still intended to reunite with Somalia someday.

Meanwhile, conflict continued. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, more than 10 peace conferences were held to end the hostilities, without success. Following a 2002 conference in Kenya, a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was organized, and in 2004, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed was elected President. The TFG received no recognition from autonomous Somaliland or from clan leaders based in Mogadishu, primarily

because Ahmed was not Hawiye. Further, it was initially based in Kenya due to continued insecurity in Somalia. In February 2006, the TFG met for the first time in Somalia in Baidoa, an inland city considered safer than Mogadishu. Meanwhile, piracy off the Somali coast added to the instability and insecurity.

Somali Pirates: With no central government to provide regulation, foreign fishing vessels sought to exploit Somalia's rich coastal waters. Some Somalis turned to piracy when overfishing and toxic waste from foreign ships began to threaten the livelihoods of Somali fishing communities. As the potential for financial gain became apparent, some warlords used piracy as a source of income through the late 2000s. By 2011, piracy off the Somali coast cost the global shipping industry over $5 billion per year. By 2012, international policing actions and improved shipping practices led to a sharp decrease in the number of incidents.

Black Hawk Down

Inspired by the 1999 non-fiction best-seller *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War,* the 2001 British-American film version depicts the Battle of Mogadishu. Despite the film's popularity at the box office, American, Somali, and international film critics point out several problems with the film, particularly its inaccurate depiction of Somali language and culture. Further, the film features no Somali actors, and American, Malaysian, and Pakistani soldiers who participated in the raid disputed the accuracy of some scenes. Nevertheless, *Black Hawk Down* won 2 Oscars in 2002 among other awards.

The Islamic Courts Union: Beginning in the 1990s, several ***sharia*** (Islamic) courts (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) banded together as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) to offer a justice system along with security, health, and education services. In mid-2006, the ICU formed a militia and took control of Mogadishu. Backed by Eritrea and other foreign entities, the ICU occupied almost all of southern Somalia over subsequent months. In December, the TFG and Ethiopian

troops, concerned about ICU links to terrorist groups, entered and quickly retook Mogadishu.

African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM): In early 2007, the African Union (AU) conducted a UN-backed peacekeeping mission known as AMISOM (see p. 7, 9, 10-12 of *Political and Social Relations*) in Somalia to promote peace and support reconciliation efforts between the various factions vying for power. With UN support, AMISOM helped achieve stability in key areas throughout 2007.

The Advent of Al-Shabaab: Meanwhile, the ICU had splintered in late 2006. Among the emerging factions was the militant Islamist group ***al-Shabaab*** (The Youth) (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). In 2008, al-Shabaab strengthened its relationship with the terror group al-Qaeda, and attacked Ethiopian, UN, and TFG troops in Somalia. Security conditions deteriorated as al-Shabaab and other opposition Islamist groups collectively regained Mogadishu and most of southern Somalia.

Coalition Government: In mid-2008, the TFG and moderate ICU members met in Djibouti. As part of the resulting power-sharing agreement, President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed resigned in December 2008, and Ethiopian troops withdrew. In January 2009, the transitional parliament elected Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, a moderate Islamist, as President and extended its own legislative mandate for 2 more years.



In 2009, the coalition government and its allies began a counteroffensive to retake areas in southern Somalia. Aided by infighting in al-Shabaab, the effort was largely successful. In 2011, in response to al-Shabaab attacks in Kenya, a joint Somali-Kenyan military operation entered conflict zones in southern Somalia, eventually forcing al-Shabaab out of key urban strongholds such as Kismayo, in 2012 (Photo: Al-Shabaab members lay down their arms and give themselves up to AMISOM in 2012).

The Federal Republic of Somalia

In August 2012, the TFG mandate expired. Under a provisional constitution, the parliament appointed Hassan Sheikh Mohamud President of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS – see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*), the first relatively stable political administration in central and southern Somalia since the fall of the Barre regime in 1991.

Contemporary Somalia

Since 2012, Somalia has continued to confront severe security and governance challenges. While the FGS has maintained and even increased its control in some areas of the country, al-Shabaab and other terror groups remain a threat, particularly in rural areas. In 2015-16, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for bombings in Kenya, Mogadishu, and other parts of Somalia, often targeting politicians (see p. 10-12 of *Political and Social Relations*). Moreover, many Somalis continue to live in abject poverty and are subject to violence, disease, and food scarcity. In 2017, a severe drought exacerbated the fragile geopolitical situation, threatening the lives of millions of Somalis.

Yet, some experts no longer classify Somalia as a failed state, but rather a fragile one. Since 2013, Somalia has attempted to repair its broken physical infrastructure and destroyed cities, establishing a post office and working traffic signals for the first time since 1991. In 2014, Somalia, the AU, and the US military began Operation Indian Ocean designed to target al-Shabaab in the southern countryside. Before ending in 2015, the operation removed key members of the militant group, significantly weakening its presence in the region. In early 2017, legislators chosen by clan leaders elected dual US-Somali citizen Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo (pictured) as President (see p. 4-6 of *Political and Social Relations*). While the election was marred by claims of corruption and foreign intervention, initial reactions among Somalis reflect widespread popular support and optimism for the future.



Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Somalia has a rich and diverse tradition of myths and folklore that are still well-known.

The Lion's Share

A popular Somali myth explores the misuse of power. According to the myth, a group of hyenas, foxes, vultures, and a lion together hunted and killed a large camel. The animals then gathered beneath an acacia tree to divide the kill. When the hyena tried to share the meat evenly, the lion gouged out the hyena's eye and asked the fox to divide the spoils. The fox made the division, giving a huge helping of meat to the lion. The lion then took his disproportionate share to his den, leaving the other animals to divide the remaining small portion. Exhausted from their hunting efforts and still hungry, the predators sadly chanted "***Qayb libaax garano, gar iyo daw ma aha!!***" or "The lion's share is not fair!" Although Somalis occasionally use this phrase in a positive way to underscore when someone has done more than expected, it typically means that someone has taken more than their fair share (Photo: An African lion).



Somalis and Serpents

Some Somalis claim to have ancient and deep connections with serpents. One myth suggests that when the first Somali was born, a snake was at his side. Another Somali myth describes a serpent that lived for 300 years, ate 3 other snakes, and then became a majestic jeweled serpent crowned with a torch-like gem. According to the myth, when this snake attacks, it lunges 3 times. If the snake fails to kill its prey, it kills itself. The myth further states that if a Somali meets this magical serpent, he must throw a shield on the gem to block its blinding light before quickly killing the snake to recover the sparkling prize.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
Federal Republic of Somalia
Jamhuuriyadda Federaalka Soomaaliya (Somali)
جمهورية الصومال الفيدرالية (Arabic)



Political Borders
Djibouti: 40 mi
Ethiopia: 1019 mi
Kenya: 425 mi
Coastline: 1880 mi

Capital
Mogadishu

Demographics
People movements during years of conflict (see "Security Issues" below) have complicated verifiying accurate estimates of Somalia's population. However, recent survey data indicates that Somalia's population was over 12.4 million people in 2014. Despite suffering high mortality and low life expectancy (see p. 4 of *Sustenance and Health*), Somalia's population is growing at 1.9% per year, in part due to high birth rates (see p. 5 of *Sex and Gender*). Of note, over 60% of the population is under age 24, and about another 60% of residents live in rural areas as nomadic herders. The capital city of Mogadishu and Somaliland's Hargeisa are the 2 most populous cities.



Flag
The Somali flag consists of a white, 5-pointed star centered on a light blue background. Adopted in 1954, the Somali flag's blue field was associated with the blue hue of the United Nations (UN) flag. Today, the blue field is more commonly associated with the sky and Indian Ocean.

The star's white color symbolizes peace and prosperity, while its 5 points denote regions in the Horn of Africa inhabited by the Somali people, including the 2 former British and Italian Somali colonies (see p. 6-11 of *History and Myth*), Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya.

Geography

Situated on the Horn of Africa, Somalia is the easternmost country on continental Africa. It borders the Gulf of Aden to the north, the Indian Ocean to the east, Kenya to the southwest, Ethiopia to the west, and Djibouti to the northwest. Of note, part of Somalia's western border with Ethiopia is disputed (see "Foreign Relations" below). Somalia's total land area is about 242,216 sq mi, making it slightly smaller than Texas. Somalia's capital city of Mogadishu is located just north of the Equator, which passes through Somalia's south.



A thin strip of semiarid plains and plateaus known as the ***Guban*** ("burned from lack of water") stretches along the Gulf of Aden coast in the North. Beyond the *Guban*, the towering Ogo and Karkaar Mountains extend from the Ethiopian border to Somalia's easternmost tip. Here, Somalia's highest peak, Shimber Berris, reaches 7,874 ft. Somalia's interior is characterized by the hot and arid Haud Plain and Ogo Plateau, consisting of grazing rangelands interspersed with deep valleys where water flows occasionally following heavy rains. The central plateaus gradually descend toward the Indian Ocean, where coastal lowlands and beaches with steep, unstable dunes dominate the terrain. Somalia's only permanent rivers, the Shebelle and Jubba (pictured), are located in the South, flowing west-east from the Ethiopian highlands to the Indian Ocean. A strip of fertile, flat land lies along the basins of the 2 rivers, constituting Somalia's major agricultural area. A savanna covered by thick thorn bush lies south of the Jubba River.

Climate

Somalia's 4 seasons differentiate by amount of rainfall. The year begins with an extremely dry season from January-March (***Jilal***), followed by heavy rains from April-June (***Gu***), a mild dry season running from June-September (***Hagaa***), and light rains occurring October-December (***Dair***). Total rainfall varies annually, though the South commonly receives more precipitation than the north.



Temperatures across the country remain high throughout the year but are generally cooler along the southern coasts and at higher elevations. In the South, the hottest temperatures average 86°F and occur between December-March, while northern temperatures peak July-August, often reaching 100°F. Somalia's coastal regions experience a hot and humid climate, while the interior is typically hot and dry (Photo: Somali terrain).

Natural Hazards

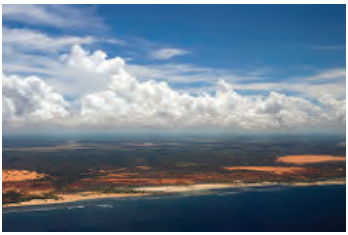
Somalia is vulnerable to several types of natural hazards, particularly droughts and floods. Caused by a lack of significant rainfall, periodic droughts may last several years and intensify food shortages, epidemics, and large-scale humanitarian crises. Over the last 15 years, Somalia has suffered multiple droughts, most notably one ending in 2009 that lasted for 5 years, followed by a massive one in 2011 which caused over 250,000 deaths. As of 2017, Somalia is again experiencing a severe drought, first triggered in 2015 when both rainy seasons yielded little or no rain. This drought has caused widespread crop failure and the deaths of livestock. Damage from the drought is currently spreading, as over 1/2 of the nation is in need of emergency food assistance.

Droughts often end with flash floods from rare but heavy downpours, typically originating in the Ethiopian highlands. In 2013, villages along the Shebelle River were evacuated after damaging floods overwhelmed the basin. Somalia also experiences periodic cyclones (tropical storms characterized by

strong, spiraling winds), the latest occurring in the northern region of Puntland in 2013 that left over 300 people dead.

Environmental Issues

Recurrent drought and a general lack of surface water leads to shortages in drinking water, desertification, and soil erosion. In addition, overgrazing and the cutting of trees for farming, timber, and fuel intensifies desertification and further strains fresh water supplies. Notably, only about 32% of the population has access to safe drinking water and only 24% to modern sanitation facilities. Along the coasts, overfishing and rampant pollution from foreign ships dumping toxic waste threaten marine biodiversity (Photo: Somali coastline near Mogadishu).



Government

Somalia is a federal republic with a parliamentary government. The country divides into 18 regions (***gobolka***), some further subdividing into smaller administrative units. As of 2017, Somalia's provisional constitution, first drafted in early 2012 by an interim government (see p. 20 of *History and Myth*), has yet to be ratified in a public referendum. Since declaring independence from Somalia in 1991 (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*), the northern Republic of Somaliland maintains its own system of government, headed by an elected President and Parliament, though it is not recognized internationally.

Executive Branch

Executive power is vested in the President, who is directly elected by members of the Parliament to serve unlimited 4-year terms. The President serves as head-of-state and oversees the country's day-to-day affairs together with a Cabinet of Ministers and the Prime Minister (PM). Appointed to the position by the President, the PM serves as head-of-government. Both the current President, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo (also known as Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed), and the PM, Hassan Ali Khaire, assumed office in February 2017.

Legislative Branch

Somalia's legislature is a 2-chamber Parliament composed of a 54-seat Upper House (UH) and 275-seat House of the People (HoP). In both the 2012 and 2016 elections, internal instability, terrorist threats, and failure to ratify a new constitution forced organizers to scrap plans for direct elections. Instead, clan elders and prominent regional figures appointed all Parliament members. Legislative members serve 4-year terms (Photo: Former US President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama pose with former Somali President Mohamud and his wife Mrs. Qamar Ali Omar).



Judicial Branch

Somalia's judiciary is a mixed system of civil, ***sharia*** (Islamic), and customary law. Although no national system exists, local *sharia* courts oversee criminal and personal matters, while in some areas, civil courts handle administrative, commercial, and civil disputes. Across the country, ***xeer*** (traditional clan-based law) adjudicates family and inter-clan disputes. Although different clans have distinct interpretations of *xeer*, in all cases ***xeer begti*** (clan elders) serve as mediators to settle disputes. Opposing parties usually send representatives to speak on their behalf, and disputed facts must be verified by witnesses. Using local customs, historical precedent, and sharia, the judges make judgments by consensus to decide on punishments and compensation.

Political Climate

President Farmajo and PM Khaire preside over Somalia's first relatively stable central government since the collapse of the Barre regime in 1991 (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*). The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) first formed in 2012, when a transitional government peacefully handed over control to the new administration (see p. 20 of *History and Myth*). In a positive sign of democratic progress, the FGS oversaw indirect elections in 2016-17 that brought a new Parliament, Farmajo, and Khaire to power, while also maintaining control over the historically splintered country.

Upon assuming office in early 2017, President Farmajo promised to improve governance mechanisms, suppress Somalia's widespread corruption, and address famine and other humanitarian crises plaguing the nation. A dual US-Somali citizen, Farmajo also vowed to curb the ongoing internal violence that has crippled Somalia for nearly 26 years (see "Security Issues" below). Of note, some observers suggest that Farmajo appointed PM Khaire, a political newcomer, in part to balance Somalia's clan relations: Farmajo is member of the Darod clan while Khaire is a member of the Hawiye clan (see p. 3, 14, 16-18 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: Former US Secretary of State Kerry greets former Somali President Mohamud).



Despite this progress, the FGS's influence remains limited. Decades of instability have destroyed Somalia's economy and infrastructure, fracturing the country into geopolitical pockets ruled by various clans, rival warlords, and Islamist insurgents. In addition, rural dwellers who live as nomadic herders generally reject centralized authority, instead relying on traditional, localized clan-based governance. In addition, the northern Somaliland region rejects FGS authority since it is an autonomous state (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*). Other regional states, like northern Puntland, operate largely independently of the federal government in Mogadishu.

Amid this fractured environment, Somalis in general remain hopeful that the FGS will lead Somalia toward stability and peace. Despite this recent surge in public optimism, prevalent corruption threatens democratic progress. For example, allegations of intimidation, violence, and corruption tainted the 2017 Presidential election, as rival candidates accused one another of bribing Parliament members for votes. Consequently, while many Somalis are optimistic, others worry that rampant corruption and ongoing internal conflict will continue to undermine Somalia's democratic, economic, and social progress.

Defense

Following the collapse of the Barre regime in 1991, defense and police forces dissolved. Combined international efforts by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM – see p. 19 of *History and Myth* and "The AU" below), the European Union (EU), and private security companies eventually created the Somali National Army (SNA), a small ground force consisting of up to 11,000 active-duty troops. Small navy and air branches with a combined force of 450 active-duty troops provide limited support to the SNA. Somalia relies heavily on international support to supplement its military operations, primarily dedicated to peacekeeping and counter-terrorism efforts.



Somalia receives most military aid from AMISOM, notably forces and equipment from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. Together, these countries contribute 21,524 active duty personnel comprised of 22 infantry battalions. In coming years, the EU plans to boost the SNA's numbers by integrating various clan-based militias into its ranks. Notably, both Somaliland and Puntland have developed their own armies, coast guards, and police forces from clan militias (Photo: Ugandan forces perform a breaching exercise in preparation for an AMISOM mission in Somalia).

Army: The Somali National Army has up to 11,000 active-duty troops, though actual numbers remain unknown. It consists of a command division and 6 light maneuver brigades and units.

Navy: The Somali National Navy has about 350 active-duty troops. Although the Navy does not currently have any equipment, the international community and the EU have expressed interest in investing in the Somali Navy and Coast Guard in the future.

Air Force: The smallest of the branches, the Somali National Air Force has about 100 active-duty troops.

Somali Army Rank Insignia



Foreign Relations

In the early years of the Barre regime, Somalia ideologically and economically aligned with the Soviet Union (see p. 14-15 of *History and Myth*). Then, in the late 1970s the government began to cultivate relations with the US and other Western nations. After the Barre government collapsed and Somalia became engulfed in civil war in 1991, maintaining internal stability became the nation's primary focus. Since then, Somalia has relied on political, military, and humanitarian assistance from its allies and global organizations to meet its internal needs. For nearly 3 decades, the US, the UN, the African Union (AU), and various humanitarian agencies have worked together to strengthen Somalia's democratic institutions, improve stability and security, and deliver basic services to the Somali people (Photo: Somalis attend a book fair in Mogadishu).



Today, Somalia's relatively new central government continues to focus primarily on improving internal conditions, while beginning to build friendly relations with neighboring and regional countries. For example, it participates in organizations that promote regional security and contributes to international efforts against regional Islamist militant groups.

The AU: Somalia participates in the AU, an organization that fosters political and social cooperation among its 55 member nations. Further, the AU encourages regional economic development and addresses common security concerns. Active since 2007, AMISOM has been a vital actor in maintaining Somalia's security. Today, AMISOM helps protect the fragile FGS, fighting alongside Somali troops in the ongoing war against Islamist terrorist groups that wish to topple the central government (see "Security Issues" below).

Relations with Kenya: While Kenya-Somali relations have improved since the Barre era, Somalia's ongoing internal conflicts often spill over its borders into Kenya, creating bilateral tension. As a result, Kenya views Somalia's instability as closely linked to its own internal security and actively engages in Somali affairs. For example, Kenya provides Somalia assistance to reduce the presence of al-Shabaab (see "Al-Shabaab" below) and to develop Somali economic, political, and social institutions. Kenyan military forces have been present in Somalia since 2011 and today are prominent in AMISOM operations. In fact, nearly 20% of Kenya's armed forces are currently deployed in Somalia (Photo: Somali and Kenyan students attend school along the Somalia-Kenya border).



Significantly, repeated al-Shabaab attacks in Kenya have killed hundreds of civilians, soldiers, and police over the last 4 years, notably 2 notoriously brutal attacks on a shopping mall and a university that left over 200 dead. Recently, there has been an upsurge in al-Shabaab attacks on Kenyan government infrastructure, police, and security forces, particularly along the extended and porous border with Somalia. Amid this violence, Kenya has vowed to expand its military presence in Somalia, promising to invest $1 billion toward military operations there over the next several years.

Relations with Ethiopia: Although Somalia and Ethiopia have had historically tense relations (see p. 3-5, 7-8, 13-15 of *History and Myth*), both nations have worked to restore peace in the region since the fall of the Barre regime. Like Kenya and other regional nations, Ethiopia contributes troops to AMISOM, while housing thousands of Somali refugees in temporary camps. The Somalia-Ethiopia border historically has been a source of conflict. Arbitrarily demarcated by colonial powers in the 1960s, the border divides land traditionally occupied by Somalis. As of 2017, portions of the border remain disputed.

Relations with the US: The US and Somalia first established political and military ties in 1960 following Somalia's independence (see p. 11-13 of *History and Myth*). While diplomatic relations became strained during the Barre era (see p. 13-16 of *History and Myth*), Somalia turned to the US for economic and military support following the war with Ethiopia in the 1970s (see p. 14-15 of *History and Myth*). During subsequent decades, the US engaged in Somali affairs on several occasions, taking part in various military and humanitarian assistance operations. Since 2006, the US has provided Somalia $1.5 billion in humanitarian assistance and an additional $240 million since 2011 to support the development of civil society (Photo: Former US Secretary of State Kerry meets with members of Somali civil society organizations).



In 2013, the US formally recognized Somalia's central government, and today continues to actively support Somalia's democratic development. In addition to promoting political and economic stability, the US is working to curtail the spread and influence of radical and extremist groups and alleviate Somalia's ongoing humanitarian crisis. In late 2015, the US reopened its US Mission to Somalia after a 25-year diplomatic absence, although it was forced to locate the embassy temporarily in Nairobi, Kenya due to ongoing internal instability. Nevertheless, its opening publicly demonstrates US support for the Somali central government and officially establishes bilateral diplomatic ties between the 2 nations.

Security Issues

Somalia's security environment is dominated by internal instability, primarily caused by destabilizing terrorist activities of extremist groups. In addition, a large-scale humanitarian crisis resulting from years of conflict, poor governance, recurrent drought, and damaging floods worsens already fragile security conditions. Somalia heavily relies on military and economic aid

from AMISOM, the US, and other international allies to adequately address security concerns.

Al-Shabaab: Al-Shabaab is a militant, Somalia-based Islamist group that first emerged in 2006 (see p. 19 of *History and Myth*). By 2011, it had gained control of most of south-central Somalia. Although AMISOM and Somali troops successfully drove al-Shabaab from Mogadishu in 2011-12, the armed group continued to control large swaths of Somali territory through 2014. Subsequently, AMISOM operations finally forced it from important urban strongholds, drastically reducing the group's size and influence (Photo: Residents of a Somali refugee camp assist children in a medical clinic).



Although weakened, al-Shabaab remains active in Somalia where it regularly conducts terror attacks, the latest occurring in Mogadishu in 2017 and resulting in dozens of deaths. Looking to topple the central government, al-Shabaab fighters often target populated areas, high-profile politicians, and prominent landmarks. In February 2017, al-Shabaab publicly denounced newly-elected President Farmajo, threatening more violence in protest of the central government. In addition to domestic terrorism, al-Shabaab has demonstrated the ability to operate across borders, occasionally mounting attacks in neighboring Kenya (see "Foreign Relations" above) and Uganda, 2 countries that regularly detail troops to AMISOM.

Ongoing instability and dire humanitarian conditions have left Somalia's population vulnerable to recruitment by al-Shabaab. Children are often the most susceptible, kidnapped from their families or lured into al-Shabaab by promises of education and employment. In 2016, UN experts estimated children comprise over 1/2 of al-Shabaab's force, fighting on the frontlines, transporting explosives, working as spies, and performing domestic chores.

Other Armed Groups: In addition to al-Shabaab, other extremist groups with smaller followings operate within Somalia. While these groups all oppose Somalia's Western-style democracy, they differ substantially in their interpretations of Islam and in their visions of Somalia's political future. Notably, in 2015, some members of al-Shabaab left to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as Daesh, ISIL, and IS), a notoriously brutal militant Islamist group currently controlling territory in Iraq and Syria. Today, Somali ISIS fighters operate primarily in Somalia's northern regions.

Somali refugees: Protracted internal conflict, environmental degradation, famine, and widespread poverty have forced millions of Somalis to flee their homes over the last 3 decades. Today, Somalia is the world's 3rd-highest source country for refugees, after Afghanistan and Syria. As of 2016, 1.1 million Somalis remain internally displaced, while Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen, Egypt, Djibouti, and Uganda host 1.1 million more in temporary camps. A major source of regional tension, refugee camps strain the host nations' financial resources, are often plagued with violence and vulnerable to outbreaks of disease (Photo: A USAID representative meets with Somali refugees in the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya).



The largest concentration of refugees is in Kenya, where the Dadaab refugee camp is home to more than 300,000 Somalis. In 2016 Kenya announced plans to eventually close the Dadaab camp, prompting thousands of refugees to return to Somalia. This flow of returning refugees has exacerbated already dire humanitarian and security conditions in receiving communities in Somalia. Likewise, ongoing violence compounds the crisis and continues to hamper international efforts to aid the displaced populations.

Ethnic Groups

The Somali government has not conducted a public census of ethnic group membership for decades. Consequently, expert estimates of the ethnic makeup of the population vary widely. Generally, observers agree that between 85-95% of Somalia's population are ethnic Somalis.

Somalis: Numbering about 15-20 million in their traditional homeland across the Horn of Africa (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*), Somalis constitute one of Africa's largest ethnic groups. Today, Somalis inhabit a broad area encompassing Somalia and parts of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya. Somalis trace their roots to a Hamitic people native to the region who mixed with Arabs around a thousand years ago, forming the Somali ethnicity (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). Somalis divide into 5 clan families, hundreds of clans, and even more sub-clans. While 4 of the Somali clan families trace their origins to a common ancestor named Samaal, the 5th clan claims descent from his brother, Saab. Most Somalis are traditionally nomadic pastoralists, although some have moved to urban areas.



The 4 dominant clans that trace their lineage to ancestor Samaal are the Hawiye, Isaaq, Darod, and Dir. Comprising around 75% of the total population, members of this clan family subsist as nomadic sheep, goat, and camel herders distributed across Somalia. In recent years, a growing number of Samaal have become sedentary farmers. The Hawiye clan of central and southern Somalia likely comprises the largest share of the Samaal clan family and is probably Somalia's largest clan group. The Isaaq also account for a large share of the Samaal and are located primarily in Somaliland. Another large clan group, the Darod, are located throughout Somalia and comprise the dominant group in Puntland. Lastly, the Dir of central and coastal Somalia make up the smallest share of the Samaal clan (Photo: A Somali mother with her children).

The 5th Somali clan family, the Rahanweyn, claims descent from Samaal's brother Saab and consists of about 20% of Somalia's population. Members are primarily settled farmers and pastoralists in the southern riverine regions.

Bantus: The Bantus of southern coastal Somalia came to the region in 2 waves. The first wave from western and central Africa possibly pre-dated the arrival of the Somali people. A second wave from eastern Africa occurred in the 18th-19th centuries, when Bantus were forcibly brought to the region as slaves to Somali sultans. Experts believe 600,000-900,000 Bantus live in Somalia today, primarily as small farmers on the coast or along Somalia's rivers. While some early Bantu residents integrated with Somalis, most former slaves remained separate, often facing discrimination for their distinct appearance, occupations, and language (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*). Since 2003, thousands of Bantus from Somalia have resettled as refugees across the US (Photo: Bantu farmers near Kismayo).



Other Groups: Other notable groups include the Benadiri and Rerhamar, historically urban coastal traders, and the Bajuni, fishermen and seafarers from the southern Bajuni islands. The Eyre are traditionally subsistence farmers, potters, or hunters and gatherers from the southern inland Buur Heybe region. Some Arabs, Indians, and Pakistanis live in urban areas as traders or shopkeepers. A few Italians live near urban areas, often as businessmen or teachers. Finally, many of Somalia's aid workers and missionaries are European or North American.

Social Relations

Kinship is the governing principle of Somali social relations. Somalis trace their identity first to their household and family, then to a clan, and finally to a clan group that typically has a geographical home.

Clans and kinship groups tend to supersede all other societal divisions in Somalia. As a result, family and clan connections are significant in most political and economic activities. In a clan, the chief typically derives his authority from the power and connections of his extended family. Instead of issuing decrees or laws, elder clan chiefs traditionally use the inclusive, traditional *xeer* legal system (see "Judicial Branch" above) which empowers elder community members to collectively mediate disputes. Of note, succession within the clan does not always pass from a generation to the next. Instead, it often passes laterally to a brother, nephew, uncle, or cousin.

The Rahanweyn clan family follows a caste system that defines social status primarily by occupation. Laborers, servants, or other workers in low-skilled and low-paying jobs such as metalworkers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, hunters, and circumcisers occupy the lower castes and typically have lower social status. In some cases, the caste system supersedes social status afforded by clan affiliation, even among non-Rahanweyn. For example, members of the Gaboye, Tumal, Yibir, and Galgala – small clan groups within the Samaal clan family, which does not typically subscribe to the same caste system – often perform jobs associated with lower castes. As a result, they may have a lower social status than clan members with occupations associated with higher castes such as pastoralists and farmers, even though they are members of the same clan family (Photo: Somali men walk past banana trees in Afgoye).



In addition to clan and caste divisions, Somali society further divides along rural-urban, male-female, rich-poor, and generational lines. Urban dwellers, males, and wealthier Somalis typically enjoy greater access to educational and economic opportunities and hold greater prestige. Some generational divisions also exist: elders garner more respect and take part in most decision-making (see p. 5 of *Language and Communication*).

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

According to US government estimates, about 99% of Somalis are Sunni Muslim. The remainder includes Christians, Shi'a Muslims, followers of traditional beliefs and practices, and those who claim no religious affiliation. Somalia's 2012 provisional constitution recognizes Islam as the state religion, prohibits the propagation of any other religion, and stipulates ***sharia*** (Islamic law) as the country's legal foundation



(Illustration: Drawing of the Mosque of Abdul Aziz and the Mnara tower of Mogadishu in 1882).

Somalia's relatively new and weak central government (see p. 4-6 of *Political and Social Relations*) struggles to uphold the constitution across the entire country but is able to do so only in the capital city of Mogadishu and surrounding areas. Meanwhile, the northern territories of Somaliland and Puntland follow separate constitutions (see p. 16-17 of *History and Myth*), which also establish Islam as the state religion, prohibits Muslims from converting to other religions, and enforces *sharia* law. Other areas of the country are controlled by various warlords, clans, and Islamist militant groups who govern through other means (see p. 11-13 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Some communities mediate and arbitrate through a combination of ***xeer*** (traditional and customary law – see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) alongside *sharia* law. The enforcement of laws and customs varies widely throughout the country, affecting the state of religious freedom to differing degrees.

Traditional Beliefs

Early inhabitants of present-day Somalia had a rich spiritual life, consisting of a variety of traditional religious beliefs and practices. Some groups practiced animism, the belief that the spirit of life or consciousness resides in all objects, both animate and inanimate. Others worshipped multiple deities, notably an all-powerful sky god known as ***Waaq*** who ruled over a realm of numerous bush and animal spirits such as insects, scorpions, snakes and others.

Today, particularly in rural areas, traditional beliefs continue to influence Somali household rituals and public celebrations such as ceremonies marking birth and death, rites of passage, and seasonal events. In addition, Muslim Somalis customarily incorporate particular elements of traditional religion into their Islamic devotional practices. For example, members of nomadic communities claiming a Muslim identity often consult spiritual advisors (see "Religion Today" below) who sometimes integrate elements of pre-Islamic beliefs into their teachings and activities.

Islam



Origins of Islam

Muhammad, who Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in 570 in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, or "Holy Book," to guide their everyday lives and shape their values (Photo: Late 7th-century Arabian Qur'an).

Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is "a person who submits to God."

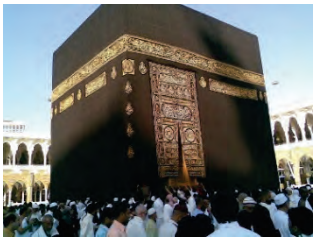
Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into 2 sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

Five Pillars of Islam

There are 5 basic principles of the Islamic faith.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray 5 times a day while facing the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'aba (pictured) is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship.



- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (The *Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a lifetime.

Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews "people of the Book," referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in 1 God.

Abraham: All 3 faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.

Scriptures: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

Jesus: The 3 religions differ significantly in their understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge his divinity or the Christian Trinity.

View of Death: Muslims believe that God determines the time of death and birth. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven (Photo: Former US President Barack Obama listens to a Somali woman during a meeting with African leaders at the White House).



Concept of Jihad

The concept of jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

Ramadan

Observed during the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*), Ramadan is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, a Muslim learns to appreciate the good in life. Somali Muslims typically break their

daily fast at sunset with a meal known as ***iftar***. Ramadan includes several holidays:

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** This "Night of Power" marks Muhammad's receipt of the first verses of the Qur'an.
- **Eid al-Fitr:** This "Festival of Fast-Breaking" celebrates Ramadan's end.

Another important holiday is celebrated when the Hajj ends, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha:** This "Festival of Sacrifice" commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to Christians), as proof of his loyalty to God.

Sufi Tradition: Characterized by mysticism and ritualistic prayer, the Sufi tradition of Islam has a rich history in Somalia. The first Sufi movements emerged in the Middle East in the 13th century, when charismatic religious leaders sought to complement Qur'anic study with direct religious experience through prayer and contemplation. Followers of these leaders formed brotherhoods to promote their versions of Islam, eventually bringing them to Somalia in the 15th century (Photo: The Mosque of Islamic Solidarity in Mogadishu).



Historically, Sufi communities served as safe havens for the persecuted, particularly freed slaves (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*) in the 1920s and ethnic Somalis fleeing unrest in Ethiopia in the 1970s. Today, these religious communities are centers of learning and worship, while Sufi shrines and tombs serve as places of pilgrimage. Somalia's Sufi followers adhere primarily to 1 of 3 sects: Qadiriya, Ahmediya, or Saalixiya. Of note, fundamentalist Islamist groups intermittently carry out attacks on Sufi religious sites, destroying mosques and tombs of Sufi scholars.

The Arrival of Islam in Somalia

Islam likely first arrived in Somalia in the 7th century, when early followers of the Prophet Muhammad arrived on the Horn of Africa after fleeing religious persecution in Arabia. By the 10th century, Islam began to spread along Somalia's coasts as Arab traders settled permanently in the region (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). Over subsequent centuries, several Arab tribal leaders migrated to Somalia and married into Somali families, founding some of Somalia's numerous clans (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). By the 13th century, all major Somali clans had adopted Islam (Photo: 14th-century Somali tablet with Arabic inscriptions).



Over the next several centuries, Arabs and Somali clans formed various sultanates (Islamic kingdoms) and fought a series of religious wars against neighboring Christian kingdoms (see p. 3-5 of *History and Myth*). By the 16th century, powerful sultanates had secured control over much of the region, solidifying Islam as the dominant religion. During this time, Mogadishu and other coastal cities became thriving centers of Islamic tradition and culture. Notably, some of Mogadishu's mosques are among the oldest in East Africa (Photo: A Somali woman dressed in colorful patriotic clothing).



Over the following 200 years, the Somali sultanates successfully repelled repeated attacks from the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia and its European Christian ally, Portugal (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*). They further reinforced the Islamic identity of the Somali people and facilitated Islam's spread along the Horn of Africa through the 20th century.

Islam under Barre

When Barre assumed control of Somalia in 1969 (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*), he declared it a socialist Islamic state and named Sunni Islam as the nation's official religion. Looking to abolish clan divisions, the Barre regime limited the application of certain traditional practices, particularly elements of *sharia* and the use of the *xeer* system of mediation and decision-making (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*). The regime also placed all Islamic mosques under state control while dismantling non-Sunni religious groups and executing, exiling, and imprisoning religious leaders, most notably in 1975.

Folk Beliefs in Contemporary Society

Somalis tend to incorporate elements of traditional religion into their Islamic beliefs and practices. For example, some Somalis believe clan elders have the ability to extend ***duco*** (blessings) and cast ***inkaar*** (curses). In addition, some Somalis engage in a daily ritual of incense lighting that not only sends prayers to Allah but also protects the home from evil ***saar*** (spirits). Some Somalis also believe that *saar* can possess an individual, causing sickness, fits, or madness. To prevent such possession, some Somalis wear protective charms and amulets. Some nomadic communities rely on ***wadaddo*** (traveling religious specialists) to lead prayers, bless livestock, resolve disputes, and perform marriages, among other services. *Wadaddo* derive their teachings from a combination of Islamic beliefs and traditional concepts of astronomy, psychology, and medicine.

Religion Today

Religion permeates daily life in Somalia. Most cities and villages feature mosques that serve as important community and learning centers in addition to their primary role as places of worship. Generally, Somalis experience strong social pressure to observe Sunni Muslim rituals. Conversion from Islam to other religions is both socially unacceptable and

prohibited by law. Non-Muslims often refrain from openly practicing their religion, fearing harassment or violence. As of 2015, Somalia had no public places of worship for followers of non-Muslim religions.

Islam

Most Somali Muslims adhere to the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam, a generally tolerant school of thought. A very small percentage of Somali Muslims hold fundamentalist beliefs known as Wahhabism or Salafism and popular in Saudi Arabia. These fundamentalist beliefs first took root in Somalia as a grassroots movement in the latter half of the 20th century. Children learn Qur'anic verses from an early age and receive Islamic instruction in school (see p. 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Some Somali adults memorize the Qur'an in its entirety (Photo: A Somali woman wearing traditional clothing receives teacher's training in Mogadishu).



Islam and Politics

Chronic conflict, recurrent drought, and widespread poverty have facilitated the emergence of fundamentalist Islamist groups actively seeking new supporters. With Somalia's central government unable to fully control the volatile environment, Somalis are somewhat vulnerable to acts of violence and intimidation by various armed groups. Somalia's most prominent terrorist group, al-Shabaab (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*), regularly harasses and kills Somalis suspected of converting from Islam to other religions and those who do not adhere to al-Shabaab's interpretation of Islamic law. In recent years, al-Shabaab has killed scores of civilians, government officials, Somali police and military personnel, and international peacekeeping troops.

Meanwhile, Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama'a (ASWJ), a Sufi militia opposed to al-Shabaab's strict interpretations of Islam, occasionally engages in armed conflict with al-Shabaab. In addition to countering the spread of al-Shabaab's Islamist

teachings, ASWJ seeks to unite and protect Somalia's Sufi Muslim orders.

Christianity

Christianity first reached Somalia in the late 19th century, shortly after the British, Italians, and French took control of the region (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). Somalis generally opposed colonialism and the efforts of early Christian missionaries. Of note, a significant aspect of Islamic religious leader Mohamed Abdullah Hassan's 20-year rebellion in the early 20th century was resistance to European cultural influence and colonization. A member of a Sufi Muslim order, Hassan united his followers under their common Islamic faith, culture, and language and is an important figure still today for many Somalis (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*).

Despite this resistance, missionaries were eventually able to cultivate a small Christian following in Italian Somalia, where Italian missions opened schools and offered medical services. Meanwhile, ongoing and violent opposition in British Somaliland generally prevented Christianity's spread. Over the latter half of the 20th century, Christianity gradually retreated from Somalia. In 1990, bomb blasts destroyed Somalia's only Catholic cathedral in Mogadishu (pictured).



Today, Somalia is home to a small community of Christians who largely refrain from openly practicing their religion. Notably in 2015, Somalia's central government temporarily banned the celebration of Christian holidays, claiming their celebration threatened the Muslim faith. Government officials later explained that the ban was meant to prevent Christian Somalis from being targeted by radical Islamist groups and not intended it to be discriminatory. Nevertheless, the incident sparked international criticism.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview
Family is the center of Somali life, whereby kinship ties across the extended family and clan often serve as a mutual support network. While there are some differences between urban and rural communities, Somalis typically celebrate common rituals to mark important personal milestones.

Residence
Somalia's long-term civil conflict (see p. 16-20 of *History and Myth*) destroyed much of the country's electrical grid. Consequently, residents of both urban and rural communities often lack access, and even where electricity is available, it is often very expensive. For example, in Mogadishu rates are currently around 10 times the US average. Further, some residents in both rural and urban areas lack access to adequate sanitation services and drinking water.

Urban: Somalis who fled the violence are returning to Mogadishu in large numbers, fueling a construction boom. Overall, about 39% of Somalis live in urban areas, where wealthier residents construct homes with tile roofs and courtyards surrounded by stone walls. In coastal communities, Arab-style white-washed homes constructed of stone or brick and covered with plaster are common. Such homes typically feature roof-top areas where families socialize, hang laundry, or sleep during summer months. Another common urban home is the ***baraka***, constructed of cement and topped with a corrugated metal roof. Some urban homes are surrounded by walls topped with broken glass for security. Interiors often feature brightly-painted walls and rug-covered floors (Photo: New homes in Mogadishu).



Rural: About 61% of Somalis live in rural areas, where home designs vary depending on lifestyle. ***Aqal*** are domed, single-room huts favored by nomads. Made from hides, cloth, branches, or tin, *aqal* are easy to dismantle, transport, and reassemble. The dwelling is usually sparsely decorated and divides into a ***gole*** or living area, along with cooking and sleeping areas. A bed made of wooden stakes and animal hides is often the only furniture.



Another rural structure is an ***arissh***, a more permanent, rectangular hut with a tin or thatched roof. It also typically consists of one room with a sparsely decorated interior. Somalis living in refugee camps typically live in temporary structures (Photo: A temporary shelter in Somaliland).

Family Structure

The nuclear family (2 parents and their children) forms the basic unit of Somali society (see p. 15-16 of *Political and Social Relations*). Traditionally, an elder man is the head of household and ultimately responsible for the safety and financial support of the family. Women customarily perform housework and care for children, although today some women also work outside the home (see p. 1-2 of *Sex and Gender*).

Beyond the nuclear family, individuals also rely on their extended family, who often live in close proximity. Extended family members typically pool resources to help individual members during sickness or accident. Somalis living abroad often provide substantial financial support to extended family members who remain in-country (see p. 3, 5 of *Economics and Resources*).

Of note, while scholars of Somali culture use the terms “clans” and “tribes” to describe the social structure, foreign nationals should avoid asking Somalis which “clan” or “tribe” they belong to. Over the past few decades, clan divisions have contributed

to civil conflicts, and referencing those divisions may cause anger or discomfort (see p. 5-6 of *Language and Communication*).

Polygyny: This practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously is legal in Somalia. According to Islamic law, a man may marry up to 4 wives if he can support them equally. While exact statistics are unavailable, polygyny is more common in rural areas. In some clan groups (see p. 14-16 of *Political and Social Relations*), the practice is relatively common, with some men having at least 2 wives and the wealthy ones often having 4.



Children

Children are particularly valued in Somali society. Childcare is usually a communal task shared among the women of an extended family. Beginning at a young age, children typically help their families with household tasks. For example, mothers usually start preparing their daughters to run a household when they are between the ages of 7-9. Sons and daughters typically live with their parents until marriage (Photo: Somali children).

Birth: Several activities and ceremonies surrounding childbirth reflect a high level of community involvement and support for new mothers. Before birth, family members and women in the community hold a baby shower for the expectant mother. Women generally give birth at home with the help of a midwife.

Following a birth, the newborn's grandmother and other female relatives help care for the mother and child. The mother remains indoors for 40 days after birth, a custom known as ***afatanbah.*** Female relatives provide nourishing foods such as soups, porridges, and teas. Between 7-40 days following the birth, Somali families hold a naming ceremony, a large social gathering where a goat or sheep is slaughtered for a feast enjoyed by the family and members of the larger community.

Circumcision: Both males and females commonly undergo circumcision, a rite of passage symbolizing acceptance into the Somali community. While boys are circumcised sometime between birth and age 5, girls usually undergo the procedure between the ages of 4-11 (see p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*).

Marriage

Marriage in Somalia is a bond between both individuals and their families. In some cases, marriages among the same clan group are preferred while in other areas, clans promote marriage between rival groups to strengthen relationships and reduce potential conflicts. Traditionally, a marriage was an arranged union decided by the families of the bride and groom. This practice continues in many rural areas and some urban communities today, although some Somalis choose their own spouse based on mutual attraction. Of note, dating in the Western sense is uncommon in Somalia, and interaction between unmarried men and women is restricted to public places and large social gatherings.

In arranged marriages, the bride is usually much younger than the groom. Somalia's provisional constitution does not specify a minimum legal age for marriage, though it does require the free consent of both parties. Observers note that Somali brides can be as young as 15, and studies show that 45% of women are married before the age of 18. By contrast, men tend to marry after establishing themselves financially.



Engagement: To initiate the engagement, the 2 families meet and become acquainted. If both parties decide to proceed, they then seek approval from the appropriate clan elders on both sides. Next, the groom's family presents the bride's family with ***sooroyo***, a sum of money representing the groom's commitment to marriage and distributed to all assembled family members. Afterward, the families celebrate the engagement with food and singing (Photo: Somali wedding basket).

Bridewealth: Somali men traditionally pay ***mahr***, or a so-called bridewealth, to the bride on the wedding night. A legal requirement for Islamic marriages, the *mahr* may consist of gold, land, cash, or livestock, and is often reserved by the bride for use in case of divorce.

Weddings: Weddings in Somalia are celebratory affairs that can last up to 7 days. First, couples sign the ***nikah*** (wedding contract) in the presence of an Islamic cleric to officially seal the marriage. The wedding celebration often occurs directly after the ceremony. Whether in an *aqal* or *arissh* in a rural community or a hotel in a city, friends and family gather to enjoy special foods while young, unmarried men and women perform traditional dances (see p. 4 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). At some weddings, a lyricist may compose a poem in honor of the newlyweds (see p. 5 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Divorce: While exact statistics are unavailable, divorce is not uncommon in Somalia. In fact, it is relatively straightforward for a Somali man to achieve divorce, though Somali women rarely initiate the process due to significant hurdles (see p. 2 of *Sex and Gender*). If the couple has children, they can remain with either parent.

Death



In line with Islamic tradition, Somalis bury their loved ones as soon as possible after death, usually within 24 hours. Family members wash the deceased's body, apply ***adar***, a traditional perfume, and then wrap it in a white shroud. Men transport the deceased to a mosque, where a religious leader offers prayers. Relatives then transport the deceased for burial in a cemetery or within a family compound. Following the ceremony, mourners gather at the family home to honor and pray for the deceased (Photo: Men in a mosque in Mogadishu.)

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Somali society is traditionally patriarchal, meaning men hold most power, authority, and social prestige. Although the law grants women equal rights and stresses the importance of female political participation, patriarchal traditions continue to prevail. Violence against females remains a significant problem in many areas of the country.



Gender Roles and Work

Traditionally, Somali communities exhibited a clear division of labor. Women typically managed the household and performed domestic work such as fetching water and firewood, cooking, and caring for children and livestock. Meanwhile, as the heads of the household, men were responsible for providing for and protecting the family. Traditional male duties also included herding camels and serving on clan councils (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations* and "Gender and the Law" below) (Photo: Women collect water in Qoryooley).



Notably, years of conflict and instability (see p. 16-20 of *History and Myth*) altered this traditional labor arrangement. As men were recruited to fight or were killed in the conflict, women became heads of household and increasingly began to work outside the home. Consequently, many women today operate small businesses, such as selling clothes, household items, food, or ***qat***, a mild stimulant (see p. 6-7 of *Sustenance and Health*) (Photo: Somali women sell tea in the central town of Buur-Hakba).

Some men, particularly those unable to find employment due to disability or *qat* addiction, are completely dependent on their wives' income, a major shift in traditional gender roles

Labor Force: In 2014, about 37% of women worked outside the home, a significantly lower rate than in neighboring Ethiopia (78%) and Kenya (62%), as well as the US (56%). Even those women who own small businesses and have modest financial stability face barriers such as a lack of access to capital (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*) and insecure living conditions (see p. 11-13 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Gender and the Law

While the 2012 provisional constitution guarantees women equal rights to men, ***sharia*** (Islamic law) and ***xeer*** (a local, clan-based legal system – see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) significantly limit their legal rights. Within the *xeer* system, women are considered legal dependents of a male guardian and are subsequently entitled to less compensation than men. For example, women are entitled to just 1/2 of their brother's portion of an inheritance. In practice, most women receive no inheritance at all: only about 15-20% receive a portion of the money owed to them. Further, traditional customs require compensation in the case of murder, yet the unlawful death of a female requires only 1/2 the amount owed to the family of a male. Under *sharia*, men can divorce women with relative ease, but women may petition for divorce only in extreme circumstances like abuse or cruelty (Photo: Somali men and women perform during a Human Rights Day event in Mogadishu).



Gender and Politics

While earlier constitutional drafts reserved 30% of Parliament seats for women, the 2012 provisional constitution discarded this requirement. Instead, the document simply requires that women hold elected and appointed positions across the 3

branches of government. In the 2016 election, women won 24% of Parliament seats, a significant increase from the 14% of seats women held in the previous Parliament. This rate is lower than in neighboring Ethiopia, where 39% of legislators are women, yet higher than the 19% rate in the US.

Nevertheless, women still face significant barriers to political participation. For one, female politicians regularly receive death threats from extremist groups who object to their activities. Further, women are frequently barred from assuming leadership positions within their clans, which traditionally favor male candidates. Consequently, they often lack representation in certain political processes, such as the 2017 presidential election, where clan leaders played a pivotal role (see p. 5-6 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Lack of security in Somalia places some females at risk for rape and assault, particularly from armed members of the Somali National Army, Somali police force, and the al-Shabaab extremist group (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). While accurate national statistics are unavailable, the United Nations (UN) reports widespread sexual violence in Somalia. Women living in displaced persons camps are especially vulnerable to attack because they lack access to traditional protection and arbitration mechanisms. In 2012, the UN estimated that the victims of 30% of rapes occurring in Mogadishu's camps were girls under the age of 18 (Photo: A woman walking in Mogadishu).



Few female victims report attacks because of fear of retaliation, the failure of authorities to investigate instances, and the social stigma associated with sexual violence. If victims do come forward, indictment and prosecution of perpetrators is rare. Of note, Somali communities traditionally settle accusations of

rape through the *xeer* system (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*). Clan elders presiding over the arbitration process sometimes force the victim to marry her assailant.

A recent case suggests public sentiment toward GBV in Somalia may be changing. In January 2017, outrage was immediate when a video circulated on public media showing 5 teenage boys raping 2 teenage girls. Within weeks, the 5 teens were prosecuted and convicted, sentenced to fines, jail time, and public lashings.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Also known as female genital cutting and female circumcision, FGM is a procedure whereby a woman's sex organ is modified in a way that reduces her ability to experience sexual pleasure. Although the international community condemns FGM, the practice is widespread in Somalia. Proponents believe FGM purifies women, while discouraging them from premarital sex and infidelity. In addition, some Somalis consider FGM a religious obligation, while others believe uncircumcized girls are unlikely to find a husband. Although exact figures are unavailable, most sources estimate that as many as 98% of Somali girls are circumcised between the ages of 5-14. Of note, some communities practice infibulation, an extreme version of FGM whereby the genitalia are cut and sewn, typically causing severe health problems (Photo: Somali girls).



There has been some local opposition to FGM in recent years. The 2012 provisional constitution bans FGM, comparing it to torture. In March 2016, former Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke signed an online petition proposing Somalia's Parliament pass a bill outlawing FGM, with no action thus far.

Forced Marriage

Historically, some families forced their daughters into unwanted marriages, especially if the marriage would increase family or clan prestige. Recently, the practice of forced marriage has

increased, especially in areas controlled by al-Shabaab (see p. 19-20 of *History and Myth*), whose members occasionally even abduct young brides.



Sex and Procreation

Somalis traditionally view sexual intimacy as a private matter appropriate only within marriage. Physical contact between members of the opposite sex is considered inappropriate though not illegal (Photo: Members of the Somali Police Force receive training).

Within marriage, Somalis welcome children, particularly for their labor in fulfilling agricultural work. Because they extend the family lineage, boys are often preferred. Somalia's birthrate is high. At 6.5 children per woman, Somalia's birthrate is higher than in neighboring Ethiopia (4.4) and Kenya (4.3), and significantly higher than the US rate of 1.9. Abortion is legal only in the case of risk of death to the mother.

Homosexuality

Somali society in general reflects intolerance of homosexuality. The 1962 Penal Code establishes homosexuality as a crime punishable with 3 years of imprisonment, though this law is not uniformly enforced today. Further, Somali law neither recognizes same-sex marriage nor does it protect LGBT members against discrimination or harassment. Of note, in areas controlled by the extremist group al-Shabaab (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*), homosexuality is sometimes punishable by death (Photo: An AMISOM police offer talks with Somali women).



6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

The 2012 provisional constitution names Somali the official language of Somalia, with Arabic a "second language." Spoken by over 16 million people in the Horn of Africa, the Somali language is an important component of the identity shared by Somali people across the region. Swahili is also prominent in some areas (Photo: Somali children wearing shirts with writing in Somali and English).



Somali was an unwritten language for much of its early history. Around the 13th century, Muslim scholars introduced Arabic to the region in order to promote the teachings of the Qur'an (see p. 2, 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Some ***wadaddo*** (local Muslim scholars and traveling religious leaders – see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality* and p. 1 of *Learning and Knowledge*) adopted the Arabic script for Somali.

Later, a 19th-century Somali Muslim scholar developed a new way of writing Somali, heavily based on the Arabic script but incorporating new features. This so-called *wadaad* writing was a notable departure from standard Arabic. By the mid-20th century, there were some 10 different writing systems for Somali, almost all based on Arabic but limited primarily to religious purposes.

Following independence (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*), Somali nationalists endeavored to bridge the differences between North and South by promoting the Somali language to replace these regions' respective reliance on English and Italian as administrative languages (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). Despite the prevalence of Arabic, reformers in 1972 deemed the Arabic script unsuitable for Somali's unique vowel

sounds. Instead, they modified the Latin alphabet for a new standardized writing system. Within a year, the national daily newspaper was published exclusively in Somali, and by the late 1970s, Somali was the primary language of instruction at all school levels (see p. 2 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Somali

A member of the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family, Somali is related to Afar and Oromo, languages spoken primarily in neighboring Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Over centuries of contact between Somali and Arabic speakers (see p. 3-6 of *History and Myth*), some Arabic words were incorporated into the Somali language. Under colonial rule (see p. 6-11 of *History and Myth*), some English and Italian words were added to the Somali vocabulary.

Somali dialects divide into 3 major groups. Coastal or Benaadir Somali is spoken along the coast south of Mogadishu. Found mainly in inland regions between the Jubba and Shebelle rivers, Central Somali includes a variety known as Maay used by about 1.75 million members of the Rahanweyn clan family (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*). The 3rd dialect, called Northern Somali, is the basis of Common or Standard Somali, spoken in much of the rest of the country and in regions of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya. Standard Somali is used in international broadcasting, written communication, and education. Of note, Standard Somali and Maay speakers tend to have difficulty understanding each other. Additional Somali varieties having smaller numbers of speakers include Garre, Dabarre, Jiddu, and Tunni.



Other Languages

Some Bantus of southern coastal Somalia (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*) speak a Swahili dialect such as Bajuni and Mwini, or the Bantu language Mushungulu (Photo: Bantu people in Somalia working in their fields).

Arabic

Arabic is also a member of the Afro-Asiatic language family but belongs to the Semitic branch. As the language of Islam, Arabic is Somalia's primary language of religious devotion (see p. 2, 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*) and plays a key role in Somali society. Used across the Arab world for formal discussions, education, and the media, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is a language of instruction in schools, especially at the secondary level (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Over 2 million Somalis speak Arabic, primarily residents of the North and coastal towns. Somalia's large diaspora community has facilitated an increased uptake of both Arabic and English.

English

As Somalia's main technical language, English provides loanwords to Somali and is taught in secondary school (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Communication Overview

Communicating effectively in Somalia requires not only knowledge of the language but also the ability to use the language to interact effectively. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends (Photo: Former US President Obama and Former Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud meet in 2013).



Communication Style

Somalis take pride in their long oral literary tradition (see p. 4-5 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Somalis typically value language abilities, historically judging the capability of a suitor, warrior, and political or religious leader at least in part by the

individual's verbal talents. Even everyday talk may include "flowery" language, such as metaphorical and indirect speech, proverbs, and lines of verse. Somalis normally choose their words carefully, expecting their conversation partner to pay close attention. To demonstrate their serious consideration of another's words, Somalis tend to repeat the word ***kow***, similar to the response, "uh-huh."

Somalis prefer indirect speech and tend to avoid blunt requests and direct refusals. They sometime introduce topics indirectly to determine their conversation partner's general attitude about the subject. If the response is positive, then the Somali will make his request. If it is not, then he is likely to drop the topic, thereby avoiding the embarrassment of refusal of his request.

Greetings

Somali greetings may vary according to region, context, and the relationship between speakers. In informal situations, Somalis may exchange a simple ***Nabad*** (Peace). Otherwise, Somalis typically greet with ***Salaam Aleikum*** (Peace be upon you), with a response from all present of ***Wa Aleikum as-Salaam*** (And upon you be peace).



Following this verbal exchange, members of the same gender usually shake hands. While men often touch their hands to their hearts following the handshake, women may kiss their partner's hand. Greetings between Somalis of the opposite sex are often nonphysical. Men tend to greet women only verbally or with a nod. When interacting with Somalis of the opposite sex, foreign nationals should wait for their conversation partners to initiate the greeting (Photo: An African Union representative shakes hands with a Somali ministry official).

Forms of Address

Somalis use different forms of address depending on the nature of the relationship. Younger Somalis typically address elders respectfully, using such titles as ***eedo*** (ma'am) for older women and ***adeer*** (similar to "sir") for older men. Of note, the Somali language has no equivalents for Mr. and Mrs. (Photo: Former US Secretary of State John Kerry shakes hands with Ahmed Madobe, the interim Juba Administration President in 2015).



Names

Somalis tend to have at least 3 names: a given or first name, their father's first name, and their paternal grandfather's first name. Some Somalis have additional names indicating other forms of kinship or clan identity (see p. 14-16 of *Political and Social Relations*). Somali women retain their names upon marriage.

Names are generally of Somali or Arabic origin. Common Somali male names include Awaale, Waabberi, and Guleed, while Awa, Amro, and Ubax are common female names. Some names incorporate prefixes or suffixes, such as ***abd-*** (servant of) and ***ina-*** (child of). Further, many Somalis are identified by ***naanays*** (nicknames). Some *naanays* are used publicly to address an individual, such as "tall Ahmed." Others are used to identify a specific person when he is absent, such as "Omar with only 2 cows."

Conversational Topics

Following initial greetings, Somalis typically exchange inquiries regarding health and family, often using humor to keep conversation light. Common conversation topics include family, work, clothing, food, and reasons for visiting Somalia. Foreign nationals should avoid discussing Islam, polygyny (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*), female circumcision (see p. 4 of *Sex and*

Gender), Somali's civil war, clan relations, and clan affiliation (see p. 2-4 of *Family and Kinship*). Of note, Somali men do not inquire about another man's female family members, and neither should foreign nationals. Somalis are typically appreciative when foreign nationals attempt to speak just a few words in a local language (Photo: Community organizers lead a discussion at a refugee camp).



Gestures

Somalis tend to be highly expressive, using eye and hand movements to augment their words. Somalis signify "no" in several ways, such as by shaking the right forefinger from left to right and raising the eyebrows while tilting the head back. To indicate "come here," Somalis extend the right hand, opening and closing it. Holding the right hand palm down and away from the body means "go away," while moving the right hand up and down with the palm facing down means "be quiet."



Somalis consider it rude to show soles of shoes or feet or walk in front of a praying person. Of note, the American "A-OK" and thumbs-up gestures are offensive to some Somalis (Photo: Bank employees speak to customers in Mogadishu).

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at http://culture.af.mil for language training resources. Click on the Resources tab on the upper toolbar then Language Resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Somali
Hi / Hello (general greeting)	Iska warran / Nabad / assalaam ‘alaikum
Good morning	subaH wanagsin
Good afternoon	galab wanagsin
Good night	Habeen wanaagsan
My name is ____	maga'eygu waa ____.
What is your name?	adeegoo maga'aa?
Pleased to meet you.	waan koo faraHsan-ahaay eenaan koo barto.
How are you?	iskaa waran?
Fine.	waa la fee'an yahey.
Thank you	Mahadsanid.
How’s the family?	rerka ka waran?
And you?	Adiguna?
Yes / No	Haa./ Ma
Excuse me.	Raalli iga ahow.
Good-bye.	Nabadeey
Where are you from?	Xagee ayaad ka timid?
I’m from ___.	___ waxaan ka imid.
Do you speak English?	Ingriis miyaad ku hadashaa?
I don’t understand.	Maan fahmin.
I don't know	Ma aqaan
Sorry.	Waan ka xumahay
Please.	Fadlan.
Where’s the toilet?	Muqusha aawey?
Good luck!	Guul ayaan kuu rajaynayaa!
Speak more slowly.	Tartiib u hadal.
Stop!	Joogso!
Help!	I caawi!

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 37.8%
- Male: 49.7%
- Female: 25.8% (2006 estimate)

Early Education

Before the introduction of formal education, the region's residents informally transmitted values, skills, and knowledge to younger generations, primarily through various oral traditions (see p. 4 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Today, some Somali children still learn clan history, Islamic principles, and practical skills through oral poetry and proverbs.

With the spread of Islam beginning in the 7th century (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), religious leaders opened schools where scholars taught scripture and Islamic law to young men. By 1300, Zeila (see p. 3-4 of *History and Myth*) and Mogadishu served as centers of Islamic learning. Over the centuries, traveling religious specialists known as ***wadaddo*** (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality* and p. 1 of *Language and Communication*) also taught children to read and write in Arabic, the language of the Qur'an (see p. 2, 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*) (Photo: A school girl in Mogadishu).



Colonial Education

Around the turn of the 20th century, the territory of present-day Somalia was under the control of European colonists (see p. 6-7 of *History and Myth*). The British invested few resources into their northern colony, opening a school in 1897 to provide math and Arabic-language instruction to 240 Somali boys. By the 1940s, just 7 schools served 400 boys in British Somaliland.

Even though the Italians invested significantly more than the British, they initially provided few education opportunities to Somalis, reserving most schools for the children of Italian

colonists. Yet by 1934, schools in Italian Somalia provided education up to the 7th grade to some 1,000 Somalis. Following World War II, Italy expanded educational opportunities for Somalis as part of the United Nations requirement that Italy prepare the colony for independence (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*).

Education Following Independence

Following independence in 1960, the 2 former colonies initially retained their separate education systems (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). For the most part, educational offerings were unevenly distributed, with entire regions lacking schools. In 1962, around 18,000 Somalis were enrolled in primary school in former Italian Somalia, while just 4,300 attended such schools in former British Somaliland. Secondary school opportunities were even more limited, with just 300 upper secondary students in the entirety of Somalia that year.

Educational development progressed slowly in the 1960s, then sharply increased in the 1970s. New facilities at all levels opened or expanded. Originally founded as an Italian colonial institute in 1954, the Somali National University (SNU) in Mogadishu obtained university status in 1969. In subsequent years, it grew substantially, producing many of the country's civil servants and offering programs of study in law, economics, agriculture, education, and medicine (Photo: Construction of a vocational school in Mogadishu in 2013).



In 1972, the government adopted a new standardized alphabet for the largely unwritten Somali language (see p. 1-2 of *Language and Communication*). A literacy campaign launched in 1974 successfully trained some 400,000 adults within 2 years, raising the overall literacy rate from 5% to 20%. By 1980, enough educational materials had been produced to make Somali the language of instruction at all grade levels.

Education under Barre: Improvement eventually slowed then reversed under the brutal Barre regime (see p. 13-16 of *History and Myth*). To finance his military spending, Barre siphoned funds from education and other domestic programs. By the late 1980s, under 3% of Somalia's national budget went to education. As many administrators and teachers left their jobs for better-paid opportunities, hundreds of schools closed. Between 1982-1990, the number of students enrolled in primary schools declined from 271,000 to 150,000.

Education and the Civil War

When civil war broke out in 1991 (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*), formal education collapsed. Rival factions targeted and destroyed schools, technical training centers, and university facilities, as some 80% of the educated elite fled the country. Even though a few educational institutions reopened, usually with the aid of Islamic charities, the violence devastated the educational prospects of an entire generation (Photo: International peacekeeping troops visit a school in Kismayo).



Current Education System

Somalia's long-term lack of a functioning educational system is apparent today: in 2014, researchers estimated that 68% of Somalis aged 15-24 had had no formal schooling at all and only 5% had completed primary school. Enrollment rates remain some of the world's lowest. A 2015 study found that only 30% of all school-age children attend school.

School attendance rates also reflect gender and geographic disparities. Girls attend school at significantly lower rates than boys, primarily due to a lack of separate bathrooms for girls, safety fears, and social norms that favor the education of boys over girls. Children in rural communities also attend school at much lower rates: in 2015, just 18% of rural children attended school. Finally, extreme poverty prevents some parents from paying mandatory school fees and buying supplies. For these

and other reasons, some children start school at a later age than usual, or their schooling is interrupted. For example, in the autonomous regions of Somaliland and Puntland (see p. 16-17 of *History and Myth*), a significant number of teenagers attend primary school (Photo: A primary school class in Mogadishu).



Somaliland introduced free primary education in 2011, creating a 12% increase in 1st-grade enrollment. However, a shortage of qualified teachers plus lack of funds to pay teachers' salaries meant schools were unable to accommodate all enrolled students. Similarly, Somalia's 2012 provisional constitution (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*) calls for free education through the primary level, although this provision remains unfulfilled. Overall, schools throughout Somalia continue to lack basic resources, adequate facilities, and qualified teachers.

The school year begins in October and ends in June. While Somali is the language of instruction in most primary schools, some secondary schools also use Arabic or English for instruction. (Photo: A civil affairs officer of the African Union Mission in Somalia visits a Mogadishu school).



Primary: Primary school consists of 6 grades starting at age 6. There is no standard curriculum across Somalia, but common subjects include math, Somali, English, reading, and writing.

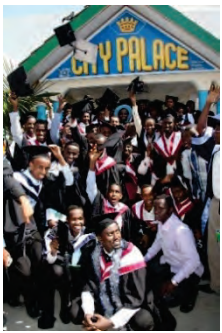
Secondary: Secondary school divides into 2 years at the lower level and 4 years at the upper level. There are 2 types of secondary school, vocational and general. Vocational school typically focuses on industrial, agricultural, or business topics. As in primary school, there is no standardized or consistent general curriculum, common subjects include Somali, Islamic

studies, English, math, science, social studies, geography, and history.

Post-Secondary: Following secondary school graduation, some students pursue post-secondary studies. When the government collapsed in 1991 (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*), SNU was Somalia's only university. Despite intermittent violence, various charities, religious and educational organizations, and Somali expatriates have opened dozens more since 2002 (Photo: Students outside SNU, which reopened in 2014, some 23 years after closing due to civil conflict).



Today, Somalia is home to some 50 universities and other post-secondary institutions supporting over 50,000 students. The most prominent institutions include Mogadishu University, the University of Hargeisa, and the University of Somalia, which together serve some 25% of all post-secondary students. Overall, these institutions face severe resource challenges: only a minority of institutions possesses library or laboratory facilities (Photo: Somali graduates from SIMAD University in Mogadishu celebrate).



Religious Education

By law, all public and private schools must provide Islamic religious instruction, except for those owned by non-Muslims. National and international Islamic aid agencies fund and operate most private schools focusing on religion. In rural areas, local communities maintain traditional Qur'anic schools called ***dugsis*** that serve as the first, and sometimes only, educational institution children attend.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Somalis consider honor, respect, and consensus fundamental to building strong personal and professional relationships. While public displays of affection are common between Somalis of the same sex, social touching between unrelated Somalis of the opposite sex is considered inappropriate.



Time and Work

Somalia's workweek runs from Saturday-Thursday, with normal business hours typically from 8:00am-2:00pm. During Ramadan (see p. 4-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*), the workday is often shorter. While some shops are open from 8:00am-1:00pm and 4:00pm-7:00pm, others are open all day. ***Suuqyada*** (open-air markets) are held daily or weekly every Friday or Saturday. In 2012, the first bank re-opened since civil war began in 1991 (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*). Today, banks typically open Saturday-Thursday from 8:00am-3:00pm or 4:00pm. In 2013, the Somali Postal Service reopened, though only to receive packages from abroad. Somaliland, Puntland, and some parts of Mogadishu feature newly-opened shopping centers. By contrast, shopping options in south-central Somalia are largely limited to informal businesses with irregular hours (Photo: Market in Mogadishu).

Working Conditions: The legal workweek is 48 hours with up to 12 hours of overtime. Herding, farming, and informal sector jobs typically have longer and irregular hours (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*). While Somali labor laws provide protection of workers, the government lacks enforcement capacity. As a result, forced labor, child labor, and other abuses regularly occur. Formal and public sector employees receive paid public holidays and 15 days of annual paid leave. Of note, widespread consumption of ***qat*** (see p. 6-7 of *Sustenance and Health*), typically starting in the early afternoon, reduces urban working hours and incomes.

Somali Solar Calendar: To track the weather and seasons, Somalis use a calendar similar to the Western (Gregorian) solar calendar, with 365 days divided into 12 months. Unlike the Western version, the Somali solar calendar designates Somali New Year in the month of Karan, on or around July 20.

Lunar Calendar: Somalis use the ***Hijri*** (Islamic) calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the solar calendar. The Islamic calendar's 12 months each have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening.

National Holidays

These holidays occur according to the solar calendar:

- January 1: New Year's Day
- May 1: Labor Day
- June 26: Somaliland Independence Day
- July 1: Republic Day
- July (variable): ***Dabshid*** (Somali New Year)

These holidays occur on variable dates according to the lunar calendar:

- ***Mawlid al-Nabi:*** Birth of Prophet Muhammad
- ***Miraaj Nabi:*** The Ascension of Muhammad
- ***Eid al-Fitr:*** End of Ramadan
- ***Eid al-Adha:*** Festival of Sacrifice
- ***Ashura:*** Day of Remembrance

Time Zone: Somalia observes East Africa Time (EAT), which is 3 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 8 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Somalia does not observe daylight savings time.

Time and Business

Business moves much slower in Somalia than in the US. Somalis prefer to build trust and develop personal relations before doing business, particularly with foreign nationals, which requires extra time and communication. While Somalis appreciate punctuality in business, arriving late to a meeting is usually acceptable given prior notification. Some business discussions occur during scheduled office meetings, although informal meetings in other locations or during meals are also common.



When meeting for the first time, Somalis greet and shake hands (see p. 4 of *Language and Communication*). They tend to begin meetings by sharing tea or coffee and engaging in light conversation (see p. 5-6 of *Language and Communication*). Appreciative of good verbal skills (see p. 3-4 of *Language and Communication*), Somalis tend to use poetic and humorous speech to help establish rapport and prefer to use indirect communication to gauge a business partner's intentions. Willingness to reach a consensus is considered key to successful business (Photo: Former US Secretary of State Kerry meets with former President Mohamud and other representatives in Somalia).

Somalis consider formality, respect, and deference to authority essential in the hierarchical Somali workplace. Although senior officials or upper management tend to run meetings and make most decisions, consensus requires consultative and informal discussions among all those involved. Generally, Somalis admire strong and decisive, yet fair and flexible leaders who emphasize honor and respect in business relations. Managers generally deliver feedback and criticism in private in order to avoid conflict and embarrassment.

Personal Space

As in most societies, the use of personal space depends on the nature of the relationship. Somalis tend to maintain an arm's length or more when conversing with strangers or members of

the opposite sex and stand closer to family and friends. Friends of the same sex often maintain very little personal space when interacting.

Touch: Close friends and relatives commonly touch one another during conversation. Friends of the same sex may hold hands in public, signaling their deep platonic friendship. Unrelated Somalis of the opposite sex usually do not touch, even during greetings (see p. 5 of *Sex and Gender* and p. 4 of *Language and Communication*).

Somalis use only the right hand when eating, gesturing, passing and accepting items, and shaking hands because traditionally the left hand is used for personal hygiene and considered unclean. Foreign nationals should adhere to this custom to avoid offense.

Eye Contact

Direct eye contact is common during conversation to convey interest, respect, and transparency among Somalis with similar social statuses. Nonetheless, men typically avoid extended eye contact when interacting with unrelated women. Somalis tend to do the same with elders and superiors as a sign of respect.

Photographs

Mosques, military or government offices, airports, and similar places may prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should always acquire a Somali's permission before taking his photo.



Driving

In addition to sharing the road with pedestrians and domesic animals, some Somalis have aggressive driving habits, such as moving into oncoming lanes to pass. In 2015, Somalia's rate of traffic-related deaths was 25.4 per 100,000 people, more than double the US rate of 10.6. Traffic enforcement suffers from corruption, such as officials accepting bribes instead of issuing fines (Photo: Trucks transport passengers on a road near Baidoa).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Somali dress, recreation, music, and arts reflect the country's Islamic heritage, rural traditions, and the political upheavals of the last century (see p. 7-20 of *History and Myth*). Somalis are particularly proud of their oral traditions, referring to their country as a "nation of poets."

Dress and Appearance

While Somalis in rural areas typically wear traditional dress on a daily basis, urban dwellers prefer a broader variety of styles.

Traditional: Prior to the 19th century, Somalis tended to wear clothing made from leather or domestic cotton. Following an influx of cheap ***merikani*** (American) cotton in the 1800s, dress patterns changed, resulting in the "traditional clothing" worn today.



Similar to an Indian ***sari***, the traditional women's ***guntiino*** consists of several yards of brightly colored cloth knotted at the shoulder and wrapped around the chest and waist so that the edge of the dress nearly reaches the ground. Customarily, a fold along the back serves as a hood (Photo: Somali women in Puntland).

A traditional men's attire is fashioned from 2 sheets of white cotton, sometimes decorated with embroidery or lace. The wearer typically wraps a sheet around the waist so that it falls slightly above the ankle, while draping or carrying the other sheet over the shoulder to cover the torso and head. Some men combine a colorful sarong or wrap-around skirt called a ***macaawii*** with a shirt. Others prefer the ***khamiis***, an ankle-length garment similar to a robe or tunic, like the ***thobe*** worn in the Arabian Peninsula. Whatever the outfit, Somali men usually add a snug cap called a ***benadiry kufia*** or ***kufi***.

Modern: Male city residents often prefer non-traditional attire, such as shirts and trousers (pictured). A few Somali women in urban areas wear Western clothing, but most prefer the Djiboutian ***dirac***. Introduced to Somalia in the 1970s, the *dirac* is a long, flowing, colorful gown often worn with a ***gorgorad*** (embroidered underskirt) and a ***garbasaar*** (light shawl). Another style also common in other countries in the region is the ***toob***, a long wrap-around cloth that reveals only the face.



Since civil conflict began in 1991 (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*), some women dress more conservatively, especially in extremist-controlled areas (see p. 11-13 of *Political and Social Relations*). To avoid rebuke or attack by extremists who object to certain clothing, some women no longer wear the *dirac* or similar styles outside the home, instead covering with loose-fitting attire like the ***jilbab***, a long, dress-like cloak, and a ***shash*** (head-scarf).

Recreation and Leisure

Somalis spend much of their leisure time with friends and family, although men and women tend to socialize separately. Women often socialize at the local market or gather in the home to cook and make handicrafts. By contrast, Somali men tend to gather at coffeehouses or tea shops to visit and exchange news. Popular community recreational activities include storytelling and poetry recitation (see "Oral Poetry" below). Some Somalis living near the coast go to the beach to swim and sight-see.

Celebrations: Somalis observe a variety of Islamic holidays (see p. 4-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) and other special occasions. They celebrate the 3 days of ***Eid al-Fitr*** at the end of Ramadan (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*) by dressing in their finest clothing, feasting, exchanging gifts, and decorating the streets with colored lights. Some Somalis hold local celebrations to honor clan ancestors (see p. 14-16 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Communities in the South traditionally perform ***roobdoon***, a collective rainmaking ritual that includes public readings from the Qur'an, animal sacrifices, and giving alms to the poor. Other festivals celebrate seasonal events, often rooted in ancient, pre-Islamic rituals. For example, Somalis celebrate the beginning of their solar year in July (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*) with ***Dabshid***, the "Festival of Fire," during which they light bonfires, throw burning sticks in the air, and dance.



Sports and Games

Soccer: Soccer, or "football," is Somalia's most popular sport. In addition to watching European matches, Somalis enjoy following their own professional league. The Somalia national men's soccer team, nicknamed the Ocean Stars, has never qualified for an international tournament (Photo: Somali boy plays soccer with Ugandan soldiers).

Other Sports: Other popular sports include basketball, volleyball, swimming, and table tennis. Few traditional sports are played today with the exception of the rugby-like ***go'oso***. Although Somalia has not medaled in any Olympics, Somalia-born athlete Mo Farah has won 4 gold medals in track and field for Great Britain (Photo: Somalia's national soccer team trains in Mogadishu's Banadir stadium in 2015).



Games: Somalis of all ages enjoy board games like ***shah***, a strategy game in which players try to place 3 figures in a row on a board with 24 points. Players often draw the board in the sand then use pebbles or bottle caps as game pieces. Other popular board games include dominoes and chess.

Literature and Theater

Oral Poetry: Somalis are internationally renowned for their complex and richly metaphorical poems and proverbs, which have been used traditionally to pass on history, teach morals and values, express feelings, convey news and information, and influence public debates. ***Maanso*** (poetry recitation) is widely respected and is a part of many special occasions and community gatherings.



Different types of poetry vary by structural complexity, length, and meter. The most technically complex is the ***gabay***, a long poem traditionally composed by men and explores a serious topic. By contrast, the ***buraanbur*** typically is composed by women and typically focuses on women's views on child-rearing and marital relations. Prominent historical Somali poets include Elmi Boodhari, whose early 20th-century love poems heavily influenced the development of modern Somali music, and Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, the "Mad Mullah" (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), whose poems rallied a Somali army against Ethiopia and British colonists in the early 20th century (Photo: Somali women perform on Human Rights Day).

Today, scholars seek to preserve Somalia's oral poetic traditions by collecting poems from ***hafadiyaal***, (memorizers). The most prominent living Somali poet is Mohamed Ibrahim Warsame, also known as Hadrawi. Imprisoned for composing poetry critical of the Barre regime (see p. 13-16 of *History and Myth*), Hadrawi has been called the "Somali Shakespeare."

Written Literature: For centuries, Somalis wrote religious texts in Arabic (see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*), notably poems and ballads dedicated to Sufi saints (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Following the creation of the Somali script (see p. 1-2 of *Language and Communication*), Somalis' oral stories were recorded for the first time (see "Myth" p. 21 of *History and Myth*), while new short stories and novels were produced.

Somalia-born expatriate Nuruddin Farah is the country's most recognized novelist, winning several prestigious international prizes.

Theater: Although storytelling is an ancient tradition in Somalia, modern theater did not gain popularity until the mid-20th century. Today, touring theater troupes are popular, particularly in small towns. Modern Somali plays are typically performed in poetic style, combining drama, song, and comedy to entertain entire communities. Plays often teach moral lessons or explore important social issues.

Dance and Music

Traditional: Somalis traditionally perform a range of folkloric dances to celebrate weddings, holidays, and other special occasions, such as the season's first rainfall. Dancers performing formalized steps are typically acompanied by rhythmic clapping and stomping, but the fundamental part of Somali traditional dance is the accompanying song. Talented lead singers motivate the dancers, often improvising appropriate lyrics. Of note, the traditional dances of Somalia's Bantu residents (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*) are typically more informal and physically expressive, with the focus on the dancer's movements rather than the singer and song lyrics (Photo: Somalis perform a traditional dance in Puntland).



Purely instrumental traditional songs are rare. Instead, a composer typically writes ***midho*** (lyrical verses) first, then develops the ***lahan*** (melody) to fit the words. There are different songs for specific occasions and moods. For example, some songs are war chants, while others are flirtatious melodies most commonly performed at weddings. Some other songs focus on emotions such as bravery, pride, and vengefulness. Of note, the different types of Somali poetry also have their own distinctive melodies and are sometimes accompanied by music, drums, or clapping.

Singers are also often accompanied by instruments such as portable drums, reed flutes, and the ***kaban*** or ***oud*** (lute). In the South, performances may include the ***seese*** (similar to a violin), the ***shareero*** (lyre), and drums like the ***nasaro***. Of note, some Islamist extremist groups (see p. 19-20 of *History and Myth*) consider traditional music and dance disrespectful. In 2008, extremists whipped some 32 Somalis for participating in a mixed-gender traditional dance (Photo: A Somali music group sings in Mogadishu).



Modern: After World War II, Abdillahi Qarshe, "the father of Somali music," drew upon traditional melodies and poetry to pioneer the new ***balwo*** and ***heello*** music genres. In subsequent decades, artists fused traditional styles with jazz, reggae, and Indian and Arabic music to create Somali funk. Since conflict flared in the early 1990s (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*), some musicians fled the country. Popular among youth today are Somali diaspora artists, such as Lafoole and Aar Maanta, or Western musicians.

Arts and Handicrafts

Somalia's traditional arts and handicrafts include woodcarvings, woven textiles, leatherwork, and metalwork. Many of these crafts are used in everyday life. For example, expert woodcarvers craft walking sticks, camel bells, and lecterns for holding the Qur'an (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*), while women typically weave mats used for sitting or praying. Because certain Islamic teachings (see p. 4 of *Religion and Spirituality*) prohibit the lifelike depiction of humans and animals, handicrafts and artistic pieces typically feature plants, flowers, calligraphy, or geometric patterns (Photo: A Somali tailor at work).



10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Somali cuisine typically reflects an austere nomadic lifestyle, although in coastal urban areas other African, Arabic, Indian, and European influences are more common. Somali dishes primarily incorporate seasonally available, local ingredients.

Dining Customs



When food is accessible, Somalis consume 3 meals and a variety of snacks daily. Generally, they prefer to socialize and share food in the afternoons or evenings. In urban areas, guests typically arrive in the late afternoon, when temperatures are cooler and the day's work is finished. Rural residents tend to visit even later, often arriving late in the evening.

Upon arriving at a Somali home, guests announce their presence then wait outside the family compound to be invited in. Hosts serve their guests light refreshments and tea laden with spices, sugar, and milk. Female family members usually prepare all meals, typically greet and serve guests, but do not dine with them. Guests and male family members usually eat first, followed by women and children (Photo: A Bantu woman tends to her fields in Kismayo).

While some families use Western-style tables and chairs, most Somalis dine while sitting on floor mats. Before and after a meal, diners customarily wash their hands in a bowl of water, perfumed with aromatic oils on special occasions. Somalis typically share food from a large, centrally-placed dish, taking food from the portion directly in front of them. Diners scoop food with the thumb, forefinger, and middle finger of their right hand (see p. 4 of *Time and Space*), refraining from touching their lips with their fingers. Somalis consider it rude to lick fingers while eating or to overeat.

Diet

Somali cuisine reflects Somalia's geographic diversity and history of foreign contact (see p. 1-11 of *History and Myth*). For example, elements of southern fare resemble Italian cuisine, while British, Arab, and Indian influences permeate northern Somali dishes. In addition, Somali traditions of herding and farming shape eating habits. For example, the diet of nomadic herding communities consists primarily of various dairy products and camel, goat, and sheep meat and is consequently high in protein. Members of such communities occasionally supplement their diet by trading and selling animal products for grains, seasonal fruits, and vegetables.

Meanwhile, Somali farmers thrive on the staples they grow. Agrarian Somali women spend several hours per day preparing bread and porridge from corn, wheat, and other cereals. Wealthier residents and urban-dwellers also enjoy imported pasta dishes. Fish is an important dietary component of Somalis living along the coast. Vegetables are relatively rare, although fruits including bananas, papaya, mangoes, limes, and grapefruit are popular when in season. Somali dishes are often fragrantly spiced with cinnamon, nutmeg, clove, cardamom, cumin, ginger, and black pepper (Photo: Somali fishermen with their catch).



Of note, observant Muslims (see p. 7-8 of *Religion and Spirituality*) consume neither pork nor alcohol. In addition, they follow particular rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is ***halal***, allowed by Islamic law.

Meals and Popular Dishes

For breakfast, Somalis often consume a type of pancake made from flour or millet. Lunch and dinner typically consist of cooked beans, rice, or millet served with milk, yogurt, and ***ghee*** (clarified butter). Dinner is the lightest meal of the day.

Popular dishes include ***fahfah*** or ***kalaankal*** (hearty meat stew); ***suqaar*** (vegetable and meat stew); ***shariiryo*** (puffy balls of fried mutton fat); ***baasto*** (pasta, often served with a thick, spicy tomato sauce); and ***manistroni*** (vegetable soup). Bread accompanies most dishes and comes in numerous varieties, such as ***injera*** or ***lahooh*** (a large, thin sorghum pancake); ***sabaayad*** (a pan-fried, flat, and thick variety); ***muufo*** (a flat, oven-baked, round bread made from sorghum or cornmeal); and ***roodhi*** or ***rooti*** (bread loaves baked in a wood-fire oven). For dessert, Somalis enjoy a wide array of ***ma'ma'aan*** (pastries) and cakes (Photo: Somalis receive meals at a food aid distribution center in Mogadishu).



Eating Out

While the average Somali cannot afford to eat out, wealthier Somalis may dine in restaurants and cafes. Located primarily in urban areas, restaurants offer both traditional Somali and international cuisine. Of note, groups of Somali men may gather at tea shops and casual eateries to converse for several hours, although Somali women rarely do (see p. 2 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Markets and small vendors in urban areas sell a variety of street foods, such as bread, porridge, fresh juice, and sweets such as sesame balls, milk caramels, and ***halwad***, a sweet meat pastry.

Beverages

Somalis enjoy tea throughout the day, often drinking multiple cups in one sitting. Tea usually is spiced with ginger, cloves, cardamom and other spices, infused with fruits, or served with milk and sugar. Somalis also consume coffee and freshly squeezed juices, such as papaya, mango, and grapefruit. Although observant Muslims do not consume alcohol, some urban restaurants serve wine, beer, and locally produced rum.

Health Overview

Years of conflict and instability (see p. 15-20 of *History and Myth*) severely damaged Somalia's healthcare system and negatively impacted Somalis' overall health. With 732 deaths per 100,000 live births, Somalia's maternal mortality rate is the world's 3rd highest, behind South Sudan and Chad. Similarly, at 96 deaths per 1,000 live births, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) is also the world's 3rd highest, behind Afghanistan and Mali. Moreover, in 2016 life expectancy at birth was 52 years, lower than the Sub-Saharan African average of 59 and significantly lower than the global average of 72. Finally, about 73% of Somalis live below the poverty line, with persistent famine affecting about 1/2 the population (see "Drought and Famine" below) (Photo: Children in line to receive meals in an aid center in Mogadishu).



Generally, medical facilities are outdated, underfunded, and understaffed. For example, in 2014, Somalia had just 2.9 physicians per 100,000 people, well below the World Health Organization's recommendation of 20 physicians per 100,000 people and significantly below the US rate of 254. In addition, trained medical professionals attended just 9% of births in 2007.

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Somali medicine relies on herbal remedies and folk traditions to identify and treat illness. Often, traditional healers are clan elders or religious figures (see p. 5-9 of *Religion and Spirituality*) who incorporate a spiritual component into their treatments to help cleanse the body of illness, ward off spirits that bring sickness, and restore physical and mental wholeness.

One popular treatment is fire burning, a procedure whereby a stick from a specific type of tree is heated and applied to the skin to cure a range of illnesses such as hepatitis, malnutrition, and pneumonia. Notably, Somali traditional healers recognized that mosquitos spread malaria before Western medicine was able to scientifically prove it.

Modern Healthcare System

Since 1991, ongoing civil war has destroyed much of Somalia's healthcare infrastructure. Today, persistent conflict prevents the new central government (see p. 4-6 of *Political and Social Relations*) from addressing the damage or the medical needs of the Somali population. Some urban areas have a few functioning hospitals and clinics, but most are typically dilapidated and severely understaffed (Photo: Somali doctors perform an operation at a Mogadishu hospital).



Quality of care diminishes even further in rural areas, where clinics lack adequate resources and medical expertise to treat serious illnesses. In addition, regional insecurity often prevents rural residents from traveling to urban areas to seek medical attention. Consequently, Somalis in both urban and rural areas usually rely on traditional healers and folk remedies for most medical concerns.

The Somali government is seeking measures to improve Somalia's healthcare environment. In 2016, the government collaborated with the United Nations (UN) to conduct a survey of public health facilities across the nation to learn how to improve the current infrastructure. In addition, international aid organizations provide modern medical services to needy populations, but ongoing violence and terrorist activity (see p. 11-13 of *Political and Social Relations*) often force them to suspend operations, limiting their impact.

Health Challenges

Communicable and infectious diseases, malnutrition, and maternal and prenatal conditions are the leading causes of illness and death in Somalia, accounting for about 69% of all deaths in 2012. The most prevalent communicable diseases include lower respiratory infections, bacterial diarrhea, measles, hepatitis, tuberculosis, and meningitis. Notably, the lack of clean water and sanitation contributes to the spread of bacterial and communicable diseases. In 2011, about 70% of urban but just 9% of rural dwellers had access to clean drinking water, while 52% of urban and 6% of rural residents had access to sanitation services (Photo: A boy suffering from malaria in a Mogadishu hospital).



Meanwhile, scarce prenatal, maternal, and child health services result in high rates of maternal and infant mortality. Significantly, 1 of every 12 women dies from pregnancy complications, while infants and young children are vulnerable to pneumonia, diarrhea, and health issues stemming from a lack of medical care during birth. In 2009, about 25% of Somali children under age 5 were underweight, the world's 9th highest rate of child malnutrition. While more recent statistics are unavailable, experts believe this rate likely has increased over the past several years as a result of ongoing conflict, drought, and famine.

Non-communicable diseases such as cancer and chronic respiratory, heart, and digestive diseases accounted for about 1/5 of all deaths in 2012. Preventable "external causes" such as car accidents, suicides, and deaths from conflict resulted in 12% of all deaths.

Chewing *Qat*: Some Somali men regularly chew fresh leaves of ***qat*** (also known as ***qaad*** or ***khat***), a green, leafy plant grown in the region. Although *qat* does not cause serious physical dependence and leads to fewer long-term health problems than

some other drugs, it contributes to a variety of negative health outcomes. For example, while *qat* (pictured) initially causes mild euphoria, the high eventually fades into depression, which can induce psychosis in susceptible people. In addition, nearly all *qat* users experience decreased appetite, which promotes malnutrition and insomnia. Other negative side effects include tooth decay, gastrointestinal orders, and cardiovascular problems. Few Somali women indulge in *qat*.



Drought and Famine: A severe drought has affected the region since 2011, endangering more than 20 million lives in what some experts are calling the most catastrophic humanitarian disaster of the 21st century. Caused by a severe shortage of rainfall, the drought has depleted Somalia's already limited fresh water supplies, destroyed crops, and killed livestock, leaving several Somalis without access to food or water. As of 2017, about 250,000 Somalis, including 133,000 children under age 5, have died from famine. Some 6 million more suffer from food and water shortages, including 330,000 acutely malnourished children. Somalis displaced by the drought live in crowded, temporary camps vulnerable to outbreaks of cholera, dengue fever, malaria, and typhoid fever (Photo: A Somali man watches over a herd of goats in a market in Mogadishu).



Significantly, chronic conflict prevents international humanitarian groups from reaching many of Somalia's affected areas. While relief organizations freely operate within areas controlled by the Somali central government, they are blocked from aiding populations in territories controlled by al-Shabaab and other Islamist militants (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*).

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

For centuries, most Somalis subsisted as nomadic sheep, goat, and cattle herders. Others settled near rivers as small farmers or along the coast as fishers or traders. While some sultanates arose to become wealthy centers of trade between the 13th-19th centuries (see p. 3-6 of *History and Myth*), most Somalis remained nomadic pastoralists, subsisting primarily on milk and meat from their livestock.

Under British colonial rule from 1884-1940, the coastal areas of British Somaliland (present-day Somaliland) grew by exporting livestock to Yemen. Most inland Somalis continued traditional nomadic pastoralism with little disruption until war nearly destroyed the economy between 1899-1920 (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*). Meanwhile, the colony of Italian Somalia (1889-1936) was affected less by the war. Italy invested heavily in the fertile region between the Jubba and Shebelle rivers in southern Somalia, building irrigation systems, roads, and ports primarily around Mogadishu to serve large export-oriented banana plantations (Photo: Mogadishu fishing harbor).



Few Somalis sought wage work on Italian farms, although some Bantus (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*) worked the irrigated farms in exchange for personal gardens on the land. Most Somalis benefitted little from colonization, except for a few farmers and some civil service employees (Photo: Bantu farmers working in fields near Kismayo).



Following World War II, Britain somewhat augmented its investments in the North. In the South, Italy heavily subsidized farm exports (primarily cotton and bananas), which by 1957, comprised about 59% of all exports, surpassing livestock in value. Even after Somalia achieved independence in 1960, Italian and British subsidies comprised over 30% of Somalia's budget. Between 1960-69, Somalia became self-sufficient in sugar production. Exports of bananas and livestock increased, allowing Somalia to invest in roads and irrigation, improving upon the colonial infrastructure.



After his 1969 military coup, President Barre implemented a system of "scientific socialism" (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*). In addition to some beneficial infrastructure investments, Barre nationalized all major companies and forcibly relocated thousands of youth and pastoral nomads into farming or fishing collectives. With aid from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Russia today), Somalia also built new factories and organized state-run cooperatives. From 1969-75, output grew, but a subsequent drought and war led to severe declines in production (Photo: A Somali man holds money he earned selling goats in Mogadishu).

In the early 1980s, assistance from the International Monetary Fund helped Somalia control growing inflation and increase agricultural output. Nevertheless, another drought combined with social unrest caused renewed economic decline. During the 1980s, per capita GDP decreased by about 2% per year, and by 1989, livestock exports again became increasingly important, accounting for about 80% of all export earnings. By the end of the Barre regime in 1991, the economy had collapsed. While inflation was rampant, wages were stagnant as widespread drought and violence forced millions of Somalis to leave their homes or nomadic lifestyles for camps within Somalia and adjacent countries (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*).

By 1992, Western countries supplied increasing levels of food and economic aid to Somalia as it plunged into civil war (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*). After years of such aid, Somalia owed billions in debt yet had no accountable central government to pay it back. With no protection or regulation from a functioning government, Somalis sought to make a living however possible. Rival factions looted factories and farms. While some Somalis returned to herding or farming, others entered the informal economy, working odd jobs or as street vendors. Others emigrated, survived on food aid, or depended on remittances (money sent from Somalis living abroad). Thousands of Somalis died from starvation and violence (Photo: A woman selling shoes at a market near Mogadishu).



Throughout the 1st decade of then 21st century, the security and economic situations in Somalia improved only intermittently. With most factories closed or abandoned, livestock exports and remittances provided most of Somalia's foreign currency. After the establishment of a new central government in 2012, the economy began to grow amidst improved security conditions. Since then, the economy has grown just under 4%-per-year as some private businesses and a new telecommunications sector have begun operations. Foreign investment rose from $107 million in 2012 to $516 million in 2015. Nevertheless, Somalia remains one of the world's poorest countries. Around 43% of Somalis live on less than $1 per day and 73% on less than $2.

In 2017, economic growth is expected to slow to 2.7% due to widespread drought (see p. 7 of *Sustenance and Health*). Somalia remains highly dependent on foreign aid and remittances, which respectively account for the equivalent of about 20% and 25% of GDP. Other problems abound. Corruption remains a pervasive issue. Government revenues account for only about 3% of GDP; just 6% of women and 10% of men have bank accounts; and while about 2/3 of youth aged

14-29 are unemployed, almost 1/2 of children aged 5-14 work. Although Somalis face these and other economic challenges, the current stable government (see p. 20 of *History and Myth*) and improved security are expected to provide an initial base for economic growth in the future.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the largest component of the Somali economy, accounting for around 60% of GDP and 66% of the labor force in 2013. This sector includes livestock, farming, fishing, and forestry.



Livestock: Nearly 70% of Somalia's land area is dedicated to herding. Accounting for about 50% of all export earnings, livestock is the most significant domestic component of the Somali economy. In 2014, Somalia exported about $400 million worth of sheep, goats, cattle, and camels primarily to countries on the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt. While Somalia suffers periodic bans on livestock exports due to diseased animals, recent investments in livestock inspection and quality control stations at major ports have reduced the number of incidents (Photo: A rancher herds cows near Kismayo).

Farming: Only about 2% of Somalia's land area is suitable for cultivation. Farming in Somalia is primarily for subsistence using traditional techniques, with some farmers residing along riverbeds employing irrigation. Somalia has a few large export-oriented plantations that use modern agro-industrial techniques. Major crops include bananas, sorghum, rice, corn, sugarcane, cotton, sesame, mangoes, peanuts, and beans.

Fishing: In 2014, about 1% of Somalis thrived as fishermen who harvested around 40,000 tons of tuna, lobster, shark, herring, mackerel, sardines, and other species. By contrast, foreign vessels caught about 132,000 tons in Somali waters that year. Illegal fishing and overfishing by non-Somalis has flourished in recent years, prompting some Somalis to turn to

piracy in retaliation for what they see as the destruction of coastal fishing waters and the livelihoods of coastal residents (see p. 18 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: A Somali fisherman holding a lobster).



Forestry: In 2015, about 10% of Somalia's land area was forested. Somalis clear trees for farming and harvest them to make charcoal, boats, homes, furniture, and other products that comprise about 5% of GDP. Somalia loses about 1% of its forests per year to the production of charcoal, making it one of the world's largest per-capita charcoal consumers. Somalis primarily use acacia trees for timber and building, while collecting the valuable resins from myrrh and frankincense trees for export.

Services

Accounting for about 33% of GDP and 30% of employment, services is the 2nd-largest sector consisting of communications, transportation, public administration, retail trade, lodging, and money transfers.



Xawaalad*:** Money transfer services called ***xawaalad (transfer) developed in Somalia due to the lack of formal banking services during the initial years of war. In this system, a global network of agents moves money primarily from abroad to Somalia for a 3-7% commission. *Xawaalad* typically involves over $1.3 billion in remittances per year. In recent years, criminal groups' use of *xawaalad* and the return of formal banking services have threatened the growth of this system (Photo: A money changer counts banknotes in Mogadishu).

Tourism: Due to violence and insecurity, Somalia currently has no tourism industry beyond small private tours. Most foreign

governments, including the US, warn their citizens against any form of travel to Somalia. Nevertheless, Somalia's tourism industry has notable potential with over 1,800 mi of coastline, diverse geography, safari animals, and various historical sites.

Industry

The industrial sector accounts for about 7% of GDP and just 4% of the labor force. Light industries, the processing of agricultural products, and construction dominate the sector.

Manufacturing: Somalia primarily manufactures light industrial products such as textiles, refined sugar, packaging, leather, soap, boats, bottled beverages, and food products. In recent years, light industry has thrived in Hargeisa and Mogadishu, which are both home to Coca-Cola bottling facilities. Manufacturing accounts for about 5% of GDP.

Construction: Since 2012, the construction sector has helped boost Somalia's economic recovery. Large cities with improved security, such as Mogadishu and Hargeisa, have benefited most. Construction's contribution to GDP and employment is difficult to assess since some construction projects are conducted informally (Photo: A Somali man walking down a Mogadishu street with a wheelbarrow).



Mining: Somalia has deposits of uranium, tin, iron, gold, coal, gemstones, and other minerals. While these reserves are believed to be sizeable since Somalia has a similar geological composition as its mineral-rich neighbors, civil war has prevented any significant exploration efforts.

Oil and Gas: Somalia also likely has substantial reserves of oil and natural gas. With improving security conditions, Somalia expects to open a round of offshore oil exploration licensing in late 2017. While in its early stages of development, the oil and gas industry has the potential to transform Somalia's economy. Of note, Somalia has taken legal action against Kenya to verify

their disputed sea border, largely due to suspected oil reserves in the area.

Currency

Somalia's currency is the Somali shilling (Sh.So.), issued in 7 banknote values (5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, 1,000) and 4 coin values (1, 5, 10, 25). A Somali shilling subdivides into 100 ***senti*** (cents), issued in 4 coin values (1, 5, 20, 50). With fluctuations in exchange rates, $1 has been worth between Sh.So.550-Sh.So.700 since early 2015. Few businesses accept credit cards, and smaller vendors, in particular, accept only cash in small denominations. Of note, Somaliland has a separate currency, the Somaliland shilling (Sl.Sh). Although most countries do not officially accept the Somaliland currency for exchange, $1 was worth around Sl.Sh. 6,000 in 2015. Of note, some Somali vendors accept the US dollar as legal tender (Photo: Sh.So.1,000 banknotes).



Foreign Trade

Totaling $819 million in 2014, Somalia's exports primarily consisted of livestock, bananas, hides, fish, charcoal, and scrap metal sold to the United Arab Emirates (46%), Yemen (20%), and Oman (16%). In the same year, Somalia imported $3.5 billion of vehicles and parts, chemical products, petroleum products, foodstuffs, construction materials, and ***qat*** (see p. 6-7 of *Sustenance and Health*) from Djibouti (19%), India (17%), China (12%), Oman (9%), Kenya (6%), and Pakistan (4%).

Foreign Aid

Somalia has been a recipient of foreign aid since the colonial era (see p. 6-11 of *History and Myth*). It receives just over $1 billion per year from various countries and multilateral aid agencies, accounting for the equivalent of about 20% of GDP. In 2016, the US provided $113 million (down from $250 million in 2014) to Somalia, primarily in the form of humanitarian assistance. Other significant donors include the United Kingdom, Turkey, Sweden, Norway, and Japan.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Somalia's ongoing civil war and instability have caused some of Africa's most underdeveloped physical infrastructure. Although a budding telecommunications network offers mobile phone coverage, few Somalis have ever used the Internet. The government and militant Islamist groups arbitrarily limit free speech and press.



Transportation

The most common form of transportation in Somalia is walking. Since few Somalis can afford privately-owned vehicles, most local trips are made via minivans or on truck beds designed to carry large groups of people. Some Somalis travel by donkey or camel, particularly in rural areas. Mogadishu, Hargeisa, and a few other urban areas offer public transportation via buses, minibuses, trucks, and taxis, which often share the road with pedestrians and domesticated animals. For inter-town travel, Somalis tend to rely on buses, trucks, or boats. Although few Somalis can afford air travel, flying is typically the most efficient form of transportation for long domestic trips (Photo: A Somali man on a donkey cart in Kismayo).

Since some stability returned to Somalia in 2012 (see p. 20 of *History and Myth*), the government, international organizations, and foreign countries have begun investing in Somali transport networks. For example, Turkey has invested heavily in the new airport in Mogadishu, while China has signed agreements for investment in roads and other infrastructure projects.

Roadways: In 2015, Somalia had about 13,800 mi of roads. About 12% of Somali roadways are paved, mostly major highways and those in urban areas. Most rural and secondary roads are not. During the rainy season, few unpaved roads are passable. Sections of some roads have been damaged during the civil war and remain in a state of disrepair.

Railways: Somalia has lacked a railway system since Britain destroyed the Italian-built Mogadishu-Villabruzzi Railway during World War II (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). Although Ethiopian officials have suggested building a railway link from Ethiopia to Somaliland, there are currently no plans to do so.

Ports and Waterways: Mogadishu and Kismayo are major Somali ports on the Indian Ocean. Berbera is the primary port on the Gulf of Aden. Smaller, minor ports typically used for fishing dot the Somali coast. Although boats may travel on some rivers during the rainy season, Somalia lacks inland waterways that are navigable year-round (Photo: Mogadishu port).



Airways: Somalia has 61 airports, though just 6 with paved runways. After the Mogadishu International Airport was damaged in the civil war, Emirati and Turkish firms began renovations in late 2010. The new Aden Adde International Airport services domestic routes and flights to the United Arab Emirates, Tukey, and Kenya. In 2015, Somali-owned Daallo Airlines and Jubba Airways merged to form African Airways Alliance (AAA). Along with Air Somalia, Turkish Airlines, and regional carriers, AAA provides services to domestic and international destinations.

Energy

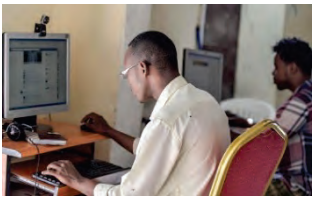
Somalia has recently pursued exploration of its potentially extensive reserves of oil and natural gas (see p. 6-7 of *Economics and Resources*), but still has to rely on imports satisfy its oil and gas needs. Somalia also has great potential for onshore wind and solar energy production, although renewable energy sources are entirely undeveloped. In 2012, less than 1/3 of Somalis had access to electricity, which is often prohibitively expensive. On average, Somalis pay 5 times more than Kenyans and 10 times more than Americans for electricity. Most rural areas are not connected to the electric grid, while power outages in connected areas are frequent. To meet their energy needs, most Somalis burn wood, although some wealthy Somalis use private generators.

Media

While relative stability in Somaliland and Puntland (see p. 16-17 of *History and Myth*) allow for some freedom of the press and speech, journalists across Somalia have been threatened, censored, detained, and killed for their activities, often with impunity. As violence against the media is unpredictable, some journalists have been pressured to self-censor or suspend their publications entirely.

Print Media: The Somali press includes local and regional periodicals published primarily in Somali, Arabic, or English. Some newspapers cater to particular clans (see p. 15-17 of *Political and Social Relations*). Popular daily newspapers include *Xog Ogaal* and *Xog Doon* in Mogadishu and *Ogaal Newspaper* and *Jamhuuriya* in Hargeisa. *The Puntland Post* and *Somaliland Times* are popular English-language weeklies.

Radio and TV: Somalia has both public and private radio and TV broadcasters. Somalis consume more content through radio than any other outlet. While the governments in Somaliland and Puntland maintain particularly tight control of radio and TV broadcasts, stations throughout the country broadcast a variety of programs in Somali, Arabic, English, and other languages.



Telecommunications

Somalia has some of the world's lowest telecommunication penetration rates, with less than 1 landline and about 55 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people. Nevertheless, due in part to high competition among mobile service providers, Somalia has some of the cheapest mobile phone services in Africa (Photo: A Somali man at an Internet café in Mogadishu).

Internet: Somalia also has one of the world's lowest rates of Internet use, with less than 2% of Somalis using the Internet in 2016. Until the 2014 launch of fiber optic cables, Somalis could only access the Internet via dial-up or satellite connections. While militant Islamist groups block Internet services in some areas, the government typically does not restrict access.

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