



## CULTURAL ORIENTATION

# SOMALI



*Colonial-era lighthouse on the edge of Mogadishu's Old Harbor  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

# CULTURAL ORIENTATION | SOMALI



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*Herd of wild camels grazing, Somaliland  
Flickr / YouTube*

## Chapter 1 | Somali Cultural Orientation

# Profile

## Introduction

Somalia occupies a geopolitically strategic position on the Horn of Africa. Its people, mostly Sunni Muslims, number nearly 15 million. The vast majority of the republic's Somali population speaks Somali, a Cushitic language.<sup>1, 2</sup> More than half of Somalis live in rural areas as nomadic or seminomadic herders.<sup>3</sup> Nomadic life, combined with clan membership, fosters local governance and a rejection of centralized authority. Many ethnic Somalis live in the nearby Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti.<sup>4</sup>

Civil war since the late 1980s has destroyed Somalia's infrastructure, blocked most economic activities, and hindered efforts to unify the country. Power struggles among clan militia, rival warlords, and Islamic insurgents have caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Somalis and the displacement of millions

more.<sup>5, 6, 7</sup> The Banadir Regional Administration (Municipality of Mogadishu) and six federal member states form the federal government, but the central government has been unable to exert control much beyond the capital.<sup>8</sup> The south is a battleground for the armed forces of neighboring countries and the al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist group Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, commonly referred to as al-Shabaab. In the northeast, al-Shabaab and the newly formed Islamic State in Somalia (ISS) fight for control, while piracy continues along the country's coasts.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the threat posed by these groups, Somalia suffers from a complex humanitarian emergency brought on by decades of endemic poverty, drought, and floods.<sup>10, 11</sup>

## Geography

Somalia lies mostly north of the equator in the Horn of Africa, the continent's easternmost point. It is slightly smaller than Texas, with the longest seacoast on the continent—3,025 km (1,880 mi) facing the Gulf of Aden to the north and the Indian Ocean to the east.<sup>12</sup> Somalia can be divided into two natural regions: the north, characterized by highlands sloping toward the ocean; and the south, where plateaus fall away to the wide coastal plains.<sup>13, 14</sup> Two permanent rivers run through the southern part of Somalia, supporting the country's main agricultural area, its largest city, Mogadishu, and roughly 40% of the total Somali population.<sup>15</sup> Light rainfall makes much of the country suitable only for nomadic herding; about 60% of the population are combination herders and farmers.<sup>16</sup>

Somalia borders Djibouti to the northwest, Ethiopia to the west, and Kenya to the southwest. Because the Ogaden highlands along the 1,600-km (994-mi) border with Ethiopia are in dispute, part of the border is shown on some maps as provisional.<sup>17</sup>



Map of Somalia and its neighbors  
Wikimedia / United Nations

## Geographic Divisions

### *The Guban*

The narrow, semiarid coastal plain called the Guban (scrub land) is a system of sandy, seasonal watercourses. It runs parallel to the Gulf of Aden in the north for about 240 km (149 mi) between the port cities of Zeila (Saylac) in the west and Berbera in the east.<sup>18</sup> The northwestern part of the Guban consists of barren lava fields that originate in Djibouti. The lava fields end in a series of hills and merge into a plain. The plain narrows as it extends eastward, widening again near Berbera. This lowland area is hot, humid, and arid. When rain does fall, scrub vegetation grows quickly, thus providing food for herd animals.<sup>19, 20</sup>

## The Karkaar Mountains

The Karkaar Mountains span the northern part of Somalia, from easternmost Puntland to just west of the Ethiopian border. The mountains rise sharply from sea level to 1,800 m (5,905 ft) in the west and 2,100 m (6,890 ft) in the east. They drop down to the sea in steep cliffs all the way to rocky Ras Asir (Cape Guardafui).<sup>21</sup> The highest point of the Karkaar Mountains is Shimber Berris (also known as Shimbiris), which reaches 2,407 m (7,897 ft) near the town of Erigavo (in the north-central area). The country's lowest temperatures occur here, dropping below freezing in December.<sup>22, 23</sup> Somalia's northern mountain regions have open woodlands, including acacia trees, African pencil cedar, juniper, and other evergreen shrubs.<sup>24, 25</sup> Frankincense and myrrh trees are native to the mountain slopes.<sup>26, 27</sup> Part of the larger Karkaar Mountain Range, the Golis Mountains (also known as the Galgala Hills) are a verdant range in the coastal Sanaag region. Both al-Shabaab and the ISS operate out of these mountains and are battling for territorial control.<sup>28, 29, 30</sup>



*Arid hills surround the town of Galgala, Puntland  
Wikimedia / Abdirisak*

## The Ogo Plateau

Southward, the Karkaar Mountains flatten to form the Ogo Plateau. This is an area of broken mountain terrain, shallow plateau valleys, and dry riverbeds that are an extension of the Ogaden highlands of Ethiopia. In the arid eastern part of the Ogo, the plateau is broken by several isolated mountain ranges, and gradually slopes toward the Indian Ocean. In central Somalia, it contains the Mudug Plain and the long and broad Nugaal Valley, with its extensive network of seasonal watercourses. As a result, the area's watersheds are dry for much of the year. To the west, the Ogo Plateau descends southward into the Haud savannah, where annual rainfall is greater than in the east. The Haud covers an area of about 64,750 sq km (25,000 sq mi) and provides grazing grounds for herds of camels, goats, and sheep during the rainy seasons. Permanent wells make some farming possible.<sup>31</sup> Natural depressions in the region become lakes and ponds during the rains.<sup>32, 33</sup>



*Somali city at the foot of a vast plateau  
Wikimedia / U.S. Department of Defense*



## Southern Somali Plateau

The basins of Somalia's two constantly flowing rivers, the Shabelle and the Juba, are south of the Mudug Plain. The middle Shabelle area receives the most rainfall in Somalia, around 76 cm (30 in) per year.<sup>34</sup> But the amount of rain varies greatly from one year to the next.<sup>35</sup> Most farming takes place in this region, supported by irrigation systems along the two rivers. The wide area between the Shabelle and the Juba, the "breadbasket" of Somalia, is the most fertile in the country. Maize, soybeans, ground nuts, sesame and sunflower seeds, mangos, watermelons, papaya, and grapefruits are main crops.<sup>36</sup> Along the rivers and streams are grasslands and areas of forest with a wide variety of trees including baobab, acacia, cassia, Egyptian thorn, and mangosteen.<sup>37, 38</sup> The outlying areas largely consist of plains and scrubland. The Somali Plateau descends into a coastal plain along the Indian Ocean and is, on average, 180 m (590 ft) above sea level.<sup>39</sup>

## Eastern Coastal Plain

The Eastern Coastal Plain, where the nation's capital is located, is the largest geographic region in Somalia, extending 1,500 km (932 mi) along the Indian Ocean.<sup>40</sup> Beaches can be short and steep, with unstable sand dunes. The plains are divided into two zones—north and south. The arid Hobyo region extends north from Mogadishu. Here, grasses prevail and steep cliffs along the coast reach 100–300 m (300–1,000 ft). Typical savannah vegetation predominates the southern two-thirds of the coast, which consists of low-level beaches backed by massive sand dunes and fronted by coral reefs.<sup>41, 42</sup> Temperatures on the southern coast are slightly cooler because of the ocean's cooling effect, typically peaking around (28°C) 82°F.<sup>43</sup> Mangrove forests are found here, particularly in the south from Kismaayo to near the Kenyan border.<sup>44</sup> Off the coast from Kismaayo lies the 125-km (77-mi) Bajuni Islands Archipelago. It consists of several small islands and numerous islets, including Coiama, Somalia's largest island, at 6 sq km (2.5 sq mi). Most of the islands are barren and uninhabited.<sup>45</sup>



Fishing boats, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Wikimedia / AMISON Public Information

## Climate

Seasonal monsoons, irregular rainfall, and recurring drought and floods characterize Somalia's climate. Because the country lies on the equator, there is little temperature variation. Hot conditions prevail all year, though the four seasons alternate between wet and dry. The main rainy season, *gu*, lasts from April to June; a dry season, *xagaa*, lasts from June to September; a second rainy season, *dayr*, lasts from October to December; and the main dry season, *jilaa*, lasts from December to March.<sup>46</sup> Average annual rainfall is 28 cm (11 in), but the amount varies greatly from north to south. Sparse rainfall in some parts of the country causes moderate droughts every 3–4 years and severe droughts about every 9 years.<sup>47</sup>

Average temperatures throughout the country are 30–40°C (86–104°F), with cooler temperatures in the southern coastal regions and at higher elevations. In the north, winter months bring below-freezing temperatures to the highlands, but summer heats the Gulf of Aden coast to over 45°C (113°F). Humidity varies more in the north, fluctuating from 40% in the afternoon to 85% at night. In the south, temperatures range from 20–40°C (68°–104°F), with the hottest part of the year occurring February through April. Along the Indian Ocean coast, relative humidity hovers around 70% in both wet and dry seasons.<sup>48</sup>

## Bodies of Water

Along Somalia's east coast, an offshore current to the south keeps water temperatures surprisingly cool, especially compared to the warm temperatures in the Gulf of Aden to the north.<sup>49</sup> In the northwest, Somalia is strategically situated along the southern approach to the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. Sometimes referred to as the Mandeb Strait, this stretch of water is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, used by oil tankers and other cargo vessels en route to the Suez Canal. The strait connects the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean.<sup>50</sup> Increased international policing has resulted in fewer incidents of piracy in recent years; but the risk of piracy and armed robbery of ships remains high throughout Somalia's waters.<sup>51, 52, 53</sup>



Map showing the Gulf of Aden, northern coast, Somalia  
Graphic / DLIFLC

Somalia's two permanent rivers, the Shabelle (Shebeli) and the Juba originate in the Ethiopian Highlands and run southwest into the Indian Ocean.<sup>54, 55</sup> The Juba River enters Somalia near the town of Doolow and flows south for 875 km (544 mi) to Kismaayo. It is the only river in Somalia that is navigable throughout the year.<sup>56</sup> The Shabelle enters Somalia north of Belet Weyne and flows south toward the Indian Ocean. At Balcad, about 32 km (20 mi) north of the Mogadishu shore, the river turns southwest and runs parallel to the coast.<sup>57</sup> About 85 km (53 mi) downstream from Mogadishu, it becomes a swamp that then dissipates in the sands near the Juba River. In the rainy season, damaging floods periodically occur.<sup>58, 59</sup>

Agricultural activity in Somalia centers around the fertile areas formed by the basins of these rivers. Before the collapse of the Somali government in 1990, over 220,000 hectares (544,000 acres) of land along the flood plains were farmed. Fruits, vegetables, maize, and sesame were grown for local market, while sugarcane and rice went to local and foreign markets. Flood control and irrigation systems are in poor condition, which has significantly affected agricultural production in the region.<sup>60</sup> In the north, the Dharoor and Nugaal valleys have seasonal rivers that flow east into the Indian Ocean at Xaafuun and Eyl, respectively.<sup>61</sup>

## Cities

### *Mogadishu*

Located in the south on the Indian Ocean, Mogadishu is Somalia's capital and most populated city. It is the largest of Somalia's four deep-water ports and a center of commerce and transportation.<sup>62, 63</sup> Mogadishu is home to 2.3 million inhabitants, 85% of whom are ethnic Somali, while the rest are Arabs, Bantu, and immigrants.<sup>64</sup> The city is dominated by the Hawiye clan, but there are neighborhoods dominated by other major clans, such as the Darood.<sup>65</sup>



*Fishing harbor, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISON Public Information*

The city was originally an Arab and Persian trading settlement. Its strategic location on the Indian Ocean made it a popular hub for trade in ivory, gold, and slaves. At the turn of the 20th century, Mogadishu became the capital of Italian Somaliland and of independent Somalia in 1960.<sup>66, 67, 68</sup>

Mogadishu was once known for the wide boulevards, Italian colonial architecture, and neem trees that made it one of Africa's most beautiful capitals.<sup>69</sup> It became a popular tourist destination, and its white beaches gained Mogadishu the nickname the "white pearl." Today, continuous violence during decades of civil war has destroyed many parts of the city and reduced its global popularity. There are few landmarks; those still recognizable in 2019 include the Shanghai old city, the ruins of the Mogadishu cathedral, the national museum of Somalia, and the mosque of Islamic solidarity. Bakaara Market is the geographical and financial center of the city.<sup>70, 71</sup>

As the seat of the fragile central government, which al-Shabaab works to undermine, Mogadishu is extremely dangerous. Al-Shabaab and other Islamist militant groups specifically target political figures and foreign nationals; guerrilla attacks and assassinations are a regular occurrence.<sup>72</sup> In 2017, twin truck bombings killed more than five hundred people.<sup>73</sup> In 2019, al-Shabaab used two separate attacks to assassinate the city's mayor and strike the United Nations (UN) compound within the heavily guarded Mogadishu International Airport complex with mortar fire.<sup>74, 75</sup>



*Collapsed building, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISON Public Information*

Although the conflict-ravaged city has been rebuilding, Mogadishu still lacks necessary amenities such as health care, education, and housing. Less than half the population has electricity, and 43% of its residents live in extreme poverty.<sup>76, 77</sup> Drought, food insecurity, joblessness, and conflict in the rest of the country drive many Somalis to urban centers like Mogadishu.<sup>78</sup> In 2018, there were 600,000 internally displaced persons in informal settlements around the city—one of the highest concentrations in Africa.<sup>79, 80</sup>

## Hargeysa

Hargeysa (also known as Hargeisa) is situated 1,334 m (4,377 ft) above sea level in the Ogo highlands of Somalia's northwest interior. The city's elevation creates a mild climate, and the surrounding area is the only region that supports farming other than the Juba and Shabelle river valleys in the south. Hargeysa began as a religious community in the 19th century and later became the capital of colonial British Somaliland.<sup>81</sup> No large industries developed, but the city became an important watering and trading hub for nomadic stock herders. Currently, the vibrant city of more than 800,000 residents is the de facto capital of the self-declared independent state of the Republic of Somaliland.<sup>82</sup> Though poverty is widespread and unemployment is around 75%, Hargeysa is a center for livestock trade. Once purchased in Hargeysa market, the animals are trucked to the port city of Berbera.<sup>83, 84, 85</sup>



*View of Hargeysa, capital of Somaliland  
Flickr / Retlaw Snellac Photography*

The population of Hargeysa, like much of Somaliland, is dominated by the Isaaq clan, who formed a group opposing the administration of Siad Barre in the 1980s. Barre retaliated by bombing Hargeysa and other Isaaq-dominated towns in Somaliland, driving thousands into exile. Tens of thousands of Isaaq were killed during the civil war, in what is known as the "Isaaq genocide."<sup>86</sup>

Hargeysa was destroyed in a 1988 air attack.<sup>87</sup> It has since been rebuilt and has an international airport, a university, and the only traffic lights in the country. Cell phones are readily available and internet connectivity is good.<sup>88, 89</sup> Hargeysa has a reputation for being safer than the rest of Somalia, and it has not seen a major terror attack since 2008. There is a functional police force and visitors can walk around unarmed—even at night. Taxis are yellow,



*Remains of houses damaged by war, Hargeysa, Somaliland  
Flickr / najeeb*

clearly marked, and metered, and buses are regular.<sup>90</sup> There are no landmarks in the city, but the Laas Geel caves, dating back thousands of years, lie just 55 km (30 mi) northeast of the city.<sup>91</sup>

## Bosaso



*Port city of Bosaso, on the Gulf of Aden, Puntland  
Flickr / Alberto D.V.*

Bosaso, formerly known as Bender Qasim, is Somalia's third-largest city and the commercial capital of the autonomous state of Puntland in northeastern Somalia. Located on the southern coast of the Gulf of Aden, the city has a major seaport, the Port of Bosaso, which was built in the 1980s for annual livestock shipments to the Middle East. Bosaso's population has grown rapidly since the civil war—from less than 50,000 inhabitants to 700,000 in 2014.<sup>92, 93</sup> There are also around 100,000 internally displaced people who have sought refuge in and around the city.<sup>94</sup> Bosaso, as with the rest of Puntland, is dominated by the Majeerteen clan, a division of the Harti Daarood clans.<sup>95, 96</sup>

In ancient times, the tip of the Horn of Africa was known as the Cape of Spices.<sup>97</sup> Trading ports like Bosaso exported myrrh, frankincense, gum, and animal hides to Phoenicia, Egypt, Greece, and Persia.<sup>98, 99</sup> In the early 1900s, Bosaso became part of Italian Somaliland, and later the business capital of Puntland State.<sup>100</sup>

In recent years, Bosaso has served as a refueling station for ships traveling between Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports, and it has also become an important commercial point of entry. The city has a diverse economy, is home to the largest telecommunications operator in Somalia, has several colleges, and a recently modernized airport—Bender Qassim International. Bosaso's growth has largely been financed by Somalis from the diaspora. Despite the rapid growth, the fishing industry still remains one of Bosaso's main sources of income.<sup>101</sup>

Since 2016, insecurity and political tension in the region has been on the rise. Puntland, on the northern coast, is home to Somalia's pirates, and they work with criminal gangs involved in arms trafficking, kidnapping, and the smuggling of people and contraband.<sup>102, 103</sup> Additionally, al-Shabaab and the ISS have carried out numerous attacks in Bosaso, where the ISS also runs extortion rackets.<sup>104, 105, 106</sup>

## Berbera

Situated in the northwest on the Gulf of Aden, Berbera is the main deep-water port of Somaliland. A Muslim settlement since medieval times, Berbera was claimed by the Portuguese, the Ottoman Turks, and the Egyptians, and was the capital of British Somaliland until 1941.<sup>107</sup> In the 1980s, the United States military

operated from Berbera's Soviet-built port facilities.<sup>108</sup> During the subsequent decades of conflict, the port was damaged but remained commercially operational. Today, Berbera's economy revolves around small-scale fishing as well as the export of livestock, frankincense, myrrh, and gum Arabic.<sup>109</sup>



*Berbera's deep-water port, Gulf of Aden, Somaliland*  
Wikimedia / Lakmi00

The livestock industry is the lifeblood of the Somaliland economy. Over four million animals are exported yearly out of Berbera, mostly to Saudi Arabia during the annual hajj. Boats can carry more than 65,000 animals at a time, which are loaded onboard at night to avoid the scorching heat of the day. Because port development is a key aspiration, the route between Berbera and the livestock-trade hub of Hargeysa is one of Somalia's best roads.<sup>110</sup> Like many cities and towns in Somalia, Berbera's population of 374,000 varies seasonally, swelling when animals are brought to market and decreasing when hot weather sends people to higher, cooler areas. It is dominated by the Isaaq clan.<sup>111, 112</sup>

Berbera's location on the Gulf of Aden, through which 30% of the world's crude oil passes, has brought the attention of international investors. In 2018, Somaliland authorities signed a deal with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for a 442-million USD port upgrade, the establishment of a UAE naval base, and the creation of a free trade zone.<sup>113</sup> When the new port becomes operational in 2020, it will be run by the UAE's DP World, one of the world's biggest port operators.<sup>114</sup>

## *Kismaayo*

Kismaayo (also known as Chisimayu) is Somalia's southernmost port and the capital of the Jubbada Hoose administrative region. The city of 235,000 people is on the Indian Ocean near the mouth of the Juba River. Formerly a fishing settlement, Kismaayo was founded in 1872 by the Sultan of Zanzibar.<sup>115, 116</sup>



*Kismaayo, capital of Jubbaland*  
Wikimedia / Abdirisak

The British took control of the city in 1887, later ceding the area to Italian colonists.<sup>117</sup> The United States built a deep-water port for Kismaayo in the 1960s and renovated it 30 years later.<sup>118</sup> The port has been economically vital for southern Somalia, supporting important exports and imports, including the export of bananas and illegal charcoal.<sup>119, 120, 121</sup> Political violence has taken its toll on the city; al-Shabaab insurgent forces have controlled Kismaayo off and on since 2009. The port, through heavy taxes on imports and exports, was the terrorist group's main source of revenue.<sup>122</sup> Al-Shabaab has since made the nearby city of Jilib its de facto capital and has launched major attacks in Kismaayo as recently as 2019.<sup>123, 124, 125</sup>

## Merca

Merca (also known as Marka) is a port city on the Indian Ocean 90 km (56 mi) southwest of Mogadishu; it is the capital of Shabeellaha Hoose administrative region. The town, which was founded by Arab and Persian immigrants, was in existence by the 10th century.<sup>126</sup> Somalis began to settle the area in the 13th century, trading in ivory, slaves, cattle, and hides. Because of offshore coral reefs and rough seas, shipping at the port is somewhat limited and is accessible from September to April.<sup>127, 128</sup> Some estimates place the city's population at 230,000, while other estimates are higher.<sup>129,130</sup> Only 23% of the population has access to electricity.<sup>131</sup>



Merca, Lower Shabelle, South West State  
Wikimedia / Bacciy

Al-Shabaab, which has controlled the city off and on since 2008, is active in the region, kidnapping Merca locals and raiding villages in the surrounding area.<sup>132, 133</sup> Fighting among clans and subclans, particularly over water and land resources, is ongoing.<sup>134</sup> Because Merca's primary export is bananas (bound for Europe and the Middle East), the power struggle between the dominant Hawiye and Dir clans in the 1990s is referred to as the Banana Wars.<sup>135, 136</sup>

## History

### Early History

The Horn of Africa has been inhabited since prehistoric times. Somalia was known to the ancient Egyptians as the Land of Punt ("God's Land"). It was the destination of Cushite peoples who migrated toward the coast from the Ethiopian and Kenyan highlands of eastern Africa's Great Rift Valley.<sup>137, 138, 139</sup> Other early occupants of modern-day Somali territory were tribal Bantu and Boni peoples.<sup>140, 141, 142</sup> Arab and Asian merchant ships visited Somali shores well before the first century C.E., and by the seventh century, coastal towns were exporting goods such as ghee (clarified butter), frankincense, myrrh, and slaves.<sup>143, 144, 145</sup> Early Arab geographers described Somalis as "black Berbers."<sup>146</sup>



Egyptian relief of Hatshepsut's journey to the Land of Punt  
Wikimedia / Σταύρος

Islam arrived in Somalia in the 7th century, taking hold from the 11th to 13th centuries when Muslim patriarchs founded major Somali clans.<sup>147, 148</sup> For the next several centuries, Somalis fought in religious wars, joining

regional Muslim kingdoms against Christian Abyssinia (modern day Ethiopia).<sup>149</sup> In the 16th century, recently arrived Portuguese and Turkish traders found themselves involved in a struggle between the Islamic state of Adal (currently northwest Somalia) and Ethiopia.<sup>150</sup> In later centuries, Ottoman Turks claimed the northern portion of the Horn, while the Sultanate of Zanzibar claimed parts of southern Somalia.<sup>151</sup>



*Map of Africa, 1883, predating the 1884 Berlin Conference  
Wikimedia / University of Florida Map and Imagery Library - Africa*

Europeans began to explore the interior of Somalia in the 19th century. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Somalia's strategic location became even more significant. Being at the intersection of Africa and Asia, British, French, and Italian interest in the country grew. At the Berlin Conference in 1884, U.S. and European powers formalized the colonization of Africa, which had begun decades before.<sup>152, 153</sup> Italy, Great Britain, and France divided the Horn of Africa into three provinces. Egypt and Ethiopia also participated in the scramble to colonize the region.<sup>154</sup> Egypt occupied the Gulf of Aden seaports of Berbera and Bulhar, but later ceded its Somali territories to Britain. When Egypt left, Ethiopia took

control of interior Somali clan lands (the Ogaden region) from the Europeans. Somalis resisted both African and European colonization.<sup>155</sup> Religious leader and early nationalist Mohamed Abdullah Hassan led his followers in a 20-year rebellion against British, Italian, and Ethiopian imperialists.<sup>156</sup> The British eventually retreated toward Somalia's northern coast, but the Italians under Mussolini later annexed Eritrea, Ethiopia, and southern Somalia, thereby surrounding the British (and French) Somaliland colonies.<sup>157</sup> In 1940, during World War II, Italy seized British Somaliland. In 1941, the British recaptured their Somali territory as well as Italian Abyssinia (Ethiopia/Eritrea) and much of Italian Somaliland.<sup>158</sup>

## *Independent Somalia*

After the war, the British military administered Somali territories with an eye toward Somali self-government. In 1947, Italy renounced its claim to Somali territory and in 1948 Britain handed over the Ogaden region and neighboring Somali territories to Ethiopia. In 1949 the UN created an Italian-administered international trusteeship to manage the transition to an independent Somalia. The British granted full independence on 26 June 1960 and the Italians on 1 July the same year. The two former colonies joined immediately to form the Somali Republic. French Somalia, which voted to remain under French rule at the time, would gain independence in 1970 and become Djibouti.<sup>159, 160</sup> The first elected president of Somalia was Aden Abdullah Osman. After leading the country for seven years, Osman was succeeded by Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke.<sup>161, 162</sup>

Pan-Somalism, the idea of unifying all Somali communities in Somalia, French Somaliland (present-day Djibouti), northern Kenya, and Ethiopia, dominated the government's first years of foreign policy. Border disputes with Kenya and Ethiopia erupted in hostilities by 1964.<sup>163, 164</sup> In 1967, the prime minister encouraged the government to renounce claims on Somali communities outside the country, but many Somalis objected



to reconciliation with Ethiopia, the country's longtime adversary. By 1969, this discontent, combined with Sharmarke's assassination and accusations of election fraud, resulted in a bloodless coup in which the army took power under the direction of Major General Mohamed Siad Barre.<sup>165, 166</sup> Barre dissolved parliament and suspended the constitution. He declared Somalia a socialist Islamist state, seeking aid from Soviet nations and joining the Arab League.<sup>167</sup>

## *Siad Barre*

Barre ruled Somalia for over 22 years. His early rule was marked by initiatives that on the face of it were meant to foster nation-building and a more cohesive Somali identity. He built roads and hospitals, embarking on an ambitious and successful literacy campaign.<sup>168</sup> Somali was not a written language until 1972, when Barre promoted a newly introduced Roman alphabet. School teaching materials, national newspapers, and government documents were switched to Somali. Literacy rates increased significantly.<sup>169, 170</sup> At the same time, he suspended elections and nationalized industry, expropriating citizens' land in the process. Moreover, Barre systematically politicized clan identity under the facade of a nonclan ideology, playing clans against one another. This created an atmosphere of predatory violence that has marked Somali society since then. The Barre regime was known for its brutal measures against anyone suspected of undermining the regime, including torture, arbitrary detention, and extrajudicial killings.<sup>171</sup>

In 1977, hoping to annex Ethiopia's Somali-inhabited eastern region, the Ogaden, Barre invaded Ethiopia. In a surprise move, Moscow supplied Ethiopia with Cuban troops and Soviet advisors, resulting in Somalia's eventual defeat in the Ogaden War.<sup>172</sup> Betrayed by the Soviets, Barre turned to the United States for support. USAID reopened its mission in Somalia in 1978, and in 1980 U.S. forces gained access to the strategic port of Berbera.<sup>173</sup>



*Cuban artillery unit, the Ogaden, Ethiopia, circa 1977*  
Wikimedia

## *Conflict and Instability*

Conflicts among Somali clans reemerged and worsened in the 1980s. After a Majeerteen clan coup failed at the end of the Ogaden War, some members formed the antigovernment Somali Salvation Democratic Front, which was based in Ethiopia and backed by Libya's President Muammar Gaddafi. Barre armed several clan militias to fight against rival clans.<sup>174</sup> He dismissed other clans from his government in favor of members of his own clan.<sup>175</sup> As a result, clans fractured and formed insurgency groups. Isaaq clan members formed the Somali National Movement (SNM) in 1981. Hawiye clan members from southern Somalia formed the United Somali Congress (USC) in 1989.<sup>176, 177</sup> That same year, the Somali Patriotic Movement also emerged. It was largely dominated by the Ogaden clan that stretches across Somalia into a large part of eastern Ethiopia.<sup>178</sup> Armed conflicts between the Barre government and these groups forced hundreds of thousands of Somalis

to flee to Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti.<sup>179, 180</sup> In 1990, Barre proposed government reforms, but they were too late and opposition forces pushed him from power in 1991, leading to all-out civil war.<sup>181</sup>

As Barre went into exile, the central government in Mogadishu collapsed. There ensued a bloody struggle for control among clan-based militias. The SNM took over former British Somaliland, declaring it the independent nation of the Republic of Somaliland in 1991. Mogadishu and much of southern Somalia became contested territory; competing USC factions of the Somali National Alliance, led by Commander Mohamed Farah Aidede, and the Somali Salvation Alliance, led by Ali Mahdi Mohamed, continued to fight Barre supporters.<sup>182</sup> The deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians from violence, disease, and famine prompted a U.S.-led international intervention in 1992–1993. More than 35,000 U.S. troops secured and distributed food, as the militias were taking it for themselves and leaving nothing for the citizens of Somalia.<sup>183, 184, 185</sup> Aidede became a focus of the U.S. military after he directed forces that attacked UN allies, killing dozens. Aidede also directed an August 1993 bombing that killed four U.S. military police officers.<sup>186</sup>



Street known as the “Green Line,” Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Wikimedia / U.S. Department of Defense

On 3 October 1993, Task Force Ranger received intelligence about a meeting of senior officials from the Somali National Alliance. The United States launched an operation to capture Aidede.<sup>187, 188</sup> During the operation, Somali militia shot down two Black Hawk helicopters, leading U.S. forces to delay their withdrawal as they worked to rescue the trapped crew.<sup>189</sup> The complicated U.S. and UN command structure created significant delays in coordinating the rescue effort. Over the next 24 hours, a battle ensued in which 18 U.S. servicemen and as many as 700 Somalis were killed, including civilians. The bodies of several of the U.S. servicemen were dragged by enraged mobs through Mogadishu’s streets, a spectacle that was also televised.<sup>190, 191</sup> After the Battle of Mogadishu, which became known as the “Black Hawk Down” incident, U.S. troops withdrew in 1994, and UN forces left in 1995.<sup>192, 193</sup>



Black Hawk helicopter “Super 64” mission over  
Mogadishu, 3 October 1993 Wikimedia / USASOC

## Attempts at Peace

Many reconciliation attempts in the ensuing years failed. Efforts in Djibouti (2000) and Kenya (2002) led to the establishment of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004.<sup>194</sup> Ethiopia entered Somalia in 2006 to defend the TFG from the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a fundamentalist Islamist organization that had grown powerful over the preceding years and controlled Mogadishu and the south of the country.<sup>195, 196</sup>

The ICU represented a broad spectrum of Islamists, from moderate to radical. It had been successful in combating the chaos and lawlessness that followed the overthrow of Barre. It provided security and essential services, and had widespread support from Mogadishu's citizens. But its rise caused international concern. Ultimately, a power-struggle between the ICU and the Ethiopia-backed TFG emerged.<sup>197</sup> The UN and the African Union sent peacekeeping troops (AMISOM) to Somalia in 2007.<sup>198</sup> A UN-brokered peace deal in 2009 led to the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops and the election of ICU leader Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed as TFG president. The TFG, seeking support from Islamists, agreed to adopt sharia law for Somalia.<sup>199, 200</sup>



*Peacekeepers from Uganda tour Mogadishu, Hirshabelle Flickr / AMISON Public Information*

Al-Shabaab (The Youth), an Islamic insurgent group, rose to challenge the TFG.<sup>201</sup> Formerly the “special forces” of the ICU, al-Shabaab branded Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed a traitor for his moderate presidential stance.<sup>202</sup> In 2010, pursuing an international jihad called for by al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for a bombing in Uganda as retaliation against Ugandan troop contributions to AMISOM.<sup>203</sup> In late 2011, Kenyan and Ethiopian troops reentered Somalia to combat the group. By early 2012, joint efforts had recovered Mogadishu from al-Shabaab.<sup>204</sup>

Since the 1991 collapse of the Barre regime, piracy off the Somali coast flourished. The shipping route through the Indian Ocean became known as one of the most dangerous sea passages in the world. Incidents of piracy peaked between 2007 and 2011 and drew international concern. Since 2012, international antipiracy measures, including an international naval presence off the coast, have reduced the number of attacks.<sup>205</sup>



*British marines conduct a counter-piracy operation, coastal waters of Somalia Flickr / Defence Images*

In August 2012, the National Constituent Assembly, which consisted of elders drawn from the country's four major clans, adopted a provisional constitution.

That same year, the Lower House of the country's new parliament was established, and Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, a politically moderate academic and one of the founders of Mogadishu's Simad University, was elected president. The Upper House of parliament was established four years later.<sup>206</sup>

## Recent History

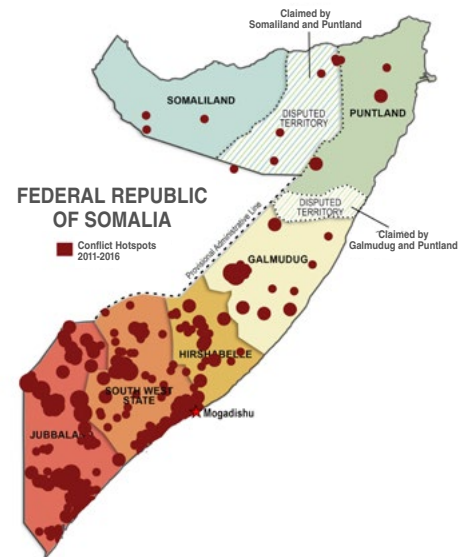
In 2017 there was a peaceful transfer of presidential power to a former prime minister, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (Farmajo). But the electoral process was clouded by allegations of intimidation, violence, and corruption.<sup>207</sup> As of 2019, the status of the federal member states remained provisional and the division of powers between them unclear. Confrontations between Somaliland and Puntland over a contested border area continue, and efforts to negotiate a formal ceasefire have been unsuccessful. Tensions continue between Mogadishu and some of the federal member states.<sup>208, 209</sup> The next elections are scheduled for 2020.<sup>210</sup>

Progress toward reform has been hindered by al-Shabaab. Although the group has lost control of most towns and cities since 2012, it still dominates in many rural areas. Since 2016, al-Shabaab has increasingly prioritized attacks on Mogadishu and other urban centers. It has also sought to undermine the central government, threatening to execute anyone who collaborates with President Farmajo. Al-Shabaab's record of human rights abuses is extensive: it has systematically attacked hospitals and schools, targeted civilians, recruited child soldiers, and murdered government employees, humanitarian workers, and diplomats.<sup>211</sup> It retains control over substantial territory in southern Somalia.<sup>212, 213</sup> The ISS emerged in 2015 when Sheikh Abdulkadir Mumin, a former scholar for al-Shabaab, pledged his allegiance to ISS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. A stretch of Somalia's northeastern coast has been seized by ISS fighters who split from al-Shabaab.<sup>214, 215</sup>

The ongoing civil war has caused significant damage to Somalia's infrastructure and economy. As of 2019, about 2.6 million people were internally displaced across the country.<sup>216</sup> Most of them had abandoned their homes between January 2017 and August 2018 because of drought, floods, conflict, and insecurity. In addition, the country hosts close to 33,600 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Ethiopia and Yemen.<sup>217, 218</sup>

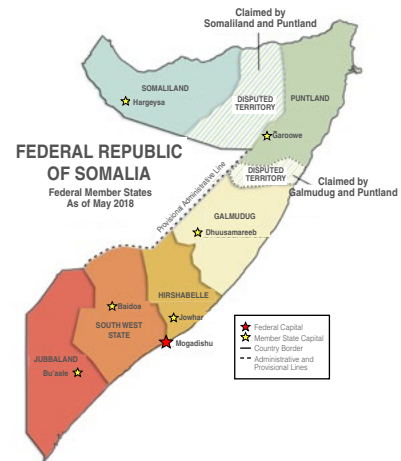
## Government

Somalia is a federal parliamentary republic, where the parliament and the executive branch together make up the government. The president is the head of government, and the cabinet reports to him through the prime minister. Though the judiciary is part of the government, it has no functional ties to the other two branches. Since the fall of Said Barre's government in early 1991, the central government has had little control beyond Mogadishu. There are six federal member states that form the federal government in Somalia: Somaliland, Puntland, Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Jubaland, Banadir Regional Administration (Mogadishu Municipality), and South West State.<sup>219</sup>



Map of conflict hotspots, Federal Republic of Somalia, 2011-2016 Graphic / DLIFLC

The former British colony of Somaliland has been a self-governing region since 1991. It has its own currency, an effective government, and a trained army and police force. While neither Mogadishu nor any foreign government recognizes its claim of independence, Somaliland has diplomatic relations with the UN, the European Union, the United States, and Great Britain, and attracts foreign investment.<sup>220</sup> The lack of support for Somaliland independence stems from concerns that the creation of a new state would embolden Somalia's other secessionist provinces (Puntland, Jubaland, and Hirshabelle), and lead to the balkanization of Somalia along clan lines.<sup>221</sup> Puntland's government, however, says it wishes to be part of a federal Somalia.<sup>222</sup>



Federal member states, Federal Republic of Somalia (May 2018) Graphic / DLIFLC

## Media

During Barre's regime, the Ministry of Information and National Guidance controlled all media.<sup>223</sup> (Local opinion of state-provided information was expressed in the nickname of the sole national newspaper—'ar-I-Dhamee, "I Dare You to Finish Me.")<sup>224</sup> In the post-republic era, Somalis have access to radio and online news outlets. Competing regional outlets provide information via print, television, and radio (the most widespread form of media). While relative stability in Somaliland and Puntland allow for some freedom of the press and speech, journalists across Somalia have been threatened, censored, detained, and killed.<sup>225, 226</sup> Despite such dangers, private outlets, especially FM radio stations, offer a variety of domestic and international product such as Al-Jazeera, CNN, and BBC (including BBC's Somali language service). There are several daily and weekly newspapers throughout the country published in English, Somali, and Italian.<sup>227</sup> They have limited readership—most under 10,000. Most press activity is centered in Mogadishu. One of the largest Somali newspapers is *Geeska Afrika*, which publishes in English and Somali and in print and online.<sup>228</sup> The *Puntland Post* and *Somaliland Sun* are popular English-language weeklies.<sup>229</sup> The longest-running Somali-language daily newspaper, *Xog Ogaal*, was shut down by government security forces in 2016 following its publication of photos of a massacre of civilians by al-Shabaab.<sup>230</sup>

The Somali diaspora makes good use of the internet and social media, and Somali digital media platforms are on the rise. Still, the communications infrastructure within Somalia is weak and fewer than 2% of its people are regularly online. Somalia has some of the world's lowest telecommunication penetration rates, with less than 1 landline and about 60 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people.<sup>231, 232</sup> Fearing its leaders could be located, al-Shabaab banned people from using cell phones with internet access and GPS and have reportedly killed Somalis carrying them.<sup>233</sup>



Somali journalist speaks at a justice conference, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle Flickr / UNSOM Somalia

## Economy

Instability and civil war over the last three decades have impacted the population as well as the economy of Somalia. It has become one of the most impoverished and corrupt nations in the world. Since 2017, inflation has slowed and growth has rebounded, but it remains too low to address poverty and unemployment, particularly among the youth.<sup>234, 235</sup> Since 2005, many young Somalis have turned to piracy.<sup>236</sup> Between 2005 and 2012 piracy generated nearly 413 million USD. Successful international counter-piracy efforts led to a hiatus until 2017 when the frequency of attacks began to rise again.<sup>237, 238</sup>



*Flood waters fill the streets, Belet Weyne, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISON Public Information*

Somalia remains vulnerable to natural disasters and food insecurity.<sup>239</sup> Poor rains in late 2019 have taken a heavy toll on farmers and herders. Drought and early depletion of food stocks, increased conflict, and a reduction of humanitarian assistance in 2019 have led to a sharp deterioration in food security.<sup>240</sup>

Somalia's traditional economy is based on herding and farming, supplemented by the earnings that Somalis who work abroad send home.<sup>241, 242</sup> Livestock (camels, cattle, sheep, and goats) is Somalia's main export and contributes about 40% to the gross domestic product.<sup>243</sup> This is followed by other agricultural products such as fruit, wood charcoal, and fish. Somalia imports more than it exports, creating a trade deficit. During the recent decades of natural and political disasters, food has become the main import, followed by petroleum products, transportation vehicles and equipment, and other manufactured goods.<sup>244, 245</sup> Unregulated trade includes the import of the drug khat and the internationally prohibited movement of arms.<sup>246</sup> The service sector has grown in recent years, particularly in telecommunications, money transfer, construction, and transport.<sup>247, 248</sup>



*Somali shepherds with herd, near Berbera, Somaliland  
Flickr / ILRI*

Private investment, especially from Somalis living abroad, is evident in construction, transportation, and small-scale manufacturing. Additionally, trade continues with African neighbors and countries in the Middle East and Asia.<sup>249</sup> Without a formal banking sector, money transfer services, known as *hawala*, have become big business, handling millions of dollars, pounds, and euros in remittance transfers every month. International law enforcement agencies would like to stop criminal use of *hawala*. But closing down these money transfer operations would threaten the well-being of Somalis who depend on remittances for living expenses, schooling, health care, and flight from war or famine.<sup>250, 251, 252</sup>

## Ethnic Groups

The Somali are one of the Eastern Cushitic peoples of the Horn of Africa, related to the Oromo in Ethiopia, the Afar in Djibouti, the Beja in Sudan, and the Reendille and Boni in Kenya.<sup>253</sup> Somalis are often described as a linguistically, culturally, and religiously homogenous people, the majority of whom trace their lineage to a shared founding father. But the emphasis on lineage as the organizing principle of social life also marks differences among Somalis—in dialects, traditions, and interpretations of Islam—which trumps ethnic solidarity.<sup>254, 255, 256</sup> Somalis divide themselves into two groups. The nomadic, herding Samaale are dominant in the north but are present throughout the country and make up three-quarters of the Somali population. The more settled, farming Sab are concentrated in the river regions of the south.<sup>257</sup> Samaale belong to one of four major nomadic clans: Dir, Daarood, Isaaq, or Hawiye, who together make up roughly three-fourths of the population. Sab belong to one of two agricultural clans: Digil or Rahanwiin, and are perhaps a fifth of the population.<sup>258</sup> (Some sources report that *sab* means “ignoble,” and that Rahanwiin and Digil clan members consider the name Sab derogatory.)<sup>259, 260</sup> A few ethnic Somalis (less than 1%) fall outside these clan relationships and are often engaged in low-status occupations (leather and metal workers, hunters, barbers, and circumcisers).<sup>261, 262, 263</sup>



*Somali nomads on a gravel road near Hiiraan, Hirshabelle*  
Flickr / Teseum

Somalis tend to view other ethnic groups in Somalia as lower-class outsiders, even when these groups predate Somali occupation of the territory.<sup>264, 265</sup> Such groups include hunting and foraging peoples like the Eyle, the Boni and a variety of Bantu peoples, some of whose ancestors arrived as slaves.<sup>266</sup> Bantus today suffer discrimination in Somalia because of their darker skin and features similar to peoples of other parts of Africa.<sup>267</sup> Some Somalis trace their lineages to Arab ancestors, which highlights their Muslim religious identity.<sup>268</sup> About 15% of the population in Somalia are nonindigenous peoples, including Arabs, Persians, Indians, Pakistanis, British, and Italians.<sup>269, 270</sup> Many Europeans left the Somali Republic shortly after independence, and most Arabs and Italians have reportedly since departed.<sup>271</sup>



*Bantu children, Jowhar, Hirshabelle*  
Wikimedia / Robbert van der Steeg

# Languages

## Somali



Somali alphabet, known as Osmanya  
Wikimedia / RoboRanks

Somali is spoken by more than 13 million people around the world and has long contributed to a shared, Pan-Somali identity. A branch of the Afro-Asiatic linguistic family that includes Afar (spoken in Djibouti), and Oromo (spoken in Ethiopia), the Somali language has many dialects. Over centuries of contact between Somali and Arabic speakers, and later under colonial rule, some Arabic, English, and Italian words were incorporated into the Somali vocabulary.<sup>272</sup>

Somali dialects fall into three regional groups: Common (or Northern) Somali, Coastal (or Banaadir) Somali, and Central Somali (which includes the Maay and Digil dialects).<sup>273</sup> These dialect groups are associated with the clan families that occupy the regions: for example, the Maay dialect is associated with the Rahanwiin clan of central Somalia.<sup>274</sup> Common Somali, now called Standard Somali, is the most used dialect in local and international broadcasting and written communication.<sup>275, 276</sup> Other dialects vary to such an extent that some linguists consider them different languages, such as the Maay and Garre spoken in central Somalia.<sup>277, 278</sup>

Somali was an unwritten language for much of its history. Although religious scholars occasionally wrote the Somali language in Arabic script, Somalis preferred spoken poetry and memorized recitation well into the 20th century. A modified Latin alphabet became the official orthography (and Somali became the sole official language) in 1972.<sup>279, 280, 281</sup> Subsequent literacy campaigns claimed a tenfold increase in nationwide reading ability; in 2018, Somali literacy was 38%.<sup>282, 283</sup>

## Other Languages

Arabic, the language of Muhammad and the Quran, serves as a unifying element of Somali identity and it is the official second language of the country. Over 2 million Somalis speak Arabic, primarily residents of northern and coastal towns.<sup>284</sup> A large portion of Somali vocabulary comes from Arabic—from old words related to religion and international trade to newer phrases related to modern finance and government. Some Bantu peoples living along the southern coast speak varieties of Swahili or the Bantu language Mushunguli.<sup>285</sup> Until the development of the Somali script, English and Italian were the languages of the government. Today, a small percentage of Somalis still speak Italian, and a growing number speak English.<sup>286</sup>



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# Cultural Orientation | Somali

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## Chapter 1 | Assessment

1. Somalia is located in a geographic area known as the Cape of Africa.
2. The desire to unite Somali communities and those in surrounding countries has been a problematic foreign policy for Somalia.
3. English is the official second language of Somalia.
4. Somalia's central government has been unable to exert control much beyond Mogadishu.
5. Fish is Somalia's main export.

*Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False*



Children with prayer boards, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

## Chapter 2 | Somali Cultural Orientation

# Religion

## Introduction

In Somalia, religion pervades daily life. Pre-Islamic spiritual traditions influence household rituals, such as incense-burning to keep away evil spirits and annual festivities to celebrate a clan ancestor.<sup>287</sup> Children learn Quranic verses at an early age, and a large number of Somalis memorize the entire Quran. Mosques are found in major cities and rural villages. Nomadic Somalis rely on traveling teachers or *wadaddo* (Somali local religious specialists) to lead prayers, perform marriages, bless livestock, and resolve disputes.<sup>288</sup> A *wadaddo's* learning and power are derived from Islamic teachings and their knowledge of astronomy, medicine, and psychology.<sup>289, 290</sup>

Islam is central to Somali identity. In the words of a Somali elder, any non-Somali “would not be a good Muslim.” Like Jews and Christians, Somalis are “people of the book.” They are said to be descended from Samaal, the biblical Ham, son of Noah.<sup>291, 292</sup> But as Muslims, Somalis believe that Allah’s final revelations were to Muhammad, the last Prophet, as set down in the Quran. Virtually all ethnic Somalis are Sunni Muslim, mostly of the Shafi’i sect, one of the four major Sunni schools of sharia (Islamic law).<sup>293, 294, 295</sup> Sunni Islam is the major branch of Islam worldwide, in which the community of believers (not a hierarchy of leaders) is “the locus of religious authority.”<sup>296</sup> Small communities of Christians and people of other faiths keep a low profile in Somalia.<sup>297, 298, 299</sup>

## Islam

The word Islam means “to submit” or “surrender.” Islam, like Judaism and Christianity before it, is a monotheistic religion and recognizes the validity of the Old and New Testaments. Muslims believe that the final and culminating revelations were made to Muhammad, the last prophet. The Quran, the Muslim’s sacred text, is considered the record of God’s revelations made to Muhammad. Muslims worship Allah directly, without the intermediary of clergy.<sup>300, 301</sup>

Islam most likely came to Somalia through Persian and Arab merchants who founded settlements along the Somali coast 1,000 years ago. Before Islam reached the land inhabited by Somalis, quarrels within the Islamic community over the succession to leadership had led to its split into two groups: the Sunni (orthodox) and the Shia (from Shiat Ali, or partisans of Ali as the legitimate successor to Muhammad).<sup>302</sup>



Ali and his sons, Qajar Dynasty, 19th century depiction Wikimedia

## Sufism

The practice of Islam has been influenced by Sufism in Somalia. Sufism (*tasawwuf*) is an Islamic mystic philosophy that spread through the Somali population in the 15th century. Common practices include visitations to saints’ tombs, veneration of the Prophet Muhammad and members of his family, and the recitation of litanies (dhikr). Sufism has given Somalis space to incorporate aspects of their pre-Islamic customs, such as prayers for rain.<sup>303</sup>

Three sects of Sufism are common in Somalia: Qadiriyyah, Ahmadiyyah, and Salihyyah.<sup>304</sup> Sufism emphasizes introspection, self-purification, and attaining a spiritual closeness with God by following a correct path (“*tariqa*” in Arabic, “*dariqa*” in Somali), typically one of self-denial and trance-inducing ritual.<sup>305, 306</sup> Religious brotherhoods of Sufi dervishes are known as *tariqas*. Membership in *tariqa* brotherhoods (and in other religious groups) is often determined by clan membership. Conversely, the religious brotherhood becomes a family for a new member in both a practical and a spiritual sense.<sup>307</sup> *Tariqa* leaders become known as sheiks, a title of respect that reflects their advanced Islamic learning and distinguishes them from *wadaddo*. Somalis believe that *tariqa* leaders (indeed, all legitimate leaders) have *baraka*, a power to grant



divine blessings or bring harm to others. Tariqa leaders (as well as exceptionally pious individuals or clan founders) may become saints after they die, and their tombs may become pilgrimage destinations.<sup>308</sup>

Do you seek blessing from Sheik Abdul-Kadir (saint)?		
Somali (Sufi):	sheyKh ‘abdul-kaadir ma ka doo’aaysataa?	Do you seek blessing from Sheik Abdul-Kadir (saint)?
Visitor:	maaya, mahadsanid	No, thank you.
Somali (Sufi):	waa tahaay	Okay.

*Exchange 1*

In central and southern Somalia, tariqa brotherhoods have created religious communities of work, learning, and worship known as *jamaat* (unit).<sup>309</sup> Historically, many *jamaats* were safe havens for persecuted groups, such as freed slaves or ethnic Somalis from other countries. Somali Sufis will make annual pilgrimages (*siyaaro*, “visit”) to the shrines of Sufi saints or sheiks.<sup>310</sup> Al-Shabaab views the beliefs of Sufi tariqa as superstition and the worship of saints as adoration, which is considered heresy. Many Sufis were killed in the early 1990s, by warlords and their militias, and, since 2013, by al-Shabaab. The group has desecrated more than a thousand Sufi shrines in southern Somalia since 2006.<sup>311</sup> Though Sufis are typically apolitical, a moderate Sufi Islamist group, Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama’a, formed in 1991 to combat militant Islamism in the country.<sup>312, 313</sup> In 2019, they were integrated into the Somali state security forces.<sup>314</sup>

### *Salafism, Wahhabism, and Somali Salihyyah Sufism*

The Arabic word *salaf* refers to the “righteous ancestors of Islam,” including the Prophet Muhammad and the two generations that followed him. Modern Salafism developed as a return to the Quran, the Sunna (descriptions of Islamic practices based on Muhammad’s example), and the exemplary behavior of the ancestral *salaf*.<sup>315</sup> In recent centuries, different kinds of Salafism—liberal and conservative, peaceful and militant—have developed throughout the Middle East.<sup>316, 317</sup> In what is today Saudi Arabia, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1766) launched a conservative version of Salafism, called Wahhabism.<sup>318</sup> Al-Wahhab called for the elimination of Shia and Sufi Islam as deviant forms of the faith and advocated the strict implementation of sharia. Influenced by al-Wahhab, Sufi leader Muhammad Salih established a new order on the Arabian Peninsula that incorporated Wahhabist teachings. Somali Islamic scholars who traveled to the area for study, encountered the Salihyyah Sufi order and brought back its Salafist-Wahhabist ideas to Somalia. In the early 20th century, Salihyyah Sufism inspired the warrior-poet Muhamed Abdullah Hassan, sometimes called the father of Somali nationalism, to resist British, Italian, and Ethiopian colonization.<sup>319</sup> In the latter half of the 20th century, several grassroots Somali Wahhabist and Salafist groups emerged, giving rise to the 1990s group al-Ittihad al-Islamiya (AIAI).<sup>320</sup> AIAI eventually became the Islamic Courts Union and al-Shabaab.<sup>321, 322</sup>



Muhamed Abdullah Hassan, illustration circa 1928 Wikimedia / Douglas James Jardine (1888-1946)

## Religion and Government

Somali common law, known as *heer*, governs social relationships at the clan level. The traditions of *heer* predate Islam. They include solutions for land disputes and compensation for the injury or death of a clan member. Sharia has shaped Somali governance for about 1,000 years, and is the source of most family law, including laws that govern polygyny and divorce.<sup>323</sup> At independence, *heer* and sharia were combined with colonial legal practices from Britain and Italy. The constitution of 1961 guaranteed freedom of religion but declared the Somali Republic an Islamic state. Sharia became applicable in civil and minor penal matters as well as family law, and *heer* continues to resolve the payment of *diya* and land and water disputes.<sup>324</sup> After military ruler Mohamed Siad Barre came to power in 1969, he claimed that Islam was compatible with his implementation of socialism. His unified civil code limited the application of sharia and *heer*, and later eliminated *diya* payment. His regime dismantled many religious groups and exiled, imprisoned, or executed a number of religious leaders.<sup>325, 326</sup>

Since the fall of the Somali Republic in 1991, clan membership and common law prevail in some regions.<sup>327</sup> In others, sharia enforcers have become a welcome, if harsh, source of local policing. Militant groups aggressively adopt differing interpretations of Islam, creating an arena for discord.<sup>328, 329, 330</sup> Tensions between different groups are common, and many Somalis do not share al-Shabaab's extreme vision of an Islamic state.<sup>331</sup>

## Religious Conventions

Mainstream Islamic religious practice in Somalia emphasizes Islam's core tenets. The most important of these are the Five Pillars of Islam, a set of essential beliefs and rites of the Islamic faith. The first and foundational pillar requires sincerely reciting the *shahada*, or Islamic creed: "Ash-hadu anna la ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasoul Allah" (I testify that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God). Somalis who do not speak Arabic, may know the *shahada*. The remaining pillars include: performing a ritual prayer five times per day; giving alms (money or other assets) to the needy, traditionally through an income tax; fasting during the holy month of Ramadan; and making a pilgrimage to the Islamic holy city of Mecca.<sup>332</sup> Muslims believe in a day of judgement when Allah will determine whether each individual will spend their afterlife in heaven or hell.<sup>333</sup>



Hajj pilgrims, Mecca, Saudi Arabia  
Wikimedia / Adli Wahid CC BY SA 4.0

Settled and nomadic Somalis conformed to Muslim requirements for ritual purity, such as washing after contact with unclean things. Settled Somalis are more likely to observe Islamic requirements than are nomads. Devout Somalis, and others who value the title of hajj (pilgrim) for its prestige, might make the pilgrimage to Mecca, but many more visit the tombs of the local saints.<sup>334, 335</sup>

## Prayer

Islam heavily influences a person's daily routine in Somalia. Foremost among daily rituals, Muslims are required to perform a series of prayers, known as *namaz* (the second pillar of Islam). Traditionally, *salat* (prayers) are performed at five approximate times of the day: before dawn, midmorning, midafternoon, at sundown, and after sundown.<sup>336, 337</sup> Muslims are called to prayer at each *salat* time by the *muezzin*, who typically announces the call to prayer (the *azaan* or *adhan*) from the minaret of the local mosque.<sup>338, 339</sup> Daily prayers may be performed alone or with other Muslims at mosques. (Al-Shabaab members tend to be reliably aggressive after each of the five daily prayers.) On Fridays, the Muslim community meets at the local mosque to participate in group prayer. All prayers must be offered in the direction of Mecca, the holy city of Islam in Saudi Arabia.<sup>340</sup> As the Sabbath is observed on Friday in the Islamic world, the weekend becomes Thursday and Friday with the 5-day work week starting on Saturday.<sup>341, 342</sup>



Eid al-Fitr prayers, Kismaayo, Jubbaland  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

Unique to Somalia is the prayer ritual of *roobdoon* (rain-making). When their lands are threatened by drought, Somalis perform *roobdoon*, which may involve public readings of the Quran, animal sacrifice, and food donations to the poor. Other motivations for group prayer and ritual are preparation for battle or travel and preventing disease.<sup>343, 344</sup>

What is this procession about?		
Visitor:	maHaa halkan ka jira?	What is this procession about?
Local:	manta waa robdon	Today is <i>roobdoon</i> .
Visitor:	mahadsanid	Thank you.

Exchange 2

## Cleansing

Prior to prayer, Muslims are required to perform *wudu* (a ritual cleansing). This purification process typically involves washing one's hands, face, arms, neck, and feet, as well as rinsing the mouth and nose.<sup>345</sup> Cleansing is not solely intended for purposes of physical cleanliness—although this, too, is important. Rather, the rite is meant to spiritually and mentally prepare the participant to perform a holy action in a pure and concentrated state. A Muslim can break this state of ritual purity through several acts, including any bodily function, and, for many Muslims, simply touching a person of the opposite sex. The necessity of performing multiple daily prayers encourages Muslims to maintain ritual purity throughout the day. Mosques often have facilities where Muslims can cleanse prior to prayer.<sup>346, 347</sup> When water is unavailable, Muslims may perform ablution with clean, dry sand.<sup>348</sup>

## Care and Treatment of the Quran

The printed Quran is regarded as holy, and desecrating a copy is a serious offense. As such, Islam's holy book should be treated with respect. Do not touch the Quran with dirty hands. Keep the Quran off the floor—if you are sitting on the floor, hold the Quran above your lap or waist. When not in use, protect the Quran with a dustcover and do not place anything on top of it. Muslims keep Quranic texts on the highest shelf of a bookcase. Finally, keep Qurans out of latrines. Old or damaged copies can be properly disposed of in one of two ways. Burning is acceptable if the process is conducted with respect. Texts should not be burned with trash or other items. The second method of disposal is burial. Before burying the text, it should be wrapped in something pure and then buried where people do not walk.<sup>349, 350, 351</sup>

Other texts sacred to Muslims include the Hadith, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, and the Sunnah, which describes the practices of Islam by way of Muhammad's example.<sup>352</sup>



*Men and sons read from the Quran, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

## Religion and Gender

Men dominate women in Somali society, but Somali patrilineal lineage (clan membership through one's father, called *tol* in Somali) and patriarchy (masculine power and authority) are not entirely derived from Islam. It is not always easy to separate Islam from other cultural ideas that shape gender identities, behaviors, and relations in Somalia. The Quran does not prohibit education for girls or bar women from earning an income.<sup>353, 354</sup> Sharia law permits women's participation in national political public assemblies and conferences (at least according to some Somali sheiks).<sup>355</sup> Nevertheless, Somalis may believe that customs harmful to women, such as female genital mutilation (FGM), are justified because they are intrinsically Muslim. Groups like al-Shabaab may claim that Islam grants men control over women.<sup>356, 357</sup> Since the fall of the Somali Republic in 1991, the rise of extreme Islamism has resulted in more conservative behavior among many Somali women.<sup>358</sup>

## Religious Events and Holidays

Festivities in Somalia are associated with religious, social, and seasonal events. Seasonal events have gained Islamic significance over the centuries. Many religious festivals are connected to the saints recognized by Somali Muslims: saints of Islam, local Somali saints, and founders of different clan lineages.<sup>359</sup>

### *Muharram*

It is believed that on the first day of Muharram, the new year of the lunar Muslim calendar, an angel shakes a tree at the boundary between earth and paradise. Each leaf bears an individual Muslim's name, and the falling leaves indicate the individuals who will die during the year.<sup>360</sup>

## Maulid al-Nabi

Somalis celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad on the 12th day of the 3rd month of the lunar calendar. Activities during this and other saints' birthdays might include animal sacrifices, requests for divine help, and storytelling.<sup>361, 362</sup>

## Ramadan

Ramadan is the ninth and holiest month of the Islamic calendar. During this time, observant Muslims fulfill the third pillar of Islam—fasting. During Ramadan, Muslims demonstrate their piety and devotion to the Islamic faith. Somali Muslims abstain from food, drink, tobacco, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset for the entire month. (While fasting is obligatory during Ramadan, fasting is also practiced among Somalis at any time of the year they want more spiritual purification.)<sup>363</sup> The sick, pregnant and breast-feeding women, and children may be exempt, but others who cannot keep the fast are expected to fast later.<sup>364</sup> A common greeting during the first few days of Ramadan is “Ramadan mubarak” (Have a blessed Ramadan).<sup>365, 366</sup>

In addition to fasting, many people perform extra prayers during Ramadan and take care to avoid any wrongdoing. During this time of piety, Muslims make charitable contributions to the homeless or to an established organization like a mosque or the Red Crescent Society (similar to the Red Cross).<sup>367, 368</sup> For that reason, “Ramadam kareem” (generous Ramadan) is also a common greeting.<sup>369, 370</sup>



Somali children study the Quran, Isbahaysiga madrasa, Mogadishu Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

Ramadan alters the usual rhythm of life in Somalia. In general, the pace of life slows considerably and people are released from work early. Meals take place before sunrise and after sunset. The predawn meal, *suhoor* (*sehri*), may consist of porridge (*sareen*, *mishaari*), bananas, or a thin flatbread topped with honey or sugar *laho* (*anjero*).<sup>371, 372</sup> Preparations for *afur* (iftar), the evening breaking of the fast, begin before sunset.<sup>373</sup> Families gather and eat traditional foods such as fritters with cardamom (*bur saliid*), samosas stuffed with onion and lamb or beef (*sambusi*), dates, and fruit.<sup>374, 375</sup>

Non-Muslims should avoid eating and drinking in public during fasting hours. To eat or drink during fasting hours is considered disrespectful and rude. The rigorous demands of the daytime fast may affect some more than others; people may become more irritable or fatigued. Traffic accidents tend to increase during Ramadan (especially at dusk) due to a combination of hunger, dehydration, and exhaustion.<sup>376</sup> Al-Shabaab is more likely to attempt acts of terrorism and militancy in Somalia during the Ramadan period.<sup>377, 378, 379</sup>

## Eid

Eid means “festival” in Arabic, and Eid al-Fitr (The Feast of the End of the Fast) marks the end of Ramadan. Muslims celebrate the end of the 29 or 30 days of fasting with a large, multiday feast with family and

friends.<sup>380, 381</sup> Somalis begin Eid celebrations by attending communal dawn prayers at outdoor locations or in mosques.<sup>382</sup> Throughout the three days of Eid al-Fitr, Somalis visit relatives and neighbors and accept sweets as they move from house to house. Children are given gifts and money.<sup>383, 384</sup> People exchange greetings of “Eid Mubarak” (Blessed Eid).<sup>385, 386</sup> More well-off Somalis give food donations (*zakat*) to the poor during an annual public charity drive, *Zakatul Fitr*.<sup>387</sup> In al-Shabaab-controlled areas, militants have been known to forcibly take *zakat* from people.<sup>388</sup>



Eid morning prayers, Baidoa, South West State  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

One of the holiest days in Islam, Eid al-Adha (The Feast of Sacrifice), celebrates the 12th month of the Islamic calendar. It traditionally marks the end of the Muslim pilgrimage, or hajj, to Mecca, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan. The festival commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah. To commemorate the story, locals slaughter a sheep or goat that is then cooked and used as a basis for a feast among family and friends. The day’s celebrations are characterized by early morning prayers and spending time with family and friends.<sup>389, 390, 391</sup> Somalis also visit the graves of relatives and give food to the less fortunate.<sup>392</sup>

## Mosques

Somalis use the Arabic word for mosque: *masjid*.<sup>393</sup> Although the specific design of mosques varies, all mosques typically include several elements. Most have four walls. The *qibla* is the western wall, facing Mecca. In the *qibla* is a small niche called the *mihrab*, which helps the faithful identify the proper direction in which to face during prayers. To the right of the *mihrab* stands a pulpit, or *minbar*, where the imam stands while giving services. Mosques also often have a minaret from which the calls to daily prayers are issued. Unlike other East African mosques, ancient Somali city mosques have minarets, which show a stronger Arabic influence.<sup>394</sup> Larger mosques may have an ablution fountain in the center of the courtyard (*sahan*), where Muslims may conduct ritual washing before prayers.<sup>395, 396</sup> Mosques are important community centers, housing schools and areas for worship.<sup>397</sup> The first women’s mosque in Somalia was established in Gabiley, Somaliland, in the 1970s.<sup>398</sup>



Mosque, Berbera, Somaliland  
Flickr / John Pavelka

## Behavior in Mosques

Mosques are sacred spaces, and they should be respected as such. Foreigners should ask permission to enter a mosque. If prayers are in progress, especially Friday prayers, visitors should refrain from visiting the mosque. Public modesty in dress and behavior is highly valued in Somalia, even among men. Clothing should always be loose fitting and free of images of living creatures. As a rule, the more rural the region, the more one should be covered. For men, pants are preferred, but shorts that cover the knees are acceptable. Shirts should have sleeves no shorter than a standard T-shirt.<sup>399, 400</sup> Once inside the mosque, non-Muslims should not touch books or walls (especially the *qibla*).<sup>401, 402</sup>

Under normal, noncombat circumstances, shoes should be removed at the doorway and placed in the designated area. Turn off cell phones and observe photography restrictions. Visitors must refrain from eating or drinking inside the mosque. Do not touch the walls or shrines or speak inside mosques unless spoken to, and then, respond in a whisper. When people are praying, avoid interrupting them. Similarly, do not walk in front of people who are praying; doing so is considered to invalidate their prayers.<sup>403</sup>

Mosques have separate worship areas for men and women.<sup>404</sup> Somali women wear a head scarf or veil to mosque. Men are not required to cover their head but may wear a small cap (called a *benadiry kufia* in Somali) to Friday prayers.<sup>405</sup> Unless ordered to do so, never take a search dog into a mosque. Many Muslims consider dogs unclean animals. Taking a dog into a mosque would cause great offense.<sup>406</sup>

Would you permit me to enter the mosque?		
Soldier:	ma ee oglaan kartaa eenaan so galo masaajidka?	Would you permit me to enter the mosque?
Local:	maaya, muslim o keli-aa baa lo oguliya	No, It is only for Muslims.

Exchange 3

Non-Muslims can enter a mosque but should obtain permission before doing so. Contact the imam (a religious elder), a sheik, or another person in charge of the premises. That person might say “Ha ga-lin” (Do not enter) or “Muslim oo keli ah!” (Only Muslims can enter!)

When Sunnis pray, they begin by standing up straight and placing their hands on their abdomen. (Shia Muslims begin praying by placing their hands on their sides.)<sup>407</sup> You may see men handling what look like rosary beads, but this does not mean that they are praying. Somali men, like Arab men of all religions, carry these prayer beads (*tusbah*).<sup>408, 409</sup>



Man with prayer beads, Merca, Lower Shabelle, South West State Wikimedia / AMISOM Public Information

Would you permit me to enter the mosque?		
Soldier:	ma ee oglaan kartaa eenaan so galo masaajidka?	Would you permit me to enter the mosque?
Local:	haa, laakeen marka hore kabaaha iska seeb	Yes, but you must remove your shoes.
Soldier:	mahadsanid	Thank you.

*Exchange 4*



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# Cultural Orientation | Somali

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## Chapter 2 | Assessment

1. As an Islamic state, Somalia operates exclusively under sharia law.
2. Men and women pray in separate areas of a mosque.
3. Somalis are said to be descended from Samaal, the biblical Ham, son of Noah.
4. Somalis believe that tariqa religious leaders have *baraka*, the spiritual power to grant blessings or bring harm.
5. Eid al-Adha is a sacred spring believed to have been visited by Abraham.

*Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. True; 5. False*



*Carrying water and herding goats, Jowhar, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

## Chapter 3 | Somali Cultural Orientation

# Traditions

## Introduction

Many Somali traditions are related to clans and associations with the land. Somalis are mostly rural dwellers, primarily nomadic herders, although some are settled agropastoralists who engage in mixed farming and herding. When towns and other permanent settlements emerged, traditions of communal land and property rights and worship developed. Farmers and nomadic pastoralists developed market trade and social events related to the seasons. Nomadic pastoralism encouraged habits of self-reliance and frontier justice. Somali nomadic pastoral clans (the Dir, Daarood, Isaaq, and Hawiye) came to view themselves as freer, braver, and superior to the settled agropastoral clans (the Digil and Rahanwiin).<sup>410</sup> Yet the six clans together placed themselves above outsiders—those excluded from clan membership by occupation (leather and metal workers, barbers, circumcisers), ethnicity (Bantu, or people of the Gosha), or a history of slavery.<sup>411, 412, 413</sup>



In contemporary Somalia, people who look different suffer discrimination. Because these people are unarmed and unrelated to a major clan, they have been especially vulnerable to the violence of Somalia's long civil war.<sup>414</sup> Somalis are mistrustful of outsiders, particularly white people, who they associate with colonialism.<sup>415</sup> It is best to be cautious in any interaction. Somali loyalty will generally remain with their ethnic group or clan above the interests of an outsider.<sup>416</sup>

## Honor and Values

Somalis value freedom, equality, loyalty, generosity, and the wisdom of tradition.<sup>417</sup> They respect strength and often challenge others to test their limits. Somalis are a proud people; saving face is very important to them, so indirectness and humor are often used in conversation. They are also able to see the humor in a situation and to laugh at themselves.<sup>418</sup> In Somali society, personal freedom and equality are constrained by family and clan loyalty.<sup>419</sup>

Many Somali values reflect Arab culture. It is difficult to say whether Arab notions about family honor, patrilineality, and patriarchy were introduced into Somalia or whether similar Somali ideas already existed. Somalis live by the saying: "My brother and I against my half-brother, my brother and I against my father, my father's household against my uncle's household, our two households (my uncle's and mine) against the rest of the immediate kin, the immediate kin against non-immediate members of the clan, my clan against other clans, and, finally, my nation and I against the world."<sup>420</sup> Close family members traditionally give help and receive protection in times of trouble.<sup>421</sup>



Children in the marketplace, Burco, Somaliland  
Flickr / YoTuT

## Somali Customary Law (*Heer*)

Besides determining a Somali's origin, social standing, and economic status, clannism permeates nearly every aspect of decision-making and power-sharing in Somalia. Clan relationships are regulated by an ancient and highly developed system of customary law: *heer*.<sup>422</sup> Somali *heer* are unwritten agreements, passed down orally from one generation to the next. *Heer* are brokered by clans living in the same region and administered by elders (sing. *oday*; pl. *odayal*). Because of the absence of a well-functioning state or judiciary system in Somalia, *heer* plays an important role in governing communities.<sup>423, 424</sup>

*Heer* between clans originally concerned the sharing of resources, especially grazing and access to water among pastoralists. Today, most *heer* are about collective defense and security, settlement of grievances and disputes, political cohesion, and provisions for crimes.<sup>425</sup>

Family and clan relationships are full of conflict that may lead to violence, including murder and revenge killing. *Heer* helps mediate conflicts and maintain peaceful relationships among Somalia's clans. The

traditions of *heer* make all members of a clan-based group collectively responsible for the actions of an individual. A group may seek to avenge a member’s murder by killing someone—anyone—from the enemy clan. *Heer* also provides a way to end revenge killing. The enemy group may end the dispute by paying *diya*, or “blood money” compensation, to members of the injured group.<sup>426, 427</sup>

The rules and obligations of *heer* are open to interpretation and can thus adapt and evolve as circumstances require. Attitudes among Somalis toward *heer* customary law are mixed. Some see it as extra-legal, biased against women, and executed by illiterate elders, while others acknowledge that without it, Somalia would fall into true anarchy.<sup>428</sup>

## Rifles



Soldiers march with rifles and ammunition, Baardheere, Jubbaland Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

A Somali man is traditionally a *waranleh* (warrior).<sup>429</sup> For centuries, Somali men have fought over water, camels, women, and land. Since the collapse of the republic, a generation of Somalis has grown up in an era of lawlessness.<sup>430</sup> Thus, many Somalis are adept at close-range rifle combat. Despite a UN arms embargo, most families own at least one rifle.<sup>431, 432, 433</sup>

In the following exchange, the soldier asks the Somali to surrender his weapon temporarily while on coalition grounds or passing through a checkpoint. But a Somali man should not be expected to give up his rifle willingly.

He owns his rifle to protect his home and family, and keeping it is a question of honor. He will not give it up unless an agreement is reached through consensus.<sup>434, 435</sup>

Are you carrying weapons?		
Soldier:	hub meeyaad sidataa?	Are you carrying weapons?
Local:	haa, waan sitaa	Yes, I am.
Soldier:	waa inaad eeska deebtaa hubka, kadib sogal	Please surrender your weapon, and you may enter.

Exchange 5

## Patriarchy

Somali culture places greater value on males than on females. A girl’s birth is celebrated with one animal’s sacrifice, a boy’s birth with two. Clan membership is patrilineal or acquired through the father’s line. Revenge killing is rare for a murdered woman, but obligatory for a murdered man. *Diya* compensation for the death of a male is twice the amount paid for a female.<sup>436</sup> Some Somali traditions result in more harm to females than to males. Almost all Somali children are circumcised, but girls undergo infibulation,

an extreme form of FGM. The procedure's origins are disputed but may be related to traditions of family honor.<sup>437</sup>

## Codes of Politeness

### Greetings

People are greeted by name and, if they are related, by a word that shows the relationship (uncle, cousin, etc.). Older people or religious leaders are addressed by a title that comes before the rest of the greeting; it is also polite to stand up to greet them.<sup>438, 439</sup>



*Restaurant owner, Baardheere, Jubbaland  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

Common casual greetings in Somali are “Sideed tahay?” (How are you?) or “Nabad” (Peace). When greeting someone older, or in a formal situation, it is often more appropriate to use the traditional Islamic greeting, “As salaamu ‘alaykum” (Peace be upon you). The correct response is “Wa ‘alaykum a salaam” (And upon you be peace).<sup>440</sup>

Peace be upon you.		
Visitor:	as salaamu ‘alaykum	Peace be upon you.
Local:	wa ‘alaykum a salaam	And upon you be peace.
Visitor:	maHaa la sheygey?	How are you (all)?
Local:	waa la fee’an yahey, mahadsanid	Fine, thank you.

*Exchange 6*

Good morning.		
Visitor:	subaH wanagsin	Good morning.
Local:	subaH wanagsin	Good morning.
Visitor:	maanta maalin wanagsin bey nokon dontaa	Today is going to be a good day.
Local:	waan racheyneynaa inshaa alaah	God willing.

*Exchange 7*

People may also say “Is ka warran?” (What’s the news?) or “Maha la shegay?” (What are people saying?). These phrases are used to mean “Hello” and “How are you?”. Greetings are followed by friendly questions about how the person has been or the weather and then an exchange of information.<sup>441, 442</sup>

Good afternoon.		
Visitor:	galab wanagsin	Good afternoon.
Local:	galab wanagsin	Good afternoon.
Visitor:	'aawaa ma habeyn kaboo bey nokon dontaa?	Is tonight going to be a cool night?
Local:	haa, waa ilaah mahedees	Yes, thank God.

*Exchange 8*



*U.S. Marine Corps Brig. Gen. David J. Furness and Somalia Ambassador Francisco Caetano Jose Madeira, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle United States Department of Defense*

Handshakes are a typical greeting between men. Men shake hands with each other three times—and may nod or bow slightly during the handshake—before putting that hand to their heart. Women shake hands but may kiss family members on the cheek or hug. In some southern areas, women may kiss the hand they have shaken.<sup>443</sup> People generally do not touch those of the opposite sex during greetings unless they are a close family member. A man should wait until a woman extends her hand before extending his own hand for a handshake.<sup>444</sup>

After greeting someone unfamiliar, it is common to ask the person's name, and once names are exchanged, locals will typically inquire about clan membership. This allows them to know exactly where they fit into society and what their responsibilities are to each other.<sup>445</sup> In rural areas, it is common to ask about someone's lineage directly, but in an urban area it is more polite to identify it through indirect questions, such as asking about the person's home region.<sup>446, 447</sup>

What's your name?		
Visitor:	adeegoo maga'aa?	What's your name?
Local:	maga'eygu waa Hasan	My name is Hassan.
Visitor:	waan koo faraHsan-ahaay eenaan koo barto, Hassan	I'm pleased to meet you, Hassan.
Local:	aneegana seedo kaley!	Me too!

*Exchange 9*

### *Appropriate Language*

Many Somalis are familiar with American slang words. For this reason, one should avoid using obscene or indecent language within earshot of Somalis. They will understand and take offense.<sup>448</sup>

It is forbidden to use foul language in public.		
Local:	waa mamnoo' inaad mer fegaare-aa hadar 'aay-aa koo hadasho	It is forbidden to use foul language in public.
Visitor:	sheygitaan-kaaga waad koo mahadsan tahaay	Thank you for telling me.

Exchange 10

## Social Interaction and Communication Style

The spoken word is highly valued, and Somalis strive to have a strong command of speech. Conversations begin with small talk, which gives Somalis time to make a first impression. Telling jokes is a welcome part of conversation.<sup>449</sup> By using humor, Somalis keep their conversations light, thereby preventing someone from losing face.<sup>450</sup> Somalis appreciate oral poetry, stories, speeches, and songs. Conversations are typically sprinkled with proverbs, poems, and indirect references.<sup>451, 452, 453</sup>



Somali men, Belet Weyne, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / Frank Keillor

Somalis use broad gestures to emphasize speech. Gestures incorporate the full hand, not a single finger. Quickly twisting an open hand outward means “nothing” or “no.” Snapping fingers may mean “long ago” or “quickly.” A thumb placed under the chin indicates fullness.<sup>454</sup> Many common American gestures, such as making the OK sign or thumbs-up sign, are considered offensive.<sup>455</sup>

### Eye Contact

In American culture, breaking eye contact may be understood as insincerity. But in Somalia, breaking eye contact is a cultural trait that does not imply rudeness, ill will, or concealment of the truth. It is a sign of respect.<sup>456</sup> It is never appropriate for a male to stare at Somali women.<sup>457, 458</sup>

### Touching

During conversation, Somalis of the same sex stand close together, less than an arm's length apart, and they often display friendly affection in public. Somali men may embrace each other, place their hands on each other's shoulders, and walk down the street holding hands. Somali women may exchange similar gestures of affection. This is a sign of kinship or friendship.<sup>459</sup> Somali society has zero tolerance for homosexuality, which is seen as a severe offense that is punishable by death.<sup>460</sup> In Somalia, the subject of sexuality should be avoided entirely.<sup>461</sup>

## Male-Female Interactions

Somalis of the opposite sex do not touch in public. Married couples may walk side by side, but holding hands is avoided.<sup>462</sup> Foreign nationals should not display affection with members of the opposite sex in public and should maintain 2–3 steps distance between them.<sup>463</sup> Men in particular should be careful not to touch or get too close to Somali women.<sup>464</sup>

Adults commonly socialize apart, men in tea or coffee shops and women in one another's homes.<sup>465</sup> Young men and women meet at traditional gatherings and events, such as weddings and harvest festivals. Men and women work in separate spheres. From an early age, girls help their mothers with housework and have little time to play or attend school with their brothers.<sup>466</sup>

## Hospitality and Gifts

Women often visit with one another, either in the home or the market. Somalis visit each other in the home on occasions such as holidays, weddings, or the birth of a child. Before entering a family compound, a visitor will announce his or her presence and wait outside to avoid surprising the family. In cities, a favorite time for visiting is late in the afternoon, when work is done and it is not too hot to walk around. In rural areas, people prefer to wait until the evening, after farm chores are completed and the animals have settled down.<sup>467, 468</sup>



*AMISOM officer presents a gift to Somalia Human Rights Minister, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle* Wikimedia / AMISOM Public Information

When Somalis have a visitor, they do not discuss anything with the guest while the person is outside or standing. The guest is asked to enter the home and be seated. Guests are always offered a refreshment (typically tea). To avoid giving offense, it is important to graciously accept a small amount of whatever is offered and to say “mahadsanid” (thank you).<sup>469, 470</sup>

While an American host may offer a plate of food and allow guests to serve themselves, a Somali host serves the food using the right hand. It is customary to accept what is served with the right hand. In fact, the right hand should always be used in any sort of interaction involving hands. According to Islamic norms, the left hand is reserved for personal hygiene and prayer purification.<sup>471, 472</sup>

When a Somali family invites someone into their home and offers a seat, the person should not sit with crossed legs. To do so is considered rude. In general, the bottoms of shoes or feet are never shown. Doing so is considered an insult. If you are sitting on a chair, place your feet flat on the floor, or if you are sitting on the floor, fold them under you.<sup>473, 474</sup>

## Exchanging Gifts

Somalis are not likely to give or expect to receive presents unless there is a special connection between the two parties. Still, it is best to be prepared to give a gift in the event that one is offered. The gift need not be expensive; the recipient will not necessarily open the gift in front of the giver. If given a gift, give a gift in return (at a later date) of slightly lesser value. When bringing a gift, make it a gift for the children.<sup>475</sup>



Somali police officer hands a gift to Ugandan police officer, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

This is for you.		
Local:	adeega ken iskaa leh	This is for you.
Visitor:	ma ahayn inaad ee keyntid	You shouldn't have.
Local:	waa waH iyar	It's just a little thing.
Visitor:	mahadsanid	Thank you.

### Exchange 11

If someone admires something a Somali owns, the person may want to give the article to the admirer. Therefore, care should be taken with compliments. If this rule is forgotten and a possession is subsequently offered, it is appropriate to say “mahadsanid” and politely refuse. A Somali may offer the item two more times. It is best to refuse, politely and graciously, all three times.<sup>476, 477</sup>

Your shirt is nice.		
Visitor:	shaakaagu woo fee'aa yahey	Your shirt is nice.
Local:	fadlan eegaa ogolo, adeegaa iskaa le	Please accept it, it's yours.
Visitor:	maaya, mahadsanid, adeegaa iskaa le	No, thank you, it's yours.

### Exchange 12

## Food

Religion influences Somali dietary practices in a number of ways. The Somali diet consists of vegetables and *halal* meats (“allowable” meat slaughtered in accordance with Islamic food purity standards). All foods of plant origin are *halal*. As Sunni Muslims, Somalis are prohibited from eating pork, drinking alcohol, or smoking cigarettes, which are considered *haram* (forbidden).<sup>478, 479</sup>



Platter of chicken and rice, served Somali-style  
Wikimedia / Naimaisse

Despite 3,000 kilometers of coastline, Somali meals are meat-driven. The country as whole is only slowly considering fish, which nomads have historically looked down on.<sup>480, 481</sup> Even basic Somali cuisine shows a sophisticated understanding of spice (spice mixes, or *xawaash*, vary regionally).<sup>482</sup> For household meals, goat or lamb and sometimes chicken is fried in ghee and spiced with coriander, turmeric, curry, and cumin and eaten with basmati rice for most meals.<sup>483</sup> It is common to eat a raw, sliced banana with the rice.<sup>484, 485</sup> When available, vegetables are woven into meat dishes, such as combining potatoes, carrots, and peas with goat meat and making a stew or a side dish, such as fried cassava.<sup>486</sup> Camel meat is widely available at roadside stands in rural areas.<sup>487</sup> Other common foods include a type of homemade bread called *anjara* or *lahooh* (a large, sweet, spongy pancake); *sambusas* are deep-fried triangular-shaped dumplings usually filled with meat or vegetables. *Xalwo* (halva) is a popular dessert.<sup>488, 489</sup> Fruits such as bananas, dates, mangos, guavas, grapefruits, and papayas are plentiful in season. In some areas, limes are always available.<sup>490, 491</sup>

The word “Somali” is derived from two words that mean, roughly, “milk to self.” Among nomads, milk and meat from camels and goats is the main food available, supplemented with grains bought with money from the sale of animals. Camel milk can be made into several varieties of yogurt.<sup>492, 493</sup> Nomads typically do not eat lunch when they are herding animals and are away from their homes, though they will snack on *otka*, a popular type of jerky made from camel meat that is dried and then fried in butter and *xawaash*.<sup>494, 495</sup>

## Beverages



Somali men gather for tea, Hargeysa, Somaliland  
Wikimedia / Dahir

Sweet, spicy tea with milk is popular in urban settings, and other refreshments, such as fresh mango and guava juice, might also be available. In rural areas, tea or milk is offered. Somalis believe camel milk is the most nutritious of the animal milks they drink, which includes goat and cow. Although infants are breastfed up to the age of two, Somalis also feed camel milk to children. Adults also regularly drink the milk and some Somali adults are apt to point to the tallest members of their families as proof of the tremendous advantage camel milk holds over other milk.<sup>496, 497</sup>

Because Somalis usually drink only black tea, it is not appropriate to ask for coffee when tea is served. Somalis like to make tea with milk and sugar, so it is generally sweet. It is acceptable to ask for more sugar or milk. Somalis signal that they do not want a second cup by moving their cup away from the person who is serving so that it cannot be refilled.<sup>498, 499</sup>



Please have some tea with us.		
Local:	shaa nala 'ab walaal	Please have some tea with us.
Visitor:	aad baad oo mahadsan tahaay walaal	Thank you very much, sir.

Exchange 13

## Khat

Somali men traditionally purchase fresh leaves of the khat (in Somali, *qaad*) plant at morning markets to chew in the afternoon or after an evening meal. The bitter-tasting leaves of the plant, native to the Horn of Africa, are chewed as a stimulant and create feelings of euphoria, suppress appetite, and keep the user awake for hours.<sup>500- 501</sup> In towns and cities, khat cafes (*mafrish*) are popular spots for socializing, drinking tea, and chewing khat.<sup>502</sup> Khat is used in the morning to eradicate the previous afternoon's khat *qaadiro* (hangover).<sup>503, 504</sup> It is a controlled substance (cathinone) in the United States. Do not accept invitations to join a khat party. American service members are prohibited from using khat.<sup>505</sup>



Vendor selling khat, Burao, Somaliland Wikimedia / World66

What is this?		
Visitor:	kanee waa maHaay?	What is this?
Local:	waHaa la yirah-daa Khaat, daadamee	It is called khat, try some.
Visitor:	maaya, mahadsanid	No, thank you.

Exchange 14

## Meals

Among Somalis, the family meal is the norm. Meals are generally cooked by the women, and frying is the most common method of cooking.<sup>506</sup> Food is traditionally served without utensils. A bowl of water is usually provided for washing hands before and after a meal. (On special occasions, Somalis also perfume their hands after the meal.) When eating, families gather around a large common platter set on a table or on a mat on the ground. Somalis use the right hand to eat, refrain from touching their fingers to their lips while eating, and eat from the part of the communal serving bowl that is directly in front of them. Men, women, and children eat separately, and men are usually served first and the women and children eat later. Guests are served larger portions. Overeating is considered impolite and unacceptable.<sup>507, 508</sup>

## Dress Codes

As the climate in Somalia is hot, Somalis cover most of the body from the sun and make clothing from natural materials. Men and women wear loose garments to prevent overheating. Somali men wear colorful, sarong-like *ma'aawii* (a long, colorful piece of cloth wrapped around the waist) and shawls, or western pants and shirts. As Somalia is close to the Arabian Peninsula, some men wear a *khameez*—an ankle-length shirt with long sleeves common among Muslims. They may wrap a colorful turban around their head or wear a *benadiry kufia* (a snug-fitting, embroidered cap, also known as a *taqiyah* in Arabic).<sup>509</sup>

Women's traditional dress varies depending upon region, religion, or marital status. In their daily activities, Somali women usually wear a long stretch of brightly colored cloth tied over one shoulder—the *guntiino* (similar to an Indian sari).<sup>510</sup> Sometimes a matching headscarf (*shash*) or shawl (*garbasaar*) is worn with the *guntiino*. Married women wear head scarves but rarely veil themselves.<sup>511</sup> In cities and rural areas of the north, women are more likely to wear a long cotton or polyester dress (*baati*) with a *garbasaar*.<sup>512, 513</sup>



Young girls wearing *guntiino* and *shash*, Afgoye, South West State Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

For formal occasions, such as weddings or religious celebrations, Somali women wear the *dirac*, a long, silky, and highly decorated dress. It is a more recent style from Djibouti and is similar to a short-sleeved Arabian kaftan dress.<sup>514</sup> Because it is semi-transparent, a petticoat (*gorgorad*) is worn beneath. Women may wear gold necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and rings.<sup>515</sup>

The rise of extreme Islamism, as seen in Wahhabism-influenced al-Shabaab, has resulted in more conservative dress.<sup>516</sup> Somalis in the north and in communities occupied by this insurgent group wear heavier fabrics, darker colors, and more voluminous scarves and shawls. This includes an outdoor dress called a *jilbaab* that covers the body from head to toe, with a *shareer* or niqab that covers the face.<sup>517</sup> Sometimes the *jilbaab* contains the veil as well—similar to a burka.<sup>518, 519</sup>



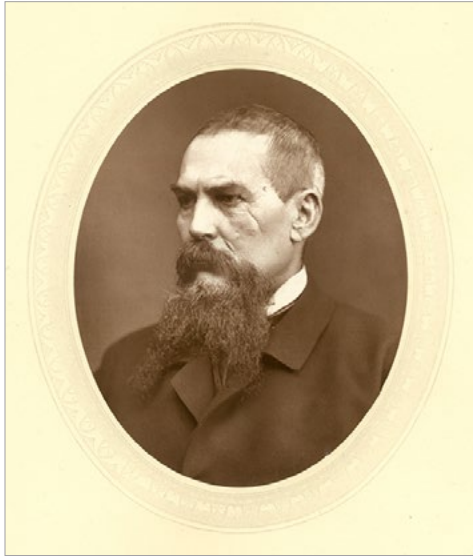
Women wearing *shareer*, Mogadishu, Benaadir, Hirshabelle Wikimedia / AMISOM Public Information

### General Rules of Dress

Conservative attire is highly recommended when visiting Somalia. Men should avoid wearing shorts and should never remove their shirts, even in hot, humid weather. Women should dress in a modest manner that does not attract attention, avoiding tight, revealing clothes like shorts and miniskirts.<sup>520</sup>

## Poetry

Poetry, folk dancing, singing, and the performance of plays are integral to Somali culture. These traditional activities are practiced not only at family and religious celebrations but also at state ceremonies.<sup>521</sup> In particular, oral verse is central to Somali life, and the country has been referred to as a “Nation of Poets.”<sup>522</sup> There are over 30 genres of poetry in Somalia, all of which may be sung. In Somali tradition,



Portrait of Richard Burton, British explorer of Somalia, circa 1854 Wikimedia / Men of Mark

music assumes a secondary role to poetry, and most poets are remembered for their poetry rather than the melodies they created.<sup>523</sup> In times of conflict, poems are used to convey social and political messages. Poetry is used to resolve disputes, to strengthen social ties, to court women or reject a suitor, and for entertainment—there is work poetry, dance poetry, classic poetry, and more.<sup>524, 525, 526</sup>

The English explorer Richard Burton traveled through Somalia in 1854. He noted “The country teems with ‘poets, poetasters, poetitoes, poetaccios’: every man has his recognized position in literature as accurately defined as though he had been reviewed in a century of magazines—the fine ear of this people causing them to take the greatest pleasure in harmonious sounds and poetical expressions, whereas a false quantity or a prosaic phrase excite their violent indignation.”<sup>527, 528</sup>

The clans of the Isaaq of northern Somalia are viewed as the experts in poetry composition.<sup>529</sup> Isaaq poet Mohammad Ibrahim Warsame “Hadraawi” (“the master of speech”) is the most beloved living poet of the Somali language, and his poetry has been translated into various languages.<sup>530</sup> Referred to as the “Somali Shakespeare,” Hadraawi’s life and work reflect the country’s upheavals; his lyrics and themes center on reviving a national destiny for the Somali people. Siad Barre imprisoned him for 10 years in the 1970s for his poems protesting the dictatorial regime.<sup>531, 532</sup>

In the poem “The Killing of the She-Camel,” Hadraawi uses a metaphor rooted in the country’s pastoral tradition for the tragedy of decades of dictatorship, war, and political and social disintegration.<sup>533</sup>

## Nonreligious Traditional Events

In addition to gathering for Islamic holidays, Somalis gather for various other occasions. Plays and storytelling are popular pastimes. Rites of passage mark life events such as childhood circumcision, engagement, marriage, and death. Families will gather, share food, recite prayers, and perform ritual killings of goats during such events. Dancing is an integral part of Somali wedding celebrations, which go on for seven consecutive days.<sup>534</sup> Annual celebrations of the clan ancestor are an important pre-Islamic tradition among northern Somalis.<sup>535, 536</sup>

Traditional festivities mark seasonal events important to herders and farmers. Dabshid, the pre-Islamic Festival of Fire, falls on 27 or 28 July and marks the beginning of the Somali solar year and the arrival of spring.<sup>537</sup> Although Islam influenced Somalia with the use of the lunar calendar, the solar calendar is also used to time crop production and animal husbandry. During this festival, people build bonfires and perform dances. Dabshid, also called Neeroosh (a Persian word for the Persian New Year), is probably a holdover of ancient Persian fire and sun worship.<sup>538</sup> In the southwest, Somalis hold the Istunka martial arts festival during Dabshid. The medieval tradition in which teams of men engage in mock combat with sticks symbolizes the defense of the community.<sup>539, 540</sup>



*Danto dance performed by Somalis, Kismaayo, Jubbaland Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

Processions may be a part of rituals that involve celebration, remembrance, or appeasement, such as the *roobdoon* rainmaking ritual. If a procession approaches, it is appropriate to stand back and show respect as it passes by.<sup>541, 542</sup>

What is this procession about?		
Visitor:	kanee waa maHaay?	What is this procession about?
Local:	manta waa dab shid	Today is Dab-shid.
Visitor:	mahadsanid	Thank you.

*Exchange 15*

### *Celebrating with Gunfire*

During celebrations, Somalis may fire rifles, especially in rural areas. For example, gunshots might be fired to mark a marriage, the birth of a child, or a battle victory. This aspect of contemporary Somali life originated in nomadic Arab culture.<sup>543, 544</sup>

In cultures that celebrate in this way, many people have been killed or critically injured by falling bullets, so onlookers should keep a safe distance. It is crucial to distinguish friendly celebration fire from hostile fire. If unsure, foreign nationals should ask a local about the reason for rifle fire.<sup>545</sup>



*Celebrating with rifles, Kismaayo, Jubbaland Wikimedia / AMISOM Public Information*

What is all this firing about?

Visitor:	maHaa da'aay o Habadaha lo ridiyaa?	What is all this firing about?
Local:	waHaa chira aros	We have a wedding going on.

*Exchange 16*

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# Cultural Orientation | Somali

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## Chapter 3 | Assessment

1. Telling jokes is a welcome part of conversation in Somalia.
2. People who are unrelated to one of Somalia's major clans have been especially vulnerable to the violence of Somalia's long civil war.
3. For men, wearing shorts is acceptable, as long as they are loose-fitting.
4. Somalis of the same gender do not touch in public.
5. Somalis gesture with their hands, but rarely point with a single finger.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. True*



*New building construction, Medina district, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

## Chapter 4 | Somali Cultural Orientation

# Urban Life

## Introduction

An image sometimes associated with Somalia is of a nomadic family herding camels in a desert. Yet, for a thousand years or more, Somalia has been home to cities. Trading ports line the coasts. The seats of historic kingdoms, colonies, and self-declared states lie in interior locations supplied with sufficient water. In recent decades, an image of contemporary urban Somalia has emerged—the bomb-flattened, corpse-strewn streets of Mogadishu. Yet urban life continues in Mogadishu and elsewhere.<sup>546</sup> The urban population is growing as hundreds of thousands of people flee into cities to escape droughts, floods, or armed conflict.<sup>547</sup> The “instant” cities of refugee camps—located in areas that lack infrastructure—have urban-sized needs for water, food, shelter, health care, and security.<sup>548</sup>

Large cities reflect their international origins and colonial pasts. For example, Mogadishu’s Benadiri population, sometimes referred to as “people of Mogadishu (Reer Xamar),” descend from Arab, Persian, and Bantu ancestors who brought trading, weaving, and fishing to the city. Italians later made Mogadishu their colonial capital, shaping its laws, schools, architecture, and cuisine, as did the British in Hargeysa.<sup>549</sup>

Urban homes, often protected by high walls topped with broken glass, may have electricity and running water. Socializing takes place at tea shops or nightclubs.<sup>550</sup> High population densities support post-republic businesses such as private electricity plants, hospitals, and mobile phone companies.<sup>551</sup>

## Urbanization

Somalia’s cities are dangerous. Their growth rate is double that of rural areas, underscoring the desperation that famine and conflict have caused throughout the country.<sup>552</sup> People come to cities to find food aid and to lose the clan-based identities that mark them for death. Aid agencies, however, are not able to meet the needs of growing urban populations.<sup>553</sup> Clan-based conflict has become urban warfare, not only in Mogadishu but in other cities with strategic value, such as Kismaayo.<sup>554</sup> In Somalia, security is the single urban issue that drives all others.<sup>555, 556</sup>



*Woman and children wait at a medical clinic, Kismaayo, Jubbaland Wikimedia / AMISOM Public Information*

The unregulated environment makes meeting other challenges of urbanization even more difficult. Urban insecurity drives up the costs and risks of business, governance, and relief efforts. Infrastructure, from electricity plants to mobile telecommunications, develops without coordination, which creates inefficiencies.<sup>557</sup> Garbage accumulates in the streets, and water and air pollution grow unchecked.<sup>558, 559</sup> Income inequality is sharply defined.<sup>560</sup> Migrants from rural areas encounter unexpectedly high living costs. They rent housing, rather than own, buy water instead of collecting it for free, and pay high prices for food instead of growing their own.<sup>561</sup> This situation is more pronounced in the south than the northeast.<sup>562, 563</sup> In 2019, nearly 600,000 urban residents were in food-security crisis, with 95,000 living in famine conditions.<sup>564, 565, 566</sup>

Please have some food!		
Visitor:	Hogaa 'un walaal!	Please have some food!
Local:	mahadsanid	Thank you.

*Exchange 17*

Please have some food. You have to eat some!

Visitor:	so freesu, waa in aad Hogaa 'untaa!	Please have some food. You have to eat some!
Local:	aad baad u mahadsan tahaay	Thank you very much.

Exchange 18

## Work in Urban Areas

East African cities, built by European colonists, depended on the labor of unaccompanied males who migrated between family homesteads and temporary urban work quarters. These quarters were usually in city slums. Working men, without their families, tended to live in clan-based groups. This pattern was amplified in Somalia when local militias took control of many available jobs after the collapse of the republic in 1991.<sup>567, 568</sup> Urban unemployment continues to be fueled by young men coming to cities to look for work.<sup>569, 570</sup>



Woman and child split rocks to sell, Baidoa, South West State Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

Families that come to the city are faced with restrictions on their traditional subsistence practices of gardening, farming, and sheep or goat tending.<sup>571</sup> Educated women may find employment as teachers or nurses. Most poor urbanites make a living as part-time traders, service workers, or artisanal manufacturers in the large informal economy. Unemployment rates in Mogadishu exceeded 74% in 2016.<sup>572</sup>

## Gender Issues

Somali culture is male centered though women play important economic roles in herding and farming families and in urban business. In recent years, the number of female-headed households has risen as a result of war, drought, and male migration. The socialist regime has worked to improve opportunities for women, and Somali women have more freedom to work, travel, and become educated than do most other Muslim women.<sup>573</sup> In 2017, there was significant progress in terms of gender equality in Somalia. Eighty female members of parliament took seats, accounting for 24% of both of the houses.<sup>574</sup>



Somali man casts his ballot, Kismaayo, Jubbaland Flickr / UNSOM Somalia

Despite this progress, women's political rights in Somalia are not equal to men's. They have little to no role in forming and interpreting *heer*, which continues to include many discriminatory practices, such as *dumaal*

(where a widow is forced to marry a male relative of her deceased husband) and *godobtir* (the forced marriage of a girl into another clan as part of a compensation payment or interclan peace settlement).<sup>575</sup>

There are few laws against spousal violence, including rape. Only Somaliland has passed laws outlawing rape and violent sexual crime in 2018.<sup>576</sup> Throughout Somalia, there are documented patterns of rape, including gang rape, particularly of displaced women and members of minority clans.<sup>577, 578</sup> Authorities rarely address rape formally. Survivors suffer subsequent discrimination because they are considered “impure.” Domestic and sexual violence against women are serious problems, despite a provision in the federal constitution prohibiting any form of violence against women.<sup>579, 580</sup>

## Health Care

The health situation in Somalia is one of the worst in Africa, although there has been some improvement. In 2016, the average life expectancy was 56, up from 51 years in 2011. Still, famine and widespread malnutrition have resulted in the highest global death rates for children under 5, after Afghanistan.<sup>581, 582</sup>



*Man receives a medical checkup, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

Overall, city dwellers are better off than rural populations because of improved drinking water, sanitation services, and availability of professional medical care.<sup>583</sup> But the urban poor, lacking access to these improvements, are more likely to suffer from diseases such as cholera, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS.<sup>584</sup> Cholera and malaria usually occur with annual heavy rains.<sup>585</sup> The last cholera outbreak, which occurred in 2017, was one of the largest epidemics the country has experienced, with 78,000 cases.<sup>586</sup> Decades of conflict and violence have resulted in many Somalis with post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>587</sup> In

particular, the number of child soldiers used by al-Shabaab has increased; thousands of children must cope with the trauma of years on the front lines. There are only five mental health centers and three psychologists for the entire country.<sup>588</sup>

There are also regional differences in health needs and health care. The less war-ridden north has been more accessible for aid and development than the violent south.<sup>589</sup> Health-related concerns in urban areas include men’s use of the drug khat and women’s susceptibility to abuse. Khat chewing causes short-term alertness and euphoria, often followed by depression, irritability, loss of appetite, and difficulty sleeping. Adverse effects of habitual use may include tooth decay and periodontal disease, gastrointestinal disorders, cardiovascular problems, and the worsening of mental illness.<sup>590</sup>

## Education

In the precolonial past, education in Somali cities began with traditions of Islamic learning. In the 19th century, European colonists established schools to train administrative workers. Italian remained a



language of instruction in higher education through the 1970s, and Arabic and English continue to be languages of instruction at all educational levels.<sup>591</sup> The Somali Republic never had the budget to provide primary and secondary education countrywide, but cities developed schools, colleges, and universities, both Quranic and Western-style, largely attended by boys and young men.<sup>592</sup> State-supported education began to deteriorate in the 1980s, and virtually ceased during the worst years of the civil war.<sup>593</sup> In the 1990s, educational institutions began to reopen in areas with strong local participation, typically aided by Arab and Islamic charities.<sup>594, 595</sup>

Education, like health care, is more established in the urban areas of the north than in the south, with the exception of Mogadishu. In the major cities of Hargeysa, Mogadishu, or Garowe, there are a number of educational offerings, from religious primary schools to private universities. While these institutions are mostly private, they are improving in quality and affordability.<sup>596</sup>

Despite the educational opportunities, primary school enrollment rates are low throughout Somalia, with girls' enrollment rates being significantly lower. According to recent estimates, less than one-third of children in Somalia attend school, and only 40% of those children are girls. As a result, just over one-third of Somalis can read and write.<sup>597</sup> Women's literacy is lower than men's, as girls often stay home from school to do housework or help raise younger children. Additionally, nearly all girls undergo FGM. The aftereffects of the procedure cause scarring and infections, and thousands of girls withdraw from school as a result.<sup>598</sup>



*Students sit for national exams, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / UNSOM Somalia*

## Food

Local meat, fish (along the coast), and imported rice are staple foods in urban areas. Pasta, of Italian colonial origin, is a popular change from rice, especially with marinara sauce. Breakfast might consist of flour or millet pancakes, lunch might be rice or millet with milk and ghee (clarified butter), and for supper a snack of milk or cooked beans.<sup>599</sup> Many new restaurants in larger cities are owned by Somalis who have returned from other countries. Restaurants serve different international cuisines (Chinese, Italian, Middle Eastern), and seafood restaurants are popular in coastal cities.<sup>600</sup> Because of Somalia's strong Arab influence, many urban restaurants serve lamb kebabs.<sup>601</sup> Wine, beer, and locally made rum are also served. As with other areas that draw crowds, restaurants in Mogadishu have been the target of al-Shabaab.<sup>602</sup> After a suicide attack on a popular restaurant in 2016, armed guards, concrete defenses, and sandbagged machine gun posts are common at Mogadishu's top restaurants.<sup>603</sup>

## Markets and Street Vendors

Trade is the main occupation in towns and cities. Central markets are full of unusual goods and interesting information. Mogadishu's Bakaara Market (Suuqa Bakaaraha) is the largest open market in Somalia. The name Bakaara is derived from the Somali word for storage, *baqaar*. The open-air street market is in the center of Somalia's capital and consists of hundreds of small stalls and buildings spread across several blocks. Vendors sell everything from food and exotic fruits and spices, to washing machines, cell phones, and rocket-propelled grenades and counterfeit passports.<sup>604</sup>



Shoppers at the Hamar Weyne Market, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

It is also where locals gather to socialize.<sup>605</sup> Vendors in Somalia's markets are primarily women. Because women are not engaged in fighting, they can carry and sell goods in areas where men cannot.<sup>606</sup> Somalia's markets are crowded, bustling places that are potentially very dangerous. In 2019, a car bomb injured numerous people in Bakaara Market.<sup>607, 608</sup>

Somalia is a world-renowned producer of frankincense and fabric. Somalis also trade a variety of animal products, such as ghee, leather, feathers, and shells. Food offered by a trusted person is probably safe. Street vendors serve hot, inexpensive foods, but these should be eaten with caution.<sup>609, 610</sup>

Where is the market?		
Visitor:	sooka waa Hagay?	Where is the market?
Local:	sooka waa, marka lagoo dego chidkan dina'eesa bidiH	The market is down that street and to the left.
Visitor:	fadlan ee tus	Please show me.

Exchange 19

What are you selling? It looks nice.		
Visitor:	maHaad gadeysaa? waa kurHon tahaay	What are you selling? It looks nice.
Local:	fadlan teechaabee waa bokol sheelin	Please try it. It's 100 shillings.
Visitor:	waakan waad mahadsan tahaay	Here you go, thank you.

Exchange 20

Buy some sweets? They are delicious!		
Local:	eebso Hogaa ma' ma'aan ah? aad bey oo fee'an tahaay!	Buy some sweets? They are delicious!
Visitor:	waad mahadsan tahaay, waHey oo eg tahaay waH fee'an	Thank you, they sure look great.

Exchange 21

## Money

Somalia's currency is the Somali shilling, except in Somaliland, which uses the Somaliland shilling. Most Somali shillings in circulation are believed to be counterfeit, so most Somalis view them with suspicion. Everyone takes U.S. dollars as a valid alternative currency.<sup>611</sup> Credit cards and traveler's checks are generally not accepted, and there are an increasing number of ATMs in Mogadishu, and a few in Hargeysa, all of which disburse U.S. dollars.<sup>612</sup>



Money-changer, Hargeysa, Somaliland  
Flickr / Clay Gilliland

Somalia lacks a formal banking system and there is no monetary regulation. About 15% of the population has a bank account. Because many Somalis own mobile phones—about 9 out of 10 Somalis above age 16 own one—mobile money has become an effective substitute for cash. In 2018, the country had one of the most active mobile money markets in the world.<sup>613</sup> Transfers are mainly available in U.S. dollars. Somalis use mobile money to pay water, electricity, and charcoal bills, as well as to buy groceries, household goods, and livestock.<sup>614</sup>

## Traffic and Transportation

Roads throughout Somalia are in poor condition. They are neither maintained nor lit at night, and traffic lights are rare, even in Mogadishu. Additionally, landmines and improvised explosive devices are an ever-present danger. As such, driving in Somalia can be dangerous, especially after nightfall. Illegal roadblocks, highway robbery, and other violent crime can occur anywhere at any time. When traveling by car, windows should be rolled up and doors locked. All road travel should be undertaken in an all-terrain vehicle and with an armed escort. Always carry a primary means of communication and a backup.<sup>615</sup>



Street near Bukara Market, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

Mogadishu has a fragmented transportation system. Three-wheeled motorized tuk-tuks and dilapidated buses serve a growing population.<sup>616</sup> Rush-hour traffic jams can be deadly. If a fight breaks out between two groups, innocent people can become trapped. It is advisable to remove yourself from such a situation quickly and remain as polite as possible. Obscene language can be counterproductive. (Many Somalis understand English obscenities.) It is more effective to use polite, respectful language.<sup>617, 618</sup>

Please give way!		
Soldier:	fadlan jid i see!	Please give way!
Local:	fadlan is sug!	Hold on, please!
Soldier:	fadlan jidka ka baH!	Please, pull over!
Local:	sababtu waa maHaay?	What for?
Soldier:	fadlan oo baney baaboorta 'iidamadu iney gudbaan	Please, let the military vehicle pass.

*Exchange 22*

Getting around Mogadishu can be demanding given the poor infrastructure, insufficient street addresses, the absence of reliable public transportation, and increasing congestion. As such, taxis and motorcycle taxis, known as *moto* or *boda bodas*, are increasingly popular. Rides can be ordered through ride-hailing apps such as Go! or Waryaa Taxi.<sup>619</sup>

## Gathering Information

Somalis seeking jobs, medical attention, or police assistance sometimes show up at coalition facilities. They might also be selling food or souvenirs. In most cases, the guard must redirect them or turn them away politely and respectfully. But if people come with information about insurgents, follow the procedures given to you by your commander.



*Foot patrol in Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

I saw some insurgents hiding in that house.		
Local:	waHaan arkey moriyaan iskoo karinayaan gureegaas	I saw some insurgents hiding in that house.
Soldier:	mahadsanid, fadlan halkan see ju	Thank you. Please stay here.

*Exchange 23*

When did the insurgents arrive?		
Soldier:	moriyaanta gormey bey yimaaden?	When did the insurgents arrive?
Local:	shaley bey yimaaden	They came here yesterday.
Soldier:	gormey bey baHen?	When did they leave?
Local:	maanta ayey baHen	They left today.

*Exchange 24*

Which village did the insurgents come from?		
Soldier:	tooladey bey moriyaanta ke yimaaden?	Which village did the insurgents come from?
Local:	waHaay ke yimaaden tooo ku taala bareyga	They came from a village in the east.
Soldier:	fadlan eega tilmaan maabka	Point to it on this map please.

*Exchange 25*

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# Cultural Orientation | Language

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# Cultural Orientation | Somali

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## Chapter 4 | Assessment

1. Peoples from Asia, Africa, and Europe all contributed to the development of Somalia's cities.
2. Mines and other explosive remnants of war are the leading cause of death among children under 5 in Somalia.
3. Urban traffic jams in Mogadishu can be a security risk.
4. Most urban Somalis trade at markets on a regular basis.
5. Education and health care are more available in urban areas of the south than in the north.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. True; 5. False*



*Livestock market, Belet Weyne, Hirshabelle  
Wikimedia / AMISOM Public Information*

## Chapter 5 | Somali Cultural Orientation

# Rural Life

## Introduction

Rural life in Somalia centers around herding livestock across thousands of miles of dry lands, raising crops near rivers or seasonal springs, or a combination of both. Nearly half the Somali population live in rural areas.<sup>620</sup> Yet recent estimates show a decline in the rural population, and Somalia's rate of urbanization is outpacing the population growth rate.<sup>621</sup> Sparse populations make rural dwellers gracious to guests and socially and economically self-reliant. Because of scarce resources, rural Somalis make the most of what there is, often competing for control of land, water, or other natural resources.<sup>622</sup> Links to the cities remain strong, with rural Somalis often caring for livestock owned by their urban relatives.<sup>623</sup>

## Somali Clan Structure

Almost all Somalis are born into a clan, a kin group based on paternal descent. Those who are not kin often find another way to affiliate themselves with a major clan family. Among some clans, it may be as simple as receiving the approval of the clan elders, making a payment of animals and money, and completing a ceremony.<sup>624</sup> Clan membership provides social identity, a support system, and clan-based responsibilities to others. There are several levels of membership: clan family (the largest group), clan, subclan, primary lineage, and *diya*-paying group. This last unit consists of a few lineages who share a common ancestor; they join together to pay compensation for injuries.<sup>625, 626</sup> The Arabic words *qabiil* and *qoo* are often used to mean “clan,” as there is no universally accepted equivalent in Somali.<sup>627</sup>



*Women and children wait at a medical clinic, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle Flickr / Expert Infantry*

Before the creation of the Somali Democratic Republic in 1961, the clan families were the largest organizational and political units. The clan families were made of independent subclans and lineages; they rarely had a permanent leader. When disputes occurred, the local lineages would act on behalf of the whole clan family.<sup>628</sup>

Today, the organization of Somali clans is fluid, with alliances typically changing, and temporary coalitions forming for protection, access to water and farmable land, and political power.<sup>629, 630</sup> For example, competing or argumentative primary lineages within a subclan regularly cause subclans to split into new groups. These characteristics of establishing a kinship and clan-based society applies mostly to Somalia’s nomadic population. Somalis who settle into a less nomadic way of life may develop social identities based on place of residence and support systems rooted in mixed-clan, multicultural communities.<sup>631, 632</sup> In such communities, the village and its headman have social and political importance.<sup>633</sup>



*Shops and dwellings, Abaarso, Somaliland Wikimedia / Vincent van Zeijst*

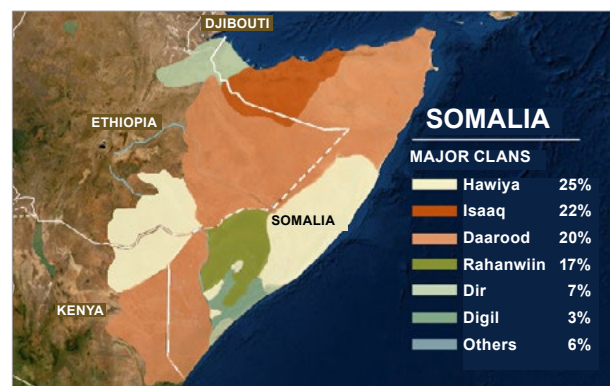
Somalis believe that they share a common ancestry with two brothers, Samaal and Sab, whose descendants founded today’s clan families. Most Somalis trace their descents from Samaal, who was a herder, and belong to a subgroup of one of the nomadic herder clan families: the Dir, Daarood, Isaaq, or Hawiye. Those Somalis who are descended from Sab, a farmer, belong to one of the farmer-herder clan families: the Digil or Rahanwiin.<sup>634</sup> Researchers note that the status of the Isaaq as a clan family is contested, with some Somalis viewing them as part of the Dir.<sup>635, 636</sup> Similarly, the Rahanwiin clan family—often referred to as a clan confederacy—may be a recent creation intended to give farming communities political power.<sup>637, 638</sup> Relationships among clans, subclans, and lineages are often in dispute.<sup>639</sup>

Somalis cannot typically tell a Hawiye from a Daarood or a Dir by physical appearance.<sup>640</sup> They tend instead to identify fellow clan members by listening for subtle regional differences of accent. Be aware that some Somalis may consider it disrespectful or even dangerous to discuss their culture in terms of clan or tribe.<sup>641</sup> These Western designations may carry connotations of colonial racism. In addition, admission of membership in a specific group could make a Somali a target of attack.<sup>642</sup>

Although much of Somalia's non-Somali population lives in Mogadishu and other cities, there are rural groups of non-Somalis who keep a low profile in areas dominated by larger clans. They hunt, farm, fish, and trade. These groups can live virtually "hidden" because the larger clans are often occupied with their own politics.<sup>643, 644</sup>

## Clan Distribution

Traditionally the Somali are divided into six major clan families, four of which are herders, and the other two agriculturalists in the southern part of Somalia. The four main Samaale clan families—Dir, Isaaq, Daarood, and Hawiye—are traditionally concerned with land and water rights for their camels, cattle, and other livestock. They follow their herds throughout the Horn of Africa, across neighboring clan territories and into neighboring countries.<sup>645</sup> The Dir clan family, including the Issa and Gadabursi clans, are concentrated in the Awdal (Adal) administrative region of northwest Somalia and extend into Djibouti and Ethiopia. Some Dir also live along the southern coast between Mogadishu and Kismaayo. The Isaaq clan family live mostly in northern Somalia and are the primary inhabitants of the self-proclaimed Republic of Somaliland. The Daarood clan family range from northeastern Somalia through eastern Ethiopia and southwest into Kenya. The Daarood clans that came to dominate the Barre government were known as the MOD (Mareehaan-Ogaadeen-Dulbahante—the name of Siad Barre's clan, his mother's clan, and his son-in-law's clan, respectively).<sup>646</sup> The Mareehaan and Ogaadeen are concentrated in southern Somalia, the Dulbahante in the north. Rival Daarood clans, in particular the Majeerteen clan, opposed Barre from the end of the Ogaden War in the late 1970s and later established Puntland's autonomy.<sup>647</sup> The Hawiye clan family live in the south-central region of Somalia. To the west, many Hawiye live in Ethiopia and Kenya. To the east, Hawiye territory includes Mogadishu, where its Abgaal and Habar Gedir clans are dominant.<sup>648, 649</sup> Toward the end of the 1980s, the MOD challenged Hawiye dominance in the capital, which resulted in an increased number of saboteurs and snipers in the city. Over the years, different Hawiye clans have allied themselves with the former Transitional Federal Government (TFG) or al-Shabaab and, thus, against one another.<sup>650, 651</sup>



Map showing locations of Somalia's major clans  
Graphic / DLIFLC

The Sab clan families—the Digil and Rahanwiin—live in southern Somalia between the Juba and the Shabelle rivers. Because of the availability of water for farming, the region supports higher population densities and

settlements. These groups had little involvement in the clan conflicts of the 1980s but found themselves defenseless against the food raids of Hawiye and Daarood groups during the famine of 1991–1992. Since then, they have developed armed forces of their own in an attempt to secure their lands.<sup>652</sup>

Minority populations of Bantu farmers and coastal fishers live in the south. In general, population displacement caused by famine and war has redistributed traditional clan-based groups throughout Somalia.<sup>653</sup>

## Economy

About 5% of Somalia's total land area is suitable for farming. Most of it lies in the fertile areas along and between the Juba and Shabelle rivers in the conflict-ridden south, with smaller farming areas in the north. Because of chronic insecurity and damage to irrigation networks and roads, only a fraction of farmable land is cultivated. Much of the rest of the country is covered by rangeland, which supports herding.<sup>654, 655</sup> Drought is a constant threat to farming and livestock production in Somalia.<sup>656</sup>



*Farmer plows a field, Gebilay, Somaliland*  
Wikimedia / World66

Colonial administrations and the early Somali Republic tried to settle many nomads, with mixed success. Drought and war have been more effective in moving herders toward settled life, whether on farms or in refugee camps or cities. In the agricultural south, landless farmworkers were once slaves of Somali pastoral clans and, later, field hands on Italian plantations.<sup>657</sup>

About half the population of the country works in agriculture, either as herders or farmers, or a combination of both. There is large-scale farming of bananas, lemons, grapefruit, and papayas; smaller farms produce grains and sesame. A small portion of farmers produce only enough to support themselves and their families. Pastoralists trade animal products—from milk to leather—to farmers for their farm products—from food to cloth. Rural Somalis also harvest other resources, such as frankincense, myrrh, gum arabic, and wood charcoal, for trade or sale whenever possible. Small, coastal communities rely mainly on fishing. The importance of livestock production and exports has grown in recent years, so that, together, livestock, crops, and fishing made up more than two-thirds of Somalia's gross domestic product in 2018.<sup>658</sup> Piracy reportedly attracts unemployed rural youth with the promise of USD 10,000 or more for participation in a single successful hijacking.<sup>659, 660</sup> Pirates hijack and loot foreign ships, including commercial vessels, yachts, and sailboats, stealing anything they can and holding hostages for ransom.<sup>661, 662</sup>



*Vendor delivers bananas by handcart, Wadajir District, Mogadishu*  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

## Transportation

Camels are the most reliable means of transportation in most of rural Somalia. Shepherds, farmers, and refugees also use donkeys and other pack animals to move belongings and transport themselves.<sup>663</sup> In secure areas (and in peaceful times), passenger minivans and cargo trucks move people and goods between major towns. Of Somalia's 22,100 km (13,732 mi) of roads, only 2,608 km (1,620 mi) are paved. Unpaved roads are usually impassable during the rainy season. Only 6 of Somalia's 61 airports have paved runways, and just 4 of those are longer than 3,000 m (9,843 ft).<sup>664</sup> Along the coast, Arabic-style dhows (boats) are used for trade and fishing, as they have been for centuries. Modern pirates have confiscated fishing boats and other larger vessels to use as mother ships from which they launch flat-bottomed boats with large outboard motors, known as skiffs.<sup>665</sup>

## Health Care

According to statistics from the World Health Organization, rural areas are the least served in Somalia's failing healthcare system. In the past 10 years, access to drinkable water and sanitation facilities has reached 76% in urban areas, but in rural areas it is much lower. In some areas, just one out of four Somalis have access to safe drinking water.<sup>666</sup> Drought and flooding contribute to a lack of clean water, which in turn leads to diseases, such as cholera and malaria, and food shortages.<sup>667, 668</sup>



*Medical clinic, Baidoa, South West State  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

Though urban women and children receive better health care, the under-5 mortality rate remains about the same for rural and urban populations, which is the highest in the world.<sup>669</sup> One out of every seven Somali children dies before their fifth birthday.<sup>670</sup> Malnutrition is widespread, increasingly so in southern areas where insurgents interfere with humanitarian aid organizations.<sup>671</sup> In 2019, it was estimated that over 2 million rural inhabitants experienced severe food shortages.<sup>672</sup>

Less than 10% of births in Somalia are performed by a skilled birth attendant; many women die of pregnancy-related complications. Under Somali law, for a woman to receive medical attention—even a life-saving procedure—consent must be given by her husband or father.<sup>673</sup> Additionally, women's access to care is limited by customary views and practices that restrict female patients from receiving treatment from male doctors.<sup>674, 675</sup>

The traditional Somali religious figure, the *wadaddo*, is also a healer and often the nearest medical practitioner in rural settings.<sup>676</sup> Traditional healers specialize in different areas. The spiritual healer treats problems such as spirit possession and the evil eye. Other practitioners specialize in bone setting, herb use, bloodletting, cauterization, circumcision, and midwifery.<sup>677, 678, 679</sup> Cases of post-traumatic stress disorder are common in

Somalia, but the understanding of mental health issues is poor. Somalis believe mental illness is caused by spirit possession. “Treatments” may involve enclosing the patient in a room with a hyena, which they believe will force the evil spirit out of the person. Families may simply chain mentally ill relatives to a tree.<sup>680</sup>

## The Evil Eye

Many Somalis believe in the evil eye. According to this belief, someone can be given the evil eye by a purposeful or accidental gaze from an envious or admiring person. Harm then comes to the person being praised or admired. For example, suppose a Western healthcare professional tells an expectant mother that her baby is big and healthy. A Westerner might interpret this as good news, but a Somali mother may fear that some harm will come to her baby as a result of such praise.<sup>681</sup> A popular belief in Islamic culture is that one should not admire something or compliment someone without using the expression “Masha’Allah” (May God protect him).<sup>682</sup>



Boy waits at a medical clinic, Kismaayo, Jubbaland  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

This is my son Ahmed.		
Local:	kan waa weelkeyga aHmed	This is my son Ahmed.
Visitor:	waHoo oo igyahey ‘agleelo, maasha alaah	He looks so smart, may God protect him.

Exchange 26

## Education

Rural children have long learned family and clan histories, practical life skills, and Islamic wisdom through Somalia’s strong traditions of oral memorization and recitation. Wandering teachers or local *wadaddo* taught youngsters, mostly boys, to read and write Quranic verses in Arabic.<sup>683</sup> Colonial administrators attempted to extend Western-style, secular education beyond cities, but found it difficult to recruit and train teachers and to convince parents and adult learners that the educational programs were valuable. The cultural bias against education for females (male teachers believed it was below their dignity to teach girls) was compounded by the refusal of rural families to send their daughters away from home for schooling. In the 1970s, a national literacy campaign increased school attendance among settled Somalis, and in the 1980s, primary education was extended to nomadic children.<sup>684</sup> Still, formal education began to decline in the 1980s and was completely eradicated with the outbreak of civil war in 1991.<sup>685, 686</sup>



Students learn Arabic, Barawe, South West State  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information



Subsequent efforts to restart rural schools are localized and fragmented, and supported mainly by Arab and Islamic aid organizations. The traditional *dugsi*, a Quranic school for young children that is built, financed, and maintained by a local community, has survived recent decades of political upheaval.<sup>687</sup> It is the first (and perhaps the only) educational institution that a rural child attends. When girls are admitted, they study separately from boys.<sup>688</sup>



*Young Somali boy learns the Quran at a madrassa, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

Since 2015, al-Shabaab has opened several Islamic religious schools in areas they control and pressured teachers to teach its ideology. More recently, the armed group's recruitment of young children as soldiers has become increasingly aggressive. Al-Shabaab has attacked rural schools, abducted young children, and ordered teachers and communities to provide children as young as 8 or face reprisal.<sup>689</sup> Hundreds of children have fled their homes and schools to escape recruitment.<sup>690, 691</sup>

## Regional Ways of Life

### *Nomadic Herders*

Because much of Somalia is too arid for crop production, most rural Somalis are nomadic or seminomadic. Their principal source of livelihood is raising cattle, camels, sheep, and goats. Nomads travel with their herds to ensure that the animals have continued access to water and food. They carry their few belongings on pack animals. These animals are their main source of transportation, food, and clothing.<sup>692</sup>

When making camp, Somali nomads assemble portable homes from tree branches and roots covered by woven grass mats. A private inner area, the *aqal*, is surrounded by a thorn fence.<sup>693</sup> Daily activities begin and end with the milking of animals. At night, a large fire is lit in the *ardaa* (men's fire corner) to ward off wild animals and welcome family members and visitors. The diet of Somali nomads consists mainly of milk, meat, and other animal products. Vessels for drinking milk are sterilized with heat, smoke, and "scrub brushes" of burning wood. Breakfast is cold, lunch may be skipped when herding away from home camp, and the evening meal is cooked.<sup>694, 695</sup>



*Somali man with a herd of camels, Adale, Hirshabelle Wikimedia / AMISOM Public Information*

Livestock and livestock-related products are the main commodities for trade at markets and export abroad. Seasonal markets are both social events and political gatherings. During the long rainy season, known as *gu*, young men court and marry.<sup>696</sup>

Pastoralist society among Somali males is fundamentally egalitarian.<sup>697</sup> Councils of men, in which each man has basically the same status and function, make decisions. Although these largely democratic councils can veer toward anarchy and become unruly, they are constrained to a degree by hierarchical influences of age, seniority, wealth, and lineage.<sup>698</sup>

## Farmer-Herders

Farmers—Somali, Bantu, and others—live in the fertile agricultural zone between the Juba and the Shabelle rivers in southern Somalia. The environmental conditions near Hargeysa in the northwest also support some farming. Northwestern farmers use plows, oxen, and tractors to increase their yields and raise their incomes.<sup>699</sup> Subsistence crops include corn, millet, sorghum, beans, fruit, and vegetables. These groups keep sheep and goats as well as chickens and cows. Camels are highly valued.<sup>700</sup> Rural villagers keep livestock for their city-dwelling relatives.<sup>701</sup>



*Farmers work the land, Kismaayo, Jubbaland  
Wikimedia / U.S. Department of Defense*

Daily life in a rural village is characterized by men working in the fields and women tending animals and gardens close to the homestead. Round houses constructed by applying clay to an underlying framework, known as wattle and daub, are typical in the south, while angular adobe buildings are found in the north. High walls of stone, brick, or wattle enclose a surrounding courtyard that may contain a kitchen and outbuildings.<sup>702</sup>



*Somali man and his mule, carrying a drum of water,  
Qoryoley, Hirshabelle Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

In Somali farm villages, the position of headman becomes important.<sup>703</sup> Culturally, a social hierarchy developed along with practices of negotiations and peaceful conflict resolutions. The Digil clan family is said to have established a central government before the Italian colonial period.<sup>704</sup>

In rural areas, when a decision is to be made that affects the whole village, such as one about a building project, outsider advisors may be invited to join in the discussions. Villagers affected by the matter or tribal elders (*odayal*) are usually included as well. The villagers may slaughter a sheep or goat and prepare an enormous meal in the visitor's honor. After the food has been prepared, everyone sits on the ground and eats—scooping food from a communal bowl.<sup>705</sup> All this is done to honor the guest. To refuse is to dishonor the villagers because it might call into question the sincerity of the matter being discussed.<sup>706</sup>

## Checkpoints and Border Crossings

At times, travel is severely restricted by the numerous checkpoints along Somali roads. In the north, checkpoints manned by regional security forces are common in the contested regions between Puntland, Somaliland, and Galmudug. Security is especially heightened in the disputed Sool region, and around the cities of Garowe and Gaalkacyo.<sup>707, 708</sup> In Puntland's interior, checkpoints serve as a line of defense against al-Shabaab and the ISS.<sup>709</sup>

Moving by road is a challenging and complex task for anyone in the southern and central areas of the country. Even ordinary Somalis must carefully weigh the urgency of their travel against the risks involved. Anyone leaving al-Shabaab-controlled areas will be questioned about their purpose, destination, and the duration of their trip.<sup>710</sup> But there are greater risks. Extortion and other forms of violence are common at the many regular and illegal checkpoints and roadblocks. These may be manned by government security forces, militants, clan factions, or other armed groups. The roads between Cadaado and Gaalkacyo, and between Mogadishu and Baidoa and Jowhar are the most affected.<sup>711, 712</sup>



*Checkpoint, Berbera, Somaliland  
Flickr / YoTuT*

Al-Shabaab generates tens of millions of dollars per year by taxing vehicles and goods, including humanitarian aid, passing through its checkpoints.<sup>713</sup> Clan militias, and underpaid police and government forces also rely on the fees and bribes they charge civilians at their checkpoints.<sup>714</sup> They often charge multiple high fees along their segments of the road, and cargo and people are still vulnerable to ambush, theft, and violence. Commercial drivers often prefer traveling through checkpoints controlled by al-Shabaab, because it does not tax drivers who have paid at another location, and vehicles are then allowed to proceed safely.<sup>715</sup> Anyone who attempts to circumvent al-Shabaab checkpoints faces execution and the destruction of their vehicle and goods if caught.<sup>716</sup> Because checkpoints are so lucrative, security forces and militias often fight each other for control of them.<sup>717</sup>



*Checkpoint, Kismaayo, Jubbaland  
Wikimedia / U.S. Department of Defense*

Al-Shabaab is active in border areas; violence along the Somalia-Kenya border occurs periodically, including large-scale attacks against civilians, government security forces, and AMISOM troops.<sup>718</sup>

## Unrelated Males and Females

If at all possible, allow families to stay together at a checkpoint; do not separate them. Do not place males and females in the same group if they are not related. For example, if you are guarding a checkpoint and you must order passengers on a bus to step off for questioning, try to lead the males into one group and the females into another.<sup>719</sup>

It is advisable to enlist a female coalition soldier to speak with women. Doing so will protect their honor. If a female soldier is not available, a male soldier should refrain from speaking directly to a Somali woman. He should instead address one of her male family members. On the other hand, a female soldier may speak directly with a Somali man without reservation. Note that people often do not carry identification cards in Somalia. When asking for identification, do so politely. The following exchange provides an example of how to ask a Somali for identification.<sup>720, 721</sup>



Foot patrol in Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

May I trouble you for your IDs, please?		
Soldier:	dib haa kogo ahaatey akonsigaagee meyey?	May I trouble you for your IDs, please?
Local:	waa kan kaado	Here, take them.

Exchange 27

Ma'am, your ID please?		
Soldier:	walaal akonsigaaga meyey?	Ma'am, your ID please?
Local:	ma haaysto akonsee	I do not have an ID.

Exchange 28

## Landmines and IEDs

Somalia's long history of armed conflict has resulted in high levels of contamination from landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW), which are believed to be widespread throughout Somalia, primarily in the south-central region.<sup>722</sup> Between 1999 and 2017, there were 3,225 casualties caused by landmines and other ERW. Somalia signed the Mine Ban Treaty (Ottawa Treaty) in 2012, committing to destroy all antipersonnel mines by October 2022. According to Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, the conflict-beleaguered country is not on track to meet the deadline as of late 2019.<sup>723</sup>

Over the last decade, non-state armed groups have increased their use of command-detonated improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Widespread instability and dangerous operating conditions for nongovernmental organizations has meant that access to the remote communities most severely affected by these issues has been impossible until recently, often because of mines and IEDs laid along roads.<sup>724</sup> In fact, IEDs are the deadliest threat to lives in Somalia and were responsible for killing or injuring more than 1,400 people in 2017.<sup>725</sup> Many of the casualties that year were the result of a single blast in Mogadishu that killed nearly 600 people.<sup>726</sup> It was labeled as one of the worst IED bombings to ever occur in Africa.<sup>727</sup>



*Soldier uncovers a Russian TM46 mine, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle U.S. Department of Defense*

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## Chapter 5 | Assessment

1. Clan family membership is most significant among Somalis of nomadic heritage.
2. Most of Somalia's landmines and explosive remnants of war are in the north.
3. In Somali farm villages, the headman oversees negotiations and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.
4. The most widespread ailment in rural Somalia is HIV/AIDS.
5. Widespread conflict is the largest threat to farming and livestock production.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. True; 5. False*



*Somali children posing in front of their village, Mareerey, South West State  
Flickr / Teseum*

## Chapter 6 | Somali Cultural Orientation

# Family Life

## Introduction

Somalis greatly value family and heritage. A person's lineage represents a lifelong source of identity. When Somalis meet, they ask, "Whom are you from?" (Tol maa tahay?) rather than "Where are you from?"<sup>728</sup> The protection of family honor is crucial. The family that surrounds one in daily life may include parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Loyalty to family means giving social and financial support to relatives and receiving help in times of need.<sup>729</sup>

Decades of war and famine have affected the Somali family in several ways. Clan-based violence has heightened mistrust within families and halted some traditional practices related to intermarriage among clans.<sup>730, 731</sup> As the authority of elders weakens, teenage marriages, divorces, and the number of young

mothers raising children on their own are on the rise. Because many men have been killed in battle or have lost their traditional livelihoods following natural disasters, women have been forced to head households and become breadwinners. Decades of hardship have made the international diaspora an essential source of economic support for many Somalis.<sup>732, 733</sup>

## The Somali Household



Internally displaced woman beside her tent, Belet Weyne, Hirshabelle Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

Parents and children form the nuclear family, the basic unit of Somali life. The father is the head of the family. He looks after the education of the children (especially sons) and represents the family in public arenas. The mother is responsible for raising the children, keeping house (which may extend to tending sheep and crops near the homestead), and collecting water. Somalis approach child rearing as a group task; mothers, aunts, sisters, and older daughters jointly supervise children.<sup>734</sup> Children are the basis of the strongest family bonds. For example, a woman remains part of her father's clan even after she marries; only her children bind her to her husband's clan.<sup>735</sup> Women, who are often expected to

give birth every year, have more than six children on average.<sup>736</sup> Most children live at home until they marry. In keeping with Islamic tradition, children are taught that they should care for their aging parents.<sup>737</sup>

Are you related?		
Visitor:	karaabo miyaad tiheen?	Are you related?
Local:	maaya waHba iskoomaa neehin	No, we are not.

Exchange 29

How are you related?		
Visitor:	maHaad iskoo tiheen?	How are you related?
Local:	waHaan nahaay ilmo adeyr	He is my cousin.

Exchange 30

## Clans and Family

The extended family—particularly the father's clan—often pools resources to support relatives. Funds may be pooled so that someone can be sent to school or travel abroad to seek work. Extended families may also live together. It is not uncommon for several siblings to live under the same roof with their children and relatives, such as grandparents, in-laws, aunts, uncles, and cousins.<sup>738</sup> Under Islamic law, a man

may have as many as four wives, but only if he can support them equally. Polygyny is more common in rural areas. Educated and urban women increasingly object to the practice.<sup>739, 740</sup>

Somalis expect each wife to receive a separate home. When a man has more than one wife, his name is on the deed to all properties. When a man is with another wife, he is said to be at “his other house.” Asking for the father of a wife’s children is a polite way of asking for her husband.<sup>741, 742</sup>



Family compound outside of Kismaayo, Jubbaland  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information

Where is the father of your children?		
Visitor:	meyey 'aroortaada aabahod?	Where is the father of your children?
Local:	kureegeesa kale	In his other house.
Visitor:	mahadsanid	Thank you.

Exchange 31

In northern Somalia, marriages among nomadic people have been used to create alliances between unrelated and potentially hostile families. Families will often choose marriage partners from a different clan for their children. Such alliances help to ensure access to water and grazing areas. Peace agreements between clans are traditionally sealed by exchanging brides.<sup>743</sup>

## Speaking with Somali Family Members

An older woman should be addressed as *eedo*.<sup>744</sup> This is similar to “ma’am,” although the term carries more respect. It is appropriate to call a younger woman *walaál*, which literally means “my sister” but carries the meaning “miss” or “ma’am.” (The accent mark placement indicates the difference in tone that distinguishes grammatical gender: *walaál* is “sister” and *waláal* is “brother.”)<sup>745</sup> A male should avoid speaking to any Somali woman; rather, he should address a male member of the woman’s family.<sup>746</sup>



Young Somali bride, Beledweyne, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / Frank Keillor

In general, only family members, relatives, and close family friends are permitted to ask a man, “How is your wife?” A man should never ask another man about his wife or any other female member of the man’s family. But it is appropriate for a man to ask, “How is your family?” It is acceptable for a woman to ask about the women in the family.<sup>747, 748</sup>

How are you, how's the family?		
Visitor:	iskaa waran, rerka ka waran?	How are you, how's the family?
Local:	al-Hamdu lilaah, wey fee'an yiheen, mahadsanid	Thanks to God, they are fine, thanks.
Visitor:	al-Hamdu lilaah	Thanks be to God.

Exchange 32

It is customary to address an older male as *adeer* to show respect.<sup>749</sup> The term “sheikh” should not be used to address anyone because it may be construed as derogatory. When standing and talking with someone, avoid direct eye contact, particularly if the conversation is heated. Avoid staring at people, which can be perceived as a challenge.<sup>750</sup>

May I enter?		
Visitor:	maa so gelee kaRaa?	May I enter?
Local:	fadlan so gal	Please come in.

Exchange 33

## Elders, Adolescents, and Children

### Elders

In Somali society, elders (*odayal*) are respected men whose life experiences, public speaking abilities, wisdom, and piety preserve traditions and resolve problems for families, clan families, and communities.<sup>751</sup> Women are excluded from the council of elders but gain influence and respect within their gender-segregated sphere. While clan elders still have significant influence on society and politics, forces outside the family have eroded their traditional authority. Pressures on the clan structure started with the Barre regime and have continued through the subsequent civil war. Conflict, land loss, and forced separation of families due to displacement, have also reduced the role of elders. In much of the country, they face many powerful armed actors over which they exercise little leverage.<sup>752, 753</sup> In Mogadishu in particular, the nuclear family has become the main mechanism of protection.<sup>754</sup>



Somali farmer near her fields, Afgoye, Hirshabelle Wikimedia / Gaasle

### Adolescents and Children

Children are highly valued in Somalia. A woman's status increases with the number of children she bears. As a result, the country



has a very high fertility rate, and more than 70% of the population is under the age of 30.<sup>755</sup> Newborns remain in the home with their mothers for 40 days, protected from the evil eye by a special bracelet made of string and an herb called *malma*. Children are breastfed for about two years. (Solid food is introduced at six months.)<sup>756</sup> At an early age, children are encouraged to pay close attention to their surroundings, to become self-reliant, and to perform family work with their parents and older siblings.<sup>757</sup>

Males face the historic preference for unaccompanied male workers in cities. This leaves them untethered and may contribute to current social problems among young Somali males, such as high urban unemployment, khat addiction, and recruitment into militias and pirate groups.<sup>758</sup> Girls, in contrast, may be betrothed at 16 with the consent of family; in rural areas, it is not uncommon for girls to be married by age 14 or 15.<sup>759</sup> Girls who attend secondary school and university marry after the completion of their education. The Somali Republic considers 18 the age of voting and legal responsibility.<sup>760</sup>



*Somali elders at a government meeting, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle Wikimedia / AMISOM Public Information*

In central and south Somalia, children are subject to recruitment and use in military operations. Al-Shabaab pursues an aggressive child recruitment campaign with retaliation against communities refusing to hand over children. Families are split as hundreds of children, many unaccompanied, flee their homes to escape. Elders and teachers who fail to hand over children have been abducted, and civilians in communities that fight back are killed.<sup>761, 762</sup>

## The Somali Life Cycle

Somalis offer prayers and perform rituals for a child before it is born.<sup>763</sup> A week to 40 days after birth, the naming ritual occurs.<sup>764</sup> The family usually slaughters a ram for a feast and may consult a *wadaddo* about the best name for the infant.<sup>765</sup> Certain names are traditionally reserved for first children: Faaduma for the first girl and Muhammad for the first boy. Male twins are usually named Hassan and Hussein.<sup>766</sup> Boys are circumcised somewhere between the ages of 5 and 8; circumcision of girls takes place between the ages of 4 and 11.<sup>767</sup>



*Mother and child, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

Historically, marriage has been arranged, and sometimes forced, but many couples nowadays choose their own mates. Some Somalis prefer endogamy—marriage within one's clan-based group. (Scorned minority groups practice endogamy by default.) Others have traditionally practiced exogamy—marriage between rival clan-based groups—which may help maintain peace among competing groups.<sup>768</sup> In all cases, the two families involved in a marriage are mutually

obligated to a series of rituals and economic exchanges. An “engagement” payment of cash from the groom’s to the bride’s family is ceremonially redistributed among all participants in both families. The groom also gives the bride a dowry (*meher*) of items, such as gold, land, cash, or livestock, personally selected by the bride. If a divorce occurs, this payment becomes the wife’s settlement.<sup>769, 770</sup>

Divorce (*furrinin*) is common. Reports differ about whether children of divorced parents more frequently remain with their mother or father.<sup>771</sup> Women usually do not want their children raised by another wife of their ex-husband, but men may want to retain custody of their sons in order to preserve lineage.<sup>772</sup> As a result of divorce, displacement, death, and the practice of fathers migrating for work, many households are now headed by women.<sup>773</sup>

Somalis follow Islamic death rituals. The body is washed, covered in white, and buried under soil and stones by men. Green branches may be placed over the stones. In accordance with Somali custom, women come after the men and sprinkle water on the grave. Commemorative meals may be prepared soon after a burial, a year later, and from then on at the discretion of the surviving children. To establish the paternity of any future children, a woman who has lost her husband does not marry for several months.<sup>774</sup>



*Woman and children, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

## Somali Naming Conventions

The origin of many Somali names is Arabic or Cushitic. Most names have a meaning, and certain names are given to indicate the time of birth, physical characteristics, birth order, and so on.<sup>775</sup> A complete Somali name has at least three components and sometimes four, five, or more.<sup>776, 777</sup> As in the West, Somali parents give a newborn child a personal first name. For example, a boy might be named Muhammad and a girl Faaduma. It is common for people to be referred to by their first name alone.<sup>778</sup>



*Children, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

A Somali’s first name is followed by their father’s personal name. For example, if the child Muhammad has a father whose first name is Husayn, the child’s name will be Muhammad Husayn. Because naming rules apply to boys and girls, Muhammad’s sister, Faaduma, will be Faaduma Husayn. Thus, the father’s first name becomes the child’s middle or second name. A Somali’s third name is the personal name of

their father's father (paternal grandfather). As a result, siblings, both male and female, will share the same second and third names.<sup>779, 780</sup>

Women do not change their names when they marry. All Somalis keep their three names, which mark their patrilineal heritage throughout their lives. Because all three names come from a shared pool of personal names, many Somalis have names that are the same or similar.<sup>781</sup>

Although a Somali's three names are generally used on official documents (passport, national ID, driver's license, etc.), they do not necessarily represent a person's full name. Complete Somali names may include additional names based on affiliation with broad kin groups such as lineages, subclans, and clans.<sup>782</sup>



*Women sipping tea, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

## Terms of Address

Somalis name their children in a fashion similar to Arabs. Many Somali personal names are of Arabic origin, and both naming systems emphasize fathers. Another shared naming practice is the addition of a prefix to a personal name, such as Abd- (servant of) or Ina- (child of). Recall in the previous example that Muhammad's father is named Husayn. A man may take such pride in his father that he will name himself after him: Ina-Husayn (Son of Husayn). Soon his relatives, friends, neighbors, and coworkers will start calling him Ina-Husayn instead of Muhammad.<sup>783, 784</sup>



*Residents gather in front of a shop, Mogadishu, Hirshabelle  
Flickr / AMISOM Public Information*

There are no equivalents for titles such as Mr. and Mrs. in the Somali language. Somalis may refer to adults that they respect and feel a closeness to as "Adeer" (uncle), "Eeda" (paternal aunt), or "Habo/Habaryar" (maternal aunt), followed by the person's first name. One does not have to be related to the person to use these titles.<sup>785</sup>

## Nicknames (Naanays)

Somalis are creative with the spoken word. In addition to crafting poems, jokes, and proverbs, it is common for Somalis to refer to each other, almost exclusively, by a nickname or *naanays*. (This could also be because so many names are similar.) A nickname is usually given by friends and family during childhood. They can

be rooted in a personality trait, physical feature, or a profession and are often used in preference over the person's birth name.<sup>786</sup> Somalis may even fill their work or other documents using their *naanays*.<sup>787</sup>

Do you have a nickname?		
Visitor:	naaneys ma le dahaay?	Do you have a nickname?
Local:	maaya ma lihee	No, I don't.

*Exchange 34*

There are two kinds of *naanays*. One is an obvious nickname, similar to a Western nickname, and may be used to address a person directly.<sup>788</sup>

Please, I am looking for Ahmed Abdul-Kadir.		
Visitor:	fadlan waHaan traadeeniya naa aHmed 'abdul-kaadir	Please, I am looking for Ahmed Abdul-Kadir.
Local:	waan ogahey, waHaad oola cheydaa aHmed derey? waa laga yaabaa eenaad ka hesho sooka	I know, you mean the tall Ahmed? You might find him in the market.
Visitor:	mahadsanid	Thank you.

*Exchange 35*

The other kind is a secret nickname. It is used to talk about a person but would rarely be used to address that person directly.<sup>789</sup> Americans, for example, are called "Kaba-weyne" (Big Shoes).<sup>790</sup>

Do you know Liban Omar?		
Visitor:	miyaad takaan leevan 'umar?	Do you know Liban Omar?
Local:	nin-ka laba sa'aalaha a	The man with only two cows.

*Exchange 36*

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# Cultural Orientation | Somali

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## Chapter 6 | Assessment

1. In the Somali clan system, a woman is incorporated into her husband's clan when she marries.
2. Because of Islamic influence, divorce is very uncommon in Somalia.
3. Somali men may have up to four wives.
4. Older Somalis should be addressed by their nicknames (*naanays*).
5. A complete Somali name has at least three components: the person's first (personal) name, followed by the father's personal name, and then the paternal grandfather's personal name.

*Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. False; 5. True*



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# Cultural Orientation | Somali

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## Final Assessment

1. Somalia's coastline is the longest on the continent.
2. The majority of Somalia's population live a nomadic lifestyle.
3. Conflicts among Somali clans contributed to the fall of the Somali Republic in 1991.
4. Italians have been the most influential nonindigenous people to settle in Somalia.
5. Without a formal banking system, Somalis no longer use money, they barter goods instead.
6. Since the fall of the central government in 1991, Islamist groups have enforced a severe version of sharia in some regions of Somalia.
7. In Somalia, sharia traditionally governed *diya* payment (compensation for a clan member's injury or death).
8. About one-third of Somalis can read and write.
9. The celebratory feast at the end of Ramadan is called Eid al-Fitr.
10. Anyone with a head covering and shoes removed can enter a Somali mosque.
11. In Somalia, the freedom to act as one chooses is constrained by the responsibilities of loyalty to one's family or clan.
12. Southwest Somalia is home to Somalia's pirates.
13. It is acceptable for a male soldier to shake hands with a Somali woman.
14. Somalis view their firearms as protective weapons and fire them only in defense of family, property, or honor.
15. Generosity is both highly valued and, by tradition, obligatory among Somalis.
16. War has destroyed all urban infrastructure in Somalia.
17. The Somali shilling is used throughout Somalia.

## Cultural Orientation | Somali

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### *Final Assessment - continued*

18. Improved sanitation services and medical care are available in cities, but the urban poor may not have access to either.
19. The unregulated environment in Somalia's cities makes running a business inexpensive.
20. Urban unemployment is fueled by young men from the countryside looking for work.
21. Not every Somali belongs to a major clan family.
22. The dominant Samaale clan families (Dir, Isaaq, Daarood, and Hawiye) are concentrated in the fertile lands between the Juba and the Shabelle rivers.
23. In Quranic schools, Somalis learn to disregard superstitions such as the evil eye.
24. Most of Somalia's roads are unpaved, making them unusable when it rains.
25. Somalia's civil war was caused by conflict between the pastoralist and agriculturalist clan families.
26. Poetry is integral to Somali culture.
27. A Somali man and woman who have the same two last names (second and third names) are husband and wife.
28. According to Islamic tradition, only men can take part in the physical burial of the dead.
29. Since the onset of civil war, birthrates in Somalia have declined dramatically to below replacement levels.
30. Siad Barre worked to unify clans as part of his nation-building efforts.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False; 6. True; 7. False; 8. True; 9. True; 10. False; 11. True; 12. False; 13. False; 14. False; 15. True; 16. False; 17. False; 18. True; 19. False; 20. True; 21. True; 22. False; 23. False; 24. True; 25. False; 26. True; 27. False; 28. True; 29. False; 30. False*