

# The Role of Civil Registration in Enhancing National Security and Stability in Somalia.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70806/1y6xxn06>

## Abstract

This article examines the critical role of civil registration in enhancing national security and stability in Somalia. Grounded in the theory of governance and state-building, the study emphasizes the importance of accurate civil registration systems in establishing identity, promoting accountability, and enabling effective governance. Employing a mixed-methods approach, it integrates qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, engaging stakeholders including government officials, NGOs, and community leaders. The findings reveal that the findings from the study indicate a strong recognition of the importance of civil registration among participants, with 90% acknowledging its role in preventing fraud and 85% providing its significance in enhancing identity verification. Despite the recognized importance of civil registration, significant challenges persist. Security concerns were identified by 85% of participants as a major barrier to effective civil registration in Somalia. The benefits of civil registration are significant, with 82% of participants recognizing its role in improving health outcomes. Participants also unveiled economic development (78%) and enhanced legal rights (76%) as significant advantages of civil registration. Participants offered several recommendations for enhancing civil registration, with 88% emphasizing the need to increase public awareness. Strengthening security measures (80%) was also deemed important, reflecting a widespread recognition that effective governance requires a secure environment where citizens feel safe to participate in civil processes. It is concluded that civil registration plays a vital role in enhancing national security and stability in Somalia, serving as an important mechanism for identity verification, resource allocation, and community trust. The findings of this study unveil the profound implications of a good civil registration system, particularly in a context characterized by insecurity and fragmented

governance. The challenges faced by Somalia's civil registration system is stemming from decades of conflict and instability. The lack of centralized governance has led to inconsistent practices and significant gap in public awareness regarding the importance of civil registration. It was recommended that to realize the potential benefits of civil registration, comprehensive strategies should be implemented to strengthen these systems. The government should prioritize investments in civil registration infrastructure to ensure accessibility and reliability. The government, along with NGOs and community leaders, should conduct outreach programs that inform citizens about the importance of registering vital events. Collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, and international organizations can enhance the effectiveness of civil registration efforts. Finally, enhancing Somalia's civil registration system is imperative for the nation's security, governance, and social cohesion.

**Key terms:** Civil registration, national security and stability

## INTRODUCTION

Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems are important for good governance, human rights, and socio-economic development in any nation. They provide legal identity to individuals, enable evidence-based policymaking, and facilitate access to important services (UN, 2014). However, Somalia's CRVS system has been severely compromised by decades of conflict and political instability, resulting in low coverage, poor data quality, and limited use of vital statistics (World Bank, 2017). The lack of a functional CRVS system has profound implications for governance and security, making it critical to re-establish such systems as a means to enhance national security and stability in Somalia.

## BACKGROUND

Somalia's civil registration system has faced significant challenges since the collapse of central governance in the early 1990s, a period that marked the beginning of prolonged civil conflict and instability. The disintegration of governmental structures resulted in the failure of important services, including civil registration, which is important for recording vital events such as births, deaths, and marriages. The fragmentation of authority among various factions has led to a decentralized approach to civil registration, with local administrations or non-state actors often taking on the role of registrars. This has resulted in inconsistent practices across the country, further complicating the situation. Without a unified civil registration system, the government is unable to compile reliable demographic data, which is important for effective governance and policy formulation.

The absence of a functioning state has created a vacuum where organized crime, terrorism, and other forms of violence thrive. This insecurity is exacerbated by the lack of reliable data on the population, which makes it difficult for authorities to implement effective security measures and allocate resources appropriately. In a context where identity verification is important for national security, the inability to accurately identify individuals poses a significant threat. Terrorist organizations, such as Al-Shabaab, exploit this lack of identification systems to carry out attacks, recruit members, and evade law enforcement. The relationship between civil registration and national security thus becomes evident, as a good civil registration system can serve as a deterrent against crime and terrorism by facilitating better identification and tracking of individuals.

Moreover, civil registration plays a vital role in resource distribution, particularly in a country like Somalia, where resources are scarce and often misallocated. The absence of reliable demographic data complicates the equitable distribution of resources and services, such as healthcare and education. Government agencies

and NGOs often rely on outdated or inaccurate information to plan and implement programs, leading to ineffective interventions that fail to address the needs of the population. By establishing a comprehensive civil registration system, the Somali government can ensure that resources are allocated based on accurate population data, thereby improving service delivery and enhancing trust among citizens. The ability to verify identities and track demographic changes can facilitate targeted interventions, which are critical for national development and stability.

Community trust is another important element that civil registration can foster in Somalia's complex socio-political landscape. In a country where many citizens have experienced displacement, violence, and marginalization, establishing trust between the government and the populace is important for social cohesion and stability. A transparent and efficient civil registration system can enhance public confidence in governmental institutions by demonstrating accountability and responsiveness to citizens' needs. When individuals feel acknowledged and included through formal registration processes, they are more likely to engage with state institutions and participate in civic life. This dynamic is particularly important in a post-conflict society, where rebuilding relationships between the government and citizens is fundamental to achieving lasting peace and stability.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was grounded in the Theory of Governance and State-Building (Olowu & Wunsch, 2004). This theory posits that effective governance relies on the establishment of reliable institutions and systems that foster citizen engagement and accountability. In the context of Somalia, where state structures have been historically fragile, civil registration emerges as a critical component in enhancing governance.

Civil registration encompasses the systematic recording of vital events such as births, deaths, marriages, and divorces. It serves as the purposes, including legal recognition, access to services, and

demographic data collection. By maintaining accurate records, authorities can better understand population dynamics, which is important for informed decision-making and resource allocation.

In Somalia, where challenges such as internal displacement, clan dynamics, and weak institutional frameworks persist, civil registration plays an important role. It not only aids in tracking population movements but also promotes social cohesion by providing a sense of identity and belonging to citizens. This is particularly relevant in a post-conflict setting where trust in state institutions is often low.

Moreover, by enhancing the legitimacy of government actions through the provision of accurate demographic data and enhancing citizen engagement civil registration contributes to national security and stability. It enables the state to effectively plan for important services like health care and education, thereby addressing grievances that could lead to conflict.

The relevance of this framework to the study lies in its ability to unveil how civil registration can mitigate risks associated with governance failures. By establishing a good civil registration system, Somalia can strengthen its institutions, promote accountability, and ultimately work towards achieving long-term stability and security.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior to the civil war in 1991, Somalia had a CRVS system established during the colonial era, yet it was not comprehensive (Lund, 2008). The ensuing conflict led to the disintegration of government infrastructure, including civil registration institutions. As a result, Somalia currently lacks a centralized, well-functioning CRVS system. A comprehensive assessment in 2015 revealed the absence of specific laws on civil registration, a central coordinating authority, and vital statistics outputs (UNICEF, 2016). Currently, some municipalities are charged with civil registration, maintaining registers, and issuing certificates for births, deaths, and marriages, as well as municipal ID cards (World Bank, 2018).

However, this decentralized implementation is uneven, and there is no dedicated civil registration system office or department at the national level. According to the 2019-2020 Somalia Demographic and Health Survey (SDHS), only 4% of children under two years had been registered, and less than 1% had birth certificates, providing the substantial need to re-establish the CRVS system at local, regional, and national levels (Somalia National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

### **The Role of Civil Registration in Enhancing National Security**

A functional CRVS system can significantly contribute to national security in several ways. First, civil registration provides a reliable means of identifying citizens, which is important for border management, election transparency, and anti-corruption efforts (Menkhaus, 2014). The lack of proper identification has been cited as a factor contributing to the success of terrorist groups in Somalia. Furthermore, by accurately registering and identifying individuals, the government can better monitor and track potential threats, thereby reducing the risk of crime and terrorism (Hassan, 2019). A national ID system can help address the challenges of identifying individuals, which has contributed to the success of terrorist groups. Effective identification and verification are also important for managing migration, reducing the risk of fraud, and ensuring that migrants' rights are respected (IOM, 2020). Strengthening authorities' capacity for identity verification, data management, and fraud detection is important for managing migration effectively. Additionally, the absence of birth registration systems makes it difficult to determine the age of national security force recruits, increasing the risk of child soldier recruitment. A functional CRVS system can help prevent this by providing verifiable proof of age (UNICEF, 2019).

### **The Role of Civil Registration in Enhancing National Stability**

Beyond security, CRVS systems play a vital role in promoting national stability. Civil registration is a cornerstone of good governance, enabling evidence-based policies, efficient public service

delivery, and the protection of citizens' rights (GAVI, 2018). A strong CRVS system allows the government to uphold the dignity of its people, ensure access to important services, and build a transparent and accountable government. Moreover, formal identification enables citizens to open bank accounts, participate in the formal economy, and access important services such as healthcare and education (World Bank, 2016). By providing legal identity, CRVS systems ensure that all citizens are recognized and included in national development efforts. Social inclusion is another critical aspect; civil registration ensures that marginalized groups have access to secure and verifiable identification, promoting social inclusion and reducing vulnerability (UNHCR, 2017). The right to be registered at birth and to have a name and identity is critical in conflict and fragile settings, as it reduces vulnerability. Furthermore, civil registration can improve disaster response and social protection programs by providing accurate data on affected populations (IFRC, 2018). Digital ID systems, underpinned by civil registration, can also contribute to significant economic growth by enabling accurate identification of citizens and facilitating economic activity (McKinsey, 2019).

### **Challenges to Establishing a Functional CRVS System in Somalia**

Despite the recognized importance of CRVS, Somalia faces numerous challenges in establishing a functional system. Ongoing conflict and insecurity make it difficult to implement civil registration services across the country (Menkhaus, 2014). Poor infrastructure, outdated legal and institutional frameworks, inadequate technologies, and insufficient human and financial resources hinder the development of the CRVS system (UNICEF, 2016). There are limited registration offices, and access to these offices is restricted for a significant portion of the population. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness among the public regarding the importance and benefits of registering vital events (World Bank, 2018). Coordination issues also hamper the effectiveness of the CRVS system, as a lack of collaboration between institutions involved in the notification, registration, and certification of vital events creates inefficiencies

(GAVI, 2018). Pronounced variations in processes and documentation across different parts of the country lead to a lack of reliable data and make it challenging to obtain accurate vital statistics. Furthermore, weaknesses in local law and administrative procedures present risks of statelessness, particularly for children of Somali mothers (UNHCR, 2017).

### **Recent efforts and the way forward**

Despite these challenges, Somalia has made some progress in recent years toward re-establishing its CRVS system. The Somali federal authorities have strengthened the legal framework for civil registration and legal identity, with National Law No. 7 of 2003 bestowing the responsibility of local government to register births, deaths, marriages, and divorces (Somalia National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The Somali Registration and Identification Policy was developed and approved in 2018. Additionally, Somalia is advancing its digital transformation efforts with the rollout of a Civil Registration Management and Vital Statistics System (CRMVS), supported by Pakistan's National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) (World Bank, 2019). This is a cornerstone of Somalia's broader National Identification System (SNID) project. The Inter-agency Legal Identity Inception Meeting in Mogadishu brought together key government agencies to strengthen Somalia's legal identity systems and improve coordination (UNICEF, 2021). A five-year National Strategic Plan for improving CRVS in Somalia has been developed, involving various stakeholders and partner institutions.

To further strengthen the CRVS system and enhance national security and stability, it is important to review and update the legal framework to establish all aspects of CRVS under one authority (Hassan, 2019). Creating a national civil registration authority with clear roles and responsibilities is necessary for effective coordination and data management. Investing in infrastructure, technology, and human resources is critical for expanding coverage and improving the quality of civil registration services. Conducting public awareness campaigns to unveil the importance



and benefits of civil registration can increase demand for these services. Strengthening collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and international partners is important for developing a unified and efficient legal identity system. Furthermore, implementing security measures to protect civil registration records and ensure the safety of registration personnel is important, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Finally, conducting mobile campaigns to provide birth certificates to the general population, especially in remote areas, can help increase registration rates.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

A mixed-methods approach was employed to gather comprehensive data on the role of civil registration in Somalia. This methodology integrates quantitative analysis, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the challenges and benefits associated with civil registration.

### *Population and Sample Size*

The target population included government officials, NGO representatives, and community leaders involved in civil registration processes. A stratified sampling technique was utilized to ensure diversity, with a sample size of 200 participants for quantitative surveys and 20 for qualitative interviews.

### *Data Collection Instruments*

Data collection involved structured questionnaires for quantitative analysis. The questionnaires assessed perceptions of civil registration's effectiveness, while interviews provided deeper narratives on experiences and challenges.

### *Data Analysis*

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software to identify trends and correlations, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed to extract key themes and narratives.

## FINDINGS

**Table 1: Participant Perceptions on Civil Registration Impact**

Finding	Percentage of Participants	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Rank
Enhances Identity Verification	85%	4.25	0.44	1
Improves Resource Allocation	80%	4.10	0.50	2
Fosters Community Trust	75%	4.00	0.55	3
Prevents Fraud	90%	4.50	0.32	1
Supports Governance	78%	4.05	0.56	4

The findings from the study in table 1 indicate a strong recognition of the importance of civil registration among participants, with 90% acknowledging its role in preventing fraud and 85% providing its significance in enhancing identity verification. This aligns with global research that unveils the critical function of civil registration systems in enhancing trust within communities.

Jong et al. (2019) emphasizes that good civil registration not only deters fraudulent activities but also strengthens the legitimacy of governmental institutions. By ensuring that citizens have verifiable identities, governments can enhance transparency and accountability, which are foundational elements for effective governance. Participants in the current study also articulated that effective civil registration fosters community trust, which is vital in a context like Somalia, where historical conflicts and mistrust towards state institutions prevail. This trust can lead to increased civic participation, as individuals feel more secure in their identities and rights. Furthermore, improved resource allocation another benefit noted by participants reflects the ability of governments to plan and execute programs effectively, ultimately leading to enhanced societal welfare.

**Table 2: Challenges Faced in Civil Registration**

Challenge	Percentage of Participants	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Rank
Lack of Infrastructure	65%	3.80	0.60	1
Public Awareness	70%	3.90	0.55	2
Security Concerns	85%	4.20	0.50	1
Bureaucratic Inefficiencies	60%	3.75	0.65	3
Limited Funding	75%	4.00	0.58	2

Despite the recognized importance of civil registration, significant challenges persist. Security concerns were identified by 85% of participants as a major barrier to effective civil registration in Somalia as provide in table 2.

This finding is corroborated by research from Khamis (2020), which unveils that insecurity can severely undermine public trust in state institutions and hinder citizens' willingness to engage with civil registration processes. The fear of violence or harassment can deter individuals from registering vital life events, thereby limiting the effectiveness of these systems. Additionally, public awareness was noted by 70% of participants as a critical issue.

This lack of awareness can stem from historical neglect of civil registration systems, as pointed out by Makhdoom et al. (2021), which emphasizes the need for targeted educational campaigns to inform citizens about the benefits of civil registration. The lack of infrastructure (65%) and limited funding (75%) further exacerbate these challenges, creating a cycle of inefficiency that can erode public trust and participation. Addressing these barriers is important for enhancing civil registration processes, as they are integral to enhancing a stable and secure environment where citizens can confidently engage with their government.

**Table 3: Benefits of Civil Registration**

Benefits	Percentage of Participants	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Rank
Improved Health Outcomes	82%	4.15	0.45	1
Economic Development	78%	4.00	0.50	2
Social Inclusion	70%	3.85	0.55	3
Enhanced Legal Rights	76%	4.05	0.52	2
Strengthened Community Bonds	74%	3.95	0.60	3

The benefits of civil registration are significant, with 82% of participants recognizing its role in improving health outcomes. This mirrors findings from a study by Dyer et al. (2018), which illustrates that comprehensive civil registration systems are linked to better public health initiatives, as they provide critical data for planning and implementing health programs. Participants also unveiled economic development (78%) and enhanced legal rights (76%) as significant advantages of civil registration. This aligns with global evidence suggesting that civil registration can facilitate access to services and resources, thereby contributing to economic growth.

Kanyesigye (2019) found that countries with good civil registration systems tend to have higher rates of economic development due to improved access to credit and social services. The findings of this study thus reinforce the notion that effective civil registration systems are not merely administrative tools; they are vital components in promoting overall societal well-being and stability in Somalia.

**Table 4: Recommendations for Improving Civil Registration**

Recommendations	Percentage of Participants	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Rank
Increase Public Awareness	88%	4.40	0.30	1
Strengthen Security Measures	80%	4.10	0.45	2
Invest in Infrastructure	75%	4.00	0.50	3
Foster Partnerships	70%	3.85	0.55	4

Streamline Bureaucratic Processes	72%	3.90	0.60	5
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Participants offered several recommendations for enhancing civil registration, with 88% emphasizing the need to increase public awareness. This finding shows the importance of education in promoting civic engagement and participation in civil registration processes. Research by Smith et al. (2020) unveils that awareness campaigns can significantly improve registration rates, as they inform citizens about the benefits and legal necessity of civil registration. Strengthening security measures (80%) was also deemed important, reflecting a widespread recognition that effective governance requires a secure environment where citizens feel safe to participate in civil processes.

Additionally, investing in infrastructure (75%) is critical, as noted in the work of Zewde (2021), which emphasizes that inadequate infrastructure can severely limit the effectiveness of civil registration systems. By addressing these recommendations, Somalia can enhance its civil registration processes, ultimately leading to improved governance and stability. These empirical findings collectively suggest a comprehensive approach to reforming civil registration systems, providing the intertwined nature of governance, security, and citizen engagement.

## CONCLUSION

Civil registration plays a vital role in enhancing national security and stability in Somalia, serving as an important mechanism for identity verification, resource allocation, and community trust. The findings of this study unveil the profound implications of a good civil registration system, particularly in a context characterized by insecurity and fragmented governance. By providing reliable data on the population, civil registration enables the government to implement effective policies that address the needs of citizens and promote social cohesion. Furthermore, the ability to verify identities can significantly deter criminal activities and terrorist threats, thereby reinforcing national security.

The challenges faced by Somalia's civil registration system are multifaceted, stemming from decades of conflict and instability. The lack of centralized governance has led to inconsistent practices and a significant gap in public awareness regarding the importance of civil registration. This gap not only undermines the effectiveness of existing systems but also perpetuates a cycle of distrust between citizens and state institutions. It is important for the Somali government to recognize that rebuilding the civil registration framework is not merely a bureaucratic endeavor but a foundational step toward establishing a functional state and enhancing a sense of belonging among its citizens.

To realize the potential benefits of civil registration, comprehensive strategies must be implemented to strengthen these systems. This requires a dimensional approach that encompasses not only infrastructural investments but also public outreach and community engagement. By prioritizing civil registration, Somalia can create a more inclusive society, ensuring that all citizens are recognized and afforded their rights. This includes not only the provision of important services but also the empowerment of individuals to engage meaningfully with their government. As trust builds between the state and its citizens, the path toward national stability becomes clearer.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The government should prioritize investments in civil registration infrastructure to ensure accessibility and reliability. This includes establishing well-equipped registration offices, training personnel, and implementing digital systems that facilitate efficient data collection and management. Enhanced infrastructure will not only improve service delivery but also encourage more citizens to participate in the civil registration process, thereby increasing coverage and accuracy.

Initiatives aimed at educating communities about the benefits of civil registration are important. The government, along with NGOs and community leaders, should conduct outreach programs that inform citizens about the importance of

registering vital events. These campaigns can help demystify the registration process, unveil its benefits for individual rights and access to services, and ultimately foster a culture of compliance and engagement.

Collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, and international organizations should enhance the effectiveness of civil registration efforts. By enhancing partnerships, resources can be pooled, best practices shared, and comprehensive strategies developed that address the unique challenges faced by different regions. Such collaboration can also help secure funding and technical assistance necessary for establishing a good civil registration system that can adapt to the specific needs of Somalia's diverse population.

Finally, enhancing Somalia's civil registration system is imperative for the nation's security, governance, and social cohesion. By investing in infrastructure, raising public awareness, and enhancing partnerships, Somalia can create a more inclusive and stable society. As these efforts unfold, the government will not only improve its ability to serve its citizens but also lay the groundwork for a more secure and prosperous future.

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