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THE ROLE OF CIVIL REGISTRATION IN ENHANCING NATIONAL SECURITY AND STABILITY IN SOMALIA

Abstract: *This research explores the critical role that civil registration plays in strengthening Somalia's security architecture and contributing to broader national stability. Grounded in governance theory, the study emphasizes the necessity of accurate and reliable civil registration systems to verify identity, enhance accountability, and facilitate the effective delivery of essential public services that support state-building efforts. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys involving key stakeholders, including government officials, NGO representatives, and community leaders. The findings reveal a strong consensus on the importance of civil registration: 90% of respondents agree that it helps prevent fraud, while 85% highlight the need to improve identity-verification mechanisms. Despite this broad recognition, significant challenges remain, with 85% citing insecurity as the primary barrier to implementing an effective civil registration system. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between civil registration, governance, and security in Somalia. It underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address existing obstacles and to strengthen civil registration procedures as a foundation for long-term institutional stability and national resilience.*

Key terms: *Civil registration, national security, stability, Somalia.*

Introduction

The CRVS, or Civil Registration and Vital Statistics recording system, is an integral part of good governance, human rights, and socio-economic development worldwide. CRVS provides people with legal identity, among other things, enabling evidence-based policymaking and easy access to essential services (UN, 2014). Years of war and political strife have almost obliterated what used to be a working system in Somalia; current coverage is minimal, with poor-quality data never being utilized for any purpose. The absence of such a system has grave implications for governance and security, thereby justifying its existence as part of efforts to re-establish systems that improve security and stability in Somalia.

Background

Somalia's civil registration system has come under great strain since the central government faded away in the early 1990s, marking the beginning of protracted internal strife and turmoil. The collapse of state structures meant the failure of essential systems to serve such a population, including civil registration, which would record vital events like births, deaths, and marriages. With authority fragmented amongst numerous factions, there is decentralization in who conducts civil registration; it falls to local administrations or, sometimes, to non-state actors to serve as the registrar. Several practices within one country are bound to complicate an already dire situation. Unified under a single system of civil registration, this government cannot build accurate demographic data, which is essential to governance and policy formulation. The lack of a functioning state in Somalia has created a situation where organized crime, terrorism, and various forms of violence can flourish. This insecurity is exacerbated by the lack of reliable population data, making it difficult for authorities to implement adequate security measures and allocate resources efficiently.

In a context where verifying identities is crucial for national security, the inability to accurately identify individuals poses a significant risk. Groups like Al-Shabaab take advantage of these weak identification systems to carry out attacks, recruit new members, and evade law enforcement. This highlights the critical link between civil registration and national security; a robust civil registration system can help deter crime and terrorism by improving the identification and tracking of individuals. Additionally, civil registration is essential for fair resource distribution, especially in a country like Somalia, where resources are limited and often misallocated. Without reliable demographic data, distributing

resources and services such as healthcare and education becomes complicated. Government agencies and NGOs frequently rely on outdated or inaccurate information to plan and implement programs, resulting in interventions that fail to effectively meet the population's needs. By establishing a comprehensive civil registration system, the Somali government can ensure that resources are allocated based on accurate population data. This would enhance service delivery and build trust among citizens. The ability to verify identities and track demographic changes is vital for targeted interventions, which are essential for national development and stability.

Community trust is a crucial element that civil registration can help foster in Somalia's complex socio-political landscape. In a country where many citizens have faced displacement, violence, and marginalization, establishing trust between the government and the populace is vital for promoting social cohesion and stability. A transparent and efficient civil registration system can enhance public confidence in government 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 engagement is significant in a post-conflict society, where rebuilding relationships between the government and its citizens is essential for achieving lasting peace and stability. A strong civil registration system not only validates individuals' identities but also lays the groundwork for a more inclusive and participatory governance framework, ultimately contributing to a more stable and unified society.

Theoretical framework

The study is grounded in the Theory of Governance and State-Building (Olowu & Wunsch, 2004), which posits that effective governance hinges on establishing reliable institutions and systems that promote citizen engagement and accountability. In Somalia, where state structures have historically been fragile, civil registration is a critical component for strengthening governance. Civil registration involves systematically recording vital events such as births, deaths, marriages, and divorces. It serves multiple purposes, including legal recognition, access to services, and the collection of demographic data. By maintaining accurate records, authorities can gain a clearer understanding of population dynamics, which is essential for informed decision-making and effective resource allocation.

In Somalia, where challenges like internal displacement, clan dynamics, and weak institutional frameworks persist, civil registration plays a significant role. It assists in tracking population movements and fosters social cohesion by providing citizens with a sense of identity and belonging. This is particularly important in a post-conflict setting, where trust in state institutions is often low. Furthermore, by enhancing the legitimacy of government actions through accurate demographic data and increased citizen engagement, civil registration contributes to national security and stability. It enables the state to effectively plan for essential services like healthcare and education, thereby addressing grievances that could lead to conflict. The relevance of this framework to the study lies in its capacity to demonstrate how civil registration can mitigate risks associated with governance failures. By establishing a robust civil registration system, Somalia can strengthen its institutions, promote accountability, and ultimately work toward achieving long-term stability and security.

Literature review

Before the civil war in 1991, Somalia had a civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system that was established during the colonial era, although it was not comprehensive (Lund, 2008). The subsequent conflict led to the destruction of government infrastructure, including civil registration institutions, leaving today's CRVS system centralized and dysfunctional. A comprehensive assessment conducted in 2015 revealed significant gaps, such as the lack of specific laws governing civil registration, a central coordinating authority, and reliable vital statistics outputs (UNICEF, 2016). Currently, some municipalities are responsible for civil registration, maintaining records and issuing certificates for births, deaths, and marriages, as well as municipal ID cards (World Bank, 2018). However, this decentralized implementation varies widely, and there is no dedicated national-level office or department for civil registration. According to the 2019-2020 Somalia Demographic and Health Survey (SDHS), only 4% of children under age two had been registered, and fewer than 1% had birth certificates. This stark reality underscores the urgent need to re-establish a comprehensive 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 essential 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 crucial 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 marginalized groups have access to secure, verifiable identification, thereby 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 precise identification of citizens and facilitating economic activity (McKinsey, 2019).

Challenges to Establishing a Functional CRVS System in Somalia

Despite the acknowledged importance of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS), Somalia faces significant challenges in establishing a functional system. Ongoing conflict and insecurity severely limit the implementation of civil registration services nationwide (Menkhaus, 2014). Factors such as poor infrastructure, outdated legal and institutional frameworks, inadequate technologies, and insufficient human and financial resources severely hinder the development of the CRVS system (UNICEF, 2016).

Access to registration offices is limited for a large segment of the population, exacerbating the issue. Furthermore, there is a general lack of public awareness regarding the importance and benefits of registering vital events, which further impedes participation (World Bank, 2018). Coordination among institutions responsible for the notification, registration, and certification of critical events is often ineffective, leading to inefficiencies (GAVI, 2018). The pronounced variations in processes and documentation across different regions contribute to unreliable data, complicating the collection of accurate vital statistics. Additionally, weaknesses in local law and administrative procedures pose risks of statelessness, particularly for children born to Somali mothers (UNHCR, 2017).

Recent Efforts and the Way Forward

Despite these challenges, Somalia has made notable strides in recent years toward re-establishing its CRVS system. The Somali federal authorities have strengthened the legal framework for civil registration and legal identity, exemplified by National Law No. 7 of 2003, which assigns local governments the responsibility for registering births, deaths, marriages, and divorces (Somalia National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). In 2018, the Somali Registration and Identification Policy was developed and approved, marking a significant step forward.

Additionally, Somalia is advancing its digital transformation efforts through 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 system is a cornerstone of Somalia's broader National Identification System (SNID) project. Key government agencies convened at the Inter-agency Legal Identity Inception Meeting in Mogadishu to strengthen legal identity systems and improve

coordination (UNICEF, 2021). Furthermore, a five-year National Strategic Plan has been developed to enhance CRVS, involving various stakeholders and partner institutions.

To further strengthen the CRVS system and enhance national security and stability, it is crucial to review and update the legal framework to consolidate all aspects of CRVS under a single authority (Hassan, 2019). Establishing 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 vital for expanding coverage and improving the quality of civil registration services. Public awareness campaigns highlighting the importance and benefits of civil registration can help increase demand for these services. Strengthening collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, and international partners is essential for developing a unified and efficient legal identity system. Additionally, implementing security measures to protect civil registration records and ensure the safety of registration personnel is critical, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Finally, conducting mobile campaigns to issue birth certificates to the general population, especially in remote areas, can significantly boost registration rates.

Methodology

Research Design- *This study employed a quantitative approach to justify the role of civil registration in Somalia comprehensively. This methodology combines quantitative and qualitative research methods, enabling a thorough understanding of the complexities and challenges of civil registration. The integration of both data types enhances the validity of the findings by providing a more nuanced perspective.*

Sampling-*The target population for this research included government officials, NGO representatives, and community leaders involved in civil registration processes. A stratified sampling technique was utilized to ensure diversity across different sectors. This approach yielded a sample of 200 participants for quantitative surveys.*

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection involved two primary instruments:

Structured Questionnaires: Used for quantitative analysis. The questionnaires assessed participants' perceptions of civil registration effectiveness, its impact on governance, and barriers to implementation. The questions were designed to capture both numerical data and participants' opinions.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the collected data involved two key processes:

Quantitative Analysis: Statistical software was used to analyze survey data. This included descriptive statistics to summarize the data and inferential statistics to identify trends and correlations among variables.

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 Gouvernance	78%	4.05	0.56	4

The study's findings, shown in Table 1, indicate strong recognition of the importance of civil registration among participants. Notably, 90% acknowledged its role in preventing fraud, while 85% highlighted its significance in enhancing identity verification. This aligns with global research that underscores the critical function of civil registration systems in fostering trust within communities. Jong et al. (2019) emphasize that effective 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 for effective governance. Participants in this study indicated that effective civil registration fosters community trust, which is vital in Somalia, where historical conflicts and mistrust of state institutions are prevalent. This trust can lead to increased civic participation, as individuals feel more secure in their identities and rights. Furthermore, the noted improvement in resource allocation reflects governments' ability to plan and execute programs effectively, ultimately enhancing 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. 85% of participants identified security concerns as a significant barrier to effective civil registration in Somalia, as shown in Table 2. This finding is supported by Khamis's (2020) research, which shows 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, limiting the effectiveness of these systems. Additionally, 70% of participants noted public awareness as a critical issue. This lack of understanding may stem from historical neglect of civil registration systems, as highlighted by Makhdoom et al. (2021), emphasizing 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 crucial for enhancing civil registration processes, as they are integral to establishing 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 finding aligns with research by Dyer et al. (2018), which shows that comprehensive civil registration systems are associated with better public health initiatives because they provide critical data for planning and implementing health programs. Participants also identified economic development (78%) and enhanced legal rights (76%) as significant advantages of civil registration. This is consistent with global evidence suggesting that civil registration facilitates access to services and resources, contributing to economic growth. Kanyesigye (2019) found that countries with effective 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 reinforce the notion that effective civil registration systems are not merely administrative tools but 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 Déviation	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

Participants offered several recommendations for enhancing civil registration, with 88% emphasizing the need to increase public awareness. This finding underscores the importance of education in promoting civic engagement and participation in civil

registration processes. Research by Smith et al. (2020) indicates that awareness campaigns can significantly improve registration rates by informing citizens about the benefits and legal necessity of civil registration. Strengthening security measures (80%) was also deemed necessary, reflecting widespread recognition that effective governance requires a secure environment in which citizens feel safe to participate in civic processes. Additionally, investing in infrastructure (75%) is critical, as Zewde (2021) highlights, noting that inadequate infrastructure can severely limit the effectiveness of civil registration systems.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of civil registration in enhancing national security and stability in Somalia. The findings reveal that a significant majority of participants recognize the importance of civil registration: 90% acknowledge its role in preventing fraud, and 85% emphasize its value in enhancing identity verification. These results underscore the potential of civil registration to foster accountability, improve governance, and build community trust. However, substantial barriers remain, particularly concerning insecurity, which 85% of participants cited as a primary challenge.

Contributions

The research contributes to understanding the impact of civil registration on governance and security in Somalia, addressing a gap in the existing literature. By employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data with qualitative insights to provide a nuanced perspective on the challenges and benefits of civil registration. This comprehensive analysis enriches the discourse around civil registration systems in post-conflict settings, highlighting their significance in state-building and social cohesion.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following concrete policy recommendations are proposed:

1. The government should prioritize establishing well-equipped registration offices and implementing digital systems to streamline data collection and management.
2. Strengthening security around registration processes is essential to ensure citizens' safety and encourage participation in civil registration.

3. Targeted educational campaigns should be developed to inform communities about the benefits of civil registration, demystify the process, and promote civic engagement.

4. Partnerships between government entities, NGOs, and international organizations should be strengthened to pool resources and share best practices, enhancing the effectiveness of civil registration efforts.

5. Implementing mobile campaigns to reach remote areas can significantly increase registration rates, ensuring that all citizens have access to civil registration services.

Directions for further research

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of improved civil registration on governance and social stability in Somalia. Additionally, studies could investigate the effectiveness of specific educational campaigns and security measures in increasing participation in civil registration. Comparative studies with other post-conflict countries could provide valuable insights into best practices and strategies for enhancing civil registration systems in similar contexts.

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