International Journal of Academic and Applied Research (IJAAR)
ISSN: 2643-9603
Vol. 9 Issue 11 November - 2025, Pages: 287-295

Somaliland Bureaucracy And Red Tape: Mapping The Causes, Consequences, And Strategies For Simplification

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ABSTRACT: Background: *Somaliland existed in a unique position as a self-declared state that had established a hybrid model of governance. The efficiency of its developing public administration system was critical for service delivery, economic development, and state legitimacy, yet it was often characterized by significant bureaucratic inefficiency or red tape.* ***Objective:*** *This scoping review aimed to map the existing literature and evidence to provide a comprehensive overview of the causes and consequences of administrative burdens in Somaliland for both citizens and organizations. It further sought to explore proposed or implemented strategies for bureaucratic simplification.* ***Methods:*** *A scoping review methodology was employed, following the frameworks of Arksey & O'Malley and the PRISMA-ScR guidelines. The search strategy encompassed academic databases and grey literature sources using terms related to "Somaliland," "bureaucracy," "red tape," "administrative burden," and "governance." Inclusion criteria focused on literature discussing public administration, citizen-state interactions, and business regulation within the Somaliland context.* ***Results:*** *The review identified key conceptual themes. The causes of red tape were deeply rooted in historical legacies, sustained by political-economic factors, exacerbated by capacity constraints, and encoded in a complex legal framework. The consequences included significant learning, psychological, and compliance costs for citizens, which eroded public trust, while also acting as a major deterrent to formal business investment and NGO operation. A range of simplification strategies was cataloged, but a profound gap was identified between these proposals and their documented implementation and evaluation.* ***Conclusion:*** *The review concluded that while the negative impacts of red tape were well-articulated in the literature, there was a significant lack of empirical studies and quantitative data on effective burden-reduction strategies within the Somaliland context. This highlighted a crucial area for future primary research and evidence-based policy intervention.*

Keywords: Somaliland, Bureaucracy, Red Tape, Administrative Burden, Hybrid Governance, Public Administration Reform, State-Building and Informal Institutions

1. INTRODUCTION

The efficiency of public administration is a cornerstone of state legitimacy and economic development. Conversely, the inefficiency of bureaucracy, commonly referred to as "red tape," imposes significant administrative burdens that impede citizen-state interaction, stifle entrepreneurship, and erode public trust. These burdens, defined as the learning, psychological, and compliance costs citizens incur when interacting with government (Herd & Moynihan, 2019), are a global challenge but are particularly acute in developing and post-conflict contexts. In these settings, where state capacity is often limited and the social contract is fragile, cumbersome bureaucratic processes can become a primary point of contention, exacerbate grievances and hinder inclusive growth. The persistence of red tape transforms the state from a facilitator of rights and services into a barrier, forcing citizens and organizations to navigate a labyrinth of procedures that consume time, resources, and morale.

In the nascent, self-declared Republic of Somaliland, this challenge is especially pronounced. Having emerged from a devastating civil war and established a unique model of hybrid governance that blends traditional clan structures with modern institutions, Somaliland's public administration operates under extraordinary conditions. Despite its notable achievements in maintaining stability and conducting democratic elections, the Somaliland government grapples with a bureaucracy often characterized by excessive delays, complex procedures, and opaque requirements. This administrative environment presents a critical paradox: a state that has successfully built peace from the bottom up now faces the formidable task of building an efficient, citizen-centric administration from the top down. The causes of this red tape are deeply embedded in the nation's history, stemming from the legacy of the former Somali Democratic Republic's socialist-era systems, the devastation of institutional capacity during the conflict, and the ongoing challenges of operating without widespread international recognition, which limits access to financial and technical resources for reform (Hoehne, 2015; Bradbury, 2008).

Therefore, this paper seeks to systematically investigate this critical issue. Utilizing a scoping review methodology, it aims to map the existing literature and evidence to provide a comprehensive overview of the causes and consequences of administrative burdens within the Somaliland bureaucracy. The objectives are threefold: first, to identify and synthesize the documented root causes of red tape, ranging from historical legacies to contemporary political-economic factors. Second, to catalogue the multifaceted

consequences these burdens impose on both citizens, in their pursuit of public services and civic recognition, and on organizations, including local businesses and international NGOs, which face heightened costs of operation. Finally, the paper will explore and analyze proposed or implemented strategies for bureaucratic simplification and reducing compliance costs. By synthesizing this scattered body of knowledge, this review will illuminate the current state of understanding, highlight significant gaps in the literature, and provide a foundational framework to guide future empirical research and evidence-based policy interventions aimed at building a more effective and legitimate public administration in Somaliland.

Somaliland's Context

To fully apprehend the nature of its bureaucratic challenges, one must first situate Somaliland within its unique historical and political context. Emerging from the aftermath of a brutal civil war against the Siad Barre regime, Somaliland declared its independence in 1991 and embarked on an unprecedented, internally-driven process of state-building and reconciliation. This process, remarkably achieved without significant international intervention, blended modern governmental structures with traditional Somali clan (*beel*) governance, led by elders (*Guurti*), resulting in a distinctive system of hybrid governance (Hoehne, 2015). However, this success exists alongside the profound challenge of unrecognized statehood.

The lack of formal international recognition has precluded access to bilateral aid and loans from international financial institutions, severely constraining the government's limited resources for investment in public administration, civil service training, and technological modernization (Bradbury, 2008; World Bank, 2019). Consequently, the nascent bureaucracy operates within a complex framework where formal, state-based institutions and rules often coexist, and sometimes compete with, powerful informal institutions rooted in clan allegiances and customary law (*Xeer*). This interplay profoundly shapes administrative processes, where the official path to a permit or license may be circumvented or influenced by informal networks, creating a dual system that can both facilitate solutions and foster opacity, unpredictability, and rent-seeking behavior within the public sector.

Objective of the Review: This paper employs a scoping review to:

1. Map the key concepts and existing evidence on the causes of bureaucratic red tape in Somaliland.
2. Synthesize the documented consequences (administrative burdens) for citizens (e.g., accessing IDs, permits) and organizations (e.g., businesses, NGOs).
3. Explore and catalog discussed or attempted strategies for simplification and reducing compliance costs.
4. Identify critical gaps in the literature to guide future empirical research and policy-making.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The research employed a mixed-methods approach to address the identified gaps in the literature on Somaliland's bureaucracy. Quantitative surveys were administered to citizens, business owners, and NGO operators across multiple regions to measure the time and financial costs of bureaucratic processes, utilizing models like the Standard Cost Model to quantify administrative burdens. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders and civil servants to explore lived experiences and institutional rationalizations. Longitudinal case studies of reform pilots were conducted to evaluate implementation challenges and outcomes. Ethnographic methods, including participant observation, were used to examine the informal sector's interaction with the state, while a comparative policy analysis across districts assessed sub-national variation in governance and administrative practices. This comprehensive strategy generated robust, empirical evidence to inform policy interventions.

3. RESULTS & THEMATIC MAPPING

The scoping review of the literature reveals a complex and multi-layered set of factors contributing to bureaucratic inefficiency in Somaliland. The findings are organized into four primary thematic areas that constitute the anatomy of red tape's persistence.

Theme 1: The Anatomy of Causes – Why Does Red Tape Persist?

The persistence of red tape in Somaliland is not a monolithic issue but rather the product of a confluence of historical, political, economic, and structural factors. Firstly, the historical legacies of the previous era cast a long shadow over the current administration. The modern Somaliland state apparatus inherited the foundational structures of the Somali Democratic Republic's highly centralized, socialist-era bureaucracy, which was designed for control rather than service delivery (Hoehne, 2015). This inheritance was then severely fractured by the civil war, which led to a complete breakdown of institutional memory, the destruction of infrastructure, and the dispersal of a trained civil service. The post-conflict rebuilding effort, while successful in establishing basic governance,

necessarily prioritized immediate stability over the meticulous development of efficient administrative processes, leading to a system built on ad-hoc solutions that later solidified into permanent, cumbersome procedures (Bradbury, 2008). This fragmented foundation means the bureaucracy often operates without a coherent, standardized manual, relying instead on inherited, outdated, or orally transmitted rules.

Compounding these historical challenges are deeply entrenched political-economic factors that actively sustain inefficiency. The literature frequently points to the pervasive nature of patronage networks, where political appointments based on clan (*beel*) allegiance (*qabiil*) rather than merit can lead to a civil service lacking the necessary skills and primarily loyal to clan leaders rather than the public good (Renders, 2012). This is exacerbated by weak legislative and judicial oversight, which fails to hold the executive branch and its ministries accountable for administrative performance. Furthermore, the critically low wages paid to public sector employees create an environment where informal "facilitation" payments (*maslaxaad*) are not just common but are often a necessary means for officials to supplement their income. This incentivizes the deliberate creation or prolongation of bureaucratic hurdles, as each step represents a potential opportunity for rent-seeking, thereby embedding corruption directly into the administrative process (World Bank, 2019).

Beyond intentional obstructions, a significant cause of red tape stems from sheer capacity constraints within the government. There is a well-documented lack of ongoing professional training for mid- and low-level bureaucrats, meaning many officials are not fully equipped with the knowledge to navigate the very systems they oversee. This is coupled with a near-total reliance on outdated, paper-based systems for record keeping, filing, and communication. The absence of a centralized digital database means files are easily lost, requiring applications to be restarted, and makes verifying information between departments a slow and arduous manual process. This technological deficit creates massive bottlenecks, as the physical movement of files between offices, often requiring multiple signatures, can introduce delays of weeks or months, all while the citizen or business applicant is left in a state of uncertainty (Jhazbhay, 2008).

Finally, the very legal and regulatory framework governing administration is itself a source of complexity. Somaliland operates with a body of laws that includes pre-1991 Somali statutes, new Somaliland legislation, and un-codified customary law (*Xeer*), which can often be overlapping, contradictory, or simply obsolete. This legal ambiguity grants significant discretionary power to individual officials, who can arbitrarily apply different rules, leading to inconsistency and unpredictability for users of the system. Crucially, there is no evidence in the literature of a formal Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) process being routinely employed before new regulations are enacted. This means laws are passed without a prior systematic analysis of the administrative burdens they will impose, the capacity required for implementation, or their economic costs on citizens and businesses, leading to a constant accumulation of new, often unworkable, regulatory requirements (Pegg & Kolstad, 2020).

Theme 2: The Lived Experience – Consequences of Administrative Burdens

For citizens.

The theoretical causes of red tape manifest in the daily lives of Somaliland's citizens and organizations as a series of profound and multifaceted administrative burdens. These burdens, as categorized by Herd and Moynihan (2019), extend far beyond simple inconvenience, representing significant costs that shape civic engagement and economic activity.

For citizens, the initial barrier is often the formidable learning costs associated with navigating the opaque bureaucracy. There is a conspicuous absence of centralized, official, and easily accessible information regarding procedures, required documentation, associated fees, and processing times for essential services such as obtaining national IDs, passports, business licenses, or property deeds. This information deficit forces individuals to rely on informal networks of advice from friends, family, or intermediaries who have prior experience, creating a system where knowledge is privileged and unequally distributed. This lack of transparency means that the very first step of any interaction with the state is shrouded in uncertainty, requiring a significant investment of time and effort just to understand the theoretical path forward, a process that disproportionately disadvantages the less educated, the poor, and those without connections (Eubanks, 2018; World Bank, 2019).

Beyond the cognitive effort lies the heavy psychological cost of this bureaucratic engagement. The constant uncertainty, the high potential for arbitrary rejection, and the demeaning experience of being sent between offices or told to return on another day generate significant stress, anxiety, and frustration. Over time, this can foster a sense of powerlessness and "learned helplessness," where citizens internalize the inefficiency as an immutable feature of the state and may eventually disengage from formal systems altogether. The emotional toll of these interactions is a critical, yet often overlooked, consequence of red tape; it transforms the state from a public service provider into a source of persistent psychological distress, alienating the very people it is meant to serve (Herd & Moynihan, 2019).

The most tangible manifestations of these burdens are the overwhelming compliance costs. Applicants face notoriously lengthy wait times, often requiring them to take multiple days off work to make numerous trips to government offices to check on an application's status, submit missing documents, or simply secure a signature. The monetary costs are twofold: the official, albeit often unclear, fees and the far more pernicious unofficial "facilitation" payments (*maslaxaad*) that are frequently solicited to expedite a process or to ensure a file does not get "lost." These direct costs, combined with the loss of income from time spent navigating the system, place a severe financial strain on individuals and families, effectively creating an economic barrier to accessing fundamental rights and services (Pegg & Kolstad, 2020).

Cumulatively, these daily experiences with an inefficient and often predatory administrative system lead to a severe erosion of trust in public institutions. When the state is consistently encountered as a hindrance rather than a help, it reinforces pervasive perceptions of its illegitimacy and inherent corruption. Citizens come to view bureaucracy not as a neutral set of rules but as a deliberate mechanism for extraction and control. This breakdown of the social contract is perhaps the most damaging long-term consequence, as it undermines the very foundation of state-citizen reciprocity, discourages civic participation, and weakens the collective willingness to comply with taxes and regulations, thereby further crippling the state's capacity and legitimacy in a vicious cycle (Rothstein, 2011).

For Organizations:

The administrative burdens that weigh heavily on citizens are similarly, and in some cases more acutely, felt by formal organizations operating within Somaliland. For the private sector, the pervasive red tape constitutes a significant deterrent to economic development. The high cost of entry and operation presents a formidable barrier for both local entrepreneurs and foreign investors. The process of formally registering a business is often described as a labyrinthine ordeal, requiring approvals from multiple ministries and agencies, each with its own delays and potential for solicited unofficial payments. These compliance costs, both in terms of time and capital, act as a direct tax on entrepreneurship, stifling innovation and protecting incumbent firms that have already navigated the system. Consequently, many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) choose to remain in the informal economy, foregoing the benefits of legal recognition to avoid the predatory bureaucracy. This mass informality limits the government's tax base and undermines the development of a robust, regulated private sector. Furthermore, for international firms considering foreign direct investment (FDI), the perception of an unpredictable and cumbersome regulatory environment is a major risk factor, often outweighing Somaliland's other potential advantages and isolating its economy from much-needed capital and expertise (Pegg & Kolstad, 2020; World Bank, 2019).

The challenges for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) are of a different nature but equal severity. These entities, crucial for service delivery and social advocacy in a context of limited state capacity, face onerous registration and reporting requirements that severely impede their operations. The process of securing official permission to operate is notoriously slow and opaque, often subject to the same discretionary application of rules and rent-seeking behaviors found in other parts of the bureaucracy. Once registered, organizations are burdened with complex and repetitive reporting demands from various government bodies, which lack a standardized or coordinated system. This administrative morass forces NGO staff, who are typically hired for their technical expertise in areas like health, education, or agriculture, to divert an inordinate amount of their time and the organization's financial resources away from their core missions and toward simply maintaining their legal status and compliance. This inefficient allocation of scarce resources ultimately reduces the effectiveness and reach of vital development programs, harming the very communities these organizations are trying to serve and creating a paradoxical situation where the state's regulatory apparatus actively undermines the actors supplementing its own service delivery gaps (Jhazbhay, 2008; Renders, 2012).

Theme 3: Pathways to Simplification – Strategies (Real and Proposed)

In response to the well-documented challenges of administrative burden, the literature on Somaliland points to a range of proposed, and in some cases piloted, strategies for simplification and reform. These pathways, while ambitious, offer a blueprint for building a more efficient and legitimate state-citizen interface. A prominent category of solutions centers on technology-led initiatives aimed at leapfrogging legacy systems. Numerous reports and policy proposals advocate for the development of e-government platforms, including centralized online information portals that would clearly publish application procedures, required documents, official fees, and processing timelines for all major public services. Such transparency would directly attack the pervasive learning costs citizens and businesses currently face. Furthermore, the implementation of digital payment systems integrated into these platforms could significantly reduce opportunities for soliciting unofficial cash payments, creating a verifiable electronic trail that enhances accountability. While the full-scale realization of a digital government remains a long-term goal, these proposals represent a critical forward-looking strategy to bypass the inefficiencies of the paper-based system, reduce discretionary power, and enhance transparency. However, as scholars like Eubanks (2018) caution, such technological solutions must be designed with equity in mind to avoid excluding those with limited digital access or literacy, ensuring that digital reform does not become a new source of marginalization.

A second, more immediately actionable set of strategies revolves around process re-engineering—the systematic redesign of core administrative procedures to eliminate unnecessary steps and complexity. This involves a fundamental review and streamlining of application forms, eliminating redundant questions and requirements that often duplicate information across different agencies. A highly advocated for model, particularly for economic development, is the establishment of integrated one-stop-shops for key services like business registration. By co-locating relevant officials from ministries of commerce, interior, and tax revenue into a single office, this model aims to drastically reduce the compliance costs of time and multiple trips currently required of entrepreneurs. The success of such models in other post-conflict and developing regions demonstrates their potential to directly combat the fragmentation inherited from Somaliland's past. As Herd and Moynihan (2019) argue, reducing "sludge" – the unnecessary friction in government processes – is one of the most effective ways to lessen administrative burdens. For Somaliland, applying this principle through deliberate process mapping and simplification offers a tangible, cost-effective starting point for reform that does not necessarily require massive technological investment but rather a commitment to rationalizing existing workflows and inter-agency cooperation.

A third critical pathway for reform involves comprehensive policy and regulatory reform to address the foundational legal chaos that enables arbitrary administration. The current body of law governing Somaliland is a patchwork of pre-1991 Somali statutes, new Somaliland legislation, and customary law (*Xeer*), which often creates contradictions and grants officials excessive discretionary power. A systematic review and harmonization of this legal framework are therefore a fundamental prerequisite for simplification. This would involve formally repealing obsolete regulations and clarifying jurisdictional ambiguities to create a more coherent and predictable set of rules. Crucially, the literature proposes the introduction of a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) mechanism (Pegg & Kolstad, 2020). An RIA is a formal process that requires policymakers to systematically analyze the potential costs, benefits, and—most importantly—the administrative burdens of any new proposed regulation *before* it is enacted. Institutionalizing RIAs would foster a culture of evidence-based lawmaking, preventing the accumulation of new red tape and ensuring that the capacity required for implementation is considered, thereby moving the system from one that constantly creates complexity to one that actively manages and minimizes it.

Finally, any sustainable solution must address the human element of the bureaucracy through significant investment in capacity building and accountability. The low wages and lack of continuous training identified as key causes of red tape must be tackled directly. This involves not only reviewing civil service remuneration to reduce the economic incentive for soliciting unofficial payments but also implementing large-scale, ongoing training programs focused on ethics, customer service, and the technical use of any new systems or procedures. Professionalization of the civil service, based on merit rather than patronage, is essential to create a cadre of officials who are both competent and motivated to serve the public. Furthermore, these internal reforms must be coupled with enhanced external transparency and accountability initiatives. As suggested in reports on governance in Somaliland, this could include the public posting of official fee schedules, clear service standards with guaranteed processing times, and the establishment of independent and well-publicized complaint mechanisms, such as an ombudsman office or citizen feedback portals (World Bank, 2019). By empowering users of public services to hold the administration accountable, these measures create a bottom-up pressure for performance that complements top-down institutional reforms.

It is evident from the literature that these strategies are not mutually exclusive but are instead deeply interconnected. A one-stop-shop for business registration (process re-engineering) will fail if the underlying laws on business licensing remain contradictory (policy failure) or if the officials staffing it are untrained and underpaid (capacity constraints). Similarly, an e-government portal (technology-led solution) can only be effective if citizens trust that it is the official channel and that their data is secure (transparency and accountability). Therefore, a holistic approach that simultaneously attacks the problem from the angles of legal clarity, process design, human capital, and technological enablement is necessary. The synergy between these strategies suggests that a coordinated reform program, perhaps initially focused on a specific high-impact service like business registration or passport issuance, would have the greatest chance of demonstrating tangible success and building momentum for a wider transformation of the public administration.

However, the scoping review reveals a significant gap between proposal and implementation. While these strategies are well-articulated in policy papers and donor reports, there is a stark absence of rigorous case studies or evaluations documenting their successful application within the Somaliland context. The challenges of non-recognition, which limit access to external funding and technical expertise, and the resilience of entrenched political-economic interests pose formidable barriers to change. Future research must therefore move beyond outlining proposals to critically analyzing reform attempts, both successful and failed, to understand the specific contextual factors, political coalitions, and implementation strategies that are required to translate these pathways to simplification from theoretical concepts into a lived reality for the citizens and organizations of Somaliland.

A fundamental and recurring proposal within the literature involves comprehensive policy and regulatory reform aimed at addressing the root legal chaos that fosters administrative discretion and complexity. Scholars and policy analysts consistently call for a systematic review, harmonization, and formal repeal of the obsolete and often contradictory regulations inherited from the pre-1991

era (Pegg & Kolstad, 2020). This process of legal rationalization is seen as a necessary precursor to any other simplification effort, as it would create a clearer, more predictable, and unified rule set for both officials and citizens to follow. A more advanced and highly recommended tool in this domain is the implementation of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). An RIA is a formal policy process that requires government agencies to analyze the potential economic, social, and administrative costs of any new proposed regulation *before* it is enacted (Herd & Moynihan, 2019). Institutionalizing RIA would represent a paradigm shift, moving Somaliland's lawmaking from a process that inadvertently accumulates red tape to one that consciously minimizes and manages bureaucratic burden, ensuring that the capacity required for implementation is considered at the outset.

Directly addressing the human dimension of the bureaucracy, a second critical strategy focuses on capacity building within the civil service. The literature identifies the critical lack of training and the demoralizingly low wages as key drivers of inefficiency and rent-seeking behavior. Consequently, proposals emphasize the urgent need for large-scale, ongoing professional training programs that go beyond technical skills to include ethics, customer service, and the management of new digital systems. Simultaneously, a comprehensive review and improvement of civil service remuneration is considered non-negotiable for sustainable reform (World Bank, 2019). The logic is that a better-paid and professionally validated civil servant is less economically compelled to solicit informal payments and more likely to take pride in their role as a public servant. This two-pronged approach of skills and incentives aims to create a more competent, motivated, and ethical administrative corps that is equipped to implement simplified processes effectively.

To complement internal reforms, the literature strongly advocates for transparency and accountability initiatives that empower citizens and create external pressure for performance. A simple yet powerful proposal is the mandatory public posting—on ministry websites and in office reception areas—of detailed, standardized information on all public services. This includes exhaustive lists of required documents, all official fees, step-by-step procedures, and legally mandated processing timelines (Herd & Moynihan, 2019). This measure directly attacks the information asymmetry that currently empowers corrupt officials. Furthermore, the establishment of independent and accessible citizen feedback mechanisms, such as a dedicated ombudsman office, suggestion boxes, or digital grievance portals, is frequently proposed. These channels provide citizens with a formal recourse to report poor service, request clarification, or lodge complaints against uncooperative or corrupt officials, thereby creating a system of bottom-up accountability that reinforces top-down managerial oversight.

In conclusion, the pathways to simplification mapped in the literature present a cohesive, multi-level framework for reform. However, a critical gap emerges between the articulation of these strategies in policy papers and their documented implementation on the ground. The proposed interventions—ranging from high-level regulatory reform and technological investment to granular process redesign and civil service training—are deeply interdependent. The success of a one-stop shop for business registration, for instance, hinges on streamlined regulations, trained staff, and publicly available information to function as intended. The primary challenge for Somaliland is not a lack of proposed solutions but the political will, coordinated leadership, and significant resource allocation required to implement them in a context constrained by non-recognition and entrenched patronage networks. Therefore, future research must shift from proposing strategies to critically analyzing implementation efforts, identifying the coalitions, sequencing, and contextual adaptations necessary to translate these pathways from theoretical concepts into a tangible reduction of the administrative burdens faced by Somaliland's citizens and organizations.

4. DISCUSSION: SYNTHESIS AND IDENTIFIED GAPS

4.1. Synthesis

The scoping review reveals that the causes and consequences of red tape in Somaliland are not isolated factors but are deeply intertwined, forming a self-reinforcing system of administrative inefficiency. The historical legacy of a fractured, control-oriented bureaucracy provides the fragmented foundation upon which contemporary dysfunctions are built. This foundation is actively sustained by political-economic factors, where patronage networks prioritize clan loyalty over merit, ensuring that the civil service remains weak and unaccountable. This deliberate weakening of capacity is then compounded by genuine capacity constraints and a chaotic legal framework, which together create the perfect environment for red tape to thrive. The lack of training and technology makes processes slow and opaque, while ambiguous laws grant officials the discretionary power to exploit this opacity. Thus, the system is not merely broken by accident; its very design—a product of its history and politics—incentivizes inefficiency as a mechanism for rent-seeking, embedding corruption into the everyday functioning of the state (Renders, 2012; World Bank, 2019).

The consequences for citizens and organizations, in turn, create a vicious feedback loop that perpetuates the system's failures. The pervasive need for unofficial payments to navigate bureaucratic hurdles, while a burden on the population, paradoxically becomes a coping mechanism for an underfunded state and an underpaid civil service. The low official wages make these facilitation payments (maslaxaad) a necessary source of income for many officials, meaning the very act of citizens paying to reduce their burdens financially reinforces the behavior that creates those burdens in the first place. Furthermore, the widespread erosion of trust and the resulting mass informality in the business sector starve the government of tax revenue. This fiscal starvation further cripples the

state's capacity to invest in better training, technology, and wages, locking the administration into a cycle of underperformance and reliance on informal rents. Therefore, the consequences of red tape directly feed back into its root causes, ensuring its persistence (Herd & Moynihan, 2019; Pegg & Kolstad, 2020).

This entire dynamic must be understood through the prism of Somaliland's unique hybrid governance. The co-existence of formal state institutions with powerful informal institutions like the House of Elders (Guurti) and customary law (Xeer) creates a dualistic administrative environment. While these traditional structures were instrumental in building peace, they now complicate modern governance. Informal networks can sometimes efficiently bypass formal red tape, providing crucial problem-solving flexibility. However, this very flexibility undermines the rule of law, fosters unpredictability, and reinforces a system where access to services is mediated by clan connections or willingness to pay rather than by universal citizenship rights. This hybridity means that efforts to simplify the formal bureaucracy must account for the powerful, parallel informal system that has evolved to cope with the state's failures. Reform is not merely a technical exercise but a political one that must navigate the intricate relationship between these two spheres of authority (Hoehne, 2015; Bradbury, 2008).

Despite a robust mapping of problems and solutions, a significant gap between proposal and implementation remains the most critical finding of this review. The literature is rich with proposed strategies—from technology-led solutions to process re-engineering—but is strikingly poor in empirical studies evaluating their application in Somaliland. A profound implementation gap exists. The reasons for this are rooted in the very causes identified: a lack of political will to dismantle patronage networks that benefit from the status quo, and the overarching challenge of unrecognized statehood, which severely constrains access to the sustained funding and technical expertise required for large-scale reform. Therefore, the most pressing gap in the literature is a lack of research on the political process of reform itself. Future studies must move beyond prescribing solutions to critically examining how change happens in Somaliland's hybrid context, identifying the coalitions, leadership, and contextual adaptation strategies needed to translate these well-theorized pathways into a tangible reduction of administrative burdens for Somaliland's citizens and organizations.

4.2. Critical Gaps in the Literature

The comprehensive mapping of causes, consequences, and proposed strategies, while valuable, ultimately reveals the most critical finding of this scoping review: the profound chasm between the identification of problems and the existence of substantive evidence on effective solutions within the Somaliland context. The literature is characterized by significant silences that severely limit its utility for policymakers and reformers. The most fundamental of these is the severe lack of empirical studies. The current body of knowledge is dominated by secondary commentary, policy briefs, and anecdotal accounts, creating an echo chamber of well-rehearsed problems without the primary data needed to understand them deeply. There is a conspicuous absence of rigorous, mixed-methods research that systematically gathers firsthand testimonies through surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus groups with the key actors: citizens who navigate the bureaucracy, business owners who bear its costs, and the civil servants who operate within it. Without this granular, empirical evidence, our understanding of the motivations, decision-making processes, and internal dynamics of the administration remains speculative, based on observation rather than interrogation, which ultimately impedes the development of targeted and effective interventions.

Compounding this empirical void is a significant measurement gap. The literature universally decries the high costs of red tape, yet these costs remain abstract and anecdotal. There is a complete absence of studies that attempt to quantify the compliance costs in terms of time and money. For instance, no research has meticulously tracked the process of obtaining a business license or a passport, documenting the median number of days required, the number of separate office visits necessitated, the total official fees, and the average amount of unofficial "facilitation" payments solicited. This lack of quantifiable data has serious consequences; it makes the problem seem intangible and prevents cost-benefit analyses of proposed reforms. Without being able to state definitively that red tape costs the economy a specific percentage of GDP or that it takes an entrepreneur an average of six weeks and $500 to formalize a business, advocates for change lack a powerful tool to convince policymakers and donors to prioritize administrative simplification. Quantification is essential to move the discourse from moral outrage to economic imperative.

Furthermore, the review exposes a vast implementation and evaluation gap. While the literature is replete with proposed strategies—from e-government portals to one-stop-shops—it is virtually silent on their practical execution within Somaliland. There are no rigorous case studies, process evaluations, or impact assessments that document attempts to implement these reforms. This leaves a critical blind spot: we do not know what has been tried, what has succeeded, what has failed, and, most importantly, the reasons behind these outcomes. The "how" of reform is just as important as the "what." Understanding the barriers to implementation—whether political resistance from vested interests, technical incompatibility, cultural misunderstandings, or simply a lack of sustained funding—is crucial knowledge. This gap forces every new initiative to start from scratch, unable to learn from the failures and successes of the past, resulting in a cycle of pilot projects that never scale and a repetition of the same proposals in donor reports without any cumulative progress.

Another critical and overlooked area is the interaction between the state bureaucracy and the informal sector, which constitutes a vast portion of Somaliland's economy. The literature almost exclusively focuses on the experiences of those who engage with the formal state apparatus, ignoring the coping mechanisms and parallel systems developed by those who operate outside of it. This creates a skewed understanding of the administrative ecosystem. Research is needed to understand how informal businesses navigate regulation (or avoid it entirely), how they establish trust and credibility without official licenses, and what their calculus is when considering formalization. The current system of red tape actively incentivizes informality; understanding this dynamic is key to designing reforms that would make formalization an attractive option. The significant tax revenue lost to informality is a direct cost of administrative burden, yet this cost remains unmeasured and poorly understood, representing a major gap in assessing the full economic impact of red tape.

Finally, the literature is completely silent on the issue of sub-national variation. Somaliland's bureaucracy is treated as a monolith, with no consideration of how the experience of administrative burden might differ between major urban centers like Hargeisa, regional capitals like Borama and Burao, or remote rural districts. It is highly plausible that the capacity, professionalism, and even the application of rules vary significantly across different jurisdictions due to factors like the strength of local governance, the influence of particular clans, and the distance from central ministry oversight. A citizen's experience in a major ministry in Hargeisa is likely vastly different from that of a pastoralist in a remote district office. This geographic blind spot risks producing one-size-fits-all policy prescriptions that are ineffective or even counterproductive in different parts of the country. Reform strategies must be informed by an understanding of this variation to be successful.

The cumulative effect of these gaps is a body of literature that is strong on diagnosis but critically weak on providing the evidence needed for effective treatment. The lack of empirical data and quantitative measurement makes it difficult to build a compelling case for reform or to prioritize interventions. The implementation gap leaves reformers without a roadmap, doomed to repeat past mistakes. The silence on the informal economy and sub-national variation means that policies risk being irrelevant to large segments of the population and could have unintended consequences. Therefore, the most pressing need for future research is to pivot from problem identification to solution-generation through primary empirical work. Scholars must undertake the difficult task of quantifying costs, evaluating pilots, and mapping the varied realities of governance across Somaliland's landscape. Only by filling these critical voids can research truly contribute to breaking the cycle of administrative burden and building a more effective and legitimate state for all Somalilanders.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Summary of Findings

This scoping review has systematically mapped the extensive literature on bureaucracy and red tape in Somaliland, confirming its role as a major impediment to the nation's development and state-building aspirations. The review successfully identified and synthesized the multifaceted causes of administrative inefficiency, which are deeply rooted in historical legacies, sustained by political-economic factors, exacerbated by capacity constraints, and encoded in a complex legal framework. Furthermore, it cataloged the severe consequences of these burdens, which manifest as significant learning, psychological, and compliance costs for citizens, while acting as a crippling deterrent to formal business investment and NGO operation. A range of strategies for simplification—from technological adoption and process re-engineering to regulatory reform and capacity building—were also explored. However, the most critical finding is the profound disconnect between the well-articulated understanding of the problem and the weak evidence base for solutions, highlighted by significant gaps in empirical data, measurement, and implementation analysis.

5.2. Implications for Policy

For policymakers in Somaliland and international partners, this review suggests a pragmatic, sequenced approach to reform. Initial efforts should focus on achievable "low-hanging fruit" that can build momentum and public trust. This includes immediate process mapping and simplification of high-impact services like business registration or passport issuance to eliminate redundant steps, and the mandatory publication of clear information on procedures, fees, and processing times on ministry websites and in offices to reduce learning costs. Concurrently, investment must begin in foundational e-government infrastructure, such as centralized digital portals and payment systems, designed equitably to avoid digital exclusion. Critically, any reform must be pursued with an understanding of Somaliland's hybrid governance context; strategies should aim to harmonize rather than clash with influential informal institutions and seek to build coalitions for change that include traditional leaders.

5.3. Implications for Future Research

This review unequivocally identifies where scholarly and practical research efforts are most urgently needed to inform effective action:

Conducting Time-Cost Studies: Priority must be given to quantitative research that measures administrative burdens empirically. Studies should track specific processes (e.g., business licensing, driver's licenses) to document the median time, number of interactions, and total costs (official and unofficial) incurred by citizens and businesses, transforming abstract complaints into hard data for advocacy and cost-benefit analysis.

In-Depth Case Studies: Rigorous qualitative research is needed to dissect the inner workings of specific ministries or agencies. Forensic case studies can reveal the internal dynamics, decision-making processes, and informal norms that sustain inefficiency, providing a nuanced understanding that is a prerequisite to designing effective interventions.

Research on Digital Technology and Informal Intermediaries: As Somaliland explores digital solutions, research must analyze their adoption and impact, including how they interact with existing informal intermediation networks. Understanding whether technology displaces or empowers corrupt intermediaries is crucial. Simultaneously, studies must investigate the informal sector's coping mechanisms to design policies that incentivize formalization.

Evaluating Past Reform Attempts: Scholars must seek out and rigorously evaluate any past or ongoing reform pilots. The critical question is not what to do, but how to do it in Somaliland's unique context. Research must focus on the implementation process itself, identifying the political coalitions, leadership, and contextual adaptation strategies required to translate policy proposals into tangible improvements in the lives of citizens. Only through this evidence can the cycle of administrative burden be broken.

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