


## Public views on Somalia's East African community membership: A perceptual study



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### ABSTRACT

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This study examines public perceptions in Somalia regarding the nation's potential membership in the East African Community (EAC), with a focus on awareness, perceived benefits, and anticipated challenges of integration. Using a quantitative cross-sectional descriptive research design, data were collected from 200 respondents through structured questionnaires. The study assessed public awareness of the EAC, perceptions of its significance, and factors influencing attitudes toward membership. The findings indicate moderate public awareness of the EAC; however, a majority of respondents expressed favorable views, recognizing the organization's potential to promote regional integration, security, and economic development. Simultaneously, concerns were noted regarding possible impacts on political sovereignty, economic inequality, and socio-cultural dynamics, which may hinder effective integration. The study concludes that Somalia's accession to the EAC holds considerable promise for advancing regional economic growth and political stability. Nonetheless, realizing these benefits requires addressing structural trade barriers, regulatory misalignments, and socio-political obstacles. Accordingly, the study recommends targeted interventions to support successful integration. These include prioritizing infrastructure development, strengthening security cooperation among member states, enacting governance reforms within Somalia to align with EAC standards, and implementing comprehensive public awareness campaigns to build informed public support for regional cooperation and sustained engagement in the integration process.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study presents an original contribution by specifically examining public perceptions within Somalia regarding potential membership in the EAC. Prior research has predominantly focused on existing member states, leaving a gap in understanding Somali citizens' perspectives on the benefits and challenges of regional integration.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The history of regional cooperation in East Africa dates back to pre-colonial times, with structured efforts beginning in 1919 when Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda—then under British administration—formed a customs union. These early moves marked the foundation for cross-border economic and social integration. However, even during the colonial period, differing economic orientations among the three territories posed challenges to seamless cooperation. For instance, Kenya's economy focused more on domestic development, supported by significant colonial investment, while Uganda and Tanganyika primarily served as exporters of raw materials (Reith & Boltz,

2011). In 1948, the establishment of the East African High Commission further strengthened economic ties, introducing measures such as a unified income tax and expanding the scope of regional collaboration. Following the colonial era, the East African Common Service Organization (EACSO) succeeded the High Commission, aiming to deepen integration among the independent states. Despite its ambitions, EACSO faced criticism for its close association with pre-independence structures, and attempts to centralize economic mechanisms, such as creating a central bank, failed to materialize.

Ndong and Ndong (2024) points out that the first East African Community (EAC) was officially created in 1967 by Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. This was an important first move towards these countries in East Africa working together. During the early years of the EAC, they made noticeable progress in making their money matters and social rules more similar. However, the initial EAC ultimately dissolved in 1977, a consequence of several key challenges. These included an asymmetric distribution of benefits among member states, deficiencies in institutional leadership frameworks, a predominant reliance on intergovernmental rather than supranational mechanisms for cooperation, and significant political discord, notably the ideological divergence and personal animosity between the regimes of Idi Amin Dada in Uganda and Julius Kambarege Nyerere in Tanzania. Subsequently, efforts aimed at the resuscitation of the EAC commenced in the 1990s, culminating in the signature of the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community in 1999. The Treaty entered into force in 2000, establishing a revised institutional architecture for enhanced regional collaboration. Subsequently, the Republic of Rwanda and the Republic of Burundi acceded to the bloc in 2007, thereby expanding its geographical purview and amplifying its strategic influence within the East African geopolitical context. The reconstituted EAC has registered notable advancements by internalizing the lessons derived from the dissolution of its precursor. These improvements are manifest in the fortification of institutional governance mechanisms, the pursuit of a more equitable distribution of the costs and benefits associated with regional integration, and the augmented engagement of non-state actors, encompassing civil society organizations and market forces (Reith & Boltz, 2011).

The East African Community (EAC), formally established in 2001, constitutes a regional intergovernmental organization with the primary objectives of fostering economic integration, promoting social development, and enhancing political stability among its seven constituent member states: the Republic of Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania, the Republic of Uganda, the Republic of Rwanda, the Republic of Burundi, the Republic of South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Okello & Novelli, 2014). Its strategic goals encompass the progressive establishment of a customs union, a common market, a monetary union, and the eventual realization of a political federation, thereby fostering deepened regional cooperation aimed at augmenting economic opportunities, consolidating political alliances, and addressing extant challenges such as infrastructural deficits, trade impediments, and regional insecurity. Originally founded by Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, these countries remain central to the EAC's economic and political framework. Kenya serves as a key economic hub with its diversified economy, technology investments, and the strategic port of Mombasa, which facilitates regional trade (Reith & Boltz, 2011). Tanzania, home to the EAC's headquarters in Arusha, contributes significantly with its agricultural and mineral wealth, while the port of Dar es Salaam enhances regional connectivity, especially for landlocked nations (Reith & Boltz, 2011). Uganda, with its fertile land and oil reserves, plays a vital role as an agricultural exporter and a bridge for trade between Central and East Africa, supporting the EAC's development goals (Buigut, 2012).

In addition to its founding members, the EAC has expanded to include Rwanda and Burundi, which joined in 2007, South Sudan in 2016, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2022. Rwanda has emerged as a hub for innovation and governance, using its EAC membership to improve trade and infrastructure (Reith & Boltz, 2011). Similarly, Burundi contributes with its rich agricultural potential, though it faces challenges of political instability and poverty (Reith & Boltz, 2011). South Sudan brings valuable oil reserves to the EAC's energy landscape, while the DRC adds immense natural resources and extends the EAC's influence to the Atlantic Ocean (Buigut, 2012).

Somalia, an aspiring member, offers strategic maritime access to the Indian Ocean and opportunities for regional economic integration despite its ongoing rebuilding efforts. Together, the members strengthen the EAC's collective vision of economic growth, political stability, and regional integration.

Somalia, a nation situated in the Horn of Africa, possesses a strategically important geographical placement with its coastline on the Indian Ocean, thereby acting as a significant connector between the Middle Eastern and African regions. While historically noted for its developed maritime trade and rich cultural traditions, the state has faced sustained periods of conflict and a lack of stability since the disintegration of its central government in 1991. In spite of these ongoing difficulties, Somalia has shown considerable recent progress in stabilizing its government, reforming its economy, and improving financial management. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), for instance, has praised Somalia's reform efforts in key financial and economic areas, which could lead to debt relief and better global economic ties (Mohamed, 2024). Mohamed (2024) notes that Somalia is experiencing increased political stability and economic recovery, a point underscored by the United Nations Security Council's recent removal of a long-standing arms embargo. Ongoing initiatives aimed at mitigating the pervasive dollarization of the economy and combating the proliferation of counterfeit currency are strategically oriented towards the fortification of monetary stability within Somalia. Concurrently, substantive institutional reforms are being implemented with the explicit intent of enhancing governance efficacy and bolstering the rule of law. These positive developments progressively position Somalia as a prospective participant within regional and international multilateral frameworks, notably the East African Community (EAC).

Somalia possesses the capacity to offer several strategic advantages to the East African Community (EAC), primarily through the exploitation of its strategic geostrategic location, its nascent but promising economic potential, and its endowment of natural resources. Its littoral access to the Indian Ocean provides EAC member states with enhanced maritime trade corridors, thereby facilitating crucial connectivity to global supply chains and international markets. Furthermore, Somalia's significant livestock and agricultural sectors represent vital assets for bolstering regional food security and mitigating potential food shortages within the EAC bloc, while its substantial, yet largely unexploited, reserves of oil and natural gas hold the potential to make a considerable contribution to the EAC's evolving energy infrastructure and overall energy security. Bachmann and Sidaway (2010) analyze the impact of external actors, particularly European involvement, on how the East African Community has developed its regional integration processes. Furthermore, Somalia's potential membership creates chances for better cooperation across borders, especially in tackling common security issues and building peace in the area. When Somalia joins the EAC Common Market and Customs Union, it will likely boost trade within the region by adding a variety of goods and creating a larger market for products from other EAC countries. Moreover, when Somalia becomes part of the EAC's political and economic structures, it strengthens unity in the region and offers a shared space for economic progress and long-term development (Mohamed, 2024).

According to Kitenge (2024) stresses how crucial the East African Community (EAC) is for helping the region grow through working together on money, politics, and society. Even though the EAC faces problems like weak organizations and having to agree on every decision, it's still trying to reach its goals of having a common market, a customs union, a shared currency, and eventually becoming one political unit (Asongu, Diop, & Ndiaye, 2024). The EAC has the ability to become a strong, united area with more power in the world economy and in politics (Katembo, 2008). While working together has brought good things like more trade, similar rules, and joint efforts for peace, there are still issues like some areas growing faster than others, weak organizations, and complicated social and political situations. These problems need ongoing hard work to make sure the integration lasts. Also, Kenyaggia (2016) points out how important it is for the public to understand and support regional integration in the EAC, showing how communication can help the countries feel closer and work together better.

While many academic studies have looked at how the countries already in the East African Community (EAC) work together, there isn't much academic research specifically about Somalia possibly joining and what that would

mean. Most of the studies focus on how countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda cooperate on economic and political issues. They often don't deeply examine how countries thinking about joining, like Somalia, view the EAC's main goals or how well their own goals fit with the EAC's (Reith & Boltz, 2011). Furthermore, Barya (2011) offers a relevant discussion on the role of social security and protection frameworks within the EAC, a critical consideration in evaluating the potential benefits and challenges associated with the accession of new member states. Significantly, the level of public awareness and the prevailing perceptions of Somali citizens regarding the EAC remain underexplored, representing a key lacuna in understanding the potential influence of societal perspectives on policy formulation and implementation pertaining to regional integration. This gap warrants particular attention given the potential for public opinion to significantly shape the trajectory and success of Somalia's integration into the EAC framework.

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The East African Community (EAC) is a regional intergovernmental organization established with the mandate to foster economic, social, and political integration among its constituent member states. While extant research has frequently underscored the purported benefits of regional integration, encompassing enhanced intra-regional commerce, improved infrastructural development, and the consolidation of political stability (Buigut, 2012; Reith & Boltz, 2011) it often neglects the perspectives and potential contributions of prospective member states such as Somalia. Characterized by a history of protracted instability, underdeveloped infrastructure, and a current lack of comprehensive regulatory harmonization with established EAC norms, Somalia presents both unique opportunities and considerable challenges with regard to its prospective membership within the regional bloc (Mohamed, 2024). While Somalia has registered notable advancements in economic stabilization and the implementation of governance reforms, the perspectives of the populace regarding the East African Community (EAC) remain largely underexplored. Existing scholarly inquiries, such as those by Buigut (2012) and Mohamed (2024) predominantly concentrate on the macroeconomic impacts and institutional preparedness for regional integration, with comparatively limited attention afforded to the significance of sociocultural elements in shaping integration outcomes. The effective implementation of EAC initiatives within Somalia may encounter challenges if the nation accedes to a regional framework absent the requisite societal support or congruence with citizen aspirations, stemming from a paucity of understanding regarding public opinions. Furthermore, Somalia must address extant socio-political disparities within the region, resolve prevailing trade impediments, and achieve comprehensive alignment of its national policies with established EAC standards (Mohamed, 2024). Addressing these challenges requires (1) systematic analysis of constituent perceptions and (2) strategic leveraging of Somalia's comparative advantages to advance EAC integration objectives. The current deficit in empirical understanding of stakeholder attitudes creates substantial barriers to evidence-based policymaking, potentially compromising the efficacy of Somalia's accession process and subsequent regional harmonization efforts.

Addressing the multifaceted challenges associated with Somalia's prospective membership within the East African Community (EAC) presents a transformative opportunity with the potential to significantly augment the bloc's overall efficacy and impact. By proactively resolving extant trade barriers and regulatory discrepancies, the EAC can strategically leverage Somalia's pivotal geostrategic location as a crucial maritime gateway to the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, thereby unlocking access to nascent markets and fostering the development of robust regional and global economic linkages. The successful integration of Somalia into the EAC framework would contribute substantively to political stabilization within the Horn of Africa, mitigate prevailing cross-border insecurity, and enhance the bloc's standing as a key driver of regional peace and security initiatives. Furthermore, the progressive alignment of Somalia's sociocultural framework with established EAC norms is crucial for garnering broad-based public support for the integration process and nurturing a cohesive shared regional identity an essential foundational element for sustained long-term prosperity and stability. A nuanced and empirically

substantiated comprehension of Somali public sentiment is therefore paramount to ensuring the integration process aligns with the aspirations of its citizenry, consequently maximizing the efficacy and legitimacy of East African Community (EAC)-led projects and policies within Somalia. Furthermore, Somalia's inclusive incorporation would serve to underscore the EAC's inherent capacity to integrate diverse nations exhibiting heterogeneous developmental trajectories, thereby reinforcing its standing as a continental exemplar of inclusivity and equitable regional growth. By strategically and comprehensively addressing these critical imperatives, the EAC can effectively advance its overarching vision of a unified, prosperous, and stable East Africa, while concurrently realizing Somalia's considerable untapped potential and abundant resources.

### 3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

This study investigates public perspectives on Somalia's prospective membership in the East African Community (EAC). The specific objectives of the study are as follows.

1. To evaluate the public awareness and perception towards EAC.
2. To analyze the factors influencing the formation and shaping of public perceptions towards the EAC within Somalia.
3. To identify and critically examine the potential challenges and opportunities associated with Somalia's accession to the East African Community.

Therefore, this study endeavors to address the following research questions.

1. How much Somali people know and understand about the EAC's purpose and activities.
2. Investigate the anticipated advantages and disadvantages of EAC membership as perceived by the Somali populace, and identify the key socio-economic, political, and cultural factors shaping these perceptions.
3. What difficulties Somalia might face in meeting the EAC's rules and becoming a full part of the organization.
4. How Somalia can use its EAC membership to improve its economy, government, and overall standing in the region.

### 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 4.1. East African Community (EAC): Establishment and Goals

The East African Community (EAC) constitutes a regional intergovernmental organization established with the overarching mandate to promote social development, political collaboration, and economic integration among its constituent member states. Initially founded in 1967 by the Republic of Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Republic of Uganda, the EAC's primary objective was the harmonization of economic and social policies and the establishment of a unified economic framework. However, this initial iteration of the EAC dissolved in 1977, primarily due to challenges related to governance structures and an inequitable distribution of benefits among participating states. Subsequently, the EAC was formally re-established in 2000, signifying a renewed commitment to the imperative of strengthened regional integration. Since its reconstitution, the organization has undergone significant expansion, incorporating the Republic of Rwanda and the Republic of Burundi in 2007, the Republic of South Sudan in 2016, and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2022, underscoring its increasing prominence and influence within the East African sub-region (Kimeu, 2020; Reith & Boltz, 2011). The EAC's core strategic objectives encompass the progressive establishment of a customs union, a common market, a monetary union, and the eventual realization of a political federation. These ambitious goals are strategically oriented towards enhancing regional economic competitiveness, reducing extant trade barriers, and augmenting collective resilience in the face of global market dynamics. Through the implementation of key initiatives such as the Common Market Protocol and strategic infrastructure development projects, the EAC endeavors to facilitate sustained economic growth and enhanced regional connectivity (Nzioki, 2013).



#### *4.2. Public Awareness and Perception towards EAC*

Public awareness is indeed a critical factor for the success of regional integration within the EAC. Research indicates a disparity in awareness levels, with urban populations generally exhibiting greater familiarity with EAC policies compared to rural communities, often attributed to differential access to information (Kimeu, 2020). This divergence in awareness underscores the importance of targeted outreach initiatives to ensure broader public engagement and support, a point echoed by Rapanyane, Mkhathshwa, and Motswakae (2024) in their analysis of the EAC's role in addressing regional challenges.

Public perceptions of the EAC are not uniform across member states and appear to correlate with tangible economic benefits experienced. In countries such as Kenya and Tanzania, where integration has been associated with discernible economic growth, public support for the EAC tends to be more robust. Conversely, in member states with smaller or less developed economies, skepticism regarding the equitable distribution of integration benefits has been observed (Nor, 2024). Addressing these perceived disparities through focused public education and ensuring a more balanced distribution of the advantages of integration are crucial for cultivating inclusive public support for the EAC. Furthermore, historical and ongoing regional dynamics, such as conflicts over shared resources like the Nile, as highlighted by Kagwanja (2007) also play a role in shaping public perceptions of regional integration within the EAC.

#### *4.3. Factors Influencing Public Perceptions towards EAC*

Several determinants shape public perceptions of the EAC. Economic aspirations, particularly the anticipation of employment opportunities and enhanced market access, serve as significant drivers of positive public sentiment. Perceived direct benefits accruing from regional integration, such as improved trade prospects and reduced commodity costs, correlate with more favorable public opinions (Nor, 2024). Furthermore, the dynamics of migration, as explored by Maluki, Kavitha, and Ayoma (2024) in contexts like Kakuma, Kenya, demonstrate a tangible impact on public views regarding regional integration and the facilitation of mobility. Political considerations and cultural dynamics also exert considerable influence. Concerns regarding the potential erosion of national sovereignty, anxieties about governance structures, and the perception of dominance by larger member economies, such as Kenya and Tanzania, can undermine public trust in the EAC. Conversely, established historical and cultural linkages between member states tend to foster greater public acceptance of regional integration initiatives (Mohamed, 2024). To effectively address these multifaceted influences, policymakers must ensure that integration endeavors are closely aligned with the priorities of the citizenry and that the equitable distribution of benefits is demonstrably emphasized. Moreover, the role of technological advancement and competitiveness in the context of Industry 4.0, as discussed by Bongomin, Nganyi, Abswaidi, Hitiyise, and Tumusiime (2020) presents a potential avenue for fostering enhanced regional cooperation and bolstering economic resilience, which could positively shape public perceptions of the EAC's future trajectory.

#### *4.4. Challenges and Opportunities for Membership in EAC*

Somalia's prospective membership in the East African Community (EAC) presents a complex interplay of potential challenges and opportunities. Challenges impeding effective integration include the nation's underdeveloped infrastructure, limited institutional capacity, and persistent political instability. Somalia's significant reliance on informal trade networks and its nascent financial systems pose further impediments to aligning with established EAC standards. Moreover, prevailing security concerns, such as terrorism and maritime piracy, complicate the country's ability to engage fully in regional cooperative initiatives (Nor, 2024). Despite these considerable challenges, Somalia offers significant opportunities for the EAC. Its strategically vital geostrategic location provides access to critical maritime trade routes, thereby enhancing regional connectivity with global markets. Somalia's agricultural and livestock sectors hold the potential to contribute substantially to regional food

security, while its largely unexploited oil and natural gas reserves represent a prospective contribution to bolstering the EAC's energy portfolio. Furthermore, integration into the EAC framework could serve as a catalyst for attracting foreign direct investment, facilitating crucial infrastructure development, and fostering sustained economic growth within Somalia (Abdirahman, 2024). To fully realize these potential opportunities, Somalia must prioritize addressing its fundamental structural challenges, ensure comprehensive alignment of its national policies with overarching EAC objectives, and invest strategically in public awareness and engagement initiatives. By strengthening governance mechanisms, enhancing critical infrastructure, and fostering broad-based public engagement, Somalia can effectively navigate the complexities of integration into the EAC and contribute meaningfully to the realization of its collective goals.

## 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 5.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional descriptive research design (Wang & Cheng, 2020) to provide a comprehensive assessment of public opinion regarding Somalia's prospective participation in the East African Community (EAC) at a specific temporal juncture. The primary objective of this inquiry is to evaluate the level of public understanding and prevailing attitudes towards the EAC within Somalia. This will encompass an examination of the potential benefits accruing from Somalia's integration, as well as an analysis of the potential political, economic, social, and cultural challenges that may arise. A secondary objective involves investigating the factors influencing public perceptions of Somalia's EAC membership, including demographic variables such as age, educational attainment, and geographical location. Finally, the study aims to identify and analyze the potential opportunities and challenges associated with Somalia's accession to the EAC.

### 5.2. Research Instrument

The data for this study was collected through a structured questionnaire designed to assess public perspectives on Somalia's potential membership in the East African Community (EAC). This instrument was divided into four key sections: the first gathered demographic information from respondents, including gender, age, education level, relevant experience, and geographic location, to analyze the influence of these factors on perceptions of EAC membership; the second section focused on gauging public awareness and understanding of the EAC, assessing knowledge of its structure, objectives, and the perceived benefits and drawbacks of Somalia's integration; the third section explored public perceptions and their determinants, utilizing statements to ascertain levels of agreement or disagreement regarding the anticipated political, economic, social, and cultural impacts of Somalia's EAC membership; and the fourth section aimed to identify perceived challenges and opportunities associated with Somalia's potential accession, investigating respondents' concerns and expectations related to the integration process. This comprehensive and structured approach enabled a thorough analysis of public sentiment concerning Somalia's EAC membership, with a specific focus on awareness levels, prevailing perceptions, and the identification of perceived challenges and opportunities.

### 5.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were gathered using an online questionnaire distributed via social media to reach a wide range of participants. The collected data were then analyzed with SPSS version 24. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to summarize participant demographics and overall public awareness and opinions about Somalia potentially joining the East African Community (EAC). To understand how factors like age, gender, education, and location might affect these opinions, regression analysis was conducted to identify significant predictors of public views on EAC membership and how different groups perceive the related challenges and opportunities.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the results of the survey conducted to ascertain public perceptions regarding Somalia's prospective membership in the East African Community (EAC). The findings are structured to provide a comprehensive analysis, examining them in relation to key demographic characteristics, the level of public awareness and comprehension of the EAC, opinions concerning its anticipated political, economic, social, and cultural ramifications, and the perceived opportunities and challenges associated with membership. The ensuing discussion aims to evaluate the prevailing level of public knowledge about the EAC, identify the salient factors influencing public perceptions, and elucidate public views on the integration process. This approach is intended to provide valuable insights into areas requiring focused attention to effectively address public concerns and maximize the potential benefits of Somalia's integration into the EAC framework.

### 6.1. Demographics Characteristics

This section outlines the demographic makeup of the 200 participants in the study, providing essential background for understanding the findings on public opinions about Somalia potentially joining the East African Community (EAC). The sample, detailed in Table 1, was predominantly male (74%) with 26% female respondents. The largest age group represented was 20-30 years (37.5%), followed by 31-40 years (34.5%), while smaller proportions included 41-50 years (17.5%), below 20 years (6%), and those above 50 years (4.5%). This demographic breakdown offers context for interpreting the public perceptions analyzed in the subsequent sections.

**Table 1.** illustrates the demographic characteristics of respondents.

Category	Frequency	Percentage %
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	52	26.00%
Male	148	74.00%
<b>Age</b>		
20 – 30 years	75	37.50%
31 – 40 years	69	34.50%
41-50 years	35	17.50%
Above 50 years	9	4.50%
Below 20 years	12	6.00%
<b>Marital status</b>		
Divorced	16	8.00%
Married	112	56.00%
Single	71	35.50%
Widowed	1	0.50%
<b>Educational level</b>		
University level	174	87.00%
School level	12	6.00%
Other	9	4.50%
Informal education	5	2.50%
<b>Experience</b>		
3-6 years	67	33.50%
7-10 years	48	24.00%
Less than 3 years	38	19.00%
More than 10 years	47	23.50%
<b>Region of residence</b>		
Banadir regional administration	63	31.50%
Galmudug State	26	13.00%
Hirshabelle State	27	13.50%
Jubbaland State	22	11.00%
Puntland State	20	10.00%
Somaliland	15	7.50%
South West State	27	13.50%



### 6.2. Public Awareness and Understanding of the EAC

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of responses regarding public awareness and understanding of the East African Community (EAC). Specifically, the data indicate that prior to Somalia's membership, a significant proportion (49%) of respondents reported a lack of awareness of the EAC, while 43.5% indicated prior awareness. Concerning the perceived significance of the EAC as a regional entity, a substantial majority (74%) agreed with its importance, contrasting with 17% who disagreed and 9% who expressed uncertainty. Regarding the perception of the EAC as an equitable and well-established organization, 63.5% of respondents agreed, while 24% disagreed, and 12.5% remained uncertain. When assessing the perceived orientation of the EAC, 61% of respondents believed it to be more politically focused than economically, socially, or culturally oriented, compared to 25.5% who disagreed and 13.5% who were unsure. In terms of the EAC's perceived impact on enhancing quality of life through economic activities, 66% of respondents believed it had a positive influence, while 23% disagreed, and 11% were uncertain. Finally, a large majority (76.5%) agreed on the crucial importance of EAC membership for East African nations, with 17.5% disagreeing and 6% being uncertain. These findings collectively suggest that while pre-membership public awareness of the EAC was moderate, there was a general perception of its significance and potential benefits, particularly concerning quality of life and regional collaboration. However, notable concerns emerged regarding the organization's perceived political focus and the assurance of equality among its member states.

**Table 2.** Shows public awareness and understanding of the EAC.

Statement	Frequency	Percentage %
1. Were you aware of the existence of the East African community (EAC) before Somalia became a member?		
• No	98	49.00%
• Not sure	15	7.50%
• Yes	87	43.50%
2. Do you think that the East African community (EAC) is a significant regional organization?		
• No	34	17.00%
• Not sure	18	9.00%
• Yes	148	74.00%
3. Do you think that East African community (EAC) is a well-established organization in which all members are respected and treated equally?		
• No	48	24.00%
• Not sure	25	12.50%
• Yes	127	63.50%
4. Do you believe that East African community (EAC) is more political than economic, social, and cultural?		
• No	51	25.50%
• Not sure	27	13.50%
• Yes	122	61.00%
5. Do you think that EAC is significantly enhancing the quality of life for East Africans through increased trade, investments, value-added production, and competitiveness?		
• No	46	23.00%
• Not sure	22	11.00%
• Yes	132	66.00%
6. Do you agree that being a member of the East African community (EAC) is crucial for East African countries?		
• No	35	17.50%
• Not sure	12	6.00%
• Yes	153	76.50%

### 6.3. Public Perceptions and Influencing Factors

Table 3 presents the prevailing public sentiment regarding the anticipated impacts of Somalia's membership in the East African Community (EAC). The data reveal a strong consensus among respondents regarding the positive implications of this integration. Specifically, a substantial majority (83.5%) agreed that Somalia's EAC membership represents a positive development, with an almost equally high percentage (80.5%) acknowledging its mutual

benefits for both Somalia and the existing member states. Furthermore, a significant proportion of respondents believe that EAC membership will enhance regional security (76%) and bolster Somalia's political influence (74%). The government's decision to join the EAC was also widely supported, with 81% of respondents concurring with its wisdom. Moreover, a notable 81.5% of the respondents anticipate that EAC membership will unlock significant trade and business opportunities. It is worth noting, however, that a small segment of the respondents expressed disagreement or neutrality across these various aspects, suggesting specific areas where further engagement and information dissemination may be beneficial in fostering more widespread public support.

**Table 3.** Presents public perceptions and influencing factors.

Statement	Frequency	Percentage %
1. Somalia's membership in the East African community (EAC) is a positive step towards regional integration.		
• Agree	77	38.50%
• Disagree	6	3.00%
• Neutral	26	13.00%
• Strongly agree	90	45.00%
• Strongly disagree	1	0.50%
2. The inclusion of Somalia in the East African community (EAC) is seen as beneficial for both Somalia and other member states.		
• Agree	80	40.00%
• Disagree	11	5.50%
• Neutral	24	12.00%
• Strongly agree	83	41.50%
• Strongly disagree	2	1.00%
3. Somalia's integration into the East African community (EAC) is expected to enhance regional security and stability.		
• Agree	76	76
• Disagree	19	19
• Neutral	26	26
• Strongly agree	76	76
• Strongly disagree	3	3
4. The membership of Somalia in the East African community (EAC) enhances Somalia's political influence within the region.		
• Agree	74	37.00%
• Disagree	15	7.50%
• Neutral	27	13.50%
• Strongly agree	80	40.00%
• Strongly disagree	4	2.00%
5. The government's decision to join the EAC was a wise and effective policy that will significantly contribute to the development of Somalia.		
• Agree	76	38.00%
• Disagree	14	7.00%
• Neutral	15	7.50%
• Strongly agree	86	43.00%
• Strongly disagree	9	4.50%
6. Somalia's membership in the East African community (EAC) brings significant opportunities for trade and business.		
• Agree	78	39.00%
• Disagree	12	6.00%
• Neutral	22	11.00%
• Strongly agree	85	42.50%
• Strongly disagree	3	1.50%
• Strongly disagree	4	2.00%

#### 6.4. Challenges and Opportunities

Table 4 Shows the key concerns identified by respondents regarding Somalia's potential membership in the East African Community (EAC). Specifically, a significant majority (64%) agreed that existing political dynamics within the EAC could threaten Somalia's national sovereignty, while 57% concurred that Somalia's accession might present challenges for current EAC member states. Regarding economic and security aspects, over half of the respondents (57.5%) believed that regional stability could be negatively affected. Furthermore, a substantial proportion (62.5%) anticipated the emergence of social and cultural challenges as a result of Somalia's integration into the EAC framework. These findings underscore the importance of proactively addressing potential political, economic, and socio-cultural issues to ensure a successful and mutually advantageous integration for Somalia within the EAC.

**Table 4.** Shows challenges and opportunities.

Statement	Frequency	Percentage %
1. There may be political issues of the East African community (EAC) that might pose challenges for Somalia's national sovereignty.		
• Agree	82	41.00%
• Disagree	21	10.50%
• Neutral	33	16.50%
• Strongly agree	46	23.00%
• Strongly disagree	18	9.00%
2. The membership of Somalis in East African community (EAC) may cause problems and challenges for other members of EAC.		
• Agree	66	33.00%
• Disagree	31	15.50%
• Neutral	31	15.50%
• Strongly agree	48	24.00%
• Strongly disagree	24	12.00%
3. Economic and Security problems can arise from the membership of Somalia in the East African Community (EAC) for its embers.		
• Agree	67	33.50%
• Disagree	27	13.50%
• Neutral	33	16.50%
• Strongly agree	48	24.00%
• Strongly disagree	25	12.50%
4. Social and cultural challenges can arise from the membership of Somalia in the East African community (EAC) for its members		
• Agree	68	34.00%
• Disagree	26	13.00%
• Neutral	26	13.00%
• Strongly agree	57	28.50%
• Strongly disagree	23	11.50%

## 7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research explored public perspectives on Somalia's potential membership in the East African Community (EAC), highlighting its capacity to boost regional economic growth and cooperation due to its strategic location and emerging stability. The study emphasizes the necessity of addressing trade barriers, regulatory inconsistencies, and socio-political issues for successful integration, while also recommending strategies to increase public awareness of the benefits within Somalia. By capitalizing on Somalia's resources and geopolitical advantages, the EAC can strengthen trade networks, promote peace, and form a more unified economic and political entity.

To facilitate this integration, the Somali government should prioritize infrastructure development in transportation and communication, collaborate with EAC members on security, establish strong governance and

anti-corruption measures, harmonize trade policies with EAC standards, reform the education system to include English, and actively engage civil society in monitoring the process. Addressing these areas will be crucial for aligning Somalia with regional norms, resolving existing barriers, and fully leveraging the opportunities presented by EAC membership for both Somalia and the wider East African region.

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**Transparency:** The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

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**Authors' Contributions:** Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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