

# HORN OF AFRICA BULLETIN

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## 2017 elections: Making Somalia great again?

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This January-February issue focuses on the elections in Somalia and their impact on the future of Somalia. This issue also addresses the interface between the elections in Somalia and their impact on 'Somaliland'.<sup>[1]</sup> Interestingly, the issue of the HAB was overtaken by the Somalia elections which proceeded more rapidly than anticipated; the elections in Somalia began in 2016 and after repeated postponements were finally concluded on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2017. Legislators elected Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (also popularly known as Farmaajo) as President, which led to widespread celebrations amongst Somalis in Somalia as well as neighbouring countries and the Diaspora. Faduma Abukar's article is particularly insightful in this regard being based on direct reportage of events just before and after the elections. Her article captures the unrestrained joy and hope that greeted the news of Farmaajo's victory and provides a very interesting overview of the outsized role of social media in the Somalia elections. As several articles in this issue of the Horn of Africa Bulletin attest, Farmaajo's victory was viewed not only as a victory for clean politics in Somalia, but also as pointing the way towards the end of the perennial conflict and foreign involvement in Somalia. The article by Najum Mushtaq explores this overarching theme in detail and provides an overview of the challenges facing the new president of Somalia. Najum's article ends on an optimistic note and suggests the possibility that the new president's thinking and priorities augur well for the future.

The larger canvas is also critical in this context. The recent elections in Somalia have generated high expectations in Somalia regarding peace and reconstitution of the fragmented Somali state, but at the same time leave the door open to disillusionment, if the new president does not perform as expected. Therefore, expectations and hope will need to be tempered especially bearing in mind the intractable challenges that the new president is facing.

In the political science literature which focuses on democratic transitions, elections have customarily been viewed as an institutional and procedural hallmark of democratic political systems, as well as a key legitimization tool for political systems and elites. While the process and outcome of the current elections is to be commended, the reality is that the elections in Somalia were based on a very narrow franchise. The 275 members of the lower house of the legislature (House of the People) were elected by 14, 025 electors, while the 54 members of the upper house of the legislature were elected by the state assemblies of the different regional administrations in Somalia.<sup>[2]</sup> The members of the various state assemblies are not elected through universal adult suffrage. The article by Mohamed Amin focuses on issues of gender and politics and sounds a sombre note in underlining the continuing obstacles to political participation by Somali women which are exacerbated in the constricted spaces allowed for in the existing political system in Somalia.

Keeping in mind developments in Somalia and political state of play in the rest of the Horn of Africa, Somaliland stands out for being a political entity that has organized successive free, fair and competitive elections. Interestingly Farmaajo's electoral victory and his calls for reconciliation with Somaliland have led to renewed expectations that Somaliland may yet be integrated with Somalia. Peter Chonka's panoramic and analytic take on the complex political manoeuvring and tensions between the Somali Federal Government and authorities in Somaliland in the context of the elections in south central Somalia is a riveting and necessary read for all those interested in the recent elections and what they portend for the future of Somalia. He concludes by suggesting that fluidity and dynamism defines the relationship between political elites and entrepreneurs in Somalia (including Somaliland) which could lead to multiple possible political outcomes.

The article by Aly Verjee discusses the often-mentioned but seldom adequately studied topic of electoral finances and the impact of financial resources in Somaliland elections. His article is based on a collaborative research project that studied the role of financial resources and inducements in the 2005 legislative and 2012 local council elections in Somaliland.<sup>[3]</sup> Aly's article highlights some of the salient effects of electoral spending by parties and political entrepreneurs and how this has affected the electoral system. The article underlines the gaps in approaches that reify elections and electoral processes while at the same time ignoring larger socio-economic dynamics.

A recurrent theme in several of the articles in this issue of the HAB focuses on foreign involvement in Somalia. The articles while showcasing the perceptions and dominant Somalia narrative regarding foreign involvement in Somalia, fail to engage adequately with the range of foreign actors engaged in Somalia and their divergent interests and motivations.

Demessie Fantaye

Editor

<sup>[1]</sup> Somaliland a self-declared independent state does not enjoy international recognition. The use of the term, Somaliland does not in any way or form imply recognition of the claim to independence.

<sup>[2]</sup> <https://unsom.unmissions.org/fact-sheet-somalia%E2%80%99s-2016-electoral-process>

<sup>[3]</sup> The Economics of Elections in Somaliland: The financing of political parties and candidates.

Aly Verjee, Adan Y. Abokor, Haroon A. Yusuf, Amina M. Warsame, Muhammad A. Farah AND Mohamed F. Hersi. Rift Valley Institute Research Paper 3. 2015

## Somali elections online: View from Mogadishu

By Faduma Abukar Mursal

On the 8th of February, although it was a weekday, most residents of Mogadishu had returned to their beds after the *fajr* prayer, and stayed in bed later than usual: there were no noise and the commotion of *bajaj*<sup>[1]</sup>, minibuses, and cars was unusually absent from the streets. This morning around 10am, the Somali National TV (SNTV) channel was already broadcasting the empty venue at the airport, which would soon be filled. Discussions were louder on social media than on the actual streets of Mogadishu. This short article describes how social media users have commented on the events around the Somali presidential election, and observations of tensions and celebrations in the streets of Mogadishu and online. It aims to illustrate the ways the Internet provided a space for political discussions between Somalis.

Since the day before the election, all the roads had been blocked, and even airplane traffic had halted on the day of the election. The much anticipated day of the Presidential election finally arrived, and the atmosphere was tense. The electoral process, that had been scheduled to take place in August 2016, had been repeatedly postponed, lasting longer than expected. These two days were like the last kilometres of an exhausting marathon. After the electoral process in the regions ended, the political elite, and their supporters, came back to Mogadishu, where presidential campaigns had started. The period of “*kala guurka*” - which refers to “transition” as the period right before the election but literally translates as “moving out” had started. Mobility had been slowly reduced for the days prior to the election, as an evening curfew had been imposed on *bajaj* and other transports from 7 pm onwards.

### **An election online: “If people on Facebook could vote - Farmaajo would be elected”**

Discussions on the latest online polls, prognostics and political humour, took place on Facebook. These discussions tackled issues such as the timing of the elections, rumours and jokes regarding how much was spent on vote buying, the latest plots, the political fate of Hassan Sheikh: will he remain or would this election unleash surprises along the lines of the elections in 2012.

Before the election, the possibility of Hassan Sheikh winning a second term had been regarded as a strong possibility, even if many observers were of the opinion that “if people on Facebook could vote, Farmaajo would be elected”. Online posts and polls seemed to back this interpretation, where Farmaajo’s supporters turned out to be the most avid polls respondents. Several journalists and politicians for instance carried out online polls on Facebook and Twitter to evaluate preferences, during the debates of presidential candidates since January and more on the day of the Presidential election. For instance, the famous VOA journalist Harun Maruf who has 74,5k followers on Twitter started polls in January 2017. On the 14th of January, he asked his followers in a first poll of several who they would want as the next Somali president. Of the 780 voters,

45% voted for Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, 25% Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, 17% for Hassan Sheikh and 13% for Omar A. Sharmarke 13%<sup>[2]</sup>. Most polls were in English on Twitter, while most comments tend to be mixed Somali and English on Facebook.

### **The day of the election: #SomaliaDecides**

When the counting started on TV, it was also livestreamed on Facebook - likes and loves flying over the screen. The hashtag #SomaliaDecides was trending both on Facebook and twitter. After all the legislators had voted, the counting started. In the first round, when it was clear that the first ten ballots were for, "Mohamed Cabdullahi Farmaajo" - this sparked surprise. The roll call also raised questions as to whether these votes denoted a trend and when the votes for Hassan Sheikh would start being called out? And it continued, slowly however. The first votes for Hassan Sheikh provoked loud cheering in the room, before the Speaker Jawari asked them to calm down and avoid cheering.

The counting itself was a long process, taking almost two hours, and during the count the mosques sounded the call for prayer. The first round ended as relatively expected, with four veteran politicians who qualified for the next round: the incumbent president Hassan Sheikh Mahamoud gathered 88 votes, former Prime Minister Mohamed Cabdullahi Farmajo with 72 votes, former president of the transitional federal government Sharif Sheikh Hassan had 49 while the former Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Sharmarke finished with 37 votes.

A picture of the Ethiopian colonel Gebre present at the counting was circulating online. Farmajo's supporters interpreted his expression as one of surprise and worry, which they put down to Hassan Sheikh gathering less than the expected 120 votes - already sparking enthusiasm among social media users. It was widely assumed that the Ethiopian government supposed Hassan Sheikh, which re-enforced the sentiment of support to Farmajo who was increasingly associated with rejection of foreign influence.

In the second round, Farmajo had secured some 180 votes when suddenly loud gun fire started. "Is the fighting already starting? Wasn't it too early to start celebrations, since the third round had yet to start?" were questions that people were asking themselves. Whether the gunfire was a premonitory signal, or an expression of support to Farmajo, the next major development which involved Hassan Sheikh taking the stage and withdrawing his candidacy was met with surprise and relief. It was already past 6pm, and it was a relief that we would be spared another long process of voting and counting.

### **Celebrating - the "ar farmaajo ii geeya" fever**

Somalia had decided. At first, only gunshots were heard on the streets. Those gunshots however were not like the mortar shells that dropped the night before. Instead the gun fire were soon followed by celebrations filling the streets, while gun shots were streaking through the black sky like fireworks. The neighbours rushed out and quickly filled the streets that had been deserted just moments earlier. This time the noise in the streets didn't come from the horns of the drivers, but from young boys and girls, men and women, and soldiers taking to the lit streets: marching, singing, and screaming

“Farmaajo”.

This celebration was widely followed online. Pictures of the crowd celebrating in Mogadishu, as well as other cities in Somalia and abroad, started to circulate. As an image of the peaceful transfer of power, a picture of the three final candidates, two former presidents and the final victor, standing together and holding hands, was circulated. Videos too were shared, wherein members of the national army were gathered, expressing their support to the elected president, by making prayers that he succeeds and that God saves the Somali people[3].

The most famous short video, however, was a video of a civilian walking in front of a crowd, singing and repeating “ar Farmaajo ii geeya” (oh bring me to Farmaajo) and the crowd responding “waa lagu geeyna” (you will be brought to him). It soon became a phenomenon, on the internet and outside. It was turned a day later into a song, and the lines rapidly appeared on Matatus in Nairobi or on caps. A wave of hope swept away the tensions that had been accumulating the past ten days prior to the election.

### **The following day: “Today feels like Eid”**

The next day everyone returned to their daily activities, but the atmosphere was still festive. In town, groups of people, men and women, kids and teenagers walked together. For shop owners, customers and *bajaj* drivers, Farmaajo was never off their lips; “Today it is our Eid: the people won”. Groups of people would walk together, branding the poster of Farmaajo, his portrait on a light blue background and the script “danta, dalka, dadka” – a slogan meaning ([national] interest, the country, the people”. Some added “diinta” (religion) to keep up with the rhyme in “d” to add an important component, or substitute it for “danta” which was not so much remembered.

The civilians demonstrated along with the military. On the way back from the market in the old town, Hamar Weyne, the road usually closed to *bajaj* was open. Groups of people were walking and chanting. A military car passed, and young boys ran after them, and jumped into the back of the car, sitting next to the soldiers. As we drove further, another military car came around the KM4 junction, and they stopped – a female soldier came out to represent the group of military soldiers in the car, stood up in the middle, shot in the air and returned to her seat. The car drove away. It had become a ritual for every military car to show support to the president by shooting in the air.

### **The use of social media as a medium to reach out**

Social media played a pivotal role in this election. While analysis has focused on alliances, use of bribery and clan loyalty, the use of social media in this election has been important in several ways. The internet created a space in which politicians could reach out to people who they couldn’t have access to otherwise – due to security reasons for instance. Reaching out through social media has been described as critical especially for the new comers in the parliament. These new comers tend to be younger and avid social media users who – at least claim to – represent their social media followers when exercising their voting rights. The day before the elections, one of the legislators, a

young man in his late 20s, was asked on SNTV what would influence his decision. He answered that he would do a poll with his Facebook followers, and vote for the candidate who acquired the most online votes. It is important to bear in mind that as discussed earlier, relative to the other candidates Farmaajo had the largest number of active online supporters.

The video of a civilian asking to meet the president had gone viral. Besides the humorous aspect and the excitement, it also captured the aspiration of a population to have an accessible and trustworthy administration - personified in the figure of the president. Soon after the spread of the video, rumours started to go around announcing that the man would meet the president. One day later, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, again HarunMarufpolls surveyed his followers. Some 1044 followers responded to the question “what should the president get done during the first one year of his four-year term”? 50% votes to rebuild/reintegrate the army, 24% on securing Mogadishu fully, 14% on jobs/economic recovery and 12% to implement reconciliation[4].

Farmaajo’s administration may enjoy strong support from the people and the military compared to the previous government. However, this president has generated high expectations, which if not met could easily turn into strong disappointment. This wave of hope may be similar to the one in 2012 when Hassan Sheikh Mahamoud, an educated man from civil society, was elected president. However, he soon became and was perceived as the personification of Somali problems. This has been illustrated by the election that quickly became “everyone but Hassan Sheikh”[5]. The new president’s task isn’t an easy one.

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### Sources

[1] “Bajaj” is the name of the Indian company that manufactures three wheeled vehicles that are popularly used both as a means of public transportation and to transport goods. The 3 wheeled vehicles have become common across the Horn of Africa.

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## SOMALIA

## Somalia under Farmaajo: Fresh start or another false dawn?

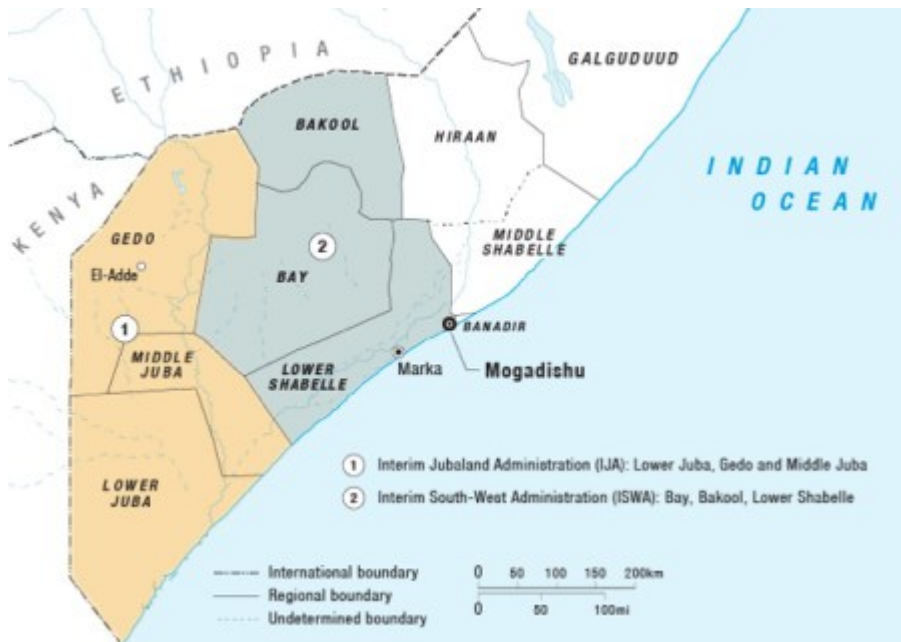
By Najum Mushtaq

When the US ambassador to Somalia, Stephen Schwartz, met the new president of Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, better known as ‘Farmaajo’, a US citizen, he presented him with a Trump cap with the slogan “Make Somalia Great Again.”<sup>[1]</sup>

The ambassador’s gesture echoed the widespread celebrations in Somali communities across the world—from Mogadishu to Nairobi to Buffalo and Minneapolis—and an unprecedented level of optimism and expectations in the new administration.

But what inspires so much hope and jubilation, given the fact that Somalia is far from attaining a semblance of political stability and setting up governance structures? The presidential election on 8 February had to be held inside an airport hangar and Mogadishu was under a security lockdown when Farmaajo emerged as the surprise winner of the contest. Other than the unfinished war on al-Shabab and multiple lingering clan conflicts, Somalia remains fragmented administratively and along clan lines and is yet again facing a severe humanitarian crisis as another famine looms in several drought-hit regions.

### An unlikely victory: ‘take the money, but vote with your conscience’



Somalia’s southern interim federal states and regions. Source: Crisis Group

In order to understand the upbeat response to Farmaajo’s election and his popularity, the context of his electoral victory must be taken into account. The odds were heavily stacked against Abdullahi Farmaajo. All five regional state presidents, whose MPs voted in the election, were backing Farmaajo’s rivals: Jubaland President Ahmed Madobe campaigned for Sheikh Sharif Ahmed; Southwest President Sharif Hasan Aden backed

the incumbent Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, as did the president of Galmudug, Abdikarim Hussein Guled, while Puntland President Abdiwali Gaas supported his fellow clansman incumbent Prime Minister Omar Sharmake. HirShabelle President Ali Osoble was reported to be ambivalent supporting at times both Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Sharmake.[2] That Farmaajo bagged 184 of the 328 votes shows that the parliamentarians did not toe the line of their regional leaders and made a decision independent of the political and clan pressure.

The election was also marked by widespread corruption and votes were being openly bought—investigators estimated that about \$20 million changed hands during the campaign with Somalia’s auditor general reporting bribes of up to 1.3 million dollar.[3] Farmaajo, on the other hand, had done his fundraising for the mandatory \$30,000 candidate registration fee in the diaspora communities and, having spent little time in Somali politics and government, was not tainted by allegations of corruption.

Whilst corruption marred the electoral process and was partly the reason for several postponements, it clearly did not decide the final outcome. Mogadishu residents say that mosque sheikhs as well as people on the street were urging the members of parliament to ‘take the money—it is *halaal* if you vote with your conscience’.[4] The MPs were also banned from carrying their mobile phones in the voting hall to prevent the ballots being photographed or MPs receiving last-minute bribes.

Equally daunting for Farmaajo was the role of regional and Middle Eastern countries backing one or the other of his rivals. Ethiopia, for instance, was believed to have been backing the incumbent for the sake of continuity and stability. The Addis Ababa-based Center for Dialogue Research and Cooperation, a think-tank run by former Ethiopian diplomats and believed to reflect the official policy, had warned that Somalia would be destabilized further if a non-Hawiye took over Villa Somalia (Farmaajo is from the Darood clan’s Marehan branch whilst the defeated Hasan Sheikh an Abgal-Hawiye). “Based on historic and current realities allowing the Hawiye to keep the Presidency might be a wise move,” the report said, adding: “It appears practically impossible for a Darood in Mogadishu to offer leadership particularly to the security institutions constituted of endogenous clans and sub clans engaged in the fight against [al-Shabab]”. [5] Meetings of the Somali regional presidents with Ethiopian authorities in Addis Ababa also sparked a reaction in Somalia to what was widely seen as an attempt to influence the outcome of the presidential election.[6]

Islamist candidates such as the outgoing president Hasan Sheikh and another former president, Sheikh Sahrif Ahmed, also had the diplomatic and financial support of their patrons in Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Turkey.[7]

Yet, despite so many hurdles, how did President Farmaajo beat the odds? From all accounts, this was the first Somali election where the Social media played a major role in determining the election result.[8]

As Radio Dalsan reports, “Unlike the previous parliaments [this] Parliament is made up of mainly new faces with 45% of the lawmakers being youth...more exposed and tech

savvy compared to the elderly MPs in the past, and have been using social media platforms to monitor and gauge the [mood of the] people they represent.”

Several MPs conducted polls on social media before making a decision on who to vote for. For example, Muna Kay, a young Somali fashion designer from the US and an MP, asked her followers for their opinion and later posted on her Facebook the results of her polling backing Farmaajo. MP Abdi Shire Jama also went on social media to ask his followers who they wanted as president. When he got 7000 plus comments backing a Farmaajo presidency he announced to his followers that he had made a decision to vote for Farmaajo.<sup>[9]</sup> In brief, social media campaigns built pressure on the MPs

### **What does Farmaajo stand for? policies and challenges**

Judging from his previous 8-month stint as prime minister in 2010-11 and his post-election policy pronouncements, Farmaajo’s vision for Somalia seems to run counter to the prevalent narratives and conventional wisdom on Somali politics.

Unlike the previous two presidents, he is not an overtly Islamist politician in a political landscape dominated by religious figures and movements. His predecessors exemplify this trend. Hassan Sheikh belongs to the *Dam-ul-Jadid* arm of Al-Islah, the Somali equivalent of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Sheikh Sharif is the leaders of *Ala Sheikh*, a Salafi-leaning revivalist group of Muslim clerics. Then, Farmaajo opposes clan-based politics and wants to do away with the 4.5 power-sharing formula that discriminates against the minor clans and ensures the dominance of the four major ones.

The new president seems to be carrying forward his agenda from his days as prime minister under President Sheikh Sharif.

“No budget! There was no budget!” he told *New Republic* about his previous term. “Nobody got paid!” Mohamed cut down the cabinet to 18 members and tried to ensure that soldiers were paid and long-closed roads were repaired.<sup>[10]</sup> He also put in place for the first time the practice of drawing an annual government budget.

More important, it was also during his days as prime minister that al-Shabab was driven out of Mogadishu and Gedo.

Based on his recent interviews, his three policy priorities can be identified as the following:<sup>[11]</sup>

- Ending political bickering and ensuring unity within the government. The new president laments the fact that every previous president had at least three prime ministers during their tenures which caused uncertainty and created instability within the government. He aims to put in place a team to work for a longer period of three or four years and rebuild the civil service.
- Defeating al-Shabab: Farmaajo says he has a “very sound strategic plan” to do so. Whilst he acknowledges and appreciates the efforts of the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the core element of his plan is to build a strong professional Somali National Army, paying soldiers on time and providing for their material needs, including medical care and assistance to soldiers’ families. Winning the

hearts and minds of the people, he believes, is critical to defeating al-Shabab.

- In order to achieve these two goals, he identifies combatting corruption as a top priority: soldiers and civil servants don't get salaries because of corruption which undermines good governance and props up al-Shabab. Also, given the degree of corruption in elections, he intends to lay foundations for a free and fair election in 2020.

Given the ambitious nature and scope of his vision, the Farmajo administration will be facing an uphill task. Oliver Chevreau and Ali Aden Abdi of Saferworld pose "4 questions the new president must confront in deciding what kind of democracy Somalia should be."<sup>[12]</sup> Here's a summary of the domestic political challenges they foresee Farmajo confronting in reforming the state-building process according to his vision of a unified Somalia:

- Which model will future elections use?
- What about elections for the federal member states?
- Can technical and political preparations be completed in time?
- Can Somalia hold peaceful elections amid continued conflict with al-Shabaab?

Chevreau and Abdi argue that "although unpopular among the minority clans who are only allocated a '0.5' share of representation, the model has arguably been successful in achieving a level of stability in Somalia otherwise absent for many decades." They fear that one-person-one-vote elections that no longer pre-allocate seats on a clan basis will lead to the largest clan to achieve the greatest representation in parliament which "would upset the balance that has underpinned recent promising, albeit uneven, state-building efforts."

Kenneth Menkhaus of Davidson College has similar reservations about Farmajo's policy agenda. "People were equally excited for [Hassan Sheikh] Mohamud when he was elected," said "But as a matter of political survival, he was co-opted by a system that relies on deal-making and corruption. Progress in Somalia is contingent on reducing that corruption."<sup>[13]</sup>

The Washington Post opines that Farmajo "will face the mammoth task of uniting a country composed of disparate so-called 'federal member states,' each of which has a distinct clan composition. In several of those states, strongmen have emerged who are seen locally as more important and more powerful than the president. Farmajo's success may rely on building a broad alliance of clans without succumbing to horse-trading of government funds."<sup>[14]</sup>

### **Silencing the guns: the future of AMISOM**

Farmaajo's biggest problem, nonetheless, lie in the security sector. The al-Shabab question goes hand in hand with the future of AMISOM. One of Farmajo's first symbolic policy moves was to use US-trained Somali elite guards for his security during his first public appearance rather than AMISOM troops mandated to protect the Somali government officials and institutions.<sup>[15]</sup> His assertion that ultimately it is up to the Somali army to overcome al-Shabab enhances his popularity with the Somalis but he has

a delicate balancing act to follow if the objective of ridding Somalia of al-Shabab is to be achieved.

The president wants the AMISOM to stay on until the Somali National Army has been rebuilt and ready to replace AMISOM troops. In his first meeting with African Union leaders and envoys of the troops contributing countries in Mogadishu, Farmaajo enunciated his policy objective with a clear objective and limited timeline. “My vision is to defeat al-Shabab in two years,” he said.”[\[16\]](#). The Special Representative of the African Union Commission for Somalia, Ambassador Francisco Madeira, said after his meeting with Farmaajo: “The president has set up his priorities. He wants Al-Shabaab defeated as quickly as possible. We assured the president that we are with him in that endeavour.”

Relations with Ethiopia and Kenya will hold the key for progress on this issue. Messages of goodwill and support from the Kenyan government and the African Union are early encouraging signs that Farmaajo could negotiate deals with Somalia’s neighbours on the issue of both strengthening AMISOM’s role, focused on training the Somali army, as well as creating conditions for putting in place an exit strategy for AMISOM. The phased withdrawal of the Ethiopian forces from many parts of Somalia in 2016 and the increasing domestic pressure on the Kenyan government to pull out its troops from Somalia may strengthen Farmaajo’s stance of simultaneously strengthening the role of AMISOM over the next two years as well as initiating the process of Somali army taking over from AMISOM.

Another indicator that his agenda may converge with that of the African Union is the six-month Peace and Security Council (PSC) report presented at the 28<sup>th</sup> African Union summit in Addis Ababa in January 2017, outlining its ‘Roadmap for silencing the guns by 2020’. As the ‘locomotive’ for ridding Africa of conflicts over the next three years, the PSC complains that when it comes to AMISOM, despite retaking large swathes of territory previously controlled by al-Shabab, the events of the past six months indicate that Somalia is still far from being safe. In its report the PSC asks the UN to authorise an additional AMISOM troop total of 4 500 and laments the fact that it still does not have adequate military hardware to carry out its mission. [\[17\]](#) Working together with the PSC to help achieve its goal of creating condition that do not require the presence of African Union troops, Farmaajo has an opportunity to pressure donor countries for a better-equipped and more efficient AMISOM that can train and build a professional Somali army within his first term.

## **Conclusion**

The euphoria caused in Somalia by Farmaajo’s election is a testimony to the resilience and optimism of a people battered by three decades of warfare, destruction and displacement. It represents a break from the past, both in terms of individuals who’ll be running the administration—likely to be specialist technocrats—and changes in policy and practice it envisages. But the expectations must be tempered with ground realities inside Somalia as well as the regional milieu. Even if under the guise of AMISOM, direct and

prolonged military intervention by regional powers is unsustainable and counterproductive after ten years of operations without achieving the overall objective of defeating al-Shabab. Somalia has voted for change; its neighbours should also review their Somalia policy to facilitate the process of building an indigenous Somali security and other state institutions whilst cooperating with the new administration in combatting al-Shabab.

If, by 2020, the Farmaajo administration is able to hold the next election in a more secure Somalia under the security cover provided by the Somali army itself, much of the rest of its agenda—stable and functional state institutions and national reconciliation—may also become a reality in the long run.

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## Somalia's recent election gives Somali women a glimmer of hope

By Mohamed Amin

The election of a new Somalia President on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, 2017 was paradoxically historic and yet business as usual. Pre-election speculation was that the incumbent Hassan Sheikh Mohamud will win re-election for four more years in part because he was believed to have deep pockets and rumoured to have the tacit support of key players in Somalia politics including some oil rich Gulf Arab states and regional powers such as Ethiopia and Kenya. Not only did he not win, he conceded defeat before the third and final round of voting where he would have squared off against the final victor Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed nicknamed Farmaajo.

This was indeed a promising sign for Somalia's nascent democracy especially for women and members of minority groups to dream of becoming President of Somalia one day. The elections were promising in the sense that the incumbent lost by a wider margin than anyone had expected, despite having all the advantages of incumbency such as money, influence and connections. In other words, money played lesser role than in the past at least as far as the final results are concerned. It is also promising because Mr. Farmaajo was popularly believed to be the least corrupt among the candidates, a reputation he earned during his brief eight months tenure as the PM of the country. Since graft, corruption and intimidation are among the main obstacles to Somali women's chances of getting elected to high offices such as the presidency and membership in the Parliament's two houses, it is a hopeful sign for women and other marginalized groups that someone can win the presidency partly due to their competence. Whether this is a one-time miracle or the beginning of a merit-based democracy is something only time will tell.

Give credit though where it is due. President Hassan was savvy enough to see the writing on the wall and was gracious in defeat. To see the incumbent and pre-election favourite as well as his predecessor President Sharif holding hands with the newly elected President, in a peaceful transfer of power in an African country let alone in Somalia was indeed historic given what has been happening in Somalia in the last 27 years.<sup>[1]</sup>

There were celebrations in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, as well as other parts of Somalia and in areas populated by Somalis in neighbouring countries such as Nairobi's Eastleigh. More importantly, the celebrations did not appear to be clan-based. Furthermore, anyone who participated or watched on television the spontaneous celebrations that erupted after Farmaajo was announced to be the winner could see the largest number and loudest celebrants were women dressed in blue and white, Somalia's national colours. Anyone unaware of what has just happened, could be forgiven for thinking Somalia had won a great war against an arch-enemy.



## Persisting obstacles against the political participation of women

On the other hand, it was business as usual as far as Somali women are concerned. The outgoing Federal Government has not implemented a Federal Gender Policy passed by cabinet last year mainly due to alleged resistance from conservative groups. [2]

Despite a requirement of 30% women representation in all political institutions, in practice this has proven easier said than done. Even the Parliament's two Chambers have been unable to attain this goal. [3] This has in turn become a self-fulfilling prophecy and perpetuated a vicious cycle. First, not being included in the decision-making process reinforces the belief on the part of some that women have no place in politics. Second, it means their agenda is often not on the table and as a result not enough resources are allocated to issues that affect women specifically despite women carrying the heaviest burden when disaster happens whether it is natural disaster like the current drought or "man" made one like the protracted civil war. Consequently, Somali women lag behind Somali men in all human development indicators, according to UNDP Gender In Somalia Brief for 2011 to 2015. [4]

Yet this was not Jeffersonian Democracy. The President was elected by members of the House of the People - Somalia's Lower House and those in the Upper House of whom only 64 (24.24%) and 12 (22.64%) respectively are women despite 30% of seats supposedly reserved for female candidates. [5] Moreover, all of the final 22 candidates were men. There were two women who in the early stages of the campaign expressed interest in putting their names forward as candidates but withdrew their names later, citing what later the UN and other international observers confirmed as wide-spread bribery, intimidation and other irregularities. [6] One of the female candidates who briefly campaigned for the presidency, Fadumo Dayib, says that "female Members of Parliament would not stand a chance if they try to assert themselves because they were sent there by male clan leaders who expect them to toe the clan line". [7]

Having said this, it is important to note that any discussion about gender politics in Somalia has to take into account three important factors - Islam, Somali culture and traditions and the country's political history. The impact of these three factors on Somali women's participation in the politics and power-sharing of Somali is complex and multidimensional and affect women's health, wealth and their ability to participate meaningfully in the socio-economic development of the country.

Somalis are nearly 100% Sunni Muslims and overwhelmingly belong to the Shafi'i school within Sunni Islam. The question of women and political roles has always been a contentious issue within the Islamic faith. Several majority-Muslim nations such as Turkey, Pakistan, and Bangladesh had female leaders. [8] In the case of Somalia, some conservative clerics oppose women holding leadership positions basing their opposition primarily but not exclusively on a Hadith that says "a people led by a woman will not prosper". [9] Others inside and outside Somalia, however, argue women can vote and hold leadership position. [10] In an interview with the Imam of Abubakr Al-Sadiq mosque in Nairobi on 18 February 2017, the Imam stated that "Islam allows women to be

consulted as part of the Shura (The compulsory consultations before a decision is taken on behalf of the Ummah - Muslim nation) and can hold leadership positions especially those concerned with women's issues as long as it does not encroach on their ability to perform their Islamic duties".[\[11\]](#)

In terms of Somali culture and traditions, Somalia is a patriarchal society like many African countries. The Somali language is replete with proverbs that belittle and demean women. For example, one Somali proverb says "A wisdom sought from a woman is like a fish sought from the desert" while another one says "A woman is like a child with big feet" and a third says "Lie to a woman when courting her but tell her the truth once she is your wife". Patriarchal traditions such as these can often have a deleterious impact. As late as 14 December 2016, a 14 year old girl was gang-raped and video-recorded in the area of the central town of Goldogob. It was reported that elders in the area (all men and actually the Somali word for elders is "Odayaasha" which translates to "a group of older men") were trying to resolve the issue through Heer, the traditional Somali conflict resolution process which is seen as lenient compared to the formal judicial system.[\[12\]](#) Another good example of a non-Islamic traditional practice that is extremely harmful to Somali girls and has long lasting physical and psychological impact on their lives is Female Genital Mutilation also known as FGM.[\[13\]](#)

The political history of Somalia also demonstrates that women had not been given an opportunity to play high profile roles in Somalia politics. No Somali woman has ever held the position of President or Prime Minister although they had held ministerial positions from time to time and even a position as high as deputy Prime Minister. Even in those instances when women held relatively prominent positions in politics, they have faced intimidation, ostracism, and threats. Fawzia Yusuf Adam is a case in point. She was the first Somali woman to hold the position of Foreign Minister as well as deputy Prime Minister. "I get threats day in day out" she said in an Al-Jazeera interview "Yes it happens but I am not afraid about what may happen tomorrow. I am busy with today" she added.[\[14\]](#)

The cumulative effect of these factors is reflected in the statistics. According to UNDP Gender Inequality Index, Somalia has the fourth highest gender inequality levels globally with female literacy 30% below that of males, and Somalia's maternal mortality rate is the highest in the world.[\[15\]](#) Does this mean the struggle to mainstream gender issues in Somalia is lost? Fortunately not. For one the situation in Somalia has recently improved at multiple fronts and that is good news for Somali women as it is for all Somalis. Women have been actively lobbying for the 30% quota in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and the number of women in Somali Parliament has more than doubled from eleven and half per cent in 2012 to twenty-four and half in 2017 .[\[16\]](#)

The civil war as brutal as it was and continues to be, for some women, has resulted in empowerment and new opportunities.[\[17\]](#) Wars often disrupt established norms and can lead to unforeseen consequences. In the case of Somalia, because of the disruptive nature of the civil war especially on the ability of some men to continue to be the bread winners, women had to step in to support their families. In particular, women have taken

to running small businesses successfully.[18] This is one area where women can continue to advance if given resources and existing barriers are removed.

## Conclusion

While continued advocacy to mainstream gender issues in Somalia is necessary and inevitable if Somalia women are to overcome the barriers that impede their human development such as clan structure, lack of resources, and societal and cultural beliefs, there are in the meantime important things that can be done to advance women's issues in Somalia such as affirmative action where possible, raising awareness, education, and economic empowerment. More importantly, lobbying decision-makers and those in power will go a long way to remedy some of what ails the system that is not responding to current interventions.

And the good news is that if there is one thing Somalis are good at, it is self-preservation bargaining. As long as lobbying is done with wisdom, persistency and patience, those in power can be persuaded to support mainstreaming gender issues. Moreover, it is important to build on the gains already made. An important milestone has already been reached. For the first time in the country's history, two women competed as candidates for the highest office in the country, a notion that would have been unthinkable in the past. The courage of these two females is commendable and their pioneering efforts are worthy of celebration. Finally, to paraphrase Michael Keating, the UN Special Representative for Somalia, there are many problems in Somalia, but it is not falling apart, it is a place coming together.[19]

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SOMALIA, SOMALILAND

## 'Regional' representation and resistance: Is there a relationship between 2017 elections in Somalia and Somaliland?

By Peter Chonka

2017 is year of elections for both the Federal Republic of Somalia and the Republic of Somaliland. The bicameral parliamentary selection process undertaken through 135 elders and 14,025 electoral delegates in the capitals of regions of the Federal Republic in southern, central and north-eastern Somalia has been underway since October last year. On 8 February 2017, these new and returned MPs elected Mohamed Abdullahi 'Farmaajo' as President. For the breakaway, *de facto* independent, but internationally un-recognized Republic of Somaliland in the north-west<sup>[1]</sup> of the Somali Horn of Africa, the latest manifestation of its much-lauded democratic process is now due to be undertaken in October. With incumbent President Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud 'Siilaanyo' not standing, a change at the top is imminent. That both Somalia and Somaliland are holding elections in 2017 is a coincidence- a result of Mogadishu and its international backers' 'Vision 2016' being delayed till this year, and political in-fighting and the humanitarian impact of severe drought bringing similar postponements to Somaliland's vote.

'National' Somali politics (or 'international', depending on one's perspective) is characterised by a curious blend of both separation and interconnectedness. The Government of the Republic of Somaliland, based in Hargeysa, rejected any official involvement in selection processes undertaken for the Parliament and Presidency for the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in Mogadishu. If Somaliland were to play any kind of official role in the FGS process this would imply that the breakaway territory was merely another 'federal' region, awaiting re-integration with a Mogadishu-centred national government. A large proportion of the population of the north-west see themselves as 'Somalilanders', and are understandably proud of their participation in the breakaway Republic's independent electoral competitions. From the perspective of the Somali Federal Government in Mogadishu, however, Somaliland *is* but one errant federal region and the fiction of 'national' unity is maintained through the allocation of seats in its parliament to representatives of the territory and its predominant clans. 'Somaliland' is allocated 46 seats in the Lower House of the Somali Parliament and 11 in the Upper House. In this sense, 'Somaliland', represents the second largest bloc of seats in the lower house - only the Southwest State has more representation.

With this in mind, it's no surprise that both Hargeysa and Mogadishu have an interest in each other's separate electoral processes. This is an oft-overlooked dimension of an opaque political game played through different regional, national and separatist political institutions. There are multiple actors who could be conceived of as northern 'representatives' in Mogadishu, and there is a degree of mobility of certain political elites across the Somaliland/Somalia political divide. Is there, then, a relationship between 2017 elections in Somalia and Somaliland? The answer is 'yes' - albeit with the

rejoinder that 'it's complicated'. Much of this complexity lies in the ambiguities of the political-geographical terminology used and intense competition over the politics of naming 'states', 'territories', 'administrations' and 'regions'.

Ostensibly, 'Somaliland's' representation in Somalia's Parliament in Mogadishu demonstrates the FGS's continued insistence on the reconstruction of the pre-1991 state which fragmented in the Somali civil war. Representation of the north-western regions thus leaves the door symbolically open for reunification and the re-integration of Somaliland based on the federal model now adopted in Mogadishu and amongst the administrations of Puntland, Jubaland, the Southwest State, Galmudug, and Hirshabelle. As mandated in the Provisional Constitution, these federal administrations have been formed out of two or more of the 'regions' of the former unitary state. For instance, Hirshabelle - the most recently formed administration - is made up of Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle regions. Somaliland, which does not see itself as a federal administration and has been independent since 1991, is itself made up of several regions, some (or parts) of which are disputed with Puntland. Herein lies one of the difficulties in using the sensitive political jargon of 'state', 'administration' and 'region' for political analysis across a highly fragmented territory.

Similar to the selection of other members of the Somali national Parliament, representatives for 'Somaliland' have been chosen through the votes of clan elders and electoral delegates. However, unlike most of the other federal administrations, this has occurred not in its respective capital city, but in Mogadishu itself. Details of the engagement of 'Somaliland' elders are vague, although it is clear that they hail from the dominant clans most commonly associated with the north-west regions[2]. Selections of MPs for the Mogadishu-based FGS Parliament once again employed the controversial 4.5 system of representation for the 4 major clan-families, with a half share for so-called 'minorities'. Whilst lists of elders involved in the selection process of electoral delegates were drawn up in terms of these clan families, final lists of MPs use the geographical terminology of the federal administrations listed above. MPs for 'Somaliland' primarily hail from the broad Dir clan family, whilst non-Dir populations of the regions claimed by Somaliland (e.g. the Dhulbahante and Warsangeli) were eventually included amongst the Upper House candidates for Puntland[3]. This was part of the deal made by Mogadishu to co-opt Puntland into accepting this final use of the 4.5 system which Garoowe has long opposed.

Assigning Upper House representation of the clans who predominantly inhabit the regions disputed by Somaliland and Puntland to the latter can be seen as a means of destabilising the hegemony of the broader idea of 'Somaliland' (in the historical British Protectorate borders it claims) and is another reason for Hargeysa to fundamentally reject the FGS selection process. Nonetheless, Somaliland's non-participation in the Mogadishu process must have presented something of a dilemma for its political leaders in that it could be interpreted by some as a symbolic ceding of Somaliland's control of representation in these disputed regions to Puntland. It also illustrates the type of leverage that Puntland can exercise on the FGS in Mogadishu with which it maintains an ambiguous and often strained political relationship and against Somaliland with which it

is in direct competition for territory.

The actual means by which such traditional elders were selected for the Mogadishu process is similarly unclear. Media in Somaliland alleged that the FGS was involved in the covert recruitment of 'fake' elders in the Northwest alongside the engagement of northern clan figures who are long-term residents of Mogadishu[4]. Disputes over the actual authority of clan elders is a common occurrence in wider Somali politics, and the interaction between customary clan norms of representation and embryonic state systems mean that elders' positions are frequently challenged. Combined with the inherent tensions between the political objectives of governments in Hargeysa and Mogadishu and ubiquitous accusations of 'corruption', this makes for a highly contestable process for actors of different affiliations.

Questions around the selection of these selectors aside, the practical process in Mogadishu of choosing MPs to both the upper and lower houses was delayed by disputes between the Somaliland elders and the Federal Indirect Electoral Implementation Team (FIEIT). Media reports suggested that some of these elders demanded the process be moved from the Somali Police Force's Transport Headquarters to the AMISOM-secured Halane camp next to the airport. Given Al Shabaab's past record in attacking government compounds and locations where MPs have gathered, considerations of the security of the selection processes are understandable. Nonetheless, some commentators based in Somaliland suggested that the calls for a change of venue were related to the allegations from some of the elders that they were being unduly pressured by government figures such as the outgoing FGS Minister of Information Mohamed Abdi Hayir 'Mareye', himself hailing from the north[5].

Mareye has subsequently been re-elected as one of the 'Somaliland' MPs of the Lower House and out of the 46 'Somaliland' seats, 22 other incumbent MPs have retained their positions. Looking at politicians such as Mareye and others raises questions about the role of individuals with regard to Somalia/Somaliland relations. From Mogadishu's perspective, allocating prominent roles to apparently 'unionist' orientated individuals hailing from the north-west is another means to maintain an image of nationwide representativeness. Political commentary in Hargeysa, however, often either castigates such individuals as traitors or mocks them as 'flops' fleeing from failure in Somaliland politics[6].

Nonetheless, certain ambiguities exist around the role of particular politicians who appear to have straddled the Somalia/Somaliland divide. An interesting case is MP Fowsiya Haji Aden, a politician hailing from the north and previously considered to be a Somaliland 'nationalist', but who entered politics in Mogadishu in 2012 and became Foreign Minister in Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud's then recently formed government. Arguably, this move was prompted by the frustration of her political ambitions in Somaliland.. In her stint as Foreign Minister for Somalia between 2012 and 2014 she maintained a fairly ambiguous position with regard to Somaliland's status. Her appointment back in 2012 could have been seen at the time as an olive branch offered by Mogadishu for the resumption of negotiations with Somaliland. Nonetheless, when

negotiations did take place during Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud's term (facilitated by Turkey) they were derailed by Somaliland's opposition to the involvement of northerners as part of the FGS's delegation[7]. The role of 'unionists' in the diplomatic wrangling between Hargeysa and Mogadishu remains highly contentious and it remains to be seen what type of strategy will be pursued by both the new government in Mogadishu and a new leadership expected to be elected through wider suffrage in Somaliland later this year.

Whilst some in Hargeysa have branded Fowsiya a 'traitor' to the Somaliland cause there is often disagreement amongst commentators about the varying roles of other northern-origin politicians[8]. For instance, deputy Prime Minister of Somalia, Mohamed Omar Arte, has been accused of more actively undermining Somaliland's *de facto* independence, particularly with statements made about his inability to return home to visit his family in Hargeysa. Regardless of the deputy Prime Minister's intentions, travel restrictions have been a sporadically high-profile means by which Somaliland has demonstrated its authority. These policies clearly demarcate Somalia as a separate country, whose residents require appropriate travel documentation and permissions to enter. They also give the Somaliland authorities a means to detain and question various individuals or groups who are suspected of undermining Somaliland's independence agenda, particularly vis-à-vis relationships with the FGS in Mogadishu. At the same time, contacts between Somaliland politicians and members of the FGS may also become a political issue in the context of Somaliland's own upcoming elections. Presidential candidate Abdirahman Cirro was recently forced to deny accusations from his opponent Muse Bixi that he had met with senior FGS leaders in Nairobi, demonstrating the potential political sensitivity in Hargeysa of allegations of infidelity to the Somaliland independence cause.

Another interesting element of electoral interaction may be seen in Mogadishu's partial success in increasing female representation in the FGS parliament. Whilst falling short of the controversial 30% quota set by the 'international community', the FGS Parliament will be made up of 24% women, a significant increase from 2012[9]. Somaliland, which prides itself on its democratic process and uses elections as a powerful tool of international propaganda for its recognition cause, has yet to institute any such quotas and only has one female legislator in its 82 seat Lower House and none in the *Guurti* Upper House. There is no indication that this will significantly change in the next elections. There is a sense amongst some Somaliland commentators and civil society actors that the breakaway state's 'enigmatic' international image is starting to lose some of its novelty[10]. While it was once easy for Somaliland to define itself as an island of security and democratic success in a sea of regional instability, the coalescence of nascent Federal state administrations and the relatively successful handover of executive power in Mogadishu this year may draw international attention elsewhere. Serious obstacles remain for these Federal administrations both in terms of the quality and representativeness of their developing electoral mechanisms, and yet the increased participation of women is one 'success' which might put pressure on Hargeysa to institute similar quotas. This is a sensitive question in both the north and south (charges of anti-Islamic western meddling abound) and yet it may be important for the image of



democratic stability which Somaliland will continue to deploy in support of its efforts for recognition.

Despite the political distance which exists between the Somali Federal Government and that of the Republic of Somaliland, both sets of electoral politicking influence both sets of actors. Popular and elite discourse between the capitals ranges from accusations in the north that representation in the Somali parliament undermines the Somaliland independence project, to conspiracy theories in the south that allege a covert role of northern agents seeking to contribute to political instability there[11]. Nonetheless, there may be modest potential for certain actors to straddle the north-south divide and promote future dialogue for either the peaceful coexistence of independent states or rapprochement and a new form of political settlement. Likewise, some commentators note that for all the public bluster about ‘treason’ and ‘conspiracy’, there remain personal links between some political elites in Hargeysa and Mogadishu[12] and that the rhetoric expressed in media and in official political communications may not mirror the type of discussions which take place behind closed doors.

The complex intertwining of the processes of ‘regional’ elections in a context where the fiction of a unitary Somalia is maintained by the FGS and the ‘international community’ creates multiple channels through which political agency is exercised. The very notions of ‘separateness’ and ‘inclusion’ are highly political, as are ideas around representation couched in clan-based and/or ‘regional’ terms. This article has introduced some of ways in which actors exert agency and express sovereignty between these political capitals. The potential impact of such activity for the future of the political map means that such relationships deserve further attention from analysts trying to make sense of political lexicons of ‘regional’ representation and resistance across what was once the unitary state of ‘Somalia’.

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## Money and drought: Beyond the politico-security sustainability of elections in Somalia and Somaliland

By Aly Verjee

The recent completion of parliamentary and presidential elections in Somalia, and the continued postponement of presidential elections in Somaliland, most recently scheduled for March 2017 and now to be held six months later in October, underscores the fragility and limitations of electoral processes in both polities.

Politico-security dimensions are often privileged in considering the question of electoral sustainability in countries in transition. Somalia is no exception, even as it is an outlier. It is striking that in the last decade, from Afghanistan to Iraq to the Central African Republic, all countries mired with persistent and unrelenting security challenges, comprehensive, near universal suffrage elections have been held.

Somalia has not joined these ranks. Its repeated recourse to 'selectocracy' demonstrates the persistence of the fragmented central state authority, nominally existing in Mogadishu, and how power continues to be contested in ways few other states still face. However, the comparative experience of the countries mentioned above also shows that complete security and consolidated territorial control is not necessarily a prerequisite to achieve comprehensive, participatory (if still deeply problematic) electoral processes.

The international community was keen to stress that Somalia's 2016 electoral process was a step forward from that of 2012. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSO), exclaimed that in the parliamentary elections "over a hundred times more Somalis will participate in this year's process than was the case in 2012."<sup>[1]</sup> In an example of how creative statistics obscure rather than illuminate, in hard numbers this equates to 14,025 persons instead of the 135 individuals of 2012, not even the population of one district of Mogadishu.

With the goal posts shifted, hopes for a universal election now move to Somalia's next vote, due in 2020. Any predictions of what will be possible in 2020 remain highly speculative. But the numerous reports of vote buying and illicit financial incentives offered to those limited few involved in the selection of parliament members in 2016, who in turn were recipients of the largesse of presidential candidates when it came for them to elect the head of state, should raise alarm, beyond the immediate credibility of the result, which in any case has been accepted by the principal contestants.

Corruption, of course, is not a new phenomenon in Somalia, and it surprises nobody that the electoral process was vulnerable to similar patterns of behaviour. Nor does it follow that Somalia's first universal participation election, whenever it occurs, will be free of improper financial influence.

What should concern Somalis, and those seeking to affirm an electoral tradition in Somalia, is that a precedent has been set to spend vast amounts of money to steal elections - whether originating from public sources, clan resources, private and

corporate donations or foreign governments. This risks a reconfiguration of the national political economy, towards further predation of the citizenry and the further entrenchment of vested interests. It is often suggested that the Somali culture is very democratic. While undoubtedly a simplification, any inherent societal tendency towards openness and transparency could easily be consumed by the leviathan that is the political economy of any electoral process itself.

### Early warning from Somaliland

The experience of Somaliland already provides such evidence, and a warning.

In collaboration with Adan Y. Abokor, Haroon A. Yusuf, Amina M. Warsame, Muhammad A. Farah and Mohamed F. Hersi, I led a research initiative that resulted in the publication of the study, *The Economics of Elections in Somaliland: The financing of political parties and candidates*, which was designed in response to concerns raised about election financing in the aftermath of the 2012 local council elections, held across all of Somaliland's regions.<sup>[2]</sup>

*Economics of Elections* aimed to assess and map the sources of income and the principal expenditure made by candidates and political parties in the 2012 local council elections and, for comparative purposes, an earlier mass candidate election, Somaliland's 2005 parliamentary elections. (We judged the 2002 local council elections to be too distant to Somaliland's current circumstances, both political and financial.) 93 candidates were surveyed, 29 from the 2005 parliamentary elections (11.8 per cent of the 246 candidates in that election), and 64 from the 2012 local council elections (2.7 per cent of the 2,368 candidates in that election). Of these, 66 per cent were candidates elected in 2005, and 56 per cent were candidates elected in 2012. Those interviewed came from five of the six regions of Somaliland: Maroodi-Jeex, Saaxil, Togdheer, Awdal and Sanaag.



Source: [goo.gl/nNy9IX](http://goo.gl/nNy9IX). Map is not official

Relative to previous polls, the November 2012 electoral process appeared to show a sharp increase in spending on individual electoral campaigns as reported by candidates, political parties and political associations. Somaliland has a constitutional limit of three

official political parties at any one time, but every ten years, via local elections, new political associations can be formed and vie for official party status on the basis of election results. As much as USD 50 million may have been mobilized for election campaign expenses in these elections.<sup>[3]</sup> This sum far exceeded the costs of administering the election, at approximately USD 11 million from government and donor sources; it amounted to almost half of the country's entire national annual budget, roughly USD 100 million, for 2012. Or, by a more recent measure, election campaign costs are nearly half of the emergency funding the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs called for in March 2016 to address humanitarian needs in Puntland and Somaliland.<sup>[4]</sup>

The study also showed that political party and candidate financing were distinct and drew on different sources. Contrary to common perceptions, funding from the diaspora, while reported by some candidates, was not significant for most. The diaspora's support was significant for political parties and associations, but only a small proportion of these funds found their way to individual candidates. Political parties also obtained significant support from businesses, but there is limited transparency in these relationships, and it is unclear whether such support was premised on the expectations of these financiers, and what those expectations were.

Our research showed that personal and family financial resources were the leading source of candidate finance, in common with most other developing democracies in sub-Saharan Africa. But spending priorities varied: the biggest single campaign expense reported by candidates was to purchase *qat* [the leaves of an Arabian shrub, which are chewed as a stimulant], and far exceeded the comparable category of expense made in other sub-Saharan African countries in terms of direct benefits to voters. Candidates were split over whether spending on *qat* is an effective way of securing votes, and voters confirmed it was not necessarily effective, with people often admitting they would take whatever *qat* was on offer but vote as they had originally intended.

Vote buying was commonly reported and expenditure by candidates suggests it was more widespread than first realized. Many electors reported that they had been paid to vote multiple times, and sometimes explained that multiple voting allowed for differing social obligations to be fulfilled: one could vote both for the voter's preferred candidate and the rival candidate who had offered an incentive to the voter. There are suggestions that social controls that once limited the scope of electoral fraud and malpractice have weakened over time; the increased monetization of elections appears to have exacerbated a problem of voter fraud.

One of the most interesting aspects in conducting the survey was the openness with which candidates, political associations and parties responded to the subject. Far from concealing or downplaying the problem, or shying away from admitting malfeasance most respondents spoke openly and acknowledged the economics of these elections as a real challenge to the continued legitimacy of the political process in Somaliland.

When the study's findings were presented in Hargeisa, the reaction was similar. Senior

political figures attended, and largely accepted the study's findings as legitimate. In terms of policy outcomes, conversations were frank and everything from *qat* bans to rigorously enforced spending limits was discussed.

### **Another casualty of the drought**

The research study, and the presentation of our findings, was of course completed well before the recent announcement of the election delay in Somaliland. But the question of sustainability now looms ever larger. While election delays in Somaliland are so common as to be unsurprising - historically, presidential, parliamentary have been repeatedly delayed - the rationale for delay this time is unprecedented. On the grounds that severe drought continues to afflict Somaliland (and significant parts of Somalia), the President of Somaliland, the leaders of the three political parties and the National Electoral Commission (NEC) collectively agreed presidential elections cannot proceed as planned, and will now be held in October 2017. Parliamentary elections will be held a year after the presidential polls, in October 2018.

An estimated 5 million people have been affected by the drought, a million of whom live in Somaliland.<sup>[5]</sup> And yet there is little indication that the upcoming elections will be any less financially competitive than those of 2012; despite the findings of *Economics of Elections*, little has so far been done to amend the electoral or legal framework, or more fundamentally address the culture of electoral competition that initially gave rise to the rapid increase in election campaign costs. The future stakes will only be greater.

### **Beyond politico-security sustainability**

Politico-security sustainability is thus no longer the sole paradigm in which to assess Somaliland's electoral process. As the drought sadly shows, environmental sustainability is also, sadly, now relevant. Donors will continue to front many of the costs for the technical delivery of the elections, but these sums will be dwarfed by campaign expenditure, in 2017 and, most probably, again in 2018. While much remains uncertain in Somaliland, the coming presidential and parliamentary elections are likely to again be competitive, and therefore expensive. How expensive remains to be seen, but some in the opposition will see their chance to retake the presidential office. The incumbent president, Ahmed Silanyo, may very well choose to not stand again due to ill-health, raising uncertain questions about whom his party will nominate to stand instead. At the same time, the drought, which has displaced many Somalilanders towards the western parts of the country, may harm the opposition parties who traditionally count on support from voters in the east. These citizens, driven by the imperative of survival, may not have returned home by the time the polls are held. Their votes may be even more vulnerable to purchase or corrupt influence in a weakened economic context.

Somalia should not ignore these lessons in electoral sustainability, even if its electoral processes are some way from resembling those of its northern neighbour. Antipathy or reluctance to consider Somaliland's experience is short-sighted, and while technical, political and security considerations are always going to preoccupy the Somali political class and its backers, the economic dimension should not be consigned to the shadows.

The money will continue to matter, and risks corroding whatever achievements are made.

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