Assessing the 2017 Somaliland Presidential Election

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In any democracy, the opportunity to vote (and be elected), and the freedom of association, including the ability to form and join organizations and associations concerned with political and public affairs, are necessary rights. In Somaliland, for almost two decades, these were considered customs, with the participation of citizens in the political process seen as being necessary. However, Somaliland's citizens are always skeptical about the pledges of politicians during any campaign—knowing that these often fail to materialize after a politician has won office. Over the last decade, Somaliland's citizens have increasingly lost trust in their politicians. More reliable delivery of pledges made during election campaigns would be one way to help restore this lost trust.

The relationship between the citizen and the politician is not the only factor in understanding the context of democracy in Somaliland. This is also negatively affected by the relationships between different political parties. While parties contest politics bitterly, their relations mostly remain friendly. Security institutions, civil society actors, and donors have also played an active and constructive role, not only in this election, but more generally on Somaliland's road to becoming a viable multi-party democracy.

One of the most concerning examples of citizen disengagement in this latest election was exemplified by the changing role of the Somaliland Diaspora. Previously, the diaspora had actively participated in state and peace building endeavors in Somaliland. However, since the start of Somaliland's democratization processes,

and the emergence of multi-party politics, the role of the diaspora in state building has declined. This is due to the emergence of divisions, occurring as various diaspora members have sided with politicians representing different political parties. Political parties have, therefore, contributed to a deeply divided society, both at home and abroad.

Somaliland's political parties need urgent legal, institutional and political reform. This is necessary to accommodate all of the state's intellectuals and elites, and also to give a chance to those who have the ambition to run the state.

A major problem for Somaliland's political parties is that democracy within the parties is either weak or, in reality, absent. This means that the party old guard usually have the final say in nominating electoral candidates.

The National Electoral Commission (NEC) is an institution in need of particular attention from both the state and its citizens. Countering the institutional weaknesses of the NEC, including on the legal and administrative side, may help improve citizens' trust in this institution. Overcoming these weaknesses will not be an easy task. It will require the support of the political parties, government and the friends of Somaliland from the international community, who have supported it since the inception of its democracy.

Of comparable importance to the NEC is the Committee for the Registration of Political Associations and the Approval of Parties. This agency, which is tasked with overseeing the behavior of the political

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parties, has failed to perform its responsibility of holding parties accountable to their charters, rules and regulations effectively. The weaknesses of the political parties are mainly caused by the absence of a regulatory framework. The agency has failed to properly evaluate political parties or, subsequently, to force them to rectify the institutional weaknesses and gaps observed. If political parties are to survive and adhere to its rules and regulations, the Committee should be institutionalized under the auspices of the NEC.

INTRODUCTION

In May 2001, Somaliland's citizens went to the polling stations to approve an interim constitution in a public referendum coordinated by the Government of Somaliland. The constitution called for multi-party politics and democratic elections. Since then, Somaliland has held a series of contested elections at different levels: local, parliamentary and presidential. This makes Somaliland one of the few functioning constitutional democracies in the Muslim world.

Elections have become a familiar occurrence in Somaliland. They are seen as a pillar of democracy, enabling voters to choose representatives who will exercise a public mandate on their behalf.

When analyzing the participation of citizens in contemporary Somaliland politics, there are two contradictory dimensions: first, the arena in which citizens involve themselves in politics is widening and, more broadly, people appear to be more active than ever before. Second, there is increasing citizen disenchantment

about their choice of leaders. Many people feel that their leaders are not effective and are nostalgic about the old days of directly appointed city mayors, some of whom were thought to be particularly effective.

The participation of citizens in politics requires institutions to be permanently accessible to the population, and also the sustained engagement of young people. In democratic societies, the participation of citizens in politics is very important. In Somaliland, the consolidation and growth of citizen participation in democracy is an important context for this analysis.

While the relationship between citizens and politicians is quite encouraging, the politicians have not transformed their party systems and structures as is needed. Many people now see political parties as tools used to win control over the state, which they then abandon.

The central theme of this study is to analyze and understand the controversies between the citizens and politicians; examine the viability of the Somaliland electoral processes, the challenges it faces; citizens' perception of the electoral system in general and the 2017 presidential election in particular. The major question this study attempts to answer is: why do people vote for a particular party. Without a doubt, the party system in Somaliland is clan-oriented, rather than national interest-driven. This hampers citizen participation as many citizens see parties as being dominated by a particular clan or allied clans against others.

SOMALILAND ELECTIONS

A decade after it declared its separation from the rest of Somalia in 1991, Somaliland conducted its first national election. Nine political associations, who registered to run in local elections, participated.

The election, held in December 2002, not only allowed citizens to elect their local representatives, but also to determine the official three political parties that would be registered as the only authorized political parties in Somaliland. The Justice and Welfare Party (known as UCID); the Unity, Peace, and Development Party (known as Kulmiye); and the United Democratic People's Party (known as UDUB) became Somaliland's political parties.[1] The latter collapsed after a decade of existence.

In April 2003, Somaliland conducted its first presidential election. The three chairmen of its authorized political parties all ran for office. The election was bitterly contested by UDUB (the ruling party), Kulmiye (the largest opposition party) and UCID. The UDUB candidate, Dahir Rayale Kahin, won the election by a narrow margin of 80 votes. Though some members of Kulmiye protested the election results, its candidate Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud 'Silanyo'— a political veteran who had served as a minister in the Somalia's military government and the longest serving chairman of the Somali National Movement (SNM)—vowed to accept the result without conditions. This concession contributed to Silanyo's successful future political career—he later became Somaliland's president.[2]

Following the 2002 and 2003 elections, Somaliland continued its democratization process and conducted its third general electoral process. In September 2005, Somaliland conducted its first parliamentary election where political parties participated. This was the first and the last parliamentary election conducted in Somaliland. The postponement of the parliamentary elections was a blow to Somaliland's democratization processes and has had a negative impact on its citizens' trust in electoral processes.[3]

Somaliland has since experienced successive postponements to its elections. For instance, the presidential election scheduled for 2008 was finally held in June 2010. The successive postponements created rifts within the political parties. In addition, local councils, which were elected in December 2002 with a 5-year mandate, remained in office for almost 10 years (2002–2012).

The extension of presidential terms, made by the House of Elders (Guurti), is the biggest challenge to Somaliland's democratization processes. Yet this extension is not the only dilemma, but also the House of the Representatives and local councils remain another challenge and problem on the nation's road to democracy and respect of democratic principles.

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[1] International Crisis Group Africa Report Nº 110, 'Somaliland: Time for African Union Leadership', Addis Ababa/Brussels/Hargeisa, 2006.

[2] Hassan Ibrahim, Mohammed and Terlinden, Making Peace, Rebuilding Institutions: Somaliland – A Success Story? In Somalia: Current Conflicts and New Chances for State Building. Berlin: Heinrich Böll Foundation. Ulf (2008). Volume 6 (English Edition).
[3] International Crisis Group, 'Somaliland: A Way out of the Electoral Crisis', Nairobi /Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2009.

METHODOLOGY

Overview

To gain a comprehensive understanding of Somaliland's 2017 presidential election, the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (in collaboration with Rift Valley Institute) conducted research to assess the problems and challenges associated with the electoral process. The study adopted a mixed methodology to triangulate data during collection and analysis phases. It focused on four cities: Hargeisa, Burao, Borama, and Las Anod. A household survey was employed using survey questionnaires, aimed at obtaining a representative picture of the target populations, while the key informant interviews were used to probe deeper and cross-validate issues that emerged from the household surveys. This mixture helped the research quality to triangulate the data collected.

Sampling method

While the population varies from one city to another, eligible voters of each city were found, which enabled the application of a sampling formula to determine a representative sample size. The study took into account certain statistical parameters, such as the level of confidence desired (95%) and margin of error (+ or – 5%).

Table 1:
Population and sample distribution by city (%)

Location	Eligible Voters	Sample	Percent
Hargeisa	179,328	476	47%
Burao	118,411	313	31%
Borama	64,160	169	17%
Las Anod	23,022	60	6%
Total	384,921	1018	100%

Household survey

Household surveys were used with the aim of conducting a face-to-face quantitative survey. These surveys asked questions relating to personal demographics, access to information regarding the election and electoral processes, collection of the voting card, access to voting and perceptions of the electoral processes, including security concerns.

Questions were asked of the respondents from randomly selected households. A team from the IPCS and the regional universities collected 1018 questionnaires in four cities from December 4–15, 2017.

IPCS employed Systematic Random Sampling (SRS) where enumerators randomly selected any 4th household after a random start point. A gender balance was emphasized across the entire survey.

Key informant interviews

The second method employed for data collection was personal interviews with key informants who possessed expert knowledge on the Somaliland electoral processes. The aim was to go deeper into

the subject and cross-validate the issues raised in the questionnaires.

The interviews were conducted between December 2017 and January 2018. Eight key informants were interviewed, including the National Electoral Commission (NEC), the Ministry of Interior, the three political parties (Kulmiye, UCID, and Waddani), the Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA), the Somaliland Non-State Actors Forum (SONSAF), and the Somaliland Woman Umbrella (Nagaad). The interviewees expressed their views on a number of key questions, including their own engagement and experience with the election processes.

Descriptions of the respondents

In this study, 44% of the respondents were female, while 56% were male.
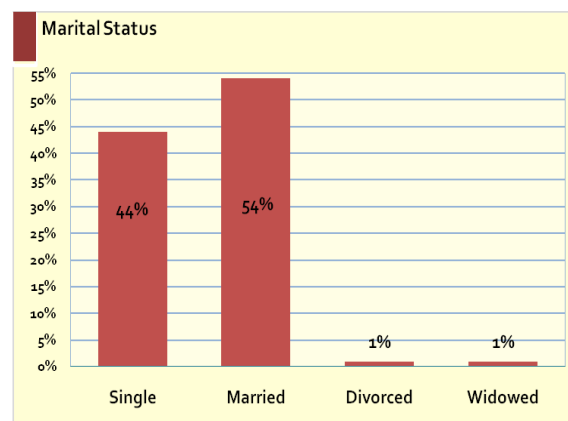
Figure 1:
Gender of the respondents (%)
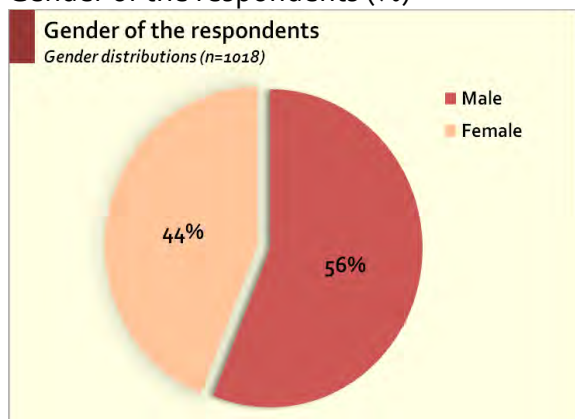
A diverse group of people took part in the study with different social statuses and backgrounds, ranging from single to married, to divorced, as well as widowed. 44% of the respondents were single compared to the 54% married. 1% were divorced and another 1% were widowed.

This inclusivity gives reliability and balance to the study.

Figure 2:
Marital status of the respondents (%)

One of the important expectations of voters from the 2017 presidential election was that candidates would work to create jobs for unemployed youth. As the following figure shows, 21% of the respondents were employed full-time, 17% were part-time employed, 21% were unemployed and looking for jobs, while 24% were unemployed and neither seeking jobs nor creating other sources of income. Besides these, 14% of the respondents were students, while 3% were retired and neither seeking jobs nor engaging in work. While explaining the level of unemployment in the country, the Ministry of National Planning and Development (2017) has argued that profound levels of unemployment disproportionately affect youth graduates. According to the ministry, unemployment rates amount to 65.5 % in urban areas, 40.7 % in rural areas, and 47.4 % across the whole country. Therefore, creating job opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed was the major reason for people to vote for any

candidate who may pledge and promise to address this critical issue.

Figure 3:
Employment status of the respondents (%)
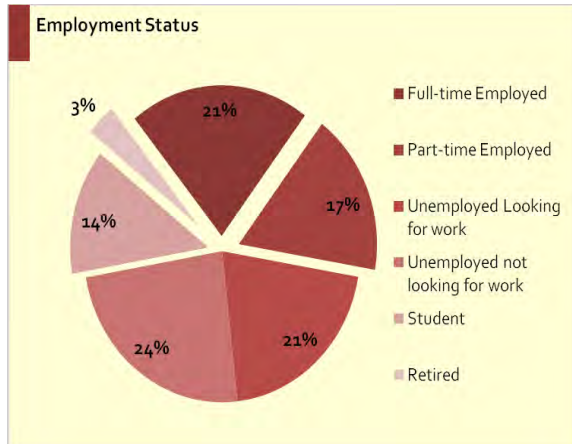
NOVEMBER 2017 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Citizens' concerns

Somaliland is the only constitutional democracy in the Horn of Africa that has conducted several contested local, parliamentary and presidential elections.[4] However, this democratic achievement has not been without challenges, including political, economic and legal issues. To understand its citizens' concerns, the study approached people in selected cities and asked whether they registered to vote in the presidential election. Overall, across Somaliland, 85% of the respondents stated that they had registered.

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[4] Article 22 (2) of the Somaliland Constitution guarantees the rights of the citizens to vote and to be elected by fulfilling the conditions and requirements obliged by other state's laws and regulations.

Figure 4:
Respondents' registration status (%)

While 85% of the respondents registered, 15% did not. The study sought to understand why not. There were various reasons given as to why respondents did not to register. 33% were out of their localities or were on holiday, 24% wanted to register in their respective region but did not manage to get there in time, 19% were not interested in the election and were tired of the elections and their outcomes, 10% had a health condition that prevented their access to the registration posts, 7% saw it as a waste of time and believed that the election would not bring any change, while 2% argued that their clansman were not registered and thus they decided not to register either.

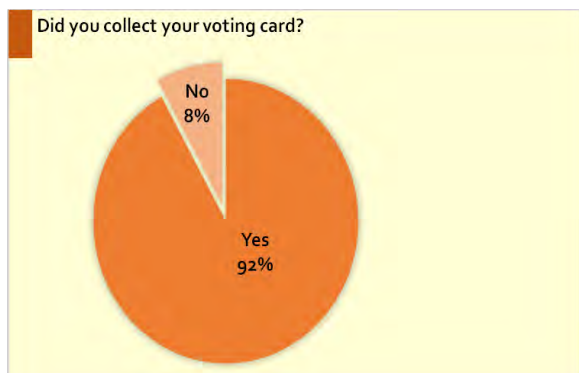15% of those who did not register were asked if they would like to register if they were given another chance. 73% of people stated that they would like to register and 27% insisted they would maintain their decision to not register even if they were given that opportunity. Why were such a high number of people interested in registering if they were given another chance? The answer is that the level of

tribalism and clan based antagonism increased during the election campaign.[5] Therefore, those of voting age became interested in participating in both the campaign and the voting, as the following figure shows.

Figure 5:
Citizens' decision whether to register again or not (%)

Would you like to have registered?
No 27%
Yes 73%

Figure 6:
Collection of voting card (%)

Did you collect your voting card?
No 8%
Yes 92%

There are various reasons why the 8% did not collect their voting cards. Indeed, 54% of the 8% stated that the time period for collecting the cards was too short, while

10% were away from the country, 9% did not care about the outcome of the election, 6% changed their minds about participating in the election, 6% lost their registration slips, 4% were in a poor health, and finally 4% argued that no party policy appealed to them.

One positive indicator is that citizens did show an understanding of their democratic rights, for instance, to elect or to be elected in the 2017 presidential election. 94% of the respondents approached by the study cast their votes, while 6% had not voted for various reasons, including: logistical problems, which included movement (transportation was banned except for those who had special permission from the NEC), or health conditions.

Figure 7:
Voting for the presidential election (%)

Did you vote during the 2017 Presidential election?
Yes 94%
No 6%
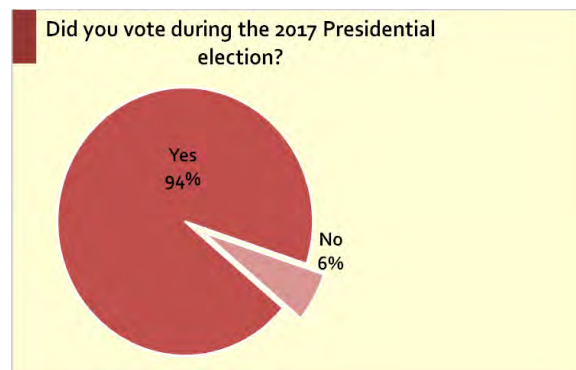
While 85% of the respondents had registered, 72% of those had never voted before the 2017 election as the following figure shows. This is an indication of one of two things. First, there was a bitter contest between the two major political parties Kulmiye and Waddani. This influenced their respective constituencies. Second, many of those participating had not had an

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[5] The two main political parties, Kulmiye and Waddani, were criticized as using the clan slogan as a tool of campaigns. They were warned by election monitoring board several times.

opportunity to vote in previous years because of age.

Figure 8:
Voting for the first time (%)
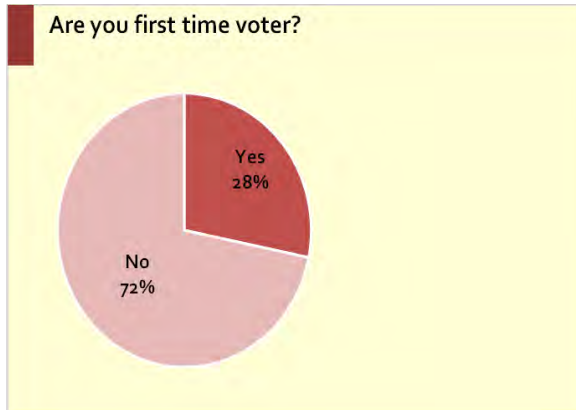
Citizens' expectations

In Somaliland, the first loyalty of people is often clan and they tend to decide who to vote for based on their clan affinity. In the 2017 election, citizens were deeply divided. One positive thing, however, emerged from this process: citizens expressed their hopes and expectations that an election would bring positive change to Somaliland (see figure 9). These included: change and development, recognition of Somaliland as an independent country and political change, peace and stability, employment and the economic progress, justice and equality; democracy and good governance, reduction of inflation, improving water and infrastructure, improving health and education sectors, fighting corruption in all levels, and improving the agriculture and fuel production sectors. While some respondents had expectations that the election would promote these issues, 6% of the respondents expressed concerns that the election would bring no form of positive change, while another 3% stated that

tribalism and clan conflict would remain deep root in their communities.

Figure 9:
Citizens' hopes and expectation in the 2017 election (%)
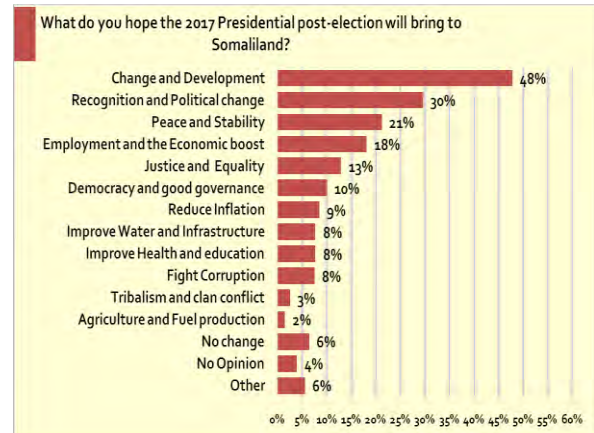
ELECTION DYNAMICS

NEC as a key actor

Conducting a free and fair election in Somaliland is no easy task. Indeed, the electoral commission—with the help of both domestic and international stakeholders—has tried to organize the election in a manner that would guarantee a successful outcome. This could be achieved with the participation of all stakeholders.

According to the National Electoral Commission, the credibility of the election can be attributed to several factors: the existence of an independent national electoral commission, an internationally accepted voter registration system, the revision of different electoral legislations, and the production of a common electoral

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law, which was passed by Somaliland's House of Representatives.[6]

While a viable system was in place, and the preparation process for the election was relatively effective, but there were still challenges. For instance, the successive postponement of the election, plus the lack of civic education, decreased the turnout.

The lack of civic education among the population was an obstacle to smooth electoral processes. Ordinary citizens, civil society actors and members of the national electoral commission approached for this study agreed that there were weaknesses in how stakeholders reached out to the general population to convince them to register to vote and collect their voting cards.[7]

The electoral commission did manage to prepare a reasonably level playing field for the competing political parties, albeit after a number of difficulties and challenges. Before the election, the commission raised concerns about whether political parties would abide by the code of conduct they had collectively agreed would guide their actions.[8] However, these fears were largely unfounded. Indeed, Justice and Welfare Party a.k.a UCID was given a political achievement award for its success in controlling its membership.
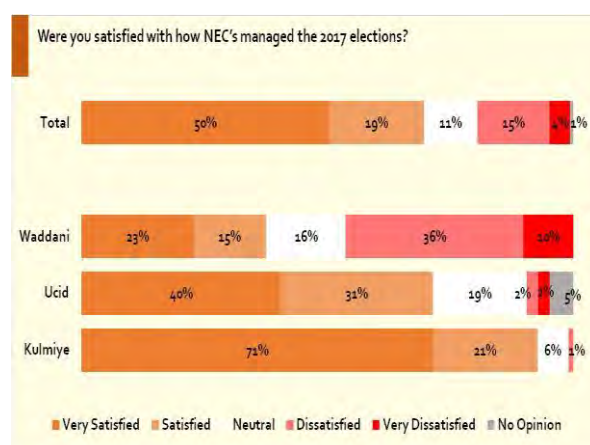
While the NEC has logistical and administrative weaknesses, the respondents approached by the study across Somaliland's four major cities were generally satisfied by the way the NEC managed the election. The figures varied between political parties as shown by Figure 10 below.

Figure 10:
Satisfaction with NEC electoral management (%)

Political parties: views on electoral process

The Somaliland presidential election in 2017 went through various stages, from the registration of voters to the distribution of voting cards and finally the campaign and polling day itself. The slow pace of preparations caused a delay, with successive postponements leading many citizens to decline either to register, collect their voting cards or even to vote.

The process was relatively successful both before and after the campaign. However, according to the opposition parties, something went wrong during the voting card distribution phase. In the eastern regions of Somaliland, many cards fell into unauthorized hands, for instance, in the

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[6] Discussion with a member of the National Electoral Commission, Hargeisa, Somaliland.

[7] This gap and challenges was acknowledged by NEC during the interview.

[8] In a joint session, the three political parties and the NEC jointly signed an agreement (electoral code of conduct). The agreement carries fundamental elements, for instance, avoid using hate speech and inflammatory words that might jeopardize the peace and stability of the nation and coexistence of the people, and cooperate with the election board.

hands of traditional chiefs and leaders who collected many cards to distribute to their clan members who were, for one reason or another; away from their villages (some had left the country or migrated from their localities due to drought).[9] These practices clearly undermined the democratic process. This experience is contrary to what happened in the western part of the country, like in the Sahil, Hargeisa and Awdal regions, in which the uncollected voting cards were sent back to the NEC headquarters.[10]

Indeed, both NEC and the competing political parties had different views and ideas about the way in which the election was organized and later conducted. The political parties, particularly the opposition, underline several challenges, for instance, the parties questioned the capacity of the electoral commission, but acknowledged the preparation and the high-tech equipment used to eliminate double voting.

The working relationship between the political parties and the NEC was generally good. Moreover, the Ministry of Interior, whose prime responsibility is to preserve and protect the internal security of the state and safety of the citizens, also worked effectively with the political parties. Both opposition parties acknowledged the role of the security institutions in protecting their property and supporters.
The ruling Kulmiye party also viewed the election positively, including its relationship with the NEC. However, like the other

political parties, Kulmiye expressed similar complaints and concerns about the commission's preparations for the election. For instance, it highlighted the danger of printing ballot papers, which the commission did unilaterally without informing or consulting with the political parties.[11]

The ruling party also highlighted another important issue. According to Kulmiye, very few government officials were willing to work with the party as most of the ministers were not expecting to be reappointed if their party was re-elected. This argument was supported by other intellectuals who linked Kulmiye's internal conflicts and rifts with the government's intervention in the party affair. However, Kulmiye highlighted that the Waddani party did not expose the weaknesses of the government as they were targeting Kulmiye's presidential candidate, who never worked as a minister or trusted advisor during the Silanyo administration.[12]

Despite their political differences, the three political parties acknowledged the participation of the eastern regions in the election. This could be attributed to the effective security preparation that was undertaken by state security institutions to enable the election to take place. Beyond the security issues in the eastern regions, a concern highlighted by several respondents was the severe drought that hit the eastern part of the country, which affected the election preparation process, including voting card distribution.

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[9] This kind of practice appeared in certain localities mainly in the eastern regions, for instance, Ainabo, El Afwein, and Garadag. NEC arrested those who collected the cards on behalf of the absent voters.
[10] Interview with a senior official from the UCID political party, Hargeisa, Somaliland.

[11] Interview with a senior officer from KULMIYE party, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
[12] Ibid., 11.

In democratic societies, citizens decide who to vote for based on at least two important factors: a) their political ideologies and loyalties; b) the party program, which seems that it could have a positive impact on their socioeconomic status and livelihood. However, this choice is not possible in Somaliland and the Somali context in general. The Somaliland and Somali political structure is mainly based on clan loyalty.[13] In this study, as the following figure shows, 55% voted for the ruling party, while 38% voted for Waddani and the rest (6%) for UCID. There is a valid question to ask, namely: why the voters decided to vote for those political parties? Several elements determined these decisions, including: political loyalty, clan affinity, party programs, and the characters and legacy of the candidates.

Figure 11:
Party distribution of votes (%)
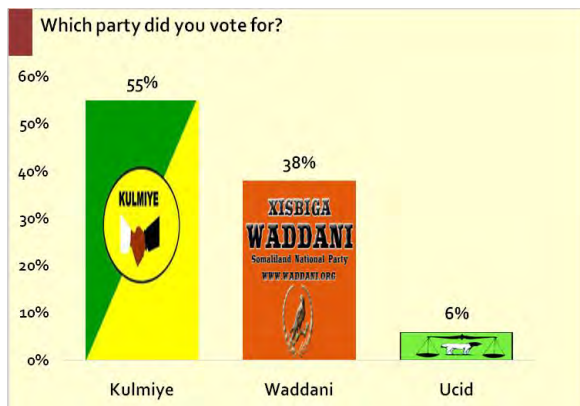
In the Somaliland and Somali context, party supporters are dynamic political actors and frequently move from one party to another. Those who follow Somaliland's political dynamics may observe the

movement of politicians and their supporters from one political party to another. This study raised a question that seems critical to the respondents: given a second chance, which party would you vote for? Interestingly, 78% of the ruling party supporters remained in their party, while 3% shifted to UCID, 3% to Waddani, and 1% decided to vote for none of the three. 14% did not know which one to vote for. Furthermore, 79% of Waddani supporters remained in their political party, 5% shifted to Kulmiye, 2% to UCID, 3% to none of the three, and 10% did not know who to vote for.

Indeed, a lack of political ideology and party loyalty appears to be the reason why many supporters and politicians move from one party to another. For instance, 19% of UCID voters in the 2017 election stated that they would vote for Kulmiye, 45% would remain in their political party, 19% would switch their support to Waddani, 5% to none of the three, and 12% did not know who to vote for.

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[13] A. Bulhan, Hussein, In-between Three Civilizations: Archaeology of Forgotten Experience and the Triple Heritage of Somalis. Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International Publishing, 2013.

Table 2:
Who would you vote for if given a second choice? (%)

Which party did you vote for?	Given a second chance, which party would you vote for?					
	Kulmiye	Ucid	Waddani	None of them	Don't know	Total
Kulmiye	78%	3%	3%	1%	14%	100%
Ucid	19%	45%	19%	5%	12%	100%
Waddani	5%	2%	79%	3%	10%	100%

Sources: Survey from four cities in Somaliland, 2017

The Media

In the 2017 presidential election, the media both print and broadcast were relatively neutral when compared to previous Somaliland elections. This neutrality can be attributed to a number of factors, including but not limited to:

1) An agreement that was reached by the political parties and the private media to engage with the media equally;
2) The state-owned media—most importantly, the Somaliland National Television and the only radio operator in the country, the Radio Hargeysa—played a neutral role in airing the programs and news related to the opposition parties.

In addition, the Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA) organized a series of training events before the election aimed at training journalists on how to report during the election period.[14]

Neither the opposition parties nor private media experienced problems from the

state security apparatuses or the electoral commission during the election. However, according to people working in the media, the NEC established its own media network whose responsibility it was to disseminate the NEC's news to the public at large through both private and public media.

Despite some generally positive developments, opposition parties have had their own concerns with the performance of the media during the election. According to Waddani, the public media such as the National TV, the Radio Hargeysa and the state-owned newspaper did not report fairly. This does not necessarily mean that the state media did not offer airtime to the opposition, but principally that this was not in prime-time slots. Specifically, Waddani stated that during the last days of the campaign, the state-controlled media offered airtime to the opposition but only during the less popular afternoon hours. Most of the time was offered to the government and the ruling party. One consequence of this was that Waddani had to invest more in private media, which was costly. Some members of the private media were also more favorable to the ruling party—usually a consequence of the pressure that government had put on it.[15]

Due to advances in technology, social media played an expanded role in this election, at times negative. To avoid violent conflicts between citizens and the dissemination of propaganda against the election results, the three political parties, the government and the electoral commission agreed to suspend social

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[14] Discussions with a Somaliland Journalists Association chairman, Hargeisa, Somaliland.

[15] Interview with a senior official from Waddani political party, Hargeisa, Somaliland.

media during the election day and for 48 hours afterwards.

Civil society actors

Since 1991, when Somaliland declared independence from Somalia, civil society actors in Somaliland have rapidly increased. This had a positive impact on the state's overall community development, peace building processes and democratization.

Somaliland's civil society groups, almost without exception, all took part in the democratization processes of the state, including the 2017 election. These institutions include: Nagaad, an umbrella group including more than 30 local non-governmental women's organizations, and the Somaliland Non-State Actors Forum (SONSAF), another umbrella organization, comprised by professional associations in Somaliland. Both organizations played a role in the election processes.

Women's organizations were given special permission to be involved in the electoral process, including through electoral observation and extending training programs to staff working on the elections. Furthermore, as the voter registration involved a sophisticated new biometric system, NEC organized a pre-test as a pilot-project to ascertain how reliable the system was. To carry this out, Nagaad selected 30 women to participate in organizing the pre-test tasks.[16]

The Electoral Monitoring Board and a mediation committee composed of traditional leaders, CSOs and other activists

also played an important role in making the election free and fair.

According to civil society actors, the election was inclusive and participatory for the political parties, local and international electoral observers. SONSAF took the lead in producing the CSOs report on the election. SONSAF not only produced reports on the process, but also acted as the local organization whose responsibility it is to deploy over 620 local observers to the country's polling stations.[17]

Local civil society organizations and Somaliland's traditional leaders have remained relatively free from the influence of politicians and their political parties. They have developed a policy to avoid the alignment of their institutions with any political party or political group. However, during this election, an opposition party, specifically Waddani, expressed grievances against civil society organizations, particularly those engaging in the election and electoral processes of the state. The Academy for Peace and Development, whose role was to mediate between the political parties, was seen to have lost the trust of this political party.

SONSAF was also accused of favoring the government and ruling party. This begs the question: to what extent was the neutrality of the civil society actors compromised, either through their actions or perception?

International election observers

The arrival of international observers in Somaliland elections is a common

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[16] Interview with a senior officer from Nagaad Umbrella, Hargeisa, Somaliland.

[17] Interview with a senior officer from SONSAF, Hargeisa, Somaliland.

phenomenon. In this election, around 60 international observers came to Somaliland to follow the process, including the preparation, voting and tallying of votes.

The observers divided themselves into groups and were dispatched across the country, mainly visiting the major cities. The purpose of this process was to follow how the election day went, particularly to see if there were any irregularities at the polling stations. For instance, if there were party slogans in and around polling stations, if the parties were campaigning there, and if unauthorized people were able to enter the polling stations.

Opposition political parties expressed their concerns, stating that in some polling stations underage voters were clearly in evidence. This can be regarded as a breach of the electoral laws, which NEC were responsible for implementing. However, international observers stated that the election was conducted fairly.

International observers noted that the voting process was peaceful. However, the Waddani party has argued that the observers did not witness the attack on its vehicles during the campaign by Kulmiye supporters. This could be because the number of observers was relatively small and therefore unable to monitor all polling stations—a criticism used by Waddani.

Though Waddani expressed grievances over the election processes, the survey conducted by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies and the Rift Valley Institute shows a different reading of events. In the context of this study, 71% of citizens argued that the election was free and fair, while 23% of citizens highlighted that the election was mired by fraud and rigging,

which affected the results. 23% of the respondents raised different types of factors, which they believed to be the source of irregularities, such as clan alliances, government intervention and bribing of the electoral commission.

Figure 12:
Citizen perception of the election (%)
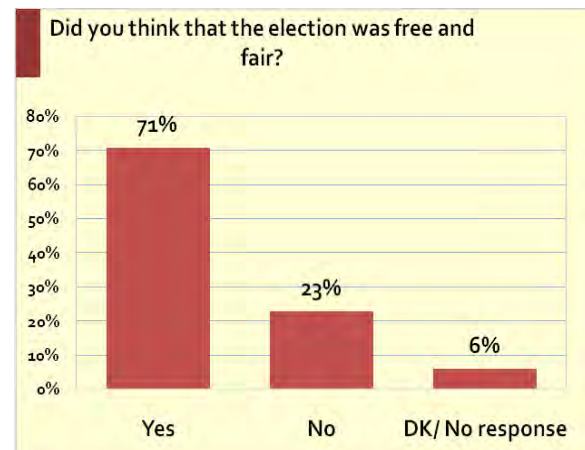
According to NEC, the role that the international community played in the election was a positive one. Its various components acted as a pressure group to monitor the process. It also provided Somaliland with all necessary materials and assistance, including ballot papers, voter cards and the system used for the biometric voter registration. They also provided technical assistance, especially the software required by the NEC, which they tailored according to demand.

Security institutions

The role of the security apparatus across the country during the election deserves mention. The Ministry of Interior is responsible for coordinating the internal security of the state. It worked closely with NEC during the election. However, its staff

has expressed their grievances against the electoral commission. According to the officials at the ministry, the electoral commission undermined its role in the electoral processes and even excluded it from the task-force assigned to work with the electoral commission during the registration process. According to the ministry, this didn't affect their responsibility for maintaining peace and security during the electoral process.[18]

In most African countries, ruling parties dominate state institutions and serve their party interests.[19] In Somaliland, where the exercise of democracy is flourishing, the security institutions have never inclined to the ruling party. According to the ministry of the interior, while those running it were members of the ruling party, the ministry provided security services to opposition parties during the campaign.

This does not mean that there weren't any challenges. The 21 day campaign was a burden both on the state and the political parties. Minimizing the number of days of campaigning in future is necessary. Furthermore, increasing the number of security personnel, including traffic police, deployed during the campaign would be an advantage.[20]

Somaliland's citizens had their own concerns about the prospect of the election and its implications on the security and coexistence of society at large. For instance, of the four cities surveyed in this

study, Hargeisa, the largest city and the political capital of Somaliland, had the lowest number of security concerns. This compares to Las Anod, which had the highest, and Burao which had the second highest level of security concerns, while Borama was ranked third.

Further analysis is needed to understand why security concerns were greater in some areas than others. In Las Anod, citizens linked their concerns to Somaliland's border conflict with Puntland State of Somalia, which threatened to prevent the election taking place in Sool and Sanaag regions. The second city to note is Burao, which is bitterly contested by Kulmiye and Waddani, the largest opposition party in Somaliland. This contest between the two parties impacted on the city and polarized its citizens at the grassroots level. This kind of polarization has never helped the coexistence of the citizens at large. However, the citizens' concerns over security in Borama, which is the cornerstone of the Somaliland state and peace building endeavors, was a surprise. This is an indication of how the election and the campaign has deeply divided the community at large at clan, sub-clan and kinship levels.

Figure 13:
Security concerns over the election

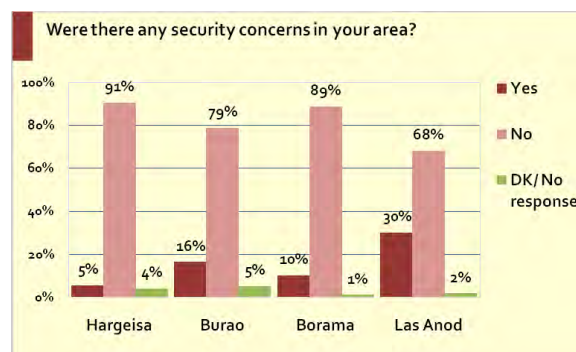[18] Interview with a senior official at the Ministry of Interior, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
[19] Salih, Mohamed & Nordlund, Political Parties in Africa: Challenges for Sustained Multiparty Democracy. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Per (2007).
[20] Ibid., 18.

Diaspora involvement

In the contemporary Somalis history, the role of the diaspora has been a relatively positive one. Prior to the eruption of the war in the 1980s, Somalis, including the Somalilanders living in the Gulf States, earned money and invested it back in their home country. This was true during the days of the struggle in the 1980s and even after the separation of Somaliland from the rest of Somalia in 1991. Somaliland citizens contributed greatly to the peace and reconciliation conferences and building blocks of the state, including democratization efforts.

This was also true in the 1990s, when the civil war broke out in Somaliland. The diaspora struggled to end the war and influenced leaders on to both sides to end the violence. The Somaliland Forum, a well-known forum for all Somalilanders, is an example of these efforts.[21]

However, the role of the Somaliland diaspora is changing. There are different and diverse factors and contributors that have led to this. This includes the democratization of the state and the emergence of political parties based on clan and kinship, which has polarized the communities abroad and divided the diaspora.

The establishment of political parties along clan-lines is the major if not the sole source of Somaliland's division both within the country and outside. Politicians raise funds from clan-affiliated diaspora and take advantage of every mechanism necessary to reach their goal. The major goal of the politicians is to secure funds from the diaspora and thus retain their state power. This kind of engagement has impacted on state security and the coexistence of Somaliland's citizens.

The 2017 election was no exception and it was more bitterly contested than previous ones. The divisions between the diaspora, as well as between the local citizens, were extremely obvious to the extent that each diaspora member allied his/herself to their respective candidate and raised funds to support him both within and outside the country. This division is the main reason why both the government and NEC refused to give the diaspora a role as international election observers.

It is important to note that clan loyalty has had a strong influence on families both at home and abroad. This is clear when we analyze citizens' perception of the election and how they decided to vote for their respective candidates. The following figure shows that 69% of the respondents voted the same way as their family members—an indication that the clan factor was influential in deciding the vote.

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[21] Some Somalilander individuals abroad were very much distressed by the sad events in Somaliland. These Somalilanders held meetings in the countries they lived in (e.g. Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Ethiopia, Djibouti, the Netherlands, etc.) and discussed how best they could help in bringing the civil conflict to an end. These activities culminated in an enlarged conference in London, UK, 29-30 April 1995. About 80 Somalilander delegates from Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Holland, Sweden, United State of America and the United Kingdom participated in the conference. One of the main objectives of the conference was to define a practical role that like-minded Somalilanders abroad could play in restoring peace and stability in Somaliland.

Figure 14:
Decision of citizens to vote similar to family members (%)
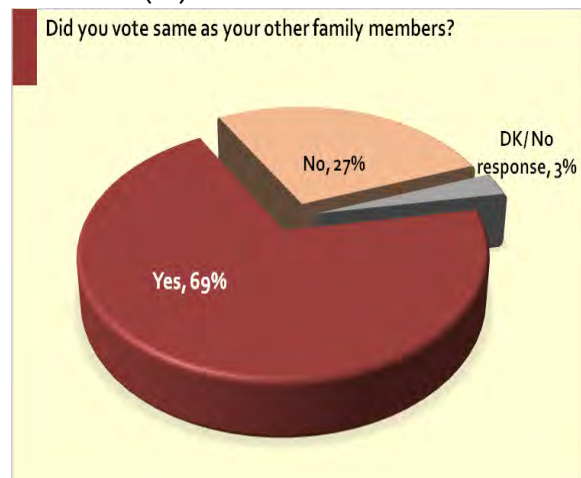
The other important factor was the role of social media, which was very critical in this election as Facebook, LinkedIn, and the Twitter were seriously threatening the security, stability and social cohesion of the state. Indeed, as previously noted, the NEC requested that telecom companies suspend social media access during the election, particularly on election day and the following 48 hours. Given the emphasis on this, the negative side of the diaspora involvement was that when they arrived in groups which were based on clan, they created competition that encouraged clan rivalry and threatened security.

CLOSING THE GAPS WITHIN THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Since 1991, Somaliland has managed to build its institutions from the ashes of conflicts and civil wars without much international engagement or intervention. The Somaliland National Electoral Commission is one of the successful state institutions. This does not mean that the NEC doesn't have any problems, but despite these, the NEC generally has public

trust. This is true when we analyze our survey results. The majority (76%) of respondents were satisfied by the system of the Somaliland elections (see figure 15).

Figure 15:
Satisfaction of citizens with electoral system (%)
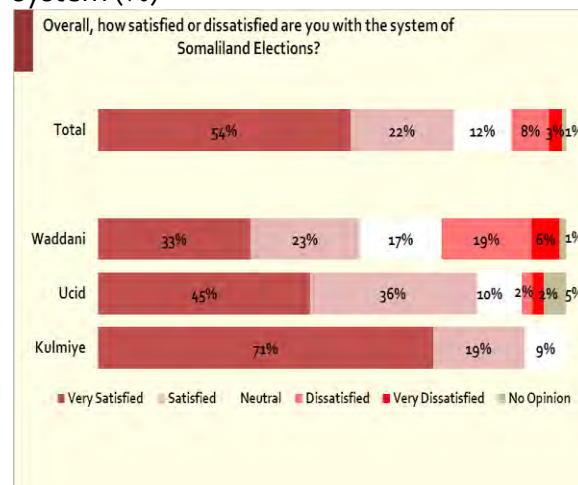
It is important to acknowledge that the NEC could not in itself resolve any of these challenges, all of which require sustained and systematic action on the part of all of the stakeholders and interested parties. In some respects, the NEC might place Somaliland more prominently in the limelight by identifying the challenges and problems from within to gain the attention of the state and its citizens. However, to overcome the electoral challenges, there are a number of factors that need to be applied and evaluated. This means that the NEC needs to perform a participatory evaluation involving all stakeholders in order to learn from each election. At present, the NEC mostly relies on the work of others, such as the reports of local and international observers. The NEC has plenty of time between elections that can be utilized for reviewing and improving

some of the systems, gaps and challenges of the electoral process.

Most importantly, the NEC needs to rethink and reformulate issues that are creating a positive public posture in the country and design new forms of cooperation with local and international stakeholders. To build a viable electoral system, the NEC needs to consider continuing and extending proper training for junior students from the universities. In this election, students from some universities faced challenges that had an effect on their work and put the burden both on the NEC and the voters. Equally important, NEC needs to appoint monitors of their own who supervise their staff at the polling stations.

The election monitoring board has been an important actor in successive Somaliland elections. However, there is a need to review their selection criteria and formalize their role in the election processes. Though the monitoring board faced challenges, in a few cases they succeeded. For example, during the voter card distribution, Waddani and Kulmiye were actively campaigning, but after they were warned by the board, they responded positively. The other case is the use of negative campaigning that relied upon inappropriate language, which was also reduced after the board took action.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In Somaliland, there are interrelated factors that influence one another and have an impact on the state's transition to democracy. It is important to note that citizens are uninvolved and uninformed regarding the registration and cards distribution period. In addition, many of the citizens voted the same way as their family members. This means that clan loyalty has had a stronger influence over voting behavior than party, particularly in the 2017 presidential election.

Multi-party and pluralist politics is a new exercise in Somaliland. However, political parties are regarded by ordinary citizens and intellectuals as one of the major drivers of division, which hampers the internal cohesion of the society. The presence of some institutional weaknesses within the parties, which have both political and legal dimensions, may have also contributed to this. It appears that the political parties have failed to unite the citizens under an ideological framework and flagship. Rather, they have accentuated resurgence in clan loyalty. Therefore, there is an urgent need for further institutional reforms and for restructuring of parties.

The success of the Somaliland political parties rests on adhering to party charters and laws of the state and respecting the citizens' unity and coexistence. In this sense, though the political parties engaged determinedly in successive democratization processes, building party capacity should be a long-term priority. The major responsibility rests on the leaders of political parties, who should outline ways forward and strategies to overcome institutional weakness.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Somaliland's road to democracy and multi-party politics has resulted from interconnected processes of political reconciliation, economic reconstruction, and the development of state institutions. This success has not been without challenges, which have political and economic as well as legal dimensions. However, despite these, Somaliland's elites and intellectuals have successfully crafted the nation's institutions, which survive today. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) is one of these. It has successfully managed its responsibilities without major conflicts and disagreements, having conducted six national elections since 2002.

This does not mean that successive national electoral commissions have not had identifiable gaps and weaknesses. There is a need for reform and re-evaluation of the current service delivery. Yet, the commission is not the only actor in the electoral processes and, in particular, political parties have a major influence on how elections are conducted in Somaliland.

Multi-party politics is a relatively new experience for Somaliland. One of the major weaknesses for the political process in the country is the lack of internal democracy within the political parties themselves. This means that the 'old guard' of each party generally have the final say over the parties' internal affairs.

This kind of practice has served to dissipate the euphoria of citizens who were initially extremely enthusiastic about Somaliland's new system of multi-party democracy. It has also served to derail some of these aspirations. It has been argued that the actions of political parties have contributed to a balkanization of Somaliland's citizens, thus damaging the peaceful coexistence of its people.

This study primarily examines the Somaliland 2017 presidential election and, specifically, citizens' perceptions

of its processes, including the performance of the NEC. The study's major finding is that Somaliland's citizens are generally tired of the measureless pledges and promises given to them by politicians. Many have become nostalgic about the old days and ways of presidents selected by traditional conferences.

The study proposes that urgent institutional and legal reforms are needed to make the state's institutions viable in order to better serve the nation with impartiality. This should include, but not be limited to, the reform of political parties.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTES

The INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES (IPCS) is a higher learning and research institution based and operating within the institutional framework of the University of Hargeisa, Somaliland. The IPCS was es-tablished in February 2008 in response to the long-recognized call for an in-depth multidisciplinary approach to understanding and addressing the conflict and violence that has engulfed many parts of the Horn of Africa. The mission of the IPCS is to provide interested scholars, institute members and students with opportunities to engage in intensive study and research on Somaliland and Somali-inhabited regions in the Horn of Africa on an interdisciplinary basis.

The RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE (RVI) is an independent, non-profit organization, founded in Sudan in 2001, currently working in seven countries in eastern and central Africa. The aim of the Institute is to advance useful knowledge of the region and its diverse communities, bringing a better understanding of local realities to bear on social and political action. The RVI works with institutions in the region to develop and implement long-term programs that combine action-oriented research with education and public information.

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