



Somali elections in 2016

FIVE KEY CHALLENGES IN SOMALIA'S GAME OF THRONES

The security situation and infighting between clans and politicians in Somalia have made it impossible to carry out the planned full-scale elections in August 2016. More realism must guide expectations of Somalia in the short and medium-term.

Somalia is at a critical juncture. The current government's mandate is ending and a constitutional referendum and elections are planned for August 2016. In 2012, when President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud took office, it was clear that ending conflict and building state institutions were Sisyphean tasks. In the course of the last few months, it has become increasingly apparent that there are

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop better models to engage productively with questions of clans.
- Maintain pressure on the offices of the President and the Prime Minister to clarify and consolidate roles and responsibilities.
- Maintain a strong focus on existing and emerging interim administrations, including Puntland.
- Establish a better understanding of how to engage in security matters beyond al-Shabaab.
- Ensure that the humanitarian situation does not turn into a crisis, which would undermine progress made.

Working explicitly with the question of clans in Somalia constitutes a considerable and unavoidable dilemma

“It’s the pinnacle of democracy that everyone who is eligible votes to elect, but there is a big gap between there and where we stand. There are different phases and different models for elections, but we have not yet agreed on a format to transition in 2016.”

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud, July 2015

unreasonable expectations of what the government can achieve by 2016. It came as no surprise that President Mohamoud announced in July 2015 that it would be impossible to hold popular elections (one person, one vote) next year. This has led to discussions on alternative electoral options, including the idea of indirect elections involving electoral colleges at the district level.

Five issues are pivotal to Somalia’s state- and peacebuilding efforts and will remain so beyond the August 2016 elections.

#1 Clans

To understand the dynamics of security and politics in Somalia, one must begin with clan identity and relationships that shape and condition regional and federal politics in Somalia with respect to elections, regional administrative borders and access to national resources.

The three Somali-governed regions centred in Mogadishu (South-Central Somalia), Garowe (Puntland) and Hargeisa (Somaliland) are considered strongholds of major clan families, including the Hawiye, Darood and Isaaq respectively. (The first two families have historically fought over control of Mogadishu.) Historical interests, distributive mechanisms and grievances are embedded in clan politics, and play a major role in conditioning the enforcement of order on both local and national levels.

Yet, there is still limited understanding in the international community of how these dynamics of informal accountability function. Even less knowledge is available on how to influence clan dynamics in a way that makes a positive contribution to stabilisation,

state-building and reconciliation. A more consistent effort must be made to engage with clan leaders directly rather than rely solely or even primarily on the Federal Government of Somalia that was established on 20 August 2012 (following the end of the interim mandate of the Transitional Federal Government).

Working explicitly with the question of clans constitutes a dilemma. To ignore this question is not an option, since representation, employment, contracts and resource distribution that benefit one clan over another may trigger violence. At the same time, explicit recognition of clans as the basis of representation and resource allocation is likely to reinforce an institution that many Somalis view as a cause of conflict in the country.

#2 Politics

Understanding and engaging with the formal Somali leadership is a complex affair because political, ideological and economic interests are exercised behind the scenes. Political groups and networks operate through often shifting alliances across the clans. As such, financial and political elites that control resource flows and armed militias have been able to use clan dynamics to their own advantage. External actors may know this, but can they engender fundamental change?

Because of the fluidity and impenetrability of these networks and alliances, the best chance of the international community to make a positive impact is to put pressure on the federal institutions in Mogadishu. This is especially the case with respect to the relationship between the Offices of the President and Prime Minister (PM), which has had a notable destabilising effect across the political system. During the

course of 2014, relations between President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (of the Hawiye clan) and PM Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed (Darood) were tense, leading to Abdiweli's removal from office in December 2014. Tension was especially evident during the FGS attempt begun in 2012 to re-establish national security institutions. Appointed in December 2013, Abdiweli was considered a generally more proactive PM, who took on more executive functions of government. This was increasingly seen as a threat to the dominance of the Office of the President (historically the centre of power in Somalia) that ultimately led to the PM's downfall.

These developments reflected the PM's attempt to establish and consolidate a power base within the government. This was encouraged in part by the international community, based on its interpretation of Somalia's Interim Constitution, whose language on the relationship between the President and PM is unclear. This inherent tension of the political system in Somalia must be resolved in order to move state- and peacebuilding forward.

#3 Federalism

Since 2012, progress has been made in developing a federal system, with the creation of three Interim

Regional Administrations (IRAs): Interim Jubaland Administration, the South-West Administration and most recently one in Central Somalia that unites Galgadug and southern Mudug. Eventually, these administrations are expected to become Federal Member States (FMS). The final IRA will likely combine Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle. As Somalia builds its federal system, many aspects of how federalism is to take form remain vague.

Clarity on the way in which decentralisation will be exercised and how power will be distributed between Mogadishu and the future FMS is critical to the



Top: Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, President of Somalia. Bottom: Members of Somalia's first parliament in twenty years were sworn in at an open-air ceremony at Mogadishu International Airport on 20 August 2012 © Un Photo/Stuart Price

functioning of inclusive and representative institutions. In the absence of such clarity, it is not surprising that new exclusionary clan politics and the strong marginalisation of certain clans at the regional levels – actions that will ultimately undermine local state-building efforts – are taking place.

It is crucial that attention be paid to these regional and local political dynamics in order to ensure credible elections. The formation of IRAs and eventual FMS is inextricably linked to the review of the Constitution. It is imperative that consultations in the course of this review involve participation of both the regional and central governments to ensure consensus, and to avoid a situation whereby future states challenge and oppose the reviewed constitution.

#4 Security

Security in Somalia in terms of international resource allocation and political attention is dominated by the onslaught of al-Shabaab, a radical neo-Salafi Jihadi Islamist organisation, against FGS. Indeed, the most concrete element of the African Union Mission in Somalia's (AMISOM) mandate focuses on reducing the threat posed by al-Shabaab.

After a string of AMISOM operations in 2014 pushed al-Shabaab out of strategic areas in South-Central Somalia, the mission stagnated in the first half of 2015. This led to a resurgence of al-Shabaab and a number of spectacular attacks in Mogadishu, Kismayo and Garowe in Puntland. While al-Shabaab has taken the responsibility for many of the attacks, it is also apparent that the attacks have been motivated by clan politics, notably in-fighting between Darood and Hawiye. Security in Somalia remains a complex mix of clan politics, business interests, lack of opportunity, particularly for young men, as well as ideology.

It is therefore paramount that much greater emphasis be put on understanding and engaging with security

issues that do not centre on al-Shabaab. Security and politics must be approached as closely intertwined in a long-term perspective that goes well beyond the 2016 election process.

#5 Humanitarian

Despite having averted an acute humanitarian crisis in 2014, the situation has remained fragile in 2015. According to the Food Security and Analysis Unit managed by the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), 3.1 million people in Somalia are in need of food and nutrition assistance and an estimated 855,000 face acute food insecurity through to December 2015.

Below average cereal harvests, poor rainfall, trade disruption due to insecurity and new and continued population displacement have been cited by FAO as contributing to increased malnutrition and food insecurity. A major challenge in the food insecurity crisis is unpredictable and impeded access to vulnerable communities, which was significantly exacerbated in 2014 when al-Shabaab blocked supply and access routes in and out of many of the towns from which it had been expelled by AMISOM. This renders many of the newly 'recovered' areas entirely cut off from aid and commercial supplies, and in fact inaccessible.

While insecurity has been the biggest obstacle to holding one person-one vote elections, the root causes of the humanitarian situation in Somalia remain unresolved. If the country is allowed to slip back into a full-blown humanitarian crisis, as happened in 2011, the gains that have been made in the state-building process over the past three years will be fundamentally compromised. Moving into 2016, the humanitarian situation will continue to greatly affect the country's ability to establish political stability.

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Cover photo: Women adorned in Somali flags celebrate Somalia's 53rd Independence Day on 1 July 2013 in Mogadishu © UN Photo/Tobin Jones

