

Attitudes towards elections and democracy in Mogadishu

Key Messages

- The overwhelming majority of Mogadishu's residents consider democratic elections important and intend to vote in future elections.
- There is widespread dissatisfaction with the 4.5 power-sharing model, though residents maintain that the representation of minority communities and women should be guaranteed.
- The security situation is closely tied to attitudes towards elections. Continuing insecurity will affect the preparations for and holding of elections.

Background

In July 2014 the Mayor of Mogadishu and Governor of Benadir Region, Hassan Mohamed Hussein 'Muungaab', announced his intention that regional democratic elections be held in 2015 to elect his successor and all district commissioners. The following year, national parliamentary elections are planned in line with the federal government's Vision 2016 framework.

So far, and despite growing concerns among the international community, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) does not appear prepared to admit publicly that the chances of free and fair national elections being held in 2016 are fading. Multiple pre-requisite steps are yet to be taken, and there is little evidence of efforts to initiate them.

However, while still ambitious, some form of local elections in Mogadishu may still be possible. Various steps have been taken; a roadmap has been drafted and discussions with potential partners in the process have been held.

In light of this, and with support from the Benadir Regional Administration (BRA), the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS) recently completed a large-scale survey to gain an understanding of attitudes towards elections and democracy among the residents of Mogadishu.

A total of 1,633 respondents from all of the city's 17 districts took part in an exercise involving 15 enumerators. A pilot study was conducted in April

2014 in Shangani, Hamar Weyne, Hamar Jajab, and Waberi districts. Surveys were conducted in the remaining 13 districts in October.

Focus group discussions were later held with various stakeholders in November to validate findings and to further our understanding with a qualitative dimension to the research.

While findings from Mogadishu are not representative of the whole of Somalia, as its most populous city they may provide an indication of broader attitudes towards elections and democracy among Somali society.

It is hoped that the study will encourage officials to pursue the process of holding regional elections and that our findings may inform stakeholders in shaping a process that could encourage further local elections elsewhere in Somalia.

Elections matter

"If Mogadishu starts with elections, other regions will follow."

The survey revealed overwhelming support for local elections in Mogadishu. A total of 92 percent of all respondents considered holding local elections important (28 percent 'important' and 64 percent 'very important'). Three in four (76 percent) respondents said that they expect local elections to take place in 2015, despite apparent widespread awareness of the considerable challenges that lie

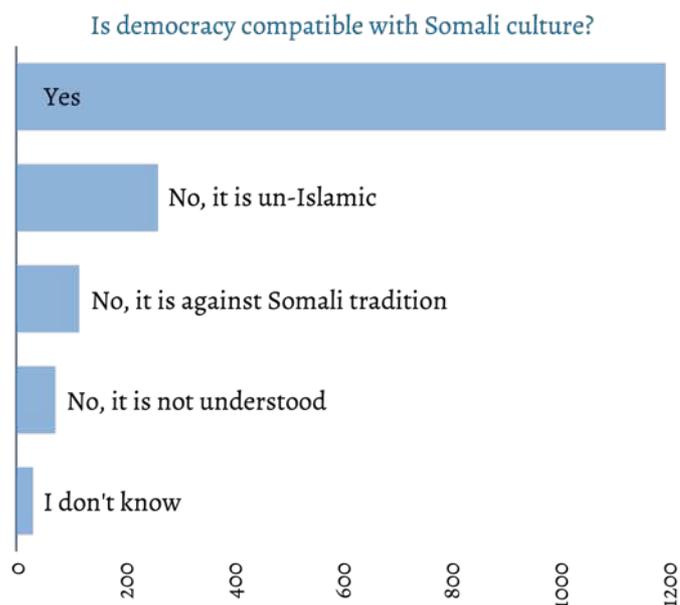
ahead, and a solid majority (86 percent) claimed that they were either 'likely' (15 percent) or 'very likely' (71 percent) to take part in such a process.

The overarching issue of security in the city, however, appears to have a profound impact on attitudes towards elections. 70 percent of all respondents claimed that continuing insecurity poses the greatest challenge to the successful holding of elections. As discussed in our last Policy Brief, Perceptions of Security and Justice in Mogadishu, the nature of insecurity in Mogadishu has evolved in recent years and, though residents may feel generally safer than they did in previous years, indiscriminate suicide attacks, hand grenade attacks, and targeted killings continue to present a grave threat.

Insecurity will certainly make preparations for city-wide elections difficult. The threat of targeted attacks against voters, election officials, observers, and security personnel on a future election day will also likely influence voter turnout. As one participant in the focus group discussions asked, "should people think about their own security or elections?"

Awareness of the potential destabilizing effects of elections was also clear, as another focus group participant explained, referring to the post-election violence in Kenya in 2007-08: "Elections are not always constructive; sometimes they create conflict, like after the election between Kibaki and Odinga." Interestingly, however, security was also the most common response (37 percent) when participants were asked why elections were important.

16 percent of respondents consider democracy to be un-Islamic or secular. As suggested in focus group discussions, it is also arguably part of Somali culture to distrust external interference. This combined with the rise of radical interpretations of Islam in recent history may have resulted in an assumption among some that democracy is an inherently 'western' concept and thus incompatible with Somali culture and/or religion. This view was articulated by a focus group participant who suggested, "We are not against everything that comes from the west... but we are against moral



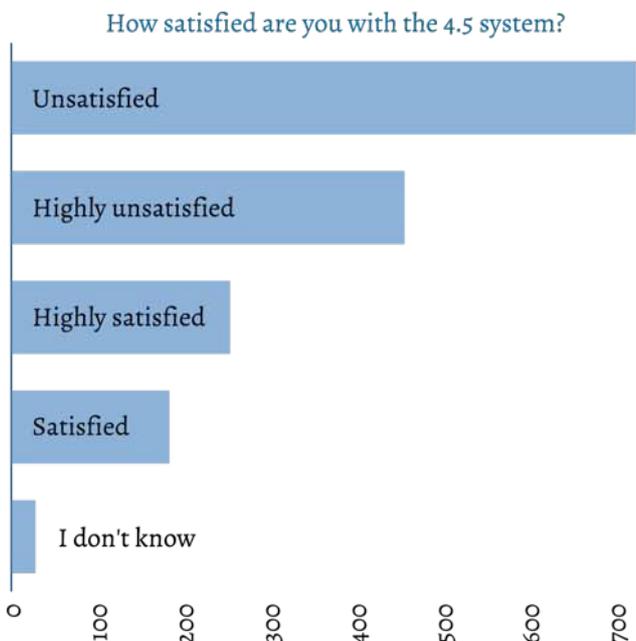
imposition [from the west]."

Representation

"If the regional administration is democratically elected based on the quality of the candidates in terms of education, it is one thing. But if it is about which clans live in each area it will just be the same as before."

"There are clans who currently have representatives in parliament who never had before and wouldn't have if we go to elections. Some seats have to be reserved for marginalized communities."

The survey suggests a clear demand for greater meritocracy in Mogadishu, while safeguarding the representation of women and minorities. Asked specifically how satisfied they are with the current 4.5 system of representation within the Somali government, a clear majority (72 percent) expressed their dissatisfaction.

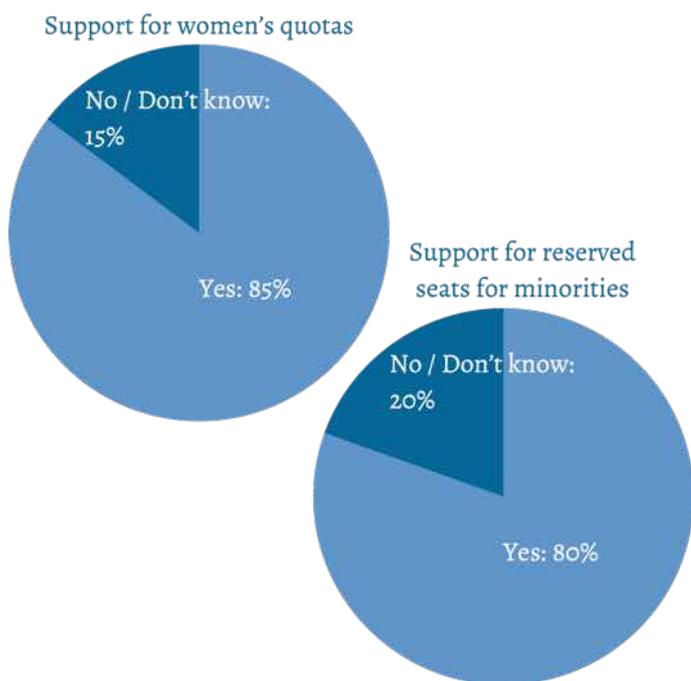


First conceived in 1997 at the Sodere meeting in Ethiopia, the 4.5 power-sharing formula was at first seen as a progressive method of ensuring inclusivity of all communities in Somali politics. The formula guarantees equal representation for the four main clan families in Somalia—the Darood, Digil and Mirifle (Rahanweyn), Dir, and Hawiye—and the equivalent of half representation for minority groups including the Bantu, Benadiri, and Madhibaan communities.

Asked why they thought there was growing consensus against the 4.5 power-sharing formula, focus group participants suggested that the system has become too rigid, that "every clan wants every position that they ever held," and that it is now a certainty that the president and prime minister posts are guaranteed to members of the Hawiye and Darood clans rather than the most qualified candidates. If democracy were based on political parties, one participant claimed, "elections may soften clan affiliation."

There remains a general consensus, however, on the importance of maintaining assurances of representation among minority communities. That 80 percent of respondents supported mechanisms to ensure minority representation while also apparently demanding greater meritocracy arguably demonstrates a degree of political maturity among Mogadishu's population that bodes well for the future politics of the city, if effective mechanisms can be designed.

Similarly, the overwhelming majority (85 percent) of respondents to the survey stated that guarantees of women's representation in politics, through quotas, should be in place for future elections. For a traditionally patriarchal society, historically governed by men, this also demonstrates a remarkably progressive attitude to governance in Mogadishu.



Obstacles

“The reason that the Western countries have successful elections and functioning democracies is that they have the supporting infrastructure and legitimate processes and procedures. We need to focus on creating these prerequisites before we rush to elections that could lead to more instability.”

Despite widespread optimism and support for elections, the reality remains that unless the current levels of insecurity are successfully addressed, free, fair, and peaceful elections in Mogadishu in 2015 remain unlikely. One in four respondents (24 percent) stated either that they thought it unlikely or didn't know if elections would take place in 2015.

The survey was conducted before the latest round of infighting within the federal government, which resulted in the ousting of another prime minister. Nonetheless, eleven percent of respondents considered political leaders to be the greatest obstacle to the holding of elections. Concerns about

exceptionally slow progress towards Vision 2016 also appear to be growing.

Attempts to add a gender dimension to the 4.5 formula to ensure the representation of women in Somali politics—such as the Sixth Clan initiative, for example¹—have had limited success. The Garowe Principles included as one of its key provisions reserving a quota of 30 percent of seats in parliament for women. When parliament was finally selected women secured just half of these reserved seats.

Responses to the question of how district and regional administrators could be appointed offer some insight into what alternative processes may be considered legitimate. While almost half (43 percent) of respondents are adamant that direct elections are the only legitimate process, 27 percent suggest that locally respected representatives could be tasked with a selection process, and another 17 percent suggested that traditional elders could assume the responsibility.

Conclusions

“It does not have to be perfect, but a system has to be established.”

The holding of successful democratic elections throughout Somalia in 2016 grows increasingly unlikely as each day passes. As expressed in focus group discussions, there is growing awareness among the Somali people that this timeframe is unrealistic. However, the holding of local elections in Mogadishu remains a possibility if security can be effectively addressed over the course of the next year, and the city's residents continue to support them.

Still, the successful completion of elections, whenever they may occur, does not mean that democracy will be accomplished. Elections are just one part of a far broader process of democratizing Somali politics, which will take time and commitment from the country's leaders and people over a long period, but they are a fundamentally important first step.

The stated commitment of the current mayor to be replaced by an elected mayor is strengthened by the fact that the Benadir Regional Administration supported this survey. It is hoped that some of the lessons drawn from it will feed into the democratic process in Mogadishu which may, in turn, encourage further steps towards democracy beyond the city.

The hopes and expectations of Mogadishu's residents are clear. They are matched, however, by a degree of realism and an understanding of the practical challenges that lie ahead. Holding free and fair local elections will only be possible if Mogadishu's political elite genuinely commits to democratic principles, works towards these principles, and fosters an environment in which they can be practiced.

Policy Considerations

The Electoral System: Given the overwhelming support for elections, attention should be focused on how, rather than whether, they should take place. Electoral systems vary considerably, and deciding upon the most appropriate system for both local and national elections will require careful consideration, and extensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders.

While there is awareness of the importance of representation and the need to ensure that both minority communities and women are fairly included in government, the 4.5-style of approach to power-sharing among clans is unsatisfactory and needs rethinking. Politics based on ideologies, as expressed through parties, is incompatible with the current system in which clan is institutionalized.

Mechanisms to ensure minority representation in national politics tend to secure particular geographic constituencies for minority communities. Similar measures in an urban environment like Mogadishu may be impractical and undesirable, arguably reinforcing perceived differences. Consideration must therefore be given to establishing how to secure minority representation in regional politics.

Most developing countries with mechanisms to safeguard women's representation in politics use quotas. In theory, legislation—lacking in the Garowe Principles—could ensure quotas are filled in elections through effective mechanisms. Ensuring such quotas would actually translate into greater gender equity at the regional level rather than offering token status in government will require further consideration.

Insecurity: The importance of addressing insecurity in Mogadishu cannot be emphasized enough. Given the clear current demand for local elections and intentions to vote, current insecurity cannot be used as an excuse not to continue the ongoing preparations. As Somaliland has demonstrated on several occasions, elections in the Somali region are possible and need not result in conflict. Lessons can be learned from Somaliland's experience and efforts to address ongoing insecurity should be intensified.

Even before the current phase of political infighting there were concerns about the government's handling of security, its commitment to political reform, and its capacity to achieve the ambitious targets laid out in Vision 2016. Al-Shabaab and

criminal networks will exploit diversions of attention away from the key responsibilities the FGS assumed when it was established in 2012.

Civic Education: Finally, civic education campaigns are required to raise awareness of elections, to explain the value of democracy, and to outline the rights and responsibilities of the Somali people. Efforts should be made to address the concerns of those who believe democracy to be incompatible with Somali culture, and particularly those who believe it to be incompatible with Islam.

While the holding of elections may be unfamiliar and associated with an external agenda, the inherently democratic nature of Somali nomadic society was acknowledged by visitors to the region throughout history.² And as one focus group participant stated, "Islam is about justice, fairness, consultation, and governance based on social contract." Civic education campaigns should include information on the democratic nature of both traditional Somali society and the Islamic faith.

Notes

¹ The Sixth Clan was founded by Asha Haji Elmi as a means for women to participate in international peace and reconciliation conferences otherwise dominated by men along clan lines.

² Anthropologist I.M. Lewis quoted the 19th century British explorer, Richard Burton, in an epigraph at the beginning of his 1961 publication, *A Pastoral Democracy*; "A fierce and turbulent race of Republicans." According to both writers Somalis had likely adhered to the basic principle of democracy, that power ultimately resides with the people, long before the arrival of European powers.



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