



Center for Democracy & Governance
"Holding Power Accountable"

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REVIVING DEMOCRACY AND RESTORING CITIZENS' TRUST IN SOMALILAND



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1. About The Center

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The Centre for Democracy and Governance (CDG) is an independent, Somaliland based nonprofit center of excellence that promotes the advancement of democracy and good governance. By deepening of democracy and works to contribute to peace and security in Horn of Africa, the African continent and beyond through dialogue, the pursuit of knowledge and rigorous analysis of critical issues and developments.

CDG activities target Socio-economic groups (Local Communities) Civil societies Academic institutions Government and non-governmental institutions Political Parties Refugee and IDPs. In exercising this responsibility, CDG focuses on the challenges of institution capacity building, democratic governance and the rule of law, as well as opportunities for peace, security, cooperation and integration.



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2. Introduction

Large number of the African countries are said to be the least democratic countries as they lack the commitment in respecting the election schedules stipulated in the constitution with election postponement and to some extent refusing to hold election for years, while others have created the means to fixing election and being in power for more than 40 years. It is not a lack of financial, human resources or the know how capacity to stick to the socially contracted plans but rather create a divide and rule ideology where with the use of clan/tribal based politics supports their position term extension.

A power balance boundary between the branches of government become blurry whenever there is a situation that will affect the position of the elite in those government branches, a shift of political competition, tension and a negotiation of scratching each other backs creates cause to the point the social contracts of the community and the sole purpose of constitution is sidelined just to please few individuals with the financial superiority.

History of Somaliland Election

In the history of Somaliland elections, every election that is constitutionally fixed with clear timeline has been postponed with the presidential being the least postponed election per administration compared to the house of representative's election with 15 years + delay prior the 2021 elections, the house of elders has never had an election since they have been institutionalized at the Great Congress of National Reconciliation in 1993. Since it is the highest position and most powerful seat in the country the presidential election gets the most attention where both local and the international community always try to influence by pressuring the president to hold elections in a timely manner. These election postponements are not necessarily solely the decision of the president however other branches of the government do facilitate it including the house of elders, the judiciary branch, or even the opposition parties particularly when the 10-year party license expires.



3. Upcoming Election 2026

With the upcoming election of 2026 for the local council and the house of representatives, large number of aspirant candidates have confirmed their interest in the election, during the 2024 presidential campaign the current president was interviewed by the Voice of America (VOA) a days before the election and in that interview the Somaliland President Mr. Abdirahman Mohamed Abdillahi promised to holding elections on time if he wins, few days after swearing in for the presidency he once again confirmed his commitment, with this the aspirants candidates number is increasing day by day where meetings and debates has been taking place to create discussion around the election.

Center for Democracy and Governance (CDG) designed a chain of meetings, discussions, and debate that brought together 130s of aspirant candidates as a pressure group to closely monitor the ever-changing political landscape of Somaliland with the main concern of yet another election postponement. The platform organized an academic discussion in Borama district (Awdal region) to promote a national level awareness by enhancing community understanding of the negative peace impact a postponed election could lead to.

4. Key Takeaways from the Dialogue

4.1 Preserving democracy and upholding public confidence of the constitution

The panelist discussed the importance of promoting the democratic integrity and increase younger generations trust in the public institutions, the power holders, and elected officials whom are entrusted with protecting the constitution by following the laws and social contracts agreed by the clans residing Somaliland will a tool to safeguard the greater national interest rather than those of specific groups or individuals.

The younger generation has grown up with the term extension and violation of laws by the power holders and now appears to have normalized whenever a president postpones election or unconstitutional move is made, however the truth of the matter is that *"If we continue with this unconstitutional term extensions and violation of the social contract facilitated by the parliament then this could jeopardize the security leading to potential widespread conflict, the only remedy for this is to hold elections as stipulated in the constitution"* Said by Dr. Mohamed Muse the president of Amoud University.

It is apparent that Somaliland practices extractive politics known as the political elite with their focus of power and wealth in the hands of few often and in the expense of the majority, However the political parties and other election stakeholders should more often practice inclusive political economy where institutions promote broader participation as well equal access to resources and benefits, the elected MPs across regions donot only represent those in their districts but are accountable speaking on behalf of constituents from regions with less representation because it is a fact that resources are not distributed equally among the regions. *Hibo Mohamed stated that the "larger community should realize they have the power to lead or influence the decision-making process by practicing their constitutionally protected rights where both men and women have equal right to joining the government branches, peacefully protesting against extractive politics will challenge calculated election postponements.*

4.2 Contributing factors of election postponement

The panelist agreed that with no formal law, every administration manages to build a close partnership with the legislative and the judiciary branch to a point they no longer have a separate power and simply facilitate the term extensions of the presidents. In the current lower house of the parliament, the majority were part of the opposition party and now are the ruling party, at the time of the 2024 elections they have made sure no delays are visible and now they are in negotiation with the house of elders for yet another term extension this shows how the opposition parties only oppose to election postponement when it does not suit them but the minute they become the ruling party everything changes “ *No president will held election on time as long as they have the majority vote in the lower house and from experience 2005 and 2021 both presidents face the toughest challenges after they held house of representatives elections and I don’t think current president will make the same decision as he needs to have the majority vote in the lower house* Political parties said by Dr Mohamed Muse.

In additional to this, most delays are intentionally calculated by those key election stakeholders there is a crucial to have an independent institution that is free from the influence of the other government and its branches the electoral commissioners: two commissioners are appointed by the opposition parties, two

are from the house of elders and three are from the president and his ruling party with coalitions and the usual allies between the ruling party and one of the opposition parties or even the house of elders always undermines the veracity of the electoral commission

4.3 Legal and Constitutional Reforms

from the stand point of laws and constitution. Although the panelist where from different political affiliations both the ruling and opposition parties, yet they agreed election postponements have negative impact of the democratic progress of the country and blamed both sides violating laws and election policies as scape goat to manipulate the interest of the community. *Dr Mohamed Muse stated if we are ever serious about bringing an end to the election delays section of article 42 (3) and 83 (5) should be removed from the constitution as they both give the house of elders the ultimate power to postpone election, although at the time of constitutional drafting both articles were crucial as they were responding to a need that was valid and current at the time and simply attempting to reform the constitution just for these articles is risky.*

Additionally, *Mohamed Ahmed Baradho the former Mayor of Borama district mentioned that for the past 30 years plus the election delays are equivalent an average of 46 year (presidents, parliament and the local council) , lack of readiness and commitment to their responsibility is one of the reasons, the electoral law clearly defines the requirement of candidacy where the highest conditions are placed on the local council candidates and the lower house requirement is very basic and this is why in the last election you could see unqualified MPs in the parliament. The recurrent dispute among the political parties is another reason said by Hibo Mohamed where they rarely have consensus of the election mater.*

4.4 Political Parties and Genuine Democracy

The panelist highlighted how the parties have some kind of democracy within their party for instance the chairman, the deputy and the second deputies are all elected, the presidential candidate and his vice president are also elected through formal elections. Nevertheless, when it comes to elections of the parliament and the local council the whole system turns into clan-based politics where the clan elders have the utmost power to endorse which candidates to join the race. No independent candidate is welcomed by the party without the full support of their clan and this indicate the level of democracy even within the party.

4.5 Election and Traditional elders

The political party manifesto, the electoral law and the constitution all estipulate the selection criteria for any candidate, the criteria they are expected to adhere to, yet clans have power to nominate candidates from their clan and only those endorsed by their clans can secure a candidacy spot from the party they join, no political party is willing to directly engage candidates as they are in a competition for the support of the clans, this is one of the reasons to why most suitable potential candidates never win a position while women are the victims of such arrangements said by Hibo Mohamed. The current local council have the responsibility to closely work with the president as well as his party to pressure him holding the election on time because we have enough time the commission to prepare election plans, *“We are willing to step down the minute our 5year term ends said by Mohamed Ahmed former Mayor of Borama, he highlighted that local councils and MPs who are seeking for term extension.*

5. Conclusion:

This academic discussion on Somaliland's constitution, democracy and election laws organized by the CDGs platform for public discussions brought together academicians, government officials and political aspirants with the deep understanding of the political situation and the impact of the election postponements to the security and political maturity of the country.

The discussion has highlighted the extent to which the constitution, laws, election institution and traditions played both positive and negative role in election and without proper dialogues to safeguard the social contract, among the panelist and the other participants amending the constitution might not be a solution as it could lead to more political dispute and the glue that is holding the community together can be jeopardized.

Additionally, the discussion has focused how the lack of power distribution among the pillars of the government undermine the integrity of the state with the control of the elite in which the majority of the society becomes the victims in the hands of the few. The discussion emphasized on the current democratic practices, the unconstitutional election practices and the never-ending political disputes which has become norm.

6. Recommendations

- The panelist suggested that the political parties to revert back to the original party mandate based on the constitution and electoral law and avoid clan-based politics to accommodate the promotion of democracy.
- The panelist arguably stressed how the term extension of any elected position impacts the security and collectiveness of the community and recommend that any administration should work of creating and sustaining united citizens and avoid dividing the people for the interest of the elite by respecting the constitution and the electoral laws.
- Voicing out their disappointment in potential 2026 election postponement, they have stressed how two sub-articles are the main source of election delays and without a proper review and amendment election delays is inevitable
- The panelist recommended that the house of elders to avoid only a tool for term extension and should focus their peacebuilding and promoting branches of the government respecting the constitutions and other laws.
- Both women and youth are underrepresented in decision making positions, to change this both groups should be more active, use all available tools and break this chain by uniting their voices, holding tangible positions at the party structure and closely work with traditional elders so to secure the elders endorsement.
- The panelist advised the constituents to hold them accountable for campaign promises they have made.
- Community to pick more educated, financially stable and patriotic candidates for the local council and lower house of the parliament.
- The supporters and members of the ruling party should closely work with the president and his administration and hold him accountable for his in a timely manner election .
- The democratic progress of Somaliland should be tied with the presidential election but the parties should also have a democratic practice, allowing different people holding higher positions, allowing women and youth to actively have e.qual access to resource without any endorsement of the traditional elders.
- Some of the participants suggested that amending the constitution should be the last resort as it will allow each government to simply amend it against for their own interest.

7 Gallery of the Event

