"The inescapable conclusion is that credible, peaceful, free and fair "One Person, One Vote" and Multiparty Election in Somalia, in its current form, is not only impractical, but it can unquestionably prompt violence and inflame tensions as the country is not fundamentally prepared for such a historical event. However, we must reconcile the absence of 'One Person, One Vote' with the diminishing of powers of influential Federal and State executives that usually have decided past elections."

Somalia—Elections 2020/2021

Position Paper

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INTRODUCTION

It's been 50 years since Somalia last conducted a "One Person, One Vote" election. Nevertheless, the current government hopes to change this history and hold a "One Person, One Vote" ballot for the 2020/2021 cycle. This paper argues against the "One Person, One Vote" election model and, at the same time, proposes an alternative for the upcoming elections.

Somali Prime Minister Abdirashid Ali Shermarke (right) defeated President Aden Abdullah Osman (L) in 1967 Elections, Photograph: -/AFP/Getty

Post-conflict elections are conducted to advance peace, stability, and, more importantly, democratic norms. Such elections are determined in part by the ugly history of painful wars and are guided by the hope of eliminating the causes of past conflicts. Many war-torn countries have used elections as a mechanism to institutionalize a democratic system following internal strife. These countries include Cambodia, El Salvador, Angola, Mozambique, Bosnia, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Afghanistan, and Iraq. While some countries have succeeded in establishing peace through elections, others have witnessed bloody standoffs and chaos. Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia are two recent examples in Africa. Côte d'Ivoire held its presidential election in 2010, only to spark a deadly confrontation between Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara[1]. In contrast, following the 2002 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which brought Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to power, Liberia held successful elections in 2005[2]. Elections are the focus of efforts to rehabilitate countries devastated by internal conflicts such as Somalia—giving such elections added significance, but at the same time challenging to occur.

[1] https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/04/world/africa/04ivory.html

[2] https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/89NegotiatingpeaceinLiberia-PreservingthepossibilityforJustice-November-2007.pdf

Is "One Person, One Vote" Unattainable in This Election Cycle?

A "One Person, One Vote" election in Somalia, in its current form, is not only impractical, but it can unquestionably prompt violence and inflame tensions as the country is not fundamentally prepared for such a historical event. However, the overarching challenge is to find a middle ground to ensure free and fair elections that are credible, peaceful, and broadly participated.

Campaigns have not officially kicked off, but Somalia is gearing up for an election season. The current government's mandate ends in February 2021, but despite the government's continued resolve and the international community's hopes, Somalia is unlikely to hold nationwide one-person-one-vote elections.

With the Al-Shabaab militant group still controlling significant areas of the country and launching attacks on areas controlled by the federal and state governments, the security situation remains bleak. Aside from insecurity, many other obstacles could pose a real threat to a One Person, One Vote election occurring. Groundwork and technical preparations, such as voter registrations and hiring and training election officials, are not completed. There is no established One Person, One Vote process; no technical and logistical requirements have been put in place. The country hasn't reached a consensus on national or state identification cards to ensure voter registration; no census has been taken to understand population trends that are detrimental to representation, constituency and precincts. There is still a significant amount of tension between Somalia's federal government and Puntland State leadership. The Jubbaland political state is still in disarray, and the issue of Somaliland remains unsolved.

With the above impediments in mind, political and theoretical deliberations of alternative proposals for the upcoming elections are active in the Somali elites and other Somali gatherings, as well as on social media — a clear suspension of the belief that credible, peaceful, free and fair One Person, One Vote elections are foreseeable by the end of 2020 or early 2021. Therefore, the current government, the National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC), and the Federal Parliament must completely adopt an alternative election model that allows as broad a participation by Somali voters as possible. However, we must reconcile the absence of One Person, One Vote with the elimination of the influential federal and state leaders who have usually decided past elections.

Furthermore, Somalia faces many of the significant corruption challenges and entrenched patronage system that affect conflict-torn countries, and it would be impossible to achieve an election without bribery and irregular dealings. However, what can be done is to increase participation in elections, empower citizens and let them, not a few influential individuals, decide the election outcome.

Ending civil wars and simultaneously democratizing war-torn states have often gone hand-in-hand with violence. However, Somalia has conducted several indirect and somewhat democratic elections and can build on those experiences to further its progress. Conversely, lack of gradualism will test the fragile peace and governance enjoyed thus far. The 2020/2021 elections demand a wise policy, adequate measures, and arrangements coupled with charismatic leadership to forge political consensus and mobilize stakeholders to attain avenues to Somalia's election aspirations. The inability of the current administration to come up with a clear and agreeable framework for the 2020/2021

elections will be anything but a show of explicit intent to foment peace and democracy, and will unquestionably exacerbate the situation.

Is Multiparty Election Viable?
The multiparty elections in the 1960s could offer some lessons for Somalia today. During those elections, political parties rose to 643, and most of those parties represented a specific lineage of a clan or sub-clan4. Multiparty democracy and clan politics are often at odds with each other and signify two uniquely different outcomes. To be both broadly representative and viable within Somali society, political parties will need to develop platforms that focus on issues important to voters.

Today, there are [63 political parties registered](#) with the National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC), and yet, almost all of them have no locations in any of the states or regions outside of Mogadishu. The NIEC website doesn't explain if any political party has fulfilled the requirement beyond meeting Article 4 of the Somali Political Parties Law—**Temporary Registration.** Nevertheless, these parties face numerous challenges. Political parties are essential in creating a link between the citizens and the political system; they are the first conduit of political representation that links people to the government. While Somalia is moving towards more inclusive institutions and policies, most citizens have never participated in a democratic, direct election based on political party structures. As a result, Somali voters don't identify themselves as party supporters, so they identify themselves with their clan politicians instead. Therefore, parliamentarian candidates may not trust political parties in their pursuit of winning a seat.

Furthermore, there are no durable foundations, such as technical expertise, logistics, infrastructure, and, most importantly, election laws, such as campaign-financing laws. The above elements are crucial for multiparty elections because they can provide mechanisms to guide the electoral processes and enforce election outcomes. In the absence of the above foundations and conditions, mult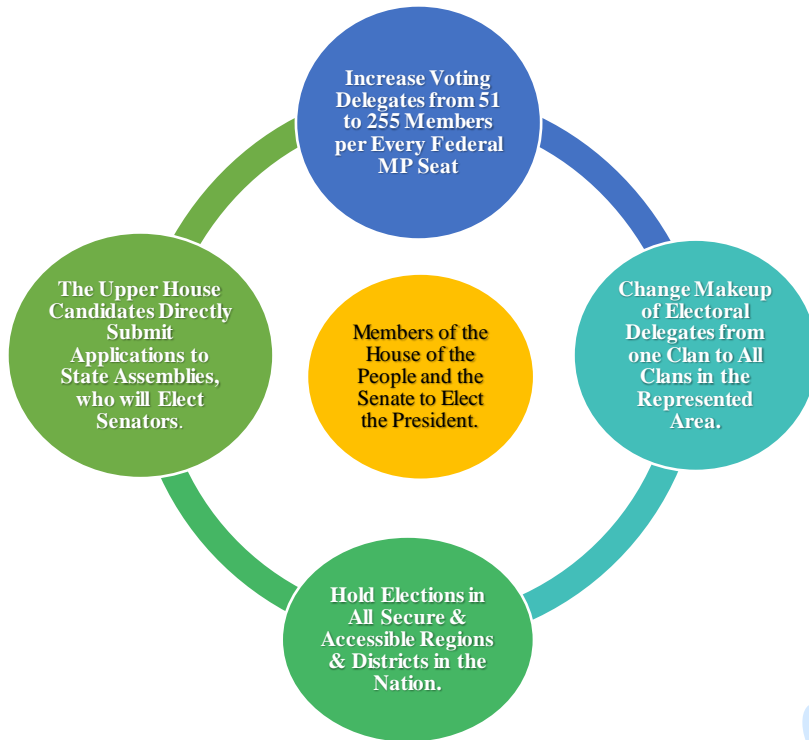iparty elections are not only improbable but outright unfeasible. To conduct multiparty elections, Somalia must fundamentally educate its public, create a level playing field, and complete the groundwork for multiparty elections not only to occur but to succeed.
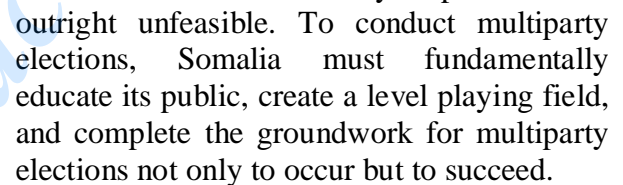
The Enhanced Indirect Election Model
Given the circumstances mentioned above, the most likely election scenario is that the country's next president will once again be chosen by the members of the House of the People and the Senate. Against this backdrop, [the Legacy Center](#) has identified an alternative election method—**the Enhanced Indirect Election Model.** Although this choice is by no means comprehensive, it is a realistic model that is meant to inform the discourse and guide the nation to an implementable, logistically affordable, agreeable to all sides, and impartial electoral model.

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[3] https://worldpolicy.org/2018/03/13/somalia-clan-politics/.

[4] https://worldpolicy.org/2018/03/13/somalia-clan-politics/

How Does the Model Work?

Increase Voting Delegates from 51 to 255 Members per Every Federal MP Seat

The Upper House Candidates Directly Submit Applications to State Assemblies, who will Elect Senators.

Members of the House of the People and the Senate to Elect the President.

Change Makeup of Electoral Delegates from one Clan to All Clans in the Represented Area.

Hold Elections in All Secure & Accessible Regions & Districts in the Nation.

The Enhanced Indirect Election Model will be built on the grounds laid during the 2016 election model and will safeguard those principles. This model will **not** trigger, invite, or cause new conflicts or arrangements, and it will protect the basic power-sharing principle of 4.5. *The "Enhanced Indirect Election Model"* guarantees quota for women and other marginalized groups; it gradually introduces elections to locals, increases broader participation, diminishes corruption and abuse of power and is easily implementable.

I. **Electoral Delegates:** Increasing the number of electoral delegates five-fold from 51 members to 255 members will:

- Increase the broader participation of the Somali public in elections.
- Diminish the abuse of power that many experienced during the past elections.
- Minimize corruption, as it presents more challenges to bribe 255 delegates.

II. **Makeup of Electoral Delegates:** The composition of electoral delegates should be: one-third from the clan contesting for the parliamentary seat and the remaining two-thirds from other clans in the represented area. Changing the makeup of the electoral process will:

- Diminish clan dominance in Somali politics and empower constituent representation.
- Force candidates to seek votes from a wide variety of diverse voters, which will ensure that elected representatives represent their constituency equally rather than being clan loyalists.
- And strengthen advocacy for constituent interest and that of the nation.

III. **Election Locations:** Instead of holding elections in the state capitals, i.e., Garowe, Dhusamareeb, Jowhar, Baidoa, and Kismayo, as well as in Mogadishu, elections should be held in secure and accessible regions and districts throughout the country. Doing so will:

- Present challenges for the influential federal and state leaders to decide elections behind closed doors. It will also provide ordinary voters the privilege of determining their elections.
- Encourage and increase public participation in elections.

IV. **The Upper House:** during the 2016 election, the state presidents nominated upper house candidates and the State Assemblies voted on the list submitted by the state presidents. In that process, state presidents not only abused their powers and corrupted the election, but also violated the citizens' constitutional rights to elect and be elected. Every senate candidate had to be in bed with his/her state president, or else he/she will not see their name on the candidacy list. That sham process made it impossible for many capable candidates to be on the ballot and be voted on. From this experience, the **Enhance Indirect Election**

Model proposes an alternative for upper house candidates to bypass their state presidents and directly submit applications to State Assemblies, which will vote to elect senators. In order for this process to be fair, transparent and credible, there should be no nominations or interference from the state presidents. This will allow every citizen to have their constitutional rights to elect and be elected.

CONCLUSION

Ever since Siad Barre's departure, the Somali people have been in search of legitimate representation and a government that genuinely serves their interests. Against this backdrop, any election model for 2020 must **not** create new conflicts and must provide a better avenue for democratization than previous elections. With this in mind, the Enhanced Indirect Election Model encompasses many elements to broaden participation and accessibility in elections; diminish clan loyalty, corruption, and abuse of power; and, most importantly, increase voter interest and engagement in elections. This model will also reconcile the absence of one-person-one-vote elections and the elimination of influential federal and state executives that have usually decided past elections. This model will also enable the nation to lay down the foundations for the much-desired one-person-one-vote elections in the next election cycle. The 2020/2021 elections demand a wise policy, proper measures, and arrangements. It calls for charismatic leadership to forge political consensus and mobilize stakeholders so to attain avenues to Somalia's democratic aspirations.

Legacy Center for Peace and Transparency (LCPT) is a research and empowerment center whose mission is to promote peace, good governance, democracy and sustainable development. LCPT was established in Minnesota, United with core operations in Somalia but with foot prints in the North Eastern Kenya region. Our aim is to provide capacity building and conduct high quality research that culminates in innovative practical recommendations for policy and practice in the following thematic areas:

- **Good governance**
- **Peace, equality and democratic values and practices**
- **Sustainable development (in particular, livelihoods)**

The LCPT conducts extensive research across Somalia, using quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. In addition to household surveys using mobile phones and interviews with key community figures and other stakeholders, LCPT also analyses publicly available data to complete its secondary research.

To learn more visit us at www.legacycentersom.org
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