



# PUBLIC POLLING: SOMALILAND'S 2022 ELECTIONS



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## 1. Executive Summary

This study was done at a period when Somaliland's ruling and opposition parties were involved in a dispute regarding the scheduling of the presidential elections and the opening of the platform for the registration of new political associations. The political contests have been aggravated by the fact that the presidential election and the end of the 10-year term for national political parties coincided. Incidentally, the ruling party wants to open the registration of political associations which the Constitution mandates to begin 6 months before their elections (Somaliland Const. art. 9, Law 14). However, the opposition parties, whose licenses expire this December, want the presidential elections to be held in November. It is against this background that the opposition parties organized a two-day demonstration in Hargeisa and other regions, resulting in several casualties and injuries.

The overall objective of this study is to find out the public's opinion on the current political issues in the country. The specific objectives are; 1. To understand the public perception of the House of Elders (Guurti), the current President and his administration, the three national parties and the National Electoral Commission. 2. To understand the public's concerns regarding the upcoming presidential elections and political parties' registration. 3. To explore the level of political consciousness of citizens in Somaliland.

### 1.1 Key Findings

The study employed both Mapping quantitative methods (questionnaires) as well as qualitative methods (focus group discussions). A summary of the finds is indicated below.

- On the upcoming 2022 presidential elections: An overwhelming majority, 91.9% of respondents are planning to vote while 5% of respondents will not be voting.
- On the motivation for voting: 39.9% of respondents indicated that they consider voting to be part of their civic duty, 33.3% consider voting to be part of their political party agenda while 16.9% vote due to their clan orientation.
- Regarding the public confidence on the National Electoral Commission (NEC): The respondents were asked whether they believed that the NEC conducted the 2021 parliamentary and local council elections freely fairly. 86.7% of respondents believed that the NEC held free and fair elections in 2021, 8.5% of respondents answered, 'I don't know' while 3.9% indicated that the elections were neither free nor fair.
- On the integrity of the upcoming Presidential elections: 81.3% of respondents expressed confidence in the NEC's ability to hold free and fair presidential elections in 2022. However, as at the time of the survey, all 7 members of the NEC who held the 2021 elections had resigned. This shows that regardless of who the members of the NEC are, the public have a high level of confidence in the institutional integrity of the NEC.

- On the opening of the platform for political parties' registration: 84.3% of respondents support opening the platform of political parties to register at the same time, 80% of respondents also want the 2022 presidential elections to be held according to schedule.
- On the possibility of election-related violence: 73.4% of respondents indicated that they would not fight for their parties in the event of election delays. This shows that the majority of the public do not want to jeopardize peace in the country.
- On the popularity of presidential candidates: 32% expressed support for Muse Bihi, 32.9% indicated that they would vote for Abdirahman Irro while 3.6% expressed support for Ali Warabe. The rest of the respondents indicated 'no answer'. This potentially shows that a significant portion of the public might not want any of these 3 candidates.
- Regarding the performance of the current government: 18.1% of respondents were highly satisfied with the performance of Bihi's administration, while 31.8% were satisfied, 29.5% were neutral, 11.5% were dissatisfied, 4.8% were very dissatisfied, 1% answered "I don't know" and 3% did not give an answer.
- On the House of elders (Guurti): 66.4% of respondents indicated that they would like to directly vote for members of Guurti while 17.5% of respondents want Guurti members to be selected in the traditional way.



## 2 Introduction

Somaliland has made commendable achievements in upholding democratic processes, especially elections. Since the unilateral dissolution of the 1960 union between Somaliland and Somalia, in 1991, Somaliland has held three presidential elections, two parliamentary elections, two local council elections, and two political party elections (APD, 2016; 2021). However, these elections experienced challenges such as an extension of terms and unprocedural delays (APD, 2014). The upcoming presidential elections and the registration of political parties are already facing similar challenges.

On 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021, Somaliland held elections for the House of Representatives and Local Council. Which were locally and internationally deemed to be successful (Walls et al., 2021). Even international observers seemed to approve of them. For instance, the Limited International Election Observation Mission (LIEOM) in their overall report, indicated that Somaliland had improved its voter registration process. The use of a biometric system enhanced confidence in the process. However, lack of Census data has undermined the ability of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) to compute an accurate number of voters (Walls et al., 2021). LIEOM also noted that the failure to hold parliamentary elections by 11 years and Local Council elections for three and half years had the effect of "...[undermining] both the legitimacy of the previous Parliament and the rule of law in Somaliland". Their most notable criticism of Somaliland's electoral system is the limitation the constitution puts on the number of political parties that can exist at time. The report observes that amending this law will enable Somaliland to build national political parties that are not based on clan politics but which represent the Somaliland people as a whole.

Somaliland's current political environment is very delicate and precarious. With the upcoming presidential elections scheduled for the 13th of November 2022 and the ten-year (Somaliland Const. art. 83) time limit for the national political parties coming to an end, cracks in the constitutional foundation of Somaliland are coming to the forefront. Through the constitutional referendum of 2001, Somaliland adopted a multi-party system that limits the number of political parties to three at a time (Hersi et al., 2016). Since 2001, Somaliland has stuck to this process of electing new political parties every decade. This year poses a challenge for Somaliland's democratic process of electing political parties with the presidential elections falling around the same time. As a result, there have been contests between the government and the opposition groups over which process should precede the other.

Existing research on Somaliland's politics and perceptions of its political environment has largely focused on political stakeholders such as members of the government, political parties, and elites. With the discussion about these issues being shaped by elites, the wider public opinion is missing. It is against this background that this study seeks to understand how the people of Somaliland perceive or react to the political issues related to the upcoming elections. The underlying questions of this research are: How do Somaliland citizens view the country's current political climate? What factors inform their opinions about

the upcoming presidential elections, the formation of new political associations, and the political relevance of the House of Elders (Guurti)? Exploring people's viewpoint on the Guurti is important for two reasons: first, the Guurti has the mandate to extend the terms of the executive and parliament (Somaliland Const. art. 57). Second, the Guurti has not been up for re-elections since its founding in 1993 (SORADI, 2012).

### 3 Background

Since its independence, Somaliland has taken a unique approach to state-building; adopting democratic institutions and processes without entirely abandoning its political organization that is rooted in a clan system. This hybrid system morphed into a multi-party system that has given the different clans the opportunity to partake in politics by forming political associations and then later electing three national political parties (Fadal, 2012; Hoehne, 2018). The multi-party system was essential to the peacebuilding and the reunification of the different clans in Somaliland under one nation (APD, 2021). During the 30+ years of its existence, Somaliland has held three successful, free, and fair presidential elections that resulted in a peaceful transition of power (Kabemba, 2003; Progressio, 2012; UNPO, 2017). Additionally, Somaliland succeeded in the delivery of two parliamentary and local council elections in 2005 and 2021 (APD, 2016&2021). These elections are important milestones for the democracy and nationhood of Somaliland. Notwithstanding the above, the elections had their own set of challenges and setbacks which included unprocedural extensions resulting in disputes between the ruling party and opposition parties, (Crisis Group, 2021). Its against this background that the House of Elders (Guurti) which has the mandate to extend terms of other government bodies, has made a total of 28 extensions over the 30-year period since independence, (APD, 2015). These extensions have however eroded people's trust in the government and democratic processes and caused political frictions between political actors (APD, 2021). The most recent elections to take place in Somaliland were the combined elections for the House of Representatives and local government councilors. For these combined elections to happen, the ruling party (Kulmiye) and opposition parties (Waddani & Ucid) had to come to a series of agreements regarding the composition of the National Electoral Commission and the timeline for opening registration and holding elections (APD, 2021).

Currently, Somaliland is dealing with disputes between the ruling party and opposition parties regarding the formation of political associations and presidential elections. The current president, Muse Bihi, came into power in November 13, 2017, for a 5-year term which ends in November, 2022. Coincidentally, this year also marks the end of the ten-year expiration date for the three national political parties (Fadal, 2012, p. 48-49). The opposition parties that were elected in 2012 (Fadal, 2012) and ran for the 2017 presidential elections but lost, want the presidential elections held on their scheduled date of 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2022



and the political parties registration done later while the President wants to open the political parties registration first and hold elections later. The opposition parties contend that holding the registrations for political associations before November can delay the elections in two ways. 1) The registration, campaign and election process of the political associations could take longer time than allocated resulting in delaying the presidential elections. 2) The three current national parties could run against the new political associations which could result in them losing supporters to the new political associations and jeopardize their opportunity to win the presidential elections.

Article 9 of Somaliland's Constitution limits the number of political parties that can exist at a time to three. This Constitutional provision has several limitations. First, it limits citizens' political choices. Secondly, it undermines the freedom to form political parties. Thirdly, in a clan-based society, the system promotes voting based on clan loyalty rather than party agendas (Walls et al, 2021).

Another area of dispute in Somaliland's current political climate is, the National Electoral Commission (NEC). The NEC is made up of seven members-Two nominated by the House of Elders, two from the opposition parties, and three nominated by the President. The recent resignation of all seven members has threatened the election schedule. (Somaliland Current, 2022). After the elections, the internal power dynamics within the leadership of NEC became a large issue, which resulted in the old chairperson (Abdirashid Riyoraac) being removed from his position, and a new chairperson being nominated to take his place (Kaltun Hassan). In accordance with Law No. 91/2020, the president appointed a national committee to investigate the NEC after the previous chairperson refused to acknowledge the outcome of the leadership selection process. The new leadership asserted that the group was not objective and was motivated by politics, so they rejected any recommendation from the committee. The opposition parties have claimed that the NEC should not be dissolved and that presidential elections should occur on the scheduled date. As of right now, all members including the former chairperson of the NEC have resigned due to the internal troubles of the NEC. Opposition parties were not happy and accused the incumbent administration for its fallout. New NEC members (composed of 7 members) were nominated by the respective institutions (3 are nominated by the president, 2 by the two opposition parties and 2 by the House of Elders). In June 2022, the president submitted their nomination to the House of the Representative who approved 4 of them and rejected 3 members (Som Tribune, 2022). With these unfolding issues and instability with the NEC, Somaliland's electoral process hangs in the balance and whether or not they will be able to deliver the presidential election in November of 2022 is still a big question.

### 3.1 Research Objectives

The specific objectives of this study were; 1. To understand the public perception of the House of Elders (Guurti), the current President and his administration, the three national parties and the National Electoral Commission. 2. To understand the public's concerns regarding the upcoming presidential elections and political parties' registration. 3. To explore the level of political consciousness of citizens in Somaliland.

## 4 Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design and Data collection

#### 4.1.1 Use of questionnaires

This study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Quantitative data was gathered through a multiple-choice questionnaire with 43 questions designed to capture the 3,300 respondents' personal information, voting experiences, political alignments, and general opinion on the president, parliaments, political parties, and associations. This method enabled the researchers to understand the citizens' level of political information and attitudes on political issues. A total of 3,300 people were interviewed for this survey. 1,980 (60%) of them were male and 1,320 (40%) were female. 72.6% of the respondents were over the age of 25 years and therefore are eligible to vote. The respondents were almost equally distributed among the main regions. 19% of respondents were from Hargeisa, 17% from Berbera, 17% from Las-anod, 16% from Erigavo, 15% from Burao, and 16% from Borama.

#### 4.1.2 Focus group discussion

To support the quantitative data, this study also used qualitative methods mainly through focus group discussions. In these focus groups, participants had the opportunity to delve deeper and provide more detailed answers to 20 questions that evaluated their perceptions of the government and the political environment. The focus group discussions complement the survey questions by providing more details on the responses and enabling the researchers identify the nuances. The focus group discussions were carried out in the main cities (Hargeisa, Berbera, Borama, Burao, Erigavo, and Las-anod) of six regions in Somaliland. For each session, the number of participants ranged from 1 to 22. Each focus group had both male and female participants of varying ages, educational levels, socioeconomic backgrounds, and employment.



## 4.2 Sampling

Non-probability sampling and non-random (convenience) sampling were chosen for this study. The first step in the sampling process was to establish a cooperative agreement with Telesom, the largest telecommunication network in Somaliland. This was meant to obtain telephone numbers from each of the six regional capitals: Hargeisa, Borama, Berbera, Burao, Erigavo, and Las-anod. Each region was assigned a unique set of initial numbers (regional identification initial numbers). These numbers were utilized to achieve a sampling that is sufficiently representative. As shown in Table 1 below, the sample was distributed proportionally to each region and sample size was calculated using UNFPA's Somaliland population estimate. The systematic sampling error was +/-3.5% based on 95% confidence level.

### 4.2.1 Sample Distribution

Table 1:

Regions	Population	Sample Universe	Sample per region
Maroodi-jeex	1,134,262	586,816	549
Saahil	168,034	87,378	546
Awdal	673,263	350,097	549
Sanaag	544,124	282,944	548
Togdheer	661,070	343,756	549
Sool	327,427	172,262	548
Total	3,508,180	1,826,253	3,289

The second step was to create a questionnaire that is straightforward and easy to administer over the phone. Due to the specific nature of the data that was sought, closed-ended questionnaires were used. They captured; personal information, questions related to elections and the National Electoral Commission, questions on the current administration and political parties and the purpose of the House of Elders in the current political environment. The questionnaire was then piloted to determine its feasibility and efficiency. The data collection of the survey took two weeks. After the completion of the phone-based data collection, members of APD's research team began processing the data using KOBO Collect for data entry and SPSS software for data analysis.

### 4.3 Selection and training of enumerators

Data was collected by a team of well-trained and experienced interviewers from the APD network. The team of seven was made up of three male interviewers and three female interviewers who were supervised by a team leader and lead researcher. Before conducting the phone interviews, the team was given training on interviewing techniques and the use of questionnaires.

### 4.4 Challenges and limitations

Telephone surveys are generally rare in Somaliland. Being that this was the first time that APD was using phones to conduct a survey of this sample size was a first of its kind in Somaliland it posed a training and logistical challenge for the organization. Secondly, the respondents, many of whom were quite unfamiliar with this form of interview, were suspicious of the authenticity and purpose of the survey. This led to the possibility of some respondents altering or withholding certain personal information. At the same time, the overlap between the survey and the ongoing political disputes over presidential and political party elections create a politically sensitive climate which worsened the suspicion of the respondents. The fluidity of the political situation also rendered some questions to be irrelevant. Lastly, due to gender dynamics, most female participants were unwilling to express themselves during the focus group discussions.

Using the phone survey methods presented certain limitations. APD signed a cooperative agreement with Telesom, the largest telecommunications company in Somaliland, to acquire the phone numbers of individuals from each region. This limited APD's ability to have control over the distribution of individuals' numbers among districts and clans.

## 5 Literature Review

Voter behavior in democratic societies is influenced by levels of knowledge and interest in their country's political issues. In societies with high levels of illiteracy, people rely on 'political experts' or the 'elite' to give them cues on both simple and complicated political matters (Murakawa and Gilens (2014)). The important factors to consider when discussing cue-taking are, the source of the information, the content of the information, as well as the medium used to share information with the public. With the increased use of media in the modern age, researchers have developed new theories surrounding the formation of public opinion (Moy and Bosch, 2013).

A study by the Academy for Peace and Development on "*Voter Behavior in Somaliland*", conducted before the 2017 Presidential elections, found that in the Maroodi Jeex region, 29.8% of survey respondents had

a lot of information on the upcoming elections whereas 38.8% had some information and 30.5% had no information. The study also looked at where respondents got their information. It noted that most people (59.8%) obtain their information from television (APD, 2016). With television being the highest source of information for respondents there is a clear opportunity for politicians to use that medium to influence the audience. Researchers have identified the different levels of political engagement of citizens. In “Elite Cues and Political Decision Making,” Gilens and Murakawa (2014) looked at how the elite deliver cues using the media and argue that the frequency and balance of content (e.g., liberal vs conservative) in the media not only helps give cues to those who are politically informed but also those who rely on cue givers to decide on political issues. However, the fact that certain society relies on elite cues, does not necessarily mean that the decisions they make and perceptions they have are not as rational or valid as other societies (Gilens and Murakawa, 2014).

## 5.1 Formation of Political Parties and Associations

Somaliland is a multi-party democratic system. In 2000, the country switched from a system based on clans sharing power to democratic parties that could compete in elections (Fadal, 2011). In this newly adopted multi-party system, Somaliland agreed on an election schedule for political associations that would take place every 10 years (Fadal, 2011). From these elections, the three top political associations would be recognized as the official “National Parties” (APD, 2016). In his analysis of Law No.14, Dr. Mohamed Fadal of SORADI Research Institute, states that;

“it has lacked any clarity of whether the successful parties won a permanent status in occupying the three constitutional slots open for multi-party system in Somaliland or whether or not there is room for new aspirants to join the exclusive political party club” (2011).

As a result of this ambiguity, the first three political parties to be named ‘national parties’; UDUB, UCID, and Kulmiye, have been in power for longer than 10 years as mandated by the Constitution, (Fadal, 2011). The ambiguity of the laws pertaining to political parties has never been addressed and continue to impact on the political landscape of Somaliland.

## 5.2 The Relevance of the House of Elders

The House of Elders (Guurti) is one of the oldest governmental institutions in Somaliland (Hersi, 2011). The Guurti is comprised of various clan leaders, chiefs, and elders who represent the various clans in Somaliland. The Guurti played an important role in the promotion of peace and security, state-building and setting up of governmental institutions during the early years of Somaliland’s state formation (Hersi, 2011, p. 106-110). Initially, the purpose of the Guurti was to unite and act as mediators between the various clans in post-civil war Somaliland (Ibid p. 106-108).

However, political stability in Somaliland has led to calls for revisiting the relevance of the Guurti. Constitutionally, the Guurti has the power to not only extend their tenure but also that of several other governmental bodies like the president and local government (Hersi, 2011, p. 112). They also have the power to amend and approve bills passed by the House of Representatives (Hersi, 2011, p. 112). In addition to having these important mandates and legislative power, the members of the Guurti have been selected based on clan system and not elected by the citizens of Somaliland. Most of the existing literature on the Guurti mainly explores their history and evolution as an important institution, but there is little exploration of the public’s sentiments and opinion.

## 6 Characteristics of survey respondents

### 6.1 Distribution and age of respondents

A total of 3,300 people were interviewed for this survey. Out of the 3,330, 1,980 of them were male and 1,320 were female. The respondents of this survey were almost equally distributed among the 6 big cities of Hargeisa, Borama, Berbera, Burao, Erigavo and Las-anod in Somaliland as shown by Figure 1.1. This distribution of respondents from all the big cities of the country allowed for the research to capture representative views and sentiments. 72.6% of the respondents were over the age of 25 years and were therefore eligible to vote.

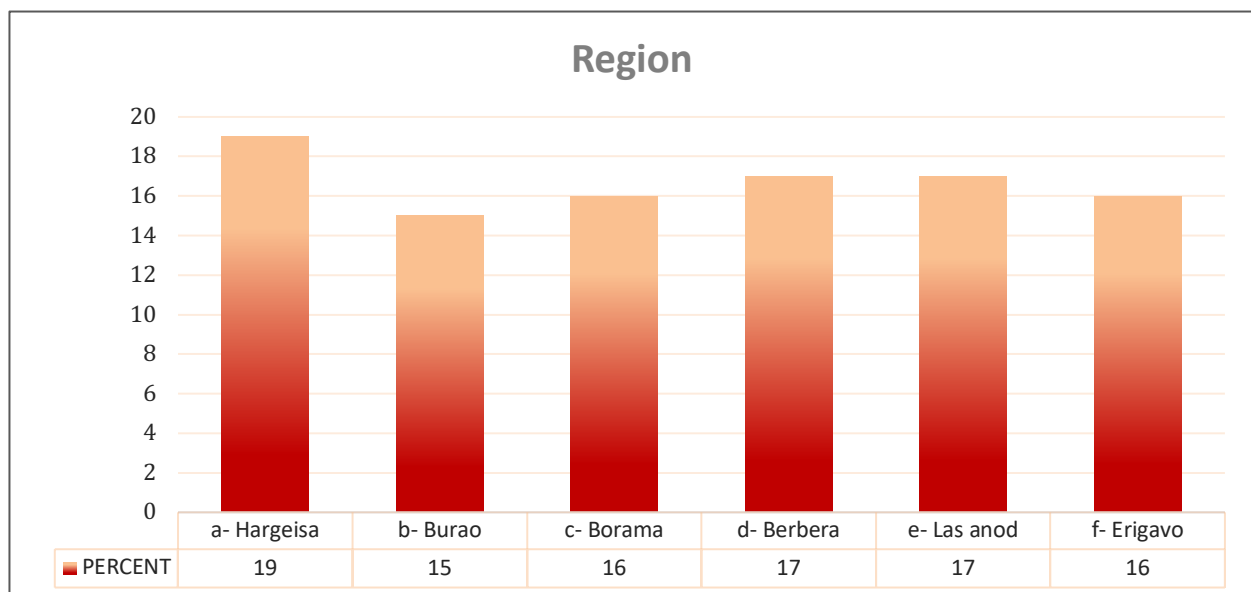


Figure 1.1

## 6.2 Employment status

As shown on Figure 1.2, the employment status of the respondents greatly varied with 54.9% reporting themselves as unemployed, 28.7% being self-employed, 9.8% being employed in the private sector, and 5.7% being civil servants.

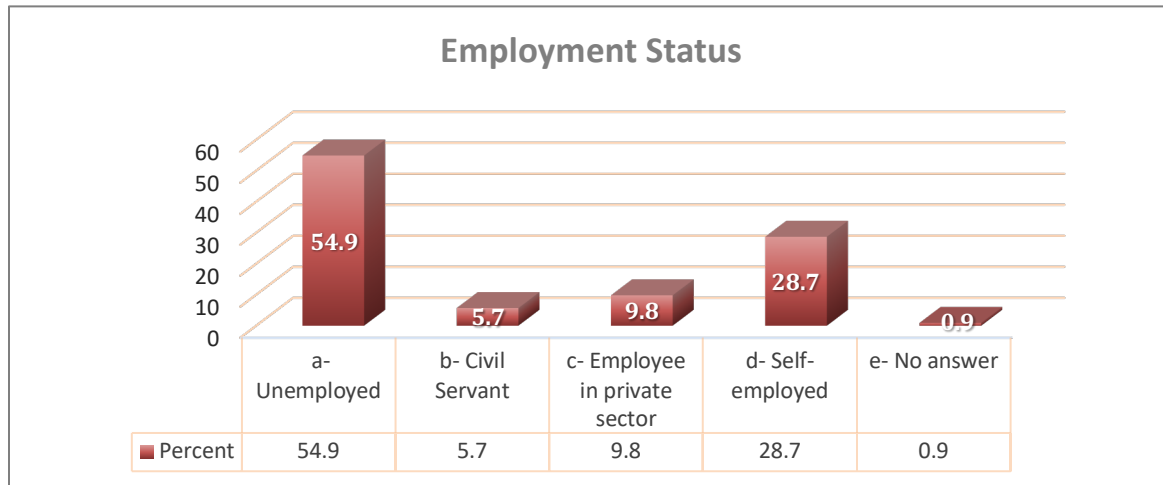


Figure 1.2

## 6.3 Education levels of respondents

As shown on Figure 1.3, the education levels of the survey respondents greatly varied. The majority of respondents, 34.2%, reported that they are uneducated, 17.2% had primary school education, 26.4% had secondary school education, 20% had university education while 1.4% reported to have received vocational training.

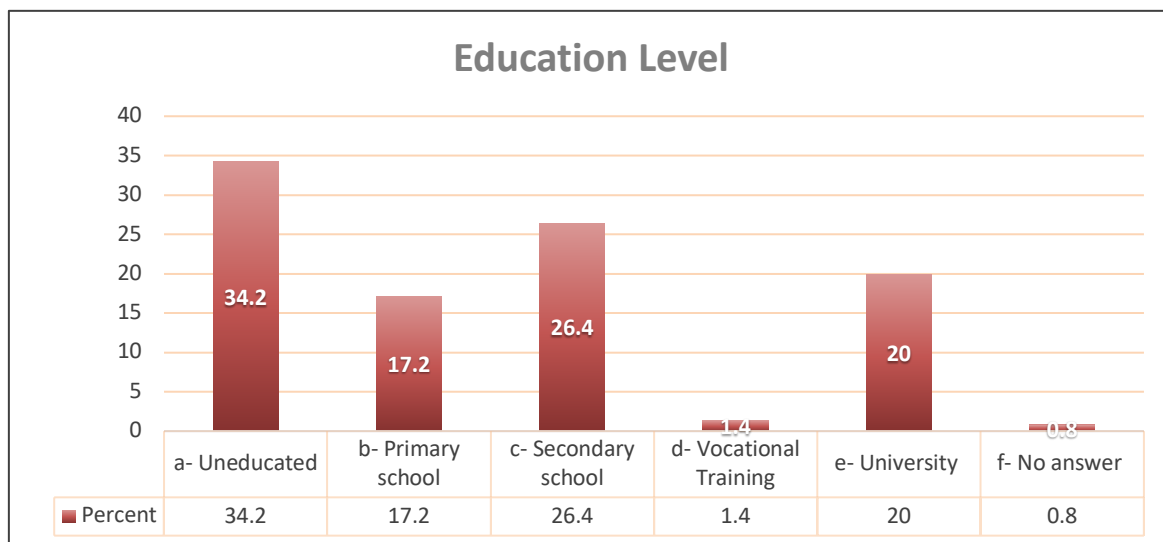


Figure 1.3

## 6.4 Internet access

Figure 1.4 shows that close to 70% of respondents reported that they have access to the Internet, which can be explained by majority of respondents being located in urban areas of the country rather than remote areas with little connectivity.

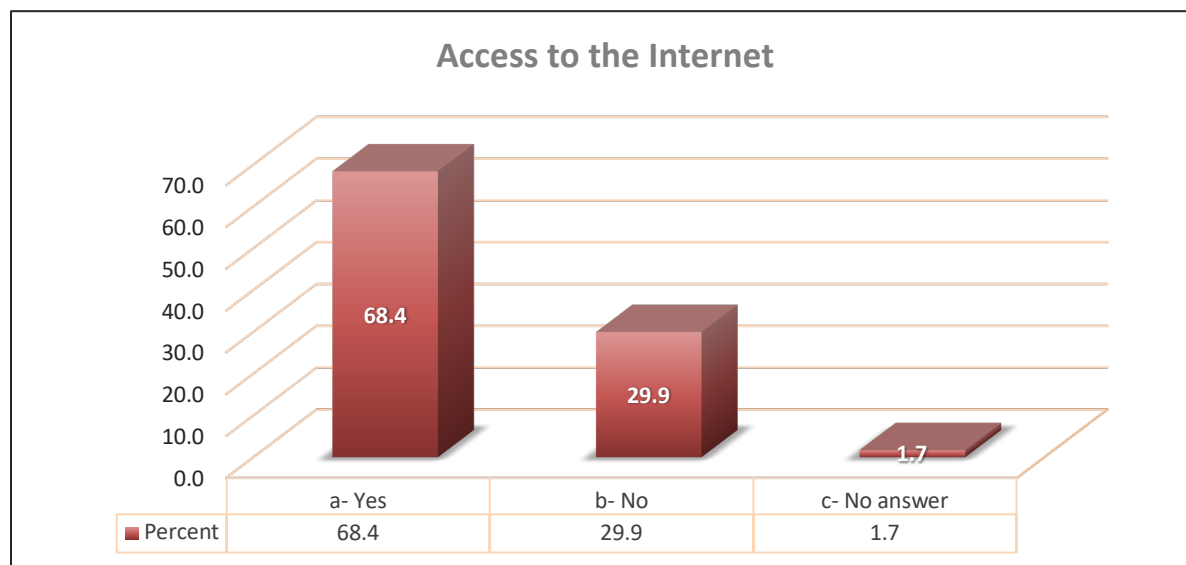


Figure 1.4

## 7 Findings

### 7.1 Somaliland's election processes and the NEC's performance in the 2021 and upcoming 2022 elections.

#### 7.1.1 Voting in the 2021 elections

Somaliland has made commendable strides in electoral processes. Respondents were asked if they registered for the 2021 elections. 87.6% answered in the affirmative while only 11.8% failed to register. However, 81.5% of respondents indicated that they voted in the 2021 elections while 18.1% did not vote. This shows that 6% of the respondents who registered to vote, did not vote in the 2021 elections.



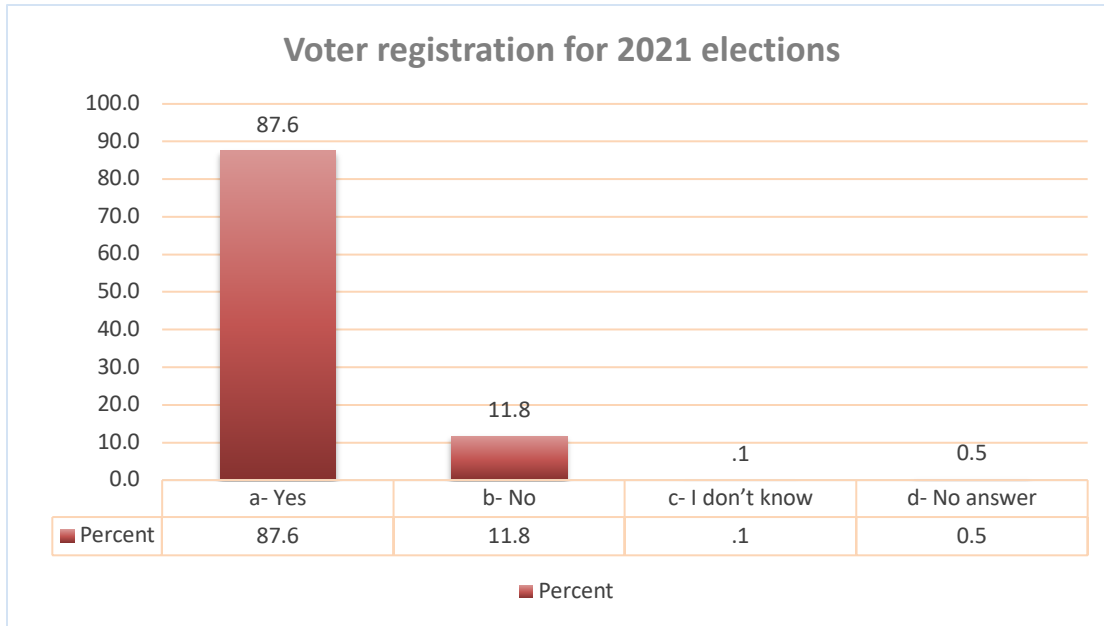


Figure 2.1

### 7.1.2 Plans to vote in the 2022 presidential elections

An overwhelming majority, 91.9% expressed their intention to vote in the 2022 elections while only 5% indicated that they would not vote as shown by Figure 2.1. This shows that there is high anticipation among the public for this year's elections.

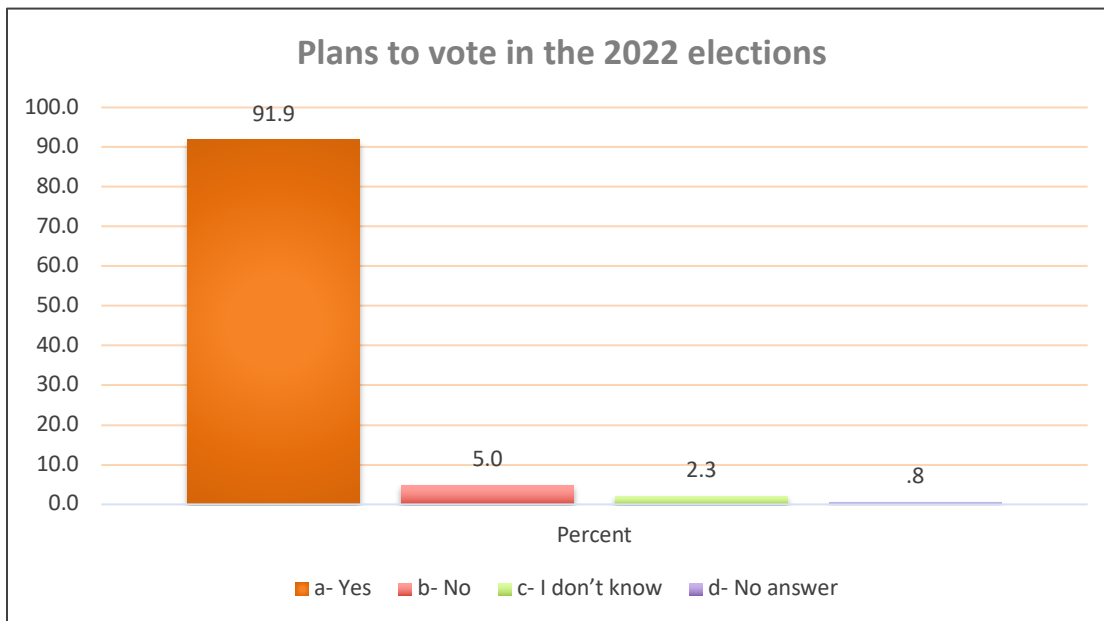


Figure 2.2

### 7.1.3 Reasons for voting

39.9% of the respondents indicated that voting is their civic duty, while 33.3% consider voting to be a way of pushing their political party agenda. 16.9% of respondents vote due to their clan orientation. As shown in Figure 2.2, there is a small percentage difference between those that consider voting to be part of their civic duty and those that see it as part of their political party agenda. From this survey question, it can be inferred that Somaliland voters care more about their civic duties and party agendas than clan affiliation and loyalty.

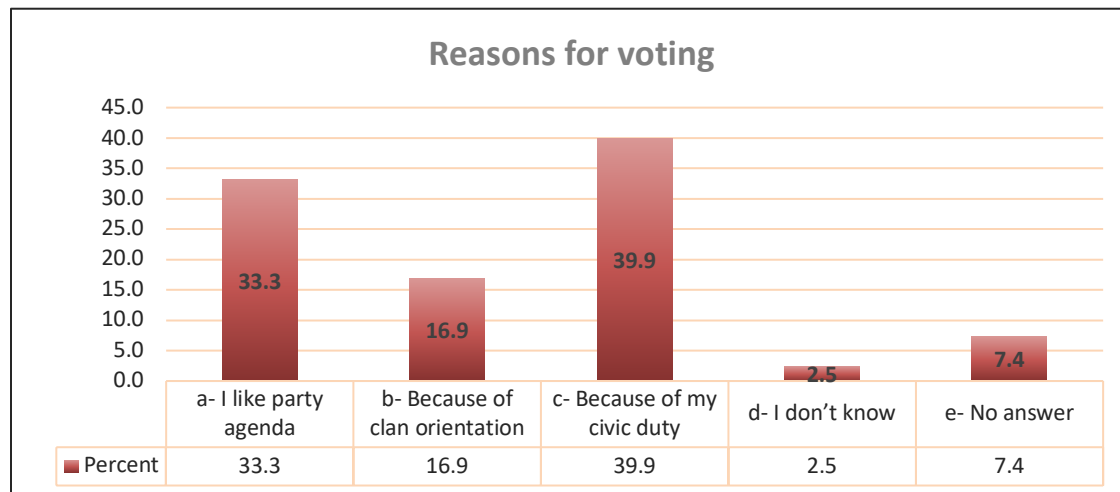


Figure 2.3

### 7.1.4 Attitudes towards the NEC

The respondents were asked if they believed that the NEC conducted the 2021 parliamentary and local council elections freely and fairly. 86.7% of respondents believed that the NEC held free and fair elections in 2021. 3.9% did not believe that the NEC conducted free and fair elections while 8.5% of respondents indicated that they didn't know whether the elections were free and fair or otherwise. This observation indicates that the public has faith in the institutional credibility of the NEC a factor that is important in the democratic legitimacy of Somaliland. Evidence from the FGDs illustrates this observation. A participant of the FGD session held in Hargeisa stated that:

*“Firstly, the NEC have held very important elections and combined two different elections. Both those elections had major significance to a lot of people especially the election for the House of Representatives as it has been a long time since its members had been elected. The NEC have done a great job and there haven't been any proven claims against the way they conducted and organized these elections.”*

Furthermore, when it comes to the levels of confidence that the public has on the NEC in the upcoming elections of 2022, 81.3% of the respondents answered that they are confident the NEC will conduct the 2022 elections freely and fairly. Despite the resignation of all 7 members of the NEC that conducted the 2021 elections and the recent uncertainty surrounding the Commission, the survey shows that the public have not lost their confidence in the institution.

## 7.2 Public sentiments on the formation of political associations and the current three National Political Parties.

The opening of platform for political association has been a contentious topic in Somaliland. As discussed in the previous sections, the current administration and the opposition parties have largely differed on the issue. This survey therefore sought to understand the opinions of the general public on the unfolding political tussles regarding the formation and registration of new political parties.

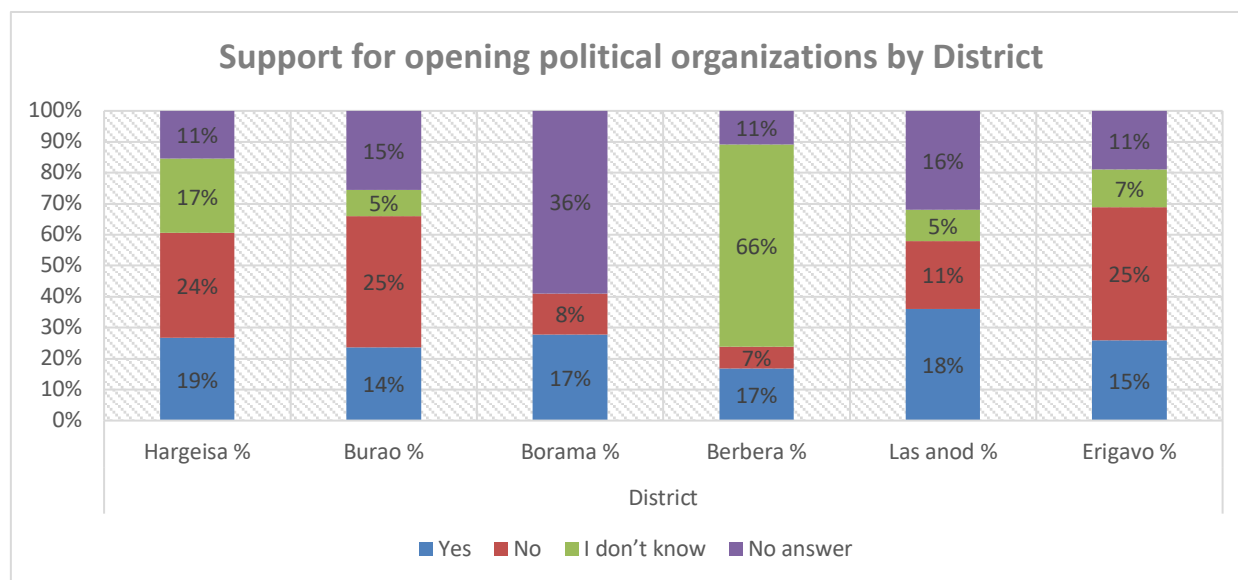


Figure 3.1

Figure 3.1 shows varying opinions on the question of opening the registration platforms for political associations in the country. Asked whether they supported the registration of new political parties, 24% of respondents from Hargeisa 25% of respondents from Burao and 25% of respondents from Erigavo opposed the registration. On the other hand, 18% of respondents from Las-anod supported the registration of new parties. Majority of respondents from Berbera indicated that they didn't know while 36% from Borama did not give an answer. 43% of respondents who supported the opening of political organization were between the ages of 25 and 35. At the same time, 43% of respondents who answered 'no' to opening of political organization were also between the ages of 25 and 35. This shows that the largest voting age group from the total respondents of the survey are equally split in their views about

political associations' platform being opened. This mixed reaction is also reflected in the FGDs. One respondent from Borama explains;

*"It is important to open the platform for political associations so that we find change. We need new candidates with new ideas who are sure of themselves and want to implement change in the country. We also need young people because our government officials are mainly above 70 now and we want these political associations to put forth younger people. We will also get people with their own political ideas and a campaign platform that is based on ideas and not just clan affiliations. We also hope we get candidates who are supported by people of different regions without basing their votes solely on clan loyalties. Women will also get the opportunity to form their own political associations and get a political platform to run for VP, for instance."*

*Female Participant, Borama*

The intersection between politics and clannism in Somaliland also emerged in the FGDs with participants noting that any new political formations would fall into the historical clan problem that has always characterized Somaliland politics. This, they argue, undermines the democratic legitimacy of party politics. One respondent in Hargeisa explains;

*"The main issues that we have political parties is their clannism, which I believe will also happen with new political associations. There won't be any difference as we can see from the formation of new political associations that have been announced recently, they still only represent individuals and their clan's interests. So, in my opinion, I don't see the opening of the platform for political associations changing the political environment that much. I don't see a need to open them, and I just see possible conflict it can lead to between clans. I would propose that we work on fixing and correcting the current political parties."*

Other respondents feared that opening room for the registration of new political parties, although constitutionally mandated risks aggravating political tensions and causing conflicts. They therefore believe that the focus should be placed on the upcoming presidential election which they consider to be central in the restoration of political normalcy. One respondent in Burao points out that;

*"Logically speaking and thinking about what is in the best interest of the people and country, the presidential election should be held first, and political associations should not be opened. At this point, Somaliland does not need another war or any kind of conflict so to keep the peace and continue the progress, the presidential election should be held on time."*

Increased level of mistrust for politicians and political parties is also a key factor in shaping the public opinion about the registration of new political parties. Having been disappointed by the existing political parties, many citizens feel that a change in the political machinery would not necessarily translate into

any change in the delivery of services or quality of life for the citizens. As such public opinions are sometimes ambivalent as captured by one respondent below.

*“In my opinion, the opening of the platform for political associations is constitutional and will happen. However, the issue at hand is not whether or not the platform should be opened but rather when. I believe that there are hidden agendas that these politicians have when it comes to this issue, and they are not thinking about the needs of all parts of society but just their own. I personally believe that whether we get new political parties or the existing one stay, none of them prioritize the needs of the people, therefore it will not make any difference.” Male Participant, Erigavo.*

### 7.3 Timing of presidential elections and support for political associations.

The opposition parties are mainly pushing for November 13, 2022, Presidential Election to be held on time and see the registration of new political associations as a stalling tactic by the current administration. As shown in Figure 3.2, the majority of respondents (80%) support presidential elections being held on time and reject any delays in the polls.

In view of the difficulties related to the organization of presidential elections, 48.4 % of respondents expressed their support for the extension of the president’s term while 40.9% of respondents do not support an extension. Of the 40.9% of respondents that are against an extension, 29.1% gave ‘President’s term is over’ as the reason why they do not support an extension, 3.1% cited the president’s ‘poor performance’ while 7.5% considered any extension to be unconstitutional and therefore opposed it. However, the majority of respondents, 58.4%, refrained from answering this question.

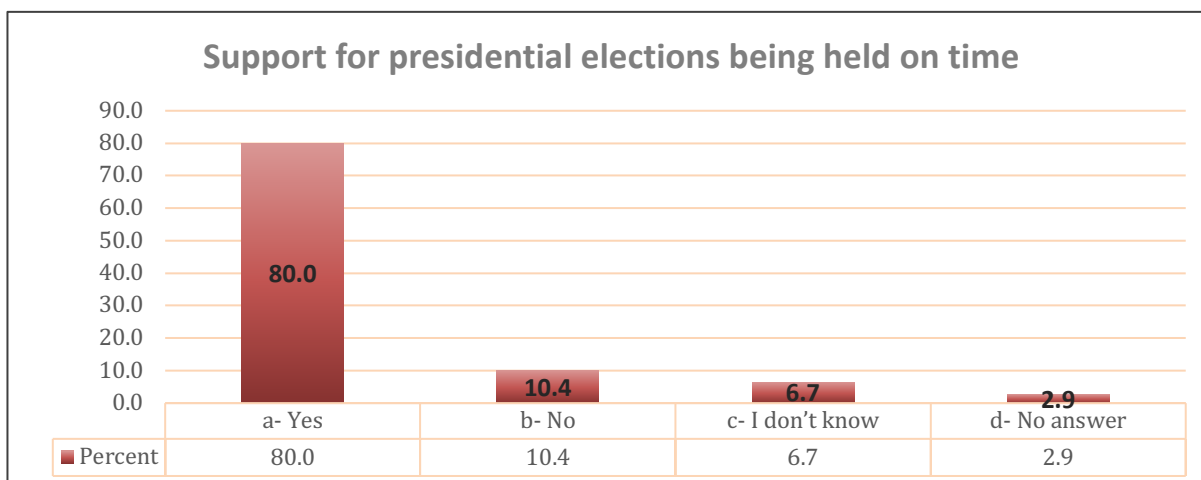


Figure 3.2

In the event that presidential elections do not take place on November 13, 2022, respondents were asked about their preferred duration of extension. Figure 3.3 shows that almost 50% of respondents refrained from answering this question. However, almost 27% preferred a 2-year extension.

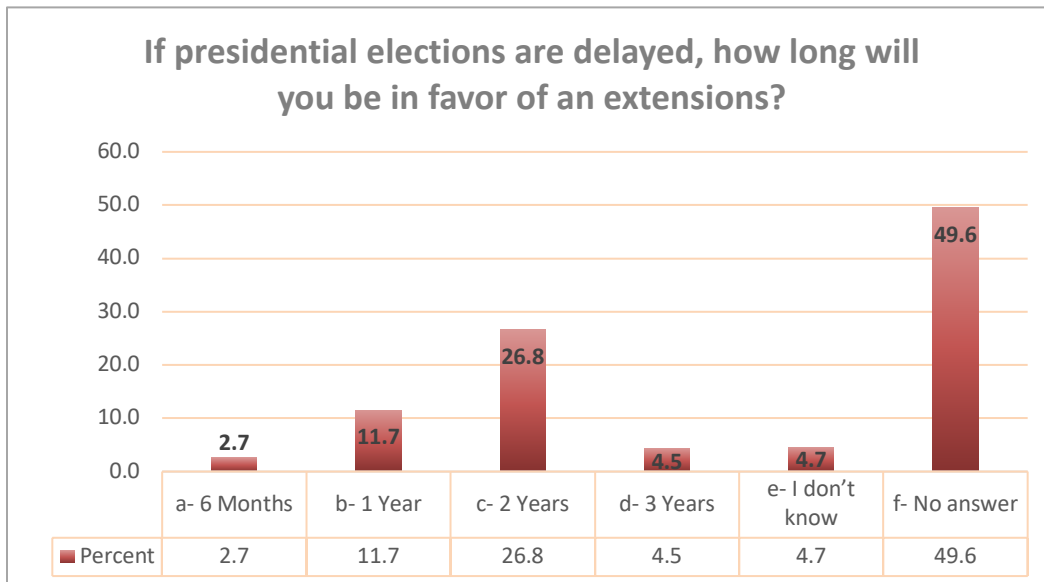


Figure 3.3

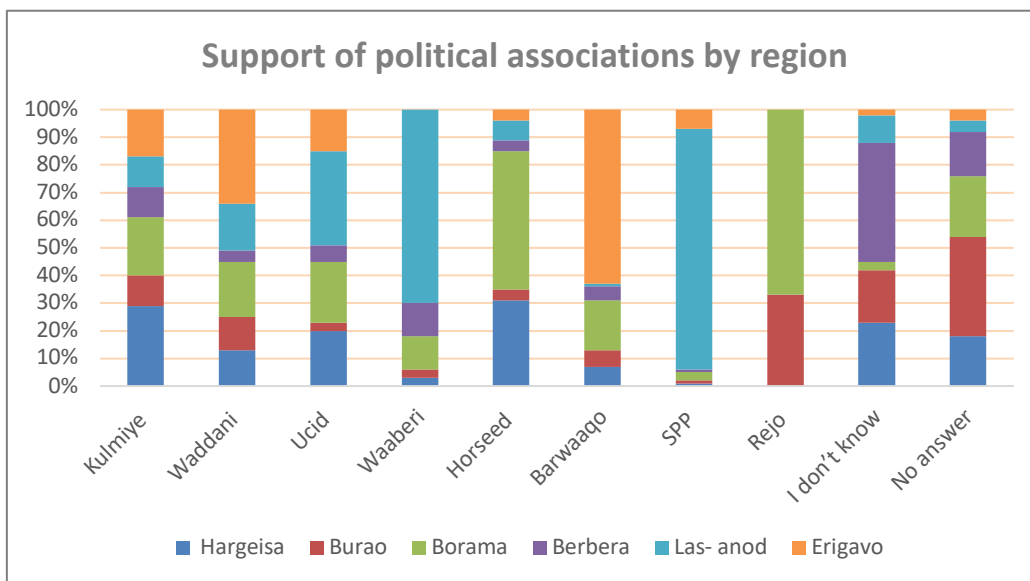


Figure 3.4

Figure 3.4 demonstrate the respondents' preferences for the three national parties and the newly announced political associations by region and gender. By region Kulmiye has most of its supporter in Hargeisa and Borama, while Waddani has the most support in Erigavo, and Ucid has the most support in Las-anod with 34% of respondents from that city supporting it. However, the party has a national average



percentage support of 2.1%. Kulmiye received 25.3% of the respondent's support while Waddani received 28.3%. The combined percentage of respondents who support the newly announced political associations is 10.2%. By gender, Kulmiye's supporters are equally distributed among males and females. Waddani and Ucid's supporters are mainly male. However, there is a significant difference between the percentage of male respondents who support the political associations and the female respondents who support them.

The participants from the FGDs expressed their disinterest in the current national parties. One participant from Hargeisa expressed that:

“My opinion on the current parties is that they have done everything possible to lose their licenses as political parties but have gotten away with it because there are no institutions that supervises them and enforce the rules upon them. Their agendas are based on clans and individual interests. For example, in the last presidential election where Bihi, Faysal and Ciro were running, within the party there were no other candidates. It was a form of dictatorship within these parties, and no one is allowed to have a differing opinion to the Chairman of each party. Therefore, we want a democratic system, but our parties are basically dictatorships.

If the presidential election comes first, then we only have these three candidates to choose from but if the political parties election comes first, we will have more options. So, I support the party elections being held first so that we can have some change.”

The FGD participants from different cities in the country indicated that they were quite disappointed with the current political parties. Most participants from Borama expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of representation for minority clans in the national political parties. Additionally, participants from Berbera and Hargeisa noted that new figures with new ideas are needed in the Somaliland political landscape. Accordingly, they largely supported the opening of the platform for political associations. Participants from Burao, however, are split in their support for opening the platform for political associations and believe that a new president should be elected first.

Support for Waddani seems to be strongest in the Eastern regions of the country which is dominated by the clans of the party's chairman and Presidential candidate. Accordingly, 83% of the support for Waddani was from the Eastern regions. Most participants from the FGD in Burao expressed their support for holding the presidential election before the political party election. Support for election-instigated violence as a result of ongoing tensions was generally low, with 73.4% of respondents indicating that they would not be fighting alongside the parties who threatened to incite violence because of the political association issue.

#### 7.4 Attitudes towards the current President and his administration.

With President Muse Bihi running for re-election it is important to evaluate how the public feels about the impact of his administration. As shown on Figure 4.1, 31.8% of respondents were 'satisfied' with Bihi's administration, 29.5% felt 'neutral' while 18.1% were 'highly satisfied'. 11.8% were 'dissatisfied' with the government's performance. On average therefore, 79.4% of respondents were either satisfied or neutral to the performance of President Bihi's government.

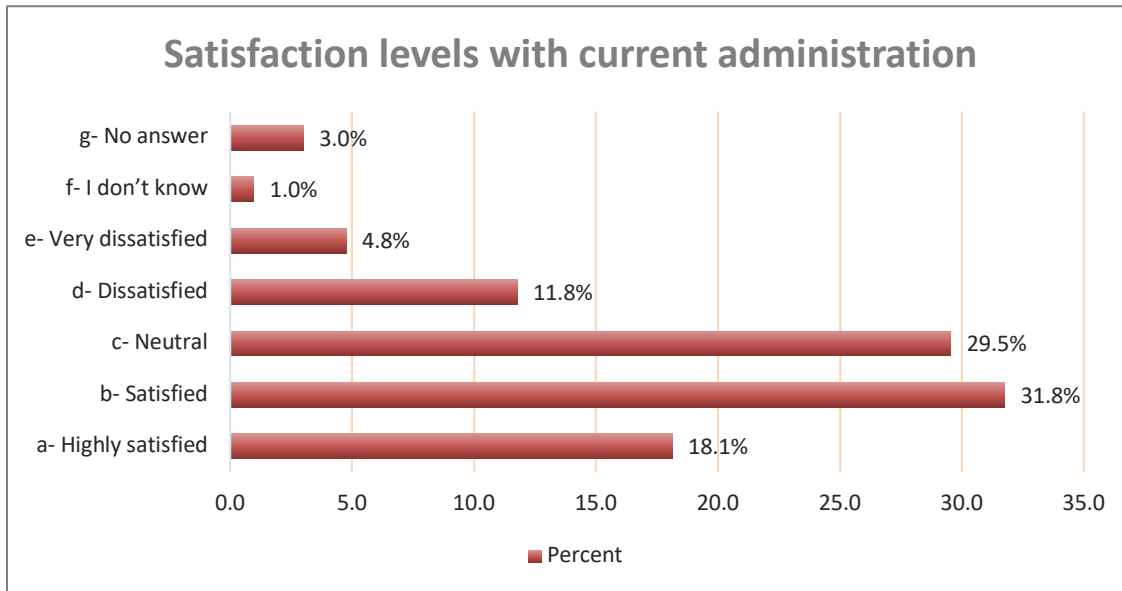


Figure 4.1

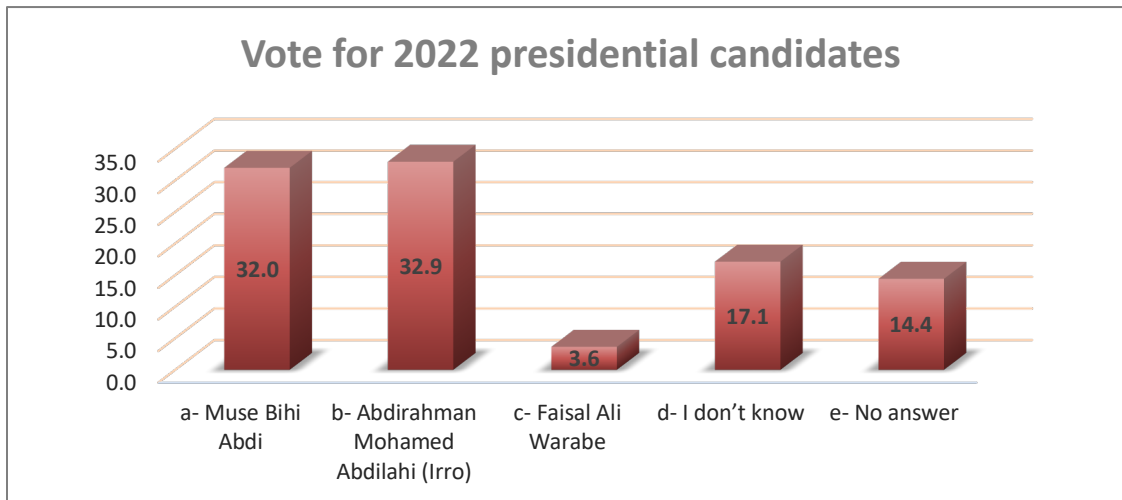


Figure 4.2

Although close to 80% of respondents reported that they were either satisfied or neutral to President Bihi's administration's performance, Figure 4.2 shows that more respondents would vote for opposition party leader Abdirahman Irro. However, it is important to note that while there is a slight difference in the support for President Bihi and Irro, almost one third of respondents did not choose either candidate. This undecided category of respondents constitutes the group that are pushing for the reopening of the platform for political associations.

Attitude towards Bihi's administration and its achievements vary by region. FGD participants from Borama, overwhelmingly stated their dissatisfaction with Bihi's administration. One participant expressed that:

*"Personally, I believe that Muse Bihi has not earned being reelected because the country is in a bad state politically, economically, and socially. He made a lot of promises about being fair and equal to all people and he didn't keep those promises."*

*Male Participant, Borama*

Some participants from Hargeisa had varying opinions on the performance of Bihi's administration. Some stated that they were not satisfied with this government's work and did not believe that the president kept the promises he made. Others expressed that in comparison to Silanyo's administration, Bihi's administration did not achieve as much. On the other hand, some respondents argued that Bihi's government had made a lot of achievements especially, in areas related to employment and infrastructure.

Participants from Berbera and Burao observed that the government had done poorly in their regions. Although a number of development projects had been implemented in Berbera, respondents attributed this to foreign investors such as DP World as well as their local government. Similar sentiments were expressed in Burao. One participant from Burao stated that:

*"Most of the developmental projects in the country happen in the western regions and less so in the eastern regions. The eastern regions believe that they were at a disadvantage during the president's time in office compared to the treatment towards the western regions of Somaliland."*

*FGD participant in Burao*

On the other hand, participants from Las-anod's FGD expressed somewhat neutral views on the government's performance. The participants indicated that although the government had implemented important developmental projects across the country, their region had largely been ignored. It is important to note that, some participants did not solely blame President Bihi for the lack of development in their region but also blamed their representatives in the parliament.

Overall, there are mixed reviews on the performance of Bihi’s administration. However, there are shared concerns among different regions in the country that the central government had failed to equally develop all regions. The 29.5% of respondents who are neutral to Bihi’s administration’s performance can be explained by the view that there is not a striking difference between this administration and previous ones.

## 7.5 Elections and the institutional role of the House of Elders (Guurti)

The Guurti is one of Somaliland’s oldest institutions (Hersi, 2011). As discussed earlier, members of the Guurti are appointed by their clans. Since the Guurti is based on appointments put forth by clans, members who left the Guurti due to old age or death were replaced by their sons. Accordingly, most of the current members occupying seats in the Guurti are not the originally selected elders. Rather, some of them are descendants of the original members. Asked about the process of Guurti membership, 66.4% of respondents indicated that they would like members of the public to vote for Guurti members while 17.5% preferred the clan-based selection process.

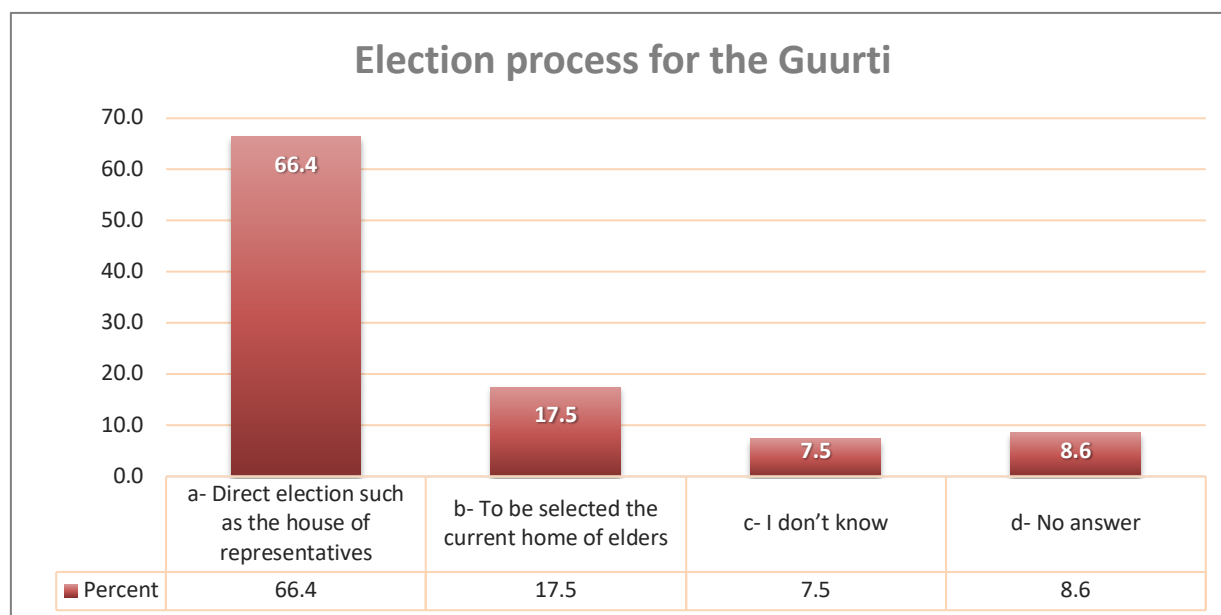


Figure 5.1

Being that the election of the Guurti has been postponed multiple times, respondents were asked to comment on the possibility of another postponement. As shown in Figure 5.2, 48.4% of respondents answered that they see an extension as a solution for delays in the Guurti elections. However, 34.5% of respondents do not agree with an extension and suggest that the Guurti elections should be held promptly.

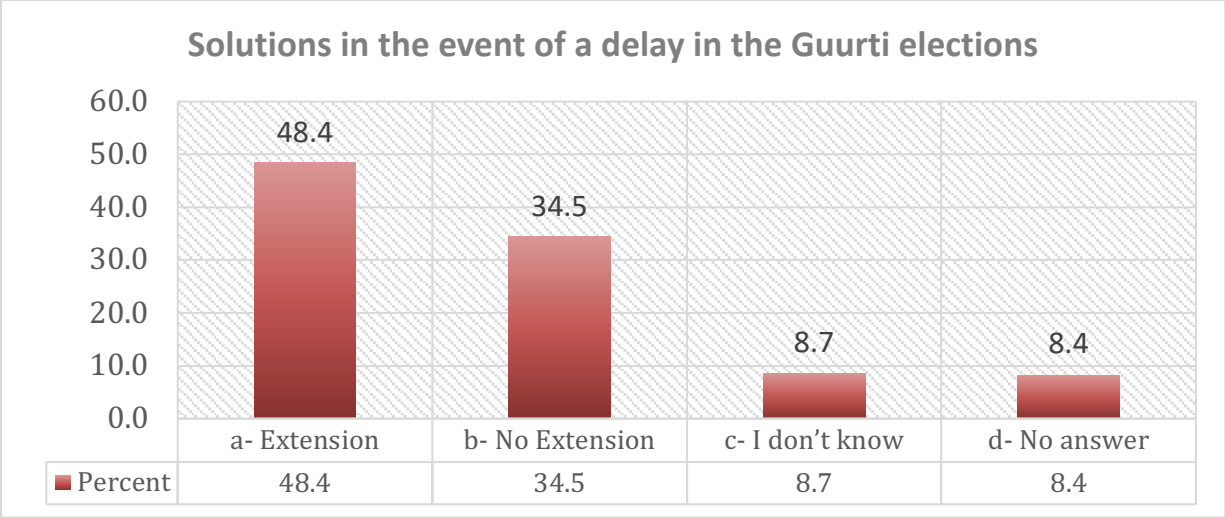


Figure 5.2

The FGD participants were quite ambivalent as to whether the Guurti should be elected or selected. Support for direct election of the Guurti members was based on the fact that the members have immense legislative power. However, those that do not support direct elections for Guurti members stated that there is wisdom in the selection of elders who represent the society, its values, and beliefs. A participant from Berbera explains;

“The Guurti are an important institution for the governance of Somaliland who also took an important role in the building of this country. The current members of the Guurti do not reflect the values of the original members who had a deeper sense of responsibility and care for Somaliland. The original members of the Guurti made important decisions and played a major role in the development that we have today. So, since the original members are not there anymore, their impact is not the same. Additionally, as a chief myself, I know the role that we play in our communities. We are the ones who collect donations for those who need assistance. We are the ones that the government utilizes to carry out certain projects in our communities. Therefore, I believe that the new members should be chiefs that are selected from each clan.”

**FGD Participant, Berbera**

Additionally, the FGD participants were asked about the significance that the Guurti has in Somaliland’s political landscape. An overwhelming majority of participants across all sessions recognized the importance that the Guurti has in Somaliland’s past and future. They stated that the Guuri as an institution played a major role in the peace-building efforts and formation of Somaliland as a nation. Some cited the Guurti’s role in mediating between the ruling party and opposition parties recently as an example of the Guurti’s important role in Somaliland’s politics. Although many participants agree with the existence of

the Guurti, many highlighted that the current members of the Guurti are not the originally selected members and therefore do not have the criteria needed to fulfill these positions.

On the other hand, some participants did not see the need for the Guurti. One participant from Hargeisa stated:

*“The Guurti does not follow its constitutional mandate but mainly serves as a body that only extends the president’s term. We do not need political institutions that depend on the mediation of elders and businesspeople, but we need a government that can solve its own issues. Therefore, their biggest role is extending terms.”*

## 8 Conclusions and Recommendations

### 8.1 Conclusions

This provides insight into the perceptions and sentiments that the public has on political matters in Somaliland. More often than not, studies focus on elites and ignore the views of the general population. This research, therefore, departs from that practice. Having interviewed 3300 respondents and held 6 focus group discussions in 6 different cities the findings of this study can be said to be generally representative of the Somaliland population.

The study has revealed that despite the resignation of the seven previous election officials, the general public still has confidence in the electoral process of the country, especially the NEC. However, uncertainty over the new membership may erode this confidence. Another key finding is the mixed responses to the opening of the platform for political associations. The study found that regional and clan dynamics largely impacted public opinions about the opening of the registration for new political parties. However, some research participants supported the formation new political associations due to the belief that it would introduce new political figures and introduce new options beyond the three candidates from the current national parties. Notwithstanding this reality, a number of respondents believed that new political parties would equally be subject to clan interests and therefore fail to respond to Somalilanders' needs.

This study also found that support for President Bihi and the Waddani candidate was quite close. At the same time, majority of respondents were neutral on the performance of Bihi’s administration. The ambivalence over the performance of Bihi’s government coupled with the increased mistrust in politics and political parties explains the closeness in support for the two candidates.



Another key finding of the study is the public's view of the Guurti and their role in Somaliland politics. Evidence from the FGDs indicates that many Somalilanders still consider the Guurti to be very important in Somaliland public affairs. However, most respondents expressed interest in directly electing the members of the Guurti rather than the current system where members are nominated by clans.

## 8.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and the lessons learned, this study recommends the following:

1. To capture the views and sentiments of the public on issues relating to political and social life, there should be an increase in public polling. Carrying out more public polls will give citizens the opportunity to express their opinions on issues that impact them the most. The results of public polls could have a huge impact on the political, social, and economic direction of Somaliland.
2. This study aimed at reaching and capturing the opinions of both male and female citizens especially in the focus group discussion sessions. However, we observed that female participants were not as actively engaged as their male counterparts during these sessions. There are multiple reasons for why this can occur with a major one being that the female participants might not feel comfortable in a mixed gender space. To have equal engagement from both female and male participants, future studies could offer single gender sessions for female participants so that they are more comfortable and can fully express their opinions.
3. There is need for increased political dialogue to bridge the gap on the various contentious issues including: the issue of new political party registration, presidential election dates, a feeling of marginalization by some regions and the structure and election of the members of the Guurti.

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