

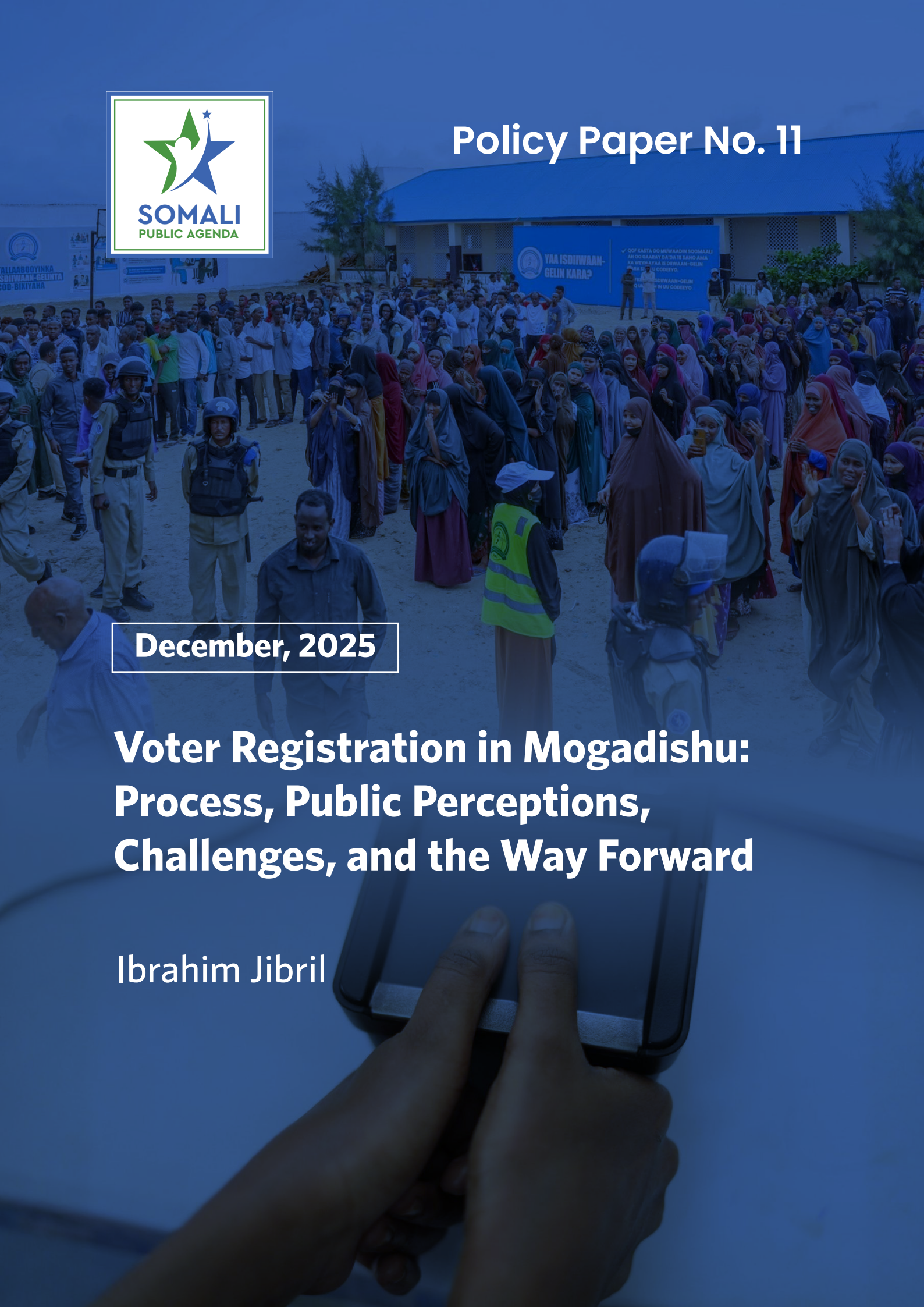


Policy Paper No. 11

December, 2025

Voter Registration in Mogadishu: Process, Public Perceptions, Challenges, and the Way Forward

Ibrahim Jibril



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Somali Public Agenda is a non-profit public policy and administration research organization based in Mogadishu, Somalia. Its aim is to advance understanding and improvement of public administration and public services in Somalia through evidence-based research and analysis.



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Cover Photo: Composite image showing people lining up for voter registration in Shengani District, Mogadishu (upper) and biometric fingerprint registration using a digital scanner (lower).

Photo Sources: Upper photo: © Publicly shared photo, accessed 20 December 2025. Lower photo: © Radio Dalsan, accessed 21 December 2025.

Both images have been combined for illustrative purposes.

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About the Author

Ibrahim Jibril is a researcher and the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Coordinator at Somali Public Agenda. He also manages SPA Polls, an initiative that aims to capture citizen voices through public opinion polling and survey-based research. Ibrahim plays a key role in producing impactful studies and contributes to the organization's qualitative and quantitative research. He has led and co-authored numerous research and analytical papers. His work focuses on good governance, democratization, accountability, transparency, and social issues. Ibrahim holds a Bachelor's degree in Public Administration from Mogadishu University. He is trilingual in Somali, English, and Arabic. He is passionate about e-governance, youth participation in policymaking, digitizing the public sector, education sector reform, and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Somali context.

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Executive Summary

This policy paper examines the first voter registration process conducted in Mogadishu in more than 55 years. It analyses the overall voter registration process led by the National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (NIEBC), identifies key limitations and operational flaws, and explores public experiences and perceptions of the process. The paper concludes with policy considerations focused on legal, technical, and political dimensions ahead of upcoming elections.

Following constitutional amendments approved by the Federal Parliament in March 2024 to the first four chapters of the Provisional Federal Constitution, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) initiated and approved a package of electoral legislation. These included the NIEBC Establishment Law, the Political Associations and Political Parties Law, and the National Electoral Law, all of which were signed into law in late November 2024.

Yet, Puntland did not participate in the election agreement or the subsequent processes. Prominent opposition politicians, including two former presidents and several former prime ministers, publicly opposed the process. Meanwhile, Jubaland withdrew from the process in October 2024.

The NIEBC commenced biometric voter registration in Mogadishu on 15 April 2025 and later expanded registration to Federal Member State (FMS) capitals, including Dhusamareeb, Baidoa, Jowhar, and Las Anod. Voter registration in Mogadishu concluded on 30 September 2025.

The voter registration timeline was postponed multiple times, leading to missed deadlines for the local council elections originally scheduled for 30 June 2025. The NIEBC announced the registration of nearly one million voters in Mogadishu's 16 districts out of the 20 districts, with 63% male and 37% female registrants, and with youth aged 18–34 accounting for 69% of the total. Despite the scale of registration, the process attracted criticism concerning funding sources, transparency, involuntary registration practices, and the perceived neutrality of the commission.

The voter registration process faced criticism over funding, transparency, and fairness. The NIEBC was criticised for unclear funding, raising questions about its independence, since its funds were not included in the national budget. Allegations of forced registration and coercion emerged, especially in Mogadishu. The process was also criticised for inequality, as it excluded districts established after 1991, including four in Mogadishu (Kahda, Daarusalam, Garasbaley, and Gubadley). Additionally, political groups questioned the independence of the voter system audit.

Somali Public Agenda (SPA) conducted an online, non-scientific poll in October 2025 following the conclusion of voter registration. The poll included 201 respondents, 81% male and 19% female. Approximately 51% reported being registered, while 49% were not. The poll revealed concerns related to forced registration, lack of identification requirements, insufficient voter education, and low trust in the process.

- 29% of the registered respondents reported being registered without their consent. Among those registered without their consent, 77% reported being stopped and taken off the road to be registered, and 23% were required to register in order to receive government services at district offices.
- Around 39% of registered respondents were registered in a district other than their own. This indicates that either the registration was forced or that the registration process did not consider the districts of residence of the citizens it registered.
- Only 38% of the registered respondents were asked to provide any form of identification (ID), including passports, national ID cards, or birth certificates as registration requirement, while the majority were not asked.
- 56% of the registered respondents reported not receiving any information (38%) or receiving unclear information (17%) about the electoral and voting processes.
- Only 27% knew the next step after the voter registration process, and 46% of those 27% correctly stated that the issuance of the voter card is the next step.
- 57% of registered respondents reported that they will vote in the upcoming elections, 23% said they will not, and the remaining 20% said they are not sure.

The paper concludes with policy considerations emphasizing the need for constitutional consensus, enhanced transparency, verification of voter data, inclusive legal frameworks, and intensified voter education efforts. Addressing these issues is critical to restoring public trust, ensuring electoral integrity, and laying the groundwork for credible and peaceful elections in Somalia.

Introduction

Somalia has not held nationwide direct elections for more than 55 years; the last such elections took place during the 1969 parliamentary polls. However, parts of the country have experienced direct elections. Somaliland has conducted elections at various levels of government since 2002, a decade after declaring secession, while Puntland State held its first direct local council elections in 2021 as a pilot and completed in 2023, more than 20 years after its establishment. Both administrations faced significant challenges transitioning from indirect to direct elections and required extended periods to establish the necessary institutional and technical infrastructure (Musa et al., 2023).

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has taken incremental steps toward implementing a One Person, One Vote (OPOV) system. An attempt was made during the 2017–2021 period. The FGS and FMSs agreed on the electoral model in Baidoa in 2018, and the National Electoral Law was enacted in February 2020.¹ However, disagreements over electoral design, limited time for implementation, and security concerns resulted in a return to an indirect electoral model, formalised through agreements reached in September 2020 and approved by Parliament in October of that year (Somali Dialogue Platform and Somali Public Agenda, 2020).

Following the election of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud on 15 May 2022, the FGS renewed efforts to implement OPOV elections. In May 2023, the National Consultative Council (NCC) signed an election agreement that became the basis for constitutional amendments and the adoption of new electoral laws.

In 2024, following the constitutional amendment of the first four chapters of the Provisional Constitution, the Council of Ministers approved the NIEBC Establishment Bill² the National Electoral Bill³ and the Political Associations and Parties Bill.⁴ These were signed into law in November 2024, creating a unified legal framework governing elections at local, state, and federal levels.

Opposition actors, including former presidents, former prime ministers, and leaders of Puntland State, contested the amendments and electoral laws, arguing that the new framework favoured the federal incumbent. Jubaland also withdrew from the process and conducted its own indirect elections.

1 https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_somali-president-signs-historic-election-bill-law/6184655.html

2 You can read a commentary reviewing and analysing the bill here <https://somalipublicagenda.org/review-of-the-new-bill-establishing-the-independent-national-electoral-and-boundaries-commission/>

3 You can read a policy paper analysing the content of the bill here https://somalipublicagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/SPA_Policy_Paper_07_2024_ENGLISH.pdf

4 You can read a commentary analysing the substance of the bill here <https://somalipublicagenda.org/re-instituting-party-politics-an-analysis-of-the-new-political-associations-and-parties-bill/>

Despite these objections, the FGS proceeded with implementing the electoral process, beginning with registration of political associations and voter registration in Mogadishu's 16 pre-1991 districts during 2025.

Overview of the Voter Registration Process

Voter registration is the process by which eligible citizens—who fulfil the requirements laid out by law—enrol and register to vote. This process is managed by the National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (NIEBC) in accordance with Article 25 of the National Electoral Law. Article 25 also states that voters can cast their votes only at the locations where they were registered. Citizens aged 18 years or older are eligible for registration, as indicated in Article 26. Voters can be registered only once, but their voter cards are renewed every election cycle, as stipulated in Article 27. The article also states that candidates for elected seats must be registered voters. The registration system uses Unique Biometric Identification.⁵

The NIEBC kicked off the voter registration process in Shengani district on April 15, 2025, and subsequently expanded it to 16 of the Mogadishu's 20 districts, as the NEC Law states that elections can occur only in pre-1991 districts in the Benadir Region and other regions. In July, the process was extended to the capital cities of the Federal Member States (FMSs): Dhusamareeb in Galmudug,⁶ Baidoa in Southwest,⁷ and Jowhar in Hirshabelle,⁸ as well as to the capital city of North-Eastern State, Las Anod,⁹ in September. The scheduled date for the direct local council elections in Mogadishu, initially set for June 30, 2025, was not achieved due to low voter registration, ongoing political opposition talks, and a lack of proper preparations.

Voter registration in Mogadishu was closed on August 15 and reopened on September 14, remaining open for two weeks until September 30,¹⁰ with a new date for pilot local council elections in Mogadishu scheduled for October 30. This postponement and reopening of the registration process followed negotiations between four members of the Somali Salvation Forum (an opposition coalition) and the leadership of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), after which the opposition members left their coalition and have registered their new political associations with the NIEBC. The electoral commission stated that these two weeks were intended for citizens who had not been registered and for the new political associations to mobilise their supporters and register. Once again, the local elections date was postponed until November 30 and was later postponed to December 25.

5 See the National Elections Law (<https://so.niebc.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Xeerka-Doorashooyinka-Qaranka-ee-Jamhuuriyadda-Federaalka-Soomaaliya-.pdf>)

6 <https://sonna.so/en/galmudug-state-president-launches-voter-registration-campaign-in-dhusamareb/>

7 <https://sonna.so/en/south-west-state-president-opens-elections-campaign-in-baidoa/>

8 https://hiiraan.com/news4/2025/July/202186/somalia_launches_voter_registration_in_jowhar_ahead_of_one_person_one_vote_elections.aspx

9 <https://www.ftl.com/voter-registration-exercise-launched-in-somalias-newest-state/>

10 https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2025/Sept/202918/somalia_reopens_mogadishu_voter_registration_under_new_election_deal.aspx

As for political associations registration, it was initiated earlier than voter registration, beginning in January.¹¹ Before its deadline of March 31, the NIEBC extended the registration period by 21 days¹². At the time of closure, there were 43 registered political associations. Following the agreement between Villa Somalia and some opposition groups in August, the commission reopened registration, and 14 additional political associations registered.¹³ The final number of registered political associations now stands at 61.

The NIEBC announced the total number of registered voters in Mogadishu on October 18, which was 923,220 across 16 districts and 54 registration centres. Of this number, 4,330 duplicate registrations (0.43%) were detected, which the commission stated were disregarded, bringing the actual total number of registered voters to 918,890.

Of the registered voters, 63% were male and 37% were female. People with special needs accounted for 2.4% of registered voters, or 22,483 individuals. The younger generation constituted the majority of registered voters; with citizens aged 18–34 accounting for 69%, followed by those aged 35–44, who accounted for 25%. The remaining 6% comprised those aged 45–64 (5%) and those aged 65 and above (1%).¹⁴

Regarding distribution of registered voters among districts, Hodan district had the highest number of registered voters at 127,884, followed by Yaqshiid district (115,151), Deynile district (111,407), and Kaaran district (109,997). These were the only districts that exceeded the registration of over 100,000 voters. The districts with the lowest number of registered voters were Hamar-Jabab district (17,704), Boondheere district (17,315), Hamar-Weyne district (10,940), Abdiaziz district (9,869), and Shengani district (8,561). The A-category districts¹⁵ exceeded 60,000 registered voters, while the B-category districts¹⁶ did not reach even half that number. This indicates that Category A districts have larger populations and are bigger than Category B districts, reinforcing the decision to allocate more local council seats (27 seats for Category A districts and 21 seats for Category B districts).

Overall, the voter registration process in Mogadishu represented a historic undertaking, both in scale and symbolic significance. While the legal framework (albeit politically contested) and biometric system provided foundations for voter enrolment, repeated postponements, uneven district participation, and political negotiations shaped the implementation process. These dynamics underscore the gap between the formal design of voter registration and its practical execution.

11 <https://www.ftlsomalia.com/somalias-iebc-launches-registration-of-political-parties/>

12 <https://shabellemedia.com/somalia-extends-political-party-registration-deadline-by-21-days/>

13 <https://www.dawan.africa/news/somalias-electoral-commission-registers-14-new-political-parties>

14 See the NIEBC report (<https://so.niebc.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/BN-DISTRACT-18-OCT-UPDATE-WITH-COVER-PPT.pdf>)

15 A-category districts are: Hodan, Yaaqshiid, Deyniile, Kaaraan, Dharkeenley, Wadajir, Warta-Nabadda, and Heliwaa, Howl-wadaag

16 B-category districts are: Waaberi, Shibis, Xamar-jabab, Boondheere, Xamar-weyne, Cabdicasiis, Shangaani.

Limitations and Flaws of the Voter Registration Process

The voter registration process was not free from criticism, whether from the government (such as members of the parliament), the opposition, the media, or the general public. Article 22 (in Chapter 5) of the NIEBC Establishment Law states that “the Commission shall have its own budget, which shall be part of the general budget of the Federal Government of Somalia.”¹⁷ During a parliamentary plenary session on the national budget, a Member of Parliament asked about the sources of funding for the NIEBC’s operating budget, raising concerns about its funding sources. The MP stated that the Commission and NOVA GROUP (the company responsible for the digital infrastructure of the voter registration system) used USD 47 million, which is not included in the national budget.¹⁸ He also added that the Ministry of Finance (MoF) does not pay the salaries of the commissioners (USD 5,000 each) or the wages of the 900 temporary staff the Commission hired. The Commission had not responded to this matter at the time of writing this paper. This reinforces narratives that the FGS and the NIEBC are using off-budget funds to advance the conduct of direct elections, and it also raises concerns about the fairness and outcomes of the scheduled pilot local council elections in Mogadishu.

Moreover, during the voter registration process in Mogadishu, one reported criticism was the involuntary registration of voters. There were media reports,¹⁹ videos circulated on social media, and opposition statements about involuntary registration.²⁰ These data and observations highlight the government’s approach to voter registration, which involved capturing people from roads, checkpoints, buses, workplaces, and homes to forcibly register them.

It also involved certain local government services being tied to possession of a voter registration certificate; individuals were required to register for the elections in order to receive services, or, in some instances, people were prevented from leaving local government offices until they are registered for the election. Although the NIEBC²¹ and the Benadir Regional Administration (BRA) both denied these reports, this does not prove that such practices did not happen, given the available evidence of videos and reports online.

17 See the NIEBC Establishment Law (<https://so.niebc.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Xeerka-Dhisidda-Guddiga-Madaxa-Bannaan-ee-Doorashooyinka-Qaranka-Soothdimaha.pdf>)

18 Watch (<https://www.facebook.com/share/r/1D4FfUisLP/?mibextid=wwXIfr>)

19 <https://eastleighvoice.co.ke/somalia/160402/somalias-forces-enforce-door-to-door-voter-registration-in-mogadishu-ahead-of-historic-polls>

20 <https://www.somaliguadian.com/news/somalia-news/somalias-ex-president-accuses-govt-of-coercion-in-controversial-voter-registration-drive/>

21 https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2025/Jun/201758/somalia_s_electoral_commission_denies_reports_of_forced_voter_registration_in_mogadishu.aspx

Additionally, the exclusion of four districts, including Kahda and three other recently elevated districts – Daarusalaam, Gubadley, and Garasbaaley – by presidential decree in May 2024 was another challenge faced by the voter registration process. According to the National Election Law, local elections will only take place in districts that existed prior to 1991 (Chapter 4, Article 19).²² This means that the Kahda district, which was established after 2012, is not allowed to elect its councilors, and district mayor, rather its community will only vote as part of the neighbouring Dharkenley district.. The Kahda community was more vocal about this exclusion from local council elections on social media, expressing the exclusionary nature of the process and stating that their participation rights had been denied.

Furthermore, another challenge arose when an alliance of three political associations—Xaqsoor, Dhulka Hooyo, and Samadoon—held a press conference on October 15 and questioned the credibility of the voter registration technology. They stated that negotiations between their associations and the government had stalled after the coalition proposed an independent third-party assessment of the voter registration system to determine its integrity. They said that the government initially agreed to the audit but later changed the company that both sides had agreed upon to conduct it.²³

On November 5, the NIEBC released a press statement stating that CERTI TRUST, an independent auditor, had thoroughly examined the technical and security aspects of the voter registration and voter verification systems.²⁴ The company stated that the equipment and systems used by the Commission for voter registration and verification are trustworthy and capable of preventing data intrusion or hacking. It also affirmed that the registration system and materials meet international standards of integrity and quality.

However, the alliance of the three political associations responded on November 17 with a joint press release²⁵ stating that they were not satisfied with the alleged independent technical audit. The alliance added that it had proposed KPMG as the independent auditor, and that the Commission initially agreed, but once they learned of the company’s expertise, independence, and the extensive scope of the audit, the commission stopped the experts’ travel to Mogadishu. The alliance accused the Commission of misleading the public with the alleged independent audit it carried out.

22 See the National Elections Law (<https://so.niebc.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Xeerka-Doorashooyinka-Qaranka-ee-Jamhuuriyadda-Federaalka-Soomaaliya-.pdf>)

23 <https://www.dawan.africa/news/three-key-somali-parties-withdraw-from-election-dialogue>

24 <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1FfxnBsZHg/>

25 <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17jpP26GWT/>

Taken together, these limitations reveal systemic weaknesses that extend beyond administrative shortcomings. The lack of transparency in election financing, allegations of coercion, and disputes over technological integrity collectively undermine integrity and confidence in the voter registration process. Without addressing these structural flaws, the credibility of subsequent electoral phases—including voting and results management—remains fragile and may create electoral disputes.

Public Perceptions and Experiences (Poll Findings)

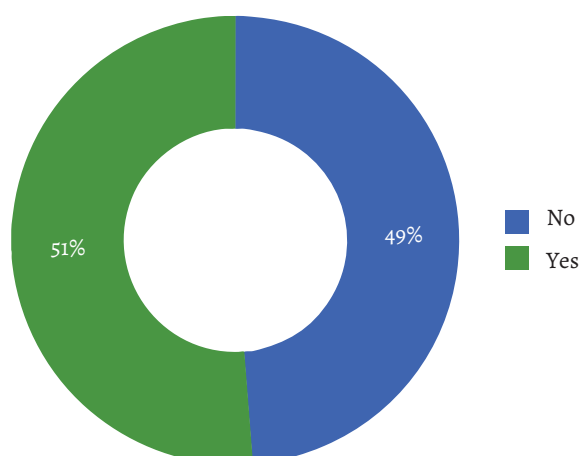
To gauge public opinion and experiences regarding the voter registration process, SPA Polls—an SPA programme for public opinion surveys—conducted an online, non-scientific poll on the public voter registration experience in Mogadishu. In October, SPA published the poll online using various social media channels, primarily Facebook, due to time and financial limitations that prevented the conduct of a scientific poll. The poll was online for three weeks, with location-specific targeted sponsorship in Mogadishu, and was open to people aged 18 years and above.

The challenges faced included the public's limited understanding of the polling concept and women's lower engagement with politics, resulting in generally low participation rates. This is indicated by the large reach of thousands, but with only 600+ poll visits and only about one-third of that number participating. To address this, SPA attempted to sponsor the poll targeting female users only, with extended reach, but this was still not effective in attracting the desired number of participants. Additionally, due to these limitations and the nature of the poll, SPA recognises that certain groups within the community may not be adequately represented in the data presented here.

The total number of polled citizens was 201, with approximately 81% male and 19% female. The majority were youths: 18–24-year-olds accounted for 20%, 25–34-year-olds for 62%, 35–44-year-olds for about 12%, and the remainder were aged 45 and above. Around 64% of participants had a university-level education, while 32% had a postgraduate-level education. About 73% were employed or self-employed, 15% were students, and the rest were unemployed.

Around 51% of participants had registered for a voter registration card, while 49% had not.

Figure 1: Proportion of respondents who were registered



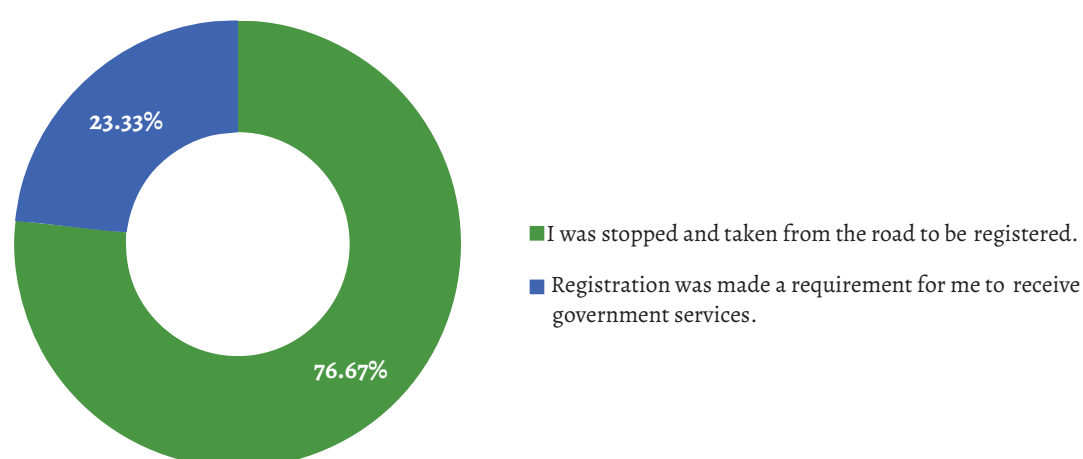
Among registered participants, 71% stated that they registered voluntarily. In contrast, around 29% reported being registered without their consent.

Figure 2: Percentages of voluntarily registered participants and those registered without consent



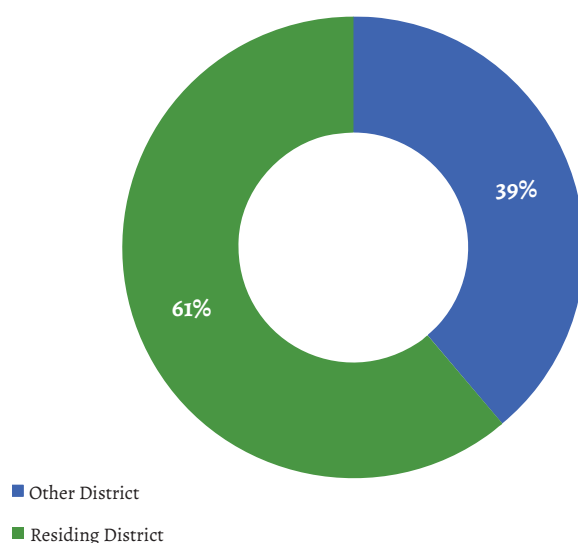
Among those registered without consent, 77% reported being stopped and taken off the road to be registered. The remaining 23% were required to register in order to receive government services at district offices, including birth certificates and National ID services (NIRA registration centres at district offices).

Figure 3: Ways participants were registered without their consent



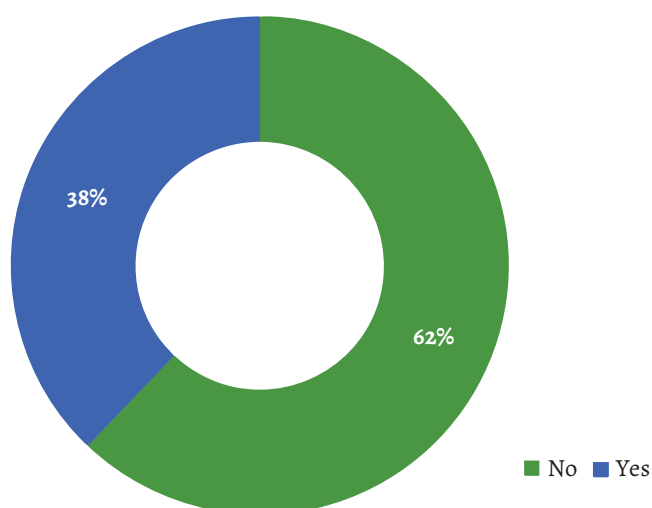
This data supports reports of forced registration in Mogadishu. It is further supported by data showing that among all registered participants, around 39% were registered in a district other than their own. This indicates either forced registration or that the registration process did not consider citizens' districts of residence, both of which affect the voting process and are not legally permitted by the electoral law, given that the law states that voters can only vote in the districts in which they registered.

Figure 4: Districts participants were registered in comparison to their districts



Ensuring the identity of voters being registered is one of the most critical steps in the process. Around 38% of registered participants were asked to provide some form of identification, including passports, national IDs, or birth certificates as a precondition for registration. In contrast, the majority (62%) were not asked for any ID before registration.

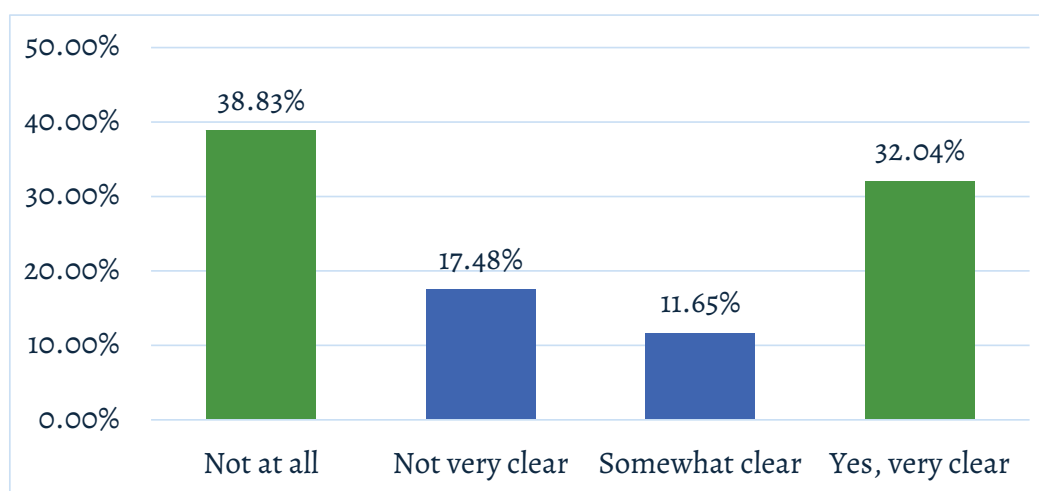
Figure 5: ID requirement for the voter registration process



This threatens the integrity of the voter register, as some registered voters may have provided false or incorrect personal information. However, one positive insight from the data is that all registered participants stated they were registered only once, except for one participant, which aligns with the NIEBC's reported low duplicate rate of 0.4%.

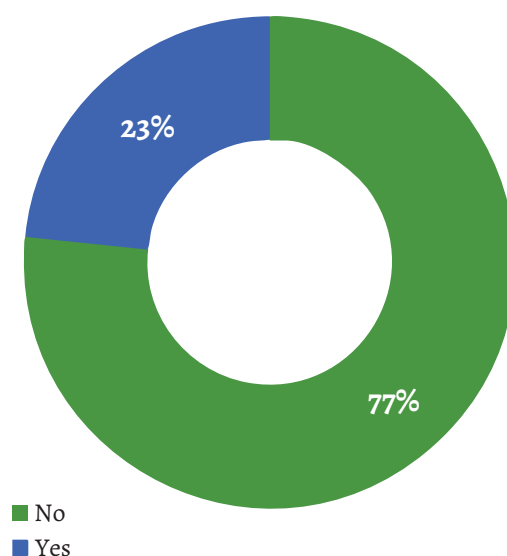
When registered participants were asked whether they received clear information about the process, 56% reported receiving no information (39%) or unclear information (17%). In contrast, the remainder reported receiving clear information (32%) or somewhat clear information (12%). This shows that the majority of registered participants did not receive adequate information.

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents who received information about the voter registration process



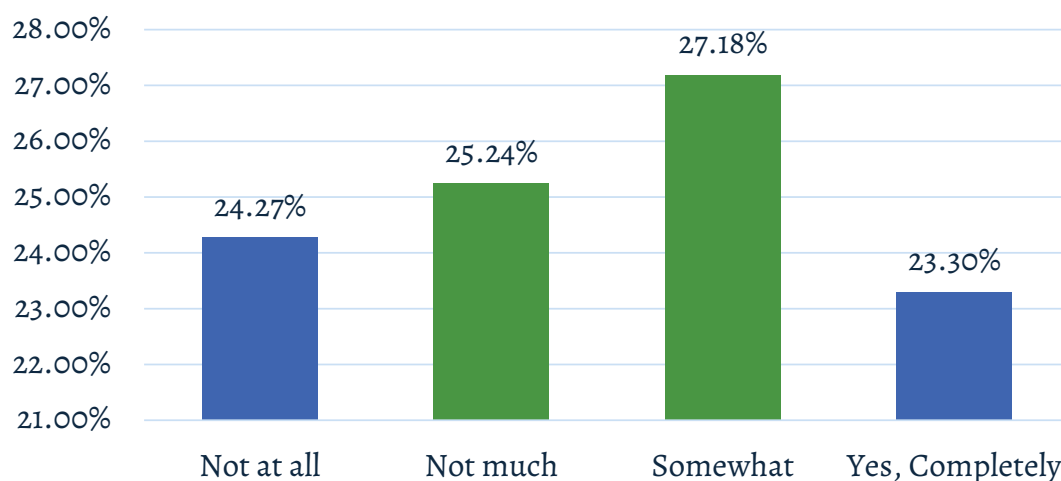
The lack of information and voter education is further emphasised by the fact that when registered participants were asked what happens after voter registration, more than two-thirds (77%) said they did not know. Only 23% said they knew, and only about half of those correctly identified the issuance of voter cards as the next step. Notably, nearly all participants who knew the next steps reported receiving very clear information.

Figure 7: Percentage of respondents who knew what was next after the voter registration process



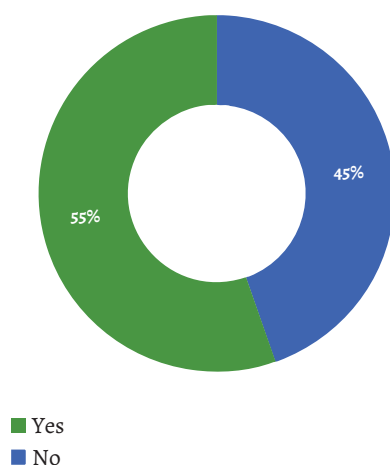
When asked whether they trusted the voter registration process to be free and fair, responses were evenly split. About 50.5% leaned toward agreement, while 49.5% leaned toward disagreement.

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents who trust the voter registration process to be free and fair



Similarly, when asked whether they would recommend others to register, 55% said yes, while 45% said no.

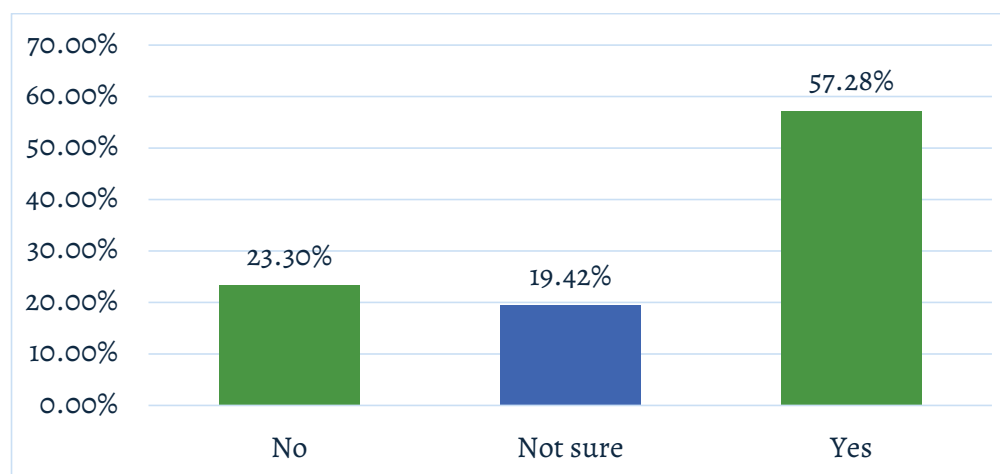
Figure 9: Percentage of respondents who recommended the voter registration process to others



Those who said no were mostly participants who had not received information. Their stated reasons included dissatisfaction and mistrust of the process, coercion, lack of information, uncertainty about the elections, lack of transparency, and concerns about legitimacy.

When asked whether they would vote if elections were held under the current process, around 57% said they would vote, 23% said they would not, and the remainder were unsure.

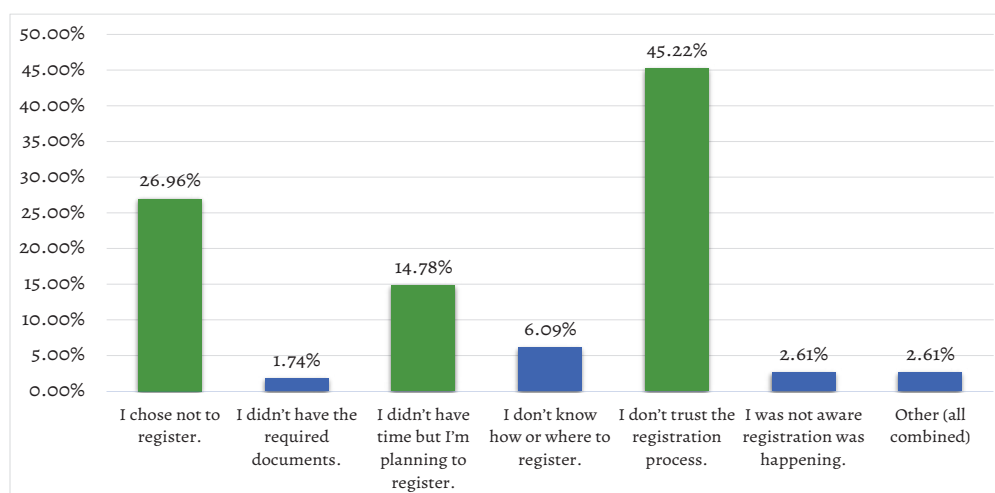
Figure 10: Percentage of respondents who would vote in the upcoming elections with the current process



Among those who said they would not vote, the main reasons included coercion, distrust, lack of information, and doubts about the fairness and legitimacy of the process. Despite this, voter turnout will depend on factors such as accessibility of polling centres, security, voter education, and the level of participation of political associations.

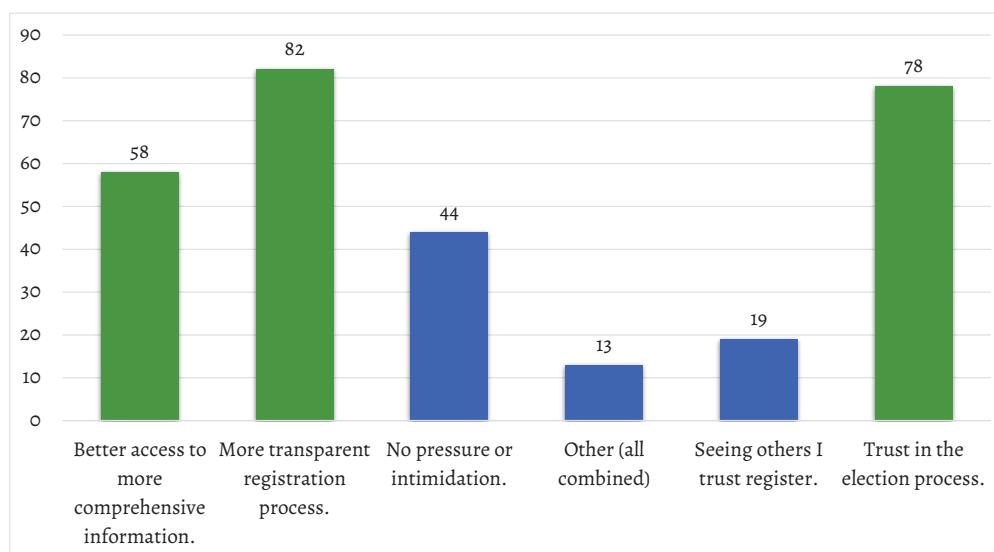
Among participants who did not register, the most common reason selected was “I don’t trust the registration process” (45%), followed by “I chose not to register” (27%), and “I didn’t have time to register but was planning to” (15%). This highlights the Commission’s difficulty in persuading the public and encouraging voluntary participation. None of the unregistered participants reported being advised by others not to register.

Figure 11: Reasons for not registering



When asked what would encourage future registration, the most selected options were a more transparent registration process (84%), increased trust in the election process (80%), better access to information (59%), and the absence of intimidation or pressure (45%).

Figure 12: Improvements that will motivate unregistered respondents to register for the voter card in the future



SPA poll findings illustrate a clear disconnect between institutional intentions and citizen experiences. While participation levels suggest a degree of engagement, concerns regarding trust, information gaps, and coercive practices significantly affect public confidence. These perceptions are critical, as they directly influence voter turnout, legitimacy of outcomes, and the sustainability of Somalia's transition to direct elections.

Policy Considerations

The National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (NIEBC) commenced voter card distribution on 15 November 2025 and aims to conduct local council elections on 25 December 2025. However, to ensure that Somalia's first nationwide direct elections in more than five decades are free, fair, credible and inclusive, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the NIEBC must address a number of legal, technical, and political issues before proceeding further.

Legal and Constitutional Matters

- **Consensus on the Election Management Body:** The legitimacy of the voter registration process has been undermined by disputes surrounding the mandate of the NIEBC. Puntland State, opposition political actors, and segments of the public have raised questions regarding the commission's mandate and whether a single, centralised election management body is suitable for Somalia's fragile and federal political context. To address these concerns, the FGS should engage in structured dialogue with key stakeholders to agree on the design, mandate, and composition of the election management framework. This process may require revisiting and revising relevant constitutional chapters to ensure broad-based political acceptance. Establishing a credible and consensual election management body with clearly defined responsibilities would significantly enhance confidence in both voter registration and the broader electoral process.
- **Transparency in the Operation of the Commission:** The FGS and the NIEBC should indicate the commission's budget and funding sources within the national budget framework. This would promote transparency, accountability, and compliance with the NIEBC Establishment Law. The federal government should also refrain from interfering in the operational affairs of the commission, as such interference undermines its independence and impartiality. For its part, the NIEBC should strictly adhere to the legal and regulatory frameworks governing elections, regardless of ongoing political disputes, and avoid actions that could be perceived as favouring one political actor over others.
- **Ensuring Equal Political Participation:** The FGS should review provisions in the National Electoral Law—particularly Chapter Four, which limits local council elections to districts that existed prior to 1991. This restriction effectively excludes residents of established and officially recognised districts created after 1991, including Kahda, Daarusalam, Garasbaley, and Gubadley in Mogadishu, as well as several districts in Federal Member States. The government should amend the law to allow all these districts to participate independently in local elections rather than being merged with neighbouring districts.

Technical and Procedural Aspects

- **Correcting and Verifying Voter Registration Data:** The NIEBC should undertake a comprehensive verification and correction of voter registration data, including personal details and district of registration. Given documented cases of forced registration and the limited use of identity verification during registration, there is a risk that some voters were registered in districts they do not inhabit or provided inaccurate information. Addressing these issues before elections are held is essential to ensure compliance with the law and to prevent disputes during the voting and results phases.
- **Voter Education and Public Awareness:** The FGS and the NIEBC should significantly strengthen voter education and public information campaigns, as mandated by law. Effective voter education is essential for ensuring that citizens understand the registration process, voting procedures, and the broader electoral timeline. Well-informed voters are more likely to participate voluntarily, trust the process, and contribute to higher turnout and more credible election outcomes.
- **Allowing Adequate Time for Elections:** The NIEBC should approach local council elections with caution and realism. Conducting Somalia's first direct elections in more than five decades requires careful planning, sufficient preparation time, and inclusive stakeholder engagement. Rushing the process risks exacerbating political tensions, leaving voters inadequately informed, and compromising the security and integrity of polling operations. Allowing adequate time for preparation is essential to building confidence and avoiding conflict.

A Stable Political Environment

- **Building Political Consensus:** The FGS should avoid framing elections as a unilateral government initiative and instead foster an inclusive political environment in which Federal Member States, political actors, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders can meaningfully contribute to the electoral process. Failure to achieve political consensus—particularly regarding state and federal elections—risks setting a dangerous precedent that could undermine political stability, disrupt regular electoral cycles, and weaken the foundations of Somalia's political settlement.
- **Transparency and Collaborative Engagement:** The FGS and the NIEBC should adopt transparent and collaborative approaches in their engagement with political actors and the public. This includes proactively addressing concerns, responding to complaints, and providing timely clarifications regarding voter registration and electoral procedures. Maintaining open and responsive communication channels is essential to rebuilding public trust and ensuring broad-based support for the electoral process.

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Somali Public Agenda (SPA) is a non-profit public policy and administration think-and-action tank based in Mogadishu, with the mission to advance responsive, evidence-based, and inclusive governance and public services in Somalia through research and analysis (through SPA Research), dialogue (through SPA Forums & SPA Podcasts), co-design of evidence-based policies and services (through SPA Policy Lab), and capacity development (through SPA Learning Lab).

SPA has established a unique reputation as a credible, neutral, and influential think-and-action tank across Somalia; has networks spanning the political landscape, including government institutions, opposition actors, and civic stakeholders; and has a strong track record of influencing policy at the highest level, as evidenced by our Success Stories and Testimonials pages on our website.

Our team is regularly called upon to provide analysis and commentary in the media, as well as to Somali government officials and the international community.

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