



Finding Common Ground: Towards a Compromise Electoral Framework for Somalia's Future Federal Elections

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Summary

- » Although the four electoral proposals differ in their institutional design, they all support direct elections and retain the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula, providing a strong foundation for political compromise.
- » The principal areas of disagreement concern the electoral system, constituency design, election management, voter registration, and the method of electing the Upper House. Important implementation issues—including women's political representation, Northeastern State's parliamentary representation, and the legal basis of the elections—also remain unresolved.
- » This Governance Brief argues that these differences are not irreconcilable. It proposes a compromise electoral framework that combines the most practical elements of the four proposals, including a First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system, geographically allocated clan constituencies, an independent federal election management body, party-affiliated and independent candidates, paper-based same-day voter registration and voting, a revised process for electing the Upper House, and practical measures to safeguard women's political representation.

About Somali Public Agenda

Somali Public Agenda is a nonprofit public policy and administration research organization based in Mogadishu. 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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Introduction

Somalia's electoral framework is once again under discussion, even as the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) continues preparations for direct elections in Galmudug and Hirshabelle. The current negotiations between the FGS and three opposition actors—the Somali Future Council (SFC), Nabad & Nolol, and the Somali Unity Council—are primarily focused on the electoral arrangements for Somalia's next Federal Parliament, comprising the House of the People and the Upper House.

This Governance Brief analyses the four electoral models presented by the negotiating parties, highlights their similarities and differences, identifies the key issues that remain unresolved, and proposes possible areas of compromise that could support a broadly acceptable electoral agreement.

Overview of the Four Electoral Models

Federal Government of Somalia (FGS): The FGS model is anchored in Chapter Four of the amended Federal Constitution, although the constitutional amendments remain contested by some political actors. It is also based on three electoral laws: the National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (NIEBC) Establishment Act, the Political Associations and Parties Act, and the National Electoral Act.

The main features of the FGS model for electing the Federal Parliament are:

- Open List Proportional Representation (OLPR) within a Single National Constituency (SNC).
- Citizens vote for political associations, which allocate seats to their candidates based on the association's share of the vote. Political associations that secure 10 percent or more of the federal parliamentary seats would become national political parties.
- Elections at all three levels of government are administered by the National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (NIEBC).
- The voter registration system would use Unique Biometric Identification.
- The 4.5 clan power-sharing formula is maintained in the composition of the Federal Parliament.

A key strength of the FGS model is that the Single National Constituency and proportional representation address the question of Somaliland's 57 parliamentary seats (46 in the House of the People and 11 in the Upper House), while maintaining the existing 4.5 clan power-sharing arrangement.

Somali Future Council (SFC): The Somali Future Council (SFC) brings together the Somali Salvation Forum and the Federal Member States of Puntland and Jubaland. It includes several prominent opposition leaders, including a former President and three former Prime Ministers, making it one of the principal opposition blocs participating in the negotiations. Before the expiry of the Federal Government's constitutional four-year mandate (which the amended Constitution extended to five years) on 15 May 2026, the FGS had engaged with the SFC as the principal representative of the opposition.

The Somali Future Council model includes the following features:

- A First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system, under which citizens vote directly for individual candidates rather than political parties (political parties would not participate in elections conducted under this model).
- Retention of the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula.
- Paper-based voter registration, allowing same-day registration and voting.

- A two-tier election management structure comprising a Federal Elections Implementation Committee (FEIC) and State Elections Implementation Committees (SEICs).
- Four electoral districts in each Federal Member State for elections to the House of the People.

A key strength of the SFC model is that it preserves the current clan-based allocation of parliamentary seats while allowing citizens to directly elect individual candidates. By avoiding biometric registration, it could also reduce costs, shorten preparation time, and simplify election administration.

Nabad & Nolol: Nabad & Nolol, led by former President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, has proposed an electoral model based on Closed List Proportional Representation (CLPR). The proposal is broadly similar to the electoral agreement reached by the National Security Council in Baidoa in June 2018 during Farmaajo's presidency.

Its principal features include:

- Closed List Proportional Representation (CLPR).
- Citizens vote for political parties rather than individual candidates.
- Flexibility between a Single National Constituency and state-level constituencies.
- A single federal election management body to administer parliamentary elections.
- Retention of the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula.
- Direct election of the Upper House.
- Paper-based voter registration.

A key strength of the Nabad & Nolol model is that it preserves the existing 4.5 clan power-sharing arrangement. Its flexibility on constituency design—allowing either a Single National Constituency or state-level constituencies—may also provide greater scope for political compromise.

Somali Unity Council: The Somali Unity Council is a recently established political coalition led primarily by former Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid. Many of its members were previously affiliated with the Somali Salvation Forum but later formed separate platforms after reaching an agreement with the FGS in August 2025 on several constitutional issues that were subsequently reflected in the constitutional amendments adopted in March 2026.

The Somali Unity Council proposal contains the following features:

- A First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system.
- Electoral constituencies based on six or more districts within each Federal Member State.
- A nationally coordinated voter registration process.
- Parliamentary candidates nominated by political parties.
- An independent federal electoral commission to administer parliamentary elections.
- Members of the Upper House elected through state-level voting processes.
- Establishment of an Electoral Dispute Resolution Commission, with the Supreme Court serving as the appellate and supervisory authority for electoral disputes.
- Protection of the 30 percent women's quota in both chambers of Parliament.

The Somali Unity Council proposal seeks to strengthen electoral governance through an independent electoral dispute resolution mechanism while preserving the constitutional commitment to women's political representation. By requiring parliamentary candidates to be affiliated with political parties, it also supports the gradual institutionalisation of Somalia's political party system while maintaining the existing clan-based allocation of parliamentary seats.

Similarities, Differences, and Unaddressed Issues

The four electoral proposals share several important similarities despite their differences in institutional design. These common elements provide a solid foundation for political compromise and suggest that the negotiations are focused less on whether direct elections should take place than on how they should be conducted.

The two most significant areas of convergence are, first, that all four proposals support direct elections to the Federal Parliament and, second, that they all retain the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula. This reflects a broad political consensus that Somalia should transition to direct elections while preserving the existing clan-based allocation of parliamentary seats for the upcoming electoral cycle.

There are also important similarities between specific proposals:

- **The Federal Government of Somalia and Nabad & Nolol** both favour Proportional Representation (PR), under which citizens vote for political parties rather than individual candidates. Both also retain the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula and support a Single National Constituency, although Nabad & Nolol has indicated flexibility regarding constituency design.
- **The Somali Future Council and the Somali Unity Council** both favour a First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system while maintaining the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula. Both proposals also support paper-based voter registration.

Despite these similarities, several important differences remain.

- **The first concerns the electoral system itself**—Proportional Representation versus First-Past-the-Post. This distinction has broader implications for constituency design, whether citizens vote for political parties or individual candidates, and how Somaliland's parliamentary representation would be accommodated within the electoral framework.
- **The second concerns election management.** The four proposals present three distinct approaches. Under the FGS proposal, as set out in the National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (NIEBC) Establishment Act, responsibility for administering elections at all levels of government is centralised in the National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (NIEBC). Nabad & Nolol and the Somali Unity Council favour a single independent federal electoral commission to administer federal parliamentary elections. By contrast, the Somali Future Council proposes a decentralised arrangement comprising one federal electoral body and separate state-level electoral management bodies in each Federal Member State.
- **The third major difference relates to voter registration.** The FGS supports biometric voter registration, whereas the other three proposals favour paper-based registration, arguing that it is more practical given the limited time and resources available before the elections.

Although these differences are significant, they do not appear insurmountable. The shared commitment to direct elections and the continued application of the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula provide a meaningful basis for compromise.

Differences	FGS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	Nabad & Nolol OPPOSITION BLOC	Somali Unity Council OPPOSITION COALITION	Somali Future Council OPPOSITION ALLIANCE
PR VS FPTP Electoral system POLITICAL	Open-List PR (OLPR)	Closed-List PR (CLPR)	First-Past-the-Post	First-Past-the-Post
MIXED POSITIONS Constituency design POLITICAL	Single National Constituency	Flexible — national or state-level	Six or more districts per state	Four districts per state
THREE DISTINCT APPROACHES Election management body POLITICAL	NIEBC administers all levels (centralised)	Single independent federal commission	Independent federal commission	Two-tier — federal (FEIC) + state committees (SEICs)
BIO-METRIC VS PAPER-BASED Voter registration TECHNICAL	Biometric (unique biometric ID)	Paper-based	Paper-based (rationally coordinated)	Paper-based, same-day
PARTY VS INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES Role of political parties POLITICAL	Vote for political associations	Vote for political parties	Candidates nominated by parties	Parties do not participate — individuals only

Moreover, although the four proposals address many aspects of the electoral process, several important issues remain unresolved. Reaching agreement on the broad features of an electoral model alone will not be sufficient; negotiators will also need to address a number of constitutional, institutional, and implementation issues.

- **One important issue is women's political representation.** While the FGS electoral legislation and the Somali Unity Council proposal explicitly reaffirm the 30 percent quota for women in both chambers of Parliament, the other proposals provide little detail on how the quota would be implemented. Since different electoral systems have different implications for women's representation, any final agreement should clearly specify how the quota will be protected.
- **A second unresolved issue concerns the election of the Upper House.** Although several proposals call for direct elections, none fully explains how the 54 members of the Upper House would be elected within a federal, clan-based electoral framework. Given the Upper House's constitutional role as the chamber representing the Federal Member States, this issue requires further clarification.
- **The third issue relates to Northeastern State.** The establishment of the new state has implications for constituency boundaries and seat allocation in both the House of the People and the Upper House. None of the four proposals addresses how parliamentary seats would be allocated to Northeastern State.

Unaddressed Issues	FGS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	Nabad & Nolol OPPOSITION BLOC	Somali Unity Council OPPOSITION COALITION	Somali Future Council OPPOSITION ALLIANCE
PARTIALLY ADDRESSED Women's 30% quota POLITICAL	Explicitly reaffirmed — both chambers	—	Explicitly protected — both chambers	—
PARTIALLY ADDRESSED Election of the Upper House POLITICAL	—	Direct election	State-level voting processes	—
SINGLE PROPOSER Electoral dispute resolution POLITICAL	—	—	Dispute Resolution Commission; Supreme Court on appeal	—
NOT YET ADDRESSED Northeastern State seat allocation POLITICAL	—	—	—	—

A Compromise Electoral Framework

Although differences remain among the four proposals, they also reveal important areas of convergence. Rather than adopting one proposal in its entirety, the negotiating parties could develop a compromise model that draws on the strongest and most practical elements of each proposal. Compromise could also be achieved by trading concessions across different issue areas.

1. Electoral System: As all parties agree that a direct electoral system retaining the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula is preferable at this stage, we propose adopting a First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) model. This system is considerably more straightforward for allocating parliamentary seats among clans, as it would require no changes to the current distribution of seats in the House of the People.

By contrast, while it is possible to maintain clan-based seat allocation under a proportional representation system (particularly if the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula is retained at the top level, such as allocating 61 MPs each to Hawiye, Darod, and Digil & Mirifle, and 31 MPs to the .5 groups), applying proportional representation at the 275-seat level would be substantially more complex. Such complexity could reduce transparency and public confidence in the electoral outcome and might empower party leaders to determine which candidates win parliamentary seats allocated to each clan. Although proportional representation may become more appropriate as Somalia's political party system matures, FPTP is the more practical option for the forthcoming elections.

2. Constituency Design: Each clan seat will need to be allocated to a geographic constituency. This can be a complex and challenging process, and prioritizing simplicity will be paramount. First, the election management body should identify pre-1991 districts that meet agreed security and administrative criteria, as well as potential polling locations within them. Second, each clan seat should be allocated to just one of these districts based on a process of negotiation with the FMSs, elders, political parties, and independent candidates. Voters in each district will then be able to choose which of the assigned clan seats to vote for.

This process would need to take into account seat allocation for Mogadishu, which has (with the exception of the Banadiri community's seats) not had direct representation in the House of the People. A certain percentage of seats currently allocated to the FMSs could be reallocated to districts in the capital to address this imbalance.

One challenge under an FPTP system would remain the parliamentary seats allocated to Somaliland. Two possible options could be considered. The first would be to designate Mogadishu as the polling location, allowing members of Somaliland clans residing in Mogadishu to register and vote. Alternatively, these seats could continue to be filled through an indirect electoral process for this electoral cycle only.

3. Election Management: Election management is arguably the most contentious issue, as it is likely to be the most significant determinant of who exercises influence over the electoral process. The election management arrangements proposed by Nabad & Nolol and the Somali Unity Council provide a basis for compromise, in which federal elections are run by an election management body whose sole mandate is to manage the federal parliamentary elections. To avoid the 2021–22 structure, the federal election commission could be given the mandate to establish its own state-level implementation committees responsible for administering elections across the various electoral constituencies.

Most importantly, the electoral commission should command the confidence of all major political stakeholders. To achieve this, a quota should be negotiated assigning seats on the committee to the FGS, FMSs, the SFC, the SUC, and Nabad & Nolol to ensure that it can maintain consensus in implementation decisions.

4. Political Parties: A practical compromise would require all parliamentary candidates to contest elections under the banner of a registered political party or political association. This could include parties registered by the current National Independent

Electoral and Boundaries Commission (NIEBC), as well as those provisionally registered by the former National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC).

At the same time, independent candidates who are not affiliated with any political party should also be permitted to contest parliamentary seats. The next government could then undertake the task of harmonising the legal framework governing political parties.

5. Voter Registration: Given the limited time remaining before the elections, together with Somalia's operational and financial constraints, paper-based, same-day voter registration and voting appear to be the most practical option for the forthcoming electoral cycle.

Although biometric registration can, in some contexts, provide stronger safeguards against electoral fraud, its effectiveness depends on adequate financial resources, technical capacity, stakeholder confidence, and sufficient preparation time. Without these prerequisites, a biometric system may be just as vulnerable to manipulation and operational failures as a paper-based model.

6. Election of the Upper House: The election of the Upper House requires a distinct arrangement that reflects its constitutional role as the chamber representing the Federal Member States. Before determining the electoral process, however, the allocation of Upper House seats should be revisited in light of the establishment of Northeastern State of Somalia in 2025. One possible option would be for Somaliland and Puntland to each transfer two seats to Northeastern State, leaving Somaliland and Puntland with nine seats each and Northeastern State with four seats.

Regarding the method of election, senators could continue to be elected by the legislatures of the Federal Member States. However, current practice, whereby FMS Presidents nominate candidates for each seat, should be reconsidered. Instead, all eligible candidates—whether independent or affiliated with political parties—should be permitted to register directly with the electoral management body, while the state legislatures continue to serve as the electoral college.

7. Women's Political Representation: Preserving the 30 percent quota for women's representation is undoubtedly more challenging under an FPTP system, but it is not impossible. One practical option would be to randomly designate 30 percent of the seats allocated to each Federal Member State as women-only constituencies. Once parliamentary seats have been allocated to the respective Federal Member States, only women would be eligible to contest these constituencies. This randomized approach would help avoid the often politicized negotiations over gender representation and seat allocation that have characterized previous electoral processes and would avoid unintentionally institutionalizing the allocation of women's representation to politically or economically weaker groups.



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A COMPROMISE ELECTORAL FRAMEWORK

1. Electoral System	First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) while retaining the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula.
2. Constituencies	Geographically allocated clan constituencies based on agreed pre-1991 district boundaries.
3. Election Management	Independent federal election commission with state implementation committees and inclusive stakeholder representation.
4. Political Parties & Candidates	Candidates may contest through registered political parties or as independent candidates.
5. Voter Registration	Paper-based same-day voter registration and voting.
6. Upper House	State legislatures elect senators, with all eligible candidates registering directly with the electoral management body.
7. Women's Representation	Protect the 30% quota through randomly designated women-only constituencies in each Federal Member State.

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These compromise options demonstrate that the differences among the four proposals are not irreconcilable. By combining the most practical elements of each proposal, negotiators could develop an electoral framework that commands broad political support while remaining administratively feasible to implement.

Outstanding Issues the Agreement Should Resolve

Beyond agreeing on an electoral model, the negotiating parties will also need to resolve two important legal and implementation issues.

First, the parties should clarify whether the upcoming elections will be conducted under the 2012 Provisional Federal Constitution or the amended Constitution adopted in 2026. Given that the constitutional amendments remain contested by some of the negotiating parties, the agreement should also specify how the constitutional provisions relating to elections will be interpreted and applied during the transition.

Second, the parties should clarify the approval process for any electoral agreement. Should the agreement be endorsed by the current Federal Parliament—similar to the ratification process for the September 2020 electoral agreement reached in Mogadishu—whose mandate remains contested by some political actors, or would the signatures of the negotiating principals be sufficient? Resolving this question would strengthen both the legal standing and the political legitimacy of the agreement.

Conclusion

Although the four electoral proposals under negotiation differ in their institutional design, they all support direct elections and retain the 4.5 clan power-sharing formula, providing a strong foundation for political compromise. The principal differences concern the electoral system, constituency design, election management, voter registration, and the election of the Upper House. This Governance Brief argues that these differences are not irreconcilable and proposes a practical compromise framework that combines the strongest elements of the four proposals, including a First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system, geographically allocated constituencies, an independent federal election management body, party-affiliated and independent candidates, paper-based same-day voter registration and voting, revised arrangements for electing the Upper House, and measures to safeguard women's political representation.