

Summary

Gedo region has recently become the contested focal point of Somali political debate. Garbaharey, the capital city of the Gedo region, was designated as the site of the election of 16 lower house seats. However, the Federal Election Implementation Team (FEIT) issued a letter changing this constituency to Ceelwaaq on 14 April 2022, the same day the majority of the members of the 11th parliament were sworn-in in Mogadishu. A parallel process produced 32 MPs elected in Ceelwaaq and Garbaharey. Before the beginning of the indirect federal parliamentary elections in Somalia, Gedo became a key arena for political squabbling between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Jubaland. Although the region falls under the jurisdiction of Jubaland, only one district in Gedo (Ceelwaaq) is currently controlled by Jubaland authority. This brief examines how Gedo became a key battleground for the center-periphery rift in Somalia's federal politics. It investigates FGS control of Gedo, the complications and challenges surrounding the holding of elections in Gedo, and the triggers of the Gedo dispute: including unaddressed grievances, a lack of state-level security presence, and greed-induced motivations. The brief also puts forward several policy considerations.

About Somali Public Agenda

Somali Public Agenda is a non-profit 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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Greed or Grievances: The Gedo Conundrum

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Introduction: The Beginning of the FGS-Jubaland Tussle

In the federal reconfiguration of the Somali state that has been ongoing over the last decade, Somalia's new Federal Member States (FMS) have been formed from the incorporation of at least two previous administrative regions. The Jubaland FMS has been composed of Lower Juba (where its capital Kismayo lies), Middle Jubba (which largely remains under the influence of al-Shabaab), and Gedo. The Jubaland administration, led by President Ahmed Mohamed Islam 'Madobe', has struggled to assert its authority across the whole of its territory due to the ongoing conflict with al-Shabaab, the wider security situation, external interference from various actors, and clan divides across these regions. Centre-periphery divisions between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Jubaland (FMS) have increasingly played out over contestation for inland Gedo, which also shares borders with both Kenya and Ethiopia.

In an August 2018 speech, the former Jubaland Security Minister Abdirashid Hassan Abdinur "Janan", a strongman in the Gedo region, cautioned the federal government not to mistake Jubaland State with its neighboring South West State during the latter's leadership election. He said that whoever is ready to come and campaign in Kismayo under Jubaland's procedures is welcome. "But if you are coming to meddle with Jubaland, [we will not hesitate to deport you.](#)" In that speech, the minister was referencing what was going on in Baydhabo, the interim capital of South West State, at the time. There, the FGS was heavily involved in the presidential elections that resulted in the election of its preferred candidate, Abdiasis Hassan Mohamed (Laftagareen), in Baydhabo in late 2018. Since their state election was also approaching, Jubaland authorities were under the impression that something similar might happen to them if they didn't prepare countermoves.

The Jubaland Security Minister at the time, Abdirishid Janan, was detained at Adan Adde International Airport on August 31, 2019, alleging crimes against humanity. Following his arbitrary detention by the federal government while en route to Addis Ababa, the FGS moved quickly to seize control of the Gedo region (International Crisis Group, 2020). A delegation of district commissioners of the Gedo region led by Mohamed Abdullahi Gardhub, the then Luuq Ganane district commissioner, was taken to Addis Ababa. Gardhub then told the BBC Somali that they had severed relations with Jubaland and that they had agreed to comply with the government in Mogadishu and authorize the federal army to land in Dolow until there is an inclusive Jubaland administration. Gardhub later parted ways with the federal government and would join Abdirishid Janan, Jubaland's Security Minister, in the jungle, the same man he conspired to oust.

On May 20, 2020, the federal government changed all of the district commissioners in the Gedo region and named Osman Nuur Haji (Moalimu) as the regional governor after gaining a firm grip on the region. This is with the exception of Ceelwaaq which hitherto remains under Jubaland authority (the only district in the Gedo region controlled by Jubaland). This appointment was made by the former deputy interior minister of Jubaland Abdirahman Mohamed Hussein, who was ousted by the Jubaland President Ahmed "Madobe". Still, the federal government used him to legitimize its political appointment.

Armed Conflicts in Gedo and the Involvement of Regional Actors

On January 28, 2020, Abdirashid Janan, Jubaland Security Minister, managed to mysteriously escape from the detention center in Mogadishu and fled to Kismayo (International Crisis Group, 2020) where his boss, Ahmed Madobe, was re-elected in a highly disputed election. After weeks in Kenya, Abdirashid Janan went back to Kismayo to plan how he would reclaim control of Gedo with the help of Kenya, which has a close relationship with the Jubaland authorities. During his brief stay in Kenya, Amnesty International asked the Kenyan authorities to arrest Abdirashid Janan and to hand him over to the federal government. However, Kenya did not listen to the official appeal of Amnesty International because Kenya was recruiting Janan to engage in violent conflict with the federal government in Gedo to relieve the pressure on Jubaland (Amnesty International, 2020).

After months of preparation in Kismayo, Abdirashid Janan managed to set up a camp in the border town of Mandera. In March 2020, Abdirashid clashed with the federal government troops on the border between Kenya and Somalia. The fighting started at midday on the outskirts of Balad-Hawo town and the fog of war made the counting of casualties difficult (Abdishakur, 2020). However, many people fled, particularly those who lived on the borderline. Schools and businesses were at a standstill. In addition, after the fighting subsided, the Kenyan media reported that several shells hit schools and homes. The people of Mandera urged their government to stop harboring a fugitive in a protest shown on Kenyan media.

On December 15, 2020, Somalia's federal government severed diplomatic ties with Kenya accusing its government of a "constant violation" of its sovereignty. Somalia ordered Kenyan diplomats to leave the country in seven days (Aljazeera, 2020). The announcement came at a time when Kenyan President Uhura Kenyatta was hosting Muse Bihi Abdi, the President of the self-declared Republic of Somaliland. "Kenya continues meddling in our internal political affairs, and it has ignored our previous calls to stop violating our sovereignty," the Somalia Minister of Information Osman Dubbe announced on the Somali National Television.

In another strongly worded statement released by Somalia in the weeks leading up to the clash in March 2020, Somalia accused Kenya of sheltering a fugitive. In addition, Somalia lodged a complaint with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) regarding Kenya's overt intervention in its domestic affairs (Aljazeera, 2020). As a result, IGAD convened an extraordinary summit in Djibouti to deliberate on the tensions in the region particularly the dispute between Somalia and its neighbor, Kenya. After the meeting, which covered a range of issues, IGAD formed a fact-finding commission to look into the incident. The committee, however, found no proof that Kenya was harboring a fugitive. The Committee first went to Nairobi, then preceded to Mandera to probe whether there were camps set up inside the Kenya border that was hosting and training Abdirashid Janan and his militia. However, according to the committee's final report, they didn't find any military camps used to destabilize or interfere with Somalia's affairs.

Consequently, Somalia rejected the fact-finding commission's findings, calling the investigation "biased". Furthermore, Somalia accused the commission of ignoring their plea to come to Somali territory while visiting Kenyan territory twice. As a result, Somalia threatened to leave IGAD, claiming that it has sided with Kenya.

On January 25, 2021, there was yet another bloody clash between the opposing groups in Gedo. This clash was

unconventional. Abdirashid Janan militia and Jubaland forces attacked Balad Hawo town at around 2 am. Unlike the previous battles, this fighting occurred inside the town at a time when everyone was asleep. Initially, Abdirashid Janan and his forces managed to take control of the town, but they were pushed back by the federal troops after a heavy gunfight in the small hours of the night. Eleven people lost their lives in that nighttime fighting, including five children from one family. 100 of Abdirashid Janan's troops were also captured alive and dozens were killed. This was quite devastating and a significant blow to Jubaland's ambition to regain control of Gedo. They failed in their second attempt in less than a year to capture a single city (Hiraan, 2021).

FGS Control of Gedo

On March 25, 2021, Abdirashid Janan, Jubaland Security Minister, along with his militia surrendered to delegates from the federal government led by the deputy minister of communication Abdirahman Alcadala. Abdirashid Janan stated that he had surrendered because of the harsh predicament that the Gedo people were facing, including drought, disease, and the COVID-19 epidemic (VOA Somali, 2021). The federal government reportedly told Abdirashid Janan that he would be freed of the charges against him. On the same day, the Jubaland president fired Abdirashid Janan from his position as the Jubaland's Security Minister after he defected to the FGS and failing to achieve the intended objectives in Gedo.

Meanwhile, the people of Gedo districts welcomed the news with patriotic songs. Many people in the very towns that suffered his invasion were now jubilant. Many said that people were happy for the simple reason that the conflict had ended. Others, however, were asking how a man who attacked his people at night during a severe drought and caused a massive displacement could be welcomed as a hero. When he arrived in Mogadishu, Abdirashid Janan had already been exonerated of the charges against him by the Benadir court, but he was still wanted by the federal government and under scrutiny from Amnesty International. According to well-informed sources that Somali Public Agenda has spoken with, the federal government wrote to Amnesty International to inform them that they had dropped their case against Abdirashid Janan. This was an indication that the FGS used the judicial process to put political pressure on Janan to work with them. After a few days, Abdirashid flew to Turkey with no fear of attention from international law enforcement agencies

When he came back to Mogadishu on October, 2021, Abdirashid Janan declared his candidacy to contest a parliamentary seat. During his campaign launch ceremony, he stated that he would not again take up arms and seek power through violent means.

Subsequently, the federal government assumed full control of Gedo (except Ceelwaaq) after Abdirashid Janan's surrender. The FGS has also incorporated all of his militiamen into their forces, giving them military uniforms, and registered them on the Somalia military payroll to ensure that Jubaland no longer exploit against them.

Despite mounting pressures, the government has deployed thousands of troops to Gedo, apparently to isolate the territory from the Jubaland administration. The plan, according to analysts, was to seize Bu'ale town, the capital city of the Jubaland currently controlled by al-Shabaab, from Gedo with the support of Ethiopia, and hold the Jubaland presidential elections there. This would eventually lead to the formation of a parallel Jubaland administration to pressure Ahmed Madobe to compromise. The plan, however, did not come to fruition.

Kenya and Ethiopia, which are only a few miles apart in Balad Hawo town, have not simply stood on the sidelines to watch the conflict and security developments in Gedo. Jubaland President Ahmed Madowe was aided by Nairobi, while Addis Ababa supported the federal government. The situation in Gedo became even more complicated and multilayered as a result of this proxy tussle.

Gedo as the Epi-center of Federal Elections Confusion

After a series of meetings in Dhusamareeb in mid-2020, the federal government and the federal member states eventually agreed on an indirect election model on September 17 of that year in Mogadishu. This electoral model was later endorsed by the two chambers of the federal parliament in a joint session. As part of the electoral procedures agreed by the NCC on 1st October 2020, Garbaharey was designated as the election location for the election of 16 lower house seats.

Since the beginning of Somalia's electoral crisis, Gedo has dominated the headlines. Due to a variety of reasons, it has become a contentious topic. President Farmaajo and his allies in Gedo intended to single-handedly pick and choose the seats in Gedo. On the other hand, Jubaland's President Ahmed Madobe, who managed to win the controversial Federal Member State presidential election in August 2019 in Kismayo against Villa Somalia's pressure, wanted to control the seats in Gedo to restore the authority in the region and leverage the seats to overthrow the regime he strongly opposes. This has exacerbated the situation. Neither party has been willing to compromise.

Many people have not been able to get a clear picture of what Gedo's people themselves think of the election of the 16 seats in the region. The people have had little say in what has been happening in their region. Rarely do people in Gedo speak out against the security forces in the region. It is the reason why people have remained largely silent regarding this election even though their seats are being contested by other parties.

The FGS Prime Minister, Mohamed Hussein Roble, attempted to resolve the Gedo issue. He traveled to Kismayo, then to Garbaharey in mid-2021 for consultations immediately after the 27 May 2021 NCC election agreement that agreed that his office take the lead on security and reconciliation in the region (Abdullahi & Wasuge, 2021). As per the NCC agreement, the Prime Minister appointed an FMS ministerial-level committee for Garbaharey to deepen the consultation, listen to the Gedo people's concerns and oversee the nomination of the Garbaharey district leadership.

After all of these efforts, the same federal government undid the progress made, partly due to the rift between the President and Prime Minister. The FGS sent more troops to Garbaharey to tighten their grip after the reconciliation committee appointed by the Premier had left. They also summoned the Gedo regional commissioner to Mogadishu and put him on house-arrest. Osman Nuur Haji (Moalimu) was later fired from his post accused of failing to carry out his duties. His replacement Ahmed Bulle Garad was appointed on a letter from the rubberstamp Jubaland deputy interior minister. This new reshuffle was interpreted by many as an effort to tighten the grip and keep holding Gedo outside of the control of Jubaland administration.

The FGS Prime Minister sacked the then National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA)'s Chief of Staff Abdullahi Kulane and NISA's Mogadishu airport officer in July 2021 after they defied his warning that no person could be barred from flying within Somalia. This incident happened after Kulane reportedly tried to block the former Gedo governor Osman Nur Haji (Moalimu) from flying to Garbaharey. Moalimu, who had been under house arrest in Mogadishu and relieved of his role, wanted to go to Gedo to campaign for a parliamentary seat (VOA Somali, 2021).

Without noticeable progress and agreement on the election of the 16 lower house seats designated in Gedo, all other federal member states except Hirshabelle have concluded the elections at the time of writing. On 14 April, most of the members of the two chambers of parliament were sworn

in. Hours later, the Federal Election Implementation Team (FEIT) announced that the 16 seats in Gedo cannot be elected in Garbaharey and that the election would take place in Ceelwaaq, the only district in the Gedo region administered by Jubaland. This was welcomed by both the Prime Minister and Jubaland President.

The Jubaland State Election Implementation Team (SEIT) then issued a letter announcing that the election of the 16 seats will be concluded in Ceelwaaq between 18 and 27 April. Politicians from the Gedo region including Abdullahi Kulane, now a newly elected MP, opposed this relocation of the constituency. Authorities in Garbaharey also stated that they would start a parallel process.

Ceelwaaq is a small town on the Somalia-Kenya border. There are two challenges surrounding the relocation of the constituency. First, the 17 September 2020 election agreement was approved by the two chambers of parliament and signed by the president. However, it did not include provisions that would allow changing the procedures agreed upon or the relocation of an election location if there are practical challenges to holding the election there. This is obviously a legal challenge for the recent shift to Ceelwaaq. Second, Ceelwaaq is a small town on the Somalia-Kenya border, and election venues and accommodations have not been prepared. Therefore, some doubt if Ceelwaaq can host and accommodate politicians and electoral delegates if the contest for the seats is opened.

Notwithstanding these challenges, members of FEIT and Jubaland SEIT concluded the election of the 16 seats in Ceelwaaq in two days. On the other hand, a parallel process led by members from FEIT started in Garbaharey. As of 25 April, 16 MPs elected in Ceelwaaq and Garbaharey who were given certificates by FEIT members were in Mogadishu waiting for the swearing-in at the House of the People.

Gedo is without a doubt one of Somalia's most neglected regions. Various atrocities have compounded this marginalization. Recurring droughts, locust invasions, the COVID-19 pandemic, violent conflict, al-Shabaab activities, Kenya arial bombardment (Hornobserver, 2021), and poor representation and leadership are some of the factors that have impacted the region. In addition, Gedo has fallen victim to the rivalry between regional powers that use local politicians for their interests. Their intellectuals have been kept out of the decision-making table.

Despite tens of thousands of boots being deployed to Gedo over the years, al-Shabaab still controls portions of the region. Several development projects that would have been undertaken in Gedo by local and international organizations have been delayed by practical challenges. Many mothers died in different regions of Gedo due to a lack of medical assistance. All major hospitals in Gedo are closed due to disagreements about who is going to benefit from the organizations that will run them. This is happening because of the ineffectiveness of the administration and is a leadership failure.

Triggers of the Gedo Dispute

a. Unaddressed Grievances

Many argue that Gedo's recent protest against being part of the Jubaland state is mainly caused by genuine grievances. Gedo's complaints stem from both inequalities experienced by the dominant clan in Gedo during the elections of the state as well as grievances against the incursion of Kenyan warplanes. Although many argue that the Marehan and Ogaden clan grievances date back many decades, and there were numerous conflicts along the way, the current resentment by a considerable number of Marehan clan members is mainly informed by their present exclusion to fairly contest for the Jubaland state presidency, as well as Jubaland's unwillingness to do something about Kenya's indiscriminate attacks against rural civilians of the Gedo region.

Aside from bombardment, Kenya has started constructing a borderline fence that stretches miles. The Gedo people have interpreted this borderline project as a pretext to usurp a portion of Somalia's territory. This was evidenced by when Kenya was digging the fence on the borderline between Mandera and Balad-Hawo. According to the locals, Kenya drew the line of the fence inside Balad-Hawo, which almost seized a whole neighborhood in the town.

The Jubaland administration has rarely commented on Kenya's bombardment nor its expansion in some parts of Jubaland territory. Jubaland's inaction on Kenya's infringement has nurtured the Gedo inhabitant's grievances against Kenya and Jubaland. In addition, due to Kenya's bombing, many rural residents have abandoned their settlements.

The killing of people from the predominant Gedo clans in Kismayo has been sometimes linked with the Jubaland authority, while others have been deported to Mogadishu for dissenting. The Jubaland administration has divided and governed Gedo areas but brought little development. Furthermore, the Jubaland administration had rarely consulted Gedo intellectuals or assigned them positions of influence. This has led militia to take control of the region's affairs and dominate the decision-making table.

This resentment and many other compounded grievances has helped the government in Mogadishu trigger flashpoints and take advantage of the situation. Gedo actors were resentful of President Ahmed Madobe's inconsiderate attempts to retain the Jubaland presidency by force by rigging the election for the third term. They felt that they were reduced to subordinates to the administering clan rather than being a significant stakeholder. This aggravation was instigated by the 'Nabad & Nolol' faction associated with Somalia's President Farmaajo to turn the Gedo people against Jubaland to score political points. The federal government has found this to be an effective strategy.

b. Greed-induced Motivations

Beyond the legitimate grievances discussed above, there are also other alternative explanations for the Gedo conundrum. Political greed (*damac siyaasadeed*) is another undeniable factor that inflames the Gedo squabble. The federal government has spent millions of dollars to cut Gedo off from the rest of Jubaland. This decision is informed by their political ambition to take control of the Federal Member State.

Aside from the federal government's ambitious crusade for control, the Gedo populace also has their own intention to take the helm of the Jubaland administration. Abdullahi Kulane (now a federal MP), the mastermind behind the Gedo incursion, and his superior President Farmajo's decision to isolate Gedo from Jubaland are informed by their greed to also install their affiliates in Jubaland.

c. Lack of State-level Security

Jubaland doesn't have an inclusive security force – except a few hundred Kambooni forces from the president's clan who are confined to Kismayo. These forces have been accused of constantly harassing people from the main Gedo clans in Kismayo.

The rest are the military from the federal government and some clan forces loyal to certain politicians. There are no Jubaland forces in any of the districts in the Gedo region. This has in part helped the federal government to deploy thousands of the federal military to Gedo and to largely operate without challenge in the region.

Policy Considerations

The recent conflict and the election tussle of the 16 parliamentary seats in Gedo is of importance not only to the Jubaland administration but also to Gedo intellectuals and whoever is interested in the region's affairs. The most important recommendations that we can draw from the dispute in Gedo and ways forward for sustainable stability and cohesion are:

1. The violent conflict in Gedo calls for an urgent and genuine reconciliation. Addressing the resentment of the Gedo inhabitants through the traditional elders is far preferable than isolating or settling the dispute through the barrel of the gun. The Jubaland parliamentary members both state and federal level and ministers should spearhead the mediation efforts between the Jubaland state and the Gedo region, and engage a wider variety of stakeholders in Gedo society in the process.
2. To avert any violent conflict in Gedo, the current Jubaland administration should address the concerns of the Gedo inhabiting clans on the aggression and expansion of the Kenyan government by holding Kenya government accountable for its violation and compensating affected families. Jubaland can't ignore the ariel bombardment of the Gedo civilians if they want to exert authority in the region.
3. The Jubaland administration should form an inclusive security force drawn from the various clans in Jubaland (while considering the integration of armed militias). The current Jubaland security apparatus is dominated by one clan and is primarily loyal to the State President. These inclusive forces should be deployed to the various districts in Jubaland.
4. Jubaland should decentralize power and bring it closer to the population. Since its inception in 2013, Jubaland hasn't made any meaningful attempt to devolve power. Devolving authority and services was the rationale underlying the adoption of federalism in Somalia, and it allows local people to participate, feel a sense of ownership of their destiny rather than having this superimposed, as well as holding local officials to account.

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