



ELECTIONS IN SOMALILAND 2017 AND THEIR AFTERMATH

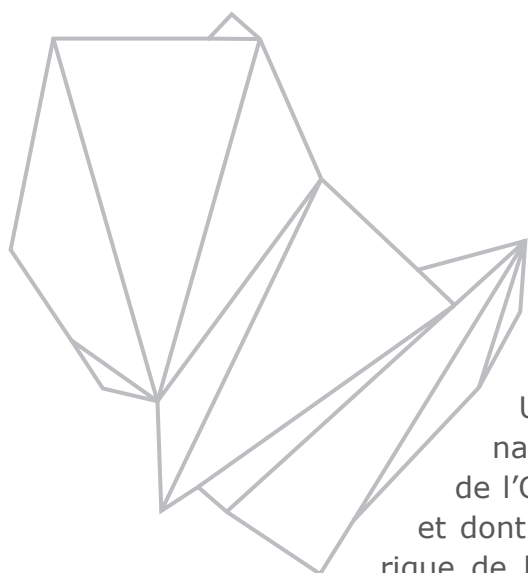
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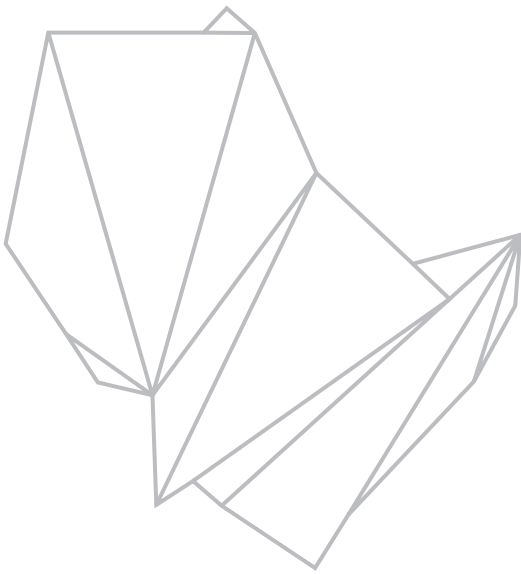
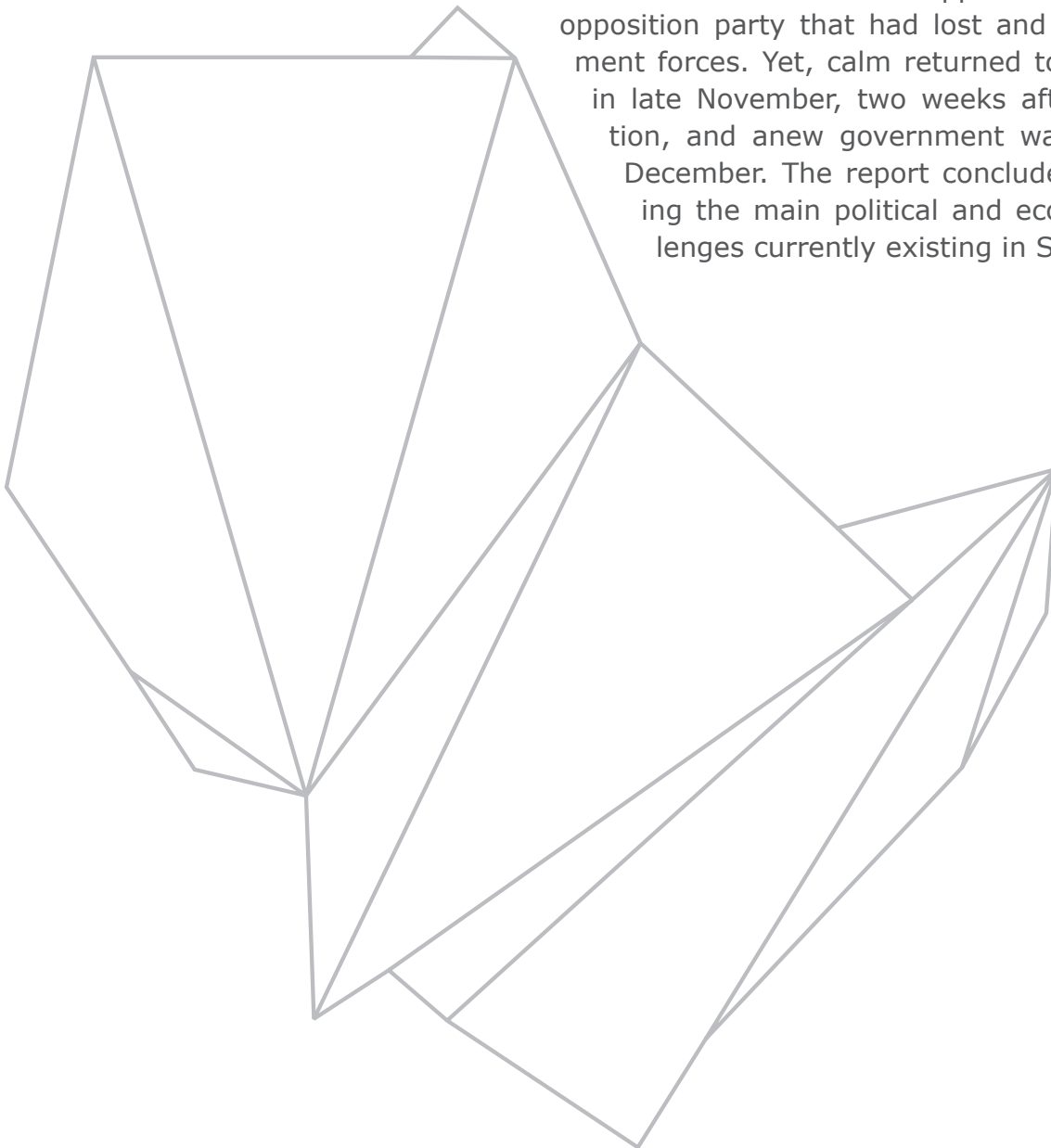


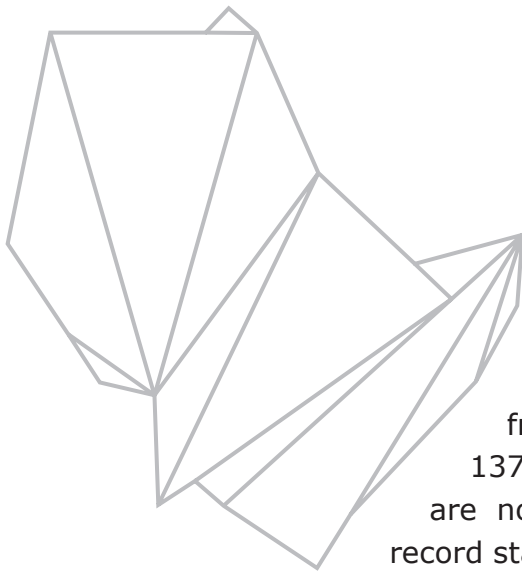
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Abstract

In November 2017, a presidential election was held in Somaliland. This report focuses on the technical and political aspects of the most recent voters-registration and the election. For the first time in Somaliland's history (and even world-wide), biometric technology in the form of iris scanners was used to diminish multiple voting. The use of this technology was successful, in the eyes of many, despite the fact that problems are remaining. This report also looks at the immediate aftermaths of the election. The result of the election was contested, which led to tensions and some violent confrontations between the supporters of the main opposition party that had lost and the government forces. Yet, calm returned to Somaliland in late November, two weeks after the election, and anew government was formed in December. The report concludes by outlining the main political and economic challenges currently existing in Somaliland.





Introduction: Background to Somaliland

Somaliland unilaterally declared its independence from collapsing Somalia on 18 May 1991. With 137.000 km², its size is similar to that of Greece. There are no reliable demographic data. Although an official record states that about 3.5 million people live in Somaliland today, a more realistic number would be around 2-2.5 million. More than half of the population today is below 30 years old. The average life expectancy is, according to Somaliland's own official sources, around 51 years. The population is 100 percent Sunni Muslim.

Northern Somalia: political divisions



Until 26 June 1960, Somaliland was a British Protectorate. After five days of independence, on 1 July 1960, Somaliland united with the Italian administered territory in the northeast and the south of the Somali Peninsula to form the Somali Republic. The democratic government was overthrown in 1969 by a group of military officers headed by Maxamed Siyaad Barre.¹ Between 1977 and 1978 Somalia engaged in the so-called Ogaden war with Ethiopia. After its devastating defeat, General Barre became suspicious of possible contenders. A failed coup-attempt in April 1978 triggered the period of guerrilla warfare. A group of Majeerteen officers established the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). Shortly afterwards Isaaq officers established the Somali National Movement (SNM).² Both groups had their bases in Ethiopia and also received military support from Somalia's arch enemy. In revenge for their guerrilla attacks, the Somali government cracked down on Majeerteen civilians in the northeast (1979-1981) and on the Isaaq civilians in the northwest (1981-1990) and perpetrated massive human rights violations. The seeds of the clan-based fighting, which should engulf all of Somalia after 1990, were sown back then.

A peace-agreement between Ethiopia and Somalia in early 1988 forced the SNM (the SSDF had dissolved in 1985 after internal splits) to enter northern Somalia. The movement captured the two largest towns: Hargeysa and Burco. The government subsequently ordered the national army to bombard these towns, which caused enormous civilian casualties and produced hundreds of thousands of refugees. In early 1991, the SNM took over the central regions of the northwest (where mainly Isaaq resided); simultaneously, other guerrillas entered the capital Mogadishu in the south and ousted the military regime. However, the southern guerrillas started fighting among each other after their victory over Barre. Mogadishu descended into mayhem. The declaration of independence of Somaliland was a reaction to the extreme violence people had suffered at the hands of state officials and state supporters in the decade before 1991. It also happened against the backdrop of the escalation of civil war in the south. This means that the independence of Somaliland was ill-prepared; many leading SNM figures were not supporting it. The international community initially ignored it (Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the UN Secretary-General in the early 1990s was focusing on "peace-building" in Somalia; the secession of Somaliland was a disturbance in that regard). From the late 1990s onward, the international com-

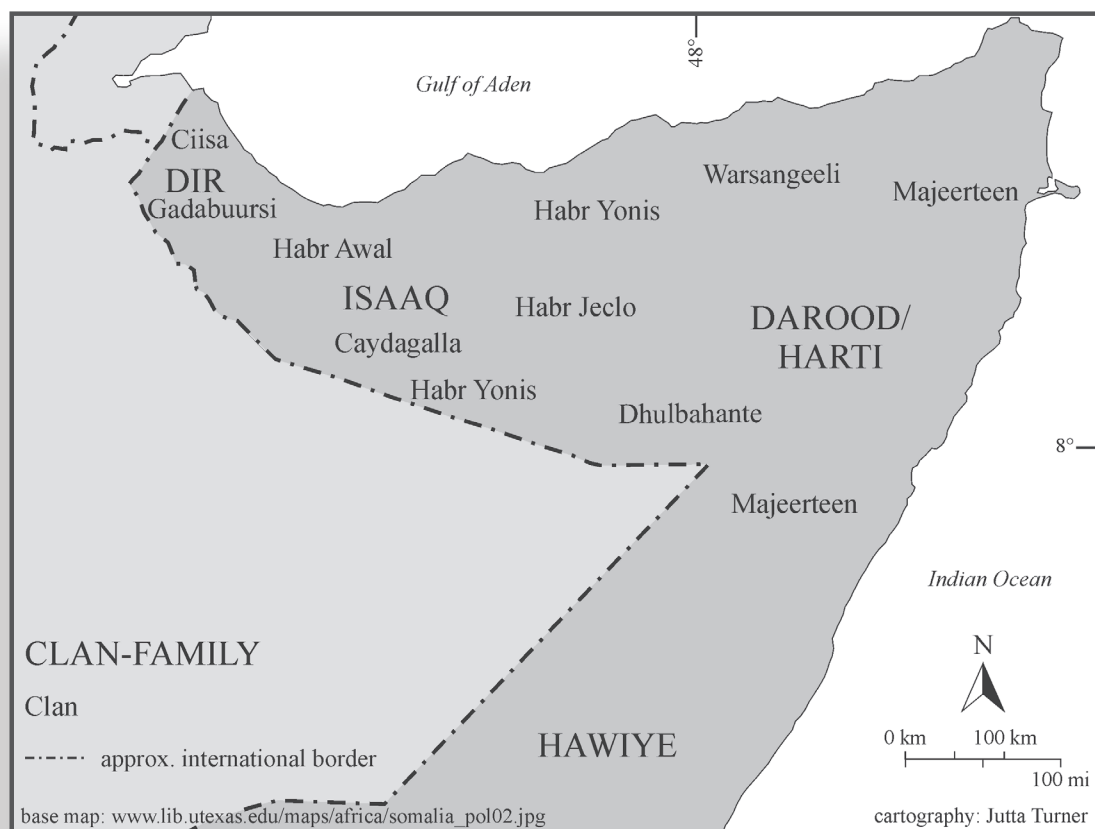
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1. Somali place and personal names in this text follow the Somali orthography (with the exception of 'Mogadishu' [Somali: Moqdisho], which is so well established in English orthography). The Latin 'c' stands for a sound close to the Arabic 'ع' (ayn); 'x' denotes 'ح' (ha), as in, e.g., Laascaanood or in Faarax.
 2. Somali society is usually depicted as segmentary lineage society. Its hallmark is that individuals through reckoning their ancestors in the father's line (patrilineal) situate themselves and are situated by others as members of clan-families, clans, sub-clans and lineages (in descending order) within the "total Somali genealogy" described initially by the British social anthropologist Ioan M. Lewis (Lewis, I.M. 1957. *The Somali Lineage System and the Total Genealogy: A General Introduction to Basic Principles of Somali Political Institutions*. Hargeisa: Somaliland Government; Lewis, I.M. 1961. *A Pastoral Democracy. A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1957 and 1961). In daily life, other orientations like attachment to a locale, adoption into a descent group, friendship, belonging to religious congregations etc. also have a strong impact on peoples' identities (Luling, Virginia 2002. *Somali Sultanate. The Geledi City-State over 150 Years*. London: HAAN, Chapter 5). Still particularly in times of crisis, patrilineal belonging is the most important basis for solidarity among Somalis (Hoehne, Markus V. 2011: *Political Orientations and Repertoires of Identification: State and Identity Formation in Northern Somalia*. PhD Dissertation Martin-Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg, p. 46).

munity (particularly the European Union and some of its member states) began to deal with the regional differences in Somalia and tacitly accepted the special status of "Somaliland". The problem, also from the perspective of the African Union (AU), was that officially recognising Somaliland's secession could lead to conflicts between Somalia and Somaliland and also elsewhere in Africa (the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Mali). Nevertheless, even in the absence of formal recognition, large sections of the Isaaq clan-family – who roughly constitutes two thirds of the population of the country – celebrated independence (and hold on to it until today).

The first decade of Somaliland was wrought with massive problems:

- 1 - Half of the population lived in refugee camps in Ethiopia or in camps for Internally Displaced People (IDP) in Somaliland;
- 2 - the two major towns Hargeysa and Burco lay in ruins;
- 3 - the population was up in arms and the SNM began to fragment; clans and sub-clans within Isaaq fought each other over the very meagre resources of the country;
- 4 - with no natural resources, the backbone of the Somaliland economy was live-stock breeding and export to the Arab peninsula; state revenue was extremely small in the early years; many state-officials hardly received any salary; there were (and are) no social services;
- 5 - clans residing in the west and the east of Somaliland were reluctant about or even opposed to the secession from Somalia.

Northern Somalia: distribution of clans



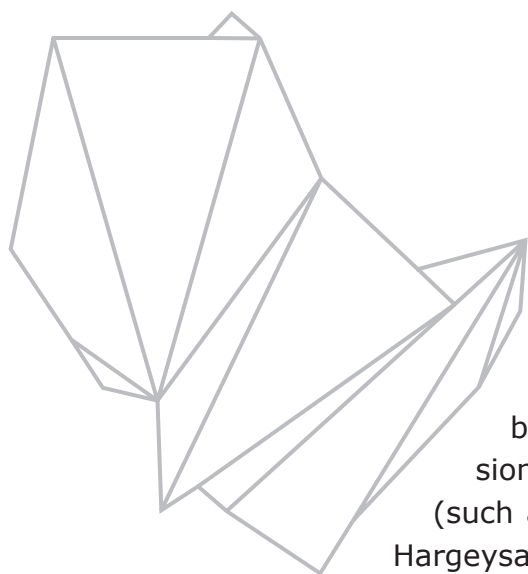
Many of these obstacles were overcome in time through slow consensus-building at inter-clan conferences within the country. Somaliland-supporters in the diaspora contributed money and knowledge and established relations with international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to provide assistance to a people and a state "rising from the ashes". Step by step, a political system was established that guaranteed clan-representation in the government and cooperation among elders, guerrilla leaders and politicians to demobilise militias, share resources and establish peace in much of the territory of Somaliland.³ The economy recovered extremely slowly and, in 2018, the annual budget of the state is just above US\$ 300 million (until 2004, it was only around US\$ 50 million; until 2010, it was around US\$ 100 million). While the budget of the state therefore tripled in the past ten years, public services did not develop accordingly. Most of the "extra-money" of the state went into increasing the salaries of the armed forces (which are still very moderate, with around US\$120 per soldier per month plus some food rations) and to a few infrastructure projects (such as the tarmac road to Ceerigaabo). Certainly, corruption is also a serious problem within the Somaliland government. Survival of the ordinary people and development projects in the country largely depend on external support (by the diaspora, by international NGOs and some donors. Estimates on the amount of annual remittances range from US\$ 500-900 million, equivalent to 35-70 per cent of Somaliland's gross domestic product (GDP). This makes Somaliland one of the world's most remittance-dependent economies.⁴ Official development assistance (ODA) for Somalia totalled US\$ 1.3 billion in 2016.⁵ It can be assumed that roughly one third of this was destined toward Somaliland.

Increasingly, peace and stability in Somaliland also attracted foreign direct investments. The most prominent deal in recent years was the agreement entered in early 2017 between Dubai Port World (DP-World), an Emirati company, and the Somaliland government over the 30-year lease of Berbera port (the country's deep-sea port) to the company in exchange for some 450 million investments in the infrastructure of the port and its surroundings (including a road to the Somaliland and Ethiopian border) and some annual rent for the state. Additional to this "port-deal", the UAE also entered into an agreement over a military base to be built near Berbera. Both deals stirred heated debates in Somaliland in 2016 and 2017. Despite many things remaining unclear (at least in public), the previous government under President Siilaanyo signed them in early 2017, much to the dislike of the opposition.

In sum, since 1991, Somaliland slowly emerged as "de facto state", which is a political entity that exhibits all basic features of a state (government, territory, population),

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3. On the complexities of peace-building and state building in Somaliland, see Bradbury, Mark 2008: *Becoming Somaliland*. Oxford: James Currey and Balthasar, Dominik 2013: Somaliland's best kept secret: shrewd politics and war projects as means of state-making. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2: 218-238.
 4. World Bank 2016: *Somaliland's private sector at a crossroads: Political economy and policy choices for prosperity and job creation*. World Bank: Washington, DC, p. 45.
 5. Aid Coordination Unit Office of Prime Minister Federal Republic of Somalia 2017: "Aid Flows in Somalia Analysis of aid flow data", p. 1; online: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Aid%20Flows%20Booklet%20-%20202017.pdf>

enjoys legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of the population and claims political independence, but is disregarded as sovereign state by the international community (similar cases would be Northern Cyprus, Taiwan, Transnistria etc.).⁶ In comparison to the neighbouring countries, Somaliland exhibits a lively and still emerging democratic system based on multi-party competition introduced in 2002.



Formal democratisation process

The formal democratisation process of Somaliland began in the early 2000s. Previously, political decisions had been taken at “national” clan-conferences (such as the one in Burco in 1991, Boorama in 1993 and Hargeysa in 1997). Constitution-like agreements had been entered between clans under the customary law (Somali: *xeer*).

Some discussions about a formal (oriented toward “western” models of state-building) constitution took place in the late 1990s and a new constitution for the country was finally accepted in a public referendum in 2001. It prescribed the introduction of a multi-party system based on regular elections. In 2002, the first parties were established and, at end of that year, local council elections were held.

The first three positions were taken by UDUB (*Ururka Demoqraadiga Ummada Bahowdey*), Kulmiye and UCID (*Ururka Caddaaladda iyo Daryeelka*). The constitution of Somaliland confines the number of the parties to three. In April 2003, the first presidential election was held. Dahir Rayaale Kaahin, the UDUB-candidate, won (by a very small margin). In September 2005, a parliamentary election was held (this election concerned only the Lower House of the parliament; the Upper House, the *Guurti*, consisted of selected elders and, up until today, no electoral modus for it has been established). President Kahin’s term officially ended in early 2008. Through manipulations of the Upper House and claims to “national emergency”, the president’s term was prolonged to May 2010. The second presidential election happened in June 2010 and, then, Ahmed Mohamed Mohamud Siilaanyo, the candidate of Kulmiye (the main opposition party), won. In 2012, the second local council election happened. UDUB, which had ceased to operate as a national party, was replaced with a new party called Wadani. The official term of President Siilaanyo ended in early 2015, but, again, through manipulations, the term was prolonged for over two years.

6. Pegg, Scott 1998. *International Society and the De Facto State*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

The third presidential election, which was the main subject of this report, took place in November 2017.

An outstanding feature of the above-mentioned elections is that they happened peacefully. In some cases, tensions emerged (e.g. after the presidential election in 2003, when Dahir Rayaale Kahin won with an extremely small margin of some 80 votes; in 2017, when Wadani contested the results of the most recent presidential election). However, apart from some demonstrations – which were dissolved by the police, causing several people to be injured and a handful to be shot – no major violent conflict erupted concerning the elections. This contrasts strongly with the situation in all neighbouring countries, where either no elections are held or, if they are held, they are highly corrupted and/or riddled with massive violence before, during and especially after the voting day. Moreover, the elections in Somaliland were observed by national and international missions of observers.

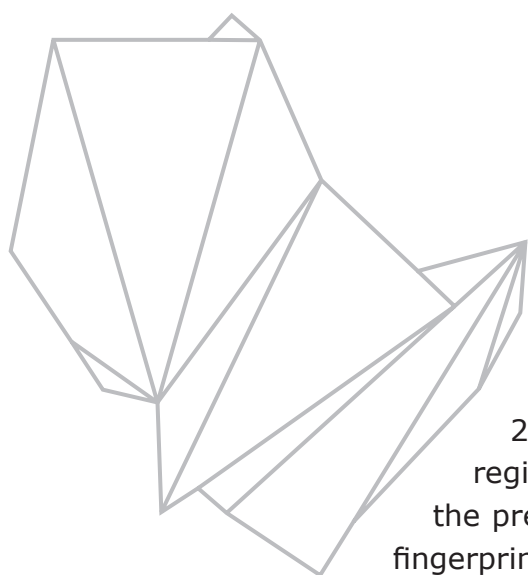
The international missions, however, were not “official” in the sense that they had been sent by the UN or another international body; the external missions were self-organised by Somaliland-supporters. A key driver behind the most recent international observers mission was, according to a knowledgeable source in Hargeysa, Somaliland’s ambassador to the UK, Ayaan Mahamoud (nominated by President Siilaanyo). Officially, Dr. Michael Walls, a long-term analyst of Somaliland’s state formation (focussing his research mainly on the area between Hargeysa, Berbera and Burco), organised and headed the mission. It consisted “of 60 observers from 27 countries, selected to balance gender, nationality and relevant experience”⁷. The mission’s official report, that was published on 15 March 2018, stressed:

“After intensive training in Hargeisa, the observation team deployed across Somaliland for election day, covering all six regions of Somaliland and 17 of the 21 districts, observing in 355 polling stations (22% of the 1,642 in operation), covering a mix of urban and rural locations as far west as the town of Seylac and surrounding rural areas and as far east as Erigavo, Las Anod, Xudun, and surrounds. Opening procedures were observed in 27 polling stations, closing and counting in 30 stations and tabulation in 12 tallying centres. The mission was able to report a largely peaceful and well-organised polling day in areas observed, albeit with some concerns, including around inconsistencies in polling station management, some irregularities in the voting process, such as the issuing of unstamped ballot papers, and the prevalence of under-age voting.”

7. *International Election Observation Mission 2018: The limits of consensus? Report on the Somaliland Presidential Election*, 13th November 2017. Development Planning Unit, The Bartlett, University College London.

This generally positive assessment of the election is in line with previous reports by observers' missions (which, since the 2010 presidential elections, has involved Dr. Michael Walls in a leading function; before that, Mark Bradbury, another well-known British Somaliland-observer, was involved as a key actor) that regularly confirmed the relatively fair and transparent conduct of the elections. The current and previous reports can be found on the website of the Somaliland National Electoral Commission (NEC) (www.slneec.com/).

While there is no basis for fundamental doubts about the general correctness of these relatively positive findings concerning the conduct of the elections, at least for the past years, it is also clear that the observers mission partly consists of strong Somaliland-supporters some of whom would qualify as political advocates. One former member of the mission for the presidential election 2010 mentioned that many diaspora Somalilanders were added (at least back in 2010) to the international mission (since they are foreign passport holders, they were eligible as international observers even if they hailed by patrilineal descent from and/or resided in Somaliland). The former observer argued that, clan-wise, many diaspora observers had been close to the candidate Axmed Maxamed Siilaanyo back then and that the infrastructure used, like hotels in certain places, had been related to the candidate's clan. While this is certainly no "proof" of any misconduct, it hints at the possibility of "selecting" international observers related to their "Somaliland-friendliness" or even "candidate-friendliness", which is a matter that could of course also influence the conduct of the mission.



The preparation of the recent elections

The voter registration process began in January 2016. This process was different from the previous registration (in 2008-2009) in several regards. First, the previous registration was based on fingerprints. Many fingerprints were lost from the data or, often, they were not properly taken. Many people were registered multiple times. At the end, there were many people who held ten voter-cards or more. In this particular case, Interpeace (a major international NGO engaged in Somaliland since the late 1990s, when it was still called the War-Torn-Societies Project) was the major facilitator of the process and several EU-countries were providing around 75 percent of the budget for the registration (and the election). Regarding the recent registration (and

election) process, the ratio was the other way around. More than half of the costs were paid by the Somaliland government, and the rest was paid by the donors. The changing ratio of payments was most probably an expression of increased “ownership” by the Somaliland government concerning the registration and the election. It may have been the result of the pressure from donors on Hargeysa to conduct elections in an orderly way – and refrain from derailing the registration and the elections, as it happened in the past (particularly between 2008 and 2010). The registration process for the most recent election was also a biometric voter registration process, but, for the first time in history (of any country), iris scanners were used in a “national” election, to diminish the possibility of double voting.⁸ One challenge was that this technology required a stable internet connection. While there is remarkably good internet in many parts of Somaliland, including the countryside, today, in some places where the registration took place, the connection was not sufficient or non-existing. This problem was overcome since the iris scanner also could work offline and would send the collected data to the central server once the internet coverage was sufficient.

The registration process went on in two phases. Initially, people registered throughout the six (old) regions of the country (Awdal, Saaxil, Maroodi Jeex, Togdheer, Sool and Sanaag). This process started mid-January 2016 and completed at the end of September 2016. In the second phase, voter cards were handed out to those who had correctly been registered. This took between April and late August 2017.⁹ A problem for the whole registration process was that it happened during an extended drought period in Somaliland. Many people in the countryside were either on the move (also into Ethiopia or Puntland) or were otherwise not able to register. This means that most probably, a large number of IDPs originally from Somaliland could not vote.

Second, and closely related to the first point, during the previous voter registration (in 2008/2009), around 1.2 million people were registered and cards were delivered. The implication was that massive “double/multiple” registration and then, after some corrections, still “double/multiple” voting happened during the past presidential elections in 2010. During the registration in 2016, some 873,000 people registered. The number of those who registered included people who were 16 years old and older (officially). But without civil registry in place in Somaliland, it is difficult to establish the age of a person. Besides, some people came from outside of Somaliland to be registered. Elders were asked in case of doubt to establish the age and rightful claim of a person to vote. Of course, there were some doubts about the accuracy of this measure. The voting process was regulated in the law No. 37 (*xeerka diwangelinta*). This law also regulates that, six months before the election, a new registration of

8. <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Somaliland-1st-in-World-to-Use-Iris-Scanner-Technology-to-Stem-Voter-Fraud-20171114-0006.html> ; see also <http://www.interpeace.org/2016/01/somaliland-successfully-launches-voter-registration/>

9. <http://www.horndiplomat.com/2017/10/24/somalilandconclusion-of-the-voter-registration-process-and-election-preparationsbriefing-paper-9/>

those who recently reached maturity age needs to be conducted. Of all those registered until mid-2016, only around 703,000 picked up their voter cards.¹⁰ The number of those who finally cast their vote was around 565,000. This number does, due to the process used for registration and then voting, most probably include very little “double/multiple” voting unlike the preceding elections.

Third, in terms of regional outreach, the most recent presidential election reached to places that had not been covered before. This concerned particularly in the extensive eastern and south-eastern margins of Somaliland. The election 2017 happened between the far west (Seylac, Boorama) and the eastern areas including Widhwidh, Xudun, Taleex, Laascaanood and Xadaftiimo. During the previous presidential and local council elections (2010 and 2012 respectively), most of the places in the east, with the exception of Laascaanood, the capital of Sool region, were not reached. The most recent election did not happen only in a few (but still politically significant) places such as Laas Qoray, Badhan and Dahar (in eastern Sanaag) and Boocame and Buuhoodle (in eastern Sool and southern Togdheer region), respectively. Regarding the percentage of voters not reached in those places, it is difficult to present concrete numbers. The aforementioned places are located in the far eastern periphery of Somaliland and in the Hawd (at the border with Ethiopia) which are sparsely populated areas. In general, one could assume that a total of some 80-100,000 people reside in these places, of whom 30-40 percent would be eligible voters. It means that possibly around 30,000 eligible voters, or around 3.5 percent of all those who registered in the first place (circa 873,000 people registered in the first place), were not reached.

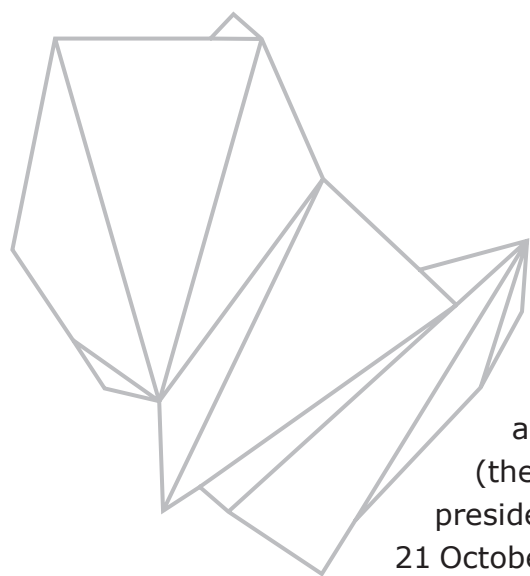
Nonetheless, the positive significance of this outreach is that, for the first time in Somaliland’s history as “de facto state”, more people in the east have been included than ever before. Those people in the east, who mainly belong to the Dhulbahante and Warsangeli clans which are part of the Harti-clan confederation of the Darood clan family, have been openly opposed to Somaliland for the better part of the past twenty years. The political distance between them and Somaliland (as a political project) has been expressed before 2003 through the absence of any serious administration of Somaliland in their clan homelands (Sing.: *degaan*). Between 2004 and 2007, Puntland, the eastern neighbour of Somaliland whose government wishes to re-establish a united Somalia and therefore opposes the secession of Somaliland, increased its influence in the areas inhabited by Warsangeli and Dhulbahante. In 2007, the military of Somaliland captured Laascaanood, the capital of Sool, which is Dhulbahante-inhabited. Between 2009 and 2014, the Dhulbahante formed armed militia groups (the first was called Sool Sanaag iyo Can [SSC]; the successor became Khaatumo) that engaged Somaliland forces between Taleex, Laascaanood and Buuhoodle. The Khaatumo movement broke down only recently at the end of 2015 and in early 2016 (due to lack of funding and leadership) and it seems that, in the past two to three years, Somaliland has gained a substantial foothold at least in many

10. <http://www.thenational-somaliland.com/2017/10/10/nec-releases-final-figure-eligible-voters/>

Dhulbahante areas. Eastern Sanaag (where the Warsangeli reside) is still out of reach for Somaliland.

The increased regional outreach in the east does not mean that many (in absolute numbers) Dhulbahante and Warsangeli people voted. Again, it is impossible to provide absolute numbers. Yet, if one assumes that some 300-400,000 Dhulbahante and Warsangeli people reside in Somaliland, of whom possibly 30-40 percent would be eligible voters, some 100-150,000 Dhulbahante and Warsangeli could have voted; however, only some 30,000, or around 20-25 per cent, actually did. Still, it means that in this recent presidential election, a precedence was established and it is likely that more people who reside in the eastern margins of Somaliland will participate in future elections.

Fourth and finally (about the preparation of the elections), in the 23 electoral districts 1,642 polling stations were established. The aim of this high number of polling stations was to limit the number of voters to about 500-700 at each polling station. Often it was much less. Each polling station had a list with the name, the card number and the picture of the voter who was enlisted only by his/her "home" polling station. If he/she was not there at the voting day, he/she could not vote. The aim of all this (including the iris scanning mentioned above) was to reduce double voting and speed up the process of voting and counting so everything could be concluded in one day.



The contenders and the elections

The three national parties Kulmiye (the ruling party) and Wadani (a leading opposition party) and UCID (the oldest opposition party) contended in the 2017 presidential elections. The official campaigning period was 21 October to 10 November 2017. It was preceded by the first ever TV-debate, shown live on Facebook and on nine Somali-language television channels, between the presidential candidates. During this debate, the candidates, Muuse Biixi (Kulmiye), Cabduraxmaan Cirro (Wadani) and Faysal Cali Waraabe (UCID), took positions on several key issues, such as strengthening the democratic process in Somaliland, fighting clannism and corruption, improving the economy to resolve rampant unemployment, widening distribution of better-quality health care, rebuilding and streamlining education and pursuing recognition for

Somaliland's independence (not only through talks with other countries but also through discussing the relationship between Somalia and Somaliland).

The general sentiment was that the key contenders, Muuse Biixi and Cabduraxmaan Cirro, were on guard and carefully avoided taking extreme positions. In many areas, they took relatively similar stances. The candidate of the UCID, Faysal Cali Waraabe, knew that he had no chance to win and therefore was freer to express opinions that were likely to offend some people (he, for instance, mentioned that Somaliland was a democratic but not a liberal country; it would not allow liberal positions like same-sex marriage, a taboo topic among Somalis many of whom, for religious reasons, would not vote for gay-rights advocates). All candidates took a clear position on Somaliland's independence from Somalia.¹¹ Yet, in some discussions with people in Hargeysa, the assessment was that Cabduraxmaan Cirro was probably more lenient on the question of how to relate to the "south" (Somalia including Puntland), whereas Muuse Biixi was seen as more anti-Somalia. This may be related to the personal and clan-backgrounds of these two candidates.

Caduraxmaan Cirro was born in Hargeysa in 1955. After his education, he entered the diplomatic service and was placed in the Somali embassy in Moscow until 1996 and then in Finland until he eventually returned to Somaliland in 1999. He established the Wadani party in 2012 and became its chairman. After the local council election in 2012 he became the speaker of the parliament (Lower House). By clan, he is Isaaq/Habar Yoonis/Muuse Cabdalle (who reside mainly in and around Berbera, Sheekh and up to Burco). Habar Yoonis in general reside in a widely stretched territory, from Gashaamo in Ethiopia's Somali region to Hargeysa, Berbera, Sheekh and Burco to Ceerigaabo and Maydh.

Muuse Biixi was born in Hargeysa in 1948. He graduated from Amuud and Sheekh (secondary schools) and was sent for higher education to the USA in the 1960s. He became a military officer and received further education in Russia (in the 1970s) and the USA (in the early 1980s). In 1985, he did not return to Somalia from a training he had received in the USA but went to join the SNM in Ethiopia. By then he was a colonel (*ganshanle dhexe*) and would have become a full colonel (*gashanle sare*) if he had returned to Somalia. In the SNM, he soon played an important role as a senior officer. After the victory of the SNM in the northwest, he played several key roles in the country's military and political affairs until the mid-1990s. Later on, he joined Kulmiye as the vice-chairman and finally became the chairman and a presidential candidate. By clan, Muuse Biixi is Isaaq/Habar Awal/Sacad Muuse from Hargeysa. His clan-relatives are concentrated in and around Hargeysa and up to Gabiley in the west and a few places south of Hargeysa (including places in Ethiopia like Xarshin, which are close to the Somaliland border).

11. For an interesting summary of key positions during the TV debate, see <http://www.thenational-somaliland.com/2017/10/26/somalilands-2017-presidential-candidates-stand-key-issues/>

Faysal Cali Waraabe was born in Hargeysa in 1948. He became a civil engineer and received some education in Russia. He worked in southern Somalia and, when the state collapsed in 1991, he went to Finland, where he stayed until the late 1990s. Upon returning to Somaliland, he established the UCID party in 2002 and has been in the opposition camp in Somaliland's politics ever since. He officially stands for a liberal-social market economy. However, for many years, his party was considered to be a "one man show". He never had a serious chance to win in any of Somaliland's election. By clan, he is Isaaq/Ciidagale. His clan resides in Hargeysa and south of it up to Ethiopia's Somali Region. On a higher level of genealogy, Habar Yoonis and Ciidagale are related as Habar Garxajis. However, as a contender in the election, there was no Habar Garxajis unity established.¹²

The above-mentioned difference (that some people in Somaliland emphasised) between the two main contenders, Muuse Biixi and Cabduraxmaan Cirro, concerning relations to Somalia could be explained with reference first to the fact that Habar Yoonis (Cabduraxmaan Cirro's group) reside much beyond the borders of Somaliland, whereas Habar Awal and particularly Muuse Biixi's sub-clan, Sacad Muuse, is largely concentrated within (western) Somaliland. Second, and possibly more important, is the fact that Muuse Biixi has a long history of struggle as a military officer against the regime of Maxamed Siyaad Barre and that he never went abroad except for brief visits. Cabduraxmaan Cirro, on the other hand, has been part of the government in the diplomatic service until the end of the Barre-regime (and beyond) and only returned to Somaliland in the late 1990s. Muuse Biixi is generally considered to be (and also himself wishes to come across as) a "tough guy".

The election took place on 13 November 2017. The day passed without any major disturbances. Two leading members of the international observers' mission outlined the following:

"Hundreds of voters were queued outside polling stations hours before they opened at 7:00 AM. In total, 555,142 voters cast ballots, a turnout of 78.85 percent of those who picked up their registration cards and 63.57 percent of all those who registered to vote. Domestic and international observers noted minor irregularities in places but nothing that affected the overall integrity of the election. In addition to the concern about potentially underage voters, probably the most consistent departure from international electoral norms concerned the secrecy of the ballot. Many Somalilanders do not feel a need to keep their preferences secret and disabled or illiterate voters would often enter a polling station and loudly proclaim the party for which they wished to vote, requesting assistance to do so. In some polling stations, officials would try to explain how to vote for that party, while asking the voter to mark the

12. For some interesting information on the contenders biographies, see: <http://www.bbc.com/somali/41926837> (on Muuse Biixi), http://www.bbc.com/somali/faaqidaad/2010/06/100602_faysalcali (Faysal Cali Waraabe), and <http://www.bbc.com/somali/41925997> (Cabduraxmaan Cirro).

ballot themselves. In other polling stations, officials would mark the ballot for the voter in accordance with his or her wish. In all such cases, the ballot would be shown to any domestic, international or political party observers present so they could see that the voter's clearly expressed preference was honored."¹³

It is noteworthy that, from the afternoon of the elections onward until 17 November 2018, the government of Somaliland blocked all access to social media sites including Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. This controversial step was taken to prevent the spread of rumours and fake news in the social media.¹⁴

Some additional problems with the election were that, in some cases, the pictures which were printed on the voters' list in each polling station (listed were the name, voter care number and picture of each voter assigned to the respective polling station) were of such poor quality that the persons in charge of the voting in a station could not always use them for recognising voters. This may have led to some fraudulent uses of voter cards of people who were absent on that day, were ill or had already deceased, by others (presumably friends or relatives). While this means that there was a certain possibility of illegitimate voting, it certainly was not a very widespread problem.

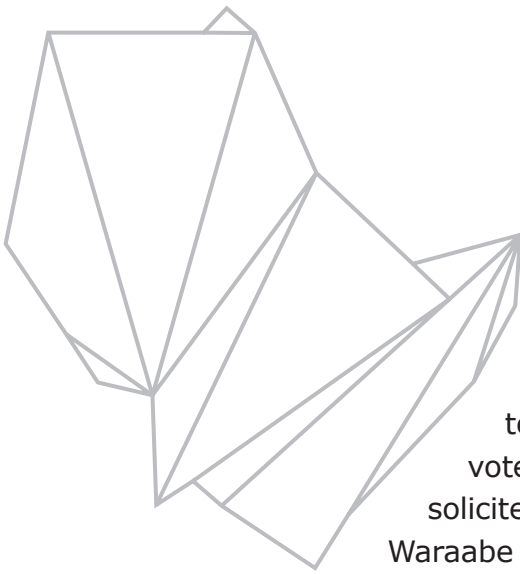
While the voting day was overall a peaceful day in Somaliland, in six out of the 1,642 polling stations, conflicts escalated and prevented proper voting. These six stations were all located in Sanaag region. The issues there concerned tensions within the local communities; it mostly concerned Dhulbahante/Naaleeye Axmed-inhabited villages. As mentioned above, only in a very few places, no polling stations could be established at all. This was the case in Buuhoodle, Dahar, Badhan and Boocame. In the areas around Buuhoodle and Badhan, however, voting happened.

Each of the three competing parties, Wadani, Kulmiye and UCID had the right to send one observer to each polling station. UCID did not send many observers, since it was clear that the party had no chance to win. But Wadani and Kulmiye covered all stations. These observers were entitled to observe the voting and to receive the final results from each station at night after the station closed. Counting started at 6pm.

Once the results were announced in each station, all present party representatives were required to sign the results and thereby confirm their correctness. Then the results were sent by each party member to the district election headquarters of his/her party, where party representatives again collected all results from all stations in the district. Finally, the results from there were sent to the regional headquarters and to the center – via SMS (internet was shut down during the elections). This means that the results were known to every party already in the early morning, hours after the polling stations had closed and before the NEC officially announced the results.

13. Pegg, Scott and Michael Walls 2018: Back on Track? Somaliland after its 2017 Presidential Election, *African Affairs*, Volume 117, Issue 467: 326–337.

14. Pegg, Scott and Michael Walls 2018: Back on Track? Somaliland after its 2017 Presidential Election, *African Affairs*, Volume 117, Issue 467: 326–337.



The immediate aftermath of the elections

The results of the elections were as follows according to the NEC: Muuse Biixi of Kulmiye received 305,909 votes (55.1 percent), Cabduraxmaan Cirro of Wadani solicited 226,092 votes (40.73 percent) and Faysal Cali Waraabe of UCID received 23,141 votes (4.17 percent). Invalid were 10,475 votes. In total, 565,617 votes were cast. The turnout, compared to all registered voters who later on had picked up their voter cards (704,198 registrations) was 80.32 percent.¹⁵ However, these results were announced only days later despite speedy tallying of votes. The reason was the conflict that conflict between the NEC and the main opposition party, Wadani, escalated after the elections.

One high-ranking Wadani representative interviewed for this report stressed that, in some polling stations, the observers sent by Wadani had been threatened and kicked out of the station. This happened particularly in Hargeysa and Gabiley and also parts of Saxiil region. The Wadani representative herself was forced out of a station in Biyo Dhacay neighbourhood in Hargeysa, at which she was supposed to work and observe the voting and counting. Subsequently she was imprisoned for one night.¹⁶ According to her, such mishandling of Wadani observers happened in several cases. She also mentioned that at least one book containing pre-stamped ballot papers (normally, these papers were supposed to be stamped only in the presence of a voters using them) was found, which hinted at some organised misconducts during the voting. Her allegations were that Wadani representatives were excluded from stations in which, during the counting process, massive vote rigging happened (in favour of Kulmiye party). Also, the pre-stamped ballot papers were allegedly used to increase the votes for Kulmiye. While such far-reaching allegations naturally have to be considered carefully, it is noteworthy that Horn Cable TV (which is generally considered as a relatively reliable channel in Somaliland and beyond) broadcasted the summary of a press conference which the chairman of the NEC and the candidate of Wadani, Cabduraxmaan "Cirro" held together on 18 November 2017. At this press conference, the NEC-chairman admitted that the book with the pre-stamped ballot papers had been found in Saxiil region and that it indeed was an official book (that should not have been pre-stamped).¹⁷

15. <http://www.slneec.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Final-PollingStation-Results.pdf>

16. On 15 November 2017 she was interviewed on the matter; the interview can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWZwcUfcnGU>

17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G83x4bY-tlo>

The opposition demanded the recounting of the votes in Maroodi Jeex region, especially in Hargeysa and Gabiley district. The idea was that, in most other districts, the voting had been up to expectations. In some regions (Awdal, Sanaag and Togdheer), Wadani was leading by a relatively small margin of some 2,000 votes per region. In others (like Saaxil and Sool), the ruling party Kulmiye was leading by several thousand votes. However, in Maroodi Jeex region, where Gabiley and the capital Hargeysa are located and where Habar Awal (and especially Sacad Muuse – the sub-clan of Muuse Biixi) dominate, Kulmiye was leading with around 70,000 votes. Wadani suspected that, at the Habar Awal (Sacad Muuse) tallying centres, massive corruption had happened. Subsequently, the NEC and Wadani fought over the recounting. Wadani representatives demanded specific ballot boxes to be checked. But according to a high-ranking party representative, the NEC refused the recounting of exactly these boxes and instead presented others for recounting. The wrangling over the recounting went on for a week. During this time, Cabduraxmaan Cirro spoke publicly about corruption and that the NEC had misguided the election. Tensions flared up and demonstrations and riots happened in several towns of Somaliland, where Wadani supporters took to the streets. Between 16 and 20 November, several people were shot and injured when the police opened fire on demonstrators in Burco, Hargeysa and Ceerigaabo.¹⁸

Eventually, the Wadani leadership took an unanimous decision to stop complaining about the election for the sake of peace in Somaliland. The recounting of uncontested ballot boxes had not brought any new results. On 21 November 2017, the NEC transmitted the preliminary results to the Constitutional Court for confirmation. A week later, on 28 November 2017, the Court confirmed and released the results.¹⁹

One of the key promises of Muuse Biixi (and also the other candidates) during the campaign was to nominate a smaller cabinet. On 14 December 2017, President Muuse Biixi nominated 23 ministers and nine vice-ministers for his cabinet. By that, he cut down the previous number of ministers, vice-ministers and state ministers under President Siilaanyo by 50 percent. Nevertheless, he increased the number of “director positions”, some of which replaced previous ministers.

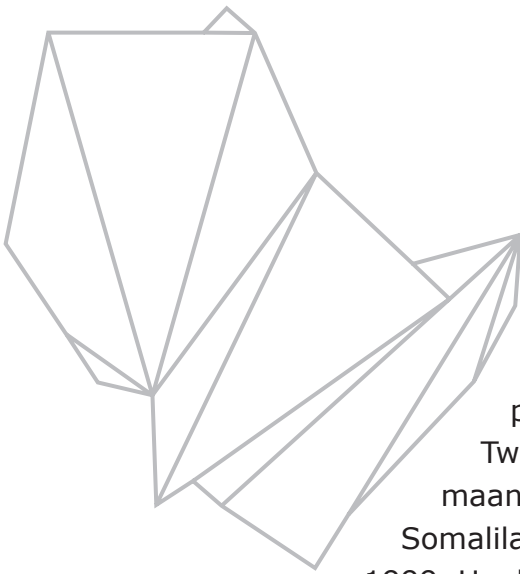
Like his predecessors, Muuse Biixi had to carefully balance clan interests in the now smaller cabinet (on the influence of “clan” in Somaliland’s elections, see below). Of the 23 ministers, four are Harti (three Dhulbahante and one Warsangeli), four are Dir (three Gadabursi and one Ciise) and 15 are Isaaq (four Habar Garxaajis – three Habar Yoonis, one Ciidagale; two Carab; five Habar Jeclo; four Habar Awal – two Sacad Muuse, two Ciise Muuse). There are a few prominent individuals from older days (Sacad Cali Shire – the minister of Foreign Affairs, who is Habar Awal/Ciise Muuse; Maxamed Kaahin – the Interior minister, who is Habar Jeclo/Reer Daahir; and Saaleebaan Yuusuf Cali Kore – the minister of Water, who is Dhulbahante/Nuur Axmed). However, many ministers are new faces and are considered as inexperienced.

18. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201711200175.html>

19. <http://www.somtribune.com/2017/11/28/somaliland-constitutional-court-validates-interim-election-results/>

There are still some unsolved technical problems that may affect the next elections. The equipment used for registration (iris scanners) was bought by the Somaliland government. It is stored by the NEC. Also, the cards of those people who registered but did not collect (some 170,000 cards) are stored by the NEC. It is unclear what will happen to these cards and how, if at all, they will be given to their legitimate owners. The more serious problem for the coming elections (a parliamentary election is scheduled for April 2019) is how to control the age of the voters. The biometric registration in combination with the voters' lists including pictures in the polling stations effectively minimised "double/multiple" voting. However, a remaining problem is the absence of civil registry in Somaliland and the lack of certainty of a person's age. The Ministry of Interior, Maxamed Kaahin, is now tasked with the establishment of a civil registry (including birth certificates), but it will take a very long time until this system works (if it will at all). This is no short-term solution for this problem of under-age voting. The current solution is that, in the case of doubt, the parents are called upon and asked to confirm the age and swear on the Koran.

Regarding the upcoming parliamentary elections, some discussions have started about quota for women and members of minority groups. Somaliland politics is still male-dominated. While there are some female ministers, only a very few members of the Lower House are female. In the *Guurti* (the Upper House), women are generally not accepted (one woman "inherited" the seat of her husband but, was after some time, pressured to leave the seat to a male relative). The members of the Lower House agreed to a quota for women of ten percent, but the Upper House (*Guurti*) refused. The *Guurti* members argued that, according to the constitution of the country, everyone should have the same chance. Nagaad, the women's organisation umbrella, is the strongest advocate for the women's quota in the parliament. Also, Gabooye (a collective name for several minority groups in Somaliland) now wishes to have their quota in the parliament. However, they have no strong organisation that is collectively representing them. Moreover, they are in opposition to Kulmiye and therefore have little chance to solicit official support.



Remaining political problems

The final election result is unambiguous. However, tensions remain. The first question to ask is what possibly brought about the victory of Muuse Biixi. Two main points can be made here: First, Cabduraxmaan Cirro is still considered to be a “late-comer” to Somaliland politics, despite his presence there since around 1999. He did not actively participate in the struggle of the SNM nor did he live through the hard times and the rebuilding in the northwest/Somaliland. Moreover, he is not rhetorically skilled. Another problem of Cabduraxmaan Cirro was that he kept his position as speaker of the House (Lower House, *Goolaha Wakiilaha*) too long. In that position, he was supposed to act “neutrally” and sign the decisions of the parliament, which was dominated by Kulmiye Members of Parliament (MPs). Thus, he had to sign decisions that he, as leader of Wadani, was actually criticising, and this brought him a plethora of criticism by his own supporters as well as confusion among the voters. Until shortly before the election campaign, it was unclear for what Cabduraxmaan Cirro stood. Muuse Biixi, on the other hand, has never been abroad for long in the past 30 years. He has fought with the SNM and lived through the different phases of Somaliland since 1991.

Second, Muuse Biixi managed to unite the Habar Awal clan, which consists of the two main sub-clans of Ciise Muuse and Sacad Muuse. They are not automatically in good terms. It was Muuse Biixi’s personality that facilitated the Habar Awal unity. He has a “good history” within the clan. He was a former SNM commander and a good friend of Ibrahim Degaweyne (Habar Awal/Ciise Muuse from Berbera), another SNM hero. Biixi helped Col. Degaweyne to defend Berbera in 1992 against the attempts of Cabduraxmaan Tuur, the last SNM chairman and the first Somaliland president, who, by clan, was Habar Yoonis/Muuse Carre, to capture the port as asset for his government. Under President Maxamed Xaji Ibraahim Cigaal (Habar Awal/Ciise Muuse), Muuse Biixi was the Minister of Interior between 1993 and 1995. He was considered as one of the drivers of the war in Hargeysa and Burco 1993-1995, in which the government of President Cigaal fought against an alliance of Habar Yoonis and Ciidagale militias. The fighting escalated when the government of President Cigaal attempted to gain control over the Hargeysa airport held by Ciidagale militias.²⁰ Habar Yoonis were disgruntled about the loss of power of “their” president, Cabduraxmaan Tuur. They united with the Ciidagale as Garxajiis (as mentioned above). In this conflict,

20. For an insightful analysis of this episode in Somaliland’s state formation, see Balthasar, Dominik 2013: Somaliland’s best kept secret: shrewd politics and war projects as means of state-making. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2: 218-238.

Muuse Biixi was on the “right side” from an Habar Awal point of view (defending the presidency of Maxamed Xaaji Ibraahim Cigaal). Later around 1995, President Cigaal removed Muuse Biixi from his ministerial position. This was part of Cigaal’s long-term plan to use and then “get rid of” former SNM-commanders who, until the mid-1990s, constituted a permanent threat to civilian politics in Somaliland. Besides his early history of supporting Habar Awal/Ciise Muuse politics, Muuse Biixi is married to a Ciise Muuse woman.

For these reasons, Muuse Biixi was able to unite Habar Awal. This brought him the votes of one of the most populous groups in central Somaliland (Habar Awal mainly reside from Gabiley and Hargeysa to Berbera and Sheekh). Additionally, supported by the outgoing president, Axmed Siilaanyo, who is Habar Jeclo/Aaden Madoobe by clan, Muuse Biixi could secure votes in another very populous clan – the Habar Jeclo (residing predominantly in and around Burco, the second largest town of Somaliland). While initially some Habar Jeclo might have been concerned about a possible Habar Awal dominance, it is likely that some agreements between representatives of both groups have been struck before the election about a considerable share of Habar Jeclo in government under Muuse Biixi. Officially, the Kulmiye strategists called this alliance *jeegaan*, meaning “rainbow”. Critics of course mentioned that a “rainbow” would have more than two colours, therefore, a really broad political alliance should consist of more than two major descent groups. Yet, for Kulmiye it was a support base broad enough to succeed in the elections.

Wadani had supporters in many different clans, but its power base was the Habar Yoonis (the group of Cabduraxmaan Cirro). They inhabit a wide stretch of land, but they are less populous. While therefore it looked as if Muuse Biixi and his Kulmiye party would have an easy ride, things changed slightly in October 2016. A group of well-known Kulmiye politicians joined Wadani, led by the former Minister of the Presidency, Xersi Cali (Habar Jeclo). Among them were MP Cabdulqadir Ismaciil Jirdeh (Carab) and a former justice minister Xuseen Axmed Caydiid (Carab). They brought their own followers and ample financial resources with them, which stirred up heated competition between Kulmiye and Wadani. Yet, at the end, the strength of Muuse Biixi to hold together the Habar Awal clan most probably secured his victory (voter registration showed that, in the region of Maroodi Jeex alone, with its centre Hargeysa, more than 250,000 valid votes were cast, which is almost 50 percent of the number of all valid votes cast throughout the country. Of these votes in Maroodi Jeex, Muuse Biixi received 61 percent. It is no exaggeration to say that who wins in Hargeysa, most likely wins the elections. In the 2017 presidential elections, the Habar Awal alliance of the Kulmiye candidate stood firm.

Of course, it would be too simple to reduce it all to clan belonging. First, personal preferences among voters, even among those belonging by descent to the main power blocs (Habar Awal, Habar Jeclo, Habar Yoonis), have to be considered. While many people in Somaliland most likely voted for their clan, patrilineal belonging is no “fate”. Individuals have a choice and some use it to stand against the grain (i.e.,

their own descent group). Second, people belonging to the other, smaller clans (e.g., Isaaq/Carab, Gadabuursi, Dhulbahante) were less intensively genealogically bound to vote for a certain candidate. Therefore, indeed the personality of Muuse Biixi – as outlined above – clearly made a difference.

On a side note, it seems that Muuse Biixi is now mobilising his old “*calan cas*” connections, dating from the time of the SNM. *Calan cas* (meaning red flag) was a group of formerly socialist-trained military officers who had joined the guerrillas but had a less “traditional” or “Islamic” outlook than others. Their personal solidarity was based on the common military education in Somalia and the former eastern bloc. Prominent living and influential members of the old *calan cas* are Saaleebaan Gaal (Habar Jeclo/Suulow Madow), the chairman of the *Guurti*, Ibraahim Degaweyne (Habar Awal/Ciise Muuse) who is not in politics but has a good reputation in public, Cabdullahi Driwal (Carab) who, like Degaweyne, has a good public reputation and Maxamed Kahin (Habar Jeclo/Reer Dahir), the current Minister of Interior. They are the last guard of the SNM and Muuse Biixi is one of them. He could be considered their last hope to leave a positive post-war legacy.²¹

Most important immediate challenges of the current government are, firstly, the tensions within the Isaaq – particularly between the Habar Awal and Habar Jeclo clans on the one hand, and the Habar Yoonis on the other – as well as the ongoing conflict in the far east of Somaliland (at the border with Puntland). The Habar Yoonis as a group invested much money to support Wadani. Now they lost it and on top of that, Muuse Biixi did not give them any real powerful positions in his government. This is like a double punishment and created lasting bad feelings (*calool xumo*, literally: “bad stomach”) among many Habar Yoonis. According to local intellectuals interviewed in Hargeysa, it was not Somali tradition that a winner excludes a loser. Normally, the winner shows generosity and attracts the oppositional group by giving them some meaningful positions (this was at least the recipe of Maxamed Haji Ibraahim Cigaal, who has been the most effective and important Somaliland’s president since 1991). It is also the logic of Somali customary law called *xeer* (which is still widely used in Somaliland) to reconcile parties in conflict by respecting, as far as possible, diverse positions and wishes of those involved, not to just punish one side.

Yet, Muuse Biixi gave many powerful positions to those groups that had supported him. The Habar Awal have four ministers and the Habar Jeclo, five. Additionally, the head of the high court, the commander-in-chief of the army and several other key positions are held by the Habar Awal/Sacad Muuse. The head of the *Guurti* (Saaleebaan Gaal) is Habar Jeclo. In contrast, the Habar Yoonis do not have many powerful positions. They have three ministers: of Health (*cafimaadka*), of the Environment (*degaanka*) and of Sports. The most important of these is the health ministry. The Ciidagale acquired a higher position – the Minister of Finance (*mayliadda*). This also

21. The previous presidents Cabduraxmaan Tuur (1991-1993) and Axmed Siilaanyo (2010-2017), both former SNM chairpersons, have been rather “weak” presidents in many regards: Cabduraxmaan Tuur had no resources to improve Somaliland and Axmed Siilaanyo was too old and almost senile when he finally came to power; he was considered to be strongly influenced by his wife and some close associates of hers.

created a rift within the larger Habar Garxaajis group (consisting of Ciidagale and Habar Yoonis). During President Axmed Siilaanyo's term, political tensions existed mainly between the Isaaq and the non-Isaaq (mainly between Isaaq and Dhulbahante groups). Now, the problem is within the Isaaq (as it was in the mid-1990s). The main tension is now between the Habar Awal and the Habar Yoonis. The general sentiment is that, if Muuse Biixi does not take care of the issue of the tension between the Habar Awal and the Habar Yoonis, this may become a major problem for his presidency.

While not being directly related to these clan tensions at the level of the government (Kulmiye) and the opposition (Wadani), a recent eruption of violence in the countryside near Ceelafweyn (in Sanaag region) sheds light on the destructive potential of clannism and the persistent lack of security in parts of Somaliland. Some years back (around 2013 or 2014), a conflict between nomadic families started near Ceelafweyn. The parties involved were the Habar Jeclo/Boho and Bicide on the one side and the Habar Yoonis/Sacad Yoonis on the other. People were killed, a cycle of revenge killing was started and, recently in January 2018, dozens of people were killed and more were wounded in one clash. In mid-February 2018, the Minister of Interior, Maxamed Kaahin, went there with a government delegation to stabilise the situation and prevent further fighting. Parts of the Somaliland army are stationed in the area to keep peace. While this fighting is not directly related to the result of the presidential election, it certainly has the potential to be manipulated by aggrieved Habar Yoonis elites.

Another and much more important conflict is ongoing in the far east of Somaliland. As mentioned above, eastern Sanaag and some places in Sool region are still not firmly controlled by Somaliland. The Warsangeli and Dhulbahante residing there partly side with Puntland while some of them are oriented towards Somalia. In their eyes, the secession of Somaliland is still not acceptable (at least for the hardliners among them although, over the past decade or so, more Dhulbahante people have made their peace with Somaliland, which they believe can provide more than Puntland and Somalia).

On 2 January 2018, Jamaal Maxamed Xasan, the Minister of Planning of the Somali National Government (SNG) visited Badhan (in eastern Sanaag). By clan, he is Warsangeli/Dubays; his lineage-relatives reside in Badhan. He came to the place officially on a humanitarian mission. His aim was, allegedly, to support his patrilineal relatives in a difficult period due to local drought. The Somaliland administration and many Somaliland supporters perceived the visit as a strong provocation and as a "foreign" intrusion. It also demonstrated that the government in Hargeysa was obviously not in control of the whole territory it claims.

The situation escalated a week later when, on 8 January 2018, President Cabdullahi Maxamed Faramaajo (Darood/Marrexaan/Reer Diini) of the SNG visited Puntland. On that day, he arrived in Garoowe, the capital of Puntland, which is some ten kilome-

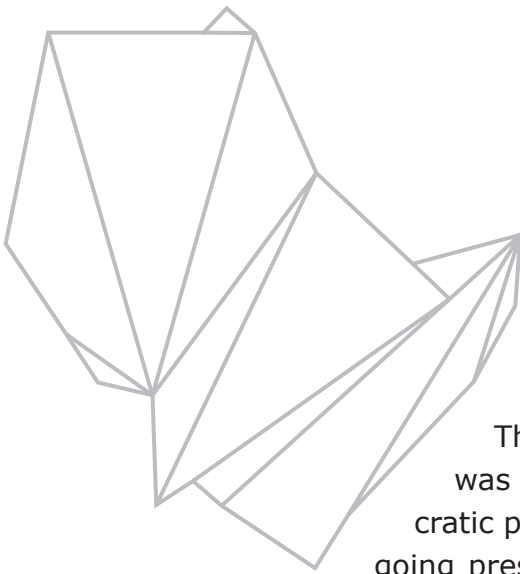
tres away from the official (ex-colonial) border between Somaliland and Puntland.²² In advance of the visit, rumours spread that President Farmaajo would be meeting with Harti elders including the Dhulbahante and the Warsangeli to discuss their position with regards to Somalia.

In this situation, Muuse Biixi had to react, also in light of the previous intervention by the SNG minister just a few days before. He reacted in a military way (after all, his professional background is in the military) and sent the well-organised Somaliland army stationed near Gambarre, some 30 kilometres east of Laascaanood, to attack Tukaraq, a tax station controlled by Puntland forces since 2004.²³ The distance between Gambarre and Tukaraq is around 20 kilometres. Tukaraq is some 80 kilometres west of Garoowe. The Puntland forces in Tukaraq at that time were mainly lighter-armed police forces. The Somaliland army attacked in early morning hours and encountered little resistance. A few soldiers were killed. The Puntland forces retreated to a very small place called Godgaboobe, some five kilometres east of Tukaraq. Since then, mobilisation is ongoing on the side of Puntland.

After the move of the Somaliland forces, an international pressure was put on the government of Muuse Biixi to withdraw the troops again. Yet the president of Somaliland did not give in. Several thousand (possibly 2-3,000) Somaliland soldiers are now stationed east of Laascaanood up to Tukaraq. At the moment, no further military moves are to be expected. Many ordinary people in Somaliland, including many Isaaq, are not in favour of war. Yet, it is clear that, eventually, the aim of Somaliland is to reach its eastern border, which is only 70 kilometres east of Tukaraq along the tarmac road. For Cabdiwali Maxamed Cali "Gaas" (Darood/Harti/Majeerteen/Cumar Maxamuud), the president of Puntland, the confrontation, if ongoing or escalating, might be a chance to prolong his term based on a "state of emergency" (the next election is planned for 2019).

22. Somaliland claims the territory of the former British Protectorate as its state territory, whereas Puntland is mainly located in the former Italian colonial territory, while its government today claims also areas in eastern Somaliland (beyond the ex-colonial border).

23. For the history of the conflict dynamics between Somaliland and Puntland, see Hoehne, Markus V. 2015: *Between Somaliland and Puntland: Political dynamics in the contested borderlands*. Nairobi: RVI.



Conclusion: a brief outlook on the near future of Somaliland

The most recent presidential election in Somaliland was important since they continued the formal democratic process and provided for a change in power. The outgoing president, Siilaanyo, was considered by many (friends and foes) as too old and as incapable of running the country. Many people feel relieved that a new person who is seemingly in good physical shape and mentally agile is now in charge of the country.

The election also illustrated pending problems in Somaliland: despite the multi-party system, politics in Somaliland (and Somalia) are very much rooted in clan politics. While this in general is not a problem, the combination of “one person one vote” and clan politics potentially leads to conflict. Previous Somaliland politics were openly based on clans, represented by traditional leaders, who discussed with each other in search of consensus at general meetings (Somali sing.: *shir*). Once consensus was established on a political issue, it was clear that the majority of those involved (and their descent groups) would accept the decision of the elders. This was a way of politics that was well understood by and effective for most people in Somaliland. Consensus was a way of keeping peace.²⁴

Yet, the majority vote provides a different approach to the traditional way of politics. It leads to “the winner takes it all” decisions and therefore leaves the weaker side (that may have up to 49 per cent of all votes) potentially destitute. Moreover, Somalis rarely admit defeat openly but rather look for a way to “save face”. Thus, a majority-vote-system puts pressure on contenders. If one combines this approach with clan politics, which are based on solidarity among and the right to self-defence of patrilineal descent groups, it becomes obvious that clan politics in combination with majority vote hold a considerable potential for conflict.

Of course, it would be wrong to subscribe to a primordial understanding of clans. Patrilineal descent is not fate. However, clan belonging provides ample possibilities for manipulation by Somali political elites. Combined with economic power and personal charisma, genealogical knowledge and (created) feelings of closeness (i.e., Ibn

24. It is noteworthy that Somali politics in general are male-dominated. At meetings, men discuss and decisions are taken by (elderly) men; women are important behind the scenes and have their own ways of influencing decisions. Nevertheless, Somali society is patriarchal.

Khaldun's *asabiyya*)²⁵ are the drivers of Somali politics – as became obvious again in the recent Somaliland election. (Clan-)politics in Somaliland create dynamic alliances but also produce deep rifts in the society. The recent election produced divisions within the Isaaq that have the potential to seriously weaken the country at a time when it is facing serious challenges.

The most important current challenges for Somaliland are the following. First, joblessness that is particularly affecting younger people (many of whom decided to leave the country illegally and migrate within Africa or to Europe in recent years for the lack of educational and job opportunities).²⁶

Secondly, a series of economic challenges are produced by the ban imposed by Saudi Arabia at the end of 2016 again on exports of Somali livestock via Berbera and the general lack of revenue production in most economic sectors of Somaliland as well as the reluctance of a few prominent companies of the country to pay adequate taxes (and the general unwillingness of Somalis to pay taxes).

Thirdly, ecological problems caused by repeated droughts over the past decades. While, in the first half of the twentieth century, periodical droughts hit the region every ten to twelve years, on average, the failure of rainfalls has led to repeated and severe droughts in Somaliland 2003, 2011, 2016. Besides the obvious humanitarian challenges, the loss of herds leads impoverished nomads to seek long-term or even permanent refuge with relatives in (mostly) larger urban settlements, where this influx burdens the economy of their relatives and possibly increases problems with water supply and waste management.

Lastly, political challenges emanating from the fact that Somalia is slowly recovering and eventually will push harder towards a clarification of the officially undecided status of Somaliland to date. A first taste of possible future confrontations between Somaliland and Somalia was provided by the recent exchanges of messages between officials in Mogadishu and Hargeysa over the lease of the port of Berbera to an Emerati-based company. On 01 March 2018, Sacad Cali Shire, the Foreign Minister of Somaliland, visited the UAE and renewed the deal (originally signed in 2017) with Dubai Port World over the lease and improvement of the port of Berbera. The next day, the Prime Minister of Somalia, Xasan Cali Khayre, declared the deal illegal.²⁷ Subsequently, officials of Somaliland and Somalia exchanged accusations via the media. In parts of Somaliland, the sentiment that “the south wants to colonise us (again)” boiled up and many politicians and ordinary people remembered the times when, before 1991, the government in Mogadishu was subjugating mainly the Isaaq in the northwest to harsh military rule including interferences into the local economy.

While Somaliland's “de facto statehood” has certainly hardened over the past decade,

25. See on this Jama Mohamed 2007: Kinship and Contract in Somali Politics. Africa vol. 77, no. 2: 226-249.

26. The very instructive study by Nimo Ilhan Ali (2015): *Going on Tahriib*. Rift Valley Institute.

27. <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/press-releases/somalia-declares-dp-world-berbera-port-deal-illegal>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9xVSaKhRqM>.

its legal status is unclear and the international community still ignores its independence and officially subsumes it under "Somalia". Talks between the governments in Mogadishu and Hargeysa will have to be organised in a careful and constructive manner to avoid military clashes over the question of Somali unity versus Somaliland secession. An economically strong and politically united Somaliland will certainly have better chances in such (future) talks. At the moment, it is hoped that Muuse Biixi as a strong president will lead the way. However, the internal challenges mentioned above need to be overcome first.