

WOMEN, YOUTH AND MINORITIES PARTICIPATION IN SOMALILAND DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS: Opportunities, Obstacles, and Potential Solutions



RESEARCH REPORT
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TIGAAL

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PROCESS:

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Executive Summary

This is the final report of a study commissioned by Interpeace on the post-2021 Somaliland election with a special focus on the political status and electoral engagement of women, youth, and minority groups in Somaliland.

The study employed mix methodology including a descriptive-analytical survey design. Gray literature resources were analyzed during the process of the study to complement primary data collection. The lead researcher and Nagaad network engaged various stakeholders including women associations, women candidates (current and the past), Somaliland National Electoral Commission (NEC), representatives of political parties, non-governmental organizations (both local and international) media, and development partners.

The present report describes the context, methodology, findings, identifying and analyzing both opportunities and gaps to provide realistic proposals and policy actions.

Women, youth, and all other residents (clans in Somaliland) have immensely contributed to the socio-economic development of Somaliland for a long time, and they have played a remarkable role in the efforts made on reconciliation and development. However, despite women and youth being more than half of the population, their representation in the fora's of the government including but not limited to parliaments, local councils, and other government institutions is still insignificant. Before June 2021 women comprised less than 3 percent of Somaliland's legislators.

The study findings demonstrate the many challenges faced by women and marginalized groups in Somaliland's democratization process including; clan networks who are usually not supportive of female candidates and not endorsing aspiring female politicians due to age-old patriarchal norms, women's voting behavior determined and directed by their household heads who are male figures, political parties not giving enough support to female candidates as their male counterparts, financial barriers and the financially demanding nature of political activities, rejection of the women quota.

The report recommends several policy actions including but not limited to; addressing structural barriers; legal and policy review to give affirmative action through a fixed number of seats reserved for women, amending the electoral policy; creating more space for women by reopening the registration of political parties, political empowerment for the youth by the political parties allowing more youth to assume the highest positions in the leadership structures of the three political parties, preparing and adopting long term strategy to increase the

representation of women and minorities and unity of purpose by the government, civil society, political parties, and international actors.

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We thank all participants who have been part of the survey, interviews as well as the Focus Group Discussions (FGD), this study couldn't have been possible without your insights, thoughts, and ideas.

The findings and analysis expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of Interpeace or the donor country

Introduction

Background and Context

After three decades of relative order and peace interspersed by few incidents, Somaliland is touted as a stable and a model democracy in a turbulent region that is epitomized by conflict and conflagration. However, some shortcomings undercut the democratization process of Somaliland that diminish and compromise the acclaim it enjoys in the eyes of the regional and international observers. Among these defects, disfavoring and excluding large sections of its population, - women, youth, and minority groups-, in assuming political positions (both elective and nominated) and reducing them to mere observers.

Women in Somaliland account for 52 percent of the total population¹ and remarkably engage actively in social and economic activities. Despite such potential demographic strength and their participation in social and economic spheres, they still lag far behind men in economic participation, economic opportunity, educational attainment, and more importantly, political participation². Women's presence and inclusion in the decision-making avenues at all levels is very negligible in local councils, two houses of the parliament to the executive branch, though they constitute a significant number of voters in Somaliland elections³. In the 2021 elections, women accounted for 47% of the total voters yet there were no women elected into the national parliament.

However, this upsetting situation contradicts the ideals inscribed in Article 22 of the Somaliland National Constitution which grants women equal rights to political participation, form political parties and nomination by political parties for political leadership positions, and the general public's openness towards women's political participation and perceived ability of women to influence decision-making to reality on the ground⁴.

Looking at the candidatures for elections at local councils, parliamentary levels, and gender composition of the executive branch and former councils could be a practical springboard to illustrate the existing women exclusion from important decision-making venues. Women are under-represented in local councils, the chambers of parliament, and the executive branch. For instance, the 82-member House of Representatives that has recently been replaced had only one women representative. Strikingly, women have no single seat in the Guurti house. While the recently replaced local councilors on 10 were women out of the total 323 local councilors across

¹ Central Statistics Department, Ministry of Planning and National Development, Somaliland Government, Op.Cit, p 17

² Nagaad Network, SOMALILAND GENDER GAP ASSESSMENT, March 2019, p 14

³ Mona Ahmed Abdi, Somaliland: Obstacles to Women Candidates in 2021 Election, April 2021, p 2

⁴ Nagaad Network, Op.Cit, p 32

the country⁵. This under-representation surpassingly contradicts with fact that women engage in areas that are critical to local governments such as water supply, small businesses, sanitation, and service deliveries such as education, health, market facilities including slaughterhouses and market stalls⁶. This implies they contribute to the local government with taxes but with no representation at the decision-making platforms.

Additionally, women's representation fares badly even in the appointed public offices. For instance, of the 32-member cabinet that President Muse Bihi formed in 2017 after his inauguration, women had only two ministers and one deputy minister. All the director generals of ministries are male except one. Similarly, all heads of government agencies are men. Statistically speaking, women occupy 25% of the Somaliland civil service⁷.

Youth, on the other hand, constitute the bulk of the Somaliland electorate but that doesn't translate into being part of decision-making bodies. They suffer from apparent underrepresentation in all government institutions whether elected or appointed. They have no representation in the combined 164-member House of Representatives and Guurti due to the age bar which the Somaliland Electoral law sets out. It conditions the age of 35 for the membership of the House of Representatives and 45 for the Guurti (Senate).⁸ This age requirement is also conditional in holding other public offices such as ministerial positions and commissions.⁹

To partially loosen the shackles that circumvent youth from participating in the decision-making process, Somaliland's Lower House approved an amendment to the Electoral law in October 2011 in which the minimum age for local elections candidacy was lowered to 25 years but this did not yield the expected results in 2012 elections because candidates run to the elections through party ticket which is usually given on clan basis¹⁰.

Women's exclusion from ascending to political positions is further compounded by estranging them from public employment. As of 2012 Somaliland government employees run into 19,000 including public agencies but most of these are elderly citizens and some 500 employees were identified as reaching the age of retirement yet they hold on to their positions¹¹. Although youth are debarred from decision-making bodies seemingly under the guise of exclusionary laws, they

⁵ Mona Ahmed Abdi, Op.Cit, p 1

⁶ Academy for Peace and Development & Interpeace, Op.Cit, p 57

⁷ Maria Abdilahi Gaheir & Guleid Ahmed Jama, Op.Cit, 4

⁸ Mohamed Abdirahman, Youth Alienation in Somaliland's Political, Social and Economic constructs, ISIR, October 2020, p 6

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Saeed M. Ahmed, The Salient Role of Youth in Somaliland Development, n.date, p 4

involve in other avenues of political participation particularly political parties. They are members of the three political parties in Somaliland and this is not the conviction to promote youth imperative in the political process as they represent most of the population but opportunistic maneuver, as they utilize them in the campaign and canvassing exercises and courting youth votes for their respective parties¹².

As illustrated above youth are underrepresented in the decision-making bodies and this springs from a combination of factors that pose real challenges to youth aspirants to be elected to the elected and/or appointed offices similar to adults. These challenges include, *inter alia*:

1. Legal constraints: in Somaliland the maturity age is 16 while the minimum age for competing in the Lower House is 35 and 45 for the Guurti. This age eligibility disfavors youth and blocks them from having a say in the decisions and policies that are made in elected offices.¹³
2. Old age traditions: in Somali tradition, age is a parameter for eligibility for positions of social importance. Thus, it perceives youth as untrustworthy and less responsible for leadership positions.¹⁴
3. Economic limitations: engaging in politics is a costly enterprise as it is across countries, thus youth lack the resources to fund their campaigns even if the process is widely opened to their favor.
4. Lack of pensions and retirement benefits: the lack of these instruments contributed to the dominance of old aged people in the political system and undercuts the opportunity for youth to rise to the political ladder.¹⁵

The blockage of youth from participating in the decision-making bodies results in negative repercussions that harm youth themselves and society as well. When the hopelessness resulting from the political alienation settles within the youth, some of them set off as illegal immigration, resort to drugs, and get into criminal activities that might potentially compromise the fabric of the society.¹⁶

To lessen minority and women exclusion from engaging in decision-making, several efforts were made by women and minority groups who campaigned to amend the electoral laws to include a provision that set quota for women and minority candidates, but those efforts ended in vain.

¹² Academy for Peace and Development & Interpeace, Op.Cit, p 20

¹³ Academy for Peace and Development & Interpeace, Op.Cit, p 21

¹⁴ Saeed M. Ahmed, The Salient Role of Youth in Somaliland Development, n.date,p 4

¹⁵ Academy for Peace and Development & Interpeace, Op.Cit, p 22

¹⁶ Academy for Peace and Development & Interpeace, Op.Cit, p 24-25

Study Objectives

The main objective of the study focuses on the political status of women, youth, and minority groups in Somaliland's post-2021 parliamentary and local council election. The study documents both opportunities barriers affecting women, youth, and minority groups' candidacy: individual, governmental, and societal barriers that are inherent to contextual/ environmental factors. These include barriers to self-efficacy and empowerment, legislative and regulatory barriers.

Specific objectives include:

- Document both opportunities & barriers affecting women, youth, and minority groups candidacy: individual, governmental, and societal barriers that are inherent to contextual/ environmental factors impact of barriers to women's political/ elections participation.
- Understand the public attitudes towards women in politics, perceived benefits of having women leaders in government, and key barriers.
- Provide recommendations for strengthening women, youth, and minority groups and possible avenues for political empowerment and increased political participation.

Methodology

The study employed mixed methodology including a descriptive-analytical survey design by using both quantitative and qualitative research methods and desk research/literature review. Gray literature resources were used interchangeably during the process of the study to complement primary data collection.

Specific study methods include the following:

- **Survey** – a survey questionnaire was developed to gauge both the institutional and cultural challenges faced by women, youth, and minority groups in Somaliland. The focus was to understand the rationale/attitude behind why women are not voting for each other despite being 47% of the registered voters across the country. The researcher interviewed respondents from Hargeisa, Borame, and Burao and filled the data collection tool through a phone-based questionnaire on the KOBO platform.
- **Key informant interviews (KIIs)** – in-depth interview was conducted with 17 people in Somaliland representing the major political participation stakeholders in Somaliland. Eight women comprising of former candidates (in 2021 election and previous elections), civil society members, youth activists, and government civil servants were interviewed for this study. Other nine members representing the political parties, electoral commission, MPs, Clan leaders and elders, Policymakers, Civil Society and NGOs, prominent women and men in politics/women and male leaders, youth representatives,

and minority group members were interviewed for the study to inform the final output of the study.

- **Focus group discussion** – the study conducted two FGDs in Somaliland, one in Hargeisa focused on minorities and marginalized groups. Hargeisa FGD was attended by 6 females and two males representing traditional leaders of minority communities, women activists and politicians from minority communities. The second FGD which was conducted in Borama focused on women and youth political participation. This FGD was attended by four females representing women leader's women candidates in the recent elections, community-based organizations (CBOs) and advocacy organizations youth organizations, and two males representing the traditional elders in the community.
- **Case study:** To Provide an in-depth look at systems and most important individual stories of change. Comparative media analyses were undertaken to analyze the media usage of both the female and male candidates who contested in the last Somaliland parliamentary and local council elections, collecting stories that transcend beyond boundaries and inspire others including the profiling of the only minority MP elected into Somaliland house of Representative.

Limitations

A few limitations to these findings should be noted. Due to the small sample size, the representativeness of findings concerning the wider Somaliland population is limited.

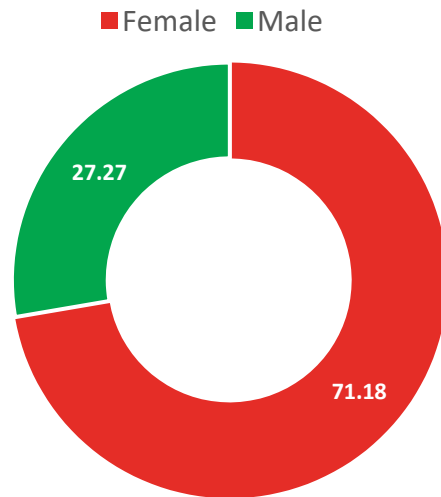
Moreover, the scope of the study was only limited to an urban setting in Somaliland despite the country having a significant number of pastoralists and countryside residents. Due to the limited time of the study, a disaggregated analysis based on regional respondents, gender, and age could not be also undertaken to determine the electorates' view and perception of the last Somaliland election particularly on women's political participation.

Key Findings

The Somaliland Parliamentary and local council elections were held in an orderly, peaceful, and inclusive manner. This is partly due to the country's experience in conducting several (7th this time) elections in the past three decades. At the onset, the voter registration, voter education, operationalizing the security apparatus, electoral campaigning nationwide, and voting in May 2021 were all conducted as planned.

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Researcher-administered survey and online self-administered survey were undertaken in Hargeisa, Borama, Buroa, and Lasanood in June 2021. Online self-administered survey link was shared with women’s networks, associations, and others. This was also complemented by a face-to-face survey. For the online survey, 71% were female respondents. The overall target was 450 respondents across Somaliland. 40% of the total respondents (180 people) were surveyed face-to-face administered by experienced field researchers. These were the respondents who did not have access to online platforms, were illiterate, or did not have access to internet-enabled devices.

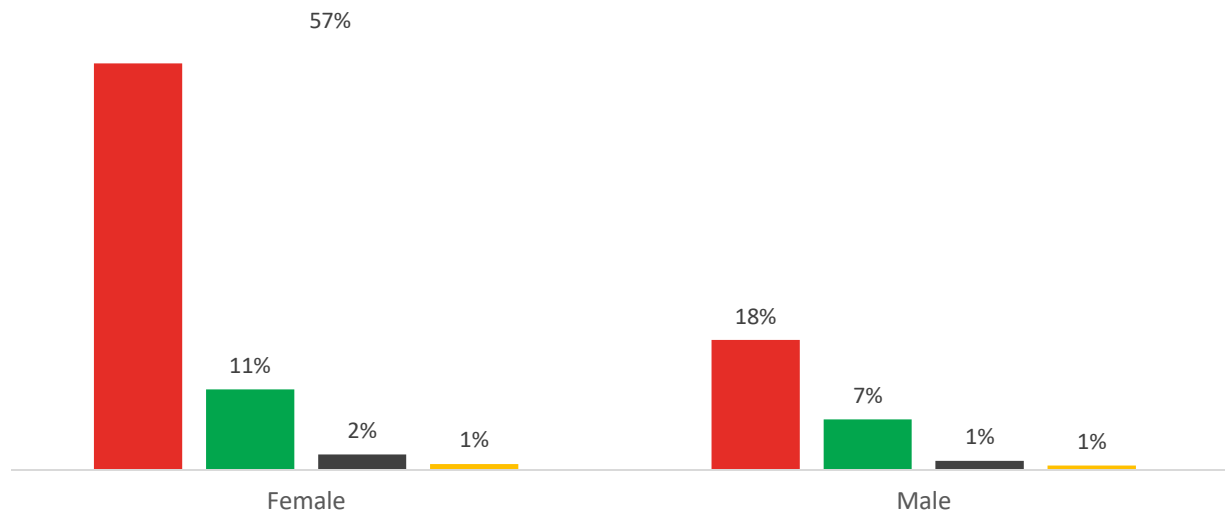


Electoral interest

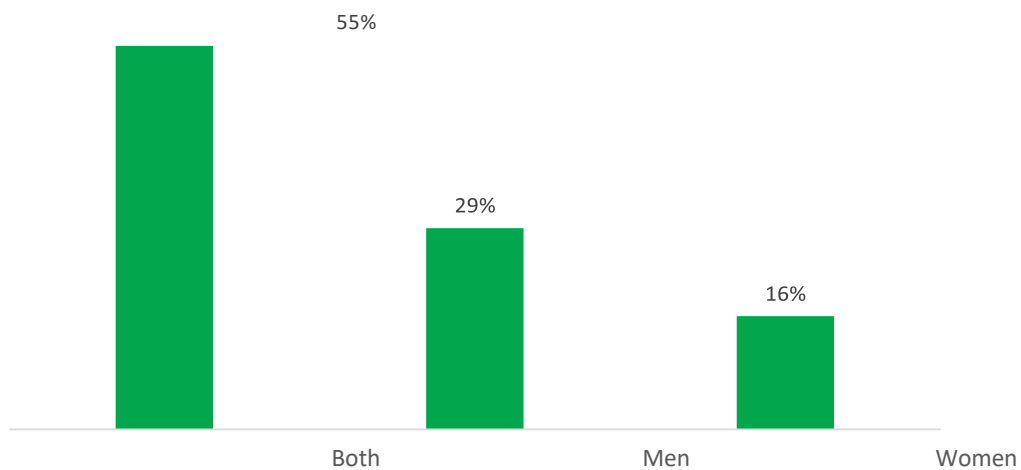
More than two-thirds of the survey respondents 57 % were very much interested in Somaliland political affairs. Young people in Somaliland are fed up with the status quo of Somaliland in terms of its public service delivery thus, the youth are keenly interested in playing a catalyzing roles in who they are electing for decision-making positions.¹⁷ Considering that the medium age of the total respondents was 30. This indicates that the youth in Somaliland are interested to partake in the mainstream politics of the country. Additionally, this reflects the whopping number of respondents 85% who said they had voted in the last Somaliland parliamentary and local council elections. To reduce the gender parity in Somaliland, this significant number of youth electorates can be appealed to by female candidates in election seasons who are less on the idea of women can’t make an equal leader as men.¹⁸



¹⁸ interview with a former female candidate in Hargeisa, June 2021



Who would make better political leader



A promising number of the respondents 55% believe that men and women equally make good political leaders. Women in Somaliland face a myriad of challenges that is a barrier to effective and efficient participation of women in decision-making avenues. This emphasizes that the patriarchal system that defines the power dynamics in Somaliland can be bypassed by female candidates systematically, adapting cause-driven content plans to influence the key political stakeholders in the country. Gender equality is vital for good governance and an equity political system.

Politics of representation & Inclusion in the democratization process

Women are significantly underrepresented in the various political institutions in Somaliland. Out of the 28 women who contested in the 2021 parliamentary and local council elections, only three

had been elected for the local councils. The "A" regions (Togdheer, Sool, Sanaag, Saahil, Maroodijeeh, Awdal, and Gabiley) have not elected a single woman for local councils. Only three districts of the "C" level (Hudun, Taleh, and Buhoodle) in eastern regions had elected one woman each to the local councils. Further research could be done on why most populous, dynamic, big regions couldn't elect a single woman while remote regions had elected a total of 3-women councilors.

In addition, there are no women elected to the House of Representatives in 2021 elections meaning an entire segment of the society without a representation in the highest and most important legislative form of the government. This is a worrying trend and could mean that any policies passed by the Somaliland parliament will not account for the views, perspectives, interests, aspirations, and priorities of Somaliland's women. Inclusive legislation can only be enacted when the citizens of the country regardless of their gender are equally participating in the consultation, debate, and decision-making of national issues.

No	Regions	UCID	Kulmiye	Waddani
1.	Sahil	2	2	1
2.	Maroodijeeh	1	0	1
3.	Sanaag	1	1	0
4.	Sool	1	1	0
5.	Togdheer	0	0	1
6.	Awdal	1	0	0
Total		6	4	3

Figure 1: illustration of women candidates list in Somaliland parliamentary seats¹⁹.

Women underrepresentation in the decision-making process features in the candidates vying for elective positions. In May 2021, in combined local councils and parliamentary elections, about Out of the 246 candidates, 13 women candidates registered to compete for the House of Representatives, while roughly 15 women were registered for local elections out of the 650+ candidates. Some electoral districts had no women candidates.²⁰

¹⁹

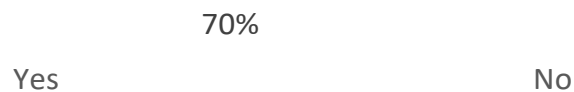
²⁰ Mona Ahmed Abdi, Op. Cit, p 1

Representation of minorities and marginalized communities

Article 8:1 of the Somaliland constitution advocates that “all citizens of Somaliland shall enjoy equal rights and obligations before the law, and shall not be accorded precedence on grounds of color, clan, birth, language, gender, property, status, opinion, etc.” Furthermore, Article 22:1 states that “Every citizen shall have the right to participate in the political, economic, social and cultural affairs in accordance with the laws and the Constitution”.²¹ Even though these progressive provisions are stuffed in the constitution, minority groups (Gabooye, Tumaalo, and Yibro) are the most vulnerable groups in the society and face alienation in socio-economic and political domains. They remain underrepresented in all major public institutions and structures of the country.²²

Minority groups have one seat in the house of representatives, but they did not have any representation in both the Guurti and local councils across Somaliland. Alongside women and youth, minority groups are disadvantaged and left behind in the participation of politics and democratization processes. Minority groups, on the other hand, have a significant number of voters to seek seats in Hargeisa and other urban centers.²³

Voting for candidates from Minority groups



²¹ Constitution of Somaliland, Somaliland Law, 2000

²² Adam Ismail, An Analysis of Women’s Land Rights & Territorial Rights of Somali Minorities In Somaliland, Smart Consultancy & Training Agency (SCOTRA), 2016, p 18

²³ Mohamed Ibrahim Gani, Somaliland Electoral Law Imperils Inclusive Representation <https://www.theelephant.info/op-eds/2021/05/28/somaliland-electoral-law-imperils-inclusive-representation/>, May 28, 2021



According to the survey respondents, more than two-third 69.56 % said they will vote for candidates from minority groups. This reflects the reality that Barkhad from minority groups had won with the largest number of votes in the last Somaliland parliamentary election²⁴. However, a further study can be undertaken to gauge why the people who said they will not vote for candidates from minority groups are thinking in that way.

Minority exclusion is steeped in history, but counting from since Somaliland unilaterally reclaimed its sovereignty, their status did not improve but was rather entrenched. The minority groups were not included in the early conferences convened to determine the fate of Somaliland and subsequent conferences held to contain intermittent clan conflicts.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

Minority groups participated in the Burco conference on April 27, 1991, and the Borama conference in 1993 with observer status but this changed in the 1997 Hargeisa conference where minority groups were accorded representation.²⁶ This marks the first time they were given political representation in the chain of Somaliland conferences after the Somali state collapsed. They had two representatives in the House of Representatives and Guurti/Senate.²⁷ On top of that, the minority groups had a deputy minister in president Dahir Riyale Kahin's cabinet.

Case studies

Case study one

Barkhad Batun- a renowned hope for the Marginalized

Barkhad Jama Batun is a minority rights activist who turned into a politician. He was a popular political figure in the recently concluded Somaliland elections where he was elected a member of parliament for Hargeisa. His campaign symbol was a yellow Bulldozer on which he said he is going to use to pave the way for justice for the marginalized groups, women, youth, and the disabled.

Barkhad was born in *Maroodijeex* Province, Hargeisa in 1984. When the civil war broke out, he fled to *Awdal* Province in a local town called before he returned to Hargeisa. In 1993, Barkhad enrolled Ahmed Gurey Primary school before the civil war interrupted and made him flee to *Baligubadle* and then to Djibouti where his mother lived. After one year in Djibouti with his mother, he came back and joined *Shiekh Bashir* school where he finished his middle school and then went to *Abu Hureyra* for his secondary.

Barkhad joined Hargeisa University where he graduated from the faculty of Law. He also has a post-graduate and master's degree in Public Administration from Golis University before he became a lecturer at Hargeisa University. Barkhad has also a master's in good governance from Hargeisa University.

After 10 years in the academia and humanitarian sector, Barkhad finally joined politics. He was part of the Youth cluster of the Udub political party. When Kulmiye won, he subsequently jumped off the Udub ship and joined Kulmiye where he was later appointed as the advisor of the president for marginalized groups. However, he resigned from his designation due to limited influence on policies for marginalized groups and instead joined the Waddani party where he became the Spokesperson and the Justice Secretary of the party. Before Barkhad joined the Waddani party, he was arrested multiple times and politically suppressed by the incumbent. He was also threatened and even attacked and hurt with very severe injuries. One time, he said he was arrested in a very small cell where he almost suffocated to death since he is asthmatic.

Barkhad decided to run for a parliamentary seat because the last time his people (the marginalized communities) got political representation was in 1960 when his cousin was elected in a similar voter turnout as him. In addition to his desire to break the barriers between the majority and marginalized, Barkhad is grateful for the role of the Wadani party chairman Mr. Cirro and the General Secretary Mr. Khadar who both assured him of the party's unwavering support.

Barkhad also met the former British Ambassador Mr. Steward, and they discussed the missing representation of the minority groups, women, and youth and the importance that these roles have for the international community.

Barkhad's journey to get a seat in Somaliland parliament wasn't smooth.

Barkhad had difficulties in raising money to manage his campaign because everyone who could offer him money asked for something in return, so to stay away from any influence by businesspeople, he did not accept donations from anyone. When many aspiring parliamentarians were assembling supporters in halls and reportedly paying thousands of dollars, Barkhad who could not afford to pay that amount decided to run his campaign on social media. He first verified his accounts to counter disinformation and propaganda and then created his own campaign slogan "*Lama kala qabiil fiicnee, waa lakala qofnimo fiicanaheh*", which loosely translates as "no clan is superior to the other but there is individual competence". This quote and many TV debates have helped Barkhad to appeal to the masses who sympathized with him and decided to be part of his quest to change the system and challenge the status quo.

During the election campaign, Barkhad received direct death threats. Someone threatened to shoot him, which he shared with the Human Rights Watch. Barkhad also received threats from the military and the police. He was also threatened by the incumbent administration. Barkhad was also threatened by the incumbent administration.

Case study two

Comparative Analysis: How men and women candidates use media (both digital and traditional): Case study of 2021 Somaliland elections

Although Somaliland political system exhibits gender stereotypes, most women candidates in Somaliland parliamentary and council elections seem to not have appreciated the importance of (social) media and how it could affect the voting behaviors of the electorates in Somaliland. Women candidates were given training on media close to the election period¹. At the time, most of the voters have predictably decided on whom they were voting for as most male candidates were campaigning for months and leveraged both the use of media and traditional leaders in engaging with the electorates at their respective districts.”

Women candidates had no significant funds to pay the media as affirmed by female candidates who contested in May parliamentary election¹. Apart from the urban electorates, an increasing number of voters had registered in the adjacent villages to the main cities. Radio was the right medium to reach out to those electorates but women candidates could hardly afford mobile radios or renting airtime on the existing radio (s) in Somaliland.

Male candidates either had role models in politics or were politically established like in the case of Barkhad Batun and Abdikarim Moge who served public offices before their campaigns. Abdikarim served as the deputy minister of Livestock and Fishery and the deputy minister of Planning. Barkhad Batun became an advisor to President Siilaanyo for the marginalized groups and he is currently the spokesperson of the Waddani party, one of the biggest opposition parties in Somaliland.

Evidence shows that candidates like Barkhad and Abdikarim-who came up with effective media and communication strategies were in a better place to secure more votes. Women candidates lacked effective branding and compelling media strategies to boost their visibilities.

Many celebrities also took a leading role in the campaign for some of the male candidates. For example, both Barkhad and Abdikarim were using especially dedicated songs on their messaging and social media. Many electorates were possibly drawn into their campaigns due to this factor.

On the other hand, female candidates who vigorously campaigned in the election time are the ones who secured the largest vote among the female candidate’s remarkable example is Sucas Ibrahim who campaigned hard from the onset. She took part in radio discussions, Tv shows and initiated a social media campaign that appealed to electorates across the aisle. She secured more than four thousand votes in her constituency, the highest vote a female candidate got in the June 2021 election. The second female who got the highest vote was Sucas Carmiye who got more than three thousand voters. She also maintained a good presence on social media.

The specific cases demonstrated here showcases the important role of media in shaping voting patterns. More capacity-building support is indeed to ensure that women have effective media strategies and media finances before, during, and after the election period. Further research could be done digging deeper into media analytics with special consideration on digital media influence.

²⁸ FGD participants in Borama June 2021

- Women-led institutions such as Nagaad and Nafis networks who advocate mainly for women issues and agendas
- Somaliland Journalist associations (SOLJA) play an important role in mainstreaming the concerns raised by these vulnerable and marginalized groups.

However, the efforts made by these institutions ended in vain in 2018 when the quota of women was rejected by the parliament. There is a weak link in how advocacy organizations and CSOs lobby and advocate for the political participation of marginalized groups²⁹. They all use the same strategy in engaging, campaigning, and promoting their respective agendas. These organizations conduct similarly designed workshops, invite the same people whose thoughts, perspectives, and ideas had been heard over many times albeit with no coordination among themselves. Their reports, finding of research studies and result of their discussion is seldom shared with the public.³⁰ This reflects a recent report titled who owns data in Somalia/Somaliland.³¹ Local and international institutions continuously collect data in Somaliland/Somalia but never share the outcome of the collected data with the beneficiaries on the pretext of lack of data protection policies in those jurisdictions. A prevalent problem in the south pole. Additionally, positive masculinity is missing in ensuring women's political participation in Somaliland—traditional leaders, social influencers, and policymakers need to be engaged in promoting women's agendas across all platforms.

Women, youth, and minorities engagement in political parties

While the status of women's representation is not significantly improving, political parties that are a significant vehicle for the democratization process are not determined in promoting the political representation of women, youth, and minorities but are an integral part of maintaining the status quo.³² This is because, in every cycle of an election, they woo women that they are committed to advancing their political participation and as a measure to show their commitment, political parties sign commitment letters of 30% women's quota within their executives if they win the presidential bid.³³

²⁹ Interview with a female journalist in Hargeisa, June 2021

³⁰ Interview with an academic, Hargeisa, June 2021

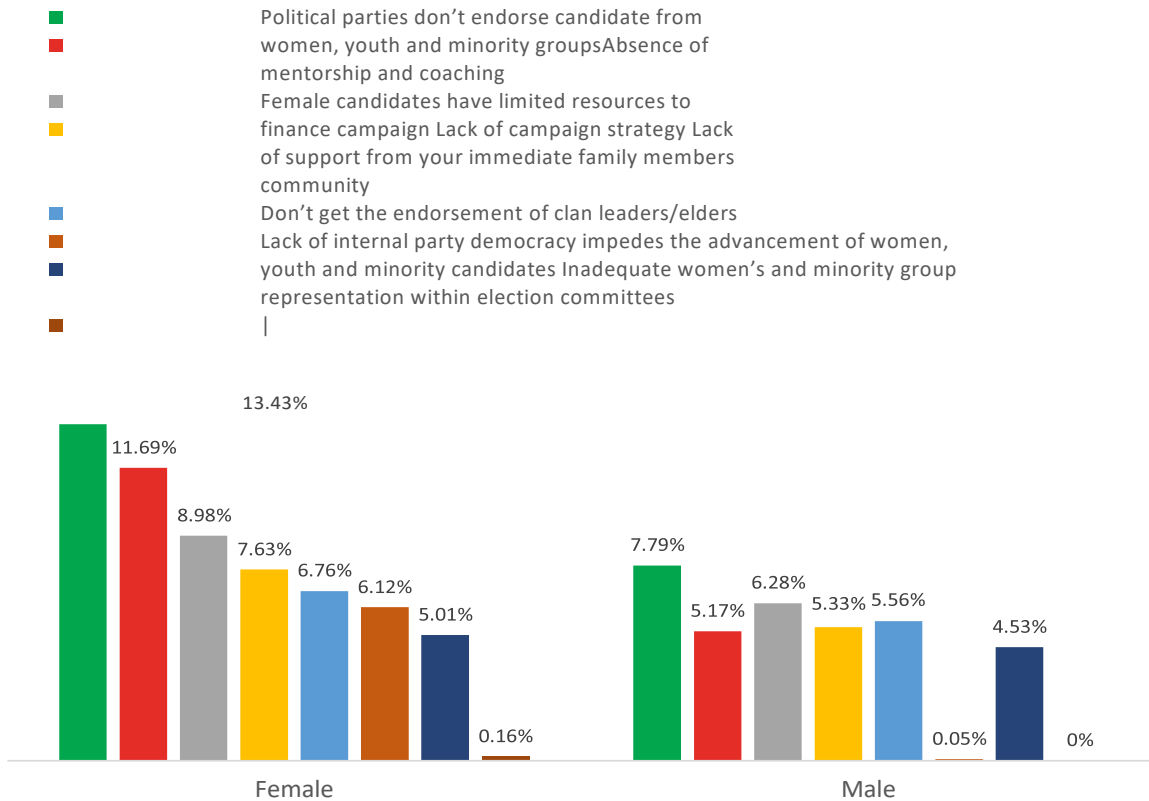
³¹ Mahad Wasuge, Ahmed M. Musa & Tobias Hagmann: Who owns data in Somalia? Ending the country's privatized knowledge economy.

³² Ibid

³³ Mona Ahmed Abdi, Op.Cit, p 1

Structural challenges facing women and minority groups

According to the respondents of the survey, the core challenges faced by women, youth and minority groups in partaking in the democratization process of the country is lack of endorsement from political parties, absence of coaching and mentorship to the female/youth political aspirants, lack of limited finance by the marginalized groups to finance their campaigns, etc.



As noted by one of the top Political party leaders in Somaliland, female candidates only join political parties close to the election period party which is a gateway to the election. For instance, Abdikarim Mooge (Mayor of Hargeisa) has been in politics for a long time now. He was continuously campaigning over the years and now he got the largest number of votes in the local councils. This shows that, if female candidates come up with objective, consistent and long engagement with the community, there is a strong possibility to be elected.³⁴

Under these prohibitive conditions, women organizations are relentlessly striving to break the mold and chart a new way for the patriarchal polity. Nevertheless, they face formidable

³⁴ Interview with Political party leader in Hargeisa, June 2021

challenges. Some of the notable challenges that inhibit women from rising to the elected positions include:

1. Somaliland women's voting behavior is primarily determined by their household heads who are male figures. They direct most women to whom they vote for.
2. Political parties who decide whom to appoint to political positions and give party tickets are a hindrance to women's advancement in the political spheres. That is, all of the high-ranking positions of the three political parties are occupied by men.
3. Financial barriers are a big challenge for politically aspiring women in the developing world. In the case of Somaliland, elections are costly and require candidates to incur costs ranging from registration fees to campaign finances. For instance, the registration fee for Hargeisa local council election is 15,000,000 Somaliland Shilling (\$1,764), while the House of Representative and presidential candidates have to foot 40,000,000 Somaliland Shilling (\$4,705), 150,000,000 Somaliland Shilling (\$17,647) respectively as stipulated in the Somaliland Election Law (Law No. 91/2020).³⁵ Women have less money than men, and this is prevalent across the country. They don't have an asset or financial campaign source that could facilitate them to reach a large audience in their electoral constituencies.³⁶
4. The clan network is usually not supportive of female candidates. For the majority of the female candidates, it's hard to get an endorsement from their clans because male candidates purport to be much suited in representing the clan and those female candidates tend to be linked to other clans; i.e in the case they marry from other clans. This is a practical challenge to female candidates who are vying for leadership positions in Somaliland.
5. The proposed women quota in Somaliland which was ultimately rejected has largely precipitated the lack of election for women in leadership positions across the country.
6. There was no formal political will as every party was fighting to nominate male candidates from the big clans to secure as many seats as possible. Support for men and women by the political has always been different in terms of connection, in-kind support, and leveraging the existing network structures of the clans.
7. Social networks helped male candidates while it was a hindrance to women. Women's networks are very limited. The traditional leader's role was very crucial in the election, and in the Somali tradition only men make a political commitment with other clans; something women can hardly do in the context of Somaliland. During the election campaign, candidates were connected in groups to bypass the threshold of winning seats. Women could hardly make that kind of arrangement.

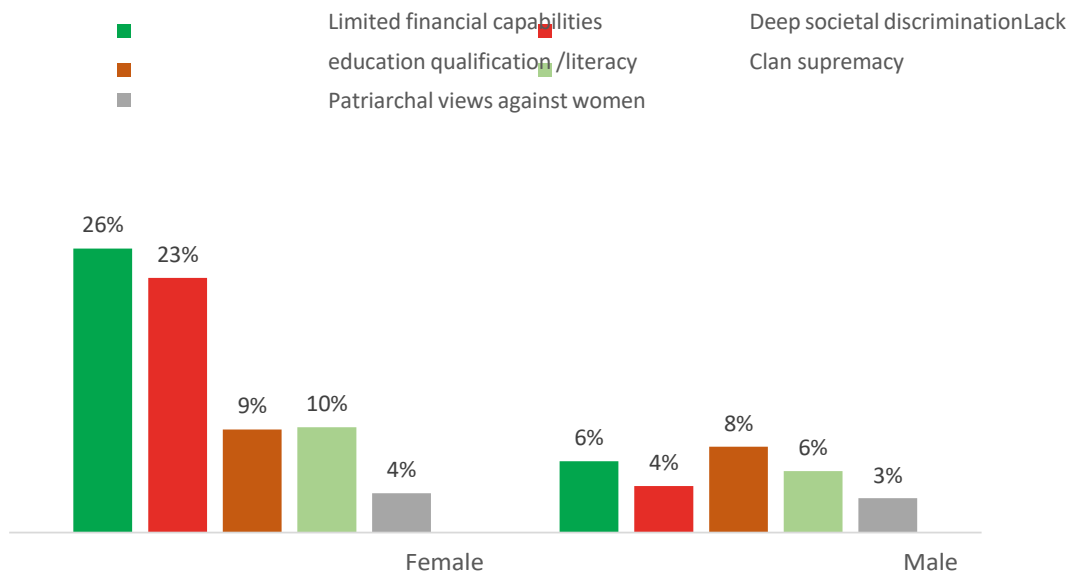
³⁵ Mona Ahmed Abdi, Op. Cit, p 4

³⁶ Interview with Representatives from Somaliland Political Parties

8. Age-old patriarchal norms posed formidable challenges to women's political participation in Somaliland. Cultural authorities usually decide who's eligible to be a candidate. So, if the cultural leaders (Chiefs, Suldan, and likes) approve a candidate to get the platform and chance to contest in an election. However, they hardly endorse female candidates which negatively affects the votes they could get from their immediate clan. Traditional leaders pose a key challenge to women in participating in politics. They usually refer to the issue of multiple identities is in place and the loyalty of the women to their clans is in question.³⁷

Core challenges women and minority groups face engaging the overall democratization process in Somaliland

Most of the respondents believe that the key impediments faced by women, youth and minority groups are limited financial capabilities, deep society discrimination towards the leadership capacity of women, lack of education to understand the political dynamics in play, clan supremacy that impedes women to maneuver in clan networks, and patriarchal views against women.

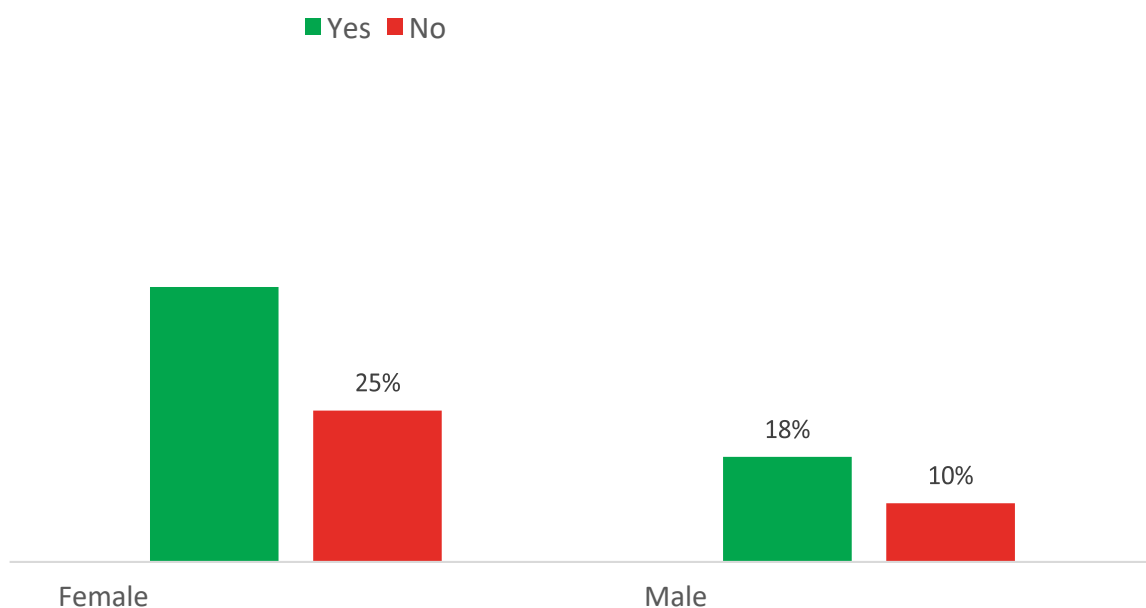


This deplorable situation is not confined to women but Somaliland youth and minority groups share the same fate. According to the Somaliland youth policy, the age bracket is between 15-35

³⁷ Interview with Representatives from Somaliland Political Parties

years.³⁸ Accordingly, Somaliland has youthful demography of which 75% of its population is below the age of 30 years while 40% population is between the ages of 15 to 29 years.³⁹

The inclusiveness of the legal frameworks in Somaliland



A significant number of the survey participant 63.56% believe that Somaliland legal framework allows an inclusive electoral process in the country. Despite the fact, no woman is elected to the legislative fora of the country. Fundamental constraints to the election of women into decision-making positions are the lack of a dedicated quota for women in Somaliland, which limits their effective participation in the expensive election of the country accompanied by traditional and cultural believes that question the core competency and leadership attributes of women.

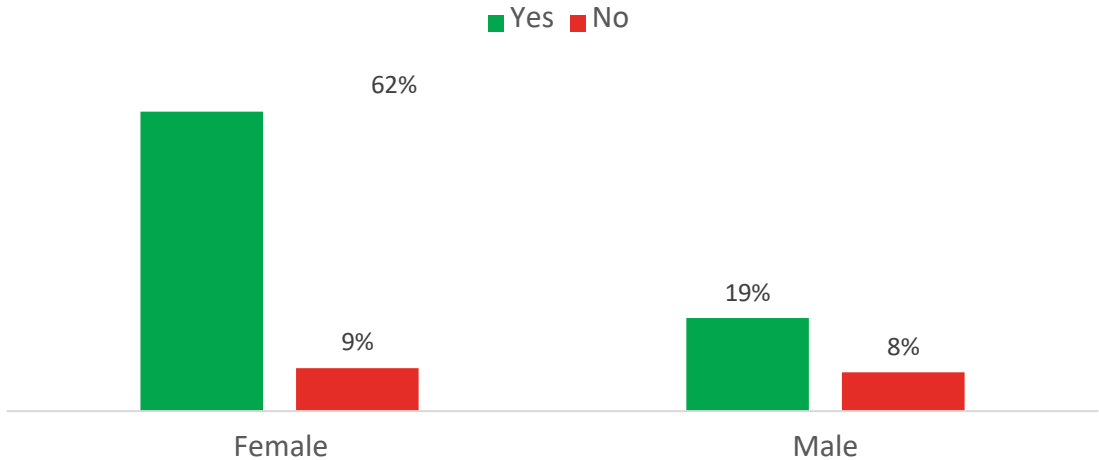
The increase in the participation of youth in the recently concluded elections and the considerably high number of seats they have won compared to minority and female candidates can be attributed to the amendment of laws that in the past were a barrier to youth participation in politics. When the age limit of 'not older than 35' was amended in 2012, more young people (as young as 25) got the chance to participate in the 2012 local elections. In 2021, a significant number of youth have been elected into parliament and local councils. However, there is no disaggregated data available to determine the overall percentage of elected youth in the election.

³⁸ SONYO Umbrella, Youth Situation: Challenges and opportunities, November 2014, p 2

³⁹ Ibid

The last time when the House of Representatives election was conducted in Somaliland was May 2005. That is a sixteen-year difference. As per Somaliland law, a person who is as young as 15 can vote, so there are hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of 15-20-year olds who were born at/around after 2005 and have never had the chance to elect their representatives. That had significantly helped the young candidates because they got a large youthful mass who were voting for the first time and whom they can appeal to. during the last decade we have witnessed a great shift in the collective thinking of the Somaliland people:⁴⁰ There is a sharp growth in the national consciousness, and there are a large number of graduates (mainly homemade) who are fed up with the status quo. The combination of these two factors can be argued, somehow led to this increase we have witnessed in the House of Representatives and local council elections across Somaliland.

Allocating 30% quota for women and minority groups of the seats of the government



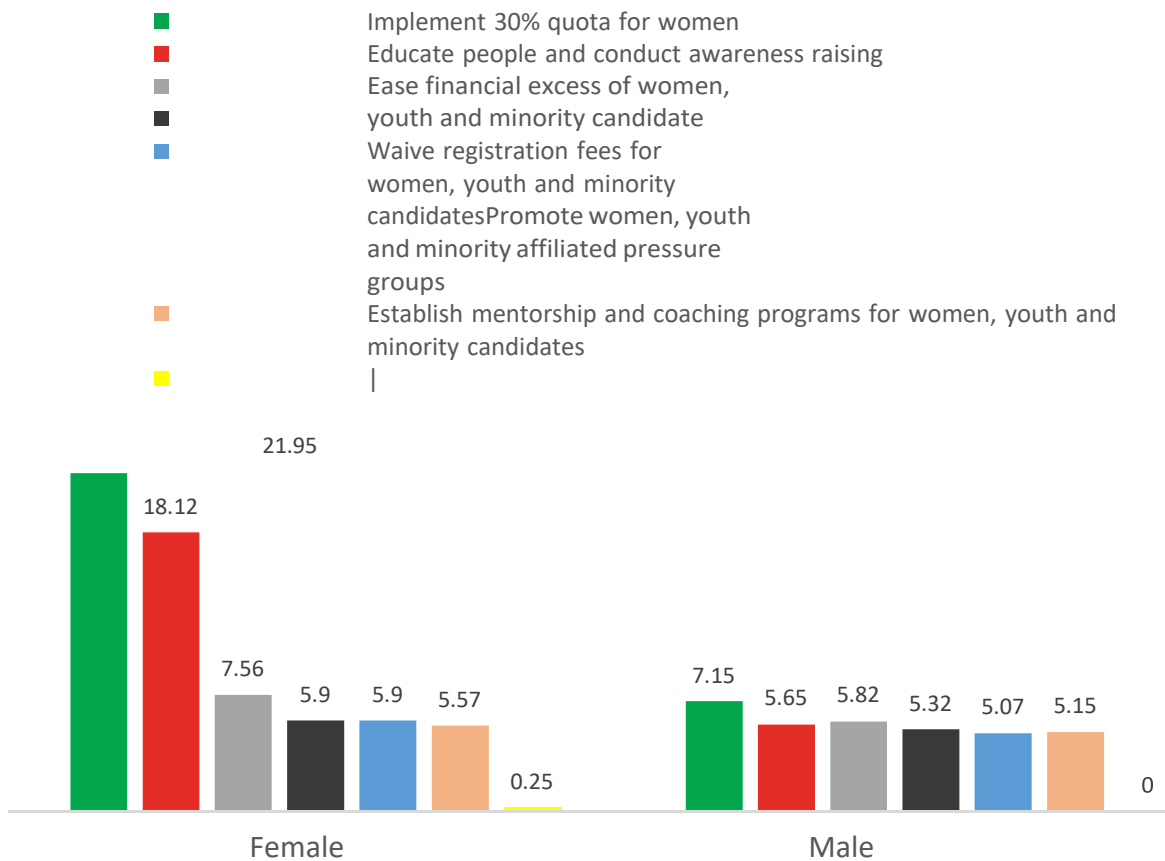
The majority of the respondents 62 % believe that women, and marginalized groups to be allocated 30% of the seats in the various institutions of the government—reflecting a positive trend of growing support for improving women's full and effective participation in the democratic processes of Somaliland.

Ensuring women, youth and minority groups’ active participation of future elections in Somaliland

To ensure women participation in political avenues, most of the participants suggested the implementation of women quota, educate and raise awareness to affect the attitude of the public towards women participation in politics, to reduce the financial excess of women such as waiving the registration for women as campaign financing is very expensive in Somaliland as any other place. Putting in place normative legal frameworks that support women participation in

⁴⁰ ibid

decision-making position can change the plight of women's in Somaliland who doesn't have any representation in the current parliament of Somaliland.



Opportunities for improvement

Despite the numerous challenges standing in the way of women, youth, and minorities participation in the democratization process, there are several opportunities and positive goodwill from the public as evidenced in the responses of the survey, that women, youth, and minorities and best practices that can be benchmarked on and should be duplicated in the future to improve their participation in the democratization process. These opportunities and best practices include:

- ❖ Appealing to the young people who constitute a significant number of the electorates. The likes of Barkhad Batun and Abdikarim Mooge who got the highest number of votes are believed to have been largely voted in by the youth.⁴¹

⁴¹ Interview with Somaliland academic

- ❖ The power of social media and how it mobilizes voters in Somaliland was a significant trend in the recently concluded elections and the campaign season that preceded. Women, in particular, should utilize social media platforms that are less costly but has a wide reach.⁴²
- ❖ Effective campaign strategies are needed to guide the messaging and tactical engagement of electorates and constituencies in the election.⁴³ Candidates from women and minority groups should be trained and prepared early on how best to communicate their manifesto and campaign blueprints.
- ❖ Mobilization of voters matters a lot. The case of Barkhad Batuun and Abdikarim Moge is unique in terms of how they went beyond the clan-centric rhetoric. They have proven a point: it is possible to mobilize the mass, especially the youth, and appeal to them in ways other than clan narratives.⁴⁴
- ❖ The power of social media is one to reckon with. This is the first combined election where the influence of social media is truly acknowledged. Somaliland had a presidential election in 2017 but the momentum was not that heavy compared to 2021. In the future, women, youth, and minorities should keep in mind the changing dynamics and the platforms to use when reaching out to young people: social media, especially Facebook.⁴⁵

Conclusion and recommendations

Somaliland runs a successful parliamentary and local election in May-June 2021. Many youths got the first opportunity to vote and get elected. However, women who constitute the largest portion of the Somaliland population were left behind, while minorities haven't gained much. No woman was elected to the House of Representatives. Only one MP from minorities made his way into the parliament.

Going forward, the following actions and policy recommendations can be considered by the Somaliland government and its international partners to fast-track effective and efficient participation of marginalized communities and minorities in the democratic processes in the future:

1. **Focus on structural barriers:** The findings of the study shows that women and minority group participation in the election are complicated, with structural barriers making it more complex. The structural barriers including deep-rooted cultural factors, combined

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Interview with Social activist in Hargeisa, June 2021

⁴⁵ Ibid

with low educational literacy and financial shortcomings. The future intervention should consider a more holistic way, particularly focusing on improving structural barriers.

2. **Legal, policy review, and amendment:** a fixed number of seats should be reserved and/or nominated out of the 82 MPs to achieve a practical women representation in the House of Representatives and the local councils. This number will be appointed by the political parties. Alternatively, each region in Somaliland can have two seats reserved for women. These seats will be contested by women only. In addition, Somaliland's electoral policy should be changed from an open list system to a closed list. In that regard, the political parties will have the guts and courage to allocate more seats to women in party leadership and elective seats.
3. **Innovative political empowerment initiatives:** The evidence shows that while the traditional political empowerment projects yielded some results but somewhat fall short in leading to transformational change, a new way of doing political empowerment is required now more than ever. These includes localizing electoral support projects, using digital technology to advance women and minority group's causes as well as keeping in mind local cultural sensitivities when designing political empowerment initiatives for women and minorities.
4. **More advocacy and lobby:** Local advocacy groups and organizations should reflect on lessons learned and engaging new ways of doing advocacy and lobbying agenda. Political parties' registration should be reopened so that women can have a chance to register their political parties in Somaliland and find a platform to sell their political agendas at an equal pace with men.
5. **Championing and Unity of purpose:** Government should appoint 'champions of inclusion', which will be men and women at the highest political positions and other influential government or private sector personalities who could champion the political inclusion cause. A national strategy steered by the president that seeks to alleviate the representation and status of women and minorities should be developed. This might include, inter alia, the dedicated quota for women in elective posts, the cabinet of ministers, civil servants, and government parastatals. Commitment should also be gotten from political parties, civil society, and international actors.
6. **Political empowerment for the youth:** to maintain the positive trend with the participation of youth in the 2021 elections, national parties need to create and nurture a friendly environment for the youth including allowing more youth to assume the highest positions in the leadership structures of Somaliland's three political parties.⁴⁶
7. **International actor's support on women political participation:** the INGOs, local civil society, and developmental partners who are interested in supporting women's

⁴⁶ Key informant Interview with Social activist in Hargeisa June 2021

candidacy should explicitly support them from the onset before the campaign period presumably 6-8 months before the election. The support can focus on capacitating women's campaign and (social) media strategy, undertaking preliminary analyses of electoral and key political dynamics of their respective constituency to predictably understand the interest, priorities, and perceptions of the voters.

- 8. Regulating campaign finance:** As our data shows, one of the key impediments faced by female candidates who are vying for a leadership position in Somaliland is inadequate access to finance. A limit of campaign spending by political parties and candidates should be established in Somaliland to regulate maximum spending of campaign finance as well as disclosure of campaign spending/cost by political parties and candidates. The source of donation and the amount that can be accepted by a candidate at any given time should be also specified to limit the excess funding by certain candidates that might give them an unfair advantage over other candidates more so women, youth and minorities.