SOMALI
DIALOGUE
PLATFORM

RAAGSAN

Enabling women's representation and participation in political dialogues in Somalia

Contents

Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
FMS	Federal Member State
GRM	grievance and redress mechanism
KII	key informant interview
MP	Member of Parliament
OPOV	one-person-one-vote
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence

Executive summary

Somalia grapples with unique cultural, societal, and structural hurdles that hinder women's access to political processes. Despite introducing a non-legally binding quota, the most recent federal elections in 2022 saw a decline in women's parliamentary representation. Beyond this, women's leadership in public spaces remains inadequate at all levels. Patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and cultural barriers hinder women's full participation in decision-making, with women predominantly perceived as homemakers, with caregiving responsibilities. Even so, over the past decade, Somali women have been increasingly motivated to participate in politics, driven onward by their professional backgrounds, support networks, increased educational opportunities, and activism experience.

Against the above backdrop, this scoping study seeks to understand better the political barriers faced by women in Somalia and, in doing so find practical ways of increasing their political participation. As such, listed below are some of the key findings and recommendations arising from the study.

Key findings:

- Women's representation in the Somali parliament falls below global averages despite the introduction of a 30 per cent quota, and women face consistent underrepresentation in government roles.

- Women seeking to participate in political processes often face significant obstacles due to cultural barriers and responsibilities and negative societal stereotypes. They are also hampered by lack of access to financial resources and networks.

- Women often receive little to no support from clan elders, religious entities, and political groups, who often act as gatekeepers which poses considerable difficulties when they attempt to run for political office.

- Women entering the political sphere in Somalia are often subject to violence and harassment.

Key recommendations:

This scoping study highlights the strong demand for increased women's involvement in decision-making and policy creation in Somalia. In light of this, a set of key recommendations are proposed for the Federal Government of Somalia and international partners who are enablers of women's participations. They are summarised as follows.

1. Create an enabling environment—governance, policy, and regulatory framework.

- Establish opportunities for women to directly shape and inform discussions within the National Consultative Council (NCC) and the constitutional review process.

- Implement a gender-responsive approach to NCC recruitment and selection, ensuring transparency and inclusivity.

- Appoint women to the council through engagement with women's organizations, networks, political parties, and civil society.

- Establish a women's caucus within the NCC to provide a dedicated space for women's voices and issues.

- Integrate gender mainstreaming into all aspects of the NCC's work.

- Engage with the public and civil society organizations through public consultations to gather input and recommendations.

- Establish a legal framework for key legal and policy reforms to promote women's participation in politics and governance.

- Implement affirmative action and quotas through appropriate legislation.

- Establish a working group led by the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development (MoWHRD) to draft amendments that institutionalize affirmative action and quotas.

- Engage influential stakeholders and community figures, seeking their input to build consensus on the proposed amendments.

- Review and update the political parties' bill to include mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating gender equality regulations.

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the Sexual Offences Bill to align it with international standards and best practices.

2. Support and empower female candidates, women groups, existing networks, and young girls.

- Build capacity for women entering politics through grassroots organizations, mentorship programs, equal access to education and specialized training, and legislative measures to promote gender equality in politics.

- Engage international partners to strengthen informal women's movements by providing mentorship networks, collaboration with international women's organizations, and support for the Women's Caucus in parliament.

■ Address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in politics through a comprehensive grievance and redress mechanism (GRM) that provides safe reporting channels, access to legal aid, counselling services, and victim-centred approaches.

3. Promote community awareness, social acceptance, and enhance data production.

■ Strengthen the role of media in advancing the representation of women in political spheres through workshops, training sessions for journalists, showcasing personal journeys of female politicians, and investigative reporting on gender gaps and challenges.

■ Develop education and awareness programs on gender equality, women's rights, and the importance of women's political participation, engaging religious and traditional leaders and organizing dialogues and town hall meetings.

■ Enhance the production of data by collecting comprehensive and accurate data on women's political participation, disseminating data findings widely, using data to inform policies and initiatives, designing capacity-building programs based on data insights, and regularly reviewing and updating data to track progress over time.

■ It is anticipated that the combination of these efforts will foster community awareness, social acceptance, and empower women to fully participate in political dialogue and processes in Somalia.

1. Introduction

There is growing consensus that women's representation and political participation are critical to advancing gender equity and genuine democracy.[1] Studies have shown that women's leadership in political decision-making helps in creating a balanced society, driving economic development, and promoting effective governance. Women's leadership has also been proven to be instrumental in advancing social justice—from preventing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) to reforming electoral systems—even in the most politically combative environments.[2] Despite this, women's political participation remains a contentious global issue.

Somalia faces particular challenges when it comes to women's representation. Although they played a crucial role in the fight for independence, Somali women leaders have often been denied political leadership positions. Somalia's first six women legislators featured in the 1979 general assembly, with the figure increasing to 25 (14 per cent) in 1984 under Said Barre's regime. The roles played by women in peacebuilding and humanitarian work following Somalia's state collapse in 1991 led to an increase in their parliamentary representation from 2000. The introduction of an unofficial quota for women in elected office increased women's representation from 14 per cent in 2012 to 24 per cent in 2016. In the latest 2022 federal election, however, women's representation dropped to 20 per cent (see Figure 1). These erratic shifts illustrate the difficulty of attaining balanced gender representation in the federal parliament and call into question the efficacy of the unofficial quota.

Figure 1. Somali women's representation in parliament, 1960–2022
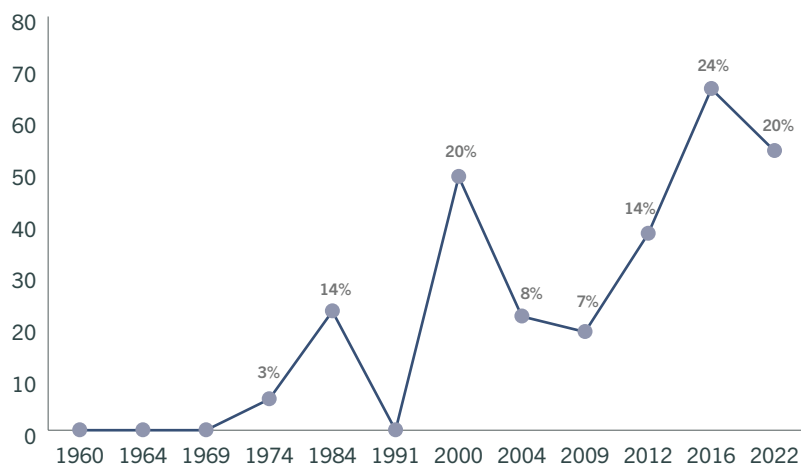
Source: Policy Brief – RAAGSAN 2022

1. UN Women, Asia, and the Pacific, 'Political Participation of Women'. https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/governance/political-participation-of-women.

2. N. Kabeer, 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal', *Gender and Development* 13 (2005).

1.1 About this study

Against the above backdrop, this scoping study seeks to better understand the political barriers faced by women in Somalia, with the ultimate aim of informing the design of a programme capable of increasing their participation in governance processes. The report's findings draw on the perceptions of a broad range of Somali stakeholders, including community members, clan elders, female political leaders past and present, political patronage groups, political financiers, local and federal-level leaders, and local and international movements advocating for women's inclusion. Diverse data collection and sampling methods—including face-to-face surveys, online surveys, key informant interviews (KIIs), consultation meetings, dialogue forums and radio shows—were utilized to ensure diverse opinions and categories. The study also conducted case studies to showcase individual stories of change.
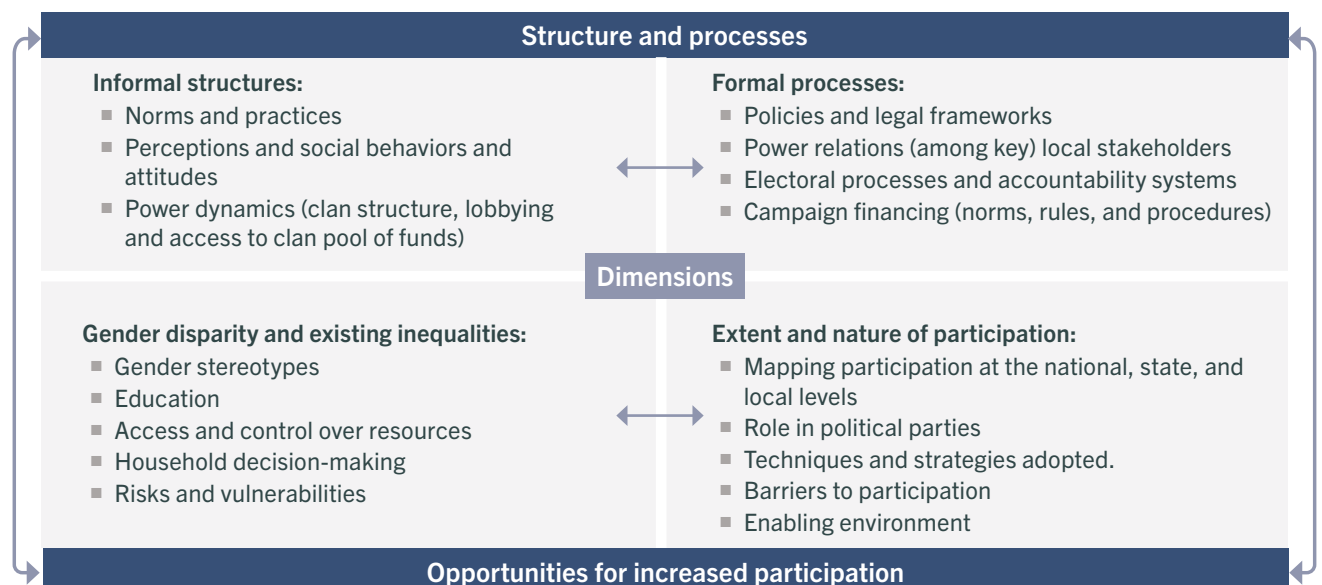
The information collected has informed the development of pragmatic recommendations for enhancing women's participation in governance processes. These in turn will feed into awareness initiatives aimed at assisting women's decision-making on contentious issues such as security, fiscal federalism, and power allocation.

1.2 Conceptual framework

The study's conceptual framework (see Figure 2) focused on understanding the factors contributing to women's (lack of) political participation, while taking pains not to brand women as mere victims of cultural and social norms. Thus, the focus was on better understanding how women's networks, financial status and roles within political groups either impeded or facilitated their involvement in governance processes.

The first section of the conceptual framework explored how, historically and contextually, formal and informal processes/structures have affected women's participation in political avenues. The second section then built on this research to produce context-specific knowledge on the nature of existing gender disparities. The outcomes of these stages informed the framework's final section, which involved documenting what worked well whilst identifying opportunities for increasing women's political participation.

Figure 2. Conceptual framework for the scoping study

Structure and processes	
Informal structures: ■ Norms and practices ■ Perceptions and social behaviors and attitudes ■ Power dynamics (clan structure, lobbying and access to clan pool of funds)	**Formal processes:** ■ Policies and legal frameworks ■ Power relations (among key) local stakeholders ■ Electoral processes and accountability systems ■ Campaign financing (norms, rules, and procedures)
Dimensions	
Gender disparity and existing inequalities: ■ Gender stereotypes ■ Education ■ Access and control over resources ■ Household decision-making ■ Risks and vulnerabilities	**Extent and nature of participation:** ■ Mapping participation at the national, state, and local levels ■ Role in political parties ■ Techniques and strategies adopted. ■ Barriers to participation ■ Enabling environment
Opportunities for increased participation	

1.3 Methodology

The methodology utilized for the study encompassed three main elements. First, a face-to-face perception survey was conducted during 14–25 March 2023 across six regions in Somalia (see Table 1). Of the 1,091 people interviewed, 50 per cent (549) were women and 50 per cent (542) men.

Table 1. Geographical distribution of face-to-face perception survey respondents

Region	City/district	Participants	Percentage %
Benadir	Mogadishu	224	21%
Bay	Baydhabo	287	26%
Galgaduud	Dhuusamareeb	112	10%
Lower Juba	Kismaayo	165	15%
Middle Shabelle	Jowhar	125	11%
Nugaal	Garowe	178	16%
Grand total		**1,091**	

Second, a remote call-based survey was conducted during 1–14 April 2023 with persons from ten regions across Somalia (see Table 2). Of the 336 people interviewed, 73 per cent (244) were women and 27 per cent (92) men.

Table 2. Geographical distribution of remote survey respondents

State	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Galmudug	76	23%
Hirshabelle	79	24%
Southwest	93	28%
Jubbaland	88	26%
Grand total	**336**	**100%**

Third, extensive qualitative research was conducted across all FMSs, in including Benadir Regional Authority. The research involved conducting KIIs with a total of 54 respondents, including women members of parliaments, women candidates, political financiers, clan leaders, religious leaders, local authorities, and leaders of women's organizations. Additionally, six consultative forums and four case studies were concluded as part of this research.

2. Context: women's political representation and participation in Somalia

Since Somalia gained independence in 1960, women have largely been excluded from the country's political processes. This is due both to Somalia's turbulent history, marked by political instability, conflict and poverty, and its cultural, social, and political environment. As a result, many Somali women are sceptical of politics, perceiving it as a male-dominated realm that perpetuates their marginalization.

Somalia's ongoing instability means women are particularly vulnerable to violence. The threat and reality of violence against women in politics, ranging from psychological intimidation to physical assault, has been a powerful deterrent to their political participation. Additionally, conflict-induced displacement has fractured communities and disrupted social networks, impairing women's ability to engage in political activities. These limitations have forced women to sacrifice their political ambitions and instead focus on supporting their families, with prolonged conflict severely reducing their educational and financial opportunities to actively participate in politics.

Even so, over the past decade or so the federal parliament has seen a significant increase in the number of women representatives, largely due to successful campaigning regarding quotas. Currently, Somalia's technically unofficial quota system reserves 30 per cent of seats in the federal parliament for women. Some regional states have instituted similar measures. Implementation of these quotas has, however, been slow (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Women's seat allocation for Somali parliaments based on 30 per cent quota representation
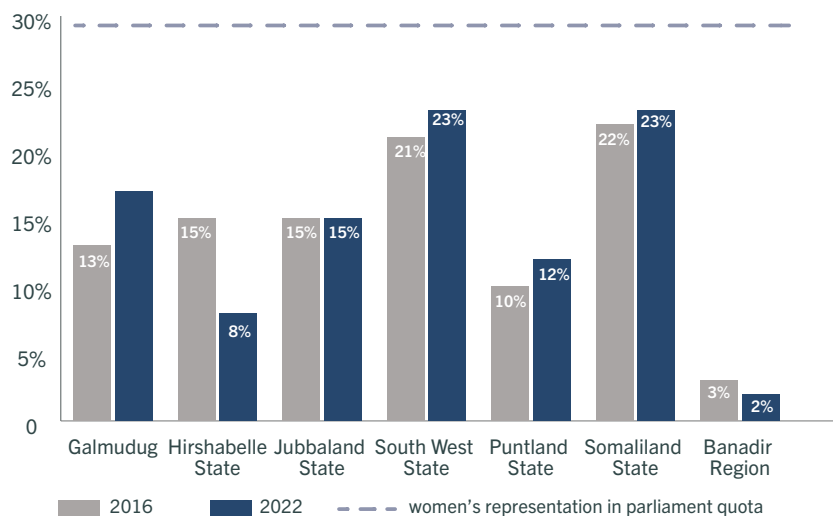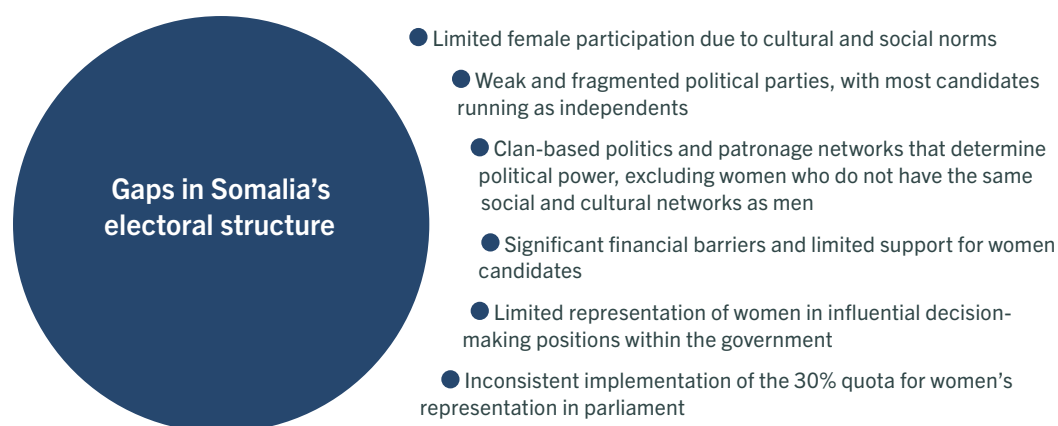
2.1 Overview of Somalia's electoral system

Somalia's electoral system, which has been in place since 2012, is a hybrid of traditional and modern systems, with clan elders selecting delegates who then elect members of parliament. While theoretically Somalia has a multi-party system, the country's political parties are weak and fragmented, making it difficult for women to access political power through them.[3] Instead, most male and female candidates run as independents.

Somalia is constituted by five federal member states (FMSs), Benadir Regional Administration and one self-declared independent state (Somaliland), each with their own political dynamics. The FGS has two houses of parliament: a lower house (the House of the People) and an upper house (the Senate). House of the People members are elected through a clan-based electoral system, while the FMSs appoint Senate members.

Figure 4. Gaps in Somalia's electoral structure

Gaps in Somalia's electoral structure

- Limited female participation due to cultural and social norms
- Weak and fragmented political parties, with most candidates running as independents
- Clan-based politics and patronage networks that determine political power, excluding women who do not have the same social and cultural networks as men
- Significant financial barriers and limited support for women candidates
- Limited representation of women in influential decision-making positions within the government
- Inconsistent implementation of the 30% quota for women's representation in parliament

When it comes to political participation, women's roles and opportunities are often constrained due to prevailing cultural and social norms, with violence and intimidation, limited access to education and resources, and discrimination based on gender and clan among the challenges faced.[4] Women candidates also face significant financial barriers to running for office compared to their male counterparts, as well as limited support from political groups and other organizations.[5]

Efforts have been made to address these issues. For example, the 2016 Electoral Law requires that at least 30 per cent of a political party's candidates for both the federal houses of parliament are women, although many parties have failed to meet the required threshold. While political parties have made some progress in enhancing women's political participation in recent years, much work remains to be done.[6] In addition to quotas, there is considerable scope for political parties to provide training and material support for female candidates, as well as encourage them to participate in internal party

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3. D. Muyonga, 'Why the First-Past-the-Post Electoral System is Elusive in Somalia', *The African Review* 49/3 (2022).

4. M. A. Mohamed and M. S. Samatar, 'Factors Influencing Women Participation in Politics at Federal, State and Local Elections in Puntland State of Somalia', *International Journal of Contemporary Applied Research* 5/6 (2019).

5. W. O. Ligawa, 'Challenges Influencing Peace Building Strategies in Somalia: A Study of AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)', *Open Access Library Journal* 4/10 (2017).
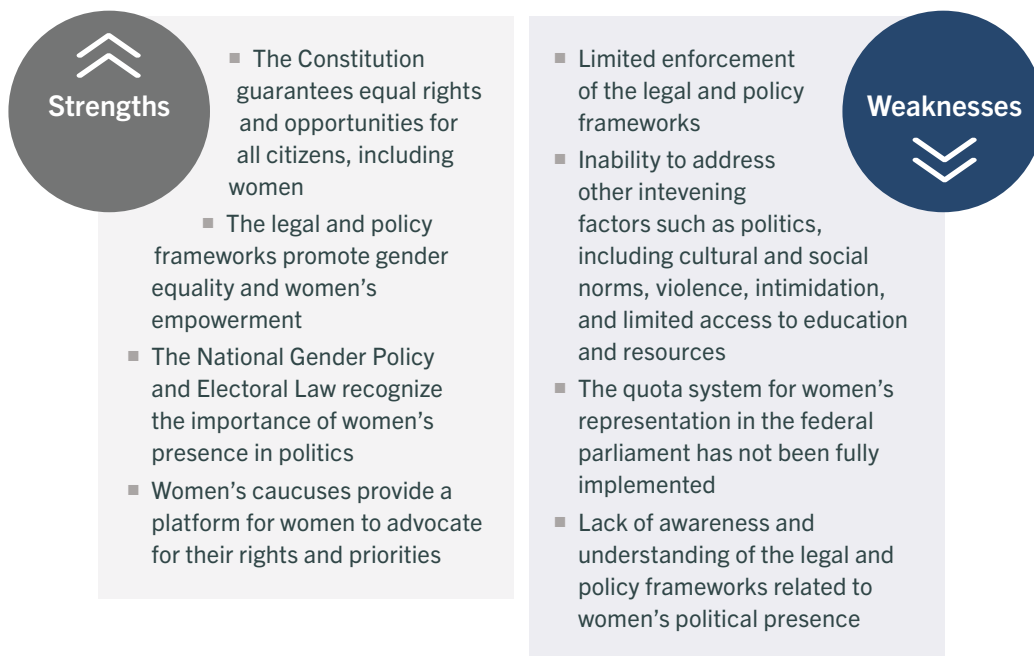
6. J. Juma, 'Political Parties and Democracy: How Influential Have Political Parties Been in the Growth of Democracy in Africa?', 2022. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4289420.

leadership positions.[7] Alongside the Electoral Law, Somalia's National Gender Policy also seeks to encourage gender-based equality, including in politics.[8] Despite such efforts, however, women's political participation overall remains limited.

2.2 Legal and policy frameworks

Women's participation in Somali politics has been governed by a legal framework and policies that have produced mixed results. Initially, the 2004 Transitional Federal Charter set a 12 per cent quota for women in Parliament, but actual representation was only 7 per cent and later dropped to 5 per cent. In 2012, the Garowe Principles established a commitment to a 30 per cent reserved seat quota for women, but the constitution did not guarantee this quota for the next parliament. When the Federal Parliament was inaugurated in 2012, only 14 per cent of its members were female due to clan disagreements. Efforts to promote gender equality, such as the enactment of the National Gender Policy of 2016 emphasizing quotas and affirmative action and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, have been implemented to enhance women's involvement in peacebuilding and decision-making processes but often fallen short. (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. Strengths and weaknesses of Somalia's legal and policy framework for women's political participation

Strengths

- The Constitution guarantees equal rights and opportunities for all citizens, including women
- The legal and policy frameworks promote gender equality and women's empowerment
- The National Gender Policy and Electoral Law recognize the importance of women's presence in politics
- Women's caucuses provide a platform for women to advocate for their rights and priorities

Weaknesses

- Limited enforcement of the legal and policy frameworks
- Inability to address other intevening factors such as politics, including cultural and social norms, violence, intimidation, and limited access to education and resources
- The quota system for women's representation in the federal parliament has not been fully implemented
- Lack of awareness and understanding of the legal and policy frameworks related to women's political presence

It is crucial to "reshift" focus towards strengthening the enforcement of existing legal and policy frameworks, comprehensively addressing cultural and social norms factors, advocating for the full implementation of quota systems, and enhancing awareness and understanding among women to create an inclusive and supportive political environment that facilitates and encourages women's active participation in politics.

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7. K. Beauregard, 'Gender, political participation, and electoral systems: A cross national analysis', *European Journal of Political Research* 53/3 (2014).

8. D. T. K. Sahu and K. Yadav, 'Women's education and political participation', *International Journal of Advanced Education and Research* 3/6 (2018).

Table 3 lists some of the international and regional frameworks related to women's political presence that have been ratified by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). This includes the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Union's Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, although implementation of their provisions has been limited. Discriminatory laws and cultural assumptions continue to restrict women's political participation in Somalia, and violence against women in politics remains a significant issue.[9] [10] [11]

Table 3. International and regional frameworks ratified by the FGS

Framework	Stipulations
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	■ Ratified in Somalia in 1985. ■ Confirms rights of women/girls and focuses on eliminating all rights violations against them.[9] ■ Calls for removal of laws and practices based on gender-based discrimination and promotion of women's participation throughout all areas of life, including politics.
African Union's Protocol for Protection of Women's Rights	■ Ratified in Somalia in 2005. ■ Seeks to support and safeguard women's rights and equality in Africa. ■ Confirms significance of role played by women in politics and decision-making and calls for measures to ensure women can fairly participate in political processes.[10] ■ Recognizes the need for an action plan, including quotas, to ensure women's presence within political institutions.
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)	■ Promotes democracy, human rights, and gender equality. Has developed tools and initiatives to promote women's participation in politics, including the 'Women in Parliament' database, which provides information on female participation in parliaments worldwide.[11]
United Nations	■ Plays a significant role in enhancing the role played by women in Somali politics. ■ UN Women's office in Somalia works closely with the FGS and civil society organizations to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. ■ Provides technical support and training to women candidates and officials.

9. United Nations General Assembly, 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women', 1979.

10. A. Budoo, 'Analysing the monitoring mechanisms of the African Women's Protocol at the level of the African Union', *African Human Rights Law Journal* 18/1 (2018).

11. Santero-Sánchez, R., and B. C. Núñez, 'Pursuing equal pay for equal work: Gender diversity in management positions and the gender pay gap throughout the wage distribution', *BRQ Business Research Quarterly*, 23 September 2022. https://doi.org/10.1177/23409444221125239.

2.3 Traditional gender roles and patriarchal attitudes

Traditional expectations around gender have historically played a significant role in limiting women's political engagement. Women often have responsibility for domestic and caregiving duties, while men are expected to be the primary breadwinners and hold positions of power. Thus, a Somali woman pursuing political ambitions is frequently perceived as having abandoned her caregiving responsibilities, regardless of the fact she may be a capable politician with good leadership skills. Moreover, the decision to venture into politics can lead to a woman's familial responsibilities coming into conflict with her political aspirations, increasing the difficulty of a women establishing herself as a credible political actor and leaving her open to ridicule as a 'bad mother' who 'will not find enough time for their family'.[12] The time demands of political office and lack of flexibility in political engagements further complicate the ability of women to manage their various responsibilities. As one female state MP from Kismayo observed:

> *I still get criticized when I stay outside in the evenings for the unofficial but crucial meetings at night. Society strictly believes that women should stay home and care for their children instead of being involved in political meetings, and everyone judges us.[13]*

Somalia's political structures themselves are highly patriarchal, with men dominating almost all political and governance spaces. Elders, who play a significant role in dictating cultural norms within clans, tend to favour men and are resistant to women representing the clan. This preference for male politicians reflects patriarchal attitudes that prioritize the interests of men over women, hindering the latter's political participation. Such attitudes often stereotype women as being 'too emotional to make any rational decision during their political careers'.[14] Moreover, women in politics face harsher scrutiny than their male counterparts, opening them up to unfair criticism and moral judgements.

In interviews, female politicians detailed how they had had to grapple with prejudice stemming from their being female, looking too young and/or being unmarried or divorced. Such prejudice had resulted in them being dismissed as being inexperienced and so unable to manage political responsibilities. It was also reported that women are perceived as weak and emotional, lacking the confidence to actively campaign and participate in politics. These stereotypes perpetuate gender bias and undermine women's credibility in the arena of political leadership. As a female member of the Qardo Council in Garowe acknowledged, *'Most Somali people are not used to women who seek public office and have political ambitions, and that was a challenge for me because people need their awareness to be changed'.*

2.4 Motivations, perceptions and behaviours of women, men, communities, and state actors

Despite the obstacles outlined above, Somali women are increasingly motivated to enter the country's political space. Support networks and a changing societal landscape have inspired women to break barriers, challenge gender norms and work towards inclusive governance in Somalia. Table 4 sets out some of the key factors underlying this motivation.

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12. Interview with Kismayo MP, 13.03.2023

13. Interview with Kismayo MP. 14.03.2023

14. Interview with Kismayo MP. 13.03.2023

Table 4. Motivating factors behind women joining political spaces in Somalia

Factors	Description
Professional background	Women with experience in the humanitarian sector gain valuable skills and networks relevant to political engagement. Moreover, working in the professional sector equips them to navigate complex systems, advocate for community interests and interact with various stakeholders.
Personal drive	For many women, their underrepresentation in politics and personal experience serves as a driving force to bring about meaningful change and address policy, legal and service delivery inadequacies.
Support networks and connections	Support networks and influential connections play a vital role in motivating women to enter politics. These networks offer guidance, mentorship, and access to resources, enabling women to amplify their voices within political circles.
Background in activism	A career or experience in activism instils a sense of civic responsibility and equips women with such valuable skills as organizing and advocacy.
Increased educational opportunities	Increases in female educational levels and societal acceptance of women in politics have helped drive women's political participation. As educational opportunities expand, so women gain the knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary for political competence.
Community familiarity	Women's involvement in community initiatives gives them a deeper understanding of local dynamics. Moreover, their active engagement showcases their commitment to public service and potential to drive positive change, thereby earning the trust and support of community members.
Experience in women's solidarity organizations	Working in women's solidarity organizations offers a platform for developing leadership abilities, building alliances, and advocating for gender equality. Experience gained within these organizations can strengthen women's confidence, propelling them towards political participation and activism.

These personal, external, and structural motivations can serve as a foundation for developing effective strategies and pathways to support women entering political spaces. Women with professional backgrounds, particularly in the humanitarian sector and women's solidarity organizations, offer a set of valuable skills and networks that can be nurtured. Providing tailored leadership development programs can be instrumental in translating women's professional skills into political action and ease their transition into political spheres. Similarly, by leveraging on personal drive and ambition by providing workshops and mentorship programs, women can be empowered and educated about the political process and the impact they can make and enhance their leadership and communication skills, and to provide them with the necessary knowledge and tools to navigate the political landscape.

2.5 Civil society and women's organizations

Over the past two decades, civil society and women's organizations have played a key role in opening up space for women's political participation. Whereas in the 1990s, reconciliation conferences only included representatives from warring factions   and some civil society members, including women. However, these women were not directly involved in negotiations between

the warring factions. The 2000 Arta Conference marked a breakthrough as it included women delegates from various civil society groups. Despite this, women were guaranteed only 9.1 per cent of seats in the Transitional Federal Charter. Moreover, the 4.5 power-sharing agreement subordinated the position of women to that of clan, leading to discontent among many Somalis.

In 2002, the Sixth Clan—a Somali women's political movement—emerged as a result of the lessons learned from the Arta Conference, inspiring Somali women to seek their rights and participate in decision-making processes. In 2012, the Garowe Principles were agreed upon, with parliamentary members to be chosen by 135 elders. Women's groups were not initially involved in discussions but bolstered by international support, they protested and were ultimately able to exert pressure. As a result, a 20 per cent quota was guaranteed for women, later increasing to 30 per cent following further pressure from civil society and women's groups. This was not, however, incorporated into national legal frameworks. During the subsequent 2016–2017 elections, Somali civil society and women's groups campaigned to safeguard the 30 per cent quota, lobbied for reduced registration fees for women candidates, and monitored election sites.

The findings from this study showed a strong belief that women's groups and civil society organizations are the best-placed actors to lead women, peace, and security work. The current pool of women activists, lawyers and political leaders in Somalia presents a unique opportunity for advancing the agenda sought by such groups, including increasing women's representation in the next election, adopting the 30 per cent quota in the constitution and advancing legal reform in key areas.

3. Findings: challenges to women's participation and the impact of quotas

3.1 Challenges faced by women seeking to participate in governance processes

Women hoping to enter politics in Somalia can expect to encounter an array of social, cultural, religious, and structural barriers. As one participant observed, 'Somali politics is not easy for anyone, and women have twice the challenges to earn a seat at the political table'.[15] This view was reinforced by the result of the perception survey (see Figure 6), which revealed that societal stereotypes are seen to substantially shape women's political opportunities and participation, with 63 per cent (683) of respondents asserting that stereotypes create barriers to women entering politics, and 52 per cent (567) reporting that they limit women's opportunities to take leadership positions. Many respondents also expressed concerns that societal stereotypes perpetuate traditional gender roles and norms (45 per cent; 486) and discourage women from seeking political positions (52 per cent; 563). With this in mind, the analysis below examines the main actors responsible for shaping women's political participation, before delving further into the main obstacles to participation identified by perception survey respondents.

**Figure 6. Influence of societal stereotypes on women's participation in politics**
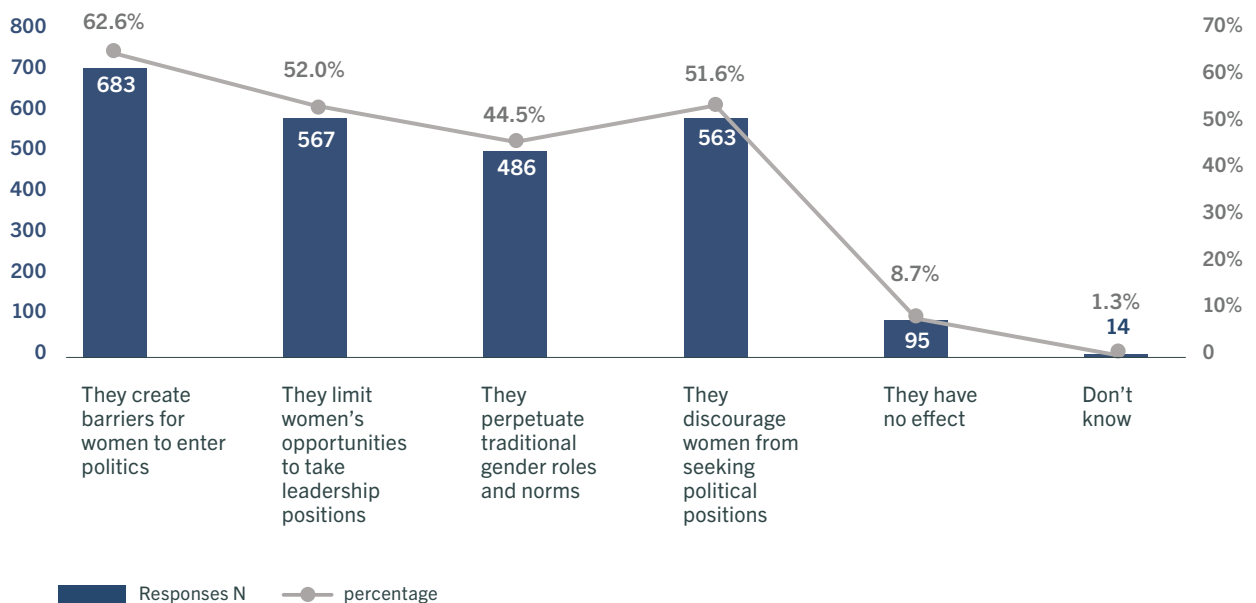
15. Interview with political gatekeeper, Garowe 15032023

3.1.1. Key stakeholders shaping women's political participation

The perception survey revealed clan leaders/elders to be the most influential group in terms of shaping women's political involvement, with approximately 78 per cent (850) of participants acknowledging their role in community decision-making. Clan elders are respected figures who embody traditional authority within their clans and act as representatives of their clans in political processes. They play a role in the selection/endorsement of political candidates, and particularly and hold influence over clan members' voting decisions and can sway political outcomes through their endorsements. Religious leaders were also identified as influential actors by 65 per cent (708) of respondents, pointing to their authority when it comes to spiritual guidance and influencing gender-related social norms. Meanwhile, state government leaders were recognized by 41 per cent (443) of participants as a key group affecting attitudes to women's participation, compared to 30 per cent (368) for federal government leaders.

Figure 7. Key groups influencing women's political involvement
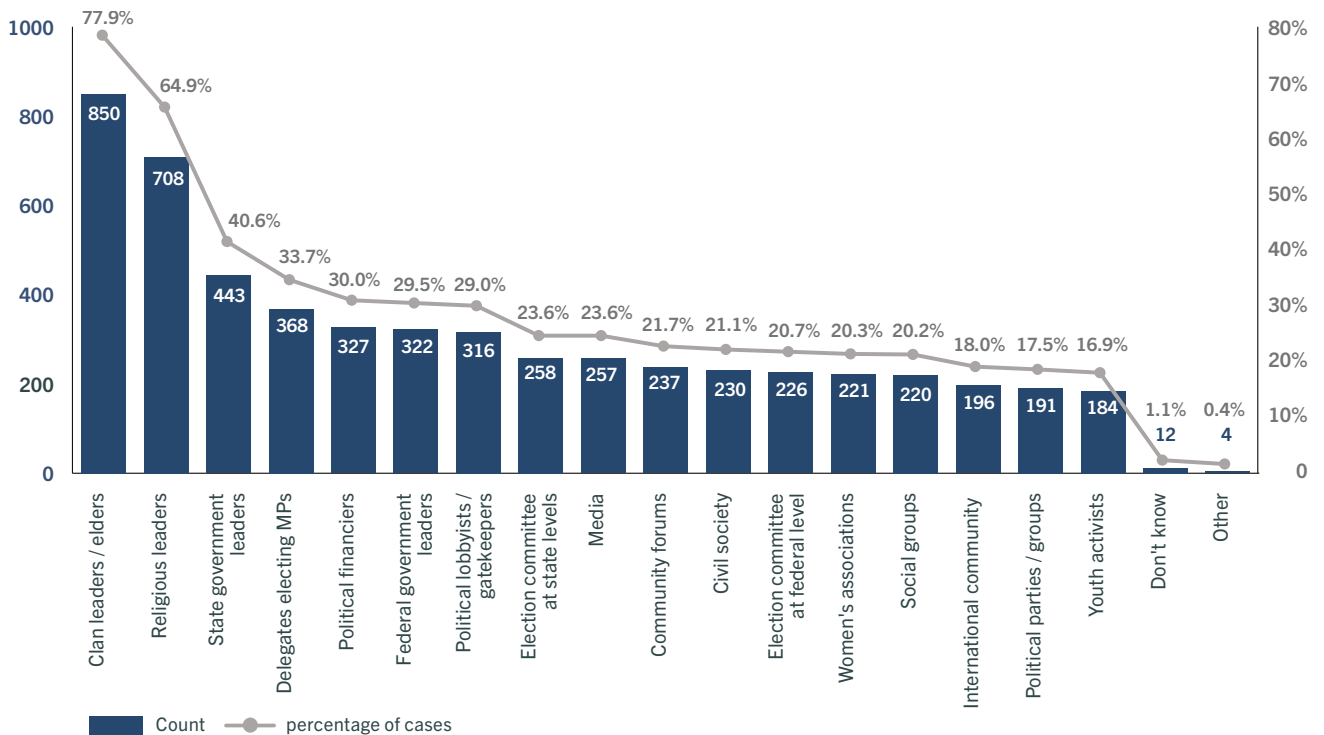
In terms of religion, while Islam does not inherently limit women's political engagement, conservative cultural interpretations and societal attitudes influenced by religious beliefs may nevertheless lead to this outcome. Respondents highlighted that religious scholar and those giving sermons in mosques have helped shape the general public's perception of what a woman's role should be, with a female political candidate from Mogadishu opining that:

> *People have been convinced that women should stay at home. The mosque sermons guide the general public's attitude and perception toward women, and some scholars believe that women should not be in decision-making positions. This spiritually affects many people who could be sympathetic to the women's cause.[16]*

16. Interview with female political candidate, Mogadishu 18.03.2023

The selection and nomination processes within political parties often exhibit bias against women. They tend to prioritize 'male traits' as the criteria for choosing candidates, creating an environment that disadvantages women. The candidate selection process often favours men due to their dominance in selection committees, perpetuating gender disparities. Similarly, women face barriers in attaining leadership roles within parties, and accessing resources crucial for political campaigns, such as funding, information, and party support as patriarchal norms persist. Party policies and platforms may also reflect gender bias as the culture within parties can be unwelcoming towards women, discouraging their involvement. Also, women may be overlooked for training and development opportunities, which limits their growth within parties. In addition, the lack of internal democracy, non-democratic membership recruitment, and the absence of meaningful elections when in the selection of party leaders further perpetuates this such bias. As a result, women's political exposure and visibility are limited, denying them the strategic political leverage necessary to secure party nominations.

Strategies to address this include implementing quotas, promoting women's representation in candidate selection committees, providing leadership training, establishing funds for women candidates, developing gender-sensitive policies and platforms, fostering an inclusive party culture, and offering equal training opportunities for women.

3.1.2 Barriers to women's political participation

Given the reported sway exerted by clan elders/leaders, it is unsurprising that lack of support from such figures was the most mentioned barrier to women's political participation, with 73 per cent (797) of respondents citing it as a factor (see Table 5). Somalia's political structure is based on the 4.5 clan system in which the four majority clans get the largest share of political seats, with the remaining 0.5 allocated to minority clans. This system vests power in clan elders, who have the biggest say in who gets selected to represent the different clans. This clan-based selection process disadvantages women, as elders are more inclined to support male candidates. No female elders currently wield sufficient influence within clans to ensure support for female candidates. Additionally, it was noted that if a woman has marital ties to a different clan, this will likely hinder her candidacy due to anxieties among clan leaders that she will favour the interests of her husband's clan:

> *Female politicians might marry into different clans from theirs. This usually affects and limits the endorsement they receive from their clan elders, as there is this widespread assumption that females will only support the clan of their children and husband if they win the candidacy. This has caused the loss of many campaigns led by well-known and academic female candidates.[17]*

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17. Interview with Head of the Women's Group under MoWHRD, Kismayo 12.03.2023

Table 5: Barriers and challenges preventing women from participating in politics

Barriers	No of responses	Proportion
Lack of support from clan leaders and elders	797	73%
Religious limitations for women	528	48%
Lack of support of political groups and lobbyists	485	45%
Lack of family support	376	35%
Lack of time due to family responsibilities	325	30%
Politics is perceived as not suitable for women culturally	230	21%
Limited financial resources to finance campaigns	200	18%
Fear of societal rejection	186	17%
Men domination and lack of encouragement for women	182	17%
Societal expectations	176	16%
Lack of confidence to stand for election	157	14%
Limited access to jobs and economic resources	143	13%
Lack of experience	130	12%
Women are not interested in politics	113	10%
Limited access to political networks	106	10%
Limited access to education	94	9%
Violence and harassment	89	8%
Other (please specify):	7	1%
Don't know	6	1%

The next two most widely cited barriers to participation were religion (48 per cent; 528) and lack of support from political groups and lobbyists (44 per cent; 485). Somalia's politics are determined by a relatively small elite, who have significant networks and power—the closer an individual is to them, the more likely they will be to win a seat or political position. Women who participate in politics in Somalia, however, often join the political landscape later in life, with many having spent the majority of their career working in the humanitarian sector. As such, they struggle to build alliances and political connections, making it difficult to gain endorsements during campaigns.

Lack of support from family (34 per cent; 376) and time constraints due to being family caretakers (30 per cent; 325) were also highlighted by many as key barriers. Women's participation in political spaces often provokes familial pushback, with interview data revealing that a woman's family members will often try to discourage her from running for office. It was also noted that women who aspire to have a political career frequently meet resistance from partners/husbands, who view such aspirations as inappropriate or unfeminine, potentially leading to separation or divorce. The demanding nature of political campaigns and the responsibilities of holding office require extensive time and energy, making it difficult for women to fulfil traditional caregiving roles and meet family expectations. Every female candidate/politician informant reported they had struggled to balance the demands of being in the political limelight with being a wife and/or mother.

Among the men interviewed for the face-to-face perception survey, 76 per cent (869) expressed a willingness to support women within their circle—such as their wife, sister, or daughter—pursue an electoral campaign. Conversely, 23 per cent (250) stated they would not support such political endeavours.

These findings broadly align with the remote survey, where 69 per cent (231) of men reported they would support a woman vying for an election, compared to 27 per cent (90) who wouldn't. Overall, these figures suggest a positive inclination among Somali men towards promoting gender equality and empowerment.

The face-to-face perception survey also documented the rationales given by the men unwilling to support women in their circle running for political positions (see Table 6). These reasons appear to be shaped largely by societal norms, religious restrictions, and gender stereotypes, with the most cited explanation (61 per cent; 135) being that women would face challenges balancing their domestic responsibilities with political involvement. Such findings underscore the persistence of traditional gender roles in Somali society.

Table 6. Reason for not supporting women to run for political positions

Reason for not supporting women to run for political positions	Number	%
Because of family/household responsibilities, they don't have time	135	61%
Our religion doesn't allow	132	59%
It is not allowed culturally	131	59%
Women cannot represent the clan	63	28%
Politics needs a lot of resources, and it will be difficult to mobilize	63	28%
Women will be harmed in politics	60	27%
They are not interested in politics	56	25%
Politics prevent women from playing their role in society which is to nurture	53	24%
Women don't have enough experience and knowledge in politics	50	22%
It is the international community that promotes women in politics	45	20%
Other (please specify)	24	11%

Those women in Somalia willing to disregard such barriers and run for political office face further significant obstacles (Table 7). Similar to the previously noted result regarding barriers to women's political participation in general, the perception survey revealed that lack of support from clan elders was seen as the most pressing barrier to female candidates (71 per cent; 780), with clans giving preference to male candidates over female candidates the second most-noted barrier (60 per cent; 653). Clan elders generally seek to uphold conservative gender norms and perceive political leadership as a male domain, and so are resistant to women's candidatures. This lack of endorsement limits women's access to resources, networks, and financial support, making it difficult for them to effectively compete when running for office. As the founder of a local NGO observed, 'From our clan, women were never allowed to represent our clan the last 20 years'.[18]

18. Interview with founder of local NGO, Baidoa. 21.03.2023

Table 7. Barrier's women face when running for political office

Barrier's women face when running for political office	No of responses	Proportion
Lack of support from clan leaders	780	72%
Clans favouring men over women	653	60%
Structural challenges at governance level (lack of progressive policies)	465	43%
Women don't get financial support for their campaigns	371	34%
Political spaces are dominated by men and that is a barrier to women	265	24%
Most of the women don't have proper campaign strategy	252	23%
Female candidates don't get the support of the leaders of political group leaders	168	15%
Women are not part of the conference and avenues where decision on elections are made	152	14%
Women don't use social platforms and media, limiting their influence in voting patterns	149	14%
Limited representation of women in election committees	146	13%
Women announce their candidacy late time	135	12%
Lack of women's quota implementation	120	11%
No clear policy on achieving women's quota	110	10%
Not being an integral part of powerful party organization(s)	108	10%
Late on start of resource mobilisation and campaigning	106	10%
Current election model and procedures are not gender inclusive	95	9%
Lack of mainstream media coverage	87	8%
Other (please specify):	7	1%

Structural challenges at a governance level, such as lack of progressive policies, were cited by 35 per cent (465) of respondents. As outlined above, Somalia lacks comprehensive legislation with which to enforce the 30 per cent quota for women in decision-making positions. This in turn weakens the national and local governments' commitment to women's representation. A Garowe-based informant expressed the issue thus: 'There needs to be a legal framework that protects women's participation in politics. Without such a framework, it is difficult to hold government officials accountable for the role of women in society'.[19]

Lack of financial support for women's campaigns was also highlighted by many as a barrier to women running for political office (34 per cent; 371). In general, Somali women face significant financial barriers, as the majority do not work or own income-generating businesses. This is exacerbated by limited access to financial resources such as banking systems, loans, and property ownership. Thus, the high registration fees for candidates—USD 20,000 for

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19. Interview with political gatekeeper, Garowe.15.03.2023

the upper house and USD 10,000 for the lower house—are prohibitive for many women.

On top of this, as a political financier from Kismayo observed, 'It costs at least $20,000 to $25,000 to run a campaign, and it will be exceedingly difficult if you lack the money to attract lobbyists and clan elders'.[20] Female candidates encounter systemic bias in the form of political gatekeepers and financiers who tend to regard women as high-risk investments and thus favour male politicians when it comes to allocating funds. As such, women find themselves excluded from recognized political organizations or networks, and frequently struggle to secure the financial backing they need to mount a successful campaign.

Almost a quarter (24 per cent; 265) of perception survey respondents cited male dominance as a key barrier to women running for political office. The political arena is male dominated, both in terms of the number of men in office and the influence they wield. This reflects the patriarchal culture prevalent in the country, which extends to the political sphere. Men dominate politics not necessarily with the express intention of stamping out female competition, but due to traditional gender norms that perceive political leadership as a male domain. The dominance of men in politics thus becomes an inherent characteristic of the system, indirectly suppressing women's participation.

It has been observed that male politicians often underestimate or overlook women as viable competition. This can be attributed to deep-seated biases and societal norms that undervalue women's capabilities. An example of this can be seen in the phenomenon of '*malxiis*' candidates where men make agreements with women candidates who agree to withdraw from the competition at the last moment, thus strengthening the position of the male candidates without the need for a competitive face-off. Also, the exploitation of women's quota is another worrying trend. Some clans or parties weaponize these quotas to undermine male candidates from rival clans or parties. This does not only violate the spirit of gender equality measures, but it further perpetuates negative perceptions of women's political participation. Women are used as pawns in the political chessboard rather than being treated as legitimate players with their own rights and abilities. The founder of a local NGO in Baidoa summed up the situation in blunt terms: 'It is man's club'.[21]

Other notable barriers highlighted in the survey are limited access to funding for campaigns (10 per cent), not being an integral part of powerful party organizations (10 per cent), and a lack of support from leaders of political groups (15 per cent). As this suggests, access to resources and relationships with influential groups can considerably impact women's chances for political participation. Table 8 elaborates on how access to resources can affect the opportunities available for women's political participation.

20. Interview with political financier, Kismayo 12.03.2023

21. Interview with founder of a local NGO, Baidoa 21.03.2023.

Table 8. Effect of access to resources on women's opportunities for political participation

Strategy	Description
Increased access to financial resources	Women with access to sufficient funding are more likely to run for political office, as it enables them to cover campaign expenses, advertising costs and networking opportunities.
Networking and mentorship	Access to powerful politicians, community leaders and decision-makers provides networking and mentorship opportunities, helping women navigate the political environment's complexities and boosting their visibility and credibility.
Access to information	Political knowledge is crucial for women to understand their rights, identify avenues for participation and engage in political debates. Access to training programmes and political information equips women with the necessary skills and expertise to effectively engage in politics. Women may face challenges in accessing the right information, however, as important political conversations often take place in environments considered inaccessible to women.
Social capital and endorsements	Connections with powerful groups allow women to leverage social capital and gain endorsements from influential individuals or organizations. These endorsements enhance women's credibility and visibility, helping them overcome gender bias and societal stereotypes.
Access to political institutions	Access to political institutions, including political parties, governmental bodies, and electoral systems, is crucial for women's political participation. Connections with influential groups enables women to navigate these institutions effectively, secure party nominations, hold leadership positions and influence decision-making processes.

The perception survey also identified a number of institutional barriers standing in the way of women from running for political office (see Figure 8). These include lack of clarity around election systems (61 per cent; 662); non-implementation or inadequate enforcement of election laws (49 per cent; 534); security concerns (50 per cent; 550); absence of a community-wide political settlement (47 per cent; 516); and resistance by political leaders to the decentralization of elections.

Figure 8. Barriers to political systems and institutions hindering women's political participation

Barrier	Value	Percentage
The election systems are not clear	662	61%
Security situation doesn't allow an election to take place in different locations	550	50%
The election laws are not implemented	534	49%
Political settlement has not yet been reached by the community	516	47%
The political leaders don't allow decentralizationn of elections or that the power of elections are handed over to the community	371	34%

3.2　The impact of governance structures and quotas

While there have been efforts to increase women's participation in Somali politics, progress has uneven across different levels of governance. As one informant from Mogadishu observed, 'There are more women MPs than before in Somalia, but they are far from being represented at all levels of the government'.[22]

At the local level, women's representation in decision-making varies between regions. While in some areas women have secured positions through clan leadership endorsements, elsewhere historically ingrained social norms have led to women being excluded from political participation and representation within their clans. At a regional/FMS level, meanwhile, women's representation on decision-making bodies remains limited. Although some regions/FMSs have taken steps to increase women's political participation, the percentage of seats held by women falls far short of the agreed-upon 30 per cent quota.

Women's representation in decision-making bodies remains particularly low at the national level. Allocation of the Somali parliament's 275 seats is very much influenced by clan dynamics, with women generally prevented from assuming leadership positions on behalf of their clans. As such, the number of women parliamentarians remains significantly below the global average.

The call for a women's quota in Somali politics dates to the early 2000s, but it wasn't until the 2012 electoral process that the idea began to gain significant traction. Despite opposition and cultural challenges, the FGS eventually put its weight behind the stated objective of at least 30 per cent of seats in the Senate and House of the People being occupied by women.

While many perception study respondents expressed support for women occupying a substantial proportion of seats, there were differing opinions on the specific percentage of seats women should occupy (see Figure 9). Among male respondents, 42 per cent (227) advocated that women occupy 25–50 per cent of seats, which was almost on a par with female respondents (43 per cent; 234). Differences between the genders emerged among those advocating higher or lower allocations: while 24 per cent (131) of women argued that women should be allocated more than 50 per cent of seats, just 10 per cent (54) of men agreed; conversely, greater proportions of men than women wished to see women occupy 10–25 per cent or less than 10 per cent of seats. A small number of respondents, 3.6 per cent (20) of women and 7 per cent (38) of men, did not support any form of quota system. These differing views on quotas highlight the delicate balance between promoting gender equality through affirmative action and advocating a merit-based approach. Although most respondents saw quotas as necessary to address historical

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22. Interview with political gatekeeper, Mogadishu 17.03.2023

imbalances, some emphasized that equal opportunities and competition should be prioritized, with quotas viewed as potentially compromising such principles.

The implications of these findings are significant and multifaceted and underscore the need for a comprehensive, consultative, and context-specific approach to address the complex issues surrounding gender parity in Somali politics. The findings reiterate the importance of conducting awareness campaigns to address misconceptions surrounding gender quota systems. Also, there is need for more dialogue and engagement with all stakeholders, including men, to forge consensus on the best ways to achieve gender parity in political representation in Somalia.

Figure 9. Male and female opinions on the proportion of political positions that should be held by women
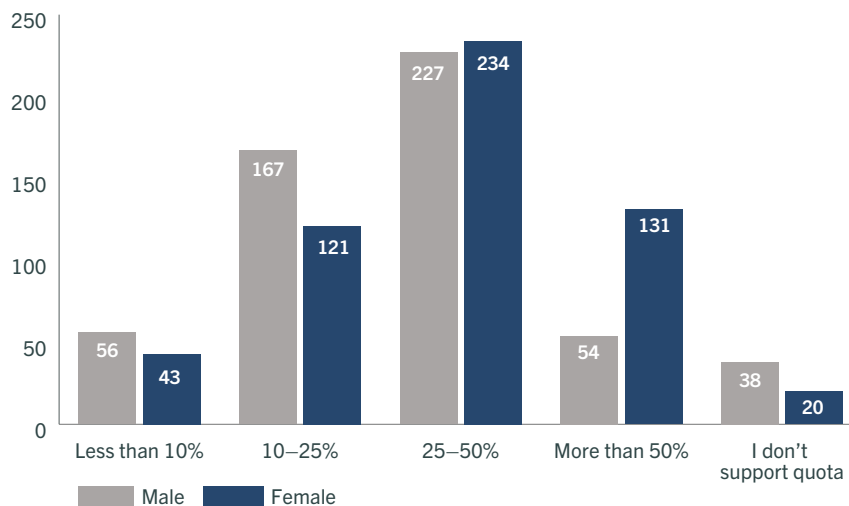
Nevertheless, key informants reported that the quota system had positively impacted the political landscape, elevating women's visibility in the political sphere and serving as a catalyst for others to engage in politics and pursue leadership roles. As a female member of the Qardo Council in Garowe observed:

> *The most important technique is how my other female colleagues, and I won the last council election, a closed list made for women to guarantee inclusive outcomes. This was possible because Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission insisted on it.*[23]

On the negative side, however, respondents highlighted that implementation of the current quota policy is impractical, as evidenced by the failure to meet the 30 per cent quota target in either 2016 or the latest 2022 elections, when women's representation dropped to 20 per cent. Respondents also aired their concerns regarding the system's practicality and sustainability—especially in light of Somalia's potential shift to a one-person-one-vote (OPOV) system in the coming years—as well as the absence of clear legal provisions or constitutional articles safeguarding implementation of the quota. In this regard, a political campaigner in Garowe argues, 'If we want to see the quota system sustained, we need to make it easier for women to get elected by passing laws to protect the allocation method'.[24]

23. Interview with member of Qardo Council, Garowe. 16.03.2023

24. Interview with political campaigner, Garowe 15.03.2023

Interviews for the study highlighted that some male political actors do support the quota system as a means of addressing the historical disadvantages faced by women, and more generally recognize the need for increased gender equality in politics. Conversely, respondents noted that other male political actors view quotas as a form of preferential treatment and believe that positions should be allocated based on qualifications and capabilities, without any consideration of the immense challenges women who choose to participate in politics endure. This raises the potential issue of quotas unintentionally reinforcing the gender stereotype that women are inherently less qualified or competent than men:

> *I think that women should not only rely on the 30 per cent quota to get into politics, but any ambitious women should learn about the political landscape of Somalia and be strategic about how they want to be seen by the public. Sometimes, women may accept the social perception of them and their abilities, which then gives society the impression that women are not good at politics.*[25]

Furthermore, outside the parliamentary realm, women are also inadequately represented in key high-level institutions such as the National Consultative Council (NCC), the Parliamentary Constitutional Oversight Committee (OC), and the Independent Constitutional Review and Implementation Commission (ICRIC). Institutionalizing gender mainstreaming, implementation of quotas/legal mandates that enforce the inclusion of women in high-level institutions, reviewing and revising recruitment and promotion policies to eliminate biases and providing training and development programs for women to prepare them for leadership roles are instrumental in promoting representation of women in high level positions in government.

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25. Interview with political gatekeeper, Garowe. 15.02.2023

4. Conclusion and recommendations

The research conducted for this study reveals a strong demand for women to be more active in decision-making and policy creation. With this in mind, a set of key recommendations are presented below aimed at enhancing women's political participation and representation in Somalia. By implementing these suggestions, Somalia can take significant steps towards achieving a more representative and equitable political landscape.

4.1 Strategic Focus Area 1: Create enabling environment—governance, policy, and regulatory framework

Creating opportunities for women to directly shape and inform National Consultative Council (NCC) discussions and the constitutional review process. A gender-responsive approach to NCC recruitment and selection can be implemented, setting specific targets for women's representation, ensuring transparent and inclusive processes, and encouraging qualified women to apply. To ensure adequate representation, women should be actively appointed to the council through engagement with women's organizations, networks, political parties, and civil society. Establishing a women's caucus within the NCC would provide a dedicated space for women to come together, exchange experiences, and build consensus on issues that hold significance for them granting women a stronger presence in the NCC's deliberations. Gender mainstreaming in decision-making processes should be integrated into all aspects of the NCC's work, including agenda development, decision-making processes, and outcomes implementation. This ensures that women's concerns and priorities are considered at every stage of discussions and the constitutional review process. Engaging with public and civil society organizations can gather input, feedback, and recommendations on important issues through public consultations, town hall meetings, and online platforms. This participatory approach would foster trust, accountability, and transparency, strengthening the legitimacy of political decisions and promoting a sense of ownership among citizens.

Establish a legal framework for legal and policy reforms. To enhance women's participation in politics and governance in Somalia, key measures must be taken. This includes implementing affirmative action and quotas through appropriate legislation, requiring a comprehensive legal framework and policy reforms. To achieve this, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) can establish a working group led by the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development (MoWHRD) at the executive level. This group's main task would be to draft amendments that institutionalize affirmative action and quotas in relevant legislation.

Engaging various stakeholders such as legislators, women's organizations, political associations/networks, and civil society groups is crucial. By involving these diverse groups, consensus can be built, and support can be garnered for the proposed amendments. Seeking the input of legal experts, policymakers,

and relevant stakeholders is particularly important to align the amended laws with the principles outlined in the Somali Women Charter. This alignment will contribute to establishing a unified legal framework. To ensure accountability, mechanisms should be developed to monitor and evaluate the activities of political parties, focusing on their adherence to gender equality regulations.

These mechanisms should be integrated into the ongoing review of the political parties' bill, as agreed upon during the recent National Consultative Council (NCC) agreements. Furthermore, a comprehensive review of the Sexual Offences Bill 2018 is necessary. This review should aim to update the bill in accordance with current international standards and best practices, especially concerning incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) reported in the context of elections to build broad-based support among stakeholders for the enactment of the updated bill into law is essential.

Shift away from 4.5 clan system and towards universal suffrage. To facilitate meaningful change, it is crucial to amend the Somali constitution to eliminate the 4.5 clan system. This amendment will require a two-thirds majority vote in parliament to ensure broad-based support and legitimacy. By abolishing this divisive system, Somalia can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable electoral process. Similarly, it is imperative to conduct a national dialogue engaging all relevant stakeholders. This dialogue should involve political parties, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens and will aim to establish a consensus on a new electoral system that upholds principles of fairness, transparency, and representation.

Additionally, enacting new electoral laws that embody the principles of a one-person, one-vote system and establishment of an independent electoral commission with representatives from diverse backgrounds—including women, minority groups and marginalized communities should be established in order to help prevent bias or unfair practices in electoral processes. This independent commission will oversee all elections in Somalia with the primary mandate to maintain public trust and credibility and ensure the integrity of the electoral process, safeguarding the rights of voters and candidates alike.

Strengthening election bodies in Somalia for fair and transparent electoral processes. To foster increased participation of women in politics, several measures need to be enacted and implemented by the National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC) to safeguard women's political representation in political elections. Electoral reforms are key, where NIEC can review and update existing laws to eliminate barriers hampering women's political participation and institute safety measures against harassment or violence against women in politics. NIEC can also put mechanisms to reduce nomination fees for women, and ring fence positions for women to encourage a greater number of women to step forward and contest elections.

The NIEC can also collaborate with political parties to promote gender equality within their candidate selection procedures, by implementing quotas or targets for women's representation. Parties that fail to comply with this requirement should face penalties or be disqualified from participating in the elections. The NIEC should also prioritize creating platforms that hold FGS/FMS leaders accountable for electoral manipulation, intimidation and exclusion and also providing civic voter education and outreach programs to provide comprehensive information about voter rights, emphasize the significance of political participation, and offer guidance on engaging in the electoral process and increasing awareness on the significance of women's political participation.

4.2 Strategic Focus Area 2: Support and empower female candidates, women groups, existing networks, and young girls

Build capacity for women entering politics. Building capacity for women entering politics requires a multifaceted approach. This includes fostering grassroots organizations to raise awareness about gender equality and women's political roles, establishing mentorship programs to enhance skill development and provide inspiration, addressing educational aspects through equal access to education and specialized training, and implementing legislative measures to promote gender equality in politics can create an inclusive and supportive environment that empowers women to participate fully and effectively in the political sphere.

Strengthen women's movements. Women's movements play a crucial role in promoting visibility and giving voice to women. These movements serve as political bridges, advocating for gender equity in governance and providing support to women politicians. Mentorship networks are essential in inspiring and motivating girls to pursue their goals, offering guidance, advice, and support from experienced female mentors. Collaboration with international women's organizations can provide funding to expand advocacy efforts. Strengthening and supporting the Women's Caucus in parliament and providing mentorship to women parliamentarians enables them to be effective advocates for women's issues and champions of gender equity.

Addressing SGBV in politics through a comprehensive GRM. A comprehensive grievance and redress mechanism (GRM) for women in politics is crucial for reporting and investigating cases of violence against women in political spaces. This mechanism should include safe and confidential reporting channels, access to legal aid, and counselling services. Collaboration with women's organizations and civil society is essential to ensure women receive necessary support. The GRM should document politically motivated sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) incidents, allowing policymakers to implement targeted interventions. A standardized protocol focused on victim-centred approaches, protection, and fair treatment should be developed to guide handling of SGBV cases in a political context, and comprehensive capacity-building programmes provided for law enforcement agencies and judicial officers, providing them with the necessary skills to handle SGBV cases sensitively and ensure justice for survivors.

4.3 Strategic Focus Area 3: Promote community awareness, social acceptance and enhance the production of data

Strengthening the role of media in advancing representation of women in political spheres. Media plays a significant role in shaping societal perceptions, and enhancing women's media coverage can help combat stereotypes, raise public awareness, and increase acceptance of women in leadership roles. To support enhanced participation and representation of women in politics, media outlets in Somalia can conduct workshops and training sessions for journalists on the importance of balanced and inclusive coverage of women politicians and provide resources to support journalists providing fair, accurate, and respectful coverage of women's issues and female politicians. In addition, the media can showcase the personal journeys of female politicians to provide motivation for women entering politics, challenging stereotypes, and promoting women's leadership capabilities. Media also has a role in investigating gender gaps and challenges to shed light on issues such as gender-based discrimination, harassment, and lack of equal opportunities, and create awareness and advocate for policy changes. Furthermore, the

media is instrumental in developing and airing educational shows to educate the public about the importance of women's representation in politics and governance, help dismantle stereotypes and generate public support for initiatives that aim to increase women's participation and representation.

Civic engagement and awareness raising to challenge negative attitudes towards women's political participation. To combat negative attitudes towards women's political participation, efforts should be made to raise awareness of the value of women's political participation roles at the international, national, and regional level. Education and awareness programs should be developed and implemented at various societal segments, focusing on gender equality, women's rights, and the importance of women's political participation. Engaging religious and traditional leaders can also be crucial in promoting gender equality and women's political participation. Community engagement is also essential in changing attitudes, as organizing dialogues, town hall meetings, and focus group discussions can encourage open conversations about women's rights and political participation allowing community members to express concerns and address misconceptions and ultimately breaking down barriers to women's political involvement.

Enhancement of data production. In order to enhance women's participation in politics in Somalia, it is imperative to focus on improving the production of data that can offer valuable insights and drive necessary actions. To kick start this process, efforts should be made to collect comprehensive and accurate data on the current levels of participation and representation of women in Somali politics, such as the work conducted in this scoping study.—The data should be used to identify patterns, trends, barriers, and opportunities related to women's political participation, delving into intersecting factors such as age, education, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, shedding light on the complex dynamics at play. This has also been achieved in this scoping study.

Considering the role of evidence in spurring change, it is imperative to disseminate data findings widely through reports, briefings, media outlets, and social media. By utilizing various channels, the aim is to raise awareness about the current state of women's political participation and emphasize the pressing need for improvement. Such data should be also utilized to inform and influence policies and initiatives aimed at promoting women's political participation. Advocacy efforts should focus on promoting gender-responsive budgeting, advocating for women-friendly political practices, and advocating for legal reforms based on evidence derived from data analysis.

Based on the insights gained from the data, it is also important to design and implement capacity building programs for women in politics. Such programs may include leadership training, campaign management workshops, public speaking seminars, and gender-sensitivity training for men in politics.

Tracking progress over time is crucial, and thus, regular updates and reviews of the data should be conducted. These insights can then be utilized to refine strategies and initiatives, ensuring an adaptive and effective approach to promoting women's participation in politics. Ultimately, this can contribute to raising community awareness and fostering social acceptance, as the power of data plays a transformative role in shifting perceptions, informing decisions, and inspiring action.

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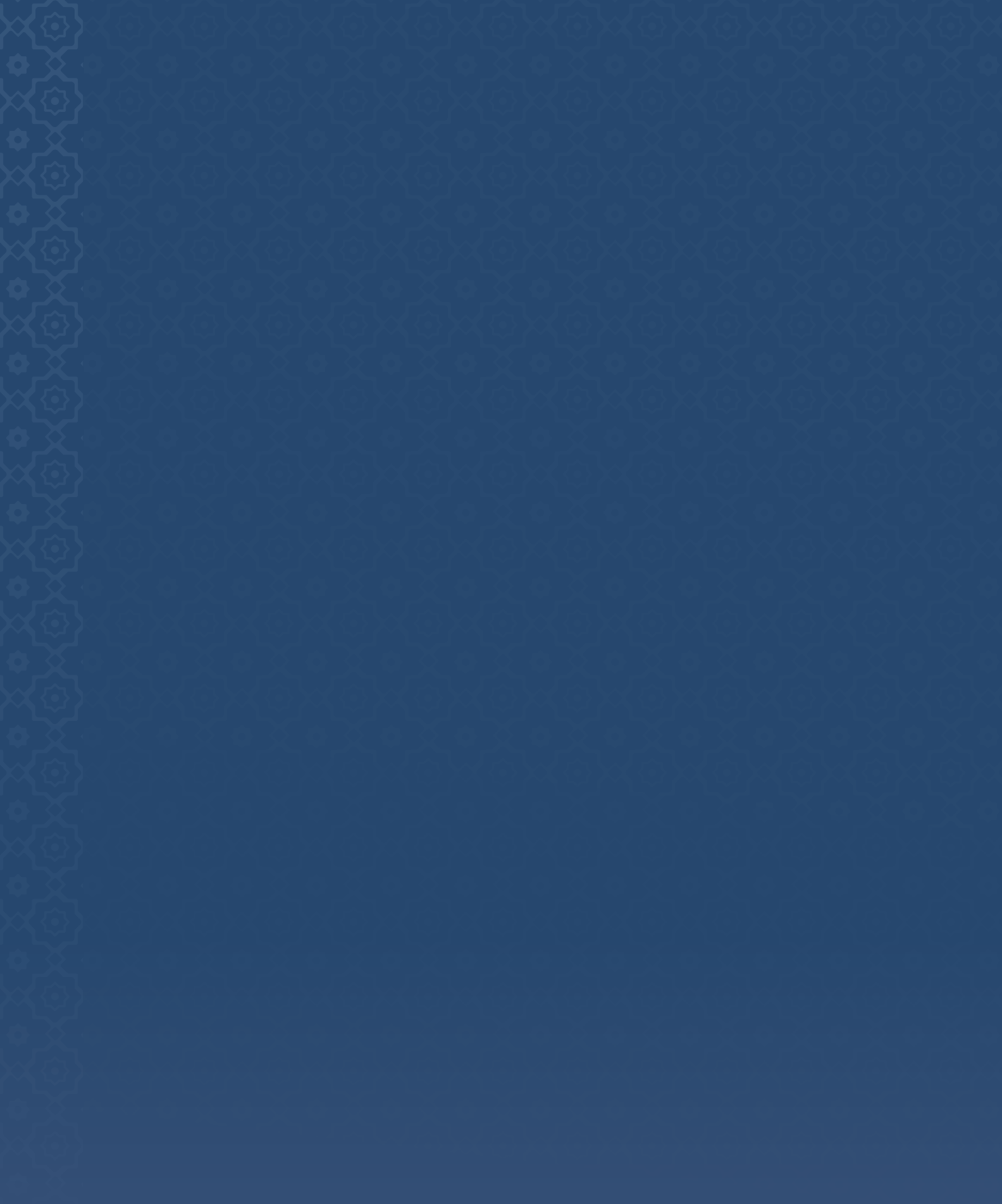This report is a joint product of the Somali Dialogue Platform and RAAGSAN.

The Somali Dialogue Platform is a programme which supports Somalis to achieve consensus on contentious political issues and is implemented by the Rift Valley Institute. The Somali Dialogue Platform is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the UK Government, the Government of Denmark or the US Government. The Platform maintains editorial independence on all its products.

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