



Puntland Non-State Actors Association (PUNSAA)

Impact of Election Dynamics on Social Structures in Puntland State of Somalia



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Research Consultant

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Acronyms

CCCM:	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
FBA:	Folke Bernadotte Academy
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
FMS:	Federal Member States
IDP(s):	Internally Displaced People(s)
MAP:	Media Association of Puntland
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
PDRC:	Puntland Development and Research Centre
PEC:	Puntland Electoral Commission
PL:	Puntland
PUNSAA:	Puntland Non-State Actors Association
SSF	Somali Stability Fund
TFG:	Transitional Federal Government
TPEC:	Puntland Transitional Electoral Commission
SSF:	Somali Stability Fund

Executive Summary

In response to the evolving political landscape in Puntland and the challenges that come with the new democratic system, this report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of election dynamics and their influence on community structures. The primary objective is to probe into how these dynamics impact social cohesion, community structures and democratic values, aiming to offer insights for policymakers and decision-makers across the region.

The research examines into the complex interplay between election dynamics – encompassing campaigning, voting procedures, and transitions of power etc – and the fabric of Puntland's social structures. The research sought to understand how elections shape various aspects of community life, including political participation, gender dynamics, and the relationships between different societal groups. By doing so, the research aims to provide actionable recommendations that can enrich the understanding of these dynamics and guide informed decision-making processes throughout the region.

The research utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to comprehensively examine the election dynamics in Puntland. While qualitative methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions were employed to delve into the nuanced aspects of community relationships and electoral processes, quantitative data from secondary sources were also utilized to enrich the analysis. Trained researchers conducted interviews and facilitated discussions with a wide array of stakeholders, including community leaders, electoral officials, and representatives from civil society organizations. Through this approach, a representative sample size was ensured, allowing for the capture of diverse perspectives and insights from across the population.

Through a thorough analysis of electoral processes and their impact on social structures in Puntland, several key findings have emerged. Firstly, it became evident that community cohesion remains a cornerstone of electoral outcomes, with close-knit communities significantly influencing voter behaviour and candidate preferences. Despite occasional challenges such as conflicts over candidate selection, the introduction of democracy did not result in significant disruptions to community relationships, showcasing the resilience and commitment of communities to maintain harmony.

Secondly, the research highlighted the crucial role of community relationships in shaping electoral campaigns and strategies. Candidates and political parties rely heavily on grassroots organizing and community outreach to mobilize support, emphasizing the significance of fostering inclusive and participatory democratic practices. However, issues such as favouritism and biases in candidate nomination processes, exacerbated tensions, and bred resentment within communities, undermining trust in the fairness and integrity of the electoral process.

Moreover, district demarcations emerged as a potential hot spot, with divergent preferences regarding administrative boundaries leading to resentment and conflict, thus jeopardizing social harmony and stability. Similarly, challenges in candidate nomination and ranking processes, compounded by unclear election policies, procedures, and guidelines, fuelled mistrust, and suspicion among stakeholders, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced transparency and clarity in electoral frameworks.

Despite women constituting half of the voting population, there was no significant increase in female representation in local councils compared to the previous system, indicating persistent challenges faced by women in getting elected. However, amidst these challenges, promising developments have emerged. For instance, there has been an increased participation of women in electoral processes, albeit still encountering significant gender disparities, reflecting progress towards gender equality in political representation.

Minority representation has experienced a decline, indicating a setback in inclusivity efforts. However, a positive aspect of inclusivity is the participation of internally displaced people (IDPs) in voting, although only one member from the IDP community was elected. Moreover, there has been momentum in initiatives aimed at empowering marginalized groups, including minority communities and IDPs, showcasing an increasing recognition of the significance of inclusive governance but these initiatives didn't bear any considerable results.

The report presents key recommendations to address these challenges and promote inclusive governance in Puntland. Recommendations include enhancing transparency in election policies, implementing mechanisms for monitoring and accountability, and fostering community engagement through civic education initiatives. Additionally, promoting inclusive representation for women, minorities, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) is essential for strengthening democratic institutions and safeguarding social cohesion.

By implementing these recommendations, Puntland can navigate electoral challenges more effectively, ensuring democratic principles are upheld and community relationships are preserved. The findings and recommendations presented in this report serve as a roadmap for policymakers, electoral authorities, and civil society actors to promote inclusive governance and foster a resilient society in Puntland.

1. Introduction

In this research report, we embarked on a comprehensive examination of the complicated dynamics governing electoral processes and community relationships within Puntland. The research explored deep into the multifaceted realm of democracy, seeking to unravel its complexities and implications for the region's social cohesion and social structures.

In embarking on this odyssey of understanding, we skim over into the elaborate tapestry of Puntland's electoral landscape, where the interplay of campaigning, voting, and power transitions shapes the very fabric of society. As we navigate through the maze of social structures, our compass is guided by a quest to unearth the impact of elections on the pillars of social cohesion, political participation, gender dynamics, and community relationships. Through the lens of empirical analysis and qualitative insights, we seek not only to unravel the mysteries of electoral processes but also to illuminate pathways towards informed decision-making and inclusive governance.

The significance of this research cannot be overstated. At its heart lies the fundamental principles of representation, equity, and participation. Elections serve as the cornerstone of democratic governance, offering a platform for the expression of collective will and the realization of societal aspirations. Through rigorous analysis of election dynamics and electoral processes and policies, we embarked to uncover the underlying factors shaping the electoral landscape and its impact on community dynamics.

Our quest is not merely academic; it is a journey of discovery into the lived experiences of individuals and communities navigating the democratic process. As we dig into the empirical data and qualitative insights, we encountered stories of resilience, challenges, and aspirations. These narratives offer a window into the soul of Puntland, reflecting the hopes, struggles, and aspirations of its diverse populace.

As readers engage with the findings of this report, we invite them to reflect deeply on the implications for governance, social cohesion, and inclusive development. By understanding the nicety of electoral processes and community relationships, we can chart a course towards a more equitable and participatory democracy. Together, let us navigate the complexities of Puntland's electoral landscape, guided by a shared commitment to democracy, justice, and progress.

2. Background

2.1 Overview of Puntland State of Somalia

In the turbulent aftermath of the Somali Civil War, characterized by chaos, conflict, and widespread despair, a beacon of hope emerged in the form of the Garowe Conference. Convened in 1998, this historic gathering marked the genesis of Puntland, a semi-autonomous region in Somalia. Led by influential figures, including traditional elders, political leaders, and representatives from various sectors of society, the conference sought to chart a path towards stability, governance, and progress for the war-torn nation.

Central to the vision of Puntland was the transition from a clan-based power-sharing system to a fully democratic governance structure. The conference adopted a comprehensive three-year charter outlining the objectives and milestones for this ambitious transformation. Key provisions included the drafting of a new constitution, the holding of a referendum, the conduct of a census, and the establishment of democratic institutions. These initiatives aimed to lay the foundations for accountable and representative governance, fostering unity and progress across the region.

The Garowe Conference, spanning three transformative months, served as a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and consensus-building among stakeholders determined to carve out a new future for Somalia. Against a backdrop of shattered institutions and fractured communities, participants deliberated on the establishment of a semi-autonomous state that could provide essential services, ensure security, and engage with both domestic and international partners. At the helm of this ambitious endeavour stood Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, who assumed the role of the inaugural president of Puntland.

In November 2001, a power struggle erupted in Puntland as Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, the first president, faced opposition from within. Refusing to step down despite his term expiring, he was forcibly removed from the capital by opposition forces. Jama Ali Jama was elected as the new president by the opposition council, leading to a brief tenure marked by instability. However, his presidency lasted only six days before yielding to further political turmoil.

In 2003, Mohamud Muse Hersi Adde, a former Lieutenant General, organized a militia group and establishing a base in Somaliland. General Adde's forces launched unsuccessful attacks on Puntland from their base in El Afweyn, escalating tensions in the region. Traditional elders intervened to broker a peace agreement between General Adde Muse and Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed in May 2003, paving the way for collaboration between the two leaders and the sharing of power.

Following Yusuf's election as President of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in October, Mohamed Abdi Hashi assumed the presidency of Puntland as the Vice President. His interim term lasted from October 14, 2004, to January 8, 2005, providing a period of stability amidst the political transition.

Puntland has persistently worked on enhancing its governance frameworks, exemplified by the drafting of a new constitution and its subsequent ratification through a referendum. Additionally, the region has undertaken crucial initiatives such as conducting a census and establishing the groundwork for democratic institutions. However, these endeavours have encountered obstacles stemming from intricate clan dynamics and external pressures.

Despite facing security challenges, notably piracy and insurgency, which posed a significant threat to stability and advancement, Puntland has demonstrated resilience. The region has proactively implemented measures to address insecurity and uphold law and order, showcasing its commitment to overcoming obstacles and fostering progress.

In January 2008, Puntland welcomed a new administration led by President Abdirahman Farole. During his tenure, the administration embarked on laying the foundations of a democratic system, aiming to institutionalize democratic practices within the region. Efforts were made to hold elections and establish political parties, intending to promote political pluralism and civic engagement. However, despite these initiatives, the establishment of a fully functional democratic system faced challenges and ultimately did not materialize as intended.

In January 2013, Puntland welcomed a new administration under President Abdiweli Gaas. During his tenure, Puntland continued its focus on economic development, launching initiatives aimed at stimulating growth and attracting investment. The administration prioritized promoting trade, nurturing entrepreneurship, and capitalizing on the region's strategic location along the Gulf of Aden to bolster its status as a key commercial and investment destination.

Moreover, Puntland embarked on ambitious infrastructure projects, investing in the construction of roads, ports, and telecommunications networks. These developments were aimed at enhancing connectivity within the region and beyond, thereby facilitating trade and commerce. Additionally, improvements in transportation and communication infrastructure contributed to better access to essential services for the population, marking significant progress in Puntland's socio-economic development agenda under President Gaas's leadership.

In January 2019, Saed Abdullahi Deni assumed the presidency after being elected to lead the new administration in Puntland. However, the onset of his term was met with numerous challenges, particularly the global COVID-19 pandemic. Like the rest of the world, Puntland grappled with the complexities posed by the pandemic. The administration swiftly implemented measures to contain the spread of the virus, mitigate its impact on public health and the economy, and bolster healthcare systems to better respond to the crisis.

Amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic, Puntland continued to confront longstanding security threats, including insurgency, and terrorism, which posed significant hurdles to its stability and development. Additionally, the region faced complexities arising from clan dynamics and rivalries, complicating efforts to maintain governance and political stability and hindering consensus-building and unity.

Despite these challenges, Puntland has achieved notable successes and milestones and has emerged as a relatively stable region within Somalia, attracting investment, fostering trade, and delivering essential services to its populace despite the legacy of conflict and instability.

Puntland has also made significant strides in transitioning from a clan-based power-sharing system to a more democratic governance structure. This transformation has been marked by the adoption of a new constitution and the establishment of democratic institutions, signalling a positive shift towards more inclusive and accountable governance practices.

2.2 Rationale

The significance of studying the impact of election dynamics on social structures in Puntland lies in its profound implications for governance, political stability, and social cohesion within Puntland State. Elections serve as a cornerstone of democratic governance, shaping power relations, institutional structures, and civic engagement. By examining how election dynamics influence social structures, such as cohesion, relationships, and participation, researchers can gain insights into the broader societal implications of political processes. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for policymakers, civil society actors, and citizens alike, as it informs efforts to foster inclusive governance, promote social harmony, and strengthen democratic institutions.

Moreover, there exists a vital link between political processes and societal transformations, wherein electoral outcomes and governance decisions have far-reaching consequences for the socio-economic landscape of Puntland. Elections serve as mechanisms for expressing public preferences, negotiating power relations, and effecting policy change. By studying this link, researchers can elucidate how political transitions, electoral reforms, and social structures shape societal norms, values, and aspirations. This understanding is particularly pertinent in contexts like Puntland, where historical legacies, cultural dynamics, and regional disparities intersect with contemporary political developments, influencing the trajectory of societal transformations.

Furthermore, recent democratic reforms in Puntland underscore the importance of understanding and evaluating the impact of electoral processes on governance inclusivity and social harmony. The democratization journey in Puntland has witnessed significant milestones, including the conduct of local council elections, constitutional revisions, and the opening of political parties. These reforms hold promise for enhancing citizen participation, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and fostering socio-political development. By examining the outcomes and challenges of these reforms, researchers can provide valuable insights into the efficacy of democratic processes in promoting inclusive governance, advancing social justice, and empowering marginalized communities in Puntland.

2.3 Objectives

Before delving into the objectives of the research, it is essential to set the context. The study aims to shed light on the complex dynamics between election processes and social structures within Puntland State. As a region undergoing significant political transitions, understanding the impact of elections on various aspects of society is paramount. Through a comprehensive analysis, this research seeks to examine how election dynamics influence social cohesion, political participation, gender dynamics, and community relationships. By elucidating these relationships, the study endeavours to provide valuable insights that can inform decision-making processes and contribute to the advancement of democracy and social development in Puntland. With this context in mind, let's explore the specific objectives of the research.

1. Examine the relationship between election dynamics and social structures.

This objective entails a thorough investigation into how various aspects of election dynamics, such as campaign strategies, voting behaviours, and electoral processes and outcomes etc, interact with social structures within Puntland. The research will explore how factors like background, clan affiliations, socioeconomic status, and cultural norms influence the electoral process and shape the distribution of political power within the society. By analysing these relationships, the study aims to uncover patterns, trends, and underlying mechanisms that reveal the complex interplay between elections and social structures in Puntland.

2. Assess the impact of elections on social cohesion, political participation, gender dynamics, and community relationships.

This objective involves evaluating the effects of electoral processes on key dimensions of social life and political engagement within Puntland. It encompasses an examination of how elections contribute to or undermine social cohesion among diverse communities, influence levels of political participation among different demographic groups, and impact gender dynamics within the political sphere. Additionally, the research will assess how elections shape relationships within communities and between various societal actors, including political parties, civil society organizations, and traditional leadership structures. Through this assessment, the study aims to provide insights into the broader societal implications of electoral processes in Puntland.

3. Provide recommendations based on research findings for informed decision-making.

This objective focuses on translating research findings into practical recommendations that can inform decision-making processes at various levels of governance and policymaking in Puntland. Drawing on empirical evidence and theoretical insights, the research aims to offer actionable suggestions for improving the conduct and outcomes of future elections, enhancing social cohesion, promoting inclusive political participation, and addressing gender disparities in political representation. These recommendations will be tailored to the specific context of Puntland and intended to support policymakers, electoral authorities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders in advancing democratic governance and social development in the region.

3. Narrative Review

3.1 Evolution of Democratic System in Puntland

The evolution of election systems from clan-based selection to recent democratic reforms in Puntland reflects a transformative journey marked by significant milestones, challenges, and aspirations for inclusive governance. Historically, Puntland's political landscape was characterized by clan-based selection processes, where traditional elders played a central role in appointing leaders based on clan affiliation and consensus. While this system provided a degree of stability and legitimacy, it also perpetuated exclusionary practices, marginalizing certain communities, and limiting democratic participation.

Over time, Puntland has embarked on a path towards democratic reforms aimed at establishing more inclusive governance structures. This transition was spurred by various factors, including internal pressures for political liberalization, external demands for democratization, and aspirations for socio-economic development. Previous attempts at reforming the electoral system have included initiatives to introduce multi-party democracy, decentralize power, and enhance citizen participation. However, these efforts have been met with challenges, including resistance from entrenched political elites, lack of commitment from the government, logistical constraints, and socio-cultural barriers.

Previous attempts to establish a democratic system in Puntland have been characterized by a mix of progress and setbacks, reflecting the region's complex socio-political landscape and historical legacies. Following the formation of the Puntland State of Somalia in 1998, efforts were made to transition from clan-based governance to more democratic structures. One significant milestone was the adoption of the Puntland Charter in 2001, which outlined principles of governance, including the separation of powers, the rule of law, and the establishment of democratic institutions.

Subsequent efforts focused on institutionalizing multi-party democracy and holding periodic elections at various levels of government. In 2009, Puntland started multi-party system and opened the registration of political parties, marking a significant step towards political pluralism and electoral competition. However, these early attempts at democratization were marred by allegations of irregularities, and limited participation from opposition parties.

Despite these challenges, Puntland has continued to refine its electoral processes and governance structures over the years. The establishment of the Puntland Electoral Commission (PEC) in 2012 was a key development aimed at enhancing the credibility and transparency of elections. The commission has been tasked with overseeing voter registration, conducting electoral campaigns, and adjudicating electoral disputes among other duties.

Despite these challenges, previous attempts to establish a democratic system in Puntland have laid the foundation for ongoing reforms and efforts to promote inclusive governance. By learning from past experiences and addressing remaining challenges, Puntland continued its journey towards building a more participatory, accountable, and resilient democratic system.

With this commitment, Puntland has made significant strides in advancing inclusive governance, albeit with varying degrees of success. The establishment of electoral commissions, the adoption of new electoral laws, and the conduct of local council elections represent important milestones in the democratization process. These reforms have sought to expand political representation, empower marginalized groups, and strengthen accountability mechanisms. However, challenges persist, including the dominance of clan politics, the legacy of conflict, and the uneven distribution of resources.

Additionally, efforts have been made to decentralize power and promote grassroots democracy through the establishment of local councils and district administrations. The introduction of direct elections for local council representatives in 2021 marked a significant departure from previous appointment-based systems, allowing for greater citizen participation and representation at the grassroots level.

Moving forward, addressing these challenges, and consolidating democratic gains will require sustained commitment from government institutions, civil society organizations, and the international community. Efforts to promote civic education, strengthen electoral institutions, and foster inter-clan dialogue are essential for building a more inclusive and resilient democratic system in Puntland. By learning from past experiences and embracing innovative approaches, Puntland can continue its journey towards democratic consolidation, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

3.2 District Demarcation

In 1998 when Puntland was established there were only 20 districts. However, over time, the number of districts has expanded significantly to 51, with the addition of 31 new districts. This expansion has occurred without a thorough demarcation process, leading to various challenges and implications for governance and administration in the region. The lack of proper demarcation has raised concerns about the equitable distribution of resources, representation, and effective governance across the newly formed districts.

In the Somali context, district demarcation has long been a contentious issue, often serving as a catalyst for conflicts and disagreements among various stakeholders. Despite the recognized importance of completing district demarcation, successive administrations over the years have encountered significant challenges and have not been successful in fully addressing this issue. The failure to complete district demarcation has hindered efforts to establish clear administrative boundaries.

The complexities surrounding district demarcation in Puntland are rooted in historical grievances, and clan rivalries, and competing claims over territory. These factors have contributed to the perpetuation of conflicts and tensions, making it difficult for administrations to navigate the demarcation process effectively. Additionally, the lack of institutional capacity, political will, and resources have further impeded progress in completing district demarcation initiatives.

The unresolved nature of district demarcation exacerbates governance challenges including elections and undermines efforts to promote stability and development in Puntland. Without clearly defined administrative boundaries, local authorities face difficulties in delivering essential services, enforcing law and order, and fostering inclusive governance. Moreover, the absence of a comprehensive demarcation framework perpetuates uncertainty and insecurity, perpetuating a cycle of instability and conflict.

Puntland's District Electoral Law, enacted in August 2012, emerged from extensive deliberations surrounding boundary demarcation. However, despite the passage of this law, the actual demarcation of boundaries for the districts remained unresolved. This issue held significant sensitivity due to its potential impact on the perceived balance of clan representation within each district and the perceived ability of clans to exert influence over district councils, contingent upon the specific delineation of boundaries. Consequently, as electoral processes commenced, district demarcation swiftly became a focal point of contention, yet it remained unresolved throughout subsequent attempts.

The failure to finalize district demarcation had profound implications for electoral dynamics and political representation in Puntland. Without clear boundaries, there existed ambiguity and disputes regarding the jurisdiction and composition of electoral districts, undermining the integrity and inclusivity of electoral processes. Moreover, the lack of resolution on this matter perpetuated tensions among clans and communities, heightening the risk of conflict and impeding efforts to foster cohesion and cooperation across diverse constituencies.

The unresolved status of district demarcation underscores the challenges inherent in navigating complex political landscapes and addressing longstanding grievances in post-conflict contexts. Moving forward, achieving consensus on boundary delineation requires transparent and inclusive dialogue, guided by principles of fairness and equity. By prioritizing constructive engagement and collaborative decision-making, Puntland can work towards establishing clear and coherent electoral boundaries that promote confidence in democratic processes and enhance political stability.

3.3 Political Parties?

Political parties are organized groups of individuals who share common political goals and ideologies, aiming to influence government policies and gain control over governmental institutions through the electoral process. They serve as essential components of democratic systems, providing a framework for political competition, representation, and governance. Political parties typically develop platforms and

agendas that articulate their vision for governance and seek to attract support from voters by promoting their policies and candidates during elections.

Political parties act as intermediaries between citizens and the government, representing the interests, concerns, and aspirations of various social groups within society. They articulate and advocate for specific policy positions and initiatives that align with the preferences of their constituents. Parties engage in activities aimed at mobilizing support from voters, including organizing rallies, canvassing neighbourhoods, and running advertising campaigns. They seek to build coalitions of support across diverse demographics to secure electoral victories.

Political parties also develop policy platforms and agendas that outline their proposed solutions to societal challenges and issues. When in power, parties implement these policies through legislative initiatives, executive actions, and administrative decisions. Political parties compete against one another in elections for political offices at various levels of government, including local, regional, and national levels. Through electoral competition, parties seek to win seats and secure positions of power and influence. Parties play a crucial role in holding elected officials accountable for their actions and decisions. They monitor the performance of government officials, criticize policies deemed ineffective or harmful, and offer alternative proposals to address societal problems.

Political parties play a pivotal role in democratic governance, serving as conduits through which the preferences of the populace are translated into policy decisions. This fundamental premise underpins much of democratic theory, with scholars like Dahl emphasizing the essentiality of government responsiveness to citizens' preferences for the functioning of a democracy. However, the extent to which elected governments are truly responsive remains a subject of debate and contention within postwar democratic theory. While some argue that political parties act as mechanisms for ensuring government responsiveness to constituents, others posit that parties may, in fact, impede such responsiveness.

Many scholars underscore the crucial function of political parties in obtaining popular consent for public policy directions. According to this perspective, parties serve as vehicles through which the will of the people is communicated and enacted within the political system. However, divergent viewpoints exist regarding the impact of political parties on government responsiveness. While proponents of party politics argue that parties compel elected officials to heed the desires of their constituents, skeptics contend that party influence may lead to governmental unresponsiveness or even detachment from public sentiment. The differing perspectives on the role of political parties in democracy reflect broader debates surrounding the mechanisms of political representation and accountability, with significant implications for the functioning and legitimacy of democratic governance.

As a foundational element of democracy, Dahl's liberal model delineates three fundamental conditions that must be universally accessible to all citizens within a state:

- Freedom of expression,

- Freedom of association, and
- Freedom of information.

To ensure the fulfilment of these conditions, a minimum of eight political arrangements, practices, or institutions are deemed necessary:

- Elected officials,
- Free, fair, and frequent elections,
- Freedom of expression,
- Alternative sources of information,
- Associational autonomy,
- Inclusive citizenship,
- Political competition, and
- Institutions that ensure a horizontal division of powers to hold government accountable.

Political parties have evolved to become integral components of the political landscape in nearly every nation, with the development and proliferation of modern party organizations spanning centuries. While a handful of countries may lack formal political parties, such instances are exceedingly rare. Most nations boast multiple political parties, although some may operate under a single-party system. The significance of parties extends beyond democracies, permeating the political dynamics of autocracies as well. However, democracies typically exhibit a more diverse array of political parties compared to autocratic regimes, where a singular party often dominates governance. This distinction underscores the perception among some political scientists that competition between multiple parties is foundational to the essence of democracy.

Political parties have emerged as a near-universal aspect of modern nation-states. In democratic nations, robust political party systems are prevalent, with many political analysts deeming countries with fewer than two parties as leaning toward autocracy. However, it's recognized that the mere presence of multiple competitive parties does not guarantee democracy. In contrast, the political landscape of numerous autocratic states revolves around a single dominant political party. The pervasiveness and influence of political parties across the global spectrum have prompted scholars to liken their existence to a fundamental law of politics, prompting inquiries into why parties are deemed indispensable components of modern governance. Consequently, political scientists have proposed various explanations to elucidate the near-universal prevalence of political parties in contemporary political systems.

3.2.1 Structure of Political Parties

The organizational structure of political parties exhibits commonalities across nations, typically comprising a singular party leader, a cadre of party executives, and a constituency of party members. In democratic settings, the process of selecting party leadership tends to be more transparent and competitive compared to autocratic regimes, where leadership transitions are often tightly managed. Moreover, in countries characterized by significant sub-national divisions, such as federalist states,

the presence of regional party leaders and members alongside the national party structure is not uncommon.

3.2.2 Types of Political Parties

Political scientists categorize political party organizations into several types based on their historical evolution and operational dynamics. These classifications include elite parties, mass parties, catch-all parties, and cartel parties.

Elite parties originated as gatherings of political elites primarily focused on electoral competition while maintaining a certain distance from the broader electorate.

Membership in such parties was often exclusive, with non-elite supporters primarily involved in auxiliary campaign activities rather than decision-making processes.

These parties prioritized the interests and agendas of the political elite over a broader participatory approach.

Mass parties emerged as antitheses to elite parties, aiming to broaden participation by actively recruiting members from the general populace. These parties often relied on their members not only for financial support through dues but also for spreading party ideologies and engaging in election-related activities. The mass party model was characterized by a more pronounced emphasis on grassroots involvement and ideological commitment among its members.

In the United States, the evolution of political parties has been distinct, with both the Democratic and Republican parties initially fitting the mold of elite parties. However, the introduction of primaries and other democratic reforms has significantly altered their structure. These changes have shifted power towards party activists and the electorate, who now play a crucial role in influencing party policies and nominating candidates. This transformation reflects a broader trend towards more participatory governance within party organizations, allowing for greater influence of rank-and-file members and activists in the political process.

Catch-all parties aim to appeal to a broad spectrum of voters, often by de-emphasizing ideological purity in favour of a more pragmatic approach. They seek to attract a wide range of societal groups and interests, prioritizing electoral success over strict adherence to a specific ideological framework. This approach often involves moderating policy positions to appeal to the centre of the political spectrum. Kirchheimer (1966) introduced the concept, noting the shift of some parties towards broader electoral strategies in post-war Europe.

Cartel parties are characterized by their cooperation with other parties to secure and maintain access to state resources, often leading to a blurring of ideological distinctions and a focus on maintaining the status quo. They tend to rely heavily on state funding for political parties and exhibit a close relationship between party organizations and the state apparatus. Katz and Mair (1995) developed this concept to describe the evolution of party systems in advanced democracies, where parties form a cartel to protect their interests against newcomers and minimize electoral competition.

Niche parties focus on specific issues or policy areas rather than seeking broad electoral appeal. They might concentrate on environmental issues, regional autonomy, or a particular social policy, appealing to voters who are particularly concerned about these issues. Niche parties often emerge in response to perceived neglect of these issues by mainstream parties. Meguid (2005) discusses how niche parties can influence the policy agendas of larger parties by drawing attention to specific issues or voter concerns.

Entrepreneurial parties are often centered around charismatic leaders and prioritize innovation in their approach to politics, using marketing techniques and new technologies to engage voters. These parties are typically personalistic in nature, with their identity and policies closely tied to their founder's persona. They may emerge quickly, capitalizing on public dissatisfaction with traditional parties. Panebianco (1988) analyses the dynamics of party formation and evolution, including the role of charismatic leadership in the development of new political entities.

3.3 Relevance of Democratic Theories in Puntland Context

In the context of Puntland, the relevance of democratic theories is significant as the region navigates its path towards governance, representation, and political stability. Democratic theories offer frameworks for understanding and analysing the functioning of political systems, the distribution of power, and the role of citizens in decision-making processes. By examining these theories through the lens of Puntland's unique socio-political context, we can better grasp the challenges and opportunities facing democratic development in the region.

Democratic theories emphasize the importance of citizen participation and representation in governance processes. In Puntland, where clan-based politics have historically dominated, democratic participation can be facilitated through mechanisms that ensure inclusivity and representation for all segments of society. This includes promoting free and fair elections, strengthening political institutions, and fostering a culture of civic engagement. By empowering citizens to participate in decision-making processes and ensuring their voices are heard, Puntland can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of its governance structures.

Democratic theories underscore the principles of accountability and transparency as essential pillars of democratic governance. In Puntland, ensuring accountability among political leaders and institutions is crucial for building trust and legitimacy. This involves promoting transparency in government operations, combating corruption, and establishing mechanisms for oversight and accountability. By holding elected officials accountable for their actions and promoting transparency in decision-making processes, Puntland can strengthen democratic institutions and foster public trust in the governance system.

Democratic theories advocate for pluralism and inclusivity in political systems, recognizing the diversity of perspectives, interests, and identities within society. In Puntland, embracing democratic pluralism requires respecting the rights of minority groups, promoting gender equality, and fostering dialogue and cooperation among

different stakeholders. By ensuring that all segments of society have a voice in political processes and decision-making, Puntland can build a more inclusive and representative democracy that reflects the diversity of its population.

Democratic theories highlight the importance of deliberation and consensus-building in democratic decision-making processes. In Puntland, where clan dynamics and regional tensions have historically influenced political dynamics, promoting deliberative democracy can help bridge divides and foster consensus on key issues. This involves creating spaces for dialogue, negotiation, and compromise among different stakeholders, including political leaders, civil society organizations, and community representatives. By encouraging open and inclusive deliberation, Puntland can build consensus around common goals and values, promoting stability and cohesion in the region.

Democratic theories emphasize the need for continuous development and capacity-building in democratic institutions and processes. In Puntland, strengthening democratic development requires investing in civic education, institutional reform, and capacity-building initiatives. This includes providing training and support for elected officials, building the capacity of electoral bodies, and promoting civic awareness and engagement among citizens. By building strong and resilient democratic institutions, Puntland can enhance its governance capacity and promote sustainable democratic development in the region.

Democratic theories provide valuable insights and guidance for understanding and advancing democratic development in Puntland. By embracing principles of democratic participation, accountability, pluralism, deliberation, and development, Puntland can strengthen its governance structures, promote political stability, and enhance the well-being of its citizens. Through continuous engagement with democratic theories and practices, Puntland can chart a course towards a more inclusive, representative, and resilient democracy that serves the interests and aspirations of all its people.

3.4 The Role of Elections in Shaping Social Structures

Elections are often regarded as pivotal moments in the political life of a society, representing opportunities for citizens to exercise their democratic rights, express their preferences, and hold their leaders accountable. However, beyond their immediate political significance, elections exert a profound influence on the social fabric of societies, shaping relationships, identities, and power dynamics in complex and nuanced ways. For the purpose of this research its imperative to understand and explore the multifaceted role of elections in shaping social structures and examine how electoral processes intersect with broader social phenomena to influence patterns of inclusion and exclusion, identity formation, and the distribution of power within societies.

3.4.1 Historical Perspectives on Elections and Social Structures

The historical relationship between elections and social structures is deeply ingrained, tracing back to the earliest formations of democratic practices in ancient societies. In ancient Greece, notably in the Athenian democracy, elections played a fundamental role in the functioning of the political system. Citizens participated in the selection of officials, including magistrates and members of the council, through a process of direct democracy. These elections served as mechanisms for representation, enabling diverse interests within the Athenian society to be voiced and considered in the decision-making process. Similarly, in the early republican experiments in Rome, elections were integral to the governance structure, allowing citizens to elect their leaders, such as consuls and tribunes, from among themselves.

The significance of elections in ancient societies extended beyond mere political participation; they were crucial for the formation and maintenance of social orders. By providing avenues for citizens to participate in the selection of leaders and the enactment of laws, elections contributed to the establishment of legitimacy and authority within society. They served as mechanisms for negotiating collective decisions, resolving conflicts, and allocating resources, thereby shaping the social fabric of ancient communities.

As democratic principles spread and evolved over time, elections became central mechanisms for organizing political life and shaping social relations in increasingly complex societies. In medieval Europe, for example, the emergence of representative institutions, such as parliaments and assemblies, introduced electoral processes that allowed for broader participation in governance. Elections enabled the representation of diverse social interests, including those of the nobility, clergy, and emerging merchant classes, leading to the negotiation of power relations and the establishment of social contracts.

During the Enlightenment period, the concept of popular sovereignty gained prominence, emphasizing the idea that political authority derives from the consent of the governed. Elections emerged as key instruments for realizing this principle, providing citizens with the opportunity to exercise their right to self-governance through the selection of their representatives. The spread of democratic ideals during this period further solidified the role of elections in shaping social structures, as they became synonymous with the principles of equality, freedom, and civic participation.

In modern times, elections have evolved into complex and institutionalized processes, characterized by universal suffrage, competitive party politics, and sophisticated electoral systems. They continue to serve as critical mechanisms for organizing political life and shaping social relations in contemporary societies. Elections enable the expression of popular will, the mediation of competing interests, and the allocation of political power, thereby influencing the distribution of resources, the formulation of policies, and the resolution of social conflicts.

3.5 Theoretical Frameworks

A variety of theoretical frameworks offer valuable perspectives on the relationship between elections and social structures, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of

power, identity, and representation in electoral processes. Among these, Marxist perspectives provide critical insights into how elections operate within broader systems of class relations and economic inequality. According to Marxist theory, elections serve to reproduce and contest existing class hierarchies, with dominant economic interests exerting significant influence over electoral outcomes and political agendas. Elections are viewed as mechanisms through which ruling classes maintain their power and privilege, often at the expense of marginalized groups. Marxist analyses highlight the ways in which economic factors, such as campaign finance, media ownership, and corporate lobbying, shape the electoral process and limit the ability of working-class and disadvantaged communities to influence political decision-making.

Similarly, feminist theories offer important perspectives on how elections intersect with gender dynamics, influencing women's political participation, representation, and the articulation of gendered interests within political systems. Feminist scholars emphasize the importance of recognizing the gendered dimensions of electoral politics, including barriers to women's political participation, such as patriarchal norms, institutional sexism, and structural inequalities. Elections are seen as sites of both opportunity and challenge for women, providing avenues for political empowerment and representation while also perpetuating gendered stereotypes and inequalities. Feminist analyses of electoral processes often focus on issues such as candidate selection, media coverage, and policy priorities, highlighting the ways in which gender shapes political outcomes and the distribution of power within society.

By integrating Marxist and feminist perspectives, one can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between elections and social structures, recognizing the intersecting dynamics of class, gender, and other forms of social inequality. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a nuanced analysis of how elections reflect and reinforce broader patterns of power and identity within political systems. Moreover, it highlights the importance of addressing structural inequalities and power imbalances in electoral processes to promote more inclusive and equitable forms of democratic governance.

3.6 Social Identity and Group Dynamics

Elections serve as crucial mechanisms for shaping social identities and group dynamics within societies, exerting a significant influence on how individuals perceive themselves and others. Group identities rooted in factors such as ethnicity, religion, language, or socioeconomic status intersect with electoral processes, contributing to the formation of collective identities and influencing patterns of political mobilization, alliance-building, and voter behaviour.

Ethnicity, for example, often plays a prominent role in electoral dynamics, particularly in multiethnic societies where diverse ethnic groups coexist. Political parties and candidates frequently appeal to ethnic identities as a means of mobilizing support, forming alliances, and garnering votes. Ethnic-based electoral strategies may include promises of representation, protection of group interests, or appeals to shared cultural values and traditions. As a result, elections can reinforce existing ethnic

divisions and hierarchies within society, exacerbating tensions and perpetuating social inequalities.

Similarly, religion can also shape electoral dynamics, particularly in societies where religious affiliations hold significant social and political influence. Religious identities may influence voter preferences, party platforms, and policy agendas, with religious leaders and institutions often playing active roles in endorsing candidates or shaping political discourse. Elections may serve as battlegrounds for competing religious ideologies, with religious rhetoric and symbolism used to mobilize supporters and rally opposition.

Language and socioeconomic status are additional factors that intersect with electoral processes, shaping patterns of political engagement and voter behaviour. Individuals from marginalized linguistic or socioeconomic backgrounds may face barriers to political participation, including limited access to education, information, and resources. Elections can either amplify or mitigate these disparities, depending on the extent to which political actors address issues of linguistic and socioeconomic inclusion and advocate for policies that prioritize the needs of marginalized communities.

3.7 Patterns of Inclusion and Exclusion

The conduct and outcomes of elections wield profound implications for patterns of inclusion and exclusion within societies, determining who is represented, who participates, and who is marginalized from the political process. Marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, women, youth, and persons with disabilities, are particularly vulnerable to exclusion from political participation and representation. Electoral systems, laws, and practices play a pivotal role in either facilitating or hindering the inclusion of these marginalized groups, with far-reaching consequences for democratic governance and social equity.

Electoral systems, which dictate how votes are translated into seats, can either amplify or mitigate disparities in political representation. Proportional representation systems, for instance, tend to provide better opportunities for minority groups to gain representation compared to majoritarian systems. By allocating seats in proportion to the share of votes received, proportional representation systems enable smaller parties and minority groups to secure parliamentary representation, thereby enhancing their political voice and influence. In contrast, majoritarian systems often disadvantage minority groups by favouring larger parties and winner-takes-all outcomes, leading to underrepresentation and marginalization.

Electoral laws, including regulations governing voter eligibility, candidate nomination procedures, and campaign financing, also shape patterns of inclusion and exclusion in electoral processes. Restrictive voter registration requirements, such as stringent identification criteria or residency conditions, can disenfranchise marginalized populations, particularly those facing socioeconomic barriers or mobility challenges. Similarly, candidate nomination rules that impose high financial thresholds or bureaucratic hurdles may deter individuals from underprivileged backgrounds or

marginalized communities from seeking elected office, perpetuating inequalities in political representation.

Moreover, electoral practices, including electoral boundaries, voter education initiatives, and campaign outreach strategies, influence the accessibility and inclusivity of electoral processes. Gerrymandering, the manipulation of electoral boundaries to favour one political party or group over others, can distort electoral outcomes and undermine the principle of fair representation. Voter education programs and civic engagement initiatives, on the other hand, can empower marginalized groups by providing information about their rights, responsibilities, and avenues for political participation. Likewise, targeted campaign outreach efforts that prioritize marginalized communities can enhance voter turnout and political engagement among historically disenfranchised populations.

3.8 Power Dynamics and Political Contestation

At their core, elections serve as contests for power, where political actors vie for control over resources, institutions, and policy agendas. The outcomes of elections hold significant sway over the distribution of power within society, determining who occupies political office and wields authority at various levels of governance. As such, elections play a pivotal role in shaping decision-making processes and influencing the direction of public policy.

Elections are arenas in which competing social groups, interests, and ideologies engage in political struggle, seeking to advance their agendas and secure their objectives. Political actors mobilize support, build coalitions, and employ various strategies to appeal to voters and gain electoral advantage. In this context, electoral competition often mirrors underlying power dynamics within society, with winners and losers emerging based on their ability to navigate the complexities of electoral politics.

The outcomes of elections have far-reaching implications for the distribution of power and the functioning of democratic governance. Those who emerge victorious in electoral contests assume positions of political authority, enabling them to shape public policy, allocate resources, and enact laws that reflect their interests and priorities. Conversely, electoral defeats can result in the loss of political influence and the relegation of certain groups or ideologies to the margins of political discourse.

Moreover, elections serve as mechanisms for legitimizing political authority and ensuring the accountability of elected officials to the electorate. By providing citizens with the opportunity to choose their representatives through free and fair electoral processes, elections confer legitimacy on the political system and its institutions. Elected officials are held accountable to the electorate for their actions and decisions, with the threat of electoral reprisal serving as a check on their exercise of power.

However, the conduct and outcomes of elections are also subject to manipulation, coercion, and distortion by those seeking to maintain or consolidate their hold on power. Electoral fraud, voter intimidation, and media manipulation are among the tactics employed to undermine the integrity of electoral processes and subvert the will of the electorate. In such instances, elections may fail to serve as genuine

expressions of popular sovereignty and instead reinforce existing power structures and inequalities.

3.9 Election as Site of Social Mobilization and Resistance

Elections serve as pivotal moments of social mobilization and resistance, offering citizens platforms to voice grievances, advocate for change, and challenge established power structures. Civil society organizations, social movements, and grassroots activists leverage electoral campaigns as strategic opportunities to advance social justice, promote human rights, and mobilize marginalized communities. Through a range of activities spanning from voter education and registration drives to protest rallies and grassroots organizing efforts, elections become catalysts for collective action, igniting movements that drive social change and empower citizens to engage with political processes.

One of the primary ways in which elections facilitate social mobilization and resistance is through voter education and registration initiatives. Civil society organizations and activists conduct outreach campaigns to inform citizens about their rights, responsibilities, and the importance of political participation. By providing accessible information on electoral processes and candidate platforms, these efforts empower individuals, particularly marginalized communities, to exercise their democratic rights and make informed choices at the ballot box.

Moreover, elections serve as focal points for protest and advocacy, with civil society groups and social movements using electoral campaigns as platforms to raise awareness about pressing social issues and demand accountability from political leaders. Protest rallies, marches, and demonstrations draw attention to systemic injustices, human rights violations, and other grievances, mobilizing public support and galvanizing collective action. Through these forms of direct action, citizens amplify their voices and exert pressure on political actors to address their concerns and prioritize the needs of marginalized communities.

Grassroots organizing efforts also play a crucial role in harnessing the potential of elections for social mobilization and resistance. Local community groups, activist networks, and neighbourhood associations engage in door-to-door canvassing, community meetings, and volunteer recruitment drives to mobilize support for candidates and causes aligned with their values and objectives. By building coalitions and fostering solidarity among diverse stakeholders, grassroots organizers amplify their collective impact and mobilize resources for sustained advocacy and activism beyond the electoral cycle.

Furthermore, elections provide opportunities for marginalized communities to assert their political agency and demand representation in decision-making processes. By organizing voter registration and turnout drives targeted at underrepresented groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, women, youth, and persons with disabilities, civil society organizations and activists seek to bridge gaps in political participation and challenge systemic barriers to electoral access. Through inclusive electoral engagement, marginalized communities can challenge entrenched power structures and advocate for policies that address their unique needs and concerns.

3.10 Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC)

Puntland, as the oldest of Somalia's Federal Member States (FMSs), has played a pioneering role in the process of democratization, particularly through the establishment of local district councils. Previously, in Puntland, both local councils and members of parliament were nominated based on the clan system. Under this system, individuals were typically nominated by clan leaders to represent their respective clans for a specified term.

The evolution of democratic governance in Puntland traces back to its establishment in 1998 and after a commitment of democratic governance was made by the first administration and most importantly after the second parliamentary election held in 2005. During this landmark event, clan elders were tasked with selecting 66 state legislators who subsequently participated in the election of President Mohamud Muse Hersi, also known as "Adde Muse." His presidency marked a pivotal moment in Puntland's political landscape, ushering in a period of constitutional reform and institutional development.

In response to the growing demand for democratic reforms, President Adde Muse took proactive steps by establishing a Constitutional Review Committee. This committee was tasked with the crucial responsibility of revising and refining the Puntland constitution to align with the evolving needs and aspirations of the region's populace. Through inclusive and participatory processes, the committee embarked on the monumental task of drafting a constitution that would serve as the cornerstone of democratic governance in Puntland.

3.10.1 The Establishment of Independent Election Commission

In 2012, a historic milestone was achieved with the establishment of the first-ever election management body in Puntland. The inception of the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) marked a significant step towards transforming the region's political landscape. TPEC was envisioned as a governmental body tasked with overseeing the transition from a parliament-based voting system to multi-party elections in Puntland.

The establishment of TPEC reflected a commitment to democratization and the promotion of inclusive and participatory governance processes. By shifting from a parliament-based vote system to multi-party elections, Puntland aimed to broaden political participation, enhance electoral transparency, and strengthen democratic institutions.

TPEC's mandate encompassed a range of responsibilities, including voter registration, election administration, and the adjudication of electoral disputes among others. Through its efforts, TPEC sought to facilitate free, fair, and credible elections that reflected the will of the Puntland populace.

The formation of TPEC represented a significant departure from past electoral practices and signalled a new era of democratic governance in Puntland. By institutionalizing mechanisms for multi-party elections, Puntland took a crucial step

towards deepening democratic principles and fostering political pluralism within the region.

3.10.2 TPEC I

The Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) serves as Puntland's primary entity responsible for election administration, overseeing the conduct and management of electoral processes within the region. The legal framework for TPEC was established with the approval of the Puntland Electoral Commission Law in 2011. This legislation formalized the creation of Puntland's inaugural electoral commission, albeit in a transitional capacity.

The establishment of TPEC marked a significant milestone in Puntland's journey towards democratic governance, providing a structured mechanism for the organization and supervision of electoral activities. In January 2011, the Parliament of Puntland ratified the Puntland Electoral Commission Law, laying the foundation for TPEC's mandate to conduct and administer electoral processes across the region.

One key development in the realm of electoral legislation was the enactment of the Political Associations Law in 2012. This legislation, approved by Parliament in June 2012 and subsequently signed by the president on 7 July, aimed to regulate the formation and operation of political associations within Puntland. Notably, an amendment to this law was introduced in September 2012, following an extraordinary session of Parliament convened at the request of TPEC. This amendment sought to streamline the process of political association formation by reducing the required number of supporting signatories from 500 to 300 in each region of Puntland.

The implementation of the Political Associations Law resulted in the registration of six political associations in Puntland by December 2012. This proliferation of political entities signified a growing interest and engagement in the political process, laying the groundwork for increased participation and competition in future electoral contests within the region.

Overall, TPEC's establishment and the subsequent enactment of electoral legislation represented significant strides towards strengthening democratic institutions and processes in Puntland, setting the stage for more inclusive and transparent governance practices.

The democratization process in Puntland encountered a significant setback following conflicts over the election process and management. These conflicts disrupted the momentum of democratic reforms and hindered progress towards building inclusive and transparent governance structures in the region.

3.10.3 TPEC II

Following a hiatus of three years, the democratization process in Puntland officially resumed with the initiation of the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) II in April 2016. This marked a significant milestone in the region's political landscape, signalling the recommencement of efforts to advance democratic governance.

The members of the commission were appointed and subsequently approved by the parliament on 24 April 2016, heralding the much-awaited resumption of the Puntland democratization process. The approval of TPEC II members was met with anticipation and optimism, as stakeholders hoped for a revitalization of democratic activities in the region.

Despite the appointment of TPEC II, democratization activities in Puntland remained stagnant for nearly three years. During this period, the commission failed to function effectively, resulting in a prolonged pause in the democratization process. This setback highlighted the challenges and obstacles confronting efforts to foster democratic governance in the region.

The failure of the democratization process to gain traction once again underscored systemic issues and institutional shortcomings that hampered progress. Despite initial optimism surrounding the establishment of TPEC II, the reality of bureaucratic inefficiencies and political dynamics within Puntland impeded the effective functioning of the electoral commission.

As a result, the democracy process failed to take off in Puntland as anticipated. The prolonged pause in democratization activities raised concerns about the region's commitment to democratic principles and the ability of electoral institutions to fulfil their mandates effectively.

3.10.4 TPEC III

In November 2019, a pivotal moment in the political landscape of Puntland was marked by the reconstitution of the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC III), endowed with a critical mandate to supervise, and manage the electoral process within the region. This development signified a renewed commitment to advancing the democratization efforts that had been set in motion. By December of the same year, TPEC III had already taken significant strides forward by crafting a detailed and strategic roadmap. This roadmap was designed to steer the journey towards the realization of local council elections, a key component in the broader vision of revitalizing democratic governance in Puntland.

In its pursuit of a democratized society, TPEC III immediately embarked on a mission to engage the public directly, reaching out to a wide spectrum of stakeholders. This included civil society organizations, community elders, youth groups, women, and political figures. The commission's inclusive approach was not just a procedural step but a strategic one, aiming to build widespread support for the democratization process. This strategy was pivotal in fostering a deep sense of ownership, engagement, and participation among the diverse communities of Puntland, laying a solid foundation for the success of the electoral process.

Armed with insights from these extensive consultations, TPEC III proceeded to fine-tune its strategic roadmap. The commission delineated clear milestones and objectives, focusing on critical areas such as the finalization of a robust legislative framework, strengthening of institutional capacities, and the assurance of transparency and accountability throughout the electoral cycle. These steps were

crucial in setting a precedent for a democratic electoral process that the people of Puntland could trust and rely upon.

Throughout 2019 and 2020, the commission was engrossed in laying the essential groundwork for the conduct of Puntland's elections. This preparatory phase involved the establishment of fundamental laws and regulations that would govern the electoral process, ensuring a fair, transparent, and smooth execution of future elections. It was a period of intense planning and organization, setting the stage for a landmark event in Puntland's political history.

The year 2021 emerged as a watershed moment for TPEC III and the people of Puntland, with the successful conduct of the Three District Elections in Eyl, Ufayn, and Qardho. This event marked the first-ever Puntland Local Government Elections, a historic achievement that signified a significant leap forward in the region's democratization journey. The elections saw the registration of over 48,300 voters in three pilot districts, an indicator of the widespread enthusiasm and eagerness among the populace to participate in the democratic process.

Encouraged by the success of the district elections, TPEC III continued its diligent work into 2022 and 2023, expanding its efforts to conduct State-wide Local Government Elections across 30 districts. This ambitious endeavour involved the comprehensive registration of voters, culminating in the successful completion of the Puntland Local Government Elections. The announcement and awarding of certificates to the winning parties marked the culmination of this extensive electoral exercise, representing a significant milestone in Puntland's ongoing democratization journey. The commission's relentless pursuit of democratic governance has not only deepened the roots of democracy in Puntland but has also set an inspiring precedent for democratic transitions in similar contexts in the region.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Concepts of social cohesion, political participation, and gender dynamics in the context of elections

In the context of elections, the concepts of social cohesion, political participation, and gender dynamics are crucial factors that influence the democratic process and shape the outcomes of electoral contests. Each of these concepts encompasses complex dynamics that interact with one another, impacting the inclusivity, fairness, and legitimacy of electoral processes. Understanding these concepts in depth is essential for analysing the broader implications of elections on society and governance.

4.1.1 Social Cohesion

Social cohesion refers to the degree of unity and solidarity within a society, characterized by shared values, norms, and identities that bind individuals and groups together. In the context of elections, social cohesion plays a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of political participation, electoral behaviour, and outcomes. High levels of social cohesion can foster trust in electoral institutions, promote civic engagement, and encourage peaceful political competition. Conversely, low levels of social cohesion may contribute to political polarization, social unrest, and electoral violence.

Factors such as inequality, exclusion, and discrimination can undermine social cohesion and erode trust in electoral processes. Addressing these issues requires efforts to promote social inclusion, respect for diversity, and the protection of human rights. Civil society organizations, community leaders, and political actors play key roles in fostering social cohesion by promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and collaboration among diverse social groups. By addressing underlying social divisions and promoting a sense of belonging and solidarity, societies can strengthen the foundations of democracy and ensure the integrity of electoral processes.

4.1.2 Political Participation

Political participation encompasses the various ways in which individuals engage with the political process, including voting, activism, advocacy, and civic engagement. In the context of elections, political participation is essential for ensuring the legitimacy and representativeness of democratic governance. However, patterns of political participation are shaped by factors such as socioeconomic status, education, access to information, and political culture, which can either facilitate or hinder citizen engagement.

Voter turnout is a key indicator of political participation in electoral processes, reflecting the level of civic engagement and citizen trust in the electoral system. High

voter turnout is generally associated with healthy democratic societies, indicating widespread political awareness and participation. Conversely, low voter turnout may signal disenchantment, apathy, or barriers to electoral access, particularly among marginalized and underrepresented groups.

Enhancing political participation requires efforts to remove barriers to electoral access, promote civic education, and empower marginalized communities to engage in the political process. Electoral reforms, such as expanded voting rights, simplified registration procedures, and increased access to polling stations, can help improve electoral participation rates and foster a more inclusive democracy. Moreover, initiatives to promote civic education, media literacy, and political awareness can empower citizens to make informed choices and actively participate in shaping the future of their communities.

4.1.3 Gender Dynamics

Gender dynamics refer to the ways in which gender identities, roles, and power relations intersect with electoral processes and outcomes. Gender inequality and discrimination can manifest in various forms within electoral contexts, affecting women's political participation, representation, and access to decision-making positions. Addressing gender dynamics in elections requires efforts to promote gender equality, eliminate barriers to women's political empowerment, and challenge patriarchal norms and stereotypes.

Women are often underrepresented in political leadership positions, including as candidates, elected officials, and decision-makers. This underrepresentation can be attributed to various factors, including social norms, cultural attitudes, discriminatory laws and practices, and structural barriers within political parties and electoral systems. Addressing these barriers requires concerted efforts to promote women's political participation, support women candidates, and implement gender-sensitive electoral reforms.

Quotas and affirmative action measures are often used to increase women's representation in elected bodies and promote gender parity in political leadership. Quotas can take various forms, including legislative quotas, party quotas, and candidate quotas, which reserve a certain percentage of seats or positions for women. While quotas have been effective in increasing women's representation in some contexts, they are not without challenges and limitations, including resistance from political elites, backlash from opponents, and concerns about tokenism.

Moreover, addressing gender dynamics in elections requires efforts to challenge patriarchal norms and stereotypes that limit women's political participation and leadership opportunities. This involves promoting gender-sensitive political discourse, challenging sexist attitudes and behaviours, and empowering women to assert their rights and aspirations in the political arena. By promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in electoral processes, societies can strengthen democracy, enhance governance, and advance social justice.

4.2 Proportional Representation – Open and Closed List

When examining proportional voting systems, or voting systems in general, the primary focus typically revolves around the method by which seats are distributed among political parties based on their share of the popular vote.

Proportional representation functions as an electoral framework wherein multiple representatives are elected in each district in accordance with the proportion of votes garnered by each political party. For instance, if one-third of voters support a particular political party, that party's candidates would ideally secure approximately one-third of the available seats. Presently, proportional representation stands as the predominant electoral system adopted by democracies worldwide, reflecting its widespread acceptance and implementation across diverse political landscapes.

Within the realm of proportional representation, the list system is a prominent method employed to translate voter preferences into elected officials. In a list proportional representation election, voters cast their ballots for a specific political party along with its attached list of candidates. These candidates are typically arranged in a predetermined order dictated by the party, except in cases of full-open or semi-open list systems where some degree of voter input is permitted, often subject to a threshold requirement. Proportional representation systems are commonly categorized as either closed or open lists, although there are other variations. In this discussion, we will focus exclusively on closed and open list systems.

Closed list proportional representation operates by adhering strictly to the pre-established ranking of candidates on the party's list. When a party secures a certain number of seats, the candidates occupying the corresponding positions on the list are deemed elected. Essentially, a vote for a particular party signifies an endorsement of its entire list of candidates, without the ability for voters to influence individual selections.

Conversely, open list proportional representation affords voters the opportunity to exercise greater agency in candidate selection. In this system, voters have the flexibility to cast their votes directly for individual candidates rather than solely endorsing a party's predetermined list. The mechanics of open list systems can vary, with distinctions between fully open and semi-open variants. In fully open systems, electoral outcomes are solely determined by the cumulative preferences of voters, with the most popular candidates securing seats. Semi-open systems, however, impose a threshold requirement, necessitating candidates to garner a minimum level of support to override the party's list order. Seats not filled through individual candidate votes are then allocated through a closed list mechanism, adhering to the party's predetermined ranking.

In essence, proportional representation, particularly through list systems, serves as a mechanism to translate the diverse preferences of voters into a representative legislative body. While closed list systems prioritize party unity and coherence, open list systems offer greater voter autonomy and individual candidate accountability.

Understanding the nuances of these systems is crucial for ensuring democratic governance that reflects the will of the electorate.

4.3 Local Governments

In the vast landscape of governance, the concept of local government varies widely, with diverse interpretations found in academic literature and legal statutes alike. Despite this variability, several core features tend to emerge consistently across different contexts. Firstly, local government is frequently characterized as a decentralized level of administration, operating closer to the communities it serves than higher tiers of government. Secondly, it is typically established through democratic processes, with officials elected by residents of the locality to represent their interests and concerns. This democratic foundation ensures accountability and responsiveness to the needs of the local population.

Moreover, local government entities are commonly entrusted with a mandate for service delivery, responsible for providing essential public services such as education, healthcare, sanitation, and infrastructure development within their jurisdiction. This service-oriented role reflects the direct impact that local authorities have on the quality of life and well-being of their constituents. Additionally, local government entities are often recognized as legal entities with defined powers and responsibilities, delineated by law or administrative regulations. These legal frameworks establish the scope of authority and autonomy granted to local governments, guiding their decision-making processes and actions.

Furthermore, local governments typically operate within a specific geographical area, exercising jurisdiction over a defined territory determined by national legislation or administrative boundaries. This territorial jurisdiction establishes the limits of the authority wielded by local officials and defines the boundaries within which they can enact policies and provide services. Additionally, local governments are often expected to be largely self-financing, generating revenue through various means such as local taxes, user fees, grants, and other sources of income. This financial autonomy enables local authorities to fund their operations and initiatives independently, reducing dependence on central government funding and enhancing their ability to respond flexibly to local needs and priorities.

5 Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The research design employed in this study aimed to comprehensively explore the intricate dynamics of election processes, governance structures, and social cohesion in Puntland State. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the study sought to provide a holistic understanding of the multifaceted relationships between election dynamics and social structures within the region. The research design is guided by the overarching goal of elucidating the impact of electoral processes on governance inclusivity, social harmony, and democratic development in Puntland State.

Drawing on a purposive sampling strategy, the research design ensured the inclusion of diverse stakeholders, including political parties, candidates, traditional leaders, civil society organizations, women's groups, youth groups, minorities, election commissions, and media representatives. Through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, open-ended surveys, and case studies, qualitative data was collected to capture nuanced perspectives and experiences related to election dynamics and social structures. Additionally, secondary data analysis complemented the qualitative inquiry, providing empirical evidence from voter registration, election results, and gender participation statistics. Through this methodological framework, the research design aimed to generate comprehensive insights that contribute to a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in Puntland's electoral landscape.

5.2 Research Questions

This study adopted a comprehensive approach to explore the multifaceted impact of election dynamics in Puntland on social structures, political processes, and governance inclusivity. A qualitative research methodology was used including interviews, focus group discussions, and data analysis, the research delved into the intricate complexities of electoral dynamics. Qualitative methods captured diverse stakeholder perspectives and provided rich context on how elections influenced social cohesion, relationships, and participation. Meanwhile, quantitative analysis of voter turnout, election results, and demographic trends offers empirical insights into the broader impact of democratic reforms on political structures and governance practices.

By integrating qualitative and quantitative findings, this research elucidated the mechanisms through which election dynamics shaped social and political landscapes in Puntland. Triangulating data from diverse sources, the study sought to provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between elections, social cohesion, political decision-making, and governance inclusivity. Ultimately, the insights generated from this study hold potential to inform policymaking, foster democratic governance, and promote social harmony in Puntland. The research questions were as follows.

1. How did election dynamics in Puntland influence social structures, including cohesion, relationships, and participation?

The first research question explored the impact of election dynamics in Puntland on social structures, including cohesion, relationships, and participation. It sought to understand how electoral processes have shaped the interconnected web of social interactions and group dynamics within Puntland, examining factors such as community cohesion, trust between individuals and groups, and levels of civic engagement.

2. To what extent do election dynamics impact the roles, status, and participation of women in Puntland, and how does this influence broader gender dynamics in the region?

The second research question delved into the influence of election dynamics on the roles, status, and participation of women in Puntland, and its broader implications for gender dynamics in the region. It aimed to assess the extent to which electoral processes have empowered women to participate in political decision-making processes and leadership roles, thereby influencing broader gender dynamics within Puntland society.

3. To what extent have the democratic reforms, including the changes in election processes and the opening of political space, been effective in promoting inclusive governance and social harmony in Puntland?

The third research question investigated the effectiveness of democratic reforms, including changes in election processes and the opening of political space, in promoting inclusive governance and social harmony in Puntland. It pursued to evaluate the impact of these reforms on the representation of marginalized groups, and the overall stability and cohesion of Puntland society.

5.3 Qualitative Research Methodology

In the study, a qualitative research approach was adopted to delve into the intricacies of election dynamics, governance structures, and social cohesion in Puntland. This methodology entailed conducting in-depth explorations of the lived experiences, perceptions, and interactions of key stakeholders through various means such as interviews, focus groups, and open-ended questionnaires. By immersing itself in a qualitative lens, the study aimed to capture the subtle nuances and underlying meanings inherent in the subject matter, thereby providing nuanced insights into the multifaceted nature of the Puntland electoral landscape.

The decision to utilize qualitative methods stemmed from their suitability in unravelling the intricate social phenomena and contextual dynamics that shape elections and governance in Puntland. Qualitative approaches offered the flexibility needed to navigate the complexities of social structures, including cohesion, relationships, and participation, allowing researchers to uncover the underlying motivations, perspectives, and social dynamics at play. Through qualitative inquiry, the study aimed to generate comprehensive insights that contributed to a nuanced

understanding of how election dynamics influence social structures and governance processes in Puntland.

Furthermore, although the research predominantly relied on qualitative methods, it also incorporated the analysis of quantitative data obtained as secondary sources, such as voter registration, election results, and gender participation statistics. Integrating quantitative data complemented the qualitative findings by providing additional context and empirical evidence to substantiate the study's conclusions. Leveraging quantitative secondary data facilitated a more comprehensive and robust analysis of the research questions, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study findings. In essence, the combined use of qualitative and quantitative approaches enriched the methodological framework of the study, enabling a thorough exploration of election dynamics and social structures in Puntland.

5.4 Sampling

In this research, the researcher employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, to select participants based on specific criteria relevant to the study objectives. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate due to the need to target individuals and groups with specialized knowledge, experiences, or perspectives related to election dynamics, social structures, and social cohesion in Puntland. By deliberately selecting participants who possess relevant insights and expertise, the researcher aimed to ensure that the sample effectively captured the diverse range of perspectives and experiences necessary for a comprehensive exploration of the research topic.

Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to strategically identify and include key stakeholders such as political leaders, candidates, civil society representatives, women, youth, and traditional leaders, thus enhancing the relevance and depth of the data collected. This approach facilitated the generation of rich, contextually relevant insights that contributed to a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in Puntland's electoral landscape and governance dynamics.

To thoroughly collect relevant data on election dynamics, impact of elections on social cohesion and community relationships in Puntland, the research has assembled a diverse and comprehensive sample comprising 315 participants drawn from various sectors and stakeholder groups within the region. This multi-faceted approach to sampling reflects a commitment to capturing a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences relevant to the research questions, ensuring a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

The research strategically targeted specific groups within the population to ensure that the collected data accurately reflected the characteristics and perspectives of the broader community. By focusing on these key groups, the study aimed to capture a diverse range of viewpoints and experiences related to election dynamics and social structures in Puntland. This approach facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between various stakeholders and their roles in shaping the electoral landscape. Additionally, by engaging with a diverse array of

participants, including political parties and leaders, candidates, business owners, traditional leaders, civil society organizations, women's groups, youth groups, minorities, election commission representatives, and members of the media, the research was able to gather rich and nuanced insights that informed its findings and conclusions.

Political Parties and Leaders - Engaging with political parties and their leaders was crucial for gaining insights into the political landscape, electoral processes, and power dynamics within Puntland. By including representatives from different political factions, the researcher explored diverse viewpoints, strategies, and motivations shaping election dynamics and social structures.

Candidates- Involving candidates who have participated in elections provides firsthand perspectives on the challenges, opportunities, and experiences associated with running for office in Puntland. Their insights shed light on campaign strategies, voter engagement efforts, and the impact of election outcomes on governance and social cohesion.

Business Community - The participation of business leaders and entrepreneurs offered valuable insights into the economic dimensions of election dynamics and governance in Puntland. Their perspectives on issues such as economic development, investment, and resource allocation inform discussions on the intersection of politics and business within the region.

Traditional Leaders- Engaging with traditional leaders allowed for an exploration of the role of customary governance structures in shaping election processes and social cohesion in Puntland. Their perspectives on community leadership, conflict resolution, and local decision-making provide valuable context for understanding traditional power dynamics alongside formal political institutions.

Civil Society - Including representatives from civil society organizations enabled an examination of their role in promoting transparency, accountability, and civic engagement in Puntland's electoral processes. Their perspectives on advocacy, voter education, and community mobilization efforts contribute to a holistic understanding of democratic governance and social activism.

Women Groups and Youth Groups - Incorporating voices from women groups and youth groups was essential for highlighting the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of marginalized and underrepresented populations in Puntland. Their perspectives on gender dynamics, youth empowerment, and political participation offered valuable insights into the inclusivity and equity of electoral processes.

Minorities - Ensuring the participation of minority groups allowed for an exploration of issues related to diversity, representation, and inclusion in Puntland's political landscape. Their perspectives on participatory politics, social cohesion, and minority rights contributed to a deeper understanding of the complexities of governance and democracy.

Election Commission - Engaging with representatives from the Election Commission provided insights into the administrative processes, challenges, and

reforms related to electoral governance in Puntland. Their perspectives on voter registration, election administration, and electoral reforms offered valuable insights into the institutional dynamics of democratic governance.

Media - Involving representatives from the media allowed for an examination of their role in shaping public discourse, political narratives, and electoral dynamics in Puntland. Their perspectives on media coverage, information dissemination, and the role of journalism in democracy contributed to an understanding of the media's influence on political processes.

By drawing on this diverse range of stakeholders and perspectives, the research sample was well-positioned to provide comprehensive insights into the complexities of election dynamics, social structures, and social cohesion in Puntland. The inclusion of multiple voices and perspectives ensured that the research findings reflect the diversity and richness of experiences within the region, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

5.5 Literature Review

At the core of the research methodology lay a meticulous literature review, which served as the foundational step in the quest to understand the impact of election dynamics on social structures in Puntland State. This comprehensive examination delved into existing scholarship on elections, social structures, and politics within the region. By meticulously analysing both historical and contemporary literature, the researcher aimed to glean crucial insights that would frame the research within the broader context of Puntland's political evolution and social dynamics.

The literature review encompassed a wide range of sources, including academic journals, books, reports, policy documents, and relevant media coverage. The researcher scrutinized scholarly works that offered theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and case studies related to election processes, social structures, and social cohesion in Puntland. Additionally, the researcher explored historical accounts and archival materials to trace the trajectory of political developments and social transformations within the region.

Through this rigorous review process, the research sought to achieve several key objectives. Firstly, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical context and socio-political dynamics that have shaped Puntland's electoral landscape. By tracing the evolution of electoral systems, governance structures, and power dynamics, the researcher could discern patterns, trends, and underlying factors that influence contemporary election dynamics and social structures.

Furthermore, the literature review informed the research design, guiding the formulation of research questions. By synthesizing existing knowledge, the researcher refined the focus areas and developed targeted research strategies that addressed pertinent issues and contributed to advancing scholarly discourse.

Moreover, the insights gleaned from the literature review served as a critical reference point throughout the research process, enabling us to contextualize the

research findings, interpret empirical data, and draw meaningful conclusions. By anchoring the research within the broader body of scholarship, the researcher ensured the relevance, validity, and significance of the research outcomes.

5.6 Data Collection

Our research methodology was designed as a nuanced and comprehensive mixed-methods approach, recognizing the intricate interplay between election dynamics and social structures in Puntland State. This approach aimed to capture the multifaceted dimensions of the subject matter through qualitative research methods, ensuring a thorough understanding of the complexities involved.

5.6.1 Primary Data Collection

To ensure the thoroughness and reliability of our research findings, we meticulously designed a comprehensive data collection strategy that encompassed various methods to capture diverse perspectives and experiences. Our approach incorporated in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, open-ended surveys and questionnaires, and case studies.

The research employed a diverse array of research instruments designed to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the impact of election dynamics on social structures in Puntland State. These instruments were critical in gathering, analysing, and interpreting data from various perspectives, allowing us to achieve a multi-dimensional analysis that is both rigorous and insightful. The primary research instruments utilized in our study included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, open ended questionnaires, and the review of secondary data. Each of these instruments played a pivotal role in our research methodology.

In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including community members, traditional leaders, political leaders, civil society representatives, and subject matter experts within Puntland. These interviews provided valuable insights into individual perspectives, experiences, and perceptions related to election dynamics and social structures. The one-on-one nature of these interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of nuanced issues and facilitated candid discussions.

To foster interactive dialogue and collective reflection, focus group discussions were organized with diverse groups of participants. By bringing together individuals from different backgrounds and perspectives, these discussions enabled us to uncover shared values, concerns, and priorities related to elections and social structures in Puntland. The group dynamics inherent in focus group discussions encouraged participants to build upon each other's ideas, leading to a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Open-ended questionnaires were also administered to a broader sample of respondents. These surveys allowed us to gather relevant data on experiences and perspectives of election dynamics and its impact on social structures. By allowing

respondents to provide detailed responses in their own words, we captured a wide range of perspectives while also inspecting key themes and trends.

In addition to gathering primary data through interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys, detailed case studies were conducted to provide rich contextual insights. These case studies involved in-depth examination of specific electoral processes, social dynamics, and community initiatives within Puntland. By analysing real-life examples and contextual factors, we identified patterns, challenges, and best practices relevant to our research objectives.

By employing a combination of these data collection methods, the research aimed to ensure the comprehensiveness, validity, and reliability of our research findings. This multi-method approach enabled us to triangulate data from different sources, cross-validate key findings, and provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between election dynamics and social structures in Puntland.

5.6.2 Secondary Data

In addition to the primary data collection through purposive sampling, this research also extensively utilized secondary data to enrich the study's findings and provide a broader context. The secondary data were meticulously collected from a variety of reliable sources, including governmental reports, official election commission records, published academic studies, policy documents, and reputable news outlets. This comprehensive collection effort aimed to gather relevant quantitative and qualitative information on voter registration statistics, election results, gender participation rates, and other pertinent demographic data related to Puntland's electoral processes.

The integration of secondary data served multiple purposes within the research framework. Firstly, it offered a macro-level view of the electoral landscape in Puntland, enabling the researcher to contextualize the primary data within broader electoral trends and outcomes. Secondly, the secondary data provided a benchmark for comparing and contrasting the qualitative insights gained from the interviews and focus groups, thus enriching the analysis and interpretation phase. By analysing this data, the researcher identified patterns, anomalies, or emerging trends that may not have been evident from the primary data alone.

Furthermore, the use of secondary data added depth to the investigation of specific research questions, particularly those related to the effectiveness of democratic reforms, gender dynamics, and the inclusivity of governance processes. It allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the changes over time in electoral participation and the representation of various demographic groups.

The incorporation of secondary data into the research methodology underscored the study's commitment to triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings by corroborating evidence from multiple sources. This mixed-methods approach, combining detailed qualitative insights with comprehensive quantitative data, facilitated a more holistic understanding of the complex interplay between election dynamics, social structures, and governance in Puntland.

6. Data Analysis

6.1 Iterative Data Analysis Approach- Thematic Coding and Pattern Recognition

The data analysis methodology was designed as an iterative process, ensuring depth and precision in extracting meaningful insights.

Thematic Coding - Thematic coding served as a foundational element in the data analysis. Through a meticulous and systematic approach, the research identified recurrent themes within the qualitative data. These themes encompassed a spectrum of elements related to social structures and election dynamics in Puntland State. By categorizing and organizing data into themes, the researcher aimed to unveil underlying patterns and intricacies inherent in the interplay between elections and social structures. Thematic coding provided a structured framework for the interpretation of qualitative data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play.

Pattern Recognition - Building upon thematic coding, the data analysis extended to pattern recognition. This phase involved a detailed examination of the qualitative data to discern overarching patterns and trends. By systematically analysing the relationships and interactions between identified themes, the research data analysis sought to draw meaningful conclusions about the impact of election dynamics on social structures. Pattern recognition added a layer of complexity to the analysis, enabling us to move beyond individual themes and understand the interconnectedness of various elements. This holistic approach ensured that the research's conclusions were grounded in a nuanced understanding of the broader context, contributing to the richness and validity of the research findings.

To further enhance the analytical framework, the researcher incorporated social analysis methods at different levels which included Micro, Meso, and Macro. This multi-dimensional approach allowed to scrutinize the impact of elections on individual behaviours and relationships (Micro), community-level dynamics (Meso), and broader societal structures and norms (Macro). This layered analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced ways in which election dynamics permeate and influence various levels of social structures in Puntland.

6.2 The research's Approach to Social Analysis

The researcher elucidated his approach to dissecting the intricate dynamics between elections and social structures in Puntland State. This entailed a methodical exploration at the micro, meso, and macro levels, employing qualitative research methods for a nuanced understanding. In the data analysis phase, the research employed a social analysis framework encompassing Micro, Meso, and Macro levels. This approach allowed to integrate qualitative insights from individual experiences

(Micro), community and organizational dynamics (Meso), and broader societal trends (Macro).

Micro-Level Analysis (Precision Insight) - At the micro level, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews, open-ended surveys, and focus group discussions with individual community members, political activists, and leaders. This granular approach served two primary objectives;

- **Capture Individual Perspectives** - Through qualitative conversations, the researcher aimed to glean a profound understanding of individual experiences, beliefs, and perceptions regarding the impact of election dynamics on personal lives and social interactions.
- **Uncover Micro-Scale Changes** - Employing a qualitative lens, the research sought to identify subtle shifts in behaviour, attitudes, and relationships within households and communities resulting from election processes.

Meso-Level Analysis (Intermediate Examination) - The meso-level analysis pivoted to investigate the dynamics within community structures. This involved analysing how elections influenced the interconnected components of communities. The objective was to discern alterations in collaborative efforts, communication patterns, and social cohesion at the community level. At the Meso level, the examination extended to civil society organizations and local institutions, akin to scrutinizing the organizational fabric. The focus was on identifying any discernible shifts in rules, operational procedures, or overall dynamics within these entities during election periods.

Macro-Level Analysis (Holistic Perspective) - Zooming out to the macro level, the qualitative research aimed to provide a comprehensive view of the broader societal implications of election dynamics.

Societal Impacts - At this level, the researcher sought to unravel the societal impacts of elections by assessing overarching patterns, trends, and shifts in the social fabric. This involved synthesizing insights from the micro and meso levels to construct a holistic narrative of the social changes induced by electoral processes.

The macro-level analysis focused on broader societal impacts, including analysing the role of media in shaping public opinion during elections and assessing shifts in the overall political landscape, as well as evaluating changes in policies and institutions resulting from election outcomes and their impact on the broader social fabric.

6.3 Limitations

While our research methodology was robust, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations although managed through the research methodology. One limitation lies in the sampling approach, where efforts were made to ensure diversity and representation across different segments of the population. However, it is possible that certain remote communities may not have been fully represented in the sample. Despite this, the sample size was carefully considered to provide meaningful insights into the research questions at hand.

Additionally, the study encountered the possibility of social desirability bias in the responses obtained, particularly in self-reported data from surveys and interviews. While measures were implemented to mitigate this bias, such as using open-ended questions and ensuring confidentiality, the presence of social desirability bias cannot be entirely ruled out. Nonetheless, efforts were made to analyse the data objectively and triangulate findings from multiple sources to enhance the reliability of the results.

Furthermore, the reliance on secondary data sources, including historical records and media reports, introduced challenges related to data availability and reliability. Despite efforts to corroborate information from various sources, the precision and broadness of secondary data may have varied. Nevertheless, careful attention was paid to critically evaluate and cross-reference secondary data to minimize inaccuracies and limitations.

Finally, while the findings and conclusions of the research offer valuable insights into election dynamics and social structures in Puntland State, it is important to recognize their contextual specificity. The findings and conclusions of the research may be contextually specific to Puntland State and may not be fully applicable to other regions or contexts in Somalia. While efforts were made to provide a nuanced understanding of the local context, the transferability of findings to different settings should be approached with caution.

7. Findings

7.1 Impact of Election Dynamics on Social Cohesion and Structures

7.1.1 Social Cohesion

The relationship between election dynamics and social cohesion within Puntland was a complex interplay of various factors. While the election reinforced communal bonds and solidarity, they also introduced tensions and challenges that tested the resilience of community relationships. Understanding these dynamics was crucial for assessing the overall impact of electoral processes on the cohesion of Puntland society.

At its core, the interplay between election dynamics and social cohesion reflected the intricate changing aspects of community dynamics and political processes. Elections served as pivotal moments where communities came together to participate in the democratic process, reaffirming their shared values and aspirations. Through active engagement in electoral activities, communities reaffirmed their commitment to collective decision-making and the pursuit of common goals, thereby strengthening social bonds and solidarity.

However, alongside these affirmations of communal unity, electoral processes also introduced tensions and challenges that tested the resilience of community relationships. Competing interests, political rivalries, and disagreements over candidate selection all served as sources of division within communities, undermining the cohesion that elections sought to reinforce. Moreover, the stakes involved in electoral outcomes heightened emotions and exacerbated existing tensions, leading to fractures in community relationships.

Positive Impacts

- **Resilience of Social Bonds**

Despite the evolving political landscape, Puntland communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience in maintaining social cohesion. Shared histories, cultural affinities, and common aspirations serve as sturdy foundations that withstand the transient disruptions induced by electoral dynamics. The enduring sense of togetherness underscores the underlying strength of societal ties that transcend political vicissitudes.

- **Community Alliances and Coalition Building**

Election dynamics have facilitated the formation of community alliances rooted in shared objectives and mutual respect. These coalitions transcend traditional divisions, promoting solidarity among diverse groups and reinforcing social

cohesion. By pooling resources and coordinating efforts, communities amplified their voices in the political arena and exerted greater influence over electoral outcomes. Dialogue and collaboration within these alliances strengthened representation and fostered a sense of belonging and empowerment among constituents.

Negative Impacts

- **Unequal Distribution of Votes**

Disparities in local level ward selection have emerged as a significant source of tension and discord within Puntland communities. Arbitrary allocation of local level wards have led to inconsistencies and inequalities in the distribution of votes among candidates, undermining electoral prospects and perpetuating feelings of disenfranchisement. Conflicts between candidates and political parties have ensued, eroding trust in the electoral process and exacerbating existing tensions.

- **Fragmentation and Division**

Exclusive alliances formed along partisan lines contributed to fragmentation and division within communities. Prioritizing partisan interests over collective well-being have led to polarization and alienation, compromising social cohesion. Marginalization of certain groups and perpetuation of existing inequalities deepened resentment and distrust, further fracturing the cohesive fabric of society.

7.2 Changes in Social Structures

7.2.1 Local Governments in Puntland

In the administrative structure of Puntland, there exist a total of 51 districts. Among these, 21 districts adhere to boundaries established prior to 1991, which indicates their historical significance predating the Somali Civil War. The remaining districts, numbering 30, represent newly demarcated areas established by the Puntland administration itself to accommodate evolving demographics, economic activities, and developmental needs within the region.

Initially, before the advent of Puntland's local government elections, governance in the region was organized such that 27 of the districts already possessed local councils. These councils were constituted through a traditional clan-based system, where nominees were selected by local traditional leaders. This system, deeply rooted in Somali culture and customary practices, aimed to ensure community representation and consensus-building within the framework of clan affiliations.

However, a pivotal transformation occurred with the introduction of democratic processes through local government elections. Following these elections, a

significant majority of the districts—specifically, 33 out of the 51—transitioned towards a more democratic system by electing their local council representatives using a multi-party electoral format. This shift marked a fundamental departure from the traditional clan-based selection process and represented a tangible step towards greater inclusivity, transparency, and accountability in local governance.

Despite the progress achieved through democratic elections, challenges persist in the completion of the electoral process across all districts. Various factors contribute to the delay or inability to conduct elections in some areas, including logistical constraints, security concerns, and institutional capacity limitations. As a result, a portion of the districts still awaits the opportunity to elect their local council representatives through democratic means, underscoring the ongoing complexities inherent in the democratization process within Puntland.

7.2.2 Evolution of Clan Representation in Puntland's City Councils Through Elections

In the recent shift from traditional clan-based nominations to a more democratic electoral process in Puntland, the landscape of city council representations has undergone significant transformations. The research has unveiled that this evolution in the electoral system has not only changed the composition of city councils but has also had a profound impact on the representation of various clans. Historically, the nomination of representatives by elders, based on a pre-agreed number of seats for each clan, served as a power-sharing mechanism. However, this method often did not reflect the actual population sizes of clans in specific districts, leading to disparities and dissatisfaction regarding equitable representation.

The introduction of elections has fundamentally altered these dynamics, basing council compositions on electoral participation and the number of candidates put forward by each clan. In Bossaso for instance, one clan witnessed its representation increase by up to fourfold compared to the allocation under the previous system. This substantial increase in seats not only signifies a shift towards a more proportionate representation based on electoral support but also underscores the potential of the electoral system to correct historical imbalances and respond to demographic changes. Additionally, four other clans in the same district secured one to two extra seats each, while a new clan gained entry into the council for the first time, highlighting the inclusivity and fluidity introduced by the electoral process.

Conversely, the transition to electoral representation has not been without its challenges. Ten clans experienced a complete loss of their seats, indicating a drastic shift away from their previously guaranteed representation. This development marks a significant departure from the past, where representation was somewhat assured, to a new reality where electoral success is uncertain. In Badhan district, similar patterns emerged, with five clans gaining additional seats, four maintaining their previous seat count, and seven clans losing their representation entirely. This loss of seats for several clans underscores the competitive nature of the electoral process and its impact on established power structures within Puntland's political landscape.

The transition from a system of pre-determined clan nominations to one based on electoral outcomes reveals a complex interplay of factors influencing clan representation. The increased representation for some clans, the introduction of new clans into the council, and the complete loss of representation for others reflect the dynamism and potential for greater inclusivity that the electoral process brings. However, it also highlights the challenges inherent in moving away from traditional power-sharing mechanisms, particularly for clans that find themselves without representation under the new system.

The alteration in the power dynamics and the representation of clans within city councils through the electoral process speaks to broader implications for governance, social cohesion, and the political landscape in Puntland. While the shift towards electoral representation offers opportunities for more equitable and representative governance, it also presents challenges, especially for clans adjusting to a new reality where their influence and representation are not guaranteed. The research underscores the need for ongoing monitoring and analysis of these changes to understand their impact on social cohesion, governance efficacy, and the overall political landscape. As Puntland navigates this transition, the findings highlight the importance of developing mechanisms to manage potential conflicts and ensure a smooth adaptation to the evolving system of political representation.

While we focused on two districts as examples, the observations hold true for all districts where elections have taken place in Puntland. The elections have profoundly transformed clan representation across all district councils, illustrating the fluid and dynamic character of democratic elections. The alterations in clan representation, marked by gains, losses, and unchanged positions among various clans, are not directly tied to the actual population sizes of the clans within those districts. Rather, these changes are indicative of the varying levels of electoral participation and the strategic voting behaviours that either benefited or hindered certain clans.

This variability in clan representation underscores the essence of electoral democracy—its inherent capacity for change and the potential for different outcomes in successive elections. The fact that some clans lost seats not because of a reduction in population but due to lower voter turnout or less effective electoral strategies highlights the importance of active and strategic engagement in the democratic process.

The fluctuating electoral landscape emphasizes the need for communities to understand the importance of voter turnout, candidate selection, and campaign strategies in shaping electoral outcomes. It also points to the necessity for ongoing political education and engagement to ensure that electoral democracy is both inclusive and reflective of the community's diversity.

In essence, the recent electoral outcomes in Puntland illustrate the transformative and unpredictable nature of democratic elections. They serve as a reminder of the importance of broad-based community engagement and active participation in shaping governance structures that are truly representative of the will of the people, thereby ensuring that the political system remains responsive and inclusive.

7.2.3 Voting Empowered People

Voting serves as a cornerstone of democracy, empowering individuals to participate in the political process and shape the direction of their society. Granting the people of Puntland, the right to vote for the first time marked a watershed moment in the region's history, empowering citizens with the ability to actively participate in the democratic process. This newfound right bestowed upon the populace a sense of agency and ownership over their governance, enabling them to exercise their democratic rights and influence the direction of their society. The new democratic governance provided the people of Puntland new power and or rights which include.

Expressing Voice and Choice. Voting has empowered regular citizens in Puntland, many of whom cast their ballots for the first time in their lives, to express their preferences and opinions regarding candidates and policies that resonate with their values and beliefs. For the first time, citizens have had the opportunity to directly elect their councils and align with political parties of their choice. This marks a significant departure from the previous system where traditional leaders and elders nominated district councils through a clan power-sharing mechanism, effectively silencing the voices of individual citizens. Through voting, Puntland residents now exercise their right to participate in the decision-making process, contributing to the collective voice of the electorate and shaping the future of their communities.

Fostering Civic Engagement. Participating in elections fosters a sense of civic duty and engagement among the people. It encourages individuals to become informed about political issues, candidates, and the electoral process itself. This engagement extends beyond the act of voting to include activities such as attending debates, volunteering for campaigns, and discussing political issues with peers, thereby enriching democratic discourse and civic culture.

Holding Leaders Accountable. Through their votes, people can hold elected officials accountable for their actions and decisions. By electing representatives who reflect their interests and values, voters empower themselves to demand transparency, responsiveness, and accountability from those in positions of power. This accountability mechanism is essential for ensuring effective governance and preventing abuses of authority.

Promoting Representation and Diversity. Voting contributes to the promotion of representation and diversity in political leadership. By participating in elections, citizens contribute to the selection of candidates who reflect the diversity of their communities, including factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic background. This diversity enriches decision-making processes and enhances the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

Driving Policy Change and Social Progress. The collective power of voters can drive policy change and social progress. By mobilizing around issues that matter to them, voters can influence the political agenda, advocate for policy reforms, and address pressing social challenges. This capacity for collective action underscores

the transformative potential of voting in advancing the interests and welfare of society as a whole.

Empowering Marginalized Communities. For marginalized communities, including minority groups, women, and youth, voting serves as a means of empowerment and inclusion in the political process. By exercising their right to vote, individuals from these communities assert their presence and demand recognition in political decision-making, thereby challenging systems of inequality and discrimination.

A compelling example of how elections empower marginalized communities is evident in Puntland, where Internally Displaced People (IDPs) have, for the first time, elected one of their own as a representative in Qardho district during the local government elections. This milestone marks a significant departure from previous clan-based nominations, where IDPs were often overlooked and marginalized within the traditional clan system of Puntland. In the past, IDP communities had limited or no representation in decision-making processes, as they were not formally recognized within the clan structures in Puntland. However, with the introduction of elections, IDPs gained the opportunity to exercise their right to vote, enabling them to elect a representative who understands and advocates for their unique needs and challenges. This demonstrates how the democratic process empowers marginalized communities by giving them a voice and agency in shaping their own governance and representation.

Building Trust in Democratic Institutions. People play a crucial role in building and maintaining trust in democratic institutions. By participating in free, fair, and transparent elections, individuals demonstrate their confidence in the democratic process and the legitimacy of elected authorities. This trust is essential for the stability and functioning of democratic societies.

7.2.4 Registered Voters in Puntland

According to the Puntland voter registration law enacted in 2021, the foundation for credible and transparent elections lies in the registration of voters, overseen by the Transitional Puntland Election Commission (TPEC). This vital process serves as a cornerstone of democratic governance, ensuring that eligible voters are properly identified and included in the electoral rolls.

The right to vote provided the people of Puntland with a powerful tool to effect change and make decisions that directly impact their lives and communities. By casting their ballots, citizens were able to voice their preferences, express their concerns, and advocate for their interests through the democratic process. This ability to participate in free and fair elections offered individuals the opportunity to shape the future of their region and contribute to the development and progress of their society.

Furthermore, the right to vote allowed the people of Puntland to elect representatives who they believed would effectively represent their interests and priorities including political parties. Through the electoral process, citizens had the power to choose

leaders who shared their values, vision, and aspirations, thereby ensuring that their voices were heard, and their needs addressed at the highest levels of government.

Communities have recognized that having more registered voters increases their chances of securing seats in elections. This understanding has motivated many individuals to actively encourage voter registration. Local people grasped that voter registration plays a crucial role in determining electoral results and ensuring representation in local councils and the parliament. As a result, there has been a collective effort among different groups to promote voter registration, emphasizing its significance in shaping the democratic process and giving communities a voice in governance.

Clan-based mobilization has proven to be particularly effective in boosting voter registration numbers. Clans that feel marginalized or underrepresented in the prior political structures have mobilized their members to register and vote. This effort is driven by the desire for equitable power and resource sharing within Puntland regions, with clans viewing the "one person, one vote" process as an opportunity to achieve fair representation and influence decision-making processes. Consequently, there was a growing recognition of the need to engage traditional leaders in voter registration campaigns to ensure broad participation and inclusivity.

However, campaigns against voter registration by opposition groups have had a detrimental impact on turnout. Opposition politicians, including presidential candidates, have publicly discouraged citizens from registering, alleging that the registration process is part of a broader agenda aimed at extending presidential term. This conflicting messaging has created confusion and hesitancy among citizens, leading to a decline in registration rates.

Despite efforts to promote voter registration, turnout has been disappointingly low. This low turnout reflects the challenges and obstacles faced in mobilizing citizens to participate in the electoral process. Addressing these challenges will require sustained efforts to overcome barriers to registration and enhance civic engagement among the population, ultimately strengthening the democratic process in Puntland.

The number of registered voters in different regions of Puntland, providing insights into the distribution of electoral participation across various geographic areas. Mudug emerges as the region with the highest number of registered voters, boasting a significant total of 100,687 voters. This suggests a strong level of political engagement and civic participation among residents of the Mudug region, potentially reflecting heightened interest in electoral processes and governance issues.

Moving on to other regions, Bari and Nugaal also stand out with substantial numbers of registered voters, recording 99,335 and 94,487 voters respectively. These figures indicate a notable level of electoral activity and voter registration efforts in these areas, highlighting their significance in shaping the electoral landscape of Puntland. The relatively high voter turnout in Bari and Nugaal underscores the importance of these regions in influencing electoral outcomes and political dynamics within the state.

Conversely, regions like Gardafuu and Haylaan exhibit lower numbers of registered voters, with 14,196 and 9,769 voters respectively. While these figures may indicate lower levels of electoral participation in these areas compared to others, they also underscore the need for targeted voter registration drives and civic engagement initiatives to ensure broader representation and inclusivity in the electoral process. Efforts to increase voter awareness and participation may be particularly crucial in regions with lower voter turnout, aiming to empower citizens and amplify their voices in the democratic process.

Furthermore, Sanaag and Karkaar present moderate numbers of registered voters, with 21,452 and 47,168 voters respectively. These regions occupy an intermediary position in terms of voter turnout, signalling a mixed level of electoral engagement and political interest among residents. Understanding the factors influencing voter registration and turnout in these regions is essential for designing effective outreach strategies and fostering greater civic participation.

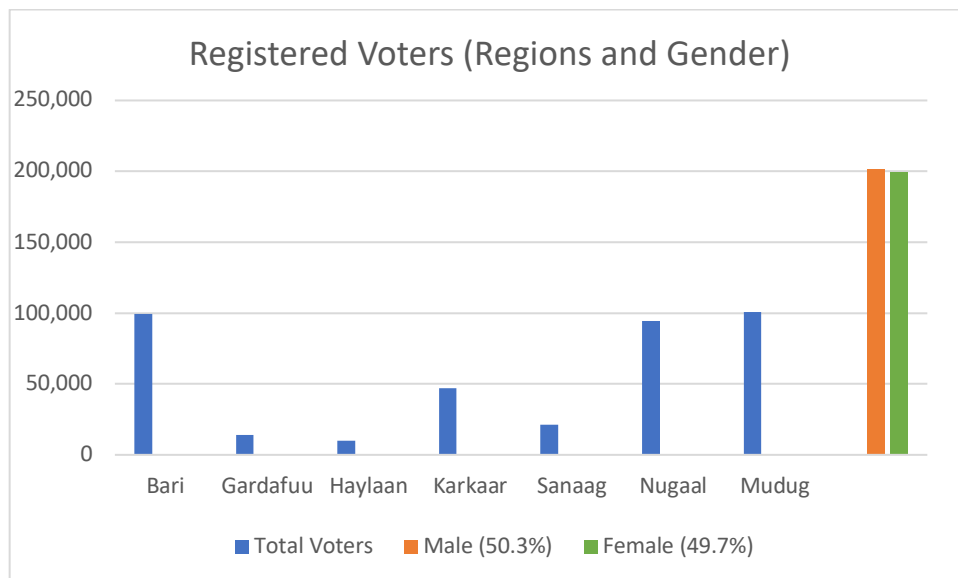


Figure 1: Registered Voters (Regions and Gender)

The data on registered voters in Puntland provides valuable insights into the composition of the electorate, offering a multifaceted understanding of its diversity and potential implications for democratic governance. With a substantial total of 387,094 registered voters, the electoral landscape appears robust and inclusive, reflecting widespread engagement in the political process. Gender parity is nearly achieved, with 50.3% of registered voters being male and 49.7% female, signalling progress towards gender equality in political participation. This gender balance suggests a democratic system that is accessible to all, fostering an environment where both men and women have a voice in shaping the future of Puntland.

In light of these findings, delving deeper into the factors influencing voter registration and turnout across different regions of Puntland becomes paramount. Essential questions arise, such as whether these regions necessitate identical strategies, if some regions require more time for implementation than others, and whether access issues or infrastructure disparities play a role. Understanding these nuances is crucial

for crafting effective and targeted interventions that cater to the unique needs and challenges of each region. For instance, regions with lower voter turnout, such as Gardafuu and Haylaan, may require specific initiatives aimed at addressing access barriers or increasing awareness about the importance of civic participation.

Conversely, regions with higher voter turnout, like Mudug and Bari, may benefit from efforts to sustain and enhance existing engagement levels. This could include initiatives to deepen community involvement in the political process, such as establishing local forums for dialogue between citizens and elected officials or providing resources for civic education and voter empowerment programs.

Moreover, considering the disparities in infrastructure and resources across different regions, tailored approaches are essential to ensure equitable representation and participation. Regions with limited infrastructure may require additional support to overcome logistical challenges associated with voter registration and polling, such as providing transportation assistance or deploying mobile voting units to remote areas.

The insights gathered from interviews and discussions with research participants shed light on a critical issue affecting voter participation in remote areas of Puntland: infrastructure challenges. Participants highlighted instances where voters intending to reach polling stations were thwarted by muddy roads, particularly after rainfall. These adverse weather conditions rendered roads impassable, trapping voters enroute to polling stations and impeding their ability to participate in the electoral process. This scenario underscores the significant impact of infrastructure deficiencies on voter registration and turnout, as similar challenges may arise in future voter registrations and elections, ultimately hindering citizens' access to electoral services.

Moreover, the experiences shared by research participants highlight the interconnected nature of infrastructure and democratic participation. Inadequate infrastructure not only impedes citizens' physical access to polling stations but also undermines the legitimacy and inclusivity of the electoral process. Addressing infrastructure deficiencies is therefore not only a matter of improving logistical efficiency but also a fundamental aspect of safeguarding democratic principles and promoting civic engagement.

Ultimately, the implementation of tailored interventions and outreach strategies holds the key to promoting inclusive democracy and fostering greater civic participation across all regions of Puntland. By addressing the specific needs and circumstances of each area, these efforts can help bridge gaps in political engagement, strengthen democratic institutions, and ensure that every citizen has a voice in shaping the future of their community and the state as a whole.

Comparatively, the fact that voter registration was low in comparison to the total population of Puntland highlights a significant gap in electoral participation. While exact figures may vary, this discrepancy underscores the need to assess and address barriers to voter registration that may be contributing to low turnout. Several factors could contribute to this disparity, including limited awareness about the importance of voter registration, logistical challenges in accessing registration

centres, and socioeconomic barriers that may disproportionately affect certain demographics.

To effectively address this issue, targeted outreach efforts and awareness campaigns are essential to educate citizens about the electoral process and the significance of voter registration. Additionally, improving accessibility to registration centres, particularly in remote and underserved areas, can help mitigate logistical barriers and ensure that all eligible individuals have the opportunity to register.

Furthermore, addressing underlying socioeconomic disparities, such as poverty and lack of education, is crucial for promoting equitable participation in the electoral process. By addressing these systemic challenges and implementing proactive measures to promote voter registration, Puntland can work towards fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy where the voices of all citizens are heard and respected.

Delving deeper into the age distribution of registered voters unveils intriguing patterns that warrant further analysis. A significant majority, accounting for 60.61% of the electorate, falls within the 18-30 age bracket, indicating a youthful demographic poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the region's political landscape. This demographic surge underscores the importance of mobilizing young voters and catering to their unique perspectives and priorities in electoral campaigns and policy-making processes. However, it also highlights the need for concerted efforts to engage middle-aged (31-40 years) and older voters (50 years and above), who constitute smaller yet significant segments of the electorate.

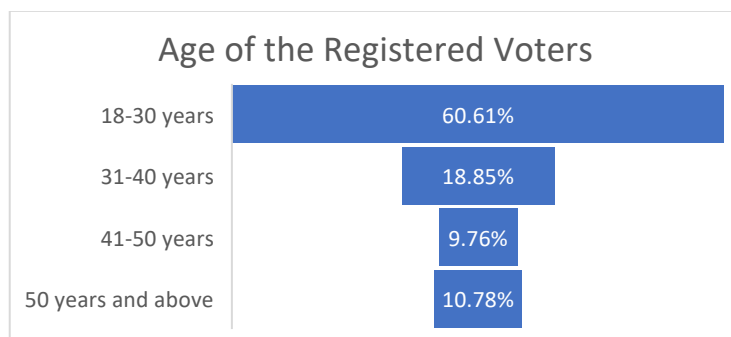


Figure 2: Age of the Registered Voters

The predominance of youth in the registered voter population presents both opportunities and challenges for political actors and electoral authorities. On one hand, harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of young voters can invigorate the democratic process, injecting fresh perspectives and driving progressive change. On the other hand, ensuring meaningful representation and participation among diverse age groups requires targeted outreach and engagement strategies tailored to the specific needs and concerns of each demographic. Political actors must navigate this demographic diversity with nuanced approaches, addressing the aspirations of the youth while also addressing the priorities of older demographics to foster inclusive and representative governance.

Moreover, understanding demographic trends in voter registration is essential for devising effective electoral strategies and policies that resonate with the electorate. By recognizing the varying interests and preferences of different age groups, political actors can craft platforms and initiatives that appeal to a broad spectrum of voters, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of the democratic process. Furthermore, targeted engagement efforts aimed at marginalized or underrepresented demographics can help bridge existing gaps in political participation, ensuring that all voices are heard and accounted for in decision-making processes.

The data on registered voters in Puntland offers a comprehensive snapshot of the electorate, highlighting its diversity and the nuanced dynamics that shape democratic governance. From gender parity to age distribution, understanding these demographic trends is crucial for fostering inclusive and representative democracy in Puntland. By addressing the unique needs and concerns of different demographic groups, political actors can cultivate a political environment that empowers all citizens to actively participate in shaping the future of their region.

7.2.5 Changing Status of Traditional Leaders Role

The introduction of elections and democratic governance in Puntland has precipitated a significant shift in the status and function of traditional leaders within the political landscape. Historically, these leaders held paramount influence as the primary decision-makers in selecting political representatives across various tiers of governance. Their authority extended from district councils to parliamentary seats, and even to governmental appointments. However, the advent of democratic processes has instigated a fundamental reconfiguration of power dynamics, challenging the traditional monopoly of authority held by these leaders and fostering a more participatory political environment.

As governance becomes more democratized, traditional leaders have witnessed a gradual erosion of their once-unchallenged authority. Decision-making processes have become more decentralized, distributing power among broader segments of society. While some traditional leaders view this transition as a relief from the burden of sole decision-making, others perceive it as a diminishment of their influence and prestige. Nonetheless, the democratization process has been widely acclaimed as a step towards fairness and transparency, diverging markedly from the opaque and exclusive nature of traditional leadership models.

In response to these changes, traditional leaders have adapted their roles, embracing new opportunities to engage with the electoral process and influence political outcomes. Despite the formal shift away from their dominant role, traditional leaders continue to wield considerable influence by leveraging their deep community ties and social capital. Through endorsing candidates, mobilizing support, and influencing political parties, traditional leaders remain formidable actors in shaping the electoral narrative and steering the course of democratic governance in Puntland.

However, this transition presents a complex blend of relief and loss for traditional leaders. While some welcome the shift away from singular decision-making, others lament the diminishing influence of their once-unquestionable authority. This duality underscores the multifaceted and nuanced emotions surrounding the evolving role of traditional leaders in the new democratic framework, reflecting diverse interpretations of power and representation.

The integration of traditional leadership into the democratic process raises critical questions about their role in a modern political context. The potential hybridization of traditional and political systems poses risks to societal cohesion and democratic principles, potentially reinforcing hierarchical power structures and undermining ideals of equality and representation. Hence, there is an urgent need for thorough reflection and examination of the evolving role of traditional leaders within the framework of democratic governance, ensuring that their participation enriches rather than detracts from the democratic aspirations of the people of Puntland.

7.3 Changes in Community Relationships

Research on voting participation often emphasizes various aspects of elections, yet the role of community dynamics in shaping electoral outcomes is frequently overlooked. While studies may analyse factors such as population size, density, and urban or rural demographics, the impact of community cohesion and relationships on elections is equally significant. Understanding how communities interact and engage with the electoral process provides valuable insights into voter behaviour, campaign strategies, and ultimately, the democratic functioning of society.

Communities play a pivotal role in elections, serving as the social fabric within which political attitudes are shaped, alliances are formed, and voting decisions are influenced. Close-knit communities foster a sense of collective identity and shared values, which can significantly impact voter turnout and candidate preferences. Moreover, community relationships, whether based on kinship, shared experiences, or common interests, often influence individuals' political beliefs and allegiances. For instance, communities with strong social ties may exhibit higher levels of civic engagement and mobilization, leading to increased voter participation and electoral activism.

Furthermore, the dynamics of community relationships can shape electoral campaigns and political strategies. Candidates and political parties often rely on grassroots organizing and community outreach to garner support and mobilize voters. Understanding the intricacies of community dynamics allows candidates to tailor their messaging and campaign efforts to resonate with local concerns and priorities. Additionally, community leaders and influencers play a crucial role in endorsing candidates, rallying support, and shaping voter perceptions within their respective communities.

Despite its significance, the impact of community relationships on elections remains underexplored in academic literature. More research is needed to elucidate how community dynamics intersect with electoral processes, including the role of social

networks, interpersonal connections, and community-based organizations. By delving deeper into the complexities of community engagement in elections, scholars can provide valuable insights into the factors driving voter behaviour and political participation, ultimately enriching our understanding of democracy and governance.

Overall, the introduction of democracy and electoral processes in the community did not result in significant disruptions to community relationships. While minor issues such as conflicts and disagreements over candidate selection or local level ward allocations did arise, they did not have a substantial impact on the overall cohesion or strength of community bonds. It appears that the community prioritized unity and cooperation over potential democratic challenges, demonstrating a resilience and commitment to maintaining harmonious relationships.

Despite occasional tensions, the community demonstrated a remarkable capacity for patience and tolerance in addressing any issues that arose during the electoral process. Rather than allowing these challenges to undermine community solidarity, members worked together to resolve conflicts and maintain a sense of unity. This collective commitment to overcoming obstacles and preserving community relationships underscores the resilience of the social fabric and the importance placed on communal harmony above all else.

The ability of the community to navigate democratic processes without significant strain on relationships highlights the underlying strength of interpersonal connections and shared values within the community. While democracy introduced new dynamics and challenges, the community's response reflects a deep-rooted commitment to collective well-being and cooperation. Moving forward, this experience serves as a testament to the resilience of community relationships in the face of evolving political landscapes and underscores the importance of fostering inclusive and participatory democratic practices.

7.3.1 Candidate Nominations and Ranking

In the context of local elections, political parties often relied on clan affiliations to select candidates, reflecting the deep-rooted influence of clan dynamics in political processes. Candidates were typically chosen based on their clans and how much votes they can secure within the respective localities. Political parties, at times, defer to the authority of elders, traditional leaders, and clan representatives when selecting candidates. These parties nominate individuals whom they believe can gather support and win elections. Whether these candidates are suggested by the parties themselves or endorsed by community leaders, it is crucial that they maintain connections with the clan they aim to represent. This ensures a level of local legitimacy and support for the candidates.

While political parties played a significant role in candidate selection, the process was not without its complexities and negotiations. Disagreements occasionally arose over the final list of candidates, reflecting differing priorities and interests among party members and community leaders. However, these disagreements typically did not escalate into major conflicts that would undermine the electoral process or

community cohesion. Instead, they were often resolved through dialogue and compromise, highlighting the resilience of local political dynamics and the importance of maintaining harmony within the community.

Despite the involvement of political parties and clan affiliations in candidate selection, local elections generally proceeded without significant disruptions to community relations. While tensions may have emerged during the candidate selection process, the overarching goal of ensuring representation and effective governance prevailed, fostering a sense of collective responsibility towards the electoral outcome.

Ultimately, the participation of diverse stakeholders, including political parties, clan leaders, and community members, contributed to the integrity and legitimacy of the electoral process, reinforcing the bonds of trust and cooperation within the local community.

One significant weakness identified in the electoral process was the lack of gender balance, particularly in candidate nominations. Despite the presence of gender quotas, their enforcement was lacking, leading to a bias in favour of male candidates. Research participants highlighted that clans often preferred male candidates over females, perpetuating gender disparities in political representation. Furthermore, elders actively campaigned for male-dominated candidate lists and vehemently opposed the inclusion of women, exacerbating the gender imbalance in candidate nominations. This resistance from influential community members further marginalized female candidates and hindered efforts to promote gender equality in political participation.

Additionally, issues of favouritism and preference within political parties were highlighted, with party representatives leveraging their influence to prioritize certain candidates or allocating them to local level wards perceived to have higher chances of success. This selective allocation of candidates favoured specific sectors of the community, potentially undermining the principles of fairness and equality in the electoral process. Such practices not only raised concerns about the integrity of candidate selection but also could fuel tensions within the community, particularly among those who felt marginalized or overlooked by the political establishment.

The ranking of candidates on electoral lists, a critical aspect of the electoral process, was often influenced by political parties, granting them significant power in determining candidates' electoral prospects. In the closed-list system, where candidates are elected in the order they appear on the list, the position of candidates can significantly impact their chances of success. While community consultation was purportedly involved in determining rankings, political party representatives at the local level sometimes wielded this power to advance their own agendas. This manipulation of candidate rankings allowed parties to prioritize their preferred candidates, often at the expense of others, thereby disadvantaging those positioned lower on the list. Consequently, candidates lower down the list faced greater challenges in securing electoral victory, highlighting the potential for abuse of power within the candidate selection process.

According to insights from research participants, the ranking of electoral lists was subject to frequent changes, even after initial agreements were reached between

political parties, candidates and the community. This fluidity in the ranking process suggests a lack of stability and consistency, potentially undermining trust in the electoral system. The shifting nature of list rankings could indicate behind-the-scenes negotiations or internal party dynamics influencing candidate positioning. Such unpredictability may have contributed to uncertainty and frustration among candidates and voters alike, highlighting the need for transparent and accountable procedures in the electoral process.

Based on insights shared by research participants, there were situations where voters chose to abstain from voting altogether due to their discovery that their candidates had been positioned lower on the electoral list, contrary to earlier agreements. This revelation had a profound effect on voter engagement and involvement in the electoral process. It underscores the crucial role of candidate placement in influencing voter participation. Furthermore, the cynicism expressed by voters underscores the critical need for transparency and integrity in candidate selection processes. Any discrepancies or alterations in rankings have the potential to undermine trust and breed disillusionment among voters, highlighting the importance of maintaining fairness and honesty throughout the electoral process.

Indeed, despite the generally positive outcome regarding community relationships during elections, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the issues that may pose challenges to social cohesion. One such concern as indicated above revolves around the process of candidate nomination, wherein the selection of candidates may not adequately represent all sections of the community. This lack of inclusivity in candidate selection could lead to feelings of marginalization among certain groups within the community, potentially undermining trust, and cooperation.

Additionally, the intervention of party representatives with favouritism and biases can exacerbate tensions and breed resentment within the community. When certain candidates receive preferential treatment due to political affiliations or personal connections, it can erode confidence in the fairness and integrity of the electoral process. Such perceptions of unfairness can strain relationships and sow seeds of discord among community members.

Moreover, the method by which candidates are ranked on electoral lists is another area of concern that warrants careful attention. The ranking process must be transparent and inclusive, with input from all stakeholders, to ensure fairness and legitimacy. If the ranking process is perceived as arbitrary or manipulated, it can fuel grievances and deepen divisions within the community.

To mitigate these risks and safeguard community relationships, it is imperative to promote transparency and inclusivity throughout the electoral process. This includes ensuring that all sections of the community are adequately represented in candidate nominations, and that party representatives refrain from engaging in biased practices. Furthermore, transparent mechanisms for ranking candidates must be established, with opportunities for community input and oversight.

By addressing these issues proactively and fostering a culture of openness and inclusivity, electoral processes can strengthen community relationships and enhance

social cohesion. By upholding democratic principles of fairness and representation, communities can navigate electoral challenges while preserving unity and cooperation among their members.

7.3.2 District Demarcations

District demarcation also stands as a critical juncture that could significantly impact community relationships and cohesion, particularly in regions where different clans and communities have divergent preferences regarding administrative boundaries. When these preferences clash, it can foster an atmosphere of hostility and potential conflict, undermining social harmony and stability. Drawing border lines between districts has historically been a contentious issue in Somalia, and particularly in Puntland, where competing interests and historical grievances often complicate the process.

While district demarcation is essential for effective election management and governance improvements, it requires careful deliberation and the involvement of all stakeholders to mitigate potential conflicts and ensure equitable outcomes. The delineation of district boundaries must take into account the diverse interests and concerns of local communities, balancing competing claims in a manner that promotes inclusivity and fairness. Failure to address these issues transparently and inclusively could exacerbate tensions and exacerbate existing divisions within communities.

To navigate the complexities of district demarcation in Puntland, it is essential to adopt a participatory approach that solicits input from all relevant stakeholders, including community leaders, clan representatives, and local authorities. Engaging in dialogue and consensus-building processes can help identify common ground and foster mutual understanding among diverse groups, paving the way for sustainable solutions that uphold community cohesion and strengthen governance structures. By prioritizing inclusivity and transparency in the district demarcation process, Puntland can mitigate potential conflicts and foster a more cohesive and resilient society.

7.3.3 District Leadership Contests

After the elections concluded, the focus shifted towards the formation of coalitions by political parties aiming to secure key leadership positions within districts. This process, while a customary practice in democratic governance, holds significant implications for community dynamics and representation. While political parties typically prioritize gaining seats and consolidating power, communities often prioritize the appointment of individuals who possess the requisite qualifications and competence to effectively serve as district mayor and deputy mayor, irrespective of political allegiance.

This divergence in priorities can sometimes lead to tension and discord between political entities and community stakeholders, necessitating careful consideration and negotiation to bridge the gap between party interests and community expectations.

In the aftermath of recent elections, where political parties successfully brokered coalitions to secure district leadership roles, a wave of discontent and rejection from various communities ensued. This discontent stemmed from the perception that the outcomes did not accurately reflect the preferences or aspirations of the local populace.

Consequently, the legitimacy of these coalitions came under scrutiny, leading to delays and postponements in the inauguration and assumption of duties by the elected councils and leaderships in affected districts. The resulting impasse not only undermines the credibility of the electoral process but also exacerbates existing tensions and divisions within communities, hindering the smooth transition of power and governance at the local level.

The complexities surrounding coalition-building in the post-election landscape highlight the complex interplay between political processes and community interests. While political parties vie for dominance and influence, communities advocate for representation and accountability in the decision-making process. Moreover, the emergence of clan-based considerations adds another layer of complexity, as certain clans may seek to assert their influence and representation in leadership positions, sometimes at the expense of democratic principles and inclusivity. Addressing these complexities requires a nuanced approach that prioritizes dialogue, transparency, and inclusivity, ensuring that the aspirations and concerns of all stakeholders are adequately addressed.

Moving forward, it is imperative for stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue and negotiation to navigate the challenges posed by coalition-building in the context of local governance. This entails fostering an environment conducive to consensus-building and compromise, wherein the interests of both political entities and community stakeholders are reconciled to facilitate the smooth transition of power and effective governance. Moreover, efforts should be directed towards enhancing civic education and awareness to empower communities to actively participate in the democratic process and hold elected representatives accountable. By fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, Puntland can strengthen its democratic institutions and ensure that the voices of its citizens are heard and respected in the governance process.

7.3.4 Unclear Election Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

Unclear policies, procedures, laws, and guidelines surrounding the electoral process can pose significant challenges to community relationships and cohesion, potentially leading to disruptions in trust and decreased voter turnout. When the rules governing elections lack clarity or are subject to interpretation, it creates ambiguity and confusion among community members, undermining their confidence in the fairness and integrity of the electoral process. This uncertainty can breed mistrust and suspicion, fuelling tensions within communities and eroding social cohesion.

One of the primary ways unclear electoral policies can impact community relationships is by fostering perceptions of unfairness and favouritism. Without

transparent and well-defined procedures for candidate nomination, voter registration, and local level - ward management, communities may perceive certain groups or individuals as receiving preferential treatment, leading to resentment and division. Additionally, the lack of clarity in election laws can create loopholes or opportunities for manipulation, further exacerbating feelings of injustice and disenfranchisement among marginalized groups.

Furthermore, the absence of clear electoral laws and guidelines can hinder efforts to resolve disputes and grievances that arise during the election process. Without established mechanisms for addressing complaints or allegations of electoral misconduct, communities may resort to informal or confrontational methods to seek redress, leading to heightened tensions and conflicts. This breakdown in trust and cooperation can have lasting repercussions on community relationships, straining social bonds and impeding efforts to promote reconciliation and unity.

In the context of the Puntland Elections, communities have expressed widespread confusion regarding the election system and unclear guidelines, particularly concerning the operation of local level wards and the selection of candidates. Research participants have highlighted instances where candidates had little control over the allocation of wards to candidates, as this decision was predominantly made by political parties rather than the candidates themselves because the wards are where the candidates votes are supposed to come from. This lack of agency over the selection of wards meant that some candidates were placed in locations where they had no voter base, resulting in their electoral defeat despite their qualifications or popularity within the community.

Another source of confusion stemmed from the process of ranking candidates, which was largely controlled by political parties with limited input from candidates and communities. The ranking of candidates, which significantly influenced their chances of election, was subject to constant changes and revisions, often without consultation or notification to the affected candidates. This lack of transparency and consistency in the ranking process further exacerbated confusion and mistrust among community members, who were left uncertain about the fairness and integrity of the ranking system.

Moreover, the absence of clear guidelines regarding candidate selection and local level ward allocation dented the legitimacy of the electoral process and eroded public confidence in the outcome. Community members were left feeling disenfranchised and disillusioned with the electoral system, as they perceived it to be controlled by political parties rather than clear procedures.

In order to address these challenges and restore public trust in the electoral process, it is imperative for authorities to develop clear policies and procedures with relevant guidelines well in advance and to consult relevant stakeholder and at the end educate the public. Priorities should be given on the development of clear guidelines for candidate selection and local level ward allocation which is candidates voter base, ensuring meaningful consultation with candidates and community stakeholders, and establishing mechanisms for accountability and redress in the event of disputes or irregularities. By promoting transparency and accountability, electoral authorities can

foster greater confidence and participation among community members, strengthening the democratic foundations of Puntland's electoral system.

7.4 Election Participation and Inclusivity

7.4.1 Women's Empowerment and Political Participation in Puntland

Women's participation in politics in Puntland, Somalia, is deeply intertwined with the region's complex historical narrative, shaped by a myriad of socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. To provide a comprehensive overview, it's essential to delve into the historical context of women's involvement in political processes, highlighting both progress and setbacks experienced over time.

Puntland, like many regions in Somalia, has a rich cultural heritage characterized by traditional norms and patriarchal structures that have historically marginalized women from active participation in political affairs. Traditionally, societal roles relegated women to domestic spheres, with limited opportunities for engagement in public life or decision-making processes. As such, women's political participation was minimal, and their voices often marginalized within broader political discourse.

However, despite these entrenched patriarchal norms, there have been instances throughout history where women have played significant roles in shaping political outcomes in Puntland. These include informal leadership positions within their communities, where women have exerted influence through kinship networks and social ties. Moreover, traditional systems of governance, such as the Xeer system,

Breaking Barriers: A Woman's Journey to Political Victory

In the bustling towns of Puntland, where the rhythm of life intertwines with the pulse of politics, one woman stood undeterred against the formidable barriers that threatened to silence her voice. In the recent 2023 local government elections, where women secured a mere 18% of the local council seats, her journey was a testament to resilience in the face of adversity.

This courageous woman, whose name echoed whispers of determination throughout her community, faced an uphill battle from the onset. In a landscape dominated by patriarchal traditions and entrenched gender biases, she found herself grappling with the daunting reality that her aspirations for political representation were met with scepticism and resistance. Despite her unwavering resolve, she encountered formidable obstacles at every turn.

Navigating the intricate web of political manoeuvring, she encountered the harsh reality that candidate nominations were not solely determined by merit, but rather influenced heavily by the whims of traditional leaders. Their reluctance to endorse a female candidate cast a shadow of doubt over her prospects, leaving her aspirations dangling precariously in the balance.

In her quest for candidacy, she initially found a glimmer of hope with a political party, only to have her aspirations dashed by the meddling influence of traditional leaders. Despite her second attempt with a different political party, her hopes were met with disappointment once again. Undeterred by the daunting odds stacked against her, she refused to succumb to defeat. Armed with courage and determination, she embarked on a journey of strategic ingenuity, seeking alternative pathways to realize her dreams. With unwavering determination, she approached a sympathetic political party, laying bare the injustices she faced at the hands of traditional leaders who sought to stifle her aspirations.

In a bold and clandestine move, the political party rallied behind her cause, defying the expectations of traditional leaders, and embracing her candidacy with fervent determination. In a stroke of poetic justice, she found herself propelled by the unwavering support of her community, defying the odds and emerging victorious in the face of adversity.

Today, she stands as a beacon of hope and inspiration, a proud member of her local council, serving her community with grace and resilience. Her journey serves as a powerful reminder that even in the darkest of times, the flame of determination can illuminate the path to change and empower those who dare to dream.

occasionally provided avenues for women to participate in dispute resolution and decision-making at the local level.

At its establishment in 1998, Puntland State of Somalia witnessed a historic moment with the election of five women to parliament out of 66 seats. This milestone marked a significant step towards gender equality and women's political representation in the region. However, despite this initial progress, subsequent years have seen slow advancements in women's participation in politics.

According to data from a PDRC report, the statistical data from 2016 and 2019 concerning women's representation in Puntland's political landscape paints a revealing picture of the persistent gender disparities in official positions. In 2016, women occupied 12% of official positions in Puntland. While women held 14% of positions in the higher judiciary committee and district councils, their representation in parliament was significantly lower, with only 3% of parliamentary representatives being women.

By 2019, the gender gap in political representation had widened further. Out of 66 members in the Puntland parliament, only one was a female representative, highlighting a stark under-representation of women in legislative decision-making. Similarly, women held just 4 out of 50 cabinet positions, indicating limited access to high-level leadership roles within the executive branch.

Furthermore, the disparity extended to departmental director positions, where only 21 out of 217 positions were held by women. Notably, no seats were occupied by women in the director general or governor positions, underscoring the pervasive gender imbalance at the highest echelons of governance in Puntland.

In the current era, the journey towards women's political empowerment in Puntland has been characterized by both progress and setbacks. Since the establishment of Puntland State of Somalia in 1998, efforts to promote gender equality and women's participation in politics have been gradually gaining momentum. Various legislative and policy measures have been introduced to enhance women's representation in political institutions, such as the adoption of gender quotas and the implementation of affirmative action policies.

Despite these initiatives, numerous challenges persist, hindering women's full and equal participation in political processes. Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes and cultural norms continue to pose significant barriers to women's political empowerment, limiting their access to education, resources, and decision-making spaces. Additionally, the protracted conflict and instability in Somalia have exacerbated gender disparities, exacerbating the socio-economic challenges faced by women and undermining their ability to engage meaningfully in politics.

Nevertheless, there have been notable strides towards women's political empowerment in Puntland in recent years. Increased advocacy, awareness-raising campaigns, and the emergence of women-led civil society organizations have contributed to raising awareness about gender equality issues and mobilizing support for women's rights.

7.4.2 Current Landscape of Women

The current status of women's participation in political processes in Puntland presents a nuanced picture, characterized by both progress and persistent challenges. Despite efforts to promote gender equality in politics, women remain significantly under-represented in elected offices in Puntland. In the most recent parliamentary (2024) clan-based selection process, women secured only one seat of 66 seats.

While women's electoral participation rates have shown improvement in recent years specially the recent Puntland local government elections, disparities persist compared to their male counterparts. Factors such as cultural norms, socio-economic constraints, and lack of access to information and resources continue to impede women's ability to participate fully in electoral processes. Women in Puntland encounter various barriers when seeking to access political opportunities.

These barriers include entrenched patriarchal attitudes and cultural norms that prioritize male leadership. The traditional clan system in Somalia continues to pose challenges for women seeking involvement in politics. Historically, political candidates or representative were chosen by male-dominated traditional elders, who typically favoured men over women. Women often faced exclusion from political participation due to factors such as marriage to individuals from different clans or plainly for the reason that the elders preferred male representation.

The power-sharing mechanism in Somalia, often referred to as the "4.5 formula," has further hindered endeavours to enhance women's engagement in politics. According to this system, the four main clans are allocated a set number of seats, while smaller clans receive half of that allocation. However, this formula overlooks women's representation by assuming their inclusion within their respective clans without directly considering their role or specific representation in decision-making processes.

7.4.3 The First Three Council Elections

The representation of women in politics and public leadership roles in Puntland has long been a matter of concern, with a consistent trend of under-representation since the establishment of the regional administration. The most recent data from the executive organ reveals a stark reality, where women hold only 1 ministerial position and 3 deputy positions. This imbalance underscores the need for concerted efforts to address gender disparities in political representation.

However, amidst this backdrop of under-representation, recent developments in the 2021 Puntland three district council elections offer a glimmer of hope. Women accounted for a significant portion, comprising 50.8% of those who registered to vote in the three pilot districts. Additionally, the number of women candidates competing for local council seats witnessed an increase, with 147 women candidates out of a total of 499 competitors, representing 29% of the field.

While these statistics indicate progress, it is crucial to delve deeper into the outcomes of the elections to assess the impact on women's representation. Analysis reveals that women achieved notable gains, securing 23 out of 87 contested seats, representing 26% of the total. This represents a significant milestone in the quest for gender parity in political leadership.

The Gender and Social Inclusion Guidelines developed by TPEC (The Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission) set a standard 3 to 1 model aimed at maximizing women's chances of election to municipality seats. This model includes a gender quota provision, mandating a minimum of 30% representation for women in political participation. While this quota system represents a commendable effort to promote gender equality, its implementation has varied across districts.

In the 2021 elections across three pilot districts, gender participation in elected positions was notably commendable, with women securing approximately 26% of the available seats. This initial success marked a significant step towards gender inclusivity in Puntland's electoral processes. However, the landscape shifted when elections were held for the remaining districts. Out of the 774 seats contested across the 30 districts, women secured only 129 seats, constituting approximately 17% of the total seats.

Among all the 33 districts where elections were conducted in 2021 and 2023, comprising a total of 861 local council seats, women secured approximately 18% of the seats, totalling 152 local council seats. Despite some progress compared to previous clan-based selections, this figure underscores the persistent challenge of achieving gender parity and equitable representation in Puntland's political landscape.

In the previous council, where members of the councils were identified through the clan nomination system, women held 17% of the seats. With the introduction of the new democratic system, women received 18% of the contested seats. Despite this shift, the overall progress for women remained marginal, with only a 1% increase in their representation. This suggests that while the transition to a democratic process may have led to a slight improvement in gender representation, significant challenges persist in achieving meaningful gender parity in Puntland's political arena and lack of considerable progress raises questions about the sustainability of efforts to promote gender diversity and equitable participation in Puntland's political arena beyond the pilot phase.

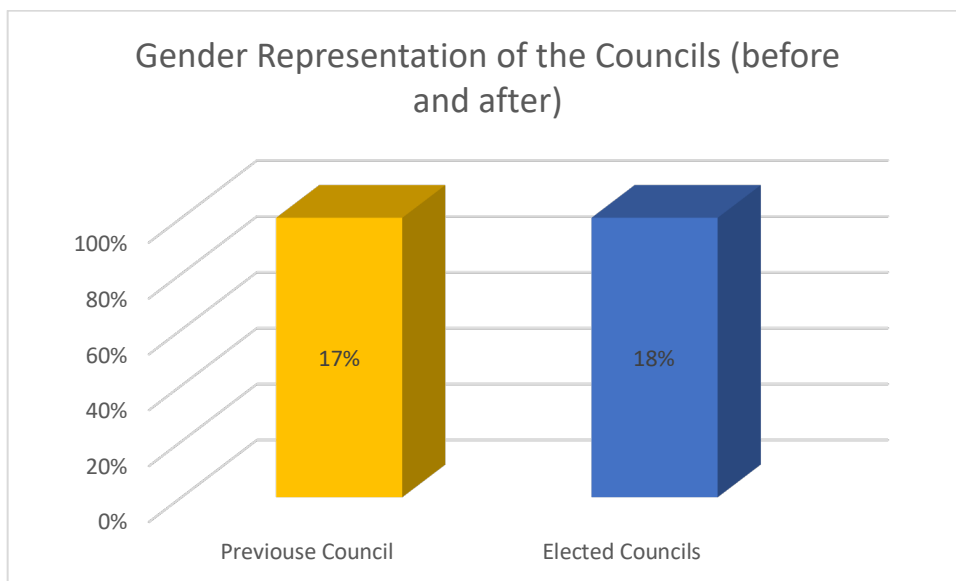


Figure 3: Gender Representation of the Councils (before and after)

The variance in women's participation and representation between the 2021 and 2023 elections in Puntland warrants thorough investigation to understand the factors contributing to this disparity.

7.4.4 Difference Between the Two Elections (2021 and 2023)

In the initial three pilot districts during the 2021 elections, the voting process entailed aggregating votes from the entire district. Successful candidates were determined based on the number of votes each political association received and the ranking of their candidates. Each political association submitted a list of candidates for each district, ranked according to their preference. For instance, if a political association received seven seats after votes were tallied, the first seven candidates on their list would secure victory. This method ensured that candidates were elected based on their association's overall performance in the district, with the top-ranked candidates securing the available seats according to the association's predetermined list.

In the May 2023 elections however, which comprised of 30 districts, a different approach was adopted. These districts were divided into multiple local wards, known locally as "Seejo," from which candidates would receive votes. The allocation of votes to candidates varied, with some candidates receiving votes from multiple local wards, depending on the total votes available in each ward. The decision regarding candidate placement and rank was determined by the respective political parties and by the pressure from the candidates along with their traditional leaders.

During these elections, each political association submitted a list of candidates for each local ward, or in some cases, for multiple wards. Unlike the previous pilot districts, where votes were aggregated at the district level, in these elections, votes were counted separately for each local ward and where there is single candidate for several wards, votes were counted and added up. Candidates were then determined based on their ranking on the submitted list and the number of votes received by their political association in that specific local ward(s). This decentralized approach

allowed for more granular representation and reflected the diverse preferences of voters across different localities within the districts.

However, the electoral system implemented in the May 2023 elections posed significant challenges for women and minorities, resulting in fewer seats being secured compared to the 2021 elections. Several factors contributed to this decline in representation. Firstly, the involvement of traditional and community leaders in the nomination process meant that women candidates often faced hesitancy or reluctance to be nominated as the preferred choice. In many cases, where women secured their candidacy, they found themselves relegated to the bottom of the candidate lists, diminishing their chances of being elected.

Secondly, despite comprising half of the voting population, women faced significant resistance from communities when they were positioned as the first choice on candidate lists. This resistance stemmed from deeply entrenched societal norms and biases that favoured male candidates over their female counterparts. As a result, women encountered formidable obstacles in garnering support from voters. Consequently, this reluctance to endorse and vote for female candidates directly translated into fewer votes received by women, ultimately impeding their ability to secure seats in the local councils.

The reluctance to support female candidates highlights the persistent gender disparities and challenges that women face in the political arena. Despite advancements in women's rights and increased awareness of gender equality issues, deeply ingrained cultural norms continue to hinder women's political participation and representation. Efforts to challenge stereotypes, promote women's leadership, and foster an environment conducive to gender equality are essential to overcoming these barriers and ensuring that women have equal opportunities to participate in and contribute to the political life of their communities.

7.4.5 Challenges and Barriers Faced by Female Candidates

The electoral dynamics observed in the May 2023 elections resembled a strategic game akin to chess, with political associations employing tactical manoeuvres to maximize their electoral advantage. For instance, if political association A prioritized a female candidate as their top choice in a particular local ward candidate list, political association B would strategically counter by ranking a male candidate as their primary choice in that same ward. This strategic move was driven by the understanding that voters were more likely to support male candidates positioned at the forefront of the candidate lists.

By strategically positioning male candidates as their top choice, the political association B aimed to capitalize on societal biases and preferences that favoured male candidates over their female counterparts. Despite efforts by political association A to prioritize female representation, the strategic move by political association B effectively diverted voter support towards male candidates, thereby increasing their electoral prospects and securing victory in the local ward.

This strategic interplay underscored the complexities of gender dynamics within the electoral process, where entrenched societal norms and biases influenced voter behaviour and electoral outcomes. The strategic choreography observed in the candidate ranking process highlighted the systemic barriers faced by female candidates, perpetuating gender disparities and hindering efforts to achieve gender equality in political representation.

Ultimately, the electoral landscape reflected a gendered power dynamic, where male candidates enjoyed a strategic advantage over their female counterparts due to prevailing societal perceptions and electoral strategies. Addressing these systemic inequalities and biases is essential to fostering gender-inclusive electoral processes and promoting equitable representation for women in political decision-making.

Overall, the May 2023 elections highlighted systemic barriers and challenges faced by women and minorities in the electoral process, underscoring the need for reforms to address gender disparities and ensure equitable representation in future elections. Efforts to promote gender-sensitive electoral practices and empower marginalized groups are essential to fostering inclusive governance and strengthening democratic processes in Puntland.

7.5 Minorities

The participation of minorities in electoral processes is a critical indicator of the inclusivity and fairness of democratic governance. However, insights gleaned from research on Puntland's recent elections reveal a concerning trend of underrepresentation and marginalization of minority communities within elected councils. When referring to minorities in this context, the research is referring to communities that are numerically smaller within a given district, irrespective of their overall population size. A thorough examination of the composition of elected councils in key cities such as Bossaso, Badhan, Qardho, and Galkacyo underscores this disparity, of the four districts taken as an example, minorities have won only two seats in Qardho, and no representation for minorities observed in other urban centres.

Research participants shed light on the underlying factors contributing to the lack of minority representation in Puntland's electoral outcomes. One prominent issue highlighted is the predominant focus of political parties on nominating candidates from clans perceived to wield significant voting influence, at the expense of minority communities. This strategic approach prioritizes electoral success over the principles of inclusivity and equitable representation, thereby perpetuating the marginalization of minority voices within the political arena. Moreover, the utilization of a closed-list proportional representation system in Puntland's elections further exacerbates this disparity, as candidates from minority backgrounds often find themselves relegated to lower positions on electoral lists, diminishing their prospects of securing seats within elected councils.

While it is acknowledged that some candidates from minority communities did participate in the electoral process, their placement on party lists significantly impacted their electoral viability. Research findings indicate that these candidates were often positioned further down the electoral lists, diminishing their visibility, and diminishing their chances of electoral success. This systemic marginalization underscores the need for a more robust and inclusive approach to candidate nomination and electoral list formation, one that prioritizes the equitable representation of all communities within Puntland.

The underrepresentation of minorities in Puntland's electoral processes not only undermines the principles of democratic governance but also perpetuates systemic inequalities and marginalization within the political sphere. By neglecting the voices and concerns of minority communities, the inclusivity of Puntland's democratic institutions is called into question, hindering the region's progress towards genuine democratic governance. Addressing this disparity requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses legal reforms, institutional accountability, and proactive measures to empower minority communities to actively participate in the electoral process.

One potential avenue for rectifying this imbalance is the implementation of legislative measures aimed at promoting minority representation within elected councils. This could include the introduction of quotas or reserved seats specifically earmarked for

minority communities, ensuring their substantive inclusion in decision-making processes. Additionally, political parties must be incentivized to prioritize diversity and inclusivity in their candidate nomination processes, with measures in place to encourage the elevation of minority candidates to prominent positions on electoral lists. Furthermore, civic education initiatives should be expanded to raise awareness about the importance of minority representation and to empower minority communities to engage effectively in the electoral process.

It is imperative for policymakers and stakeholders in Puntland to recognize the urgency of addressing the underrepresentation of minorities in electoral processes and to take proactive steps towards remedying this disparity. Failure to do so not only undermines the legitimacy of democratic governance but also perpetuates systemic inequalities and marginalization, posing significant challenges to the region's socio-political stability and development. By fostering a more inclusive and representative political landscape, Puntland can uphold the principles of democracy and advance towards a future characterized by equitable governance and social cohesion.

7.5 Participation of IDP Communities in the Election

In Puntland, there exists a sizable population of Internally Displaced People (IDPs), with data from the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) cluster indicating the presence of 187,947 IDPs residing across 82 IDP settlements. This significant demographic underscores the complex humanitarian situation in the region and the challenges associated with providing adequate support and services to displaced communities. Moreover, the presence of IDPs has implications for electoral processes, as efforts to ensure their inclusion in political participation become crucial for upholding democratic principles and fostering social cohesion.

For the 2021 and 2023 elections in Puntland, IDPs from other federal member states were afforded the opportunity to register as voters, provided they met certain residency requirements, such as residing in Puntland or having lived in the state for a minimum of 10 years and possessing the requisite documentation. However, verifying the duration of residency posed challenges due to the lack of proper documentation, complicating the registration process. Despite these challenges, research participants have indicated a significant number of IDPs registered as voters and were deemed eligible to participate in the electoral process, underscoring the importance of ensuring access to political rights and representation for vulnerable populations.

Registered voters from internally displaced persons (IDPs) have actively participated in elections by casting their votes for candidates from the host community. However, it is notable that there were limited candidates representing the IDP communities themselves. The absence of enough candidates from IDP communities raises concerns about the inclusivity of the election process. A notable finding from the research is that IDPs not only voted for candidates from the host community but also for clans that have ownership or claim ownership or are in proximity to the settlements where they reside. The lack of IDP candidates in the 2023 elections, coupled with their voting behaviour favouring neighbouring host communities,

prompts questions. This phenomenon indicates a nuanced interplay of alliances and dynamics within the electoral landscape, underscoring the need for deeper investigation to comprehend the underlying motivations and ramifications.

As highlighted by research participants and corroborated by reports such as the one by the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) and Puntland Development and Research Centre (PDRC) titled 'Gender Assessment of the Electoral Process in Puntland', there were instances of vote buying from IDPs. Political associations reportedly offered IDPs food or money in exchange for their votes, indicating a potential exploitation of vulnerable communities for political gain. Despite these challenges, IDP communities generally expressed positivity towards the Puntland election process and felt a sense of equality with the host community due to their participation in voting.

When queried about the absence of candidates from IDP communities, respondents cited various reasons including a lack of individuals willing to stand as candidates, limited understanding of politics and the electoral process among IDP communities, and socioeconomic disparities. This underscores the need for enhanced civic education and outreach efforts to empower IDP communities to engage more actively in the political arena and advocate for their interests effectively.

To enhance inclusivity and promote the participation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in electoral processes in Puntland, several key recommendations emerge. Firstly, targeted awareness campaigns and outreach initiatives should be undertaken to educate IDPs about their rights and the importance of voting. These efforts, conducted in collaboration with community leaders and civil society organizations, can help overcome barriers related to awareness and ensure that IDPs are informed and engaged in the electoral process. Secondly, measures should be implemented to address practical challenges faced by IDPs, including accessibility to registration centres and documentation support. Establishing mobile registration units and facilitating the acquisition of necessary identification documents can streamline the registration process for IDPs and enable their meaningful participation in elections.

Furthermore, political parties should be encouraged to nominate candidates from IDP communities, promoting diversity and inclusivity in candidate selection. Training and capacity-building programs can empower IDPs with the knowledge and skills needed to engage effectively in the electoral process, while partnerships between government agencies, civil society, and IDP communities can foster collaboration and address electoral challenges collectively. By implementing these recommendations and ensuring the safety, accessibility, and representation of IDPs in electoral processes, Puntland can move towards a more inclusive democracy that reflects the voices and aspirations of all its citizens.

7.6 Political Parties

The transition to democratic governance in Puntland represented a significant turning point in the region's political trajectory and confirmed a departure from previous governance models towards a more participatory and inclusive system. Central to

this transition is the establishment of mechanisms that facilitate broader political representation and engagement. Among these mechanisms, the registration of local political associations stands out as a crucial step in laying the groundwork for a pluralistic and inclusive political landscape. By allowing diverse voices and interests to coalesce into organized entities, the registration process sets the stage for meaningful political participation and representation, reflecting the aspirations of a society in transition towards democratic ideals.

Following the announcement of the democratization process, seventeen local political associations swiftly registered to participate in the planned elections. Guided by clear directives from TPEC, each association was required to submit a comprehensive constitution, founder details, and a registration fee of US\$ 3,500. Notably, stringent requirements mandated support from a minimum of 300 individuals in each of Puntland's six regions, along with a commitment to maintain civilian identity and distance from paramilitary or militia affiliations.

Amid the registration frenzy, three associations merged to form a coalition, prompting similar actions by two others. Consequently, the initial pool of 17 associations narrowed down to 12, subject to rigorous scrutiny and verification processes. However, during the final evaluation phase, two associations failed to meet the requisite criteria, resulting in their disqualification and a final tally of 10 eligible participants for the elections were confirmed.

Initially constrained by a constitutional provision limiting political parties to three, amendments allowed for the recognition of all participating organizations as political entities. This adjustment reflected a dynamic response to the evolving political landscape and underscored the commitment to fostering pluralism and inclusivity. Ultimately, TPEC announced eight parties as official political entities in Puntland for the next five years, following meticulous adherence to procedural requirements and confirmation of election results.

The amendment allowing all participating parties that secured seats in local councils to become regional political parties marked a significant departure from the initial plan of limiting the number to three. This shift in policy was met with considerable criticism from opposition groups and political elites within Puntland.

Research participants expressed reservations about the amendment, highlighting the perceived flaws in the decision-making process and its potential impact on governance dynamics. While the three-party model initially garnered support, the realization that the leaders of all three front-running parties belonged to the same sub-clans raised concerns about the representativeness of the political landscape. This development sparked fears that the concentration of power within a few sub-clans could marginalize other clans and undermine the principles of inclusivity and diversity in political representation.

Moreover, the backlash against the amendment underscored broader questions about the effectiveness of Puntland's governance system in anticipating and addressing such challenges. Critics argued that the reactive nature of the amendment reflected a lack of foresight and strategic planning on the part of

decision-makers. They contended that proactive measures could have been taken to mitigate the potential risks associated with concentrating political power within a few sub-clans.

The controversy surrounding the amendment highlights the complexities and sensitivities inherent in the political dynamics of Puntland. It underscores the importance of inclusive governance structures and decision-making processes that reflect the diversity of the region's population. Moving forward, there is a need for policymakers to engage in transparent and consultative processes that take into account the concerns and perspectives of all stakeholders, ensuring that governance reforms promote inclusivity, equity, and social cohesion within Puntland.

7.6.1 The Three Political Parties

The pilot election held in 2021 served as a crucial testing ground for Puntland's newly developed electoral system, providing valuable insights ahead of more comprehensive elections. This pilot phase, which included three districts selected for their varying sociopolitical landscapes, offered a snapshot of the electoral dynamics, and set the stage for evaluating the effectiveness and readiness of the electoral infrastructure. The election saw the emergence of three political associations as prominent contenders; KAAH, associated with the incumbent president, alongside MIDEYE and SINCAD, each carving out significant presences in the political arena.

By the time of the 2023 elections, these three associations had solidified their positions as the dominant forces within Puntland's political landscape. The results underscored their influence and the electorate's support, with KAAH securing 286 seats, MIDEYE achieving 211 seats, and SINCAD garnering 133 seats. This outcome not only reflected the associations' organizational strength and widespread appeal but also hinted at the strategic alliances and grassroots mobilization efforts that underpinned their electoral successes.

Had the constitution not been amended, the impressive performance of KAAH, MIDEYE, and SINCAD in both the pilot and subsequent 2023 elections would have positioned them as the sole political parties eligible to contest in future Puntland elections. This exclusive status would have been a direct consequence of the original constitutional stipulation, which aimed to limit the number of political parties to foster stability and manageable political competition within the nascent democratic system.

The constitutional amendment that allowed for a broader inclusion of political associations into the electoral contest reflects a commitment to a more pluralistic political environment. This adjustment acknowledges the evolving nature of Puntland's political landscape and the importance of providing a platform for diverse voices and perspectives. It represents a balancing act between maintaining political stability and encouraging democratic participation and competition.

This transition and the electoral outcomes offer a compelling narrative of Puntland's journey towards democratic governance, underscoring the challenges and triumphs

of establishing a pluralistic political system in a context characterized by complex clan dynamics and the need for political inclusivity.

The swift rise of three political associations to the forefront of Puntland's political scene following the region's transition towards democratic governance invites a thorough analysis to discern the factors underpinning their dominance. Insights from research participants point to a confluence of strategic advantages that set these associations apart from their competitors, suggesting a multifaceted foundation for their success.

Firstly, the composition of these leading political associations is notable for including a cadre of Puntland's political elite. The involvement of such influential figures not only lends political clout and legitimacy but also ensures a depth of experience and an understanding of the local political fabric that can be leveraged to navigate the complex political landscape effectively. The presence of political veterans within these associations likely facilitated more sophisticated campaign strategies, broader outreach, and a nuanced approach to addressing the concerns and aspirations of the electorate.

Furthermore, the resource disparity between these leading associations and their competitors emerged as a significant factor. The possession of substantial financial and material resources afforded these groups a considerable advantage in mounting extensive campaigns, mobilizing support, and conducting outreach activities. The source of these resources remains unclear, raising questions about the transparency and accountability mechanisms in place to monitor political financing within Puntland's emerging democratic system. This disparity in resources underscores the need for equitable access to funding and support to ensure a level playing field for all political contenders.

Lastly, the strategic relationships and connections maintained by the leadership of these associations played a pivotal role in their ascendancy. These connections extended across a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including local and regional leaders, business communities, and possibly international partners. Such networks could provide critical support in terms of endorsements, financial backing, and logistical assistance, thereby enhancing the operational capacity and reach of these associations.

The convergence of political acumen, resource superiority, and strategic alliances underlines the multifaceted approach adopted by these associations to secure their position within Puntland's political hierarchy. This scenario illustrates the complex interplay of factors influencing political success in emerging democratic systems and highlights the importance of transparency, fairness, and equitable opportunities for all political actors to foster a truly inclusive and representative political landscape.

The democratic integrity of political parties within Puntland faces critical scrutiny, particularly regarding the internal governance and decision-making processes of these entities. Despite the active involvement of Puntland's political elites, research participants have raised significant concerns over the autocratic tendencies observed within these parties. This issue was a recurring theme in focus group discussions

(FGDs), where participants deliberated on the paradox of entrusting the democratic future of Puntland to parties that themselves practice limited internal democracy.

A core issue highlighted was the characterization of these political parties as being dominated by singular leadership figures, effectively rendering them 'one-man show.' Within such a framework, decisions are often dictated from the top down, bypassing the democratic involvement of party members in shaping policies and strategic directions. This top-heavy approach to leadership not only stiffens internal party democracy but also undermines the principles of collective decision-making and inclusive participation, which are essential to the democratic ethos.

This lack of internal democracy and participation has led to significant dissatisfaction among party members, culminating in conflicts and, in some cases, the departure of members from these parties. The grievances cited include a lack of genuine consultation, insufficient participation in decision-making processes, and a perceived inequality among members. Such internal party dynamics raise poignant questions about the ability of these parties to champion and uphold democratic values within the broader political system of Puntland.

The concerns expressed by FGD participants underscore a critical dilemma. How can a party that does not embody democratic principles internally be trusted to foster and safeguard democracy at the state level? This question is of paramount importance, as the democratic legitimacy of a political party is fundamentally linked to its internal governance practices. The ability of a party to contribute positively to the democratization process and democratic governance in Puntland hinges on its commitment to practicing democracy within its own ranks.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to instill democratic practices and principles at all levels of political party operations. This includes fostering a culture of open dialogue, ensuring equitable participation in decision-making processes, and committing to transparent and inclusive governance mechanisms. By prioritizing internal democracy, political parties in Puntland can strengthen their legitimacy and effectiveness as key actors in the region's democratic journey, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive, participatory, and democratic political landscape.

7.6.2 Performance of Political Parties in the Election

The disparity in seat distribution between the three leading political parties—SINCAD, MIDEEYE, and KAAH—and the remaining five parties—MUSTAQBAL, IFIYE, RUNCAD, SHAQAALAHA, and HORSEED—highlights a significant imbalance in political representation within Puntland. With a combined total of 710 seats, the three leading parties hold a dominant position in the political landscape, collectively wielding substantial influence, and power. In contrast, the other five parties, with a total of 151 seats, face a stark disparity in representation, significantly trailing behind their counterparts.

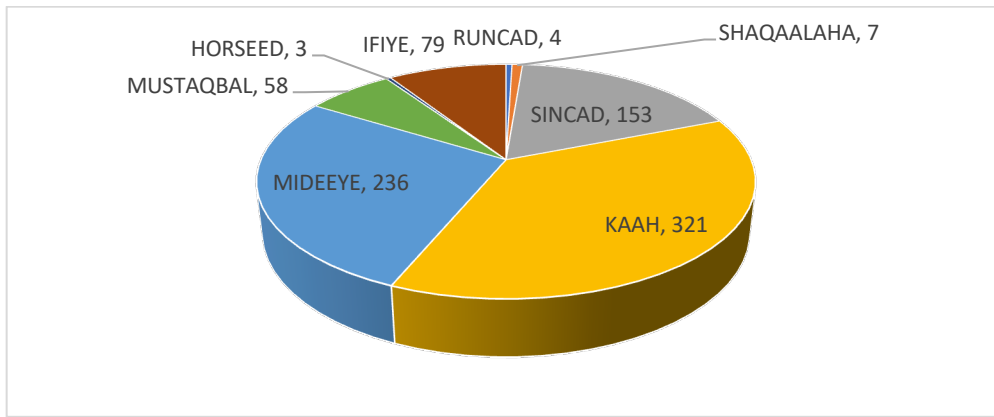


Figure 4: Election Results (Political Parties)

Their combined aggregate seats, which exceed four times the total seats held by the other five parties, signify a consolidation of power and influence among these leading political entities. This concentration of seats suggests a higher level of voter support, organizational capacity, and political mobilization strategies employed by the dominant parties, enabling them to secure a substantial share of representation.

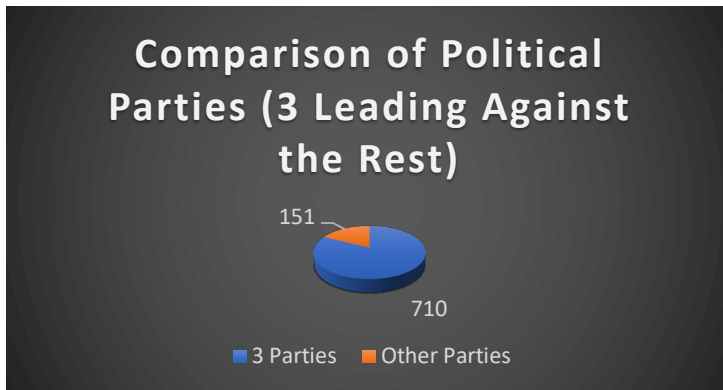


Figure 5: Comparison of Political Parties (3 Leading Against the Rest)

On the contrary, the comparatively lower seat count of the other five parties highlights their marginalized position within the political hierarchy of Puntland. Despite their efforts, MUSTAQBAL, IFIYE, RUNCAD, SHAQAALAHA, and HORSEED face significant challenges in garnering electoral support and competing effectively against the dominant parties.

The eligibility of political parties with single-digit seat counts, such as HORSEED, RUNCAD, and SHAQAALAHA, to attain state-level status despite their limited representation raises questions about the criteria and mechanisms for party recognition and classification within Puntland's political framework. One plausible explanation could be the absence of stringent requirements or thresholds for state-level party designation, allowing smaller parties to attain this status based on minimal electoral performance.

It is so that Puntland's electoral laws or regulations do not stipulate specific seat thresholds or percentage requirements for political parties to achieve state-level recognition. In the absence of such criteria, parties with even a minimal number of seats may qualify for state-level status, albeit with limited influence or representation. This leniency in party classification criteria could reflect a commitment to political pluralism and inclusivity, allowing smaller parties to participate in the political process and contribute to governance, albeit in a limited capacity.

Alternatively, the decision to grant state-level status to parties with single-digit seat counts may stem from political considerations or negotiations within Puntland's political landscape. Political parties may leverage their influence or alliances to secure state-level recognition, irrespective of their electoral performance. This could be driven by broader political objectives, such as coalition-building, power-sharing agreements, or efforts to maintain stability and accommodate diverse political interests within the region.

Overall, the eligibility of political parties with minimal seat counts for state-level recognition underscores the complex interplay of electoral laws, political dynamics, and governance structures within Puntland. While this approach may promote inclusivity and accommodate diverse political voices, it also raises questions about the effectiveness and representativeness of the party classification system and its implications for democratic governance in the region.

7.6.3 Qardho Issue

The pilot elections in Puntland in 2021 marked a significant milestone in the political landscape of the region, particularly spotlighting the emergence of three political parties that quickly rose to prominence which are KAAH, MIDEEYE and SINCAD. The foundational leaders or founders of these parties share a common origin, all hailing from Qardho district as indicated by research participants, which notably stands as the largest among the three pilot districts involved in the electoral process. This geographical and demographic advantage is underscored by the voter registration numbers, with Qardho boasting 25,405 registered voters, significantly overshadowing the totals of Ely and Ufayn, which registered 11,470 and 9,964 voters respectively. The sheer volume of potential support in Qardho eclipses the combined voter base of the other two pilot districts, presenting a fertile ground for these parties to establish their initial stronghold.

This demographic edge in Qardho not only catapulted these three parties into the limelight but also set a robust foundation for their subsequent ascendancy in Puntland's broader political arena. As indicated by the people who participated in the research, their ability to secure substantial votes early in the pilot phase distinguished them from their competitors, positioning them as frontrunners in a highly competitive field. This phenomenon, often referred to locally as the "Qardho issue," highlights the strategic importance of early success in electoral politics, where momentum from initial victories can significantly influence wider voter perceptions and preferences.

The relationship between the Qardho district's demographic dominance and the success of these parties in the pilot elections—and their sustained prominence in Puntland's political landscape thereafter—raises intriguing questions about the dynamics of electoral influence and voter behaviour. Research participants have consistently pointed to the "Qardho effect," suggesting that the early successes achieved by these parties in Qardho had a ripple effect, influencing voter behaviour across Puntland. This suggests a psychological and strategic dimension to electoral

success, where victories in key districts can enhance a party's visibility and perceived viability, thereby attracting more supporters in subsequent contests.

The case of Qardho and its disproportionate influence on the trajectory of Puntland's political parties underscores the complex interplay of regional dynamics, party strategies, and voter behaviour in shaping political outcomes. It serves as a compelling case study for understanding the nuances of electoral politics in regional contexts, where geographic, demographic, and sociopolitical factors converge to influence the direction of political developments. As such, the "Qardho issue" not only reflects the strategic successes of certain political parties but also highlights the broader themes of influence, identity, and power within the intricate tapestry of Puntland's political landscape.

The narrative surrounding the "Qardho issue" and its purported pivotal role in the ascendance of three major political parties during the 2021 pilot elections in Puntland is compelling, yet it necessitates a nuanced examination when confronted with the electoral dynamics across other pilot districts. Notably, these parties' performance in the Eyl and Ufayn districts introduces a layer of complexity that challenges the singular attribution of their success to the demographic leverage and early victories in Qardho.

In Eyl district, the distribution of votes among the parties showcases a competitive landscape that diverges from the narrative propelled by Qardho's initial influence. SINCAD party, for instance, secured 854 votes translating into 4 seats, while KAAH significantly outperformed with 2,659 votes, securing 13 seats in the local councils. MIDEEYE also demonstrated substantial support, garnering 1,108 votes which afforded them 6 seats. Similarly, in Ufayn district, the electoral performance further complicates the Qardho-centric perspective. SINCAD improved its standing with 1,248 votes earning 7 seats, KAAH led with 1,741 votes and 10 seats, and MIDEEYE closely followed with 1,300 votes resulting in 8 seats.

When comparing the electoral performance of the three leading parties with their competitors in the Eyl and Ufayn districts, the distinction becomes clear. In Eyl district, the party that came closest to these three major parties secured only 2 seats. Similarly, in Ufayn district, the closest competitor to these leading parties managed to secure just 1 seat. This contrast highlights the significant lead and popularity the three parties enjoyed over their rivals in these districts.

These results across Eyl and Ufayn districts suggest that while Qardho's demographic might and early victories provided a strategic springboard for the three parties, their abilities to resonate with voters and secure seats in other districts indicate a broader appeal beyond a single district's influence. It implies that the parties' policies, campaign strategies, and perhaps broader socio-political dynamics played significant roles in their widespread electoral success.

The variance in electoral outcomes across different districts invites a more holistic analysis of the factors contributing to the prominence of these political entities in Puntland's political sphere. It underscores the importance of recognizing the multifaceted nature of electoral politics, where local dynamics, party platforms,

leadership qualities, and campaign strategies collectively influence voter preferences and decisions.

Therefore, while the "Qardho issue" highlights a fascinating aspect of electoral strategy and regional influence, the broader electoral success of these parties across Eyl and Ufayn points to a complex interplay of factors. This complexity challenges simplistic explanations and underscores the intricate nature of political competition and voter behaviour in Puntland, reflecting a political landscape shaped by a diverse array of influences beyond the confines of a single influential district.

The researcher delved into the selection process of the three pilot districts, probing whether the three prominent parties had any sway in their choice. To this end, the researcher engaged with the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC), including former commissioners responsible for the 2021 elections, as well as other stakeholders active during that time. Each of these participants unequivocally confirmed that the selection was uninfluenced by external parties. They asserted that the decision to choose these districts was based on criteria established in advance, and the selection was made solely by TPEC members. This clarifies that the process was impartial, aimed at ensuring a fair and transparent electoral framework.

7.7 Changing Political Leaders – More Community Engagement

The transition to a democratic system in Puntland has brought about notable changes in the behaviour and engagement of political leaders with the community. In contrast to previous practices, where politicians primarily focused on establishing connections with traditional leaders, the advent of elections has compelled them to adopt a more community-centric approach. Political campaigns have become a platform for politicians to actively engage with the community, demonstrating a newfound sympathy towards their needs and concerns.

President Knocks the Doors and Asks for Votes

The advent of a new democratic system and elections in Puntland has ushered in a transformative era, marked by a notable departure from traditional political practices. A groundbreaking shift is exemplified by the unprecedented sight of the President actively engaging with ordinary citizens during the campaign trail. Unlike past practices, where presidential visits were reserved for substantial and high-level discussions with community leaders, business figures, governors, and mayors, the new democratic system has compelled the President to traverse beyond the confines of the presidential palace. This change was symbolized by the President knocking on the doors of random households, initiating conversations with residents, and expressing a genuine interest in understanding the challenges faced by ordinary people.

This newfound approach to presidential campaigning signifies a significant recalibration of power dynamics in Puntland. The President's direct interaction with citizens at their doorsteps reflects a tangible acknowledgment of the importance of grassroots voices in the democratic process. It not only breaks away from the traditional top-down communication style but also underscores the principle that leadership should be attuned to the concerns of the people. The President's willingness to engage in candid discussions with citizens, inquire about the conditions in their neighbourhoods, and seek their support for his political party exemplifies a democratic ethos where the power of the people takes centre stage.

The impact of this change extends beyond the symbolic gesture of door-to-door campaigning. It is indicative of a broader shift in the political landscape, where citizens are recognized as active participants in shaping the destiny of Puntland. The essence of democracy lies in the power vested in the people to choose their leadership, and the new democratic process in Puntland has successfully reinstated this principle. Candidates, political leaders including the President, have been compelled to become more attuned to the concerns and aspirations of the electorate, recognizing that their success hinges on aligning with the needs of the people.

This shift has revitalized the democratic spirit in Puntland, fostering a more dynamic and interactive political environment. The President's direct engagement with citizens not only allows for a firsthand understanding of grassroots issues but also creates a platform for citizens to express their expectations and aspirations directly to the highest office. Such direct interactions between leaders and citizens are essential for building trust, transparency, and accountability within the democratic framework.

Moreover, this change in campaign strategy is reflective of a broader commitment to inclusivity and responsiveness in governance. The President's willingness to go beyond the conventional circles of influence and directly connect with citizens speaks to a commitment to a government that is rooted in the needs and realities of the people. It signals a departure from the detached and elite-centric political practices of the past, embracing a more people-centric approach that aligns with the democratic ideals of representation and participation.

In conclusion, the changes brought about by the new democratic system and elections in Puntland are not confined to procedural modifications but extend to a fundamental reorientation of political culture. The act of a President knocking on doors and engaging directly with citizens epitomizes the democratization of power, placing the people at the forefront of political discourse. This shift signifies a departure from traditional power structures and underscores a commitment to a more inclusive, responsive, and accountable governance model. As Puntland continues to navigate its democratic journey, the direct interaction between leaders and citizens serves as a testament to the evolving democratic ethos that places the power to shape the nation firmly in the hands of its people.

One significant shift is evident in the increased visibility of politicians within the community. Previously, their presence was limited, with rare appearances at community gatherings or public events. However, with the need to garner votes from the community, politicians have become more accessible and proactive in reaching out to constituents. Organizing community meetings and gatherings has become a common strategy employed by politicians to directly engage with citizens, listen to their grievances, and present their campaign promises.

Moreover, the democratic reforms have prompted politicians to prioritize community concerns and voices in their policy agendas. By actively soliciting feedback and consulting with citizens, political leaders are attempting to convey a sense of responsiveness and accountability. This newfound emphasis on community engagement extends beyond formal campaign events, with some politicians going door-to-door to interact with ordinary citizens, inquire about their well-being, and solicit support for their political party.

Indeed, the sustainability of this heightened level of engagement and accessibility among political leaders remains to be seen. While the democratic process and electoral campaigns have incentivized politicians to actively engage with the community, there is uncertainty about whether this trend will endure beyond the election period. The true test lies in whether political leaders will uphold their commitments to community involvement and responsiveness once they secure their positions in office.

It is plausible that some politicians may revert to previous patterns of behaviour once the immediate pressure of the election campaign subsides. However, the experience of heightened community engagement during the election season could also serve as a valuable lesson for both politicians and the community alike. Citizens now have a newfound awareness of their role in holding leaders accountable and may demand continued engagement and responsiveness from their elected representatives.

Ultimately, the sustainability of community-oriented governance practices will depend on various factors, including the institutionalization of democratic norms, the strength of civil society, and the vigilance of the electorate. Time will indeed be the ultimate arbiter, as the post-election period unfolds and the extent of political leaders' commitment to sustained community engagement becomes apparent.

Overall, the democratization process in Puntland has led to a noticeable transformation in the relationship between political leaders and the community. The shift towards a more community-oriented approach underscores the evolving dynamics of governance and political participation, highlighting the increasing importance of citizen voices and concerns in shaping political agendas and decision-making processes.

7.8 Impact of Elections on Business Environment

The Puntland elections in 2021 and 2023, while not causing major upheavals in the region's business landscape, did introduce some notable challenges and

uncertainties. While there were no significant disruptions reported, the electoral process did contribute to delays in investments and projects. This delay stemmed from the uncertainties surrounding the elections, which led to concerns among investors about the potential cancellation or abandonment of ongoing initiatives. Consequently, this uncertainty resulted in a temporary slowdown in business activity as stakeholders awaited clarity on the electoral outcomes.

Moreover, the insecurity arising from election-related conflicts added another layer of complexity to the business environment in Puntland. This insecurity prompted some businesses to consider relocating to more favourable areas, such as Mogadishu, Kismayo, and Nairobi, as mentioned by research participants. The perception of heightened risk and instability associated with election-related tensions prompted these strategic decisions to safeguard business interests and continuity.

Business owners in Puntland voiced frustration over what they perceived as a prioritization of political matters over economic concerns by political leaders. The apparent shift in focus towards political affairs raised questions about the dedication of these leaders to the economic well-being of the region and the business community. This sentiment reflects a growing concern among stakeholders about the disconnect between political priorities and the needs of the economy.

Looking ahead, it is imperative to recognize the economic ramifications of political decisions and to prioritize policies and initiatives that foster both security and economic prosperity. Balancing the demands of political governance with the imperatives of economic development requires a concerted effort to ensure that policies and strategies are aligned with the long-term interests of the society. By incorporating economic considerations into political decision-making processes, leaders can better address the needs of businesses and promote sustainable growth and prosperity for all stakeholders.

Overall, while the impact on the business and economy of Puntland may not have been profound, the elections did introduce challenges that affected investor confidence and business operations. Addressing these challenges and ensuring a conducive business environment will be crucial for sustaining economic growth and stability in the region.

7.9 Media and the Elections

The role of media in elections within the context of Puntland is multifaceted and influential, shaping public opinion, political discourse, and electoral outcomes. Media platforms, including television, radio, newspapers, and social media, serve as crucial channels for disseminating information, shaping voter perceptions, and mobilizing support for political candidates and parties.

Several changes have occurred in the media landscape as a result of the elections and the new democratic governance system implemented in Puntland. Firstly, election reporting has emerged as a new frontier for media outlets in the region. This shift necessitated a learning curve as journalists and media organizations navigated

the methods and rules associated with reporting on electoral processes. From covering campaign rallies to analysing voter sentiments, media professionals had to adapt to the unique challenges and responsibilities of reporting on elections.

Secondly, the introduction of new guidelines and ethics has transformed the media landscape in Puntland. With the implementation of codes of conduct for local government elections, media practitioners were tasked with adhering to stringent ethical standards and reporting guidelines. These regulations aimed to ensure fairness, accuracy, and impartiality in election coverage, fostering transparency and credibility in the media's role as a watchdog of the electoral process.

In May 2021, right before elections commenced. The Media Association of Puntland (MAP) took a significant step forward by signing the Puntland Journalists Code of Conduct on Local Government Elections in collaboration with the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC). This milestone agreement aimed to establish ethical guidelines and standards for journalists operating in Puntland during electoral processes.

The Code of Conduct served as a comprehensive framework outlining the responsibilities and obligations of journalists in their coverage of local government elections. It emphasizes the principles of fairness, accuracy, impartiality, and integrity in reporting, aiming to uphold the highest standards of ethical journalism. By adhering to these guidelines, journalists were empowered to fulfil their crucial role as watchdogs of the electoral process, providing citizens with timely, reliable, and unbiased information.

One of the key provisions of the Code of Conduct is the call for unrestricted media access to election-related events and activities. By advocating for transparency and openness, the agreement encourages TPEC and other stakeholders to provide journalists with unfettered access to information, ensuring that the media can effectively fulfil its role as a conduit for public discourse and accountability. Through this collaborative effort between MAP and TPEC, the Code of Conduct represented a commitment to promoting ethical journalism and strengthening democratic governance in Puntland.

Furthermore, the proliferation of social media platforms has revolutionized the dissemination of election-related information and political discourse in Puntland. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and WhatsApp have provided citizens with unprecedented access to real-time updates, political commentary, and grassroots mobilization efforts. However, the unregulated nature of social media has also posed challenges, including the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and divisive rhetoric, which can influence voter perceptions and undermine the integrity of the electoral process.

According to feedback from research participants, including journalists, there were no significant restrictions faced by media personnel during the electoral period in Puntland. Journalists reported having access to all relevant information pertaining to the elections and their processes, enabling them to fulfil their reporting duties effectively. However, despite this unhindered access, the utilization of conventional

media platforms was relatively limited during the elections. Instead, there was a notable preference among individuals, including candidates, politicians, and political parties, for utilizing social media channels as primary avenues for communication and information dissemination. Many media houses in Puntland predominantly relied on social media platforms over traditional media outlets for election-related coverage.

Research participants emphasized that media organizations exercised heightened caution and diligence during the electoral period, recognizing the sensitivity of the context wherein any perceived bias or lack of integrity in reporting could have significant repercussions. As a result, media practitioners engaged in meticulous planning, thorough scrutiny, and fact-checking processes to ensure the accuracy and impartiality of their coverage. This extra level of scrutiny and diligence demanded additional efforts from media professionals, reflecting their commitment to upholding journalistic standards during this critical period.

Media played a vital role in facilitating voter education and disseminating essential information to the general public throughout the election cycle. Beyond merely reporting on election processes and outcomes, media outlets actively engaged in raising awareness among citizens, providing insights into electoral procedures, and amplifying the diverse voices and perspectives of the electorate. By serving as conduits for democratic discourse and public engagement, media organizations contributed significantly to fostering informed citizenship and promoting transparency in the electoral process.

Overall, the evolving role of media in Puntland's elections underscores the importance of responsible journalism, ethical reporting practices, and media literacy initiatives. As media continues to play a central role in shaping public opinion and political discourse, it is essential for media practitioners, electoral authorities, and civil society stakeholders to collaborate in promoting transparency, accountability, and democratic values in the electoral process.

7.10 Why Elections Failed to Advance

In Puntland, the ambitious plans for transitioning away from a clan-based electoral model faced formidable hurdles, leading to the eventual breakdown of the electoral process. This proposed shift elicited resistance from various sectors of Puntland's elite, particularly clan elders who wield considerable influence in determining public office holders. The abandonment of the clan-based system also posed a threat to the longstanding tradition that rotated the presidency among the region's three primary sub-clans.

The traditional rotation of the presidency among the major clans of Garowe, Galkayo, and Qardho is a cornerstone of Puntland's political landscape. Despite the formal voting process conducted by parliamentarians, clan power-sharing arrangements continue to wield significant influence in determining the presidency. This historical practice reflects the deeply entrenched role of clan affiliations in Puntland's governance structure, with each major clan taking its turn to lead the region. The rotational presidency was something people accepted but had marginalized and

impacted negatively on other clans. As such, it symbolizes a delicate equilibrium forged through decades of clan-based governance traditions in Puntland.

In Garowe, the prospect of one man one vote sparked deep-seated concerns among certain clans, heightening fears of diminished electoral influence beyond traditional clan affiliations. This apprehension was fuelled by the realization that elections would introduce a competitive electoral landscape, potentially diluting the dominant position held by established clans. As tensions simmered, the cancellation of the May 2023 district elections in Nugaal served as a flashpoint, triggering subsequent clashes in June 2023 that underscored the profound societal divisions surrounding electoral reforms.

Despite the formidable challenges posed by entrenched opposition to electoral changes, President Deni forged ahead, daring to defy the rotational norm that had long governed Puntland's political landscape. Securing victory in the indirect vote, President Deni's triumph was buoyed by a groundswell of public disillusionment with the disruptive actions of the opposition, which had effectively stalled the electoral process. This disillusionment, fuelled by a desire for stability and progress, propelled Deni to victory and signalled a shift in public sentiment away from traditional power dynamics towards a more pragmatic approach to governance.

Research participants indicated that the government faced criticism from the oppositions for its perceived unilateralism in implementing electoral reforms without sufficient engagement with critical political stakeholders. Opposition parties vehemently opposed the government's efforts to amend electoral laws, alleging bias and an ulterior motive to consolidate power. Despite legal challenges brought forth by major opposition factions, the Constitutional Court's decision to sideline these challenges only served to exacerbate tensions and undermine trust in the electoral process.

Furthermore, the stringent timeline for technical preparations posed a significant obstacle to the feasibility of transitioning to a one-person, one-vote system. This logistical challenge fuelled accusations that the president's prioritization of national elections had diverted attention and resources away from completing local electoral processes. As frustrations mounted over perceived delays and government overreach, public confidence in the integrity and fairness of the electoral system waned, casting a shadow over the prospects for democratic progress in Puntland.

8. Conclusions

Social Cohesion

In exploring the dynamics between election processes and social cohesion in Puntland, the research has revealed a nuanced interplay characterized by both reinforcing communal bonds and introducing tensions that challenge community relationships. Within this complex landscape, several key findings emerge, shedding light on the complicated dynamics shaping social cohesion within the region.

On the positive side, our findings highlight the resilience of social bonds among Puntland communities, underpinned by shared histories, cultural heritage, and collective aspirations. Despite facing various challenges, including those arising from the electoral process, communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience in maintaining cohesion and solidarity, reflecting the strength of communal ties in navigating periods of uncertainty and change.

Moreover, elections have served as catalysts for forging community alliances and coalition building, transcending traditional divisions and amplifying the voices of marginalized groups. Through collaborative efforts and collective action, communities have leveraged electoral processes to advocate for shared interests and aspirations, fostering a sense of unity and empowerment among diverse segments of society.

However, our research also identified several negative impacts stemming from the unequal distribution of votes and partisan alignments within Puntland's electoral landscape. Disparities in local ward selection have fuelled tensions and conflicts, eroding trust in the electoral process and exacerbating divisions within communities. Moreover, partisan alliances have deepened fragmentation and polarization, marginalized certain groups and exacerbated societal divisions along political lines.

While elections served moments of communal unity and democratic participation, they also pose significant challenges to social cohesion, particularly when disparities, exclusions, and partisan interests come into play. It is imperative to recognize and address these challenges to ensure that electoral processes contribute positively to the overall well-being and cohesion of Puntland society. By understanding the multifaceted dynamics at play, policymakers and stakeholders can develop informed strategies to mitigate tensions, promote inclusivity, and foster a more cohesive and resilient community fabric within the region.

Community Relationships

Community dynamics wield significant influence over electoral outcomes, serving as the bedrock upon which voter behaviour, campaign strategies, and overall democratic functioning rest. Close-knit communities nurture collective identity and shared values, directly impacting voter turnout and preferences for political candidates. Within the realm of electoral campaigns, community relationships involvedly shape campaign strategies and political manoeuvres, as candidates and parties rely heavily on

grassroots and community outreach to mobilize support and secure electoral victories.

In the context of Puntland, the significance of community relationships in elections cannot be overstated. While the introduction of democracy brought about new challenges and dynamics, the resilience of community relationships remained steadfast. Despite occasional conflicts over candidate selection and other democratic challenges, communities prioritized unity and cooperation, demonstrating a collective commitment to maintaining harmonious relationships. The community's response to electoral challenges exemplifies patience, tolerance, and a shared understanding of the importance of preserving communal harmony in the face of evolving political landscapes.

The strength of interpersonal connections within communities serves as a bulwark against the disruptions brought about by democratic transitions. Despite the introduction of new political dynamics, communities navigated these changes with resilience, underscoring a deep-rooted commitment to collective well-being and cooperation. Moving forward, the lessons gleaned from the intersection of community dynamics and electoral processes offer valuable insights for fostering inclusive and participatory democratic practices. By recognizing the pivotal role of communities in shaping electoral outcomes and governance, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards fostering environments that promote unity, cooperation, and collective engagement in the democratic process.

Despite potential hot spots such as district demarcations, candidate nomination and ranking, unclear election policies, and district leadership contests, communities in Puntland have displayed resilience and prioritized the benefits of the democratic process over potential conflicts. Despite possible tensions arising from disputes over district boundaries, biases in candidate nominations and rankings, or ambiguity in election procedures, communities have emphasized the broader goals of fair representation and democratic participation. Their ability to navigate through these challenges with cooperation and dialogue underscores their commitment to fostering stability, unity, and democratic values, ultimately contributing to the resilience and strength of Puntland's democratic institutions.

Candidate nomination and ranking processes played a pivotal role in shaping electoral outcomes and maintaining and or disrupting social cohesion within communities. Inclusivity in candidate nominations is paramount to ensuring that all segments of the community feel adequately represented and valued in the electoral process. Lack of inclusivity can lead to feelings of marginalization among certain community groups, potentially undermining trust and cooperation. To maintain social cohesion, it is crucial to adopt measures that guarantee diverse representation in candidate nominations, reflecting the demographic composition and interests of the community.

In some cases, the intervention of regional party representatives in candidate nominations introduce biases and favouritism, exacerbating tensions and breeding resentment within the community. Preferential treatment based on political affiliations or personal connections can erode confidence in the fairness and integrity of the

electoral process, undermining social cohesion. Therefore, it is essential to establish clear guidelines and mechanisms to prevent biased practices and ensure that candidate nominations are conducted in a transparent and equitable manner.

Transparency in candidate ranking is equally important to uphold the legitimacy and credibility of the electoral process. The method of ranking candidates on electoral lists should be transparent and inclusive, with input from all stakeholders, to mitigate perceptions of arbitrariness or manipulation. Transparent mechanisms for ranking candidates, coupled with opportunities for community input and oversight, are essential to address concerns and maintain social cohesion. By fostering transparency and inclusivity in candidate ranking processes, communities can uphold democratic principles and promote trust and cooperation among their members.

Mitigating risks and safeguarding relationships during candidate nominations and ranking processes requires proactive efforts to promote openness and inclusivity. Measures should be taken to ensure adequate representation in candidate nominations and prevent biased practices. By fostering a culture of openness and inclusivity, communities can strengthen relationships and enhance social cohesion, thereby navigating electoral challenges while preserving unity and cooperation among their members. Ultimately, upholding democratic principles of fairness and representation is key to fostering trust and cooperation within communities during electoral periods.

District demarcations in Puntland have the potential to significantly impact community relationships and cohesion, particularly in regions where divergent preferences regarding administrative boundaries exist. The clash of preferences regarding border lines may lead to hostility and conflict, undermining social harmony and stability within communities. Understanding the historical context and complexity of district demarcation is crucial, as it has been a contentious issue in Somalia, including Puntland, due to competing interests and historical grievances. Competing claims and complexities often complicate the process, requiring careful deliberation and involvement of all stakeholders to reach equitable outcomes.

Ensuring equitable outcomes in district demarcation is essential for effective governance and election management. Transparent and inclusive processes are necessary to balance competing claims and promote fairness, preventing exacerbation of tensions and divisions within communities. Adopting a participatory approach that involves all relevant stakeholders, including community leaders, clan representatives, and local authorities, is crucial for navigating complexities and identifying common ground. Engaging in dialogue and consensus-building processes can facilitate mutual understanding and foster sustainable solutions that address the diverse interests and concerns of local communities.

Prioritizing inclusivity and transparency in the district demarcation process is essential for mitigating conflicts and fostering a cohesive and resilient society in Puntland. By involving all stakeholders and ensuring equitable outcomes, Puntland can promote social harmony and strengthen governance structures. To achieve an effective democratic system, all stakeholders should understand district demarcations

must be implemented and before it starts should develop and agree on predetermined criteria.

District leadership contests in Puntland often unfold through the formation of coalitions among political parties after elections. While customary in democratic governance, this process holds implications for community dynamics and representation. Political parties prioritize gaining seats and consolidating power, while communities prioritize clan power sharing and sometimes appointing individuals based on competence and qualifications. This divergence in priorities can lead to tension between party interests and community expectations, necessitating careful negotiation to bridge the gap.

Recent coalition formations post-elections have resulted in discontent and rejection from various communities. There is a perception that outcomes did not reflect local preferences or aspirations, leading to scrutiny of coalition legitimacy and delays in assuming leadership roles. The complex interplay between political processes and community interests is further complicated by clan-based considerations, as certain clans seek influence in leadership positions sometimes at the expense of democratic principles.

Addressing these complexities requires constructive dialogue and negotiation, prioritizing transparency, and inclusivity. Stakeholders must reconcile interests to facilitate a smooth transition of power and effective governance. Enhancing civic education and awareness is crucial in empowering communities to participate actively in the democratic process and hold elected representatives accountable. Fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity strengthens democratic institutions and ensures that citizen voices are heard and respected, contributing to a more equitable and representative governance framework in Puntland.

The presence of unclear election policies, procedures, and guidelines can have significant ramifications on community relationships within Puntland. Such ambiguity often leads to mistrust, suspicion, and tensions, ultimately eroding social cohesion within communities. When procedures lack transparency and well-defined rules, perceptions of unfairness and favouritism can arise, further exacerbating existing divisions and undermining trust in the electoral process.

One of the primary challenges stemming from unclear election policies in Puntland is observed in candidate nomination and local ward (*seejo*) allocation processes. Without clear guidelines, confusion and disenfranchisement among candidates and voters become prevalent. Candidates may find themselves placed in wards where they lack a substantial voter base, severely affecting their electoral chances and diminishing the representativeness of the electoral outcomes.

Similarly, issues arise with the ranking process, where the control lies predominantly with political parties, often without sufficient input from candidates and community elders. This lack of transparency and consistency in the ranking process contributes to confusion and mistrust among community members, further eroding confidence in the fairness and integrity of the electoral system.

To address these challenges, it is imperative for authorities to develop clear policies and procedures well in advance of elections. This includes prioritizing clear guidelines for candidate selection and local ward allocation, ensuring meaningful consultation with candidates and stakeholders throughout the process. Additionally, establishing mechanisms for accountability and redress to address disputes or irregularities is essential to uphold the integrity of the electoral process.

The nomination of candidates in Puntland's electoral process was deeply intertwined with clan affiliations, which served as crucial determinants of candidacy selection. Political parties often relied on these affiliations to select candidates based on their perceived ability to secure votes within their respective clans. Candidates maintain connections with their clans to ensure local legitimacy and support, highlighting the importance of clan dynamics in shaping candidate nominations.

However, the process of candidate selection was not without its complexities. Disagreements have risen among party members and community leaders over the final list of candidates, reflecting the diverse interests and preferences within the community. Nevertheless, these tensions were typically resolved through dialogue and compromise, allowing the electoral process to proceed without significant disruptions to community relations.

Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, gender imbalance persisted in candidate nominations, with male candidates often preferred over females by clans and elders. Resistance from influential community members further marginalizes female candidates, hindering efforts to achieve gender equality in political participation. This imbalance underscored the challenges faced in ensuring equal representation and opportunities for women in the political sphere.

Issues of favouritism and preference also surfaced in the candidate selection process, with party representatives sometimes prioritizing certain candidates or allocating them to local wards perceived to have higher chances of success. Such selective allocations have undermined perceptions of fairness and equality within the community, leading to tensions among those who feel marginalized by the political establishment.

Moreover, political parties wielded significant power in determining candidate rankings on electoral lists, potentially disadvantaging candidates positioned lower on the list. The fluidity in the ranking process and frequent changes undermined trust in the electoral system and might have contributed to voter disillusionment. In Some cases, voters have abstained from voting after their preferred candidates were positioned lower on the electoral list, highlighting the crucial role of candidate placement in influencing voter engagement.

In light of these challenges, ensuring transparency and integrity in candidate selection processes is essential to uphold the legitimacy of the electoral process. Addressing issues of gender imbalance, favouritism, and unfair candidate rankings requires concerted efforts to promote inclusivity, accountability, and equal representation within Puntland's political landscape. By fostering a more transparent and equitable candidate nomination process, stakeholders can enhance trust and

confidence in the electoral system, ultimately strengthening democratic governance and community relations.

Election Dynamics

Voter registration plays a pivotal role in ensuring credible and transparent elections in Puntland, as it serves as the foundation for identifying and including eligible voters in the electoral process. By registering to vote, individuals gain the opportunity to exercise their democratic rights, shaping the future of their communities and advocating for their interests.

Empowerment through voting rights is fundamental and it allowed individuals to express their preferences and elect representatives who reflect their values and priorities. By participating in elections, citizens ensured that their voices are heard in governance, contributing to the creation of a more representative and responsive political system.

Several factors influenced voter registration and turnout in Puntland. Efforts to promote voter registration were driven by the recognition that registered voters enhance communities' chances of securing representation. Clan-based mobilization had proven effective in boosting registration numbers, particularly among marginalized or underrepresented clans. However, campaigns against voter registration by opposition groups have had adverse effects, which led to confusion and hesitancy among citizens.

Regional disparities in voter registration and turnout highlight the diverse political engagement across different regions of Puntland. While regions like Mudug, Nugaal, and Bari exhibit high registration rates, indicating strong political engagement, others like Gardafuu and Haylaan show lower rates, emphasizing the need for targeted outreach and engagement efforts. Understanding these regional variations is crucial for devising effective electoral strategies and policies.

Demographic insights further inform voter registration efforts, with the majority of registered voters falling within the 18-30 age bracket. Mobilizing young voters is therefore essential for ensuring broad-based participation in the electoral process. Additionally, tailoring engagement strategies to middle-aged and older voters is necessary to ensure inclusivity across all age groups.

Challenges such as infrastructure deficiencies and opposition campaigns against registration hinder voter participation, highlighting the importance of addressing barriers to registration and turnout. However, opportunities exist in targeted outreach efforts, awareness campaigns, and engagement strategies tailored to diverse demographic groups.

Inclusive democracy requires recognizing and addressing the unique needs and concerns of different demographic groups. By fostering greater civic participation and representation, Puntland can build a more inclusive and responsive political system that reflects the diversity and aspirations of its citizens. Generally, understanding the dynamics of voter registration, turnout, and demographic trends is essential for

promoting inclusive democracy and strengthening civic engagement across all regions of Puntland.

In examining the evolution of local government structures within Puntland, the research illuminates a transformative journey marked by significant shifts from traditional clan-based governance to more democratic systems. The administrative landscape of Puntland encompasses 51 districts, each with its own unique history and significance. Of these, 21 districts hold historical relevance dating back to the pre-civil war era, while 30 districts have been established by Puntland administration to accommodate evolving demographics and developmental imperatives.

Traditionally, governance in Puntland was largely characterized by clan-based systems, where local councils were constituted through nominations by traditional leaders. This approach ensured community representation based on clan affiliations, with traditional structures playing a central role in the selection and appointment of council members. However, the new democratic system also posed challenges in terms of inclusivity and accountability, often limiting participation to select groups within society.

The introduction of local government elections marked a significant departure from traditional governance norms, ushering in a new era of democratic representation and accountability. With 33 out of 51 districts transitioning to a more democratic framework, the electoral process became a pivotal mechanism for selecting local council representatives. This shift allowed for greater citizen participation and engagement, enabling communities to have a direct voice in the selection of their local leaders.

However, this transition was not without its challenges and complexities. While the move towards democratic governance represented a significant step forward, it also brought about inherent tensions and adjustments within the socio-political landscape. The coexistence of traditional and democratic governance systems posed unique challenges, requiring careful navigation and adaptation to ensure smooth transitions and effective governance structures.

The evolution of clan representation in Puntland's city councils through elections signifies a profound transformation in the region's governance dynamics. Traditionally, clan-based nominations dominated the composition of city councils, with representation largely determined by traditional power-sharing mechanisms. However, the transition to a democratic system has brought about significant changes, with electoral processes now playing a central role in determining council compositions.

One of the notable impacts of elections on clan representation has been the increased representation of certain clans, reflecting a move towards more proportionate representation based on electoral support. For example, in Bossaso, some clans have witnessed a substantial increase in seats, with one clan experiencing a fourfold increase in representation. This shift underscores the importance of electoral participation and highlights the evolving nature of clan representation in Puntland's political landscape.

Moreover, the electoral process has facilitated greater inclusivity, with new clans gaining entry into city councils for the first time. This inclusivity represents a departure from past practices where representation was largely limited to a select few clans. However, alongside these gains, some clans have experienced a loss of representation, facing the challenge of adjusting to a new reality where their influence and representation are not guaranteed.

The competitive nature of the electoral process has further complicated the dynamics of clan representation, impacting established power structures within Puntland's political landscape. Clans adapting to this new reality must navigate challenges and potential conflicts, emphasizing the need for mechanisms to manage transitions smoothly and ensure the effective functioning of city councils.

These electoral changes have broader implications for governance and social cohesion in Puntland. The dynamic electoral landscape underscores the essence of electoral democracy and the importance of active and strategic engagement in the democratic process. Ongoing political education and community engagement are essential to ensuring that electoral democracy is inclusive and reflective of the region's diverse population.

Continued monitoring and analysis of these changes are necessary to understand their impact on social cohesion, governance efficacy, and the overall political landscape in Puntland. By addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities presented by evolving electoral dynamics, Puntland can further strengthen its democratic institutions and foster greater representation and inclusivity within its city councils.

Voting has emerged as a powerful tool for empowerment in Puntland, marking a significant milestone in the region's democratic journey. Granting citizens the right to vote has bestowed upon them agency and ownership over their governance, fundamentally transforming the dynamics of political participation and decision-making.

One of the key aspects of empowerment through voting lies in the ability of citizens to express their voice and choice. Unlike the previous clan-based system, where political representation was largely predetermined, voting allowed individuals to align with political parties of their choice, participate directly in decision-making processes, and shape the future direction of their communities.

Moreover, participation in elections fostered civic engagement among citizens, instilling a sense of responsibility and duty towards their society. By actively engaging in the electoral process, individuals contribute to enriching democratic discourse, fostering political awareness, and strengthening the democratic fabric of Puntland.

Another critical dimension of empowerment through voting is the accountability it demands from elected leaders. By casting their votes, citizens hold elected officials responsible for their actions, demanding transparency, responsiveness, and effective governance. This accountability mechanism is essential for ensuring that elected representatives remain accountable to the needs and aspirations of the electorate.

Furthermore, voting promoted representation and diversity within political leadership, enriching decision-making processes, and enhancing democratic legitimacy. Through their collective voting power, citizens can drive policy change, address social challenges, and advance the interests and welfare of society as a whole.

Importantly, voting served as a means of empowerment for marginalized communities, providing them with a platform to voice their concerns and advocate for their rights. The election of a representative from the Internally Displaced People (IDP) community in Qardho district serves as a compelling example of how elections empower marginalized groups by affording them representation and a voice in governance despite being limited.

Participation in free, fair, and transparent elections also played a crucial role in building trust in democratic institutions. The confidence demonstrated by individuals in the electoral process and the legitimacy of elected authorities is indispensable for ensuring the stability and functioning of democratic societies.

The introduction of elections and democratic governance in Puntland has triggered a profound shift in the status and function of traditional leaders within the political landscape. Once regarded as the primary decision-makers within their communities, traditional leaders have experienced a gradual erosion of their authority as decision-making processes become more decentralized and power is distributed among broader segments of society. This transformation has forced traditional leaders to adapt their roles, embracing new opportunities to engage with the electoral process and influence political outcomes.

Despite the formal shift away from their dominant role, traditional leaders continue to wield significant influence by leveraging their deep community ties and social capital. Through endorsing candidates, mobilizing support, and influencing political parties, traditional leaders remain pivotal actors in shaping the political landscape of Puntland. However, this transition presents a complex mix of emotions for traditional leaders, with some welcoming the shift away from singular decision-making while others lament the diminishing influence of their once-unquestionable authority.

The integration of traditional leadership into the democratic process raises critical questions about their role in a modern political context. While their continued involvement can enrich the democratic process by ensuring representation and community engagement, it also poses risks to societal cohesion and democratic principles if not carefully managed. As such, there is an urgent need for thorough reflection and examination of the evolving role of traditional leaders within the framework of democratic governance.

By addressing these critical questions and fostering dialogue between traditional and democratic systems, Puntland can harness the unique strengths of both models to build a more inclusive and responsive political system. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that the participation of traditional leaders enriches rather than detracts from democratic aspirations, fostering a political environment that is both respectful of tradition and committed to democratic principles.

Election Participation and Inclusivity

The landscape of election participation and inclusivity in Puntland reflects a complex interplay of progress and persistent challenges across various dimensions.

Historically, entrenched patriarchal structures and cultural norms have limited women's engagement in politics, despite occasional strides such as the election of five women to parliament in 1998. However, subsequent years have seen slow progress, with women remaining significantly under-represented in legislative and executive positions.

Deep-rooted attitudes, socio-economic constraints, and the impact of conflict further hinder women's political empowerment. Efforts to promote gender equality, including legislative measures and advocacy campaigns, have gradually gained momentum but face ongoing challenges. Similarly, the recent electoral landscape underscores disparities in women's representation, with only one seat secured by women in the 2024 parliamentary selection process. Challenges such as societal biases, limited candidate nomination opportunities, and strategic manoeuvres by political associations continue to impede progress towards gender parity.

Additionally, minority communities face underrepresentation in elected councils, highlighting systemic inequalities within electoral processes. Despite efforts to address these disparities, including legislative reforms and awareness campaigns, marginalized groups such as Internally Displaced People (IDPs) encounter obstacles such as vote-buying and limited candidate representation. To foster inclusive democracy, concerted efforts are needed, including targeted awareness campaigns, practical support for marginalized communities, and measures to promote diversity and inclusivity in candidate selection. By addressing these challenges, Puntland can move towards a more equitable and representative political landscape that reflects the voices and aspirations of all its citizens.

Women's empowerment and political participation in Puntland have been shaped by the region's cultural heritage and historical context. Traditional roles relegated women to domestic spheres, limiting their opportunities for engagement in public life and decision-making processes. Despite these challenges, women have occasionally held informal leadership positions within their communities since Puntland's establishment.

However, subsequent years have seen slow advancements, with women's political participation remaining minimal compared to their male counterparts. Gender disparities persist in legislative decision-making and high-level leadership roles, with women holding only a fraction of parliamentary and cabinet positions. Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes and cultural norms continue to serve as significant barriers to women's political empowerment in Puntland, limiting their access to education, resources, and decision-making spaces. Moreover, the protracted conflict and instability in Somalia exacerbate gender disparities, hindering women's ability to engage meaningfully in politics.

Despite these challenges, efforts to promote gender equality and women's participation in politics have gradually gained momentum in Puntland. Legislative

measures such as gender quotas and affirmative action policies have been introduced to enhance women's representation in political institutions. Additionally, increased advocacy, awareness-raising campaigns, and the emergence of women-led civil society organizations have contributed to raising awareness about gender equality issues and mobilizing support for women's rights. However, addressing deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes, providing access to education and resources, and mitigating the impact of conflict and instability are crucial for advancing women's political empowerment in the region. By promoting gender equality and creating inclusive political spaces, Puntland can harness the full potential of women's leadership and contributions to governance and development efforts.

The current landscape of women's participation in political processes in Puntland reflects a mixture of progress and persistent challenges. Despite efforts to promote gender equality, women remain significantly under-represented in elected offices, as evidenced by the recent parliamentary selection process in 2024, where only one out of 66 seats were secured by women. This stark disparity underscores the need for continued advocacy and targeted interventions to address barriers to women's political participation.

While there has been some improvement in women's electoral participation rates, particularly in local government elections, disparities persist compared to their male counterparts. Cultural norms, socio-economic constraints, and lack of access to information and resources continue to impede women's full engagement in electoral processes. Entrenched patriarchal attitudes prioritize male leadership, while the traditional clan system in Somalia poses additional challenges for women seeking involvement in politics.

Exclusionary practices, historically perpetuated by male-dominated traditional elders, further marginalize women from political participation. These practices often favour men over women in candidate selection, leading to a systemic under-representation of women in elected offices. The impact of power-sharing mechanisms, such as the "4.5 formula" in Somalia's political landscape, presents both opportunities and challenges for women's representation. While the formula allocates seats based on clan representation, it often overlooks women's specific representation, assuming their inclusion within their respective clans without direct consideration of their role or representation in decision-making processes. This underscores the importance of ensuring that gender considerations are integrated into existing power-sharing mechanisms to promote women's meaningful participation in political processes.

The first three council elections in Puntland marked a significant juncture in the region's political landscape, particularly concerning the representation of women in public leadership roles. Historically, Puntland has grappled with gender disparities in political representation, with women consistently under-represented in political decision-making processes. This disparity is starkly evident in the current scenario, where women hold only a fraction of ministerial and deputy positions within the executive organ, highlighting the urgent need for proactive measures to address gender imbalances in political leadership.

However, amidst these longstanding challenges, the 2021 Puntland three district council elections presented a promising development. The significant participation of women in the electoral process, comprising over 50% of registered voters, and the notable increase in the number of women candidates contesting for local council seats, with 29% of the total field, indicated a positive shift towards greater gender inclusivity in political participation. These statistics reflected a growing recognition of the importance of women's voices and perspectives in governance and decision-making processes.

An in-depth analysis of the election outcomes revealed tangible progress in women's representation, with women securing 26% of the total contested seats in 2021 elections, marking a significant milestone in the pursuit of gender parity in political leadership. However, the landscape shifted when elections were held for the remaining districts, with women securing only 17% of the total seats contested across 30 districts. Despite the initial success in the pilot phase, the subsequent elections highlighted the persistence of gender disparities in political representation.

Among all 33 districts where elections were conducted in 2021 and 2023, women secured approximately 18% of the local council seats, indicating an inconsequential improvement compared to previous elections but underscoring the ongoing challenge of achieving meaningful gender parity in Puntland's political arena. The transition from the clan nomination system to a democratic process led to a slight increase in women's representation, from 17% to 18% of contested seats. However, the modest progress suggests that significant obstacles remain in achieving equitable gender representation in Puntland's political landscape. The lack of substantial progress raises questions about the sustainability of efforts to promote gender diversity and inclusive participation beyond the pilot phase, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies to address systemic barriers to women's political empowerment.

The differences between the 2021 and 2023 elections in Puntland reflect distinct approaches to the voting process and candidate selection, leading to varied outcomes in terms of representation, particularly for women and minorities. In the 2021 elections, conducted in three pilot districts, the voting process involved aggregating votes at the district level, with successful candidates determined based on their political association's overall performance and predetermined ranking of candidates. This method ensured that candidates were elected based on their association's performance, with the top-ranked candidates securing available seats according to the association's predetermined list.

In contrast, the 2023 elections, comprising 30 districts, adopted a decentralized approach, dividing districts into multiple local wards from which candidates would receive votes. Candidates were determined based on their ranking on submitted lists and the number of votes received by their political association in specific local wards. This approach allowed for more granular representation and reflected diverse voter preferences across different localities within the districts. However, despite the decentralized nature of the 2023 elections, significant challenges arose for women and minorities, resulting in fewer seats secured compared to the 2021 elections.

Several factors contributed to this decline in representation. Firstly, the involvement of traditional and community leaders in the nomination process often led to hesitancy or reluctance to nominate women candidates as preferred choices. Women candidates were frequently relegated to lower positions on candidate lists, diminishing their chances of being elected. Secondly, despite comprising half of the voting population, women encountered resistance from communities when positioned as the first choice on candidate lists. This resistance stemmed from deeply entrenched societal norms and biases favouring male candidates, hindering women's ability to garner support from voters. Consequently, women received fewer votes, impeding their chances of securing seats in local councils.

The electoral landscape of the May 2023 elections in Puntland revealed a strategic game among political associations, where tactical manoeuvres were employed to maximize electoral advantage. In this intricate political chessboard, associations strategically positioned male candidates to capitalize on societal biases favouring male leadership. For instance, if one political association prioritized a female candidate in a specific ward, another association strategically countered by placing a male candidate as their primary choice in the same ward. This strategic move aimed to exploit prevailing societal norms and preferences that inherently favoured male candidates over their female counterparts.

The influence of societal biases and preferences was palpable in the electoral process, where voters including female voters tended to support male candidates prominently positioned at the forefront of candidate lists. Despite efforts to prioritize female representation and promote gender equality, strategic manoeuvres by opposing political associations effectively diverted voter support towards male candidates, thereby augmenting their electoral prospects. This dynamic underscored the systemic barriers faced by female candidates, perpetuating gender disparities and impeding progress towards achieving gender equality in political representation.

The complexities of gender dynamics within electoral processes shed light on the entrenched gendered power dynamics that continue to shape political landscapes. These dynamics afford male candidates a strategic advantage, influenced by prevailing societal perceptions and electoral strategies. Consequently, female candidates encounter formidable obstacles in navigating the electoral terrain, as strategic moves by political associations often thwart their chances of securing electoral success.

The 2023 elections underscored the pressing need for reforms aimed at addressing gender disparities and ensuring equitable representation for women in political decision-making. Efforts to promote gender-sensitive electoral practices and empower marginalized groups are imperative to fostering inclusive governance and strengthening democratic processes in Puntland. By implementing reforms that prioritize gender equality and challenge entrenched biases, Puntland can pave the way for a more inclusive and representative political landscape where women have equal opportunities to contribute to the governance and development of their communities.

The same is true for minorities as well and the elections in Puntland have unveiled a troubling pattern of underrepresentation and marginalization of minority communities within elected councils, casting a shadow over the principles of democratic governance. Across key cities such as Bossaso, Badhan, Qardho, and Galkacyo, minority groups have secured limited seats, with many districts even devoid of any representation for minority communities. This glaring disparity underscores the need for urgent action to address systemic inequalities within the electoral process.

Several factors contribute to the underrepresentation of minorities in electoral processes. Political parties often prioritize nominating candidates from clans with significant voting influence, sidelining minority communities in the candidate selection process. Furthermore, the closed-list proportional representation system exacerbates this disparity by relegating minority candidates to lower positions on electoral lists, thereby reducing their chances of electoral success.

The impact of candidate placement cannot be overstated, as it significantly influences the electoral viability of minority candidates. Despite their participation in the electoral process, minority candidates are often positioned further down the lists, diminishing their visibility and electoral prospects. This systemic bias perpetuates the marginalization of minority communities and undermines the principles of democratic representation.

Addressing the underrepresentation of minorities requires a multifaceted approach encompassing legislative measures, institutional accountability, and proactive efforts to empower minority communities. Legislative measures such as quotas or reserved seats for minority communities could ensure their substantive inclusion in decision-making.

Political Parties

The transition to democratic governance in Puntland marked a significant shift towards a more inclusive political system, facilitated by the registration of local political associations and the recognition of multiple political parties. However, during the process some of them failed to meet the required criteria, leading to their disqualification while some of them formed coalitions and joined each other. Adjustments were made to the initial plan of limiting political parties to three. While the amendment allowed all participating parties to become political entities aimed to foster pluralism and inclusivity, it faced criticism for lacking consultations and participation by all stakeholders. This controversy underscores the importance of transparent and consultative governance structures that prioritize inclusivity and diversity in political representation. Moving forward, policymakers must engage in proactive measures to address such challenges, ensuring that governance reforms promote equity, social cohesion, and meaningful political participation for all citizens of Puntland.

The pilot election in 2021 served as a pivotal test for Puntland's evolving electoral system, offering valuable insights ahead of broader elections. The subsequent dominance of three political associations - KAAH, MIDEEYE, and SINCAD -

underscored their organizational strength and strategic alliances, shaping the region's political landscape. While constitutional amendments broadened political participation beyond initial restrictions, questions arose regarding the concentration of power and internal democracy within these associations. The success of these parties was attributed to factors such as political elite involvement, resource superiority, and strategic alliances, highlighting the complexity of political success in emerging democracies. However, concerns over limited internal democracy raise critical questions about the parties' ability to champion democratic values at the state level. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment to fostering internal democracy, ensuring transparency, and promoting inclusive governance mechanisms within political parties to strengthen their legitimacy and contribute to a more democratic political landscape in Puntland.

The significant disparity in seat distribution between Puntland's leading political parties - SINCAD, MIDEEYE, and KAAH - and the remaining five parties highlights a pronounced imbalance in political representation. With a combined total of 710 seats compared to the other five parties' 151 seats, the dominant parties wield substantial influence, signalling a consolidation of power within the political landscape. This concentration underscores their formidable electoral success and organizational capacity, enabling them to secure a significant share of representation. However, the recognition of parties with single-digit seat counts, such as HORSEED, RUNCAD, and SHAQAALAHA, raises questions about the criteria for state-level party recognition. While the absence of stringent requirements may promote political pluralism and inclusivity, it also prompts scrutiny regarding the effectiveness and representativeness of the party classification system in fostering democratic governance in Puntland.

The pilot elections in Puntland in 2021 marked a significant milestone, notably highlighting the emergence of three prominent political parties: KAAH, MIDEEYE, and SINCAD. While these parties gained early momentum, particularly in Qardho district due to its demographic advantage and initial victories, a nuanced analysis reveals a more complex electoral landscape. While Qardho's influence provided a strategic foothold, the parties' performances across Eyl and Ufayn districts suggest broader appeal beyond Qardho's influence. Factors such as party platforms, campaign strategies, and socio-political dynamics played pivotal roles in their widespread success. Thus, while the "Qardho issue" offers insight into electoral strategy and regional influence, the broader electoral success of these parties reflects a multifaceted interplay of factors shaping Puntland's political landscape.

Changing Political Leaders

The transition to democracy in Puntland has catalysed a significant change in the interaction between political leaders and the community, marked by a shift towards a more community-centric approach. Unlike past practices where politicians primarily engaged with traditional leaders, the advent of elections has compelled them to be more visible and accessible within the community. Political campaigns now serve as platforms for direct engagement, with politicians actively listening to citizens'

concerns, organizing community meetings, and soliciting feedback. While the sustainability of this heightened engagement remains uncertain, the experience has raised awareness among citizens about their role in holding leaders accountable. The post-election period will test the commitment of political leaders to sustained community engagement, with factors like institutionalization of democratic norms and civil society strength playing pivotal roles. Overall, this transformation underscores the evolving dynamics of governance and political participation, emphasizing the growing significance of citizen voices in shaping political agendas and decision-making processes in Puntland.

Impact of Elections on Business Environment

The Puntland elections in 2021 and 2023, though not causing significant disruptions in the region's business landscape, did introduce notable challenges and uncertainties. Delays in investments and projects arose from the uncertainties surrounding the elections, leading to concerns among investors about potential disruptions. Additionally, election-related conflicts contributed to insecurity, prompting some businesses to consider relocating to more favourable areas.

Frustration among business owners over what they perceived as a prioritization of political matters over economic concerns highlighted a growing concern about the disconnect between political priorities and economic needs. Moving forward, it is crucial to recognize the economic ramifications of political decisions and prioritize policies that foster both security and economic prosperity. Balancing political governance with economic development requires aligning policies with long-term societal interests, incorporating economic considerations into decision-making processes to better address the needs of businesses and promote sustainable growth. While the impact on Puntland's business and economy may not have been profound, addressing these challenges and ensuring a conducive business environment will be vital for sustaining economic growth and stability in the region.

Media and the Elections

The role of media in elections within Puntland is multifaceted and influential, shaping public opinion, political discourse, and electoral outcomes. The introduction of democratic governance has led to significant changes in the media landscape, with election reporting emerging as a new focus for media outlets. This shift has required journalists to adapt to new methods and ethical guidelines, promoting fairness, accuracy, and impartiality in reporting.

The signing of the Puntland Journalists Code of Conduct on Local Government Elections represents a milestone in promoting ethical journalism and transparency during electoral processes. Despite the proliferation of social media platforms, traditional media outlets remain essential in providing reliable information to citizens. During the electoral period, media organizations exercised heightened caution and diligence, contributing to informed citizenship and promoting transparency. Moving

forward, collaboration between media practitioners, electoral authorities, and civil society stakeholders will be crucial in upholding democratic values and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process in Puntland.

Why Elections Failed to Continue

In Puntland, the ambitious plans to transition away from a clan-based electoral model encountered substantial obstacles, ultimately leading to the breakdown of the electoral process in three districts including Puntland's capital city and the subsequent cancelation of the parliamentary and presidential elections. Resistance to this proposed shift came from various sectors of Puntland's elite, particularly political leaders with clan elders who wield significant influence in politics. The abandonment of the clan-based system also posed a threat to the longstanding gentle man's agreement that rotated the presidency among the region's primary sub-clans, which had served as a mechanism for maintaining balance and stability.

President Deni's victory in the indirect vote, despite opposition, reflected a shift in public sentiment away from traditional power dynamics towards a more pragmatic approach to governance. However, criticisms of the government's unilateralism in implementing electoral reforms and the logistical challenges in transitioning to a one-person, one-vote system underscored deep divisions and undermined public confidence in the electoral process, casting doubt on the prospects for democratic progress in Puntland.

9. Recommendations

1. Strengthen Electoral Processes

The research highlights instances where unclear election policies and procedures led to confusion and disenfranchisement among candidates and voters. By establishing clear and accessible guidelines for candidate nomination, ranking, and selection processes, stakeholders can ensure transparency and build trust in the electoral system.

There were instances in which the equality of candidate nomination and ranking processes were questioned, which can further undermine fairness and integrity. By implementing monitoring mechanisms, such as independent observers or electoral oversight bodies not only the election day but the entire process, irregularities can be identified and addressed promptly, enhancing accountability, and ensuring fairness in electoral processes.

The report emphasizes the importance of civic education campaigns to empower communities to participate actively in the electoral process. For example, conducting workshops, seminars, and outreach programs can educate voters about their rights and responsibilities, as well as the electoral procedures and candidates' platforms, fostering informed decision-making and increasing voter turnout.

The research highlights concern about vote-buying which can be considered electoral malpractice, particularly in vulnerable communities like IDPs. To address this issue, clear regulations prohibiting vote-buying can be enforced, supported by robust oversight mechanisms and punitive measures for offenders. Additionally, measures such as voter education campaigns can raise awareness about the dangers of vote-buying and empower communities to report such incidents.

It is therefore to implement below recommendations to strengthen the electoral processes of Puntland as well as promote transparency and accountability and ensure the active participation and protection of all citizens' rights in the democratic process.

Specific Recommendations

- Enhance transparency and clarity in election policies, procedures, and guidelines.
- Implement mechanisms for monitoring and accountability not only on election day but the entire process.
- Foster community engagement and awareness through targeted civic education campaigns
- Establish clear regulations and oversight mechanisms to prevent vote-buying and other forms of electoral malpractice.

2. Promote Inclusivity and Representation

Despite the existence of gender quotas, women remain significantly underrepresented in elected offices in Puntland, as highlighted in the report. By effectively implementing gender quotas and affirmative action policies, Puntland can increase women's representation in leadership roles and ensure their equal participation in decision-making processes.

The report also identified the lack of representation for minority communities in candidate nomination processes, indicating a need for greater diversity and inclusivity within political parties. By encouraging political parties to prioritize diversity and inclusivity, Puntland can ensure that candidates from minority communities are given equal opportunities to participate in electoral processes and hold leadership positions.

Specific Recommendations

- Strengthen the enforcement of existing gender quotas and affirmative action policies.
- Encourage political parties to prioritize diversity and inclusivity.
- Facilitate the active participation of IDP communities.
- Introduce legislative measures, such as reserved seats or quotas, to ensure substantive inclusion of minority communities in decision-making processes.
- Encourage political parties to elevate minority candidates to prominent positions on electoral lists and promote their visibility and electoral viability.

3. Support Women's Empowerment

Women's leadership development programs and capacity-building initiatives have been recommended to enhance women's political participation and representation. The research is recommending providing training workshops, mentoring programs, and networking opportunities specifically tailored to women interested in pursuing political careers.

The report mentions the need for awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts to address societal barriers and biases. Programs such as public outreach events, media campaigns, and educational workshops aimed at challenging stereotypes, promoting women's leadership roles, and fostering a culture of gender equality in politics will be important.

Gender-sensitive electoral practices are highlighted as crucial such as implementing gender quotas or affirmative action policies, ensuring equal representation of women in candidate nomination lists, and establishing transparent and inclusive selection processes that provide equal opportunities for women to participate in elections.

Specific Recommendations

- Provide support for women's leadership development programs and capacity-building initiatives to enhance their political participation and representation.

- Address societal barriers and biases through awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts to challenge stereotypes and promote women's leadership in politics.
- Implement gender-sensitive electoral practices and ensure equal opportunities for women in candidate nomination, ranking, and selection processes.

4. Enhance Community Cohesion

The report highlights the importance of fostering dialogue and reconciliation efforts to address potential tensions arising from electoral processes, such as disputes over district demarcations and leadership contests. For instance, in districts where there were disagreements over district boundaries, community forums and facilitated discussions could be organized to allow stakeholders to voice their concerns and work towards mutually acceptable solutions.

Promoting a culture of inclusivity, tolerance, and cooperation among diverse communities is crucial for safeguarding social cohesion during electoral periods. Initiatives such as organizing inter-community events, communal exchanges, and collaborative projects that bring different groups together to celebrate shared values and promote understanding.

Community-led initiatives for conflict resolution and mediation are recommended to prevent electoral disputes from escalating. For example, local peace committees or mediation councils could be established with representation from various community groups to intervene in disputes, facilitate dialogue, and promote peaceful resolution of conflicts related to elections.

Specific Recommendations

- Foster dialogue and reconciliation efforts to address potential tensions arising from electoral processes, such as disputes over district demarcations and leadership contests (mayor and deputy mayor) among others.
- Promote a culture of inclusivity, tolerance, and cooperation among diverse communities to safeguard social cohesion and unity during electoral periods.
- Encourage community-led initiatives for conflict resolution and mediation to prevent electoral disputes from escalating and undermining trust in democratic institutions.

Other Important Recommendations

Implement iVerify Platform in Puntland

Given the possible prevalence of misinformation and disinformation during electoral periods, there is a pressing need for robust fact-checking mechanisms to combat the

spread of false information and ensure the integrity of the electoral process. Building on the success and lessons learned from the iVerify platform's implementation in Kenya, Puntland should consider adopting a similar fact-checking tool tailored to its local context. It is recommended that Puntland partners with relevant international organizations, such as the UNDP and the European Union, to pilot and implement an enhanced version of the iVerify platform ahead of future elections.

The platform should prioritize longer implementation timeframes to allow for greater awareness-building efforts among journalists, civil society organizations, and the general public. Additionally, the platform should be positioned as an independent verification tool available year-round, rather than solely during electoral periods, to ensure its sustained relevance and impact in combating misinformation beyond election cycles. By investing in innovative fact-checking technologies like iVerify, Puntland can strengthen its electoral processes and uphold the integrity of its democratic institutions.

Adopt eMonitor+

In light of the increasing influence of digital media in shaping public opinion and the risk of misinformation during electoral periods, Puntland should explore the adoption of eMonitor+ developed by UNDP's Regional Bureau of Arab States. This suite of digital tools harnesses artificial intelligence to monitor digital media platforms, enabling the detection of electoral violations, hate speech, political polarization, and online violence against women. Given its successful implementation in countries like Tunisia, Lebanon, and Libya, as well as its versatility in analysing content in multiple languages, including Arabic, English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. eMonitor+ presents a comprehensive solution for monitoring and mitigating digital threats during elections.

By leveraging AI algorithms for sentiment analysis, topic modelling, hate speech detection, bot scanning, and reverse image verification, eMonitor+ provides real-time insights into online discourse, empowering electoral commissions, media organizations, and civil society actors to respond effectively to emerging issues.

Moreover, the platform's ability to visualize data through online dashboards enhances transparency and facilitates informed decision-making. Therefore, Puntland should consider partnering with UNDP to pilot eMonitor+ and include Somali language ahead of future elections, thereby bolstering the resilience of its electoral processes against digital threats and ensuring the integrity of its democratic institutions.

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