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I N S T I T U T E

DISTRICT COUNCIL FORMATION THROUGH INDIRECT ELECTION IN SOUTHWEST STATE OF SOMALIA: A MEANS TO DEMOCRATIZATION



Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Background	4
3	Methodology	6
4	Phases of slow stabilization as means to indirect election	6
5	Reconciliation through indirect elections	7
6	Approaches to inclusivity	9
7	Technical expertise outweighs political maneuvers	11
8	Post-election hurdles	14
9	Conclusion	15
10	Recommendations	16

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1. Introduction

Southwest state is the third oldest federal member state, only preceded by Puntland and Jubbaland in Somalia's fledgling federal arrangement. It consists of three regions (provinces), Lower Shebelle, Bay and Bakol and 18 districts, and has the most diverse number of clans in the country.¹ Although no accurate census data are available, it is also thought to be one of the most populated regions in Somalia.² Over the last seven years, a clamor for democratization, decentralization of authority and the formation of local governments through an indirect election has been growing in the state. This study explores Southwest's attempts to form local district councils through indirect elections mediated by elders – a process that is more democratic than the practice of direct appointments. It investigates phases of slow stabilization and reconciliation through indirect election. The paper also examines organic approaches to political inclusion, the role of technical expertise in conducting indirect election at the district level and illustrates major post-election hurdle and concludes with recommendations.

2. Background

Article 77 of the Southwest constitution stipulates that “Southwest state should be governed on the principle of decentralizing authority to districts and sub-districts.”³ Although hastily established in its current form in 2014, the revival of local government in Southwest began in 2017. That was one year before Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan, the region's first president, was ousted in 2018. Additionally, Southwest, like the rest of south-central Somalia, has been beset by the menace of al Shabaab. The extremist group controls a large swathe of the region, slowing down the formation of the district councils and arresting economic progress.⁴ At the time of writing this study, four districts, Sablale and Kuntunwarey in the Lower Shabelle, and Tiye glow and Rabdure in Bakol, were under the control of the militant group.⁵

Initially, a persistent social and political polarization and occasional violence dampened the democratization process.⁶ However, the political upheavals did not stop the formation of local governments. Although there are political issues and competition for power within the political class, Southwest has less active clan warfare or organized militia groups than other member states. Moreover, all its 18 districts retain their pre-1991 borders, with no additional districts added during the post-1991 political mayhem.⁷ This saved Southwest from the additional difficulties of demarcation and the burden of district-based border disputes in the process of district council formation through indirect elections.

1. HIPS interview, 2022.

2. HIPS interview, 2022.

3. Southwest constitution.

4. HIPS interview, 2022.

5. HIPS interview, 2022.

6. HIPS interview, 2022.

7. Local Government Law of Southwest state, 2017.

Southwest state's regions and districts

Regions	Lower Shabelle	Bay	Bakol
Districts	Afgoye	Burhakabo	Hudur
	Walawen	Baidoa	Wajid
	Sablale	Berdale	Elbarde
	Awdhegle	Qasahdhere/Qansahdheere	Rabdhure
	Kuntuwarey	Dinsor	Tiyeglow
	Marka		
	Qoryoley		
	Barawe		

Southwest's Local Government Law, enacted in 2017, empowers the local councils as the third layer of governance in the federal structure.⁸ In practice, power is concentrated in Baidoa, the capital and governmental service delivery and security provisions across the state, are extremely limited. As a result, only five districts (Hudur, Wajid, Barawe, Dinsor and Bardale) have indirectly elected local councils.⁹



Indirect elections transitioned these five districts from top-down and politically appointed officials to what one senior local government official described as “mini-social contract”

Indirect elections transitioned these five districts from top-down and politically appointed officials to what one senior local government official described as “mini-social contract”¹⁰ in which elders and community members have a say in who becomes a mayor or a district council member. An indirect election is by nature a transitional phase, which takes place between popular one-person, one-vote elections and top-down political appointments. Article 9 of the Southwest Local Government Law recognizes this distinction by stating “until circumstances and conditions allow holding popular local council election, traditional elders represent the clans residing in the district.”¹¹

This is to say that democratization in Southwest state, refers to the level of citizen participation and the degree of power given to communities in the formation of district councils. The political dispensation is, an indirect democracy, midwived by traditional leaders and religious scholars. It is also a process that is more democratic and wider in scope and outreach than the previous political practice in which mayors and district councils were hand-picked. In other words, it is a circumstantial democracy. But given the security situation and disconnects between cities as the result of al-Shabaab, the progress made so far is “remarkable”.¹²

8. Local Government Law of Southwest state, 2017.

9. HIPS interview, 2022.

10. HIPS interview, 2022.

11. Local Government Law of Southwest state.

12. HIPS interview, 2022.

3. Methodology

Since there is not a significant literature on the formation of local government both in Southwest state and in Somalia, this study used the qualitative method to collect data. Researchers interviewed technical experts (facilitators of local government indirect election), practitioners, policymakers, advisors to the state ministry of the interior and local government, academics, and district council members, both in Baidoa and Mogadishu. The data was then transcribed, categorized, and analyzed. Researchers also consulted Southwest’s constitution and local government law.

4. Phases of slow stabilization as means to indirect election

In Southwest state, stabilization and indirect elections are intertwined. Where a degree of stabilization is established, a modicum of democracy, peace and progress is attained through the formation of local councils. As one key informant put it, both stabilization and indirect elections “are joined at the hip and their inseparability is quite understandable”¹³ in Southwest.

However, stabilization and local government formation require time, energy, resources, and leadership. According to one senior civil servant from the state ministry of interior, “there is no other way of going about the formation of local councils but to seriously invest in stabilization first.”¹⁴ Southwest has, therefore, been slow to form local councils due to the degree of stabilization required after years of al-Shabaab’s rule in almost all the districts. One reason for the slow process is that those living under al-Shabaab rule for 10 years or more need to be convinced about the importance of local government which brings with it development projects and self-rule.

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Secondly, the process of local government formation depends on the “art of persuasion”.¹⁵ Mustafe Sheikh Abdullahi, director of the Ministry of Interior of the Southwest, likened the state to a “person who had fallen from a skyscraper whose bones are broken and the whole body is aching”¹⁶ because of the prolonged conflict. Finally, consensus among major clans in each district is also needed and the process is halted if that isn’t achieved.¹⁷

13. HIPS interview, 2022.

14. HIPS interview, 2022.

15. HIPS interview, 2022.

16. HIPS interview, 2022.

17. HIPS interview, 2022.



These phases (stabilization, caretaker, and transitional administrations) could be adopted by other federal member states in south-central Somalia in forming local district councils for districts liberated from al Shabaab

In Southwest, caretaker administrations with a six-month to one-year mandate have morphed into a transitional local authority in the districts. The mayors were appointed by the state ministry of interior and local government. The aim of this approach, according to a civil servant, was to prepare the ground for the “actual process of democratization through indirect election.”¹⁸ These phases (stabilization, caretaker, and transitional administrations) could be adopted by other federal member states in south-central Somalia in forming local district councils for districts liberated from al Shabaab.

The formation of local government is a gateway to bottom-up democratization and slow political stabilization. According to one security official, the election of the local council members “gives a sense of ownership to the people in the districts.”¹⁹ This increases the credibility of the member state and the federal government. As a result, local people resist the return of al Shabaab, allowing the state and federal governments to mobilize the public in the fight against the militant group.²⁰

5. Reconciliation through indirect elections



Unlike the indirect election at the federal and state level which has been a bedrock for violent confrontation, the formation of the local government in Southwest creates “reconciliatory infrastructure”

Merilee Grindele argued that local government is a “modernizing tool of public administration.”²¹ In Southwest, the indirect election of district council members is an innovative instrument for public reconciliation. Unlike the indirect election at the federal and state level which has been a bedrock for violent confrontation, the formation of the local government in Southwest creates “reconciliatory infrastructure.”²²

This includes open debates, gathering of elders, talking about past grievances and an acknowledgement of who is a majority group in any given district. An official from the state ministry of interior and local government explained that a “simple acknowledgement of any majority group in any given district removes a great hurdle on the path to local government formation.”²³ This reassures the clans that the state is neither a threat nor unfairly snatching their seats but does not mean that the majority clan gets all it wants in terms of power-sharing.

One key informant explained that “unlike the indirect election at the federal and state level where politicians present imposters as clan leaders, we bring respected personalities among communities on board at the district level.”²⁴ The indirect election at the district level is a springboard for social cohesion. If properly handled it does not, according to one key informant, generate political tension and social polarization, which is usually an outcome in every election cycle at both the federal and state level.

18. HIPS interview, 2022.

19. HIPS interview, 2022.

20. Grindle, M. (2007). *Going Local: Decentralization, Democratization, and the Promise of Good Governance*. Princeton University Press.

21. HIPS interview, 2022.

22. HIPS interview, 2022.

23. HIPS interview, 2022.

24. HIPS interview, 2022.

Reconciliation is promoted in the process of political engagement with communities. The process is not forced on the community. Their buy-in is prioritized and the power-sharing model is agreed upon. In the words of an advisor, the election is not held until all prominent elders accept the allocation of seats for each clan. It is a bottom-up process that recognizes the will of the people in many aspects.



One of the key informants explained that the indirect elections herald a “possible creation of a democratic political culture

Elements of democratization are imbedded in the indirect election at the district level. Unlike the political tradition in which the president of the state appointed district commissioners and city mayors, the indirect election lets elders select who speaks on behalf of them. The formation of the local government promises decentralization of power and democracy, at least in Southwest. One of the key informants explained that the indirect elections herald a “possible creation of a democratic political culture.”²⁵



As one key informant said, a lone person “is someone thrown at community by external body politics,” jeopardizing both stabilization and reconciliation processes

This self-rule at the district level doesn’t mean that the “minority clans and sub-clans will be dominated.”²⁶ Elders from the majority clans make concessions of their own free will, meaning that fewer difficulties arise than if force is used and seats are unfairly allocated to a “lone person”²⁷ claiming to represent a clan or sub-clan that is not a resident in a district. The lone person refers to an individual whose clan members are neither sizeable residents in a district nor has not a following of the communities that he claims to represent in district council. This happens when a person secures the backing of powerful politicians from the state or from the federal government. Communities in the districts then feel a sense of injustice and manipulation and resist the formation of the district council. As one key informant said, a lone person “is someone thrown at community by external body politics,” jeopardizing both stabilization and reconciliation processes.²⁸

An expert in the formation of local governments explained that both stabilization and reconciliation pave the way for communities to express their views and preferences. For example, local communities in Dinsor would not engage in politics immediately after the district was liberated. To ease tensions and allay communal fear, the state’s interior ministry, put in place caretaker local administration as a mechanism for reconciliation. This instead, allowed communities to identify their choices, representatives, and spokespersons in the process. Consequently, community leaders appealed to the ministry of interior and local government to expedite the election and formation of the district council.

25. HIPS interview, 2022.

26. HIPS interview with district council member, 2022.

27. HIPS interview, 2022.

28. HIPS interview, 2022.

6. Approaches to inclusivity

The evidence overwhelming indicates that the local population resists what is perceived as an imported political agenda. This includes interference from the federal and state governments or the advocacy for a women's quota which is seen by some as a "foreign project."²⁹ and a "cultural intrusion."³⁰

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It became clear that in remote districts innovative local approaches, as well as cultural and religious knowledge, were more effective in achieving women's and minority inclusion than constitutional clauses

Bearing this opposition in mind, technical facilitators devised new approaches that sought religious and cultural justification for political inclusion of women and minorities from Islam. This included engaging with religious scholars, traditional leaders and giving Friday sermons in key mosques. It became clear that in remote districts innovative local approaches, as well as cultural and religious knowledge, were more effective in achieving women's and minority inclusion than constitutional clauses.

Article 9 (f) of the Local Government Law stipulates that "the ministry shall ensure that twenty percent (20%) of the delegates who elect the local councilors are women." Despite this, no women were selected to Hudur's district council in 2017. Wadajir, a national framework for the formation of district council, falls far short of mapping potential conflicts and clan dynamics, let alone addressing the question of inclusion in the formation of local government. In Hudur, facilitators prioritized constitutional directives and overlooked cultural and religious sensitivity.

In comparison, 10 out of 21 district council members in Dinsor are women, despite stiff opposition from elders and religious scholars. In response, the head of the technical facilitators and the director of state ministry of interior and local government, Mustaf Sheikh Abdullahi and his team, embarked on an awareness and educational campaign rooted in the Islamic and cultural justification for including women in government. Abdullahi had meetings and gave series of Friday sermons on the empowerment of women from the Islamic perspective to debunk the notions that NGOs and donor communities push "anti-Islamic values into the throat of local communities as a condition for developmental assistance."³¹ The director gave evidence from Islamic sources that Islam itself uplifts the condition of women. This approach was not only successful but was also well received in the sense that a number of sub-clans fronted a female as one of their representatives in Dinsor's district council.

29. HIPS interview, 2022.

30. HIPS interview, 2022.

31. HIPS interview, 2022.



According to one key informant, the facilitators “depicted public social amenities such as schools, hospitals and even roads as homes of which only women can manage, and it worked on the elders”

This bottom-up approach was replicated in the re-election of Hudur’s district council in 2022 when five women were elected from zero in 2017. Facilitators presented women as “less corrupt and more hard working than men”.³² According to one key informant, the facilitators “depicted public social amenities such as schools, hospitals and even roads as homes of which only women can manage, and it worked on the elders”.³³

According to Abdullahi, “practical experience shows that relying on constitutional clauses, Wadajir frameworks and local government law is, sometimes, counter-productive.”³⁴ Constitution directives and clauses do not appeal to the public because of their abstract nature. This is in line with Nadya Hajji’s argument that it is the “norms or shared understandings that successfully generate rules on rights and limitation.”³⁵ In other words, a constitution or a legal framework which does not appeal to social norms risks public rejection.

The same approach has been taken when allocating seats among clans. As the head of technical team explained, “traditional leaders and religious scholars do not understand the essence of the constitution nor the Wadajir framework, and even if they do, they don’t respect it. But they know and honor Islamic jurisprudence and that is why we used it as logical legal approach in allocating seats among clans.”³⁶

These approaches work in parallel with the Local Government Law which regulates the number of delegates in the election and categorizes districts as either an (A) or a (B). If a district is the capital city of a province/region it is designated as A and has 27 members of local council. B districts have 21 members. Article 9 (d) of the Local Government Law says that “the number of delegates that elect the local council of district (A) shall not be more than 150” and that of district (B) “shall not be more than 100.”³⁷

While these are actual delegates with voting rights in the indirect election, halls are filled on the election day by what a key informant described as “electoral spectators”. For example, over 500 people attended Hudur’s re-election, which was hailed as democratic by the standards of an indirect election. But it must be pointed out that constitutional directives, local government laws and the Wadajir framework have little bearing on the approaches of inclusivity, conflict resolution and allocation of seats. Localized methods and knowledge are more effective, at least in the arenas of power sharing and inclusivity at the district level in Southwest.

32. HIPS interview, 2022.

33. HIPS interview, 2022.

34. HIPS interview, 2022.

35. Hajji, N. (2014). Institutional formation in transitional settings. *Comparative Politics*.

36. HIPS interview, 2022.

37. Local Government Law of Southwest state, 2017.

7. Technical expertise outweighs political maneuvers

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Power brokers and representatives of state and national political figures at the district level tend to complicate the process, creating what one key informant described as “short-term political patronage”

One of the key findings of this paper is that a team of technical experts is more effective in resolving contentious issues in the formation of district council than a group of politicians. Power brokers and representatives of state and national political figures at the district level tend to complicate the process, creating what one key informant described as “short-term political patronage”.³⁸

National political figures such as the speaker of the federal parliament, members of the federal parliament from Southwest and the state president vie for political influence at the district level. This in turn erodes public trust from the process, generating what a technical expert termed as an “unnecessary wave of mistrust”.³⁹ This mistrust is rooted in the belief that political figures manipulate the process for self-gain. Unlike politicians, the technical team often creates inclusive designs to accommodate politically grieving clans or minority groups. Elders and religious scholars are more willing to listen to and respect suggestions of the technical team.

In most cases, communities resist candidates openly fronted by politicians and their nominees. For example, Abdi’aziz Hassan Mohamed (Lafta-gareen), the president, and Adan Mohamed Nur, (Adan Madobe), the speaker of the federal parliament, pushed for the re-election of Mohamed Ma’alin in Hudur and attempted to bar the candidacy of Omar Abdullahi Mohamed, the mayor of Hudur.⁴⁰ Ma’alin was not only unpopular contender, but he had been the mayor for close to twenty years. Mohamed is, on the other hand, youthful and popular with promising leadership quality.

However, the local communities threatened to take up arms if their preferred candidate was blocked from competing as the result of top-down political maneuvering and manipulation. The technical team convinced the political leadership to allow Mohamed to compete for mayor. On election day, district council members openly defied the underhand directives of state and federal political figures by electing Mohamed as the mayor. The voting was, according to a member of the technical team, transparent beyond reproach. It was, as one advisor to the state ministry of interior put it, “an hour-long display of democracy.”⁴¹

38. HIPS interview, 2022.

39. HIPS interview, 2022.

40. HIPS interview, 2022.

41. HIPS interview, 2022.



As if capitalizing on his popularity, Hudur's elected mayor initiated new approach to transparency. He published the district's sources of revenue and a comprehensive breakdown of budget expenditure in his first month in office, a first of its kind in Somalia

Any top-down attempt to reverse the result would have instigated political violence which the national and state politicians could not prevent. For the technical team, it was the transparency and landslide victory for Mohamed that forced the political heavyweights into accepting the outcome. As if capitalizing on his popularity, Hudur's elected mayor initiated new approach to transparency. He published the district's sources of revenue and a comprehensive breakdown of budget expenditure in his first month in office, a first of its kind in Somalia.⁴²

Evidence from Puntland's direct local district council election in Qardho, Eyl and Ufayn also overwhelmingly proved that transparency is one of the key preventive measures against post-election violence. Helen Thompson, an academic, argued that "democracy depends on the acceptance of the outcome by the loser."⁴³ Acceptance in this regard, relies largely on the degree of transparency in the process and vote counting. Where transparency is a victim of political manipulation, the result is violently contested.

In Southwest, the technical team re-assured competing parties that "nothing would move on, and no election would take place without the collective approval by communities."⁴⁴ Political figures paradoxically focused on creating quick and short-term patronage. They are seldom in the district to assess conflict dynamics and power matrix and parachute in unpopular candidates through powerbrokers, exacerbating communal grievances and disentangling mechanisms of power sharing by bypassing genuine traditional leaders and religious scholars.⁴⁵

As a member of district council in Bardale explained, political figures at the federal level send a "mayor to be" from Mogadishu, causing a rift between communities. For example, politicians ignored directives and proposals of the technical team about the re-election of local councils in Bardale after the first four-year mandate came to an end. Consequently, two parallel elections were held, and political grievances were aggravated. In the end, inclusivity was the casualty.

In Barawe the then, senior state politicians used state machinery to engineer the election of the district council and installed a political ally as the mayor.⁴⁶ Subsequently, the working relationship between members of the district council and the mayor has been riddled with crisis, almost disabling the operationalization of the local government. One key informant explained that "externally engineered elections and the imposition of unpopular political friends on the communities, renders the district council dysfunctional, if it does not violently collapse."⁴⁷

42. Hudur's district council webpage.

43. Thompson, H. (2022). *Disorder in Hard times*. Oxford University Press.

44. HIPS interview, 2022.

45. HIPS interview, 2022.

46. HIPS interview, 2022.

47. HIPS interview, 2022.

Elbarde best illustrates the distinct approaches taken by the technical team and politicians in resolving electoral hurdles. In July 2019, a delegation of politicians arrived in the district with a mission of forming a local council through indirect election. The politicians bypassed and ignored the presence of the most prominent traditional leader in the district which violated both the communal norms and Southwest's local government law that puts traditional leaders at the center in the process of indirect election. The traditional elder rebelled, mobilizing communities against the process and the political hawkers from the federal and state governments. No progress was made, and the politicians left after spending tens of thousands of dollars on bribery and the creation of short-term networks and political patronage. The community was left more polarized than ever, with grievances which spilled over to the bordering Somali region (Ogaden).⁴⁸

With Elbarde isolated from Southwest, a technical team went back in November 2022 to prepare the ground for the formation of the district council. The community refused to engage because of the previous experience and the perception that the technical team came to implement the directives of federal and state politicians. However, facilitators allayed communal fears by inviting prominent religious scholars to a reconciliation session. The technical team made clear that they had not come to impose a pre-selected or nominated individual on the community but to listen to their concerns. These organic interventions and approaches put the public in Elbarde at ease, and the ground was laid for the election.

The head of the technical team, Abdullahi, gave a Friday sermon in the district's central mosque, advocating for the role of religious leaders in building a "better society and governance".⁴⁹ These Friday sermons have become one of the most effective communication channels, a last resort to resolving contentious issues, and a way to address public grievances from an Islamic point of view. It has also proven to be a platform for public outreach and political inclusivity in the indirect electoral process. One key informant said that the technical experts "speak to the hearts of the community,"⁵⁰ putting the local context first.

Elders and local religious authorities form the heart of the community rather than political figures thrown at them from Baidoa or Mogadishu. The Mosques are the most visible political avenues in the districts, equivalent to town hall meetings in Western democracies. Recognizing the central role of the Mosque and how it can be used distinguished the technical team from politicians when they devised innovative local approaches in the Southwest.

48. HIPS interview, 2022.
49. HIPS interview, 2022.
50. HIPS interview, 2022.

It remains difficult to find the delicate balance between the domination that the national and state leaders seek and safeguarding the indirect elections and the ongoing democratization process from political maneuvering and manipulation. One way to achieve this balance is to empower the technical experts to ensure sensitivity, transparency and inclusive approach in resolving contentious issues and addressing communal grievances.

8. Post-election hurdles

Although inaccessibility by road and insecurity due to al Shabaab are formidable challenges, the main post-election hurdle lies in the operationalization of the districts after the election. In the words of a district council member, an “election should be a gateway to a meaningful representation in terms of addressing public needs”.⁵¹ While the indirect election creates a sense of political representation, a local council without a budget is, according to a key informant, “an empty political pawl”.⁵² For this key informant, political authority at the local government level must come with an allocation of budget. Another district council member explained the expectation that the local government should “operate and respond to public demand without financial support is in itself a political misnomer”.⁵³ Extremely limited financial resources are, therefore, a major obstacle to the formation and sustainability of a functioning local government, not only in Southwest but across Somalia.

Politicians at the federal and state level are quick to sponsor the candidacy of mayors for political manipulation in the districts but seem uninterested in the allocation of budget for the operationalization of the local government. This, according to a council member in Bardale, defeats the purpose of local government in terms of bringing services closer to the people and political representation at the district level.⁵⁴



District council members do not receive a regular salary or a monthly allowance. This limits the decision-making authority of local government, an entity that Merilee Grindle argued is “palliative to overcentralized power” in a federal arrangement

District council members do not receive a regular salary or a monthly allowance. This limits the decision-making authority of local government, an entity that Merilee Grindle argued is “palliative to overcentralized power”⁵⁵ in a federal arrangement. According to a technical expert, the disinterest at federal and state level in allocating budget for local government has two more implications. First, the public in districts is likely to become disenchanted, interpreting the indirect elections as a political show which is not substantially different from the ineffective governance at the federal and state level. The total absence of service delivery also impedes the generation of domestic revenue, creating no incentives for public participation in the electoral process.

51. HIPS interview, 2022.

52. HIPS interview, 2022.

53. HIPS interview, 2022.

54. HIPS interview, 2022.

55. Grindle, M. (2007). *Going Local: Decentralization, Democratization, and the Promise of Good Governance*. Princeton University Press.

Despite these obstacles, people prefer indirectly elected mayors and district councils to political appointees. The belief that the local government is a bridge that connects communities to government and is an alternative to the federal and state entities is prevalent in the districts.

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Training councilors on budget management, taxation and their overall responsibilities should be prioritized before the operationalization of local government

One local governance expert suggested “mapping potential avenues for domestic revenue generation”⁵⁶ before the formation of the district council. He proposed that a team of local government practitioners should conduct a study on the district’s main economic lifelines and provide an estimate of the revenue that the district could generate per month. This could serve as a guide for the district council. Training councilors on budget management, taxation and their overall responsibilities should be prioritized before the operationalization of local government.

Nevertheless, the momentum of democratization through the indirect election of the local government in Southwest state seems to be more politically appealing to the public than the previous system of top-down appointments. According to a senior advisor in the state ministry of interior and local government, it must be “maintained with its imperfections and the process must move on”.⁵⁷ The indirect election in the districts is, “the only possible means to politically engage with the citizens”.⁵⁸

9. Conclusion

Five out of Southwest’s 18 districts now have indirectly elected local governments. Top-down political appointment has been replaced by indirectly elected mayors and councilors in Hudur, Bardale, Wajid, Barawe and Dinsor. This is a complex and slow process which involves liberating a district from al Shabaab, followed by a stabilization period in which a caretaker administration is put in place. This caretaker administration often morphs into a transitional local government which works to prepare the ground for a democratic but indirect election. This process puts traditional clan elders at the center of political and societal negotiations, creating a sense of a bottom-up democratization.

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Unlike the indirect election at the state and national level, the formation of district councils in Southwest has provided a reconciliatory infrastructure

Reconciliation is embedded in this process. Unlike the indirect election at the state and national level, the formation of district councils in Southwest has provided a reconciliatory infrastructure. This has included public debate on power sharing among various communities in the same districts and the airing of individual and group grievances. In most cases, this happens only when the mediation process is left for the technical team to handle.

56. HIPS interview, 2022.

57. HIPS interview, 2022.

58. HIPS interview, 2022.

Southwest's indirect elections have been unique because of the way in which facilitators approached inclusivity. The local population resists what they perceived as imported foreign agendas such as female quotas. Addressing these challenges, facilitators relied on cultural and Islamic justifications for the inclusion of women and minority groups in district councils. Cultural knowledge and in-depth understanding of the local context are more effective than constitutional directives and local government laws in achieving inclusivity in the electoral process.



In Dinsor, the inclusion of women on the council is the highest anywhere in Somalia. This was achieved by theologically justifying women's empowerment and dignity from an Islamic perspective

In practical terms, mosques, Friday sermons and Islamic jurisprudence serve as popular and respected avenues for inclusion. Communities are likely to accept what is justified using Islamic sources and traditions. To their credit, the technical team have been utilizing these local avenues as a political tool to raise awareness, resolve complex issues like power sharing and navigate tides of cultural sensitivity. For example, the head of the technical team put Islamic jurisprudence to use to settle a contentious aspect of power sharing in Hudur. In Dinsor, the inclusion of women on the council is the highest anywhere in Somalia. This was achieved by theologically justifying women's empowerment and dignity from an Islamic perspective.

Technical expertise outweighs political manipulations in the formation of district councils. Politicians instigate social and political polarization while the technical team adopts organic interventions in putting communities at ease. But the absence of budgetary allocation, domestic revenue generation and service delivery threaten the sustainability of local government as the third layer of authority in the federal arrangement. Nevertheless, the indirect election and district council formations are seen in Southwest as an enhancement of democracy, an alternative to top-down appointments and the process should be continued.

10. Recommendations

1. Establishing district councils through indirect elections creates a platform for citizen participation in government. Southwest should continue building on the gains made by establishing local government through indirect and democratic elections in all the districts under its full control.
2. Increasing transparency in the indirect election process is a means to social and political reconciliation. Politicians from the federal and state governments should refrain from imposing their own candidates on communities.

3. The federal and state governments should adopt the use of innovative and context-appropriate approaches to political inclusion. The use of Mosques, Islamic jurisprudence and Friday sermons has proven to be useful in advancing the democratization process and the inclusion of women and minorities in local government.
4. Southwest state should give a degree of independence to technical experts/facilitators in conducting elections. Evidence reveals that technical experts are better suited for resolving complex issues such power sharing and political grievances than politicians.
5. Facilitators should conduct a study on each district's economic lifelines before the formation of the district council. This will help the district to generate domestic revenue to run its affairs.
6. The Federal government should pressure states to allocate a budget, however meagre, it might be to the local government to operationalize the authority of the district council.
7. District councils and city mayors should publish budget expenditure for public scrutiny. The case of Hudur can serve as an example.

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