



Commentary

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**Unpacking the NCC  
Decision: Political  
Ramifications for  
Somalia's Future**

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The October 30, 2024, decision by Somalia's National Consultative Council (NCC) has ignited intense debate among the country's political actors, touching on the sensitive issue of upcoming federal and state elections. At the center of this debate is President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's insistence that a one-person, one-vote (OPOV) electoral model is feasible for the upcoming elections. This principle resonates with the desires of the overwhelming majority of the Somali people, who are eager to move beyond the indirect election systems that have marred recent electoral cycles. These indirect elections, characterized by manipulation and undue influence from state and federal leaders, have led to political instability and widespread disillusionment. Many Somalis vividly remember the political turmoil of 2016/2017 and 2021/2022, where elections were marked by widespread fraud, interference, and corruption. For a nation whose political instability dates back to the military coup that followed the deeply corrupt elections of 1969, the push for OPOV represents a long-overdue opportunity for democratic renewal.

The concept of OPOV, coupled with party-based politics that emphasizes competition of ideas, offers the Somali people a chance to directly elect their leaders and hold them accountable. In theory, this shift toward democratic principles should be welcomed by all political actors. However, despite its democratic appeal, many citizens and political actors remain skeptical of President Hassan Sheikh's intentions and his ability to fulfill the promise of OPOV for the following reasons:

**Firstly**, President Hassan Sheikh, along with NCC members (minus Puntland), made a similar promise in 2023, vowing to implement OPOV for local and state elections in 2024 but failed to meet this commitment. This unfulfilled pledge has left many questioning the president's ability to deliver on his new promises.

**Secondly**, the president has entered into this agreement with the leaders of federal member state (FMS) whose terms have expired over a year ago. These leaders stand to benefit from repeated delays in the electoral process, as the extensions allow them to retain power without accountability or legal mandate. For many Somalis, another year-long extension of these FMS leaders' mandates is a bitter pill to swallow, raising doubts about whether they can be partners for a genuine electoral reform.

**Thirdly**, President Hassan Sheikh's commitment to OPOV would have been far more credible if he had managed to organize a universal suffrage local election in Benadir, the only region fully under federal government control. Despite repeated assurances, the nearly three million residents of Benadir remain under an appointed local administration, denied their right to elect their leaders. This broken promise casts further doubt on the president's broader pledge for national OPOV, suggesting a gap between rhetoric and action.

**Fourthly**, the timing of this renewed push for OPOV—well past the president’s midterm—has only intensified skepticism among political stakeholders. Many worry that it may be a strategic maneuver to extend his four-year term, much like his predecessor attempted in 2021. That attempt led to violent confrontations in Mogadishu, underscoring the high stakes involved in badly managed elections.

**Fifthly**, the most significant obstacle to the realization of OPOV lies in the absence of two crucial federal states, Puntland and Jubbaland, along with the newly recognized regional administration of SSC Khatumo. In a highly polarized society, inclusivity is essential, and any credible electoral process requires the participation of these regions and the political opposition. Without a consensus among key stakeholders, including the opposition, the legitimacy of OPOV remains precarious.

Given these challenges, the viability of OPOV in the current political climate is uncertain. However, President Hassan Sheikh’s recent announcement extending an olive branch to the dissenting federal member states is a positive step. This gesture offers a glimmer of hope that political reconciliation and consensus on the upcoming election may still be possible. The leaders of Puntland and Jubbaland, in turn, should consider the president’s overture and rejoin the NCC framework in the interest of national unity. Similarly, President Hassan Sheikh must demonstrate flexibility and statesmanship, embracing compromise and accommodating the demands of dissenting states and opposition groups. This collaborative spirit is precisely the approach that opposition leader Hassan Sheikh himself had successfully advocated during the tumultuous years of 2021 and 2022.

**To move forward**, the following recommendations offer a pathway toward a stable, inclusive, and credible electoral process:

- 1. Develop a Consensus-Driven Electoral Model:** Establish an electoral framework that brings together the FGS, federal member states, opposition, and civil society. Such a model would ensure a durable foundation for the 2026 elections and foster national unity. Quick fixes or shortcuts will only deepen divisions and undermine credibility.
- 2. Implement Robust Electoral Standards:** Integrity in the electoral process is essential. Regardless of whether the election is direct or indirect, a transparent and fair process must reject past corrupt practices and guarantee accountability. Various institutions, including the Heritage Institute, have outlined viable, implementable frameworks that can support a transparent and credible election process, which the FGS would do well to adopt.

- 3. Prioritize National Unity Over Short-Term Political Gains:** Somali leaders must place the nation's long-term stability above immediate personal ambitions. No FGS leader can impose their will on the nation unilaterally; genuine leadership in Somalia requires compromise, negotiation, and a commitment to shared governance.

**Ultimately,** Somalia's federal and state leaders must prioritize the quality and integrity of the electoral process over its specific modality. Whether achieved through direct or indirect elections, a process free from manipulation by state and federal actors is the only way to restore public trust in Somali democracy and pave the way for a stable political future. Incremental gains towards nationwide OPOV forms a key part of Somalia's electoral journey. A genuine, inclusive approach to electoral reform is Somalia's best hope for a peaceful and prosperous future, and all political actors bear the responsibility to make that vision a reality.

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