



Commentary

December  
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**18 Months**  
to Fix Somalia's Broken  
Political Trajectory

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## **Bold Action Needed to Overcome Divisions and Restore Trust in the System**

### **Introduction: A Nation at a Crossroads**

With just 18 months remaining before the parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for May 2026, Somalia is at a critical juncture. The political framework established through the Arta Agreement of 2000 and further consolidated by the Mbagathi Conference in 2004 has been instrumental in helping Somalia to emerge from a decade of civil war and statelessness. These agreements laid the foundation for the Third Republic, emphasizing inclusivity, federalism, and shared governance. However, escalating divisions between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Federal Member States (FMS), coupled with unilateral governance decisions and a growing erosion of public trust, now threaten to dismantle these hard-won gains.

### **Shattered Trust: The Cost of Corruption**

Corruption in Somalia, entrenched within both the FGS and FMS, severely undermines governance. Consistently ranked at the bottom of Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Somalia exemplifies governance rife with malpractice, from mismanagement of public funds and properties to patronage politics. These practices erode institutional credibility, hinder service delivery, and deepen public cynicism about state-led reforms.

Somalia's decentralized governance, characterized by overlapping authorities between the FGS and FMS, exacerbates corruption through weak accountability mechanisms and fragmented enforcement. The country's poor performance on government effectiveness and corruption control in the Worldwide Governance Indicators underscores this institutional fragility.

Without urgent reforms, Somalia risks further political instability. Rampant favoritism, impunity, and weak oversight have eroded public trust, jeopardizing the fragile social contract. International donors, critical to Somalia's recovery, are increasingly frustrated by the lack of progress in anti-corruption efforts, threatening essential foreign aid and compounding vulnerabilities.

### **Deepening Political Crisis**

The political crisis in Somalia has intensified due to unilateral actions by the FGS. In early 2024, the FGS amended four of the 15 chapters of the provisional constitution without adequate consultation. These amendments triggered Puntland, Somalia's oldest federal member state, to suspend its working relationship with the FGS. While the substance of the changes may not be inherently controversial, the exclusionary process undermined trust in the constitution, which remains the central framework holding Somalia's federal system together.

This unilateral approach highlights the hollowing out of Somalia's federal parliament. Designed to act as an oversight body, parliamentarians have alleged repeated violations of legislative procedures, with key decisions being passed without transparent consultations. Although these allegations remain unverified, the resulting lack of confidence in parliamentary processes undermines public trust and the inclusivity central to the foundations of the Third Republic.

This erosion of trust in Somalia's governing institutions poses an existential threat to the federal system, which was envisioned as a mechanism to ensure cooperation and reconciliation among its diverse political entities.

### **FGS-Jubbaland Conflict**

The armed confrontation between Jubbaland's security forces and FGS troops in Raskamboni serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of Somalia's political system. Instead of uniting forces against their common enemy, al-Shabaab, the FGS and Jubbaland turned their military might against one another. Al-Shabaab, a long-standing security threat, is likely to capitalize on the chaos, highlighting the dangers of political divisions within Somalia's leadership.

The conflict underscores Somalia's deeply entrenched political decay, where tactical power struggles overshadow national priorities. While the FGS's push for one-person, one-vote elections aligns with the aspirations of most Somali citizens, the credibility of this initiative has been undermined by a lack of transparency in how electoral laws and management bodies were established. Jubbaland's decision to organize its own elections in November 2024 is similarly fraught with irregularities, further diminishing public confidence in governance at all levels.

The fallout from the Jubbaland crisis has left Somali citizens demoralized and international partners increasingly frustrated. Donors, who fund approximately 70% of Somalia's federal budget, are growing weary of the persistent political squabbles, lack of progress, and misuse of resources. Without urgent action, Somalia risks losing critical international support for its recovery efforts.

### **Stalled War Against Al-Shabaab**

In May 2022 at the start of his second, non-consecutive term, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud launched a major military campaign against al-Shabaab, garnering widespread public and political support. However, a catastrophic counterattack in Osweyne in August 2023 marked a turning point. Al-Shabaab inflicted severe losses on the Somali National Army (SNA), capturing significant weaponry and stalling the momentum of the campaign.

Since then, the war effort has lost focus, and the FGS appears distracted by political priorities. Meanwhile, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) has continued its drawdown, leaving Somalia's security forces under-resourced. Although the FGS initially advocated for the complete withdrawal of peacekeeping forces by the end of 2024, it has since adopted a more pragmatic approach, acknowledging the necessity of continued support from the African continent.

The stalled campaign has not only emboldened Al-Shabaab but also highlighted the urgent need for coordinated military and political strategies to regain momentum in the fight against terrorism.

### **A Fleeting Window to Change Course**

With only 18 months remaining in its mandate, the FGS leadership has a limited window to initiate a bold course correction on both political and security fronts. Immediate action is essential to restore public confidence and international trust.

### **Recommendations**

#### **For Building Political Consensus and International Confidence**

- A comprehensive national dialogue involving FGS leaders, former presidents, prime ministers, deputy prime ministers, speakers of parliament, and prominent civil society representatives should be convened.
- The war against al-Shabaab should be relaunched through unified national and state efforts.
- Procedures for one-person, one-vote elections, revising electoral laws, electoral commission, and timelines need to be agreed on.
- A Government of National Unity should be formed to oversee inclusive political and security reforms.
- Demonstrating unity and progress in resolving political disputes while engaging transparently with donors would secure continued support and restore international confidence.

#### **For Revitalizing Security**

- National resources should be recommitted to the military campaign against al-Shabaab, addressing operational weaknesses and ensuring accountability.
- Sustainable funding must be secured for the African Union Somalia Support Mission (AUSSOM) to maintain international support for Somalia's security.

### **For Fighting Corruption, Strengthening Governance, Public Trust**

- Systemic corruption at all levels of government should be addressed by urging politicians to denounce the misappropriation of public funds and abuse of power while emphasizing that investigations will be conducted, and cases with evidence of corruption will be prosecuted.
- Robust anti-corruption mechanisms need to be established including fast-tracking the formation of the independent Anti-Corruption Commission, finalizing its strategy, and implementing transparent systems for resource allocation and monitoring.
- Governance reforms to enhance transparency such as regular public reporting on government activities and finances must be enacted and accountability enforced through engaging civil society and independent oversight bodies to monitor FGS and FMS coordination.

### **Conclusion: A Path Forward**

Somalia's current trajectory risks further fragmentation and instability. However, by embracing unity, transparency, and collaboration, the FGS can restore trust and steer the country toward a more stable and prosperous future. With decisive action and renewed focus, Somalia can overcome its challenges and ensure that the 2026 elections mark a turning point for its democratic governance and state-building efforts. Staying on the current course will have a catastrophic impact on the state-building and peacebuilding efforts.

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