

**With Time Running
Out, Government -
Opposition Talks Must
Deliver a Consensus
Electoral Model**

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Introduction

To say Somalia stands at a critical political juncture is an understatement. Federal mandates are set to expire in April and May 2026. Relations between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and key Federal Member States (FMS) remain strained following three years of non-cooperation and, at times, violent confrontation. The last attempt to discuss contentious and critical issues in a broad-based format was in June 2025, and it failed to even materialize. Existing al-Shabaab security challenges remain acute.

The international atmosphere surrounding Somalia's peace, state-building, and institutional development is complex. Powerful forces are attempting to dismember Somalia. The current US President Donald Trump has been overtly hostile in tone while traditional partners in Europe are increasingly exhausted by the never-ending intra-Somali political squabbles, alongside their own security and geopolitical pressures.

Talks between FGS leaders and an opposition alliance — consisting of Mogadishu-based presidential candidates, opposition MPs, and the leaders of Puntland and Jubaland — are scheduled to begin in Mogadishu in the coming days. Citizens and donors expect the gathering to reset the fractured federal compact and avert further constitutional and security deterioration.

To its credit, the FGS accepted the opposition's call for dialogue and issued an invitation within the stipulated timeframe, and the Presidents of Puntland and Jubaland, for their part, traveled to the capital to engage in negotiations despite their reservations. Nevertheless, tensions have already surfaced ahead of the talks, as security deployments, airport restrictions, and mutual accusations deepen mistrust. Serious differences remain, and as of this writing, the talks have yet to begin, largely due to disagreements over procedural issues such as the venue. The government prefers hosting the talks at the Office of the President, while the opposition demands neutral ground, such as the AU-secured airport zone (Halane).

Thus, whether the planned negotiations become a genuine turning point — or another symbolic but futile exercise — will depend on structure and intent. Somalia does not suffer from a shortage of meetings, rather it suffers from a deficit of consensus — and enforceable, implementable consensus at that.

Divergent Political Calculus

Although all parties are in Mogadishu and have publicly declared their willingness to negotiate, the FGS and the opposition remain far apart. Disputes center on competing interpretations of federal mandates, the legal status and implications of recent unilateral constitutional amendments, and the timeline for one-person, one-vote elections. Preparations for state-level polls in several FMS are reportedly underway, with elections anticipated in the coming months, alongside discussions of a limited mandate rollover. These moves are viewed by the opposition as unilateral and indicative of insufficient consensus. Concerns have also been amplified by signs of growing international frustration over stalled progress on security and accountability.

Clearly, the two sides appear to be operating from fundamentally different baseline assumptions. FGS leaders seem both unfazed and in no hurry to compromise, while the opposition views the FGS as running out of time and lacking leverage. On the other hand, discussions among international diplomats, civil society actors, and broader societal stakeholders indicate that unless the federal government shifts from a posture of managed consultation to one of shared ownership in negotiating the next mandate, the stalemate may deepen — particularly as barely two and a half months remain before institutional mandates expire.

The core issue is straightforward: the mandates of FGS institutions will expire in April and May 2026. The next mandate must be negotiated, agreed upon, and collectively implemented. FMS — particularly Puntland and Jubaland — are indispensable to any national electoral process. Without their participation, elections risk losing both national inclusivity and international legitimacy.

Meanwhile, now as in the past, Somalia's international partners — particularly the UN and Western democracies — have shown little appetite to back processes that lack broad based legitimacy. Likewise, ignoring the position of partners who provide nearly three-quarters of national budget and underwrite the AU peace mission sustaining pressure on al-Shabaab reflects a level of strategic miscalculation with potentially serious consequences.

The Genesis of the Crisis

It was hoped that the June 2025 consultation would restore consensus-based politics. Instead, it exposed how far the federal compact had unraveled. Puntland and Jubaland boycotted the gathering. Prominent opposition leaders in the capital declined to participate. What remained was widely perceived as a discussion convened primarily to legitimize predetermined constitutional amendments and an electoral model lacking broad consensus.

The launch of the Justice and Solidarity Party (JSP) in May 2025 — whose members included NCC participants other than Puntland and Jubaland — further blurred the line between a bipartisan FGS–FMS coordinating mechanism such as the NCC and a partisan structure such as the JSP, of which the President is said to be the candidate. The merger and the term extensions given by the President to three allied FMS leaders fueled concerns that national dialogue was being instrumentalized for evident political ends.

The preparation of the current talks shows signs of procedural learning. A joint technical team — comprising the FGS and opposition representatives — co-designed elements of the agenda and negotiated logistics. As such, security personnel from Puntland and Jubaland were eventually allowed entry. However, given the ticking clock toward April, procedural improvements alone will not suffice. The FGS and opposition must now engage substantively as mounting security and external threats require prioritization of internal cohesion and stability.

Fragmentation as Strategic Risk

The consequences of political fragmentation are neither academic nor abstract. In the weeks following the failed June meeting, pressures mounted across multiple fronts — security, federal cohesion, and geopolitics. Simultaneously, federal fragmentation deepened. In July, the FGS declared Northeastern State as a new member state. This triggered a flurry of political activity and military mobilization by Puntland and Somaliland, culminating in the Nairobi Accord of 5 October 2025 — an unprecedented alignment between historically rival administrations.

Geopolitical tensions escalated further following Israel’s controversial recognition of Somaliland on 26 December 2025, prompting demonstrations and the Federal Government’s termination of certain security agreements with the UAE in January 2026.

Against such entanglement and a volatile regional backdrop — and amid repeated questioning by Donald Trump of whether Somalia even has a functioning government — it is obvious to all that Somalia face serious strategic perils. Likewise, domestic cohesion is at a historic low. And in an environment such as this, compromise and collaboration are not rhetorical luxuries but critical for survival.

Constitutional Ambiguity and Donor Fatigue

At the heart of Somalia’s recurring political squabbling lies an unfinished Provisional Constitution. Core questions such as the division of powers, fiscal federalism, resource allocation, and electoral design remain unresolved. This ambiguity has enabled unilateral state-building initiatives and competitive federalism.

International fatigue with never-ending intra-Somali political squabbling has become increasingly evident. The April 2025 Kampala meeting on AUSSOM financing was a case in point. The meeting failed to secure sufficient resources for the AU peace support mission. Financial sustainability challenges and burden-sharing concerns among member states were referenced, together with the need for Somalia to expedite political reconciliation and institutional reforms to justify continued support.

Both the FGS and the opposition know that Somalia’s national budget remains approximately 68% donor funded. Partners have signaled that legitimacy — not merely security performance — will determine sustained assistance. Suggestions during the Kampala meeting that AU contingents might assume expanded supervisory roles over Somali political processes reflect growing impatience. In an increasingly transactional global order — where major powers prioritize their own strategic interests — Somalia cannot assume automatic diplomatic insulation from internal dysfunction.

Conditions for a Credible Negotiation

For the expected talks to succeed, structured inclusion, shared ownership and focus on the fundamentals are essential. Participation must extend beyond elite coalitions. It is evident that former allies are now adversaries. In addition to the opposition, credible civic and intellectual actors must also be brought on board. Elite bargains alone have proven insufficient and have brought Somalia to the current eleventh-hour scramble. Domestic squabbling, international threats, and acute security risks have put the nation on the brink.

Time is not on the federal government's side and the time for consensus and compromise is now. The joint preparatory committee should benefit from advisory input from civil society and transparent engagement with key international observers. History proves that transparency reduces suspicion and increases buy-in which is in everyone's interest.

Among all the core and contentious issues, the most time-sensitive is the electoral model. Disputed constitutional questions and fiscal federalism — while critical — can be deferred to the next government. What cannot be deferred is agreement on the next mandate, as this is the priority for everyone. What cannot wait must be addressed and in earnest.

The talks therefore must produce a tangible, legally binding agreement on an electoral model, a strict timeline for transition, and mechanisms to prevent a constitutional vacuum after May 2026. Without such outcomes, Somalia risks yet another cycle of polarization and externally mediated settlement. Simply put, the stakes are too high for brinkmanship. Now is the time for statesmanship.

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