



# *Gender Assessment of the 2021 Electoral Process in Puntland*



Puntland  
Development &  
Research Center



FBA

## Gender Assessment of the 2021 Electoral Process in Puntland

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Produced in collaboration with the Puntland Development  
and Research Centre (PDRC) and written by Gabrielle  
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# Executive Summary

**ON OCTOBER 25, 2021**, Puntland became the first federal member state in Somalia to hold democratic elections to district councils. “One person one vote” (OPOV) elections were conducted in three “early districts” of Eyl, Ufeyn and Qardho. In addition to their historic significance, these elections offer an important opportunity to learn lessons, not least when it comes to the promotion of gender equality and the political participation of women.

This first experience in expanded suffrage was a new opportunity for many previously excluded citizens to participate in the political process as voters, candidates, civic educators and election workers. Chief among these is the participation of women, who had been deeply disadvantaged under the clan-based system. It was also a barometer to understand the dynamics of women’s participation, representation and influence in Somalia’s transition to universal suffrage. Understanding gender equality and participation of marginalized groups in Puntland’s municipal elections will help stakeholders reduce barriers to more equal participation as the rest of the country moves towards OPOV.

The purpose of this analysis was to document challenges and enabling factors for the promotion of gender equality as part of democratization during the elections in the early districts. The lessons learned from the present assessment are valuable for upcoming electoral processes, not only in Puntland but also in other member states, to which Puntland’s efforts towards democratization can provide key insights.

This analysis draws on an extensive literature review, 21 interviews, four focus group discussions with 28 participants, and sample poll observation on Election Day. Key findings are summarized as follows:

## **Normative and Legal Context**

The 2021 municipal elections were a significant step forward for women’s representation as they brought women’s representation to nearly 30% in three early districts compared to 15% prior to the elections. One of the main reasons behind this increase was the strengthened quota guidelines (the “one in three model”) developed by the Transitional Puntland Electoral

Commission (TPEC). These guidelines contributed to a more diverse and gender balanced pool of candidates in some political associations. However, there is still a lack of binding measures in Puntland’s legal framework when it comes to gender quotas, which leaves the door open to disregard gender equality in coming elections.

Despite the introduction of OPOV elections, the clan system imposes structural barriers to women’s equal participation in decision-making. Misinterpreted religious beliefs and traditional culturally assigned gender roles and norms also disadvantage women’s status.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Adopt the “one in three model” to Puntland electoral laws.
- Ensure that political associations understand and adhere to the established quota and reject non-compliant lists.

### **Electoral Management**

In preparations for the 2021 elections, TPEC emphasized gender equality and electoral participation of marginalized groups in its internal structures and civil service functions. To fulfill its mission to create a gender responsive and inclusive organization that promotes engagement among diverse groups of men and women in the electoral processes, TPEC instituted

various initiatives. These included targets for women’s participation at leadership and staff levels, training, a dedicated budget for inclusion initiatives and a dedicated gender specialist position. However, several parts of the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Guidelines remain to be implemented, including a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination and harassment, the creation of a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Coordination Committee, and a systematic approach to gender mainstreaming in external processes.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continue to follow up and monitor progress towards goals set during the 2021 elections in terms of gender equality, especially in internal processes, opportunities and recruitment practices.
- Collect sex-disaggregated data for all external activities, including voter turnout, and use data to inform operational planning.

### **Political Associations and Parties**

The introduction of political associations has improved women’s access to politics compared to the previous clan-based system. In the three early elections, 29% of the candidates were women (147 of 499 candidates in total). These women represented eight different political associations and ran for 87 seats. In the political associations in Puntland,

women hold between 22% to 30% of the positions, but none is chaired by a woman. On the whole, women's participation within the associations lags, due to lack of financial support, cultural norms, incumbency advantages for men, the persistent claim that the associations cannot find enough women candidates, and a lack of legally binding quota provisions.

In this context, TPEC's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Guidelines strongly contributed to associations nominating nearly one third women candidates for their closed lists.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Review internal procedures and policies, founding documents and membership rules from a gender perspective to promote equitable access and opportunity within the associations at all levels (members, leaders, candidates).
- Respect and implement to the full letter and spirit of the law all measures relating to promoting women's representation and positioning on the candidate lists.
- Maximize the associations' role in promoting awareness, capacity building and financial support to all members and candidates, especially women and traditionally underrepresented groups of women and men.

- Ensure that women candidates receive commensurate financial support and public exposure/platforms.
- Encourage associations to earmark specific positions where women would top candidate lists, such as mayoral races.

#### **Voter Registration and Polling Day**

In partnership with civil society, TPEC conducted extension outreach and awareness to support registration among women. Women constituted just over half of the 48,535 registered voters. However, the under-registration of nomadic pastoralists, who are mostly men, may have skewed registration data. In the polling stations, women accounted for 31% of the staff, but only 5% of the polling stations had women as chairpersons. Based on observations, it appears that women turned out to vote in high numbers, but there is no sex-disaggregated data of voter turnout, which means that these observations cannot be verified.

Interviews indicate confusion about the closed-list electoral system and suggest the existence of bias and family voting pressure from clans. Many voters, especially women, who are over-represented among those who cannot read and write, needed assistance when casting their vote. This compromised the secrecy of the vote. Additionally, heat and long

waits constituted health hazards for some voters, including the elderly and parents with small children. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) from other federal member states were able to register to vote for the 2021 elections, provided they were living in Puntland or lived in the State for at least 10 years and had the proper documentation. The most significant issue relating to IDP participation was the presence of vote buying, specifically, of political associations offering IDPs food or money in exchange for their voter cards.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ongoing enhanced voter education, including on the use of symbols, ballot papers and the closed lists, and targeted education for under-represented groups of women and men.
- Use of education strategies that are adapted to populations with high illiteracy rates.
- Increased presence of female polling workers by ensuring parity in polling station leadership roles.
- Review polling day for accessibility issues including average distance travelled, security measures provided, accessibility for special needs (including parents of young children and caregivers), crowding and crowd control
- Consider providing measures to mitigate uncomfortable environmental

factors, such as shades, health facilities and water

- Consider increasing mobile registration and polling units, especially for nomadic populations

#### Economic and Social Obstacles

The report notes that limited funding impacts women's ability to campaign, secure political alliances, connect with political actors or community leaders, and conduct public outreach. Male candidates were noted to have stronger support networks, access to contributions and loans from clans and businesses, and generally to be more financially prepared to compete than women.

Poor journalistic standards, sensationalism and harmful gender stereotypes result in a challenging or hostile media environment for many women candidates. At the same time, media offers an opportunity for women candidates to enhance their public profiles and women candidates would benefit from more media training.

In the 2021 elections, a vibrant civil society contributed to enhancing women's participation as voters and as candidates through education, training and other support. Nevertheless, there is a need for increased support to women candidates to overcome economic and social obstacles.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Offer opportunities for women’s leadership training including coaching, political finance and fundraising.
- Invest in media training programs and platforms for women candidates to build accessibility, confidence and public speaking skills.
- Identify innovative solutions to fill the gap on women’s political funding, including potentially funding pools, training and tools to help women build their fundraising skills and networks.
- Engage the private sector to advance and promote women in politics.

## **Violence Against Women in Elections/Politics**

The problem of violence against women in elections/politics (VAWE/P) is global and many interviewees for the report had personally experienced or knew a woman in Puntland who had experienced VAWE/P or violence related to a public or professional role. Forms of violence included acts of intimidation, physical assaults, exploitation, threats, humiliation, harassment, social media attacks, and killings. Women candidates and public leaders appeared to face the highest risk, followed by women journalists. The notion that harassment and abuse of women candidates is a “normal” part of politics undermines efforts to recognize and address the problem.

In the 2021 elections, important measures were taken to create a secure electoral environment through gender sensitive electoral security planning, for example through the presence of a Women’s Situation Room.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Set and meet internal targets for women’s recruitment to all levels of the security apparatus including officers and electoral security commission.
- Map deployment distribution with sex-disaggregated data and strive to provide mixed-sex security teams to polling stations, also those that are placed in higher risk areas.
- Enhance training for security providers especially on crowd management, sexual harassment and other topics deemed relevant for gender-sensitive security training.
- Examine prevalence of VAWP online and offline and develop targeted strategic plans for preventing and responding to it.
- Increase use of Women’s Situation Rooms and ensure widespread public awareness of their functions, services and how to access them.



## List of Abbreviations

<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>EARF</b>	East Africa Research Fund
<b>EMB</b>	Electoral Management Body
<b>FBA</b>	Folke Bernadotte Academy
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation
<b>GSESP</b>	Gender sensitive electoral security planning
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>MAP</b>	Media Association Puntland
<b>MOWDAFA</b>	Ministry of Women Development and Family Affairs
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>OPOV</b>	One Person, One Vote
<b>PDRC</b>	Puntland Development and Research Center
<b>SIDRA</b>	Somali Institute for Development Research and Analysis
<b>TPEC</b>	Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission
<b>VAWE/P</b>	Violence against women in elections/politics

# Methodology

**THE GENDER ASSESSMENT** of the Puntland elections was commissioned by the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) and conducted by a lead expert on women's electoral participation together with the Puntland Development and Research Centre (PDRC), based in Puntland. The research was conducted through an in-depth initial desk review, 21 interviews and 4 focus group discussions with 28 participants in four cities and towns in Puntland (Eyl, Garowe, Qardho, Ufeyn) led by the PDRC. Selective, sample polling observation was also conducted on Election Day in 16 locations.

Based on the findings of the preliminary literature review, the thematic priorities, and the expertise of the team, the Consultant designed the Gender Analysis Research Matrix (See Annex A). The matrix linked the analysis questions to the data sources and methods for each thematic area: 1) Legal and policy frameworks, 2) Political institutions, 3) Electoral Management, 4) Political Associations (and, later, political parties), 5) Civic engagement and public awareness and 6) Barriers to participation.

The research design matrix informed the design of the draft tools (question guides) for primary data information. These questions, tailored to each stakeholder, collected data on the advances and gaps identified in the literature review below. The team jointly developed a preliminary list of potential key stakeholders to consult during interviews.

Primary data collection was led by the PDRC. The PDRC conducted 21 interviews and 4 focus group discussions with 28 participants between September 14 and November 30, 2021. The specific individuals who were interviewed were identified and contacted by PDRC based on the list in annex. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and through focus group discussions.

Primary research with human subjects respected the guiding principles defined in the text box to the right. The PDRC registered the basic demographic data of the respondents (name, sex, organization, sector, etc.) to allow for verification of the extent and type of consultation. See Annex A for more information about the research approach to managing risk.



# Introduction

**ON OCTOBER 25, 2021**, Puntland became the first federal member state in Somalia to hold democratic elections to district councils. “One person one vote” (OPOV) elections were conducted in three “early districts” of Eyl, Ufeyn and Qardho, which were to be followed by a second stage of voting in all districts across Puntland. The OPOV system will eventually replace the current indirect election system also at the federal level, where clan representatives elect parliamentarians who then vote for the country’s leadership.

In addition to their historic significance, the 2021 Puntland municipal elections were also a first logistical experience for electoral stakeholders in carrying out direct elections. In this sense, they laid the foundation for carrying out parliamentary and presidential elections as Somalia anticipates achieving federal universal suffrage in 2025.

This first experience in expanded suffrage was a new opportunity for many previously excluded citizens to participate in the political process as voters, candidates, civic educators and election workers. Chief among these are women, who had been deeply

disadvantaged under the clan-based system. It was also a barometer to understand the dynamics of political inclusion in Somalia’s transition to universal suffrage. Understanding gender equality and participation of marginalized groups in Puntland’s municipal elections will help stakeholders reduce barriers as the rest of the country moves towards OPOV.

In general, women in Somalia are severely under-represented in formal and informal decision-making.<sup>2</sup> In Puntland, only two of 66 parliamentarians are women, and only 17 % of local councillors are women.<sup>1</sup> A recent survey indicates that 92 % of women in Somalia would like an opportunity to participate in decision-making.<sup>2</sup> However, the majority feel that they have no such opportunity. For this reason, the local council elections in Puntland constituted an important step towards increased participation of women in decision-making in Somalia in general.

The entire process – from the ongoing preparations for elections in “early districts” to the formation of the first democratically elected district councils in Somalia – provided a unique

opportunity to document challenges and enabling factors for the promotion of gender equality as part of democratization. The lessons learned from the present assessment are valuable for upcoming electoral processes, not only in Puntland but also in other member states, to which Puntland's efforts towards democratization can provide key insights.

The findings of this report are presented in five main sections. Following an introduction to the status of women in Puntland's political sphere, the normative framework is analyzed and discussed as it relates to emerging frameworks, shortcomings of quota measures, efforts to reform and stakeholder recommendations. Next, we look at electoral management around the early elections. This section presents both the internal efforts of the electoral management body to enhance gender mainstreaming as well as various, distinct aspects of public participation in the electoral process. The role of the new political associations is the subject of the next section, which considers both the positive impacts of the intro-

duction of the associations as well as the shortcomings. An overview of other, related challenges and opportunities is offered next, including a discussion of political finance, the role of media, gender sensitive electoral security planning and women's civil society. Finally, the analysis concludes with an assessment of the presence and impacts of violence against women in elections and politics, both online and offline. The report concludes with recommendations on each of these areas.

“

[Under OPOV, candidates must] seek support from an entire population of voters... We must go from door to door, knocking each door and asking youth, women, IDPs, and minority groups for their votes. We even had to communicate with the deaf members of the community to promote our election campaign... I think it is a fair process and should be applied throughout Puntland and Somalia.”

~ Deputy Mayor/Male Voter, Ufeyn, October 21, 2021

<sup>1</sup> Muri, W. and Said Samantar, M.: Factors Influencing Women Participation in Local Councils in Puntland State of Somalia, a Case of Galkacyo District, 2018

<sup>2</sup>Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development (MoWHRD), Somalia. Somali Women Forging Alliances to Safeguard Equal Rights For All. October 2020. <https://mwhrd.gov.so/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Somali-Women-Forging-Alliance-Report-October-2020-1.pdf>

# *Findings* **Status of Women's Political Participation**





### KEY FINDINGS – STATUS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The 2021 early municipal elections were a significant step forward for women's representation, bringing women's representation to nearly 30% in the three districts compared to around 15% before the elections

- Despite changes to the electoral system, the clan system imposes structural barriers to women's increased participation in decision-making
- Misinterpreted religious beliefs and traditional culturally assigned gender roles and norms disadvantage women's status and opportunities

**THE 2021 EARLY DISTRICT** elections were held in three locations in Puntland: Eyl, Ufeyn and Qardho. They marked a major step forward in terms of women’s representation in elected office.

Historically, women’s representation has been low in most areas of public leadership in Puntland. When Puntland was first established in 1998, just 5 women were elected to parliament.<sup>3</sup> Growth has remained exceedingly slow. In 2016, women held 12 % of official positions in Puntland. Women held 14 % of the higher judiciary committee and district councillor positions, but only 3 % of representatives in parliament were women.<sup>4</sup> In 2019, there was only one female representative out of 66 members in the Puntland parliament, 4 of 50 cabinet positions were held by women, and 21 out of 217 departmental director positions were represented by women. No seats were held by women in the director general or governor positions.<sup>5</sup>

In 2020, TPEC held meetings with a variety of stakeholders in Puntland to determine their opinions on democratization and a multi-party system. TPEC

noted that women in general and young women and men were particularly enthusiastic about their participation “as they believed this was their opportunity to play an inclusive role in policy and decision-making processes”.

The outcomes of the early municipal elections reflect significant change. Women won 23 of 87 council seats (26 %) in the three districts which can be compared to 15 % representation of women in the three districts prior to the elections. The results varied from a low of 22 % in Eyl to a high of 29.6 % in Qardho. Yet, fundamental barriers to women’s political participation were at play throughout the process.

### **The Usual Suspects: The Role of Clans, Religion and Tradition in Women’s Exclusion**

The historically low rate of women’s representation in Puntland reflects the case across Somalia. As PDRC reports, “Women are marginalised and excluded from most leadership and decision-making areas, including politics”.<sup>6</sup> Somalia’s clan system remains a barrier for women aiming to engage in politics. In the past, traditional elders who are

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<sup>3</sup> PDRC 2019

<sup>4</sup> Puntland Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation 2018

exclusively male decided the political candidates and often preferred men.<sup>7</sup> Women were excluded because of “being married to men from other clans, or simply because they wanted their male members to represent them.”<sup>8</sup>

Under the “4.5 power sharing formula”, the four clans categorized as main clans all acquire an equal number of seats and smaller clans earn half of the amount. Within the clan system, there is a concentration of power between a small group of male elders.<sup>9</sup> In comparison to men, Somali women have reduced access to these elite leaders. Previous studies have found that women aspirants are impeded by inability to travel to remote or dangerous areas to meet with clan elders or, in other situations, clan elders have declined to engage with women.<sup>10</sup> Earlier advocacy efforts by women’s organizations to create quota-style rules to ensure women’s representation within the 4.5 system were not successful.<sup>11</sup>

In their 2020 stakeholder meetings, TPEC concluded that a “majority of

the people expressed their concern over the clan-based system which they said they were fed up of and believe it is very unjust and unfair to them as electorates as their voices and wants are not included in the election of their representatives”.<sup>12</sup>

The role of religion was a hotly debated issue among respondents. Some felt that traditionalist interpretations of Islam were a significant barrier for women’s leadership. The East Africa Research Fund (EARF) noted that religion has the capacity to shape cultural norms and, in turn, “prohibit women from taking on presidential roles or positions of senior leadership”. However, this idea was contested by participants who asserted the difference between culture and religion and highlighted that no religious text explicitly states the exclusion of women in politics.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> PDRC 2019

<sup>6</sup> PDRC 2019

<sup>7</sup> Local Government Secretary, Eyl, October 14, 2021; Elder, Ufeyn, October 22, 2021

<sup>8</sup> Elder, Ufeyn, October 22, 2021

<sup>9</sup> EARF 2017

<sup>10</sup> Affi 2020

<sup>11</sup> Affi 2020

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> EARF 2017

<sup>14</sup> EARF 2017

# *Normative Framework*

## **Emerging Groundwork for Political Gender Equality**

**ACCORDING TO SIDRA**, there is an overall lack of policy and legal strategies that promote women's participation in Somali politics. While there has been some progress, advancement towards women's rights to "self-determination and political participation has been slow". This can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the absence of political will, weak government organizations, economic disenfranchisement, and restricted access to education. While Article 41 of the Constitution of Puntland gives rights to every citizen in terms of political participation, "the reality is different because of lack of enforcement and opposing and constraining cultural practices".<sup>15</sup>

As of February 2022, the Somali government is not a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). According to UN Women, consultations on ratifying CEDAW and the evaluation of existing laws that are in contradiction with CEDAW are ongoing.

<sup>16</sup> The UN has collaborated with the government of Somalia to endorse and develop the National Gender Policy, the National Action Plan on Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and an Independent National Human Rights Commission.<sup>17</sup>

Article 11 of the Provisional Constitution states that all Somali citizens have equal rights, regardless of their sex, religion, socio-economic status, political affiliation, or nationality.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Article 11 asserts that "the State must not discriminate against any person on the basis of gender".<sup>19</sup> The Somali Provisional Constitution states that women must be included in the three branches of government, national independent commissions, and all national institutions.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, women have the right to participate in decision-making and "vie for the country's highest office".<sup>21</sup> The Puntland State Constitution recognizes the equal rights of men and women, minorities, and emphasizes non-discrimination.<sup>22</sup>

Puntland has also drafted a gender policy, but resistance from religious elders has stalled the ratification process in parliament.

Advocacy efforts have targeted the electoral law as an area of reform. In 2019, the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, in partnership with federal and federal member state governments as well as civil society organisations, convened the Somali Women’s Convention to discuss women’s rights in peace and state-building. The demands and concerns that arose from this convention were compiled into the Somali Women’s Charter which calls for full participation of women across the political, economic and social spectrum in Somalia. The main objectives of the Somali Women’s Charter include a 50 % gender quota and equal participation in political and peacebuilding procedures, the solidification of legal protections against gender-based violence (such as the Sexual Offences Bill), and female economic empowerment.<sup>23</sup> 300 delegates from

federal and federal member states governments, women and youth group representatives, disability organisations, private sector organisations and members of academia from across the federal member states provided input to the Charter during the Convention.<sup>24</sup>

Other organizations, such as the Somali Women Development Centre, Somali Women’s Leadership Initiative, and Save Somali Women and Children have also urged reform, including a 30 % gender quota in the Somali parliament.<sup>25</sup> Co-authors of this report, the Puntland Development and Research Center (PDRC) have supported women’s political engagement within the state through advocacy, research, capacity building, and trainings.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> SIDRA Institute 2018

<sup>16</sup> UN Women 2019

<sup>17</sup> UN Somalia 2018-2020

<sup>18</sup> PDRC 2019; UN Women 2019

<sup>19</sup> UN Women 2019

<sup>20</sup> Affi 2020; TPEC 2021

<sup>21</sup> Affi 2020; UN Somalia 2018- 2020

<sup>22</sup> TPEC 2021

<sup>23</sup> Federal Government of Somalia 2020

<sup>24</sup> UNDP 2019. <https://www.so.undp.org/content/somalia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/iwd-2019--delegates->

[at-three-day-somali-womens-convention-issue-.html](https://www.so.undp.org/content/somalia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/iwd-2019--delegates-at-three-day-somali-womens-convention-issue-.html)

[at-three-day-somali-womens-convention-issue-.html](https://www.so.undp.org/content/somalia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/iwd-2019--delegates-at-three-day-somali-womens-convention-issue-.html)

<sup>25</sup> Mahmood 2018

<sup>26</sup> PDRC 2019

## Gender Quota Measures Fail to Disrupt Balance of Clan Power Systems

In Puntland, Article 17 of the Puntland Local Council Election Law includes a gender quota stipulating that the first five candidates on the candidate lists cannot all be of the same sex. A presidential decree was also issued in 2007 to ensure that 30 % of positions in public institutions were held by women. After 15 years, the quota has yet to be reached.<sup>27</sup> In 2019, there was only one woman representative out of 66 members in the Puntland parliament.<sup>28</sup>

In Somalia, women attempting to engage and work in politics face a variety of challenges. Clannism is noted as a barrier for women as it is a male-dominated institution, which “permeates political life.”<sup>29</sup> As stated by the EARF, “[i]n a political system predicated on balancing power between clan and sub-clan groups, women are therefore disadvantaged as the exclusion they experience in clan structures is directly mirrored in formal politics”. Women who marry into a different clan also face the added challenge of acquiring support. According to the PDRC, “[w]hen women are married into another clan, then there is a belief that she is no longer ‘ours’ so her birth tribe does not select her, less so her married tribe”.<sup>30</sup>

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[During the 2016 federal elections] Men occupied seats that were reserved for women. The electoral teams blocked a few of those results, but others went ahead, showing that one of the key issues lay in the lack of enforcement mechanisms.

~ Omar S. Mahmood, 2018

## A Move for Stronger Inclusion Measures

In the interviews, 9 respondents highlighted the importance of implementing a gender quota within Puntland law and indeed, some progressive steps have been taken. The Puntland Local Council Election Law stipulates in Article 17.3 that the first 5 candidates of a political association’s candidate list can neither be all men, nor all women. Law Number 7, article 21.5 provides the electing local council members should include all the categories of the community including academics, business, religious, women, professionals etc. Furthermore, through the collaboration with FBA, TPEC developed Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Guidelines which were updated to include a “one in three model”. Under this model, each block of three candidates on the lists must include both

women and men (two women and one man, or two men and one woman).

While TPEC promoted the participation of women in politics, with a particular emphasis on reaching 30 % representation of women, the guidelines were not formally approved or adopted by the government. Since the gender quota is not required by law, some political associations failed to comply with the guidelines, with several claiming that “they could not get qualified women”.<sup>31</sup>

In interviews, TPEC officials viewed the implementation of the guidelines in political associations as largely successful in that they pushed the political associations to have a greater gender balance in their candidate lists than they otherwise would have. They noted that TPEC rejected many candidates’ lists that were submitted but failed to comply with the one in three model and instructed the political associations to review their selections.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, interviewees noted that many political associations actively seek to include and involve women, community members with disabilities, and minori-

ty groups within their programs and procedures. For example, the regional representative of the Caddaalad and Sinnaan Political Association noted in an interview that his association includes provisions for women’s participation by ensuring a 30 % gender quota in various departments, committees, and candidate lists. In another example, a member of the KAAH Political Association and Member of the Executive Committee, said that her political association has policies to ensure female political participation: “Every committee and sub-committee within our political association has women members. We also have women and youth wings with their own policies. Looking at the committees, their female members are more active than their male members.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Stakeholder Recommendations to Enact an Empowering Legal Framework**

Numerous recommendations emerged through the interviews for strengthening the legal framework for women’s participation and for enhancing implementation of existing measures. Interviewees emphasized the impor-

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<sup>27</sup> TPEC 2021

<sup>28</sup> PDRC 2019

<sup>29</sup> Mahmood 2018

<sup>30</sup> PDRC 2019

<sup>31</sup> TPEC, Eyl, October 14, 2021

<sup>32</sup> Representative of RUNCAD Political Association, Garowe, September 28, 2021

<sup>33</sup> Member, KAAH Political Association, Garowe, October 6, 2021,



**“First and foremost, there must be a legal framework where women can take their legal complaints.”**

~ Former Deputy Minister, Garowe,  
September 15, 2021

tance of leadership from TPEC in setting the tone and driving ahead fair and gender-responsive measures. Some interviewees felt that enhanced, reciprocal relationships between local communities and policymakers would result in stronger policy proposals that would have a great chance of popular acceptance. Enforcement challenges were consistently noted. Above all, interviewees almost unanimously agreed that “the most effective, and sustainable, solution to the issue of women’s political participation and leadership is the creation and adoption of a law, which makes it compulsory for the political association and the local government council to have at least 30 % women members.”

Some recommendations went above and beyond targeted electoral measures to address deeper social inequality. For several respondents, it is es-

sential that laws surrounding violence, particularly violence against women in elections/politics (VAWE/P), are better implemented and upheld, including strict laws and punishment.<sup>34</sup>

According to a member of Eyl local council, “The government must react to such cases by investigating the source and bringing them to justice.”<sup>35</sup> In order to enforce laws surrounding VAWE/P and violence against women generally, the courts should be accessible, policewomen must receive proper training, and it is essential that investigators keep the findings of their investigation confidential. According to a politician and former Deputy Minister at Ministry of Women Development & Family Affairs (MOWDAFA) in Garowe, “I know of many people who decide not to report, or provide information on, crimes for fear of the investigators revealing their identity. The system has to be comprehensive, reliable and effective.”<sup>36</sup>

While a Sexual Offence Law and Zero tolerance FGM policy are in place in Puntland, as well as the Puntland media law, there is a gap where online forms of violence and harassment are concerned. Overall, four respondents noted the need to implement media laws, with a specific emphasis

on social media. Hate speech and sexualized content were identified as threats to women in politics and several respondents called for legal protection against these acts. Feedback on the actors to take responsibility for these measures was mixed. Some interviewees felt that the Ministry of Information should be responsible for implementing these measures and providing a “place where complaints and concerns can be filed”.<sup>37</sup> Others felt that TPEC was the best placed to handle these concerns by developing regulations to address these issues and, in turn, share and collaborate with law enforcement. Interviewees pointed to positive steps already taken by TPEC, specifically their media rules and regulations regarding the harassment and abuse of candidates on social media, which was developed by the ethics committee. According to a TPEC Commissioner in Garowe, “Any harassment that comes to the women during work comes under our responsibility. But if the matter involves public or social media, it becomes the responsibility of the police.”<sup>38</sup>



“The only way to deal with online forms of VAWG is to apply the law. It is a crime, just like other forms of crime. If someone goes unpunished for his crime, that will encourage others to follow his steps and even do worse.”

~ Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021

<sup>34</sup> Member of Mustaqbal Political Association, Garowe, September 29, 2021

<sup>35</sup> Member of local council, Eyl, October 13, 2021; Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021; Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021; MAP General Secretary, Garowe, September 29, 2021; Saida Hussein Ali

<sup>36</sup> Member of local council, Eyl, October 13, 2021

<sup>37</sup> Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021

<sup>38</sup> Media, Qardho, October 18, 2021

# *Electoral* Management

**ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT** bodies (EMBs) play a key role in setting the course for gender equality in elections. EMBs' internal structures determine women's leadership in designing the implementation of electoral processes. This, in turn, is determinative for downstream gender equality outcomes, such as voter registration, polling practices and civic education.

In 2019, the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) was ratified by the Parliament of Puntland. TPEC's responsibilities include preparing, organizing, and supervising local elections, reporting the results to the public, voter registration, the regulation of political associations and parties, civil and voter education, and security.

## **Women in Election Administration**

Since its inception in 2019, TPEC has emphasized gender equality and social inclusion to ensure that diverse groups of men and women in Puntland can exercise their right to vote and contribute to Puntland's democratization process. This starts with the internal structure of the institution.

## **Key Findings – Electoral Management**

- The Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) emphasized gender equality and social inclusion in both its internal structures and civil service functions throughout the 2021 electoral cycle
- To fulfill its mission to create a gender responsive and inclusive organization that promotes engagement among diverse groups of women and men in the electoral processes, TPEC instituted various initiatives including targets for women's participation at leadership and staff levels, training, a dedicated budget for inclusion initiatives and a dedicated gender specialist position. Several parts of the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Guidelines, however, remain to be implemented. These include a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination and harassment and the creation of a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Coordination Committee as well as a systematic approach to gender mainstreaming
- The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Guidelines set targets for TPEC to promote gender equality in its external activities, including establishing training programmes to promote women's engagement and ensuring that voter registration and polling stations are accessible to women as well as female and male parts of minorities and marginalized groups.

TPEC positioned itself as a “front-runner of gender equal and inclusive democratization among public institutions in Somalia” with its mission to create a gender responsive and inclusive organization that promotes engagement among men, women, marginalized groups, and minorities in the electoral processes. In TPEC’s mandate, the commission aims to conduct a gender analysis and assemble sex-disaggregated data on a variety of electoral processes, including political association registration, voter registration, and voter education. With this information, TPEC strives to “set targets for women’s and men’s registration and voting to strive for equal access to voter registration, voter information and outreach for women and men”.

Two of the nine High Level Commissioners are women, as is the Secretary General. Within TPEC, a gender balance is applied to district representatives, in which three men and three women represent each district, and support staff. TPEC has a policy to recruit 40 to 50 % women at all levels.

Internally, TPEC aimed to establish gender equality training for staff,

budget gender equality initiatives, set requirement targets to ensure gender balance, implement accountability measures, and “ensure equal opportunities and zero tolerance to discrimination and harassment for women, men and marginalized groups in human resource policies and processes”. In order to successfully establish and implement these objectives, the commission plans to form a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Coordination Committee and create a gender specialist position to “provide on-going advice to management for the promotion of gender equality within the institution as well as in its activities”.<sup>39</sup> As of March 2022, there is a gender adviser position within TPEC but no Committee has been set up as of yet.

At the outset of the process, TPEC set forth their intent to implement a gender perspective to their plans of operation, post-election processes and electoral Code of Conduct, which would include provisions against gender-based violence, including sexual violence. As of writing, TPEC does not have any gender-specific training for staff. However, TPEC offers election management and capacity building training. A

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<sup>39</sup> TPEC 2021

<sup>40</sup> Garowe, September 26, 2021

TPEC Commissioner stated, “Capacity building on gender mainstreaming is an integral part of our work.”<sup>40</sup>

The 2021 Puntland Election Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Guidelines set targets for TPEC to promote gender equality and women’s participation in its external activities as well, including establishing training programmes to promote women’s engagement and ensuring that voter registration and polling stations are accessible to diverse groups of women and men, including from minorities and marginalized groups, such as individuals with disabilities. TPEC also put forth guidelines to “reduce risk of harassment and violence for female and male voters, outside and inside polling stations as well as in connection to electoral activities”. These are discussed in detail in the following sections.

### **Voter Registration**

TPEC registered 48,535 voters ahead of the October elections. Women constituted just over half (50.5 %) of registered voters. Voter registration requirements underwent significant revision over the course of the electoral process. Ultimate-

### **Key Findings – Voter Registration**

- Women constituted just over half of the 48,535 registered voters
- TPEC, in partnership with civil society, conducted extension outreach and awareness raising, to support registration among women and young women and men
- Available data suggests that the voter registration process was relatively equitable for men and women in terms of accessibility and in the numbers of each sex registered
- Technical problems with the registration process do not appear to have had a gendered impact or to have significantly limited registration
- The under-registration of mostly-male nomadic pastoralists may skew registration data

ly, the guidelines were simplified which increased accessibility of the process.

TPEC conducted general and targeted voter registration awareness outreach during the process. This included in-person outreach targeted at women and young women and men. TPEC also engaged in outreach via traditional media

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<sup>41</sup> TPEC 2021 Garowe, September 26, 2021

(radio, print) and social media. Several respondents credited the success of the voter registration campaign with TPEC's partnerships with civil society for awareness raising. Overall, TPEC made "great efforts to increase the participation of women".<sup>41</sup> TPEC conducted raising awareness campaigns and connected with women through the political associations, which allowed women to share the process of voter registration and spread awareness to other women. Furthermore, female members in the village committees informed their communities about the registration process and urged people to register to vote. A TPEC Commissioner in Garowe explained that women "have a role to play in encouraging other women to participate in the electoral process. It was a factor that helped more women to show up for registration."<sup>42</sup>

Available data suggests that the voter registration process was relatively equitable for men and women. The majority of female registered voters were between 18 and 30 years old, while most of the female candidates were between 25 and 35 years old.

Overall, interview respondents felt that there were few if any obstacles for



**"The fact that about 50 % of those who registered are women is evidence enough that if women are given the opportunity, they will participate in politics."**

~ Member of Mustaqbal Political Association, Garowe, September 29, 2021

women in the voter registration process. Delays related to slow internet speeds, slow printing equipment, errors committed and corrected by undertrained staff and equipment issues<sup>43</sup> did not appear to have a gendered impact on the registration process. Likewise, the relatively short timeframe for registration and the various problems encountered in the distribution of voter cards did not appear to have a disproportionate effect on women's ability to register or vote.

During the post-election evaluation, TPEC acknowledged the possibility of a gender skew effect regarding nomadic pastoral workers. Despite the use of mobile registration units, it is believed that there was under-enrollment of this predominantly male population.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> TPEC/Commissioner, Garowe, September 26, 2021

<sup>43</sup> IFES 2022 <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 2022

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 2022

## Electoral / Civic Education and Awareness

According to a TPEC Commissioner in Garowe, the organization regards “awareness of women with high priority.”<sup>45</sup> TPEC has a voter education unit that coordinates education and awareness initiatives. The unit has a dedicated budget to fund activities and awareness campaigns targeted towards women.

### Key Findings – Electoral/Civic Education and Awareness

- Awareness raising and electoral education was a critical need for all during the transition to a new electoral system and first time balloting for most
- Awareness campaigns used both traditional and social media to reach targeted populations
- TPEC partnerships with civil society were important to achieve broad distribution

The EMB collaborated with a variety of organizations, such as the PDRC, Diakonia, Kaalo, PUNSA, and Somali Family Service<sup>46</sup> to deliver civic and voter education ahead of the polls. This included civic engagement exercises

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“A lack of understanding of democracy is a common denominator for all people, the elders, the intellectuals and the educated alike. ... in order “to prevent that risk, the public should be educated about their rights”

~ Elder, Ufeyn, October 22, 2021

for youth, women, traditional leaders, and students to allow them “to openly air out their grievances, thoughts and suggestions about the 2021 local elections”.<sup>47</sup>

In the interviews, voter education and public awareness of women’s political participation were important areas of focus for stakeholders. In particular, several women candidates and politicians recognized the key role of TPEC in providing education and awareness needed to bring women’s participation fully into the process. They viewed TPEC as the pivotal actor and the only body with the resources to educate about the importance of promoting women’s political participation and representation in Puntland.

<sup>45</sup> September 26, 2021

<sup>46</sup> PDRC and Interpeace Regional Office for Eastern and Central Africa 2015

<sup>47</sup> PDRC and Interpeace Regional Office for Eastern and Central Africa 2015; TPEC 2020

## Polling Day & Access

55 polling stations staffed by 350 poll workers were organized in the three districts. Women accounted for 31 % of poll workers but only 5 % of chairperson positions.<sup>48</sup> Over half of secretaries were women. Women also often occupied the rolls of checker and second checker. All voting was held on a single day, from 6am to 6pm. Provisions were made to allow queued voters present before 6pm to cast their vote after 6pm in the case of long waits.<sup>49</sup>

Many respondents in the interviews noted high voter turnout among women.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, voter turnout data collected by TPEC is not sex-disaggregated and therefore observations cannot be verified by polling place data. A male voter in Ufeyn, asserted that the high volume of women voters reflected the transformation of the democratization process: “women are now eligible to vote and compete for political positions. They are going to cast their votes alongside the traditional elders. They

### Key Findings – Polling Day and Access

- Women accounted for 31 % of staff but only 5 % of chairpersons in the 55 polling stations (350 staff) in the three districts
- Women turned out to vote in very high numbers, but there was no sex-disaggregated data to verify observations
- Interviews indicate ongoing confusion about the closed-list electoral system and suggest the existence of bias and family voting pressure from clans
- Heat, sun and long waits were health hazards for some, including the elderly and parents with small children.
- Vote buying on election day was reported in some locales

are represented at the decision-making table”.<sup>51</sup>

Many voters needed assistance in filling out their ballot papers, which compromised the secrecy of the vote.

<sup>48</sup> TPEC gender advisor, Garowe, November 30, 2021; TPEC & FBA

<sup>49</sup> The Law of Puntland Local Council Election 2013

<sup>50</sup> Representative of RUNCAD Political Association, Garowe, September 28, 2021; Elder, Ufeyn, October 22, 2021; Member of Mustaqbal Political Association, Garowe, September 29, 2021; Member of KAAH Political Association, Garowe, October 6, 2021; Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021; Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021; TPEC/Commissioner, Garowe, September 26, 2021; MOWDAFA, Eyl, October 14, 2021; MOWDAFA head of Gender Department, Garowe, October 9, 2021; TPEC, Eyl, October 14, 2021; Elder, Ufeyn, October 22, 2021; MAP General Secretary, Garowe, September 29, 2021; Women In Media Initiative (WIMI), Garowe, October 6, 2021; TPEC/Commissioner, Garowe, September 26, 2021; TPEC/Commissioner, Garowe, September 26, 2021; Male Voter, Eyl, October 14, 2021; Male Voter, Qardho, October 17, 2021

<sup>51</sup> Male Voter, Ufeyn, October 21, 2021

This disproportionately affected women, who have higher rates of illiteracy than men.

The 2021 elections used closed lists, where voters cast their ballots for a political association rather than for individual candidates. This is generally favorable for women's representation compared to open list systems where voters vote for candidates. However, the responses of several respondents reflected ongoing confusion about the use of closed lists in these elections. Multiple respondents argued that high voter turnout among women does not guarantee that more women candidates would be elected because women do not vote for other women. This assertion reflects both a misunderstanding of the closed list electoral system as well as the pervasive and unfounded pre-conception regarding women's support for other women.<sup>52</sup>

Respondents also felt that women voters' choices were pressured by clan preferences because women would be compelled to vote according to the wishes of their male clan members and/or be caught between the political preferences

of their family and their husbands' family. However, here too, confusion about the electoral system was apparent. Of the respondents who commented on the problem of family- or clan-voting, several suggested that women would be compelled to choose male candidates instead of women candidates – an erroneous understanding of the electoral system where voters vote for political associations and not for candidates.

The misunderstandings about the electoral system reflected in these responses should not automatically discredit the underlying concerns. While the electoral system design may defend women candidates against the impacts of these forms of discrimination and coercion, the existence of such bias or pressure may certainly underlie women's participation as voters. Indeed, as one respondent stated, many female registered voters do “not believe that women can be councilors, that their place is at home.” These attitudes will continue to undermine women's leadership even if the closed-list electoral system shields elected women from being victims of this kind of sexist attitude.

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<sup>52</sup> The assertion that “women don't vote for other women” is widespread in many countries and is the subject of a growing body of literature. General trends suggest that, despite this common assertion, people with a given social characteristic tend to prefer candidates or leaders who share that characteristic. Findings specific on women are mixed. In general, this argument is considered a misconception unless proven to the contrary. See Rosie Campbell & Oliver Heath. “Do Women Vote for Women Candidates? Attitudes toward Descriptive Representation and Voting Behavior in the 2010 British Election”. *Politics & Gender*. Vol 13. Issue 2. June 2017. Pp 209-231.

The errors reflected in comments about the electoral system point to another, frequently raised challenge regarding voter education. Several respondents stated that they believed many women voters were either unaware or unsure that voting was both confidential and private. According to a politician and former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, women require voter education “so that they know what to do on election day and have a clear picture of the qualities of the person they are voting for.”<sup>53</sup> This was also reflected in comments about clan pressure.

During the elections, two types of health and security issues were identified for polling. The first relates to general contextual hazards, such as exposure to the heat and sun, and long voting lines. In response to safety hazards, respondents urged dedicated training of polling staff to offer appropriate accommodations and support for voters with special needs, including parents of small children, the elderly, infirm or people with disabilities. Other recommendations from respondents included to deploy teams of young people to provide water or to establish medical teams at

polling stations in case of need. No data is available about emergency medical needs during the last polls. Respondents also noted that polling station locations still required many to travel long distances. This was considered a disproportionate burden on women who face more challenges in travelling, including care responsibilities. The second health and security issue concerns specific violence against women in politics and is addressed in a separate section.

Electoral malpractice has been a historic problem for women and may have continued to play a role in 2021. Women have also faced particular barriers in their attempt to participate in past elections. During the 2012 federal indirect elections, women were at a disadvantage due to “blatant seat buying” and bribes paid to clan elders. In the 2016 election, male politicians and clan elders reportedly conspired with each other to sidestep the 30 % gender quota. Bribery was again used as a tool to ensure that male candidates won their electoral races. In some cases, Ladan Affi found that “male candidates, with support from clan elders, ran for women’s seats, paying off young women to run against them

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<sup>53</sup> Garowe, September 14, 2021

<sup>54</sup> Affi 2020

<sup>55</sup> MOWDAFA, Eyl, October 14, 2021



and lose. Other male candidates would pay women to run for and win the seat, with the understanding that they would step aside later for the man”.<sup>54</sup> Female candidates were intimidated, kidnapped, or arrested, which prevented them from participating or voting in the elections. In reaction, women attempted to enforce the gender quota, spoke with clan elders “to convince them of the merits of electing women”, and sought help from international bodies, such as the United Nations and European Union, but were met with minimal results. Furthermore, women candidates who wanted to file a

complaint were forced to pay \$1,000 to the Electoral Dispute Resolution Mechanism.

Malpractice reportedly impacted women voters to some extent during the October polls. Vote buying was present, especially for the internally displaced. Some individuals reported being approached by political associations offering money or food in exchange for their voting cards.<sup>55</sup>

### **Internally Displaced People in the Electoral Process**

Globally, between 75 and 80 % of the world’s 50 million refugees and internally displaced persons are women and their dependent children. No gender disaggregated data is available on IDPs in Puntland, but we pay special attention to IDP participation based on this general indication of the disproportionate representation of women among IDP communities globally. Of the nearly 900,000 internal displacements across Somalia in 2021, there were 17,000 new internal displacements to the three districts holding early elections (13,000 to Qardho, 3,000 to Garowe, and 1,000 to Eyl).<sup>56</sup> Most IDPs came from Bari and

<sup>56</sup> UNHCR data, January 2022, <https://unhcr.github.io/dataviz-somalia-prmn/index.html#reason=&month=&need=&pregion=&pdistrictmap=&cregion=&cdistrictmap=Garowe%2CBossaso%2CEyl%2CQardho&year=2021>

<sup>57</sup> October 17, 2021

<sup>58</sup> Member of IDP Community, Qardho, October 17, 2021

<sup>59</sup> Member of IDP Community, Qardho, October 17, 2021,

PDRC and Interpeace Regional Office for Eastern and Central Africa 2015

Nugaal and were impacted by drought.

IDPs from other federal member states were able to register to vote for the 2021 elections, provided they were living in Puntland or lived in the country for at least 10 years and had the proper documentation.

Registration of displaced persons is often a challenge for EMBs due to lack of adequate documentation or lacking distribution of voter cards in camps. Interviewee reports regarding the participation of IDPs in the 2021 elections did not flag significant challenges of this nature. The most significant issue relating to IDP participation was the presence of vote buying, specifically, of political associations offering IDPs food or money in exchange for their voter cards, as described above.

IDP and non-IDP interviewees alike shared generally positive feedback about the inclusion of IDPs in the polls. A young man and member of the IDP community in Qardho stated, “This is an exceptionally important opportunity for us. We are equal to the host community when it comes to participation in politics.”<sup>57</sup> A female member of the IDP community, added, “It makes me pleased to see my community taking part in the elections. Yesterday we were known as the displaced community, but

### Key Findings – Internally Displaced People

- IDPs from other federal member states were able to register to vote for the 2021 elections, provided they were living in Puntland or lived in the country for at least 10 years and had the proper documentation.
- The most significant issue relating to IDP participation was the presence of vote buying, specifically, of political associations offering IDPs food or money in exchange for their voter cards.
- IDP and non-IDP interviewees alike shared generally positive feedback about the participation of IDPs in the polls.
- There were IDP members in all political associations. One person with IDP status was elected to office.

today we are part of the mainstream society.”<sup>58</sup>

According to interview reports, all political associations included IDP members. One IDP was elected to office. Interviewees reported that, in the past, the IDP community did not carry significant political weight. Now, however, the IDP community has become an important constituency. As stated by a male member of the IDP community, “The political associations rely on, and are competing for, the IDP communities. Each association is making promises. It is the government that has elevated the status of the IDP to that level.”<sup>59</sup>

# *Political Associations and Parties:* Puntland's Gatekeepers to Power

**POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS** are in evolution in Puntland. The registration of political associations was established by TPEC in 2012.<sup>60</sup> In 2019, TPEC held a registration exercise for political associations in Puntland. In 2020, 17 political associations had “successfully passed the initial phase of registration and were granted temporary registration status”. In the October 2021 elections, 499 candidates from nine political organizations ran for 87 seats in the three districts.<sup>61</sup> 147 of the 499 candidates were women (29 %).

## **Political Associations and Women's Representation in Puntland**

Puntland has nine political associations: KAAH, MIDEEYE, Run iyo Cadaalad, Cadaald iyo Sinaan, Mustaqbal, IFIYE, Dhalinyarada, Horseed, and Shaqaalaha. None of the nine political associations are chaired by woman representatives although some reports suggest that women represent between 22 % to 30 % of the membership within all the political associations.<sup>62</sup> Women's representation in the associations is presented in the table below.

The status of women as leaders of

## **Key Findings – Status of Women's Political Participation**

- 147 women out of 499 candidates (29 %) from eight political associations ran for 87 seats
- None of Puntland's nine political associations are chaired by woman representatives although women may represent between 22 % to 30 % of other positions within all the political associations
- The introduction of political associations has improved women's access to politics compared to the previous clan-based system
- TPEC's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Guidelines contributed to associations nominating nearly 1/3 women candidates for their closed lists
- Women's participation within the associations lags due to lack of financial support, cultural norms and incumbency advantages for men

political associations in Puntland reflects a broader national trend. There are 90 political parties registered in Somalia. However, the National Democratic Party is, as of 2020, the only association led by a woman, former deputy prime minister Fowzia Yusuf Haji Aden.

Association <sup>63</sup>	Women chair/deputy chair	Women in central leadership positions	Women in executive leadership positions
KAAH		49 of 379	No information
MIDEEYE	Deputy Chair	14 of 174	3 of 11
Run iyo Cadaalad		30 of 81	5 of 15
Cadaald iyo Sinaan		25 of 91	6 of 17
Mustaqbal	Deputy Chair, 7 out of 60 founders	16 of 122	6 of 15
IFIYE		14 of 63	7 (no total)
Dhaliyarada	Deputy Chair	No information	No information
Horseed		No information	No information
Shaqaalaha		No information	No information

According to Affi, “a few have women in the top leadership, but the vast majority have no women in the leadership”.<sup>64</sup>

Although women are not well-represented in leadership, the political associations nominated roughly consistent numbers of women candidates for their lists:

Qardho	51 women candidates	30 % of total
Ufeyn	47 women candidates	28 % of total
Eyl	49 women candidates	28 % of total

Interviewees reported that each political association had at least 3 to 4

woman candidates, with some having 7 to 9 woman candidates.

<sup>60</sup> PDRC and Interpeace Regional Office for Eastern and Central Africa 2015

<sup>61</sup> Nine political associations were vetted and certified but only eight of them contested into the early elections. The Dhaliyarada political association did not contest

<sup>62</sup> Nine political associations were vetted and certified but only eight of them contested into the early elections. The Dhaliyarada political association did not contest

<sup>63</sup>TPEC/Commissioner, Garowe, September 26, 2021

<sup>64</sup> “Women in the Leadership of the Political Associations” n.d.

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“Looking at the big picture, the ratio of men to women in politics is shifting in favor of women.”

~ Male Voter, Qardho, October 17, 2021

### Positive Impacts of Political Associations in Expanding Participation

According to the study’s respondents, the status of women’s political participation has improved in Puntland thanks to the introduction of political associations. In the past, women were rarely included at the decision-making table, however some respondents felt that existence of political associations has opened the space in new ways. While the clans are still present in the new political associations, the democratization process has opened the path to a self-reinforcing cycle where women have more options to have their voices heard and thus take greater interest in pursuing public leadership.

Credit for this opening within the associations is attributed to a large extent to TPEC’s efforts to increase women’s representation, especially the development of the Gender Equality and Social

Inclusion Guidelines. The guidelines stipulate that each block of three candidates on the lists must include both women and men (a “three in one model” for closed lists). In addition, as of 2016, women pay 50 % less in registration fees to stand for political office in Somalia.<sup>65</sup>

Overall, respondents described women as very active in the current democratization process, such as participating in political campaigns and voting.<sup>66</sup> Running for positions in local government, at the Puntland level, and federal level, women have also become candidates for political associations.<sup>67</sup> Within the political associations, women are filling public positions, which includes the cabinet of ministers, civil servant positions, departmental heads, parliaments, and local governments.<sup>68</sup>

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“I know that the [Gender Equality and Social Inclusion] Guidelines and the requirement of TPEC for the political associations to include women in the lists made a change. It kind of moved things from talk to action.”

~ DIAKONIA, Garowe, October 4, 2021

## Ongoing Challenges

Even though there has been an increase in women's political participation, not many women are found in the political associations' membership.<sup>69</sup> Overall, the "process with women in the associations is slow, though still moving forward".<sup>70</sup> Respondents reported that the political associations do not financially support their woman candidates. Therefore, it is difficult for women to finance public gatherings and transportation for their campaigns.

Several issues that can be classified as "organizational culture" were also raised as challenges to women's participation within the associations. Some respondents noted that, even where women are present in mid- or senior-levels in the associations, decisions are still made by the men and women rarely lead meetings or activities.<sup>71</sup> Others suggested that<sup>71</sup> there is a lack of mutual support between women within the associations. A respondent from the Women in Media Initiative (WIMI) stated, "Even though women



"Women's status is not something that can be ignored. It is obvious to everyone...that women are moving up the ladder. The democratization process has made a tremendous change in their attitude and commitment to participate in politics."

~ Elder, Ufeyn, October 22, 2021

are very engaged in the campaigns for political associations, they are not united as women."<sup>72</sup> The scarcity of women and the steep challenge of acceding to such positions has worked against women's solidarity, according to some.

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<sup>65</sup> Affi 2020

<sup>66</sup> Adam et al. 2018

<sup>67</sup> Candidate for KAAH Political Association, Eyl, October 13, 2021; Women In Media Initiative (WIMI), Garowe, October 6, 2021

<sup>68</sup> Male Voter, Qardho, October 17, 2021; Women In Media Initiative (WIMI), Garowe, October 6, 2021

<sup>69</sup> Representative of RUNCAD Political Association, Garowe, September 28, 2021

<sup>70</sup> Female voter, Eyl, October 14, 2021

<sup>71</sup> Female voter, Eyl, October 14, 2021

<sup>72</sup> Garowe, October 6, 2021

# *Other Blockers & Opportunities to Accessing Political Processes*

## **Key Findings – Other Blockers & Opportunities**

- Limited funding impacts a woman's ability to campaign, secure political alliances, connect with political actors or community leaders, and conduct public outreach
- Male candidates were noted to have stronger support networks, access to contributions and loans from clans and businesses, and generally be more financially prepared to compete than women
- Poor journalistic standards, sensationalism and harmful gender stereotypes results in a challenging or hostile media environment for many women candidates
- Media offers an opportunity for women candidates to enhance their public profiles and women candidates would benefit from more media training
- Gender sensitive electoral security planning (GSESP) contributed to a secure electoral environment, including the presence of Women's Situation Rooms
- A vibrant civil society contributed to enhancing women's participation as voters and as candidate through education, training, and other support

**THE FUNDAMENTAL SOCIAL** inequalities paired with poorly enforced legal protections described above, result in numerous blockers limiting women's ability to participate freely in electoral politics.

## **Political Finance and Gender Inequality**

Access to political finance is a key to electoral success and the roots of gender inequality in this area go deep. Limited funding impacts a woman's ability to campaign, secure political alliances, connect with political actors or community leaders, and conduct public outreach. Today, lack of funding and financial resources acts as a significant barrier for women in politics in Puntland.

The opportunity to pursue political careers is grounded in the general status of labour rights and equality and women's economic status. The Provisional Constitution states that all labour laws promote and abide by gender equality. Within the constitution, woman workers are protected from discrimination. Un-

der the Private Sector Employees Laws of Puntland, it is illegal for employers to dismiss woman workers because of pregnancy and women are also entitled to maternity leave. Furthermore, the Private Sector Employees Laws of Puntland assert that men and women receive equal pay for their work. However, women are restricted from working at night in factories, commercial enterprises, and farms under the Labour Code of 1972 and Article 8 of the Puntland Labour Code.<sup>73</sup>

Women in Somalia are “the primary providers, breadwinners and the backbone of many households”. In addition to caring for family members, including children, those who are ill, and the elderly, women are often tasked with paying rent, school and health care fees, and buying food. PDRC has observed that more women are entrepreneurs and starting their own businesses.<sup>75</sup> Many women are “engaged particularly in small-scale trade, selling cloths, vegetables, snacks or household items in the markets” or work in “less remunerative forms of petty trade, such as firewood and charcoal”. Women with



**“Women simply lack the financial ability to fund their political campaigns.”**

Male Voter, Ufeyn, October 21, 2021

an education are working with development organizations and NGOs.<sup>76</sup>

Financial capacity acts as a barrier for women entering politics. The PDRC noted that women have fewer financial resources than men, which are needed to organize events, volunteer, and increase their public profile (possibly because their role as family breadwinners leaves less disposable income for them to invest in political pursuits). Even though many women are considered the breadwinners in their households, their financial resources are still limited.

UNFPA reports that, in Somalia in general, “[f]emale labor force participation has remained lower than male participation, gender wage gaps are high, and women are overrepresented

<sup>73</sup> UN Women 2019

<sup>74</sup> Somali Women Forging Alliances to Safeguard Equal Rights For All, 2020 <https://mwhrd.gov.so/en/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Somali-Women-Forging-Alliance-Report-October-2020-1.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> PDRC n.d.

<sup>76</sup> Ingiriis and Hoehne 2013

in the informal sector and among the poor... At the workplace, women are usually sidelined when it comes to promotions and training opportunities. The qualitative findings show that men are still perceived as the stronger, smarter ones and better suited for white collar jobs".<sup>77</sup> This situation is attributed to traditional roles and responsibilities of women that keep them away from the labor force market, discrimination against women in the workplace and low levels of education among women. UNFPA further notes that Somali women with the lowest levels of education have the highest rates of economic activity, reflecting the role of women with little or no education in providing a livelihood for

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**[Male candidates] are convinced that, if they lose, they will somehow recover their money. Very few women are prepared to sell their jewelry or plot of land to invest in their political campaign."**

~ MAP General Secretary, Garowe, September 29, 2021

their families or serving as caregivers, in contrast to significantly lower economic participation among women with more education.

In Somalia, women “do not have savings to support political campaigns and they do not have a support system that fund raises for them”.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, a significant number of enlisted women candidates are young women and, therefore, lack income and resources.

Male electoral candidates are noted to have stronger support networks and generally more financially prepared to compete. Men often receive funding from clan members and businesses, “are given loans, and tribe/family affiliations gather everything they have for them”.<sup>79</sup> According to the PDRC, there is a lack of support among women. Relationships between women business owners or women in the community are limited and “they do not advocate for each other, nor do they support each other financially”.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, unemployment rates are higher among women in Somalia. 74 % of women face unemployment versus 61 % of men.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup> UNFPA. "Gender Equity: Hit or Miss in the Somali Population". Undated. <https://somalia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Gender%20Report.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> UNFPA. "Gender Equity: Hit or Miss in the Somali Population". Undated. <https://somalia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Gender%20Report.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> PDRC 2019

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> PDRC 2019

<sup>81</sup> UN Somalia 2018-2020



Respondents spoke about finance and politics in terms of investment and risk taking. In comparison to men, women do not prioritize political participation and are hesitant to “make political investments”.<sup>82</sup> Ultimately, women “do not know how to finance (or invest in) politics, whereas men have been doing it for a long time”.<sup>83</sup> As stated by a member of DIAKONIA, “A very small number of women are willing to invest in politics. They however focus their energy on trade, self-employment, and family issues.”<sup>84</sup> Overall, women need more financial and logistical support for outreach, rallying, and campaigning,

as they often lack the skills needed for fundraising and establishing connections with local decision makers.<sup>85</sup>

In addition to the economic factors described above and the gender stereotypes addressed elsewhere in this report, health and education are also structural impediments to women’s political participation, especially as candidates. Somali women have reduced access to credit and technology. Additionally, women also have limited access to health care and education. Somalia has a high maternal mortality rate with 1,600 deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> DIAKONIA, Garowe, October 4, 2021; MAP General Secretary, Garowe, September 29, 2021

<sup>83</sup> Member of Mustaqbal Political Association, Garowe, September 29, 2021

<sup>84</sup> Garowe, October 4, 2021

<sup>85</sup> Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021; Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021; Women In Media Initiative (WIMI), Garowe, October 6, 2021

<sup>86</sup> UN Somalia 2018-2020

In 2014, around 70 % of individuals 25 years or older stated that they had no formal education. In the 2012/2013 academic year, there was a gender disparity of 7 female students for every 10 male students in Somali secondary schools. Gender disparity in favour of males “remained unchanged” in primary schools between 2012 and 2016.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Somalia’s literacy levels are low and disproportionate between men and women. The literacy rate for men in Somalia is 36 %, compared to 26 % for women.<sup>88</sup>

### **Mixed Feelings on the Role of Media**

Somewhat surprisingly, the results of the study were fairly inconclusive regarding the role of media in impacting women’s political leadership. While both traditional and social media are often found to be strong influencers of women’s willingness to pursue political leadership, the available literature does not provide substantial information on the treatment of women by the media in Somalia. A variety of media outlets have emerged in Puntland, such as radio and television stations, websites, and newspapers. The PDRC and Interpeace Regional Office for Eastern and Central Africa stated that it is “quite apparent that most media outlets do not practice even minimal

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**In the campaign gatherings...it is often men who deliver the speeches and address crowds while women are a bit reserved or at best support the points men make.”**

~ Representative of RUNCAD Political Association, Garowe, September 28, 2021

standards of professionalism, especially during elections when biased and imbalanced media coverage is prevalent”. Sensationalism is reportedly common. The Media Code of Conduct was implemented in 2013 to “govern the activities of the various media facilities and personnel, as well as to promote fair media reporting and equal access to all contestants”<sup>89</sup> however, nearly ten years later, media professionalism remains a major problem.

The present study conducted a limited pilot sampling of data from high profile Somali women to take a closer look at the issue of online behavior. This too, was inconclusive due to the very low number of women using social media extensively for their political careers.

<sup>87</sup> UN Somalia 2018-2020

<sup>88</sup> Puntland Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation 2018

Within the interviews, respondents noted that the media acts both as a barrier and opportunity for women in politics. Several respondents stated that women in politics do not receive as much media coverage as men.<sup>90</sup> In general, women are often positioned in a behind-the-scenes role, while men “demand to deliver public speeches, hence more media coverage for them compared to women”.<sup>91</sup> In contrast to men, women candidates have limited political outreach and do not know how to effectively use social media for self-promotion.<sup>92</sup> Overall, “women do not push their political agenda as fiercely as men do, like winning public support, dominating the social media, [and] engaging in public speeches”.<sup>93</sup>

In contrast, a number of respondents noted that the media can act as an opportunity for women in politics. The Secretary-General of Media Association Puntland (MAP) and Gender Focal Person, noted that the biggest role the media can play is to provide equal opportunities for male and female candidates and encourage “those who are reserved to stand up and make their voices heard.”<sup>94</sup> The media provides

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“I know of journalists who sought, but failed to find, women politicians whose stories they could cover and share with the public. They even approached some of the women candidates, who turned down the offer for no obvious reasons, other than being conservative and hesitant to appear in the media.”

~ Dr. Yusra Mohamed Yassin

a platform for women to promote their causes, share messages, connect with communities, participate in discussion panels, and reveal their potential, competence, and leadership skills.<sup>95</sup> During the electoral period, some respondents felt that the media has made an effort to promote women candidates by creating platforms for public presentations and inviting women to important events or that women were given preference by the media, e.g., that women candidates were featured in longer stories and are invited to do interviews with journalists.

However, women do not fully understand how the media will “support them and their struggle” and are often hesitant to share their stories according

<sup>89</sup> UN Somalia 2018-2020

<sup>90</sup> PDRC and Interpeace Regional Office for Eastern and Central Africa 2015

<sup>91</sup> Member of KAAH Political Association, Garowe, October 6, 2021

<sup>92</sup> Member of Mustaqbal Political Association, Garowe, September 29, 2021

<sup>93</sup> Women In Media Initiative (WIMI), Garowe, October 6, 2021

<sup>94</sup> MAP General Secretary, Garowe, September 29, 2021

<sup>95</sup> Media, Qardho, October 18, 2021; Women In Media Initiative

to some.<sup>96</sup> Respondents noted that it is more common for male candidates to seek out journalists and ask them to cover their stories.<sup>97</sup> A member of the media in Garowe, stated, “Women do not understand that the media is their link to the people and offers them the means to educate people of who they are and what their political aspirations are.”<sup>98</sup>

### **Gender Sensitive Electoral Security Planning & Women’s Situation Room**

Gender sensitive electoral security planning (GSESP) reflects both how to deal with gender-specific security risks (see below) and inclusive policing. To promote safety and reduce instances of commotion or violence, TPEC established an Election Security Committee, which includes members of TPEC, the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Security, and police. An SOS Desk was also implemented to respond to emergency calls. Police were recruited and dispatched during the elections. Women officers were not expected to work in unsafe areas. Instead, TPEC anticipated deploying women officers to work in urban areas such as Eyl, Qarxis

and Qardho. Similarly, women election staff were to be accompanied by men when working in remote areas. While this approach is intended to protect women from security risks, it can reinforce gender stereotypes. For this reason, it is recommended to strive for mixed-sex security teams at all polling stations, which in turn requires investment in the development of gender strategies in the security sector.

Situation rooms were established to “monitor, analyze and respond to incidents as they happen”.<sup>99</sup> An Election Situation Room and a Women’s Situation Room (WSR) were set up and run by Puntland Non-State Actors Association (PUNSAA).<sup>100</sup> Election monitors were trained to operate on site and submit real-time information, not only on the elections but also on VAWE and any other violence. The WSR was a 6-member committee established to “counteract all forms of violence to the citizens, both candidates and voters”.<sup>101</sup> Each member of the WSR was provided communication equipment, such as mobile phones and computers, to stay in touch and re-

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<sup>96</sup> Media, Qardho, October 18, 2021

<sup>97</sup> Media, Qardho, October 18, 2021

<sup>98</sup> MAP General Secretary, Garowe, September 29, 2021; Women In Media Initiative (WIMI), Garowe, October 6, 2021

<sup>99</sup> Women in Media Initiative (WIMI), Garowe, October 6, 2021

<sup>100</sup> DIAKONIA, Garowe, October 4, 2021

<sup>101</sup> TPEC & FBA

<sup>102</sup> PUNSAA chairman, Garowe, November 23, 2021; MOWDAFA head of Gender Department, Garowe, October 9, 2021

spond immediately to cases of insecurity or violence.

On Election Day, the WSR was operational “during the whole day and received calls from all three districts concerning incidents against or concerning women”.<sup>102</sup> The minister of MOWDAFA took calls for the WSR on Election Day. A significant amount of people called the WSR. Many calls were concerning the long lines and requests for the prioritization of certain groups of women, such as pregnant women. However, there was also at least one reported case “of a security officer harassing a woman voter and another of violence against voters”.<sup>103</sup> A police officer was tasked to ensure the immediate response of reported VAWE/P incidents, while a representative from TPEC was responsible for correcting any problems relating to voting cards and IDs.

### **Women’s Civil Society**

Women’s civil society is active in Puntland. The CSOs undertake activities, organize meetings, conduct awareness training programs, provide training for woman voters and candidates, and advocate for women’s political participation

among the political associations. For example, PDRC has provided workshops to improve the awareness of women in politics. As a result of these workshops and awareness programs, “many women demonstrated willingness to participate in politics”.<sup>104</sup> Likewise, PDRC conducted research to “understand the roots of the problem with women participation in social, political and economic spheres, as well as inspire, support and empower many young girls to take part in the decision-making processes at local government and central government levels” and established women umbrellas “for peace building and social reconciliation”.<sup>105</sup> Another organization, We Are Women Activists (WAWA), was noted as an umbrella organization that united 34 women organizations that is actively engaged in awareness raising, voter registration, and women’s mobilization.

Some interviewees were critical of the CSO sector. There are many women organizations, women activists, and CSOs operating in Puntland, however, according to a journalist from Qardho, “they made little impact” and the women umbrellas are “not effective”, stating that “they are mostly old-fashioned and need

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<sup>103</sup> TPEC & FBA

<sup>104</sup> TPEC & FBA

<sup>105</sup> Local Government Secretary, Eyl, October 14, 2021

<sup>106</sup> Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe,

September 14, 2021 Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021

<sup>106</sup> Media, Qardho, October 18, 2021

<sup>107</sup> Media, Qardho, October 18, 2021

updating in terms of legislation, procedures, and programs. They are currently inactive mainly due to lack of funding and cooperation. The women umbrellas need funding to manage their member organizations.”<sup>106</sup> Still other interviewees registered complaints about the impact of foreign aid on civil society. They stated that smaller women’s organizations had faded away due to donor streams going to larger organizations and umbrella groups.

While such claims about the level of activity and impact of women’s CSOs are disputable, women’s organizations often lack financial support, effective networking and coordination. Organizational capacity building, civic education, and awareness raising programs were identified as potential remedies.





# *Violence Against Women in Elections/Politics (VAWE/P)*

## **Key Findings – Violence Against Women in Elections/Politics**

- Puntland was considered at high risk of VAWE/P due to the rapidly changing context of women's participation and existing historic security environment.
- Many interview respondents had personally experienced or personally knew a woman who had experienced VAWE/P in Puntland, including acts of intimidation, physical assaults, exploitation, threats, humiliation, harassment, and social media attacks.
- Women candidates and public leaders appeared to face the highest risk, followed by women journalists
- Online forms VAWE/P are a common problem including harassment, harmful propaganda, misleading publicity, and personality attacks
- The notion that harassment and abuse of women candidates is a “normal” part of politics undermines the ability to recognize and address the problem
- Psychological forms of VAWE/P were reported, including from family and clan members

**VAWLENCE AGAINST WOMEN** in elections or in politics (VAWE/P) targets women who participate in public or political life, either specifically because they are women, or in distinctly gendered ways. VAWE/P incidents seek to control and restrict women's participation in political processes and institutions on the basis of their gender through emotional, social, or economic force; coercion; pressure; or physical and sexual harm. VAWE/P is not only about physical harm, but it also includes sexual harm and psychological harm (intimidation and threats, public shaming, humiliation, etc.). Administrative violations may also be considered related forms of VAWE/P, for example violations of the quota rules or other measures existing to ensure a level playing field for women in politics.

VAWE is not only about political candidates. It also concerns voters, electoral management officials, journalists and civil society members. Among institutional actors, EMB leaders may be at risk of targeting. In the professional classes, women journalists and civic leaders are at high risk. Private citizens

can be targeted, such as voters who experience domestic/intimate partner violence or rape for their choices.

### **VAWE/P as a Form of Backlash to Rapid Change**

The gender assessment team paid close attention to the context around VAWE/P in the Puntland elections for two particular reasons. First, VAWE/P is often exacerbated in contexts with high existing levels of public violence and/or a history of conflict, such as Somalia. Second, VAWE/P often flares as a backlash response to sudden changes in gendered patterns of political participation and leadership. “Backlash” is defined as social and economic reprisal for behaving in ways that appear to be different from stereotypes and norms. Gender stereotypes can result in negative reactions to women’s agency and authority (i.e., backlash). This dilemma has serious consequences for gender parity, as it undermines women at every stage of their careers.

During elections, backlash can occur when men or women hold negative gender stereotypes such as:

- “women’s place is in the home, not in public”
- “politics is a man’s place to lead”
- “women who run for office are stealing places from men”

- “women who enter politics have low morals/are bad mothers/are not womanly”

This can also occur for women voters.

Women may be pressured into voting according to the wishes of their family or clan. They may be threatened for wanting to vote differently or for deciding not to vote. This can include threats, abuse and even violence or domestic abuse.

### **Legal Protections Against Gender-Based Violence**

There is a limited legal framework around VAWE/P. Laws have been implemented to protect citizens from sexual harassment and rape. Sexual abuse in the workplace is prohibited under Article 24 of the Provisional Constitution. Sexual harassment is considered illegal under the Puntland Sexual Offences Act 2016. A federal Sexual Offences Bill has been drafted to criminalize sexual harassment and rape, but has several years since its drafting still not been passed by Parliament. Within Article 398 of the Penal Code, rape is criminalized, and an offender can be sentenced up to 15 years in prison.

There are currently no laws that specifically address marital rape and domestic violence such as intimate partner violence.<sup>107</sup> However, crimes involving gender-based violence are often dealt

with outside of court. Instead, crimes are settled through customary laws by community and religious elders.<sup>108</sup>

### **VAWE/P during the 2021 Puntland Elections**

A total of 8 respondents stated that they have experienced a form of VAWE/P or know of someone who has experienced VAWE/P or violence against women in their professional or public roles. These cases include intimidation, physical assaults, exploitation, threats, humiliation, harassment and social media attacks.

VAWE/P is a pervasive risk in both online and offline spaces, as described by a Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA:

To belong to a minority group, or being of old age or with a disability, all those make women vulnerable to virtual attacks. In the physical world (non-virtual), you find yourself in a male-dominated machinery; the president is a man, his deputy is a man, the ministers are all men (except one), 65 of the 66 Puntland parliamentarians are men, the judges are men and so on. Your whole life is regulated by men. Your needs are managed by men. And you are at the mercy of men.

If you stay at home, you are not exposed to the above threats and dangers. It is when you step out with the ambition to participate in politics or leadership. Women from the minority groups (clans) are the most vulnerable of all. Somalis call them Looma-ooyaan (literally means “there is nobody who cries for them,” and metaphorically means “someone who is completely defenseless”). But nowadays violence is being targeted at all women, not just the minority groups.<sup>109</sup>

Prior to the elections, opinions were divided as to whether or not to expect VAWE/P to be a problem during the October elections. Some respondents anticipated VAWE/P would occur during the October 2021 elections and that “women have special security needs which should be considered during and before election.”<sup>110</sup> While most felt that polling stations were well secured, risks identified were associated with the travel to polling places and targeted at candidates. Meanwhile, a similar number of respondents disagreed. A member of the local government council in Eyl, summarized this position, stating, “I cannot foresee any

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<sup>107</sup> UN Women 2019

<sup>108</sup> UN Women 2019

<sup>109</sup> PDRC 2020; SIDRA Institute 2018

VAWE at the present. There might be trivial incidents between two people, but I foresee no concern for VAWE.”

Of interviewees that were concerned about VAWE/P, most felt that women leaders faced the highest risk. This was reflected in the experience shared:

One interviewee from the KAAH Political Association and Member of the Executive Committee in Eyl recounted her experience previously serving as president of a political association. She explained that men continually tried to oust her through a variety of strategies, such as inhibiting her ability to raise funds. Ultimately, the political association could not be sustained and was eventually dissolved.<sup>112</sup>

In another example from the interviews, a candidate for Mayorship, was attacked by a group of young men in her office. Her shoulder was injured in the attack, and she could not use her hand for three days. After the initial incident, she was subjected to “a series of intimidations and physical assaults by the same group of people.” When she attempted to confront the families of her attackers,

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“We sometimes see politically motivated women being attacked online, even from outside Somalia, to break her morale. Some may give in and give up their competition. They may feel ashamed to stand in public due to the wrong information shared online.”

~ Representative of RUNCAD Political Association, Garowe, September 28, 2021

she was evicted from her office by the landlord, even though she paid her rent in advance. She expressed, “The best advice I got from people close to me was to just close down the office. All that made me very upset, and almost caused me to give up. But I did not give up. I moved to a more secure neighborhood and kept up my work. It was a terrible experience. I would not be subject to such a humiliation if I had been a man.”<sup>113</sup>

In the media sector, women also experience sexual harassment by their male supervisors or superiors.<sup>114</sup> A representative of DIAKONIA reported hearing “many complaints by women journal-

<sup>110</sup> Garowe, September 14, 2021

<sup>111</sup> Representative of RUNCAD Political Association, Garowe, September 28, 2021

<sup>112</sup> October 13, 2021

<sup>113</sup> Member of KAAH Political Association, Garowe, October 6, 2021

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“We sometimes see politically motivated women being attacked online, even from outside Somalia, to break her morale. Some may give in and give up their competition. They may feel ashamed to stand in public due to the wrong information shared online.”

~ Representative of RUNCAD Political Association, Garowe, September 28, 2021



ists,” who shared “horrible experiences they had encountered from men at their workplaces.”<sup>115</sup> In one case, a woman journalist was denied job opportunities after resisting sexual advances from potential male employers.<sup>116</sup>

Online forms of VAWE/P are a common problem including harassment, harmful propaganda, misleading publicity, and personality attacks.<sup>117</sup> Some interviewees felt that online violence was more of a potential threat than physical or sexual attacks. “Social platforms are where the majority of violence take place. Women are attacked from all

sides.... To belong to a minority group, or being of old age or with a disability, all those make women vulnerable to virtual attacks” stated a Politician/Formal Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA.<sup>118</sup>

The challenge of controlling and regulating online violence was raised by several interviewees. The notion that online harassment is “normal” behavior to be expected in politics was shared by some who felt it should not be flagged as specifically targeted at women. However, other interviewees felt differently, stating that social media serves as a platform for propaganda and misinfor-

<sup>114</sup> UN Women 2019

<sup>115</sup> MAP General Secretary, Garowe, September 29, 2021

<sup>116</sup> DIAKONIA, Garowe, October 4, 2021

<sup>117</sup> DIAKONIA, Garowe, October 4, 2021

<sup>118</sup> Politician/Formal Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021; Politician/Formal Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021; Media, Qardho, October 18, 2021

<sup>119</sup> Garowe, September 14, 2021



mation harmful to women in particular. Women who are older, living with disabilities, belong to a minority clan, or are political candidates are reportedly particularly vulnerable to online forms of VAWE/P.<sup>119</sup>

Finally, the significance of non-physical, psychological forms of VAWE/P were also underlined by interviewees. Women aspirants and candidates faced discouragement, disparagement, and discrimination from family, clan and other community members in relation to breaking gender norms. These behaviors can have lasting impacts. According to a politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, “[wom-

en candidates are] made to feel as an outsider. That feeling will accompany women who actually succeed to hold senior positions, whether in the cabinet of ministers or the parliament, and she is made to feel less important.”<sup>120</sup>

## Responses to VAWE/P

A variety of responses to prevent and mitigate VAWE/P were flagged by interviewees. Some called for stronger measures to mitigate risks through the election cycle. Awareness-raising is a first step in helping recognize the existence and extent of the problem and to help women that experience them understand available recourse. Interviewees noted the fact that people in positions of authority, such as poll workers or security officials, can become perpetrators of VAWE/P and urged appropriate training and protocols.

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“People in general do not acknowledge online VAWE as harmful. It is a form of [violence that] society accepts with less regard compared to physical [violence].”

~ Media, Qardho, October 18, 2021

<sup>120</sup> September 14, 2021,

# Conclusion

**WHILE PROGRESS HAS BEEN** made in women's participation, significant work remains including the need to build political will for change among clan leaders and political associations. There has been a gradual change and many women have seen improvements over the course of the 2021 electoral process. TPEC's implementation of the guidelines/requirements for political associations on a gender quota enabling a minimum level of women's representation made a valuable and positive impact in improving women's access to local council seats. As a result of active efforts to reach out to women, over half of registered voters were women. In particular, young voters turned out in high numbers. The results show the key role of the EMB in analyzing each step of the electoral cycle from a gender perspective and adapt planning and implementation of elections to the needs of both male and female voters.

Women do not hold many senior management/leadership positions, neither

in the political associations or in government or public agencies. Women are often found in middle management while men often are in charge of processes. To achieve meaningful and lasting change, women need to be more involved in the decision-making process at senior levels. Political associations can make important contributions by engaging women as members and allowing them space to gain experience and grow as political leaders.

There are a variety of impediments to achieving this enduring change. Social norms and stereotypes, gendered divisions of labour and women's often double burden of care and household responsibilities coupled with bread-winning responsibilities naturally impact women's opportunities and experiences to engage in public life and political roles. Men tend to be more socially connected than women in politics. Our interviewees reported overall lower levels of knowledge about the process and understanding of how to engage among women in

politics. There is a need to invest in the education of women, including more mentoring and skill-building programs (networking, campaigning, fundraising, leadership, public presentations, etc.) and media training for women in politics.

Our interviewees reported that clans still have influence in democratic processes, which can be a barrier for women. Finances, gender norms, lack of education and community and/or family support also act as barriers for women in politics. Notably, women in politics need more financial support for outreach and campaigning. Due to the limited access to resources, interviewees reported a lack of outreach by women in politics during the 2021 elections. Men engaging in politics are reportedly more willing to take risks, as they can recover financially. However, according to the interviews, women tend to spend money on their family, rather than politics.

Women often work behind the scenes, while supporting and enabling others to succeed. We also heard from our interviews that women are often not engaged in political campaigns, or make speeches and have reduced

media coverage compared to men. A serious issue reported during the research was that of violence against women in elections or in public roles. The most common forms of VAWE/P are online/virtual harassment, attacks on personality, and credibility (which can also be online), and psychological (coercion, discouragement, withholding support). Overall, the justice system needs to be more reliable and effective where cases of violence against women are concerned. Gender-sensitive electoral security planning is a good practice that can be further strengthened. Preventative measures have been implemented for all forms of VAWE/P during the elections, such as situation rooms. Lessons learned from civil society – security sector partnerships to prevent and respond to VAWE should be institutionalized and further developed.

The 2021 Puntland elections were a watershed for democracy in Somalia and a historic milestone in advancing women's participation. The lessons from Puntland will help inform the future of policy and practice in upcoming OPOV elections at the state and federal levels.

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<sup>59</sup> Campbell, 2017. <https://academic.oup.com/jogss/article-abstract/2/1/89/2959877?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

# *Annex A – Additional* **Information on Methodology Approach to Data Sources & Risks**

**THE ONGOING CONFLICT** in Somalia is associated with multiple ethical challenges and dilemmas. It is necessary to go above and beyond the basic ethical principles established to guide research on human subjects for research in conflict and post-conflict environments. Environments such as Somalia present unique challenges to informed consent, confidentiality, risk-benefit analysis, researcher security, and beneficence. Specifically, to ensure “truly informed consent” precaution must be taken for respecting the interviewee’s autonomy, giving them the authority to decline to answer specific questions, withdraw their participation at any point during the process, and dictate whether information can be attributed, published without attribution, or used only for informational purposes, as well as refraining from pushing the interviewee to answer questions. It also requires sensitivity to the culture of the participants, which can be improved by working with a local research partner. To address

this, at the onset of any semi-structured interview or focus group, PDRC established free and prior informed consent.

This included:

- An explanation of the purposes of the research, how long it will take, and the procedures to be followed.
- A description of any risks to the person participating (if relevant).
- A description of any expected benefits to the person participating, or to their community, as a result of participating.
- A statement describing whether the data will be anonymous or stored confidentially.
- Contact details for the person to get in touch with if they have questions or concerns regarding the research.
- A statement that participation is voluntary, that refusal to participate will involve no penalty, and that the subject may stop participating at any time.



In many cases, participation in gender research can result in elevated risks for individuals and organizations. The Consultant will obscure or will not record personally identifying information, including names, ages, organizations, and even times and

dates of interviews. The appropriate data recording method will be determined on a case by case basis and will adhere to what the participant is most comfortable with, adhering to do-no-harm and ethical data collection protocols.

# Gender Analysis Research Matrix

Research Theme	Information Needs	Tools and Sources of Information
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on gender gaps and trends</li> <li>• Cultural norms and beliefs</li> <li>• Gender roles, responsibilities and time use</li> <li>• Access to and control over assets and resources, including land, finance, etc.</li> </ul>	Literature review: National statistics and data bases, research reports, global indexes, donor and NGO studies.
Legal and policy frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laws, policies, regulations and institutional practices</li> <li>• International commitments and UN resolutions</li> </ul>	Literature review: National statistics and data bases, UN repositories.
Political Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on key gender gaps and challenges related to good governance (women's representation, gender mainstreaming in public policy and programs) at national and sub-national levels.</li> <li>• Impact/implications of decentralization on gender equality.</li> </ul>	<p>Literature review: National statistics and databases, research documents. Research reports, PDRC, donors' and other NGOs' program studies and evaluations.</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews: PDRC staff, public sector representatives at national and local levels, UN Gender Advisor if applicable, UNDP</p>
Electoral Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on composition of EMB at all levels, gender-specific policies/staffing resources, targeted outreach or inclusion measures</li> <li>• Gender-specific barriers to electoral participation</li> </ul>	Semi-structured interviews: PDRC staff, public sector representatives at national and local levels, UNDP

Research Theme	Information Needs	Tools and Sources of Information
Political Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patterns of Power and Decision-Making at household, community, economic and political levels</li> <li>• Gender &amp; party structures (leadership, membership, policies, practices, women's wings)</li> </ul>	Semi-structured interviews: Party representatives, local experts (academic, CSO)
Civic Engagement & Public Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data on women's registration &amp; turnout, existence of targeted civic and voter education</li> <li>• Available data on popular perception of WPPL</li> <li>• Women's role in civil society, existence and achievements of national women's machinery and/or civil society movements</li> </ul>	Semi-structured interviews & Focus Group Discussions: CSO representatives, national experts, PDRC staff, voters
Barriers to participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature of and extent of violence against women in politics, including online harassment and abuse</li> <li>• Inequality in campaign finance</li> <li>• Other barriers (logistical, conflict-related, cultural constraints)</li> </ul>	<p>Semi-structured interviews &amp; FGD: CSO representatives, national experts, PDRC staff, public sector representatives at national and local levels, voters</p> <p>Primary data collection through monitoring online sources and check-ins with sources for offline violence: to be developed in data collection tools</p>

# List of interviews

Representative of RUNCAD Political Association, Garowe, September 28, 2021

Focus Group Participant, Eyl, October 15, 2021

Local Government Secretary, Eyl, October 14, 2021

Member of IDP Community, Qardho, October 17, 2021

Elder, Ufeyn, October 22, 2021

Member of local council, Eyl, October 13, 2021

Mayoral Candidate, Ufeyn, October 23, 2021

Candidate for KAAH Political Association, Eyl, October 13, 2021

Deputy Mayor/Male Voter, Ufeyn, October 21, 2021

Member of Mustaqbal Political Association, Garowe, September 29, 2021

Member of KAAH Political Association, Garowe, October 6, 2021

Politician/Former Deputy Minister at MOWDAFA, Garowe, September 14, 2021

PUNSAA chairman, Garowe, November 23, 2021

TPEC/Commissioner, Garowe, September 26, 2021

Male Voter, Qardho, October 17, 2021

Elder, Ufeyn, October 22, 2021

TPEC gender advisor, Garowe, November 30, 2021

MOWDAFA, Eyl, October 14, 2021

Member of IDP Community, Qardho, October 17, 2021

Member of IDP Community, Qardho, October 17, 2021

Female voter, Eyl, October 14, 2021

MOWDAFA head of Gender Department, Garowe, October 9, 2021

DIAKONIA, Garowe, October 4, 2021

TPEC, Eyl, October 14, 2021

Elder, Ufeyn, October 22, 2021

Male Voter, Ufeyn, October 21, 2021

Elder, Ufeyn, October 22, 2021

Member of IDP Community, Qardho, October 17, 2021

Media, Qardho, October 18, 2021

MAP General Secretary, Garowe, September 29, 2021

Women In Media Initiative (WIMI), Garowe, October 6, 2021

TPEC/Commissioner, Garowe, September 26, 2021

Male Voter, Eyl, October 14, 2021

Former Deputy Minister, Garowe, September 15, 2021

Male Voter, Ufeyn, October 21, 2021

Male Voter, Qardho, October 17, 2021

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