

State of Somalia

2020 Report

Contents

1. Executive Summary	3
2. Dispute over elections	4
2.1 Dhuusamarreeb dialogues	5
2.2 Ouster of PM	6
2.3 Electoral agreement	7
2.4 Unraveling of electoral agreement	7
2.5 Appointment of new PM	8
3. State-level developments	9
3.1 Puntland	9
3.1.1 Security	10
3.1.2 Politics	10
3.1.3. Tussle over education	11
3.1.4 Socioeconomic situation	11
3.2 Jubbaland	12
3.2.1 Security	12
3.2.2 Politics	13
3.3 Southwest	14
3.3.1 Security	14
3.3.2 Politics	14
3.4 Galmudug	15
3.4.1 Politics	15
3.4.2 Security	16
3.5.Hirshabeelle	16
3.5.1 Politics	17
3.5.2.Security	17
3.5.3.Humanitarian situation	18
3.6. Benadir	18
3.7 Somaliland	19
3.7.1.Somalia-Somaliland Talks	19
4. Al-Shabaab	20
4.1 Al Shabaab Financing	21
5. Economy	22
5.1 Debt relief	23
5.2 Natural resources	23
6. Humanitarian issues	24
6.1 COVID-19 pandemic	24
7. Press freedom	26
8. External relations	26
8.1 Souring relations with Djibouti	27
8.2 Close ties with Ethiopia and Eritrea	27
8.3 Relations with others	28
9. Conclusion	29

1. Executive summary

This report covers the period from January 2020 to January 2021. It tracks the main developments in politics, security and the economy as well as in the humanitarian sector and also looks at the role of external actors. The report takes both qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the key events in Somalia during the reporting period. The objective of the report is to (i) empirically document key events in Somalia (ii) provide analysis and context to policymakers, academics and the general public and (iii) support peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts in Somalia.

During the reporting period, the political climate of the country was animated by disputes over the 2020 parliamentary elections and the 2021 presidential elections. After signing an electoral bill into law in early February, president Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo insisted that one-person, one-vote (OPOV) was the only legal poll that his government was willing to carry out. However, credible voices, including the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS), noted the lack of adequate preparations to allow a universal suffrage elections to take place on time.

The debate over the practical and implementable electoral modality led to the unceremonious sacking of the longest serving prime minister in the history of Somalia, Hassan Ali Khaire, who fell out with President Farmaajo after three and half years of close partnership. Nearly two months later, President Farmaajo appointed Mohamed Hussien Roble, a political novice, as the new prime minister. In his first five months, Roble has largely toed the president's line.

The federal government of Somalia (FGS) continued to install its allies as presidents of federal member states (FMS). In February, a federal state minister, Ahmed Abdi Karie (Qoorqoor), was elected as the president of Galmudug. By all accounts, the election was rigged in his favor, forcing his rivals to boycott the polls. In November, another ally of the FGS leadership, Ali Guudlaawe, was installed as the president of Hirshabelle. The former vice president was also elected largely uncontested.

The FGS renewed the halting dialogue with Somaliland in 2020 with enthusiasm. The Ethiopian prime minister brokered a meeting between President Farmaajo and Somaliland president Muse Bihi in Addis Ababa during which President Farmaajo apologized for the massacres committed by the military dictatorship in the 1980s. The Ethiopian prime minister pushed for a historic visit by President Farmaajo to Hargeisa, a prospect that appeared imminent until it was flatly rejected by the Somaliland government. A more subdued dialogue followed in Djibouti, and the outcome was underwhelming.

On the security front, al-Shabaab remained a potent threat to peace and security across the country. As its capability for traditional warfare diminished considerably as a result of intense air strikes by the US and ground operations by Somali forces and AMISOM, the group moved underground, and is slowly morphing into a mafia-like entity that prioritizes collecting taxes over armed struggle. Still, al-Shabaab managed to disrupt peacebuilding and statebuilding and forced the FGS and FMS operate out of large urban centers without the ability to move between cities.

During the reporting period, the economy of the country shrank as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating impact. However, 2020 was a great year for Somalia in terms of debt relief. The country has reached the so-called ‘decision point’—a remarkable milestone that triggers reengagement with international financial institutions. The World Bank, the IMF and the African Development Bank have all cleared arrears on loans, and have normalized relations with Somalia.

The humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate. In 2020, UN agencies announced that a third of the population was in dire need of urgent humanitarian assistance due to the consequences of COVID-19, cyclical droughts, floods and desert locusts. The pandemic has had a deleterious impact on the health of the society. Although the country has a very limited testing capacity, the federal ministry of health reported that out of the 81,000 people who were tested for suspected coronavirus, nearly 4,700 tested positive, with an average case fatality rate of about 2.8%.

On the external relations front, Somalia’s relationships with several key countries took a turn for the worse. Mogadishu severed ties with Kenya, and the relationship with Djibouti, a longstanding ally, is suffering. Similarly, the relationship with UAE remains frozen in mutual acrimony while the ties with Saudi Arabia remain cold. However, Somalia’s relationship with Ethiopia and Eritrea continued to thrive. The relationship with Qatar and Turkey went from strength to strength, with strong economic and security cooperation. The US and Europe continue to provide the largest humanitarian, economic and security support to Somalia, however, they maintain a distant relationship that is not proportional to their support. The Trump administration withdrew several hundred American forces from Somalia as one of his final foreign policy actions.

Looking ahead, 2021 is a make or break year for Somalia. Depending on how political leaders at the FGS and FMS levels manage the ongoing crisis over the elections, the country could either return to a modicum of normalcy after relatively free and fair elections, or slide back into its dark past after a disputed election.

2. Dispute over elections

In Somalia, 2020 was marked by heightened political tension over the electoral modality that would be appropriate, acceptable and implementable within the mandate of the federal government. President Farmaajo insisted that a OPOV election was implementable, despite mounting evidence that lack of preparations and the absence of political consensus among key stakeholders was making it impossible to realize a universal suffrage election by early February 2021 when his four-year mandate came to an end.¹

¹ See, for example, “In Search of a Workable 2020 Electoral Model” (2019). Heritage Institute. Accessed at: http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/HIPS_report_english_version.pdf

In February 2020, President Farmaajo signed an electoral law that was passed by both houses of parliament after nearly two years of negotiations. While the law was a cause for celebration given the hope it gave to citizens wanting to exercise their democratic duty for the first time since 1969, it became abundantly clear that it wouldn't be applicable to the 2020 elections due to lack of preparations. Key stakeholders, including some federal member states, rejected the law as unimplementable.²

For months, President Farmaajo insisted that OPOV was not only doable within the remaining mandate of the government, but that it was the only electoral modality that his administration was willing to organize, regardless of what other stakeholders (federal member states and opposition) thought. Then, in June 2020, the National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC) dropped a bombshell. Its chairwoman, Halima Ismail Ibrahim, announced that her committee couldn't organize OPOV election by the end of the mandates of the parliament and the president (27 November 2020 and 8 February 2021 respectively). Ibrahim cited the political crisis, insecurity, COVID-19 and humanitarian disasters as key factors scuttling OPOV elections.³

She asked parliament to grant the NIEC 13 months and \$70 million to biometrically register about three million voters, identify 5,000 polling stations and hire thousands of election workers across the country. The reaction to the NIEC's announcement was swift and strong: opposition groups and some federal member states immediately rejected it as a cover to illegally extend the mandate of President Farmaajo.⁴

By that time, it was becoming clear that the country was headed to an electoral crisis of epic proportions. Neither the universal suffrage election promised by the government nor an alternative modality was in place, and only a few short months remained from the constitutional mandates of the federal parliament and the president. A scramble for mediation and middle ground began in earnest among political leaders and key stakeholders. But the federal government rebuffed stakeholders who argued that OPOV was not feasible. International partners also started exerting pressure on stakeholders to find common ground.

2.1 Dhuusamarreeb dialogues

On 10 June 2020, the US Embassy in Somalia issued a strongly worded statement calling on the leadership of the federal government to convene with federal member states and discuss the electoral disputes.⁵ Three days later, the Villa Somalia announced that President Farmaajo would meet with member states to engage in a substantive dialogue about the electoral impasse.

2 See "Expanded Participation Model: Alternative for Somalia's 2020 One-Person, One-Vote Plan". (2020). Heritage Institute. Accessed at: <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Heritage-Institute-Policy-Brief-on-the-2020-Election.-English.pdf>

3 Maruf, H. "Somali Elections Won't Take Place on Schedule." (June 2020). VOA News. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/somali-elections-wont-take-place-schedule>

4 Ibid.

5 See "Statement by the United States Calling for a Meeting Between the Federal Government of Somalia and Federal Member States." (June 2020). US Embassy. Accessed at: <https://so.usembassy.gov/statement-by-the-united-states-calling-for-a-meeting-between-the-federal-government-of-somalia-and-federal-member-states/>

Crucially, the federal government also announced that it recognizes Ahmed Madoobe as the “interim president” of Jubbaland, paving the way for a face-to-face meeting between the two leaders.⁶ The relationship between Jubbaland and the FGS has been acrimonious since the 2019 presidential election in that state when the incumbent was reelected in disputed elections.

By late June, President Farmaajo had held virtual meetings with all five member states plus Benadir—the first such dialogue since June 2018 in Baidoa.⁷ And a few weeks after that, leaders of the federal government and the member states began meeting in Dhuusamarreeb, the capital of Galmudug state. President Farmaajo also joined the Dhuusamarreeb dialogue as stakeholders discussed how to create a workable electoral model.

After nearly 10 days of negotiations, the FGS and FMS agreed on an outline of an indirect electoral modality that was broadly modelled after the 2016 elections.⁸ However, the leaders agreed to increase the number of electors for each of the 275 seats of the Lower House of the parliament from 51 to 301 and increase the locations of elections from one in each FMS to two. Both Somalis and international partners saw the agreement as a major breakthrough. However, President Farmaajo wasn’t happy as he felt that prime minister Hassan Ali Khaire had conspired against him and strong-armed him into a political deal that scuttled his OPOV ambition and ultimately damaged his electoral prospects.

2.2 Ouster of PM

On 25 July 2020, a day after Dhuusamarreeb Two ended, the lower house of the federal parliament sacked Prime Minister Khaire in the most unceremonious fashion: a motion of no-confidence was tabled and, without a discussion, the majority of the MPs present voted to remove him from office.⁹ The whole exercise took less than seven minutes—a record in the long and checkered history of Somali parliaments removing heads of governments.

Among the litany of accusations, the motion of no-confidence mentioned that the prime minister had “failed to organize one-person, one-vote,” a striking accusation given the fact that, for three and half years, Khaire and Farmaajo were seen as inseparable on virtually all matters of national importance. However, tension was brewing quietly between the two men over how to solve the electoral impasse.

6 See “FGS recognizes Madoobe as ‘interim president’, invites FMS leaders for a meeting.” (June 2020). Garowe Online. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-fgs-recognises-madoobe-as-interim-president-invites-fms-leaders-to-meeting>

7 See “Farmaajo holds virtual meeting with FMS leaders amid int’l pressure,” (June 2020). Garowe Online. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-farmaajo-holds-virtual-meeting-with-fms-leaders-amid-pressure-from-intl-partners>

8 In 2016, each of the 275 seats of the Lower House of parliament was elected by 51 delegates from the subclan that ‘owns’ the seat. Nearly all of the 54 seats of the Upper House were elected by state legislatures (except the 11 senators from Somaliland who were elected by a special caucus in Mogadishu).

9 Hassan, M. “Somalia’s Parliament Votes Out Prime Minister.” (July 2020). VOA News. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/somalias-parliament-votes-out-prime-minister>

While President Farmaajo insisted on OPOV even if it led to the extension of his term, Prime Minister Khaire made it clear that an extension was unconstitutional and that political consensus was necessary to solve the electoral crisis.¹⁰

The sudden decapitation of Khaire administration threatened to unravel the Dhuusamarreeb dialogues. Both Puntland and Jubbaland sharply criticized the move as a ploy by President Farmaajo to undermine the dialogues and revert to his “extensionist instincts”.¹¹ As a condition of returning to the dialogues, Puntland demanded that President Farmaajo urgently appoint a new prime minister who would lead the negotiations on behalf of the FGS.¹² Traditionally, the Somali president appoints a new prime minister within 30 days.

2.3 Electoral agreement

President Farmaajo ignored calls to urgently appoint a new prime minister and invited FMS leaders to Mogadishu to finalize the agreement on an acceptable electoral modality. Under duress by international partners, the FMS leaders reluctantly came to the capital in early September and continued their dialogue with the president. After more than a week of intense negotiations, the FGS and FMS signed a landmark electoral agreement, known as the 17 September Agreement.¹³ The new agreement effectively discarded the framework agreed in Dhuusamarreeb by reducing the number of electoral delegates from 301 to 101 and giving substantial powers to the presidents of federal member states to select the electors. However, it was widely lauded as a “Somali-led, Somali-owned” breakthrough to the electoral impasse.¹⁴ International partners, anticipating further disagreements over the implementation of this agreement, have urged Somali leaders to regularly meet and continue finessing the fine details of this agreement.¹⁵

2.4 Unraveling of electoral agreement

Predictably, disagreements over the implementation of the 17 September Agreement came to the fore even before the ink it was written with had dried. As soon as the FGS appointed the Federal Electoral Implementation Team (FEIT), Puntland, Jubbaland and an opposition umbrella group rejected it as illegal and in violation of the 17 September Agreement. Among other accusations, they alleged that FEIT members are drawn from the office of the president, security agencies and the diplomatic corps.¹⁶ Indeed, several members of the FEIT are known FGS officials and aides to senior officials.¹⁷

10 See “Ra’iisul Wasaare Khaire oo ka Horyimid Muddo Kordhin.” (July 2020). VOA Somali. Accessed at: <https://www.voasomali.com/a/5496181.html>

11 See “Puntland oo shuruudo adag ku xirtay shirka Dhuusamarreeb 3”. (August 2020). BBC Somali. Accessed at: <https://www.bbc.com/somali/war-53803447>

12 Ibid.

13 See Dhaysan, M. “Somali leaders agree on revised election model.” (Sept. 2020). Anadolu Agency. Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somali-leaders-agree-on-revised-election-model/1977240>

14 See “International Partners Note FGS-FMS Electoral Agreement.” (Sept. 2020). Accessed at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/international-partners-note-announced-fgs-fms-electoral-agreement>

15 Ibid.

16 See “Somali opposition candidates threaten to boycott presidential election.” (Nov. 2020). Garowe Online. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-new-electoral-body-faces-backlash-for-inclusion-of-spy-agents>

17 These include Abdinur Mohamed, deputy chief of staff at Villa Somalia, and Abdirahim Aden, an official at the office of the prime minister.

Other points of contention have also arisen. The speaker of the Upper House, Abdi Hashi Abdillahi, rejected the FGS-appointed electoral management body for Somaliland's parliamentary seats, since they are elected in Mogadishu and Somaliland is not part of the current federal arrangement.¹⁸ As the highest elected Somaliland official in the nation, Abdillahi argued that he should have a say in the appointment of the State Electoral Implementation Team (SEIT) for the Somaliland parliamentary caucus. Appointed by the prime minister for procedural reasons, the Somaliland SEIT was selected and proposed by the deputy prime minister, Mahdi Guled, who is the highest executive official from Somaliland.

Further contributing to the unraveling of the agreement is how to handle the 16 parliamentary seats allocated for Gedo province in Jubbaland state. In late 2019 and early 2020, the FGS deployed hundreds of highly trained forces to Gedo to dislodge the Jubbaland-appointed local administration and replace it with one aligned with President Farmaajo, whose clan dominates the province. This came after the 2019 disputed presidential election in Jubbaland, which the FGS rejected as “illegal”.¹⁹

In December, HIPS held its Annual Forum for Ideas (AFI) in Garowe, the capital of Puntland. Presidents of three member states (Puntland, Jubbaland and Galmudug) as well as the two speakers of the two houses of parliament, the deputy prime minister and nearly all the opposition leaders were among 750 people who participated at the three-day conference. Predictably, the 2020/2021 federal elections dominated the discussions, and the political leaders who attended engaged in sideline dialogues to find a common ground on the election stalemate. In the end, they agreed that further dialogue was necessary to solve the impasse.²⁰ Galmudug president Ahmed Abdi Karie (Qoorqoor) was dispatched to Mogadishu to find a common ground on (a) disputed FEIT members, (b) Somaliland electoral management and (c) Gedo elections.

2020 ended without an agreement on the electoral process. For the first time in 20 years, Somalia was inching towards the end of the mandate of a sitting administration without having an agreement on the electoral process and the way forward.

2.5 Appointment of new PM

After keeping the premiership vacant for nearly two months—the longest in the history of the nation—President Farmaajo appointed Mohamed Hussein Roble, a civil engineer and a mid-level UN official as his new prime minister. A political novice who was a surprise pick, Roble was immediately confirmed by parliament after telling MPs during his confirmation that he would champion inclusive elections.²¹

18 See “Upper House Speaker Rejects Appointment of New Electoral Committee.” (Nov. 2020). Dalsan Radio. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/en/2020/11/05/upper-house-speaker-rejects-the-appointment-of-the-new-electoral-committee/>

19 For a deeper understanding of the situation in Gedo, see “Ending the Dangerous Standoff in Southern Somalia.” (July 2020). Crisis Group Briefing No. 158. Accessed at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b158-ending-dangerous-standoff-southern-somalia>

20 See Communique of the 2020 Annual Forum for Ideas here: <https://twitter.com/HIPSINSTITUTE/status/1346422621274058752>

21 See “Somalia Parliament Approves New PM.” (Sept. 2020). VOA News. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/somalia-parliament-approves-new-prime-minister>

However, it quickly became apparent that, unlike his predecessor, Prime Minister Roble has very little influence on political matters.

His maiden mission to Puntland to resolve the electoral impasse failed after the president, Said Deni, refused to submit the list of its electoral management body (SEIT) without first resolving other related matters.²² In Mogadishu, the prime minister met with many opposition figures and frequently spoke about his desire to end the electoral impasse through dialogue.

In early January 2021, Roble, flanked by the presidents of Galmudug, Southwest and Hirshabeelle, announced that attempts to resolve the electoral crisis had failed but that elections would go ahead regardless. This was widely interpreted as meaning that the elections would take place, but only in the three states aligned with the FGS.²³

The opposition and international partners immediately warned against this approach.²⁴ On 30 January 2021, President Farmaajo announced that he would meet with FMS leaders in Dhuusamarreeb in early February to find a solution to the impasse.²⁵ This came after intense pressure by international partners, who made it clear that they would not accept “partial or parallel elections”.²⁶ After five days of dialogue, the meeting collapsed and the FGS and FMS blamed each other for refusing to compromise. Two days before his legal mandate expires on 8 February 2021, President Farmaajo spoke to the Lower House of the parliament and signaled that he would remain in office until a successor was elected. However, the opposition announced that they no longer recognize him as the legitimate president of Somalia.²⁷

3. State-level developments

There are five federal member states recognized by the FGS: Puntland, Jubbaland, Southwest, Galmudug and Hirshabeelle. Benadir, the capital city, remains a province under the direct authority of the FGS. Somaliland declared unilateral secession in 1991. This section provides an overview of the key developments in each state.

3.1 Puntland

As the oldest of the FMS, Puntland is the most stable and most developed state in the union and is comprised of Mudug, Nugaal, Bari, Sool and Sanaag.²⁸ Over its 21 years of existence, it has significantly improved its governance capacity. Still, it continues to confront security, political, humanitarian and socioeconomic challenges.

22 See “Somali PM’s Talks Over Election Crisis with Puntland Collapse.” (Dec. 2020). Garowe Online. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/puntland-president-deni-demands-for-withdrawal-of-sna-from-gedo>

23 See “PM Roble Declares Govt Will Hold Unilateral Election Amid Wrangling.” (Jan. 2021). Radio Dalsan. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/en/2021/01/09/pm-roble-declares-govt-will-hold-unilateral-elections-amid-wrangling/>

24 See “Joint Statement from International Partners on the Need for Ongoing Dialogue Among Somali Leaders.” (Jan. 2021). Accessed at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/joint-statement-international-partners-need-ongoing-dialogue-among-somali-leaders>

25 See “Madaxweyne Farmaajo oo Shir Wadatashi ah Isugu Yeeray Madaxda Dowlad Goboleedyada iyo Gobolka Benadir.” (Jan. 2021). Villa Somalia. Accessed at: <https://villasomalia.gov.so/soomaali/madaxweyne-farmaajo-oo-shir-wadatashi-ah-isugu-yeeray-madaxda-dowlad-goboleedyada-iyo-gobolka-banaadir/>

26 See statement by Somalia’s international partners on elections. (Jan. 2021). Accessed at: <https://unsom.unmissions.org/international-partners-elections>

27 See “Somali Opposition Leaders ‘No Longer Recognize President.’” (Feb. 2021). Al Jazeera. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/8/somali-opposition-leaders-no-longer-recognise-president>

28 Somaliland controls parts of Sool and Sanaag and lays claim to the rest of them. Galmudug controls parts of Mudug.

3.1.1 Security

The militant group al-Shabaab appears to have intensified its operations in the state to disrupt peace and stability. In March 2020, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the killing of Nugaal governor Abdisalam Hassan Hersi in a suicide bombing in the capital Garowe.²⁹ In May, the group claimed responsibility for another suicide attack that killed the governor of Mudug province, Ahmed Muse Nur, his brother and two bodyguards in the city of Galkayo, which straddles Galmudug and Puntland.³⁰ In August 2020, the high profile commander of the Puntland presidential guard, Col. Osman Omar Mohamed, was killed in the restive city of Galkayo in a gunfight with militias.³¹

In March, brief skirmishes between Puntland and Somaliland forces were reported in Tukarraq, a flashpoint between the neighboring states for 15 years.³² The area saw major fighting in 2018 between the two states.

In October, authorities in Puntland announced that they had seized 324 children who had been trafficked throughout the state. The Ministry of Women and Family Affairs told Radio Ergo that most of the children were 15, and that about half were saved in the port city of Bossaso. “The main reasons for child trafficking is to subject them to forced labor, to harvest their body organs to sell to people in critical health conditions, or for sexual exploitation. Most of these children leave by their own will, or are accompanied by their parents in order to migrate to Arab countries bordering us. Sometimes, parents who reach Arab countries via illegal migration request their children at home to be smuggled over to join them there,” Mohamed Abdirizak Hantiile was quoted as saying.³³

3.1.2 Politics

In March, the president of Puntland, Said Abdullahi Deni, convened a major conference in the capital Garowe called the Puntland Consultations Convention. Two former Puntland presidents, dozens of federal MPs and many traditional leaders were among 1,800 delegates from around the world who participated at the three-day conference, which came at a time of heightened tension between Garowe and Mogadishu.

29 See “Somali Governor Killed in Al-Shabab Suicide Bombing.” (March 2020). Al Jazeera. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/30/somali-governor-killed-in-al-shabab-suicide-bomb-attack>

30 Maruf, H. “Suicide Bomb Kills Somali Governor.” (May 2020). VOA News. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/suicide-bomb-kills-somali-governor>

31 See “Puntland Presidential Guard Commander Killed in Clash with Militias.” (Aug. 2020). Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2020/Aug/179462/puntland_presidential_guard_commander_killed_in_clash_with_militias.aspx

32 See “Somaliland and Puntland in Fresh Battle.” (March 2020). Radio Dalsan. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/en/2020/03/02/somaliland-and-puntland-in-fresh-battle/>

33 See “Trafficked Somali Children Ending Up in Puntland.” (Oct. 2020). Radio Ergo. Accessed at: [https://radioergo.org/en/2020/10/24/trafficked-somali-children-ending-up-in-puntland/#:~:text=\(ERGO\)%20%E2%80%93%20Authorities%20in%20the,in%20various%20towns%20and%20cities](https://radioergo.org/en/2020/10/24/trafficked-somali-children-ending-up-in-puntland/#:~:text=(ERGO)%20%E2%80%93%20Authorities%20in%20the,in%20various%20towns%20and%20cities)

In the final communiqué, the convention sharply criticized the federal government for what it described as its “wanton interventions” in the internal affairs of states, and its “disregard for the letter and spirit of the provisional constitution”. Furthermore, the convention rejected the electoral law that was signed by President Farmaajo just a few weeks earlier, and called for an urgent “stakeholders meeting to discuss the most appropriate electoral model”.³⁴

In December 2020, the Puntland parliament stripped the immunity of eight MPs accused of a litany of illegal activities and conduct unbecoming of a legislator. The MPs appealed their case to the state supreme court, which ruled against them, leading them to lose their seats.³⁵ The unprecedented move sparked controversy in Puntland. Vice President Ahmed Elmi Osman (Karaash), who has had rocky relations with President Deni for nearly two years, rejected the move as “overreach” and a violation of the state’s constitution.³⁶

Media reports suggested that the underlying factor in the dispute was linked to the tussle between the FGS and Puntland. The MPs who lost their parliamentary immunity were said to be part of a faction within that parliament that planned to oust the speaker, Abdirashid Yusuf, a close ally of President Deni.³⁷ Yusuf replaced Abdihakim Mohamed Ahmed in November 2019 after he was accused of subverting the political order of the state on the orders of the FGS, a charge he denies.³⁸

3.1.3. Tussle over education

To consolidate its power, the FGS demanded that Puntland students graduating from high schools should take the national exam administered by federal the ministry of education.³⁹ When Puntland refused, Education Minister Abdullahi Godah Barre made it clear that Puntland students would not receive the national high school certificate if they didn’t take this exam.⁴⁰ After a year-long tussle, the FGS softened its stand in December 2020 and allowed Puntland students to receive national certificates without sitting the national exam.⁴¹

3.1.4 Socioeconomic situation

In 2020, Puntland was deeply affected by rising inflation which affected the price of basic commodities and exchange rates.⁴²

34 See “Warmurtiyeedka Shirka Wadatashiga Puntland.” (March 2020). Accessed at: <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/somali/audio/warmurtiyeedka-shirka-wadatashiga-puntland>

35 See “Eight Regional MPs Stripped of Immunity for Going Against Standing Orders.” (Dec. 2020). Accessed at: <https://www.radioshabelle.com/eight-regional-mps-stripped-of-immunity-for-going-against-standing-orders/>

36 See “Madaxweyne kuxigeenka Puntland oo Kahor Yimid Xildhibaanadii Xasaanadda Laga Qaaday.” (Dec. 2020) Accessed at: <http://www.wardoonv.com/2020/12/03/madaxweyne-ku-xigeenka-puntland-oo-ka-hor-yimid-xildhibaan-xasaanadii-laga-qaaday/>

37 See “Eight Immunity Stripped of Immunity in Puntland.” (Dec. 2020). Goobjoog News. Accessed at: <https://goobjoog.com/english/eight-mps-stripped-of-immunity-in-puntland/>

38 See “Puntland Parliament Speaker Voted Out of Office by MPs.” (Nov. 2019). Garowe Online. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/somalia-puntland-parliament-speaker-voted-out-of-office-by-mps>

39 See “Minister Godah Barre: Puntland Should Take Somali National Exam.” (Jan. 2020). Goobjoog News. Accessed at: <http://goobjoog.com/english/minister-goodah-bare-puntland-should-take-somali-national-exam/>

40 See “Education Minister Declares Puntland Students to Miss Certificates.” (July 2020). Goobjoog News. Accessed at: <http://goobjoog.com/english/federal-govt-minister-of-education-declares-puntland-students-will-not-receive-somalias-secondary-school-certificate/>

41 See “Puntland Students to Receive Somalia’s Secondary School Certificates.” (Dec. 2020). Radio Dalsan. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/en/2020/12/14/puntland-students-to-receive-somalias-secondary-school-certificates/>

42 See “Maxaa Sabab u ah Sicir Bararka Xooggan ee ka Jira Puntland?.” (Oct. 2020). VOA Somali. Accessed at: <https://www.voasomali.com/a/5619577.html>

Some businesses refused to accept the Somali shilling and demanded US dollar as the only acceptable currency. Authorities formed a commission in October to study the underlying factors behind the rising inflation and its impact on the livelihoods of the population.⁴³ Following a review, the government ordered all businesses to accept the Somali shilling. But many traders have ignored the government's order which has deepened the crisis. In December 2020, boisterous protests erupted in Garowe demanding immediate action by the government to stem inflation.⁴⁴

President Deni formed another high-level commission to conduct another study and propose actionable solutions. In early January 2021, the committee proposed a set of policy actions to mitigate the economic impact. Among other proposals, the committee called on Puntland Bank to set and control exchange rates and for revenue authorities to collect at least 20% of all state income in Somali shillings.⁴⁵

3.2 Jubbaland

Jubbaland was convulsed by the disputed 2019 presidential election in which president Ahmed Mohamed Islam (Madoobe) was re-elected. The FGS exerted maximum pressure on the state by imposing an economic blockade and even cut off Gedo province from the rest of Jubbaland. The fallout from that election animates the political, security and socioeconomic situation to this day. Established in 2013, Jubbaland is comprised of Middle Jubba, Lower Jubba and Gedo provinces.

3.2.1 Security

A large swathe of Jubbaland is controlled by al-Shabaab. The group also controls almost all of Middle Jubba province, where they have their capital, and the majority of Lower Jubba. The war against al-Shabaab has stalled as the state and the FGS use their military might against each other.

In January, Jubbaland security minister Abdirashid Janan escaped from a prison in Mogadishu where he had been held for several months after he was arrested at Mogadishu airport for "serious crimes".⁴⁶ He then fled to Kenya. This was a major embarrassment for the FGS, which held Janan as part of its broader pressure against President Ahmed Madoobe. A right hand man for President Madoobe, Janan also doubled as the de facto ruler of the Gedo region where he is from and where he had cooperated with the security services of neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya in the Dolow-Beled Hawo corridor for years as a local militia commander.

43 See "Puntland oo Guddi u Magacowday Xaalad Sicir Barar oo Taagan." (Oct. 2020). Radio Dalsan. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/puntland-oo-guddi-u-magacaawday-xaalad-sicir-barar-oo-taagan/>

44 See "Bannaanbaxyo Rabshado Wata oo ka Socda Magaalada Garowe." (Dec. 2020). Radio Dalsan. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/bannaanbax-rabshado-wata-oo-ka-socda-magaalada-garoowe/>

45 See "Maamulka Puntland oo Loo Gudbiyey Qodobbo Lagu Xallinayo Sicir Bararka." (Jan. 2021). Jowhar Online. Accessed at: <https://www.jowhar.com/news/maamulka-puntland-oo-loo-gudbiyay-qodobbo-lagu-xalinayo-sicir-bararka.html>

46 See "Jubbaland Security Minister Escapes from Detention." (Jan. 2020). Garowe Online. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-jubaland-security-minister-escapes-from-detention>

International human rights agencies accuse him of serious crimes and have urged Kenya to return him to Mogadishu to face trial.⁴⁷ The FGS has also issued an INTERPOL notice urging member states to hand over Janan.⁴⁸

A week after he fled prison, the federal government deployed hundreds of newly trained forces to Beled Hawo, a border town near Kenya, and dislodged the local administration that was loyal to Jubbaland.⁴⁹ In doing so, the FGS began a concerted effort to wrest the entire Gedo province from Jubbaland and encircle the administration of President Madoobe. International partners roundly criticized the federal government's operations in Gedo. At a UN Security Council meeting on Somalia, an official from the US Embassy called the operation "politically motivated".⁵⁰

Meanwhile, al-Shabaab gleefully exploited the political distraction between Jubbaland and FGS. In September 2020, it carried out a suicide attack which killed several people, including the highly respected chairman of the Jubbaland Chamber of Commerce, Shafi Raabbi Kahin.⁵¹ Moreover, the militant group tightened its grip in the Middle Jubba province.

3.2.2 Politics

Under assault by the juggernaut of the federal government, president President Madoobe sought to reconcile with his political rivals to ease domestic tensions and focus on resisting the FGS. In April 2020, he signed a truce with his arch enemies, committing to power-sharing and not running for a third term.⁵² Signed in Nairobi, the agreement may have been brokered by Kenyan Somali officials who have a kinship relationship with Madoobe and his rivals.⁵³

The agreement was a blow to the FGS, which was using all its arsenal to undermine the Jubbaland administration. For over a year, the FGS provided support to anyone opposed to Madoobe to ensure that his authority is weakened across the state, most importantly in Kismaayo, the port city which the administration relies on heavily for financial and political survival.⁵⁴

After failing to meaningfully weaken President Madoobe in Kismaayo, the FGS eventually recognized him as the "interim president" of Jubbaland in June 2020, ahead of a meeting between the FGS and FMS leaders in Dhuusamarreeb. This was instantly welcomed by international partners notably the US.⁵⁵ President Madoobe quickly rebuffed the half-hearted recognition as "meaningless" and asserted that he was the legitimate leader of the state.⁵⁶

47 See, for example "Kenya Must Arrest and Return Jubbaland Minister to Face Trial in Mogadishu" (Feb. 2020). Amnesty International. Accessed at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/somalia-kenya-must-arrest-and-return-escaped-jubaland-minister-to-face-trial-in-mogadishu/>

48 See "Somalia Engages INTERPOL to Arrest Janan, Urges Kenya to Extradite Him." (Feb. 2020). Hiiraan Online. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2020/Feb/167029/somalia_engages_interpol_to_arrest_janan_urgues_%20kenya_to_extradite_him.aspx

49 See "FGS Retakes Strategic Border Town from Jubbaland." (Feb. 2020). Garowe Online. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-fgs-retakes-retake-strategic-border-towns-from-jubaland>

50 See "US, UN Scold Farmaajo Over Gedo Deployment, Urge Withdrawal." (Feb. 2020). Goobjoog. Accessed at: <https://goobjoog.com/english/u-s-un-rebuke-farmaajo-over-gedo-deployment-demand-withdrawal/>

51 Dhaysane, M. "Suicide Attack Outside Mosque Kills 3." (Sept. 2020). Anadolu Agency. Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-suicide-attack-outside-mosque-kills-3/1970292>

52 See "Axmed Madoobe iyo Mucaaradka Jubbaland oo Heshiis Gaaray." (April 2020). VOA Somali. Accessed at: <https://www.voasomali.com/a/5388273.html>

53 Former parliament majority leader Aden Duale and Senator Yusuf Haji were among the many Kenyan Somalis who were deeply involved in reconciling among the Ogaden political elite in Jubbaland

54 See "Madoobe Wins Over Rivals; Deals Blow to FGS Opposition." (April 2020). Goobjoog. Accessed at: <https://goobjoog.com/english/madobe-wins-over-rivals-deals-blow-to-fgs-opposition/>

55 See "US Lauds FGS's Recognition of Madoobe as [Jubbaland] President." (June 2020) Goobjoog. Accessed at: <https://goobjoog.com/english/us-embassy-in-mogadishu-welcomes-federal-govt-reorganization-of-madobe-as-a-jubaland-president/>

56 See "Jubbaland Officials Rebuff Farmaajo's Recognition as Interim Administration." (June 2020). Hiiraan Online. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2020/Jun/178595/somali_government_recognizes_madobe_s_interim_jubaland_administration.aspx

3.3 Southwest

2020 was a relatively good year for Southwest state in comparison to 2019 when a flawed presidential election resulted in a political upheaval and even some violence. Still, the state has seen considerable security, political and security challenges. The state is one of the most populous in the union and is comprised of three provinces: Lower Shabelle, Bay and Bakool. It was established in 2014.

3.3.1 Security

Much of the counterterrorism efforts of the Somali National Army (SNA) and AMISOM in 2020 were dedicated to a military operation known as Badbaado 1, which had the objective of dislodging al-Shabaab from most of Lower Shabelle province, believed to be the headquarters of their explosive-making factories.⁵⁷ After nearly a year of operations, the SNA and AMISOM have successfully recaptured four main towns in Lower Shabelle: Jannaale, Sabiid, Bariirre and Awdhiigle.⁵⁸ Each of these towns has a bridge that crosses over the Shabelle river towards Mogadishu. These bridges were used by al-Shabaab for years as their main supply routes to transport vehicle-borne improvised explosives devices (VBIED) to the capital. For the first time in many years, SNA forces have not only been able to clear the area of al-Shabaab but also hold onto it.⁵⁹

Despite the success of Operation Badbaado 1 in Lower Shabelle, Southwest state remains one of the most vulnerable to al-Shabaab attacks as the group still controls large swathes of territory in all three provinces: Lower Shabelle, Bay and Bakool. Travel between the cities is done largely by air. In December 2020, the residents of Huddur, a district in Bakool province surrounded by al-Shabaab, made a national appeal for urgent humanitarian support. In collaboration with the FGS, the state sent a plane load of food and medical supplies to the desperate residents of the city.⁶⁰ President Abdulaziz Hassan Mohamed “Laftagreen” also visited the city and called for international humanitarian organizations to provide additional support.⁶¹

3.3.2 Politics

In March 2020, the new parliament of the Southwest state was selected by clan elders. In an unprecedented move, the number of MPs was reduced dramatically from 149 to 95 in recognition of the bloated nature of the state’s legislature—the largest in the union.⁶²

57 See “AMISOM Troops Advance Mission’s Mandate Despite COVID-19 Disruptions.” (Aug. 2020). AMISOM. Accessed at: <https://amisom-au.org/2020/08/amisom-troops-advance-missions-mandate-despite-covid-19-disruptions/>

58 Ibid.

59 Review of a report commissioned by Ministry of Interior of Somalia titled “Lower Shabelle Stabilization: Lessons from Operation Badbaado 1” (Sept. 2020).

60 See “Diyaarad Sidda Gargaar oo ka Degtay Degmada Gadoonsan ee Xuddur.” (Jan. 2021). Dalsan Radio. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/diyaarad-sida-gargaar-oo-ka-degtay-degmada-gadoonsan-ee-xudur/>

61 Ibid.

62 See “New Southwest State MPs Unveiled, Reduced from 149 to 95.” (March 2020). Hiiraan Online. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2020/Mar/167481/new_south_west_state_mps_unveiled_reduced_from_149_to_95.aspx

On 1 April, the parliament elected Dr. Ali Said Faqi as its new speaker.⁶³ A former Somali ambassador to the EU, Faqi is also a close ally of President Farmaajo whom he worked for as interim chief of staff and a special envoy. It is believed that Faqi's election as the speaker sealed the state's leadership as the most aligned with President Farmaajo less than a year before federal elections in which Southwest state sends 77 members to the federal parliament, the largest of any state.

Barely two weeks after Faqi was elected, the state legislature took the highly unusual step of extending the mandate of President Laftagareen by one year "in order to align the parliamentary and presidential elections of the state."⁶⁴ In doing so, the state legislature has effectively granted the president a five-year mandate instead of the four years stipulated under the state's constitution.

3.4 Galmudug

Established in 2015, Galmudug comprises of Galgaduud and Mudug provinces.⁶⁵ Reeling from years of mismanagement and incessant political crises, Galmudug was preparing for a fresh start in 2020 as an FGS-led reconciliation process aimed to address past problems and correct structural challenges. However, the crisis only worsened amid a deeply flawed state election.

3.4.1 Politics

2020 began with the controversial selection of the state's new legislature after nearly a year of political upheaval in which the former president was sidelined by the FGS in collaboration with a local militia group.⁶⁶ When members of the new parliament were unveiled in late January, the list was immediately rejected by Ahlu Sunna Wal-Jama'ah (ASWJ), the armed Sufi group that controlled the state capital for over a decade and has played a key role in enabling the FGS to take charge of the state electoral process.⁶⁷

In a futile attempt to block the very electoral process they enabled, ASWJ crowned its own speaker of parliament and president in Dhuusamarreeb, essentially creating a parallel process to the FGS-led dispensation.⁶⁸ But they were widely criticized and ignored as the FGS-led electoral process continued unfazed by ASWJ's maneuvers. As one analysis put it, "ASWJ became a guest of their own house" overnight.⁶⁹

Despite ASWJ's objections, the new state legislature elected Dr. Mohamed Nur Ga'al as a speaker of parliament.⁷⁰

63 See "Southwest Regional State Elects New Speaker." (April 2020). Goobjoog News. Accessed at: <https://goobjoog.com/english/south-west-regional-state-parliament-elects-new-parliament-speaker/>

64 See "Baarlamaanka Koonfur Galbeed oo Muddo Kordhin u Sameeyay Madaxweyne Laftagareen." (April 2020). Goobjoog News. Accessed at: <https://goobjoog.com/baarlamaanka-koonfur-galbeed-oo-muddo-kordhin-u-sameeyay-madaxweyne-laftagareen/>

65 Puntland controls the northern half of Mudug province

66 For a detailed treatment, see "The Galmudug Crisis: A Blueprint for Sustainable Settlement." (Sept. 2020). Heritage Institute. Accessed at: <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/the-galmudug-crisis-a-blueprint-for-sustainable-settlement/>

67 See "ASWJ Rejects FGS-led Galmudug Election Process." (Jan. 2020). Garowe Online. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-aswj-rejects-fgs-led-galmudug-election-process>

68 Ibid.

69 See "The Highly Contested Electoral Process in Galmudug." (Feb. 2020). FTL Somalia. Accessed at: <https://www.ftlsomalia.com/the-highly-contested-electoral-process-in-galmudug/>

70 See "Galmudug Parliament Elects Former Minister as Its Speaker." (Jan. 2020). Horn Observer. Accessed at: <https://hornobserver.com/articles/145/Somalia-Galmudug-parliament-elects-former-minister-as-its-new-speaker>

A former state minister of foreign affairs and a close ally of former prime minister Hassan Ali Khaire (who was leading the process on behalf of the FGS), Ga'al's election showcased the domination of FGS-aligned MPs in the state legislature and signaled the direction of the presidential election. More than half a dozen heavyweight politicians were vying for the top office. However, as soon as Ga'al was elected speaker, nearly all presidential candidates boycotted the process on the grounds that it was rigged in favor of Ahmed Abdi Karie (Qoorqoor), a former FGS minister who was being openly supported by Mogadishu.⁷¹

On 2 February 2020, Qoorqoor sailed to victory, receiving 66 out of the 77 votes cast.⁷² Hours after his election, key international partners congratulated the new president. The US Embassy was among the first to endorse a process it knew was contentious, if not fundamentally flawed.⁷³ Others, including AMISOM, also rushed to congratulate the new president.⁷⁴

For the FGS leadership, Qoorqoor's election was part of a broader agenda to change the face of federal member states, install allies in each FMS capital and ultimately reap the benefits for the federal elections. With Southwest Galmudug on their side, the FGS leadership set its sights on Hirshabelle, the last FMS to hold state elections.

3.4.2 Security

Al-Shabaab continued to control almost the entire eastern shore and parts of the center of the state, including four major districts: El-Dheer, El-Buur, Galhareeri and Haradheere. The militant group is only about 40 kilometers outside the state capital Dhuusamarreeb and, in the past few months, has attempted to attack targets around the capital. In November 2020, there were credible reports that al-Shabaab shot at an aircraft carrying President Qoorqoor and a large delegation as it was taking off from Dhuusamarreeb airport.⁷⁵

3.5 Hirshabeelle

Comprising of Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle provinces, Hirshabelle is the youngest state in the union, formed in 2016. Like other states, its politics is animated by the internal dynamics from its provinces and the communities that live there. During its establishment, the two dominant clans in the state entered into an informal agreement to exchange the state capital and the presidency.⁷⁶ That political dynamic continues to play a key role in the state. On the security front, al-Shabaab continues to undermine peace and security, and has a disruptive impact on the state. The humanitarian situation is also worsening with cyclical droughts and floods effecting Hirshabeelle more than any other in the federation.

71 See "Four Aspirants Boycott Galmudug Presidential Polls, Citing Interference by Villa Somalia." (Jan. 2020). Garowe Online. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/four-aspirants-boycott-galmudug-presidential-polls-citing-interference-by-villa-somalia>

72 See "Ex-Minister Qoorqoor Elected Galmudug President in FGS-Led Process." (Feb. 2020). Hiiraan Online. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/4/2020/Feb/167006/ex_state_minister_abdi_qoorqoor_elected_galmudug_president_in_fgs_led_process.aspx

73 See US Embassy Statement on Qoorqoor election. (Feb. 2020). Accessed at: <https://so.usembassy.gov/galmudug-elections/>

74 See AMISOM statement on Galmudug election here. (Feb. 2020). Accessed at: <https://amisom-au.org/2020/02/amisom-congratulates-newly-elected-leaders-of-galmudug-and-urges-president-ahmed-abdi-kariye-to-continue-with-reconciliation-efforts/>

75 Interview with senior Galmudug officials. Also see news reports: <https://www.shaaciyee.org/2020/11/03/wararkii-ugu-dambeeyay-diyaarad-uu-la-socday-madaxweynaha-galmudug-oo-la-weeraray/>

76 The Abgal, dominant in Middle Shabelle, agreed to give the presidency to Hawadle, dominant in Hiiraan, in exchange for the state capital being based in Jowhar.

3.5.1 Politics

In October 2020, members of the new state legislature were sworn in. On 4 November, the 99-member parliament elected Mohamed Abdihakim Luqman as its speaker.⁷⁷ A former diplomat at the Somali embassy in Sudan, Luqman is thought to be a close ally of the FGS leadership. A week later, Ali Guudlaawe, a former vice president, was elected president with 86 votes.⁷⁸ A month after his election, the state legislature changed the constitution and changed the term of the president from four years to five years.⁷⁹ With Guudlaawe's election, the FGS leadership has successfully installed three allies as FGS presidents.

Before becoming a vice president in the previous administration, Guudlaawe was the governor of Middle Shabelle province. His election as president was perceived as a violation of the informal agreement between the two dominant clans. This triggered a political revolt and even an armed separatist movement in reaction to what the dominant clan in Hiiraan viewed as a power grab by their cousins in Middle Shabelle.⁸⁰ Among other things, this separatist movement is demanding that Hiiraan province be separated from the Hirshabelle and divided into two administrative regions so that they can establish their own federal member state. Part of this grievance is linked to the fact that Hiiraan is the only province that remained geographically and administratively intact since the 1960s, even as other eight provinces were divided into 18 administrative regions under the Siyad Barre.

3.5.2 Security

On top of the insecurity triggered by political grievances, a significant portion of the state is controlled by al-Shabaab. The entire northern section of the Middle Shabelle province is controlled by the group, as well as key districts in Hiiraan province. Even in areas that are not under the direct control of al-Shabaab, the group has successfully disrupted major supply routes. For example, FGS and Hirshabelle officials can no longer use vehicles to travel between Mogadishu and Jowar, a mere 90 kilometer drive. AMISOM and FGS officials use airplanes to travel and supply districts in Hiiraan province.

In September, al-Shabaab even tried to capture the city of Bal'ad, 60 kilometers north of Mogadishu.⁸¹ Although the attack was rebuffed by the Somali National Army, it was an audacious attempt so close to Mogadishu and could have isolated the state capital from the rest of the country. A few years ago, the road between Mogadishu and Jowhar was so safe that even senior FGS leaders frequently traveled it by car.

⁷⁷ See "Hirshabelle Parliament Elects New Speaker." (Nov. 2020). Radio Dalsan. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/en/2020/11/04/hirshabelle-parliament-elects-new-speaker/>

⁷⁸ See "Hirshabelle Parliament Elects Ali Guudlaawe as New President." (Nov. 2020). Hiiraan Online. Accessed at: <https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2020/Nov/180667/hirshabelle-parliament-elects-ali-guudlaawe-as-new-president.aspx>

⁷⁹ See "Guudlaawe Gets Five Years in Office as Hirshabelle Amends Law." (Dec. 2020). Goobjoog News. Accessed at: <http://goobjoog.com/english/guudlaawe-gets-five-years-in-office-as-hirshabelle-amends-law/>

⁸⁰ See "Clan Militia Join 'Separatist' General Hud Faction in Hiiraan Region." (Nov. 2020). Hiiraan Online. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2020/Nov/180888/clan_militia_join_separatist_general_hud_faction_in_hiiraan_region.aspx

⁸¹ See "14 Al-Shabaab Terrorists Killed in Southern Somalia, Military Says." (Sept. 2020). Daily Sabah. Accessed at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/africa/14-al-shabab-terrorists-killed-in-southern-somalia-military-says>

Al-Shabaab carries out regular attacks even inside Jowhar. In August, the militant group killed the agriculture minister of the state, Abdulkadir Abukar, as he left a mosque after the evening prayer.⁸² A month later, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the shooting of Nur Hashi Warsame, the state's religious and endowment minister, as he left a mosque.⁸³

3.5.3 Humanitarian situation

Hirshabelle is among the states that are most vulnerable to severe humanitarian crisis triggered by droughts and flash floods. According to the UN, nearly 150,000 hectares of farmland in three districts (Jowhar, Bal'ad and Mahadday) was destroyed by flooding in 2020 alone.⁸⁴ Beledweyn also experienced major flooding, displacement and a catastrophic humanitarian situation. At one point, half of the city's population was displaced and the other half was cut off by flooding.⁸⁵ The Shabelle river that snakes through the state represents both a boon and a bane for the residents. During droughts, the river dries up to the point that its bed is exposed in many parts of the state. During rainy seasons, its banks are overwhelmed by water due to poor infrastructure. The FGS says it will cost about \$6 million to rebuild a local canal to manage the water.⁸⁶

3.6 Benadir

Comprised of 17 administrative districts in the capital Mogadishu, Benadir is also one of Somalia's 18 administrative provinces. It is by far the most populated province in the nation. The provisional constitution stipulates that the federal parliament will decide on the status of Mogadishu within the federal arrangement. In 2016, when Hirshabelle, the last of the five federal member states, was set-up, residents of Mogadishu launched a campaign to recognize Benadir as its own federal member state. But the proposal remains politically complex given that Benadir as a state would tip the artificial balance of power in favor of certain clans. Moreover, the FGS leadership—both current and past—oppose making Benadir a standalone FMS, as the government would lose vast powers by doing so. The FGS president appoints mayors and several deputies and mobilizes them as needed for political, financial and security reasons.

Since coming to power, President Farmaajo has appointed three mayors and four deputy mayors for reasons that are unclear. They include Ali Yare Ali, a close campaign operative and social media personality, as the deputy mayor of Mogadishu for political and security affairs.⁸⁷

82 Dhaysane, M. "Somali Regional Minister Shot Dead." (Aug. 2020). Anadolu Agency. Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somali-regional-minister-shot-dead-police/1944971>

83 Dhaysane, M. "Regional Minister Shot Dead in Southern Somalia." (Sept. 2020). Anadolu Agency. Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/regional-minister-shot-dead-in-southern-somalia/1977285>

84 See "Nearly 200,000 Affected by Flash Floods in Somalia, UN Says." (Aug. 2020). CGTN. Accessed at: <https://africa.cgtn.com/2020/08/06/nearly-200000-affected-by-flash-floods-in-somalia-un-says/>

85 Khalif, A. "Somali Beledweyne City Cut Off by Flooding." (May 2020). The East African. Accessed at: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/somali-beledweyne-city-cut-off-by-flooding-1442094>

86 Ibid.

87 See "Farmaajo Sacks Mogadishu's Deputy Mayors." (Nov. 2020). FTL. Accessed at: <https://www.ftl-somalia.com/farmaa-j0-sacks-mogadishu-deputy-mayors/>

In January 2021, President Farmaajo signed a law that allocated 13 additional senate seats for Benadir. This directly violated the provisional constitution, which caps the number of senators at 54 divided equally among Somalia's 18 provinces.⁸⁸ The move is seen as a political napalm aimed at throwing the discourse on the electoral process off course and undermining the 17 September agreement.

3.7 Somaliland

Somaliland declared a unilateral secession from Somalia in 1991. Since then, it has established a functioning government and enjoys greater stability than the rest of the country. Its political, security and economic situation is largely disconnected from the rest of the nation. However, successive Somali governments have been engaged in a dialogue that aims to find a way to cajole Hargeisa back into the union. At the same time, Somaliland has been using the dialogues, which ebbed and flowed, as a platform to promote its independence.

3.7.1 Somalia-Somaliland Talks

In February 2020, the prime minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed, brokered a meeting between President Farmaajo of Somalia and President Muse Bihi of Somaliland on the sidelines of the African Union summit. Billed as an 'ice-breaking' discussion, the meeting was the first face-to-face meeting between the two leaders.⁸⁹ A few weeks later, President Farmaajo issued a rare apology for the atrocities committed by the military dictatorship of Siyad Barre against the people of Somaliland in the 1980s, and president Bihi swiftly accepted the apology, adding that it was a good beginning.⁹⁰

A few days after President Farmaajo issued the apology, he planned to travel to Hargeisa, together with the prime minister of Ethiopia, in what would have been a spectacular political achievement for Ahmed who wanted to add this historic reconciliation to his glittering, Nobel-studded profile. However, the potential visit by a sitting Somali president to Hargeisa unleashed a huge reaction among the Somaliland population who thought that a visit by President Farmaajo would mean a death knell to 30-year project of Somaliland. President Bihi asked his cabinet to weigh in on the matter, and, on 17 February, it unanimously rejected a visit by Farmaajo. This ended the prospect of transformative change in a frozen conflict, and dashed the hopes of President Farmaajo whose re-election would have been almost certainly secured had he pulled off that visit.⁹¹

88 See "Ansixinta 13ka Kursi ee Lagu Kordhinaayo Matalaadda Gobolka Benadir" (Jan. 2021). Villa Somalia. Accessed at: <https://villasomalia.gov.so/soomaali/ansixinta-13ka-kursi-ee-lagu-kordhinayo-golaha-aqal-ka-sare-ee-matalaadda-gobolka-banaadir/>

89 See "Somalia, Somaliland Leaders Meet in Ethiopia." (Feb. 2020). AfricaNews. Accessed at: <https://www.africanews.com/2020/02/11/somalia-somaliland-leaders-meet-in-ethiopia-voa-report/>

90 See "Somaliland Accepts Apology by Farmaajo, Says it Was First." (Feb. 2020). HOL. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2020/Feb/167165/somaliland_accepts_farmaajo_s_apology_says_was_a_first.aspx

91 See "Somaliland Cabinet Didn't Approve Farmaajo's Visit." (Feb. 2020). HOL. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2020/Feb/167158/somaliland_cabinet_did_not_approve_farmaajo_s_visit_official.aspx

In June 2020, the leaders of Somalia and Somaliland met again in Djibouti under the auspices of President Ismail Omar Guelleh. Key international partners including the US, EU and IGAD were also present in the meeting.⁹² With much less fanfare and a more subdued attitude, the two sides engaged in a more substantive dialogue focusing on the practical aspects of the relationship, such as sharing international aid, trade and security cooperation.

In their equally subdued statement, the international partners said that they “welcome the meeting as an important step in strengthening communication and fostering understanding, and encourage the technical committee named by the principals to deliver tangible benefits for their people.”⁹³ Since then, the dialogue has been “halting” as the Crisis Group has aptly noted.⁹⁴

4. Al-Shabaab

In 2020, al-Shabaab remained the most significant threat to peace and security in Somalia. Its fighters are active across the country and are carrying out attacks with an increasing intensity and lethal frequency. The group has intensified its high-profile attacks in Mogadishu and elsewhere. In August, the group carried out a complex attack against the Elite Hotel, a popular, beachside spot frequented by politicians and businesspeople. A siege of 24 hours ended with 16 people killed and many more injured.⁹⁵ In January 2021, the group claimed responsibility for a similar attack at the Afrik Hotel, another fortified hotel at the heart of the city. Among the half a dozen people killed was Mohamed Nur Galal, a decorated army general.⁹⁶ In a statement, al-Shabaab said it had tracked him for 13 years and blamed him for the death of their co-founder, Aden Hashi Ayrow, who was killed by a 2008 US airstrike in central Somalia.⁹⁷

Outside Somalia, the militant group is still capable of attacking targets in neighboring countries. In January 2020, al-Shabaab carried out a deadly attack against a US military base near the tourist town of Lamu in Kenya.⁹⁸ Three Americans were killed, and two others were injured. The Manda Bay attack was described as “audacious” and al-Shabaab has claimed that it has used drones to film the entire operation, a development that could dramatically change the quality of the group’s attacks.⁹⁹

In Somalia, the SNA-led Operation Badbaado 1 in Lower Shabelle has significantly reduced al-Shabaab’s ability to manufacture and transport explosive devices to Mogadishu. Additionally, US airstrikes have demonstrably degraded the group’s overall operations across the country.

92 See “Somali, Somaliland leaders Resume Talks in Djibouti.” (June 2020). VOA. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/somali-somaliland-leaders-resume-talks-djibouti>

93 See “Joint International Statement on Somalia-Somaliland Talks.” (June 2020). Accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-on-djibouti-talks-between-somalia-and-somaliland-leaders>

94 See “Somalia-Somaliland: A Halting Embrace of Dialogue.” (Aug. 2020). Crisis Group. Accessed <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-of-africa/somalia/somalia-somaliland-halting-embrace-dialogue>

95 See “Somalia: Over a Dozen Killed In Hours-Long Mogadishu Hotel Siege.” (Aug. 2020). Al Jazeera. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/17/somalia-over-a-dozen-killed-in-hours-long-mogadishu-hotel-siege>

96 See “Somalia: al-Shabab Militants Attack Afrik Hotel in Mogadishu.” (Jan. 2021). Accessed at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55879679>

97 Khalif, A. “Target in Mogadishu Attack Was Retired Army General, says Al-Shabaab.” (Feb. 2021). Nation Media. Accessed at: <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/africa/target-in-mogadishu-attack-was-retired-army-general-says-al-shabaab-3278522?view=htmlamp>

98 See “Camp Simba: Three Americans Killed in Kenya Base.” (Jan. 2020). BBC. Accessed at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50997769>

99 See a tweet by Harun Maruf, a VOA journalist and an expert on al-Shabaab. (Jan. 2021). Accessed at: <https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/1355758355634147329?s=20>

Since 2017, about 1,000 al-Shabaab fighters have been killed in 197 airstrikes carried out by the US across the country.¹⁰⁰ Still, al-Shabaab remains a major threat to the federal government and federal member states. Its forces are estimated to be between 5,000 and 10,000 fighters.¹⁰¹

Figure 1

Number of US airstrikes in Somalia 2017-2020	
Year	Number of strikes
2017	35
2018	47
2019	63
2020	51

Despite its capability to disrupt and damage, al-Shabaab no longer poses an existential threat to the Somali government, according to a report by the Pentagon.¹⁰² This is largely to the huge investment that the FGS and international partners have made in the security sector. However, the group is exploiting the internecine political warfare among Somalia's political elite who are now distracted by the electoral crisis and have largely neglected the war against al-Shabaab. Thousands of Somalia's security forces are engaged in conflicts that are entirely avoidable and have the potential to embolden the militant group.

4.1 Al Shabaab financing

According to report by the security think tank the Hiraal Institute, al-Shabaab collected about \$15 million a month from the private across the country in the form of taxes and other fees it levied.¹⁰³ "Based on how widespread the group's taxation is, and how much more depth it has compared to the FGS and the FMS in southern Somalia, we assess that this amount is a very conservative estimate," the report highlighted. Even government officials in Mogadishu and elsewhere pay taxes to al-Shabaab to buy their own safety, according to the report. By this estimate, al-Shabaab collects nearly as many annual revenues as the FGS.

100 Maruf, H. "Ships Positioned on Somalia's Coast for US Troops' Drawdown." (Dec. 2020). VOA News. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/ships-positioned-somalias-coast-us-troops-drawdown>

101 See report by Pentagon Inspector General (Sept. 2020). Page 15. Accessed at: <https://www.dodig.mil/Reports/Lead-Inspector-General-Reports/Article/2427451/lead-inspector-general-for-east-africa-and-north-and-west-africa-counterterrori/>

102 Ibid, page 13.

103 See "A Losing Game: Countering Al-Shabaab's Financial System." (Oct. 2020). Page 5. Accessed at: <https://hiraal institute.org/a-losing-game-countering-al-shababs-financial-system/>

Businesses that pay AS

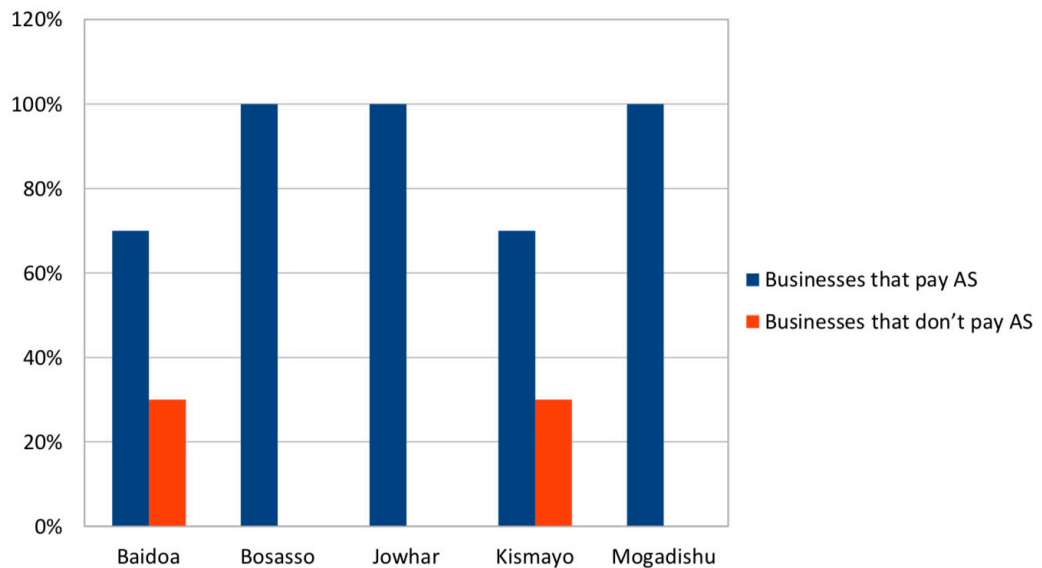


Figure 1 Surveyed businesses that pay AS and those that do not (Ten in each city)

5. Economy

Like many other aspects of life, Somalia's economy was severely impacted by COVID-19, according to the World Bank. The projected growth of 3.2% was decimated by "a slowdown in economic activities, declining remittances, falling exports, and the government-mandated closures of airports and businesses to contain the spread of the virus are reducing household income".¹⁰⁴ Instead, the economy was projected to contract by 2.5% in 2020 due to COVID-19. This will have a "large negative impact on real GDP growth in 2020, affecting the economy through a combination of supply and demand shocks".¹⁰⁵ Although all sectors of the economy were hit hard by the pandemic, aviation and education sectors as well as imports and exports were most severely damaged, according to a study by HIPS and City University.¹⁰⁶ In February 2020, the US Treasury Department removed Al-Barakaat from its sanctions list after it was added immediately after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States.¹⁰⁷ The company was the largest telecoms and money transfer service in Somalia. The move by the US government closes one of the most difficult episodes for the Somali business community who argued that, in the aftermath of 9/11 events, they were swept into the global counterterrorism efforts without any evidence.

¹⁰⁴ See "Somalia Economic Update" (June 2020). World Bank. Page 5. Accessed at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34239/Somalia-Economic-Update-Impact-of-COVID-19-Policies-to-Manage-the-Crisis-and-Strengthen-Economic-Recovery.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ See "The Economic Impacts of COVID-19 on Somalia." (Nov. 2020). HIPS and City University. Accessed at: <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/the-economic-impacts-of-covid-19-on-somalia/>

¹⁰⁷ See "Counter Terrorism Designations Removals." (Feb. 2020). US Treasury. Accessed at: <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/financial-sanctions/recent-actions>

5.1 Debt relief

By far, the most important achievement made by the federal government in 2020 has been the tangible progress it made in terms of debt relief, a key priority for the FGS leadership. On 27 February, the executive board of directors of the World Bank decided to reestablish a formal relationship with Somalia after 30 years, marking a huge milestone for the country.¹⁰⁸ A month later, the African Development Bank (AfDB) announced that it was clearing all arrears on loans owed by Somalia after the UK and EU paid \$122.55 on behalf of Somalia. In a statement, the AfDB said that this marks “the end of sanctions and the resumption of full re-engagement between the Bank Group and the East African nation”.¹⁰⁹

On 25 March 2020, the World Bank and the IMF determined that Somalia “has taken the necessary steps to begin receiving debt relief under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC)”, becoming the 37th country to reach what is known among the international financial institutions as the “decision point”.¹¹⁰ On the same day, the IMF approved a three-year credit facility to support Somalia’s National Development Plan and reform agenda.¹¹¹

Although the debt relief process and re-engagement with international financial institutions started during the previous administration of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, President Farmaajo and his former prime minister prioritized this work and ensured that the FGS took measurable steps to meet strict benchmarks.¹¹²

5.2 Natural resources

In February 2020, President Farmaajo signed into law a landmark petroleum bill, paving the way for exploration for oil and natural gas in the country.¹¹³ In July, the Somali government formed the Somali Petroleum Authority (SPA) and appointed Ibrahim Ali Hussein, a longtime senior advisor at the Ministry of Petroleum, as the chairman and chief executive officer. The formation of the regulatory agency was hailed as “a milestone...towards the development of oil and gas sectors in the country”.¹¹⁴ Immediately after the SPA was formed, the Somali government announced that it was auctioning eight oil blocks and expected to award the first contracts by the spring of 2021.¹¹⁵

108 See “Somalia to Reestablish with World Bank After Thirty Years.” (Feb. 2020). Accessed at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/02/27/somalia-to-reestablish-financial-relations-with-the-world-bank-group-after-thirty-years>
109 See “A New Dawn for Somalia: Arrears Owed to the African Development Bank Group Cleared.” (March 2020). Accessed at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/new-dawn-somalia-arrears-owed-african-development-bank-group-cleared-34933>

110 See “Somalia to Receive Debt Relief Under the Enhanced HIPC Initiative.” (March 2020). Accessed at: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/03/25/pr20104-somalia-somalia-to-receive-debt-relief-under-the-enhanced-hipc-initiative>

111 See IMF Statement on the three-year ECF funding (March 2020). Accessed at: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/03/25/pr20105-somalia-imf-executive-board-approves-3-year-ecf-and-eff-arrangements>

112 See “2019 State of Somalia Report” (Jan. 2020) Heritage Institute. Accessed at: <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/the-state-of-somalia-sos-report/>

113 See “Somalia President Signs New Petroleum Bill Into Law.” (Feb. 2020). Reuters. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/somalia-oil-idUSL8N2A80BF>

114 See “Somali Petroleum Authority Established.” (July 2020). Petroleum Africa. Accessed at: <https://www.petroleumafrika.com/somali-petroleum-authority-established/>

115 Roelf, W. “Somalia Expects to Announce Winners of First Petroleum Auction Early 2021.” (Aug. 2021). Reuters. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-oil-idUSKCN2512DJ>

Barely six months after assuming the leadership of the SPA, Hussein was unexpectedly dismissed in January 2021 and his deputy Asha Osman was named as an interim chairwoman.¹¹⁶ In a strongly worded letter to the prime minister, the Natural Resources and Environment Committee of the federal parliament noted a dispute between the SPA and the Ministry of Petroleum and accused the minister of infringing upon the independence of the regulatory agency. Moreover, they decried the decision to dismiss Hussein as illegal and urged the prime minister to prevent the minister of petroleum from signing oil contracts considering that the mandate of the government was coming to an end in early February.¹¹⁷

The scramble for the natural resources of Somalia has intensified over the past few months with many companies and countries seeking a foothold in what could prove to be potentially lucrative deals. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey said that Somalia invited his country to explore oil offshore.¹¹⁸

6. Humanitarian issues

Typical humanitarian crises such as droughts and cyclical flooding were compounded by a desert locust invasion in 2020. Farmers across the country were acutely impacted by this destructive migratory pest. UN agencies said it was the worst locust invasion in over a quarter of a century.¹¹⁹ USAID and other donors have provided millions of dollars to national authorities and UN agencies to control the locust invasion.¹²⁰

In July 2020, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) announced that more than five million people in Somalia—a third of the population including three million children - were in desperate need of urgent humanitarian assistance due to the combined devastating impacts of locust invasion, COVID-19, flooding and cyclical droughts. “In the recent month, there has been an upsurge in cases of acute watery diarrhea/cholera. To further exacerbate the situation, while the immediate impact of the locust invasion is on crop production, which is projected to be 10 to 15 percent lower than the long-term average, the secondary impact will be on children with an anticipated increase of children being severely malnourished due to food shortages,” said UNICEF deputy representative to Somalia Jesper Moller.¹²¹

6.1 COVID-19 pandemic

Like many countries around the world, Somalia was acutely impacted by the coronavirus. Although the FGS was quick to close the main airport in Mogadishu and elsewhere, social distancing and other preventative measures were rarely observed in the country. The federal ministry of health reported that between 19 March 2019 and 2 January 2021, some 81, 282 people were tested after they were suspected of having COVID-19. Only 4,726 tested positive, with an average case fatality rate of 2.8%.¹²²

Reuters. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-oil-idUSKCN2512DJ>

116 See a tweet by Minister of Petroleum, Eng. Abdirashid Ahmed (Jan. 2021). Accessed at: <https://twitter.com/EngAbdirashidd/status/1352464531688140802?s=20>

117 See “Muxuu Yhaya Khilaafka Hareeyay Batroolka Soomaaliya.” (Feb. 2021). BBC Somali. Accessed at: <https://www.bbc.com/somali/war-55922141>

118 See “Erdogan Says Somalia Invited Turkey to Explore for Oil Offshore.” (Jan. 2020). Al Jazeera. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/1/21/erdogan-says-somalia-invited-turkey-to-explore-for-oil-offshore>

119 See “Act Now to Prevent Desert Locust Catastrophe in the Horn of Africa: UN Agencies.” (Feb. 2020). UN News. Accessed at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/02/1057071>

120 See “East Africa Locusts” by USAID, accessed at: <https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/eastafricalocusts>

121 Mudia, J. “Somalia: Three Million Children Need Help – UNICEF” (July 2020). Development Diaries. Accessed at: <https://www.developmentdiaries.com/2020/07/somalia-three-million-children-need-help-unicef/>

122 Ministry of Health COVID-19 situation report reviewed by HIPS. (Jan. 2021) Also see regular updates on the ministry's dashboard here: <https://moh.gov.so/en/covid19/>

COVID-19 Situation Report - Somalia

Issue 43 (27 DECEMBER – 2 JANUARY 2021)







Jointly published by the Ministry of Health and Human Services, Federal Government of Somalia and WHO Somalia Country Office

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

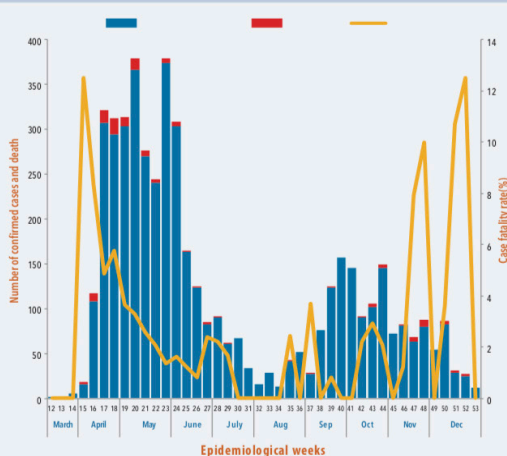
Between 27 December 2020 and 2 January 2021, a total of 3630 suspected cases of COVID-19 were tested, of which 12 were confirmed to be laboratory-positive. The majority (67%) of samples tested were from Banadir region, followed by Somaliland (25%) and most of the confirmed cases were reported from Somaliland (75%) and Jubaland (17%). No new death was reported during the reporting period. The district reporting a higher incidence of COVID-19 this week was Hargeisa (Somaliland) with a weekly incidence rate of 1 case per 100 000 population per week. The positivity rate for the current reporting week stands at 0.3%, and it has been below 1% for the last three consecutive weeks.

Since 16 March 2020, 4726 laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19 including 130 associated deaths were reported in Somalia. The large majority (86%) of cases are aged between 20 and 60 years, with a median age of 33 (ranging from 1 to 110 years) and 74% of the confirmed cases have been male. The cumulative positivity rate, since the start of the outbreak, has declined gradually and as of this week, the rate stands at 5.8%, whilst the cumulative case fatality rate stands at 2.8%.

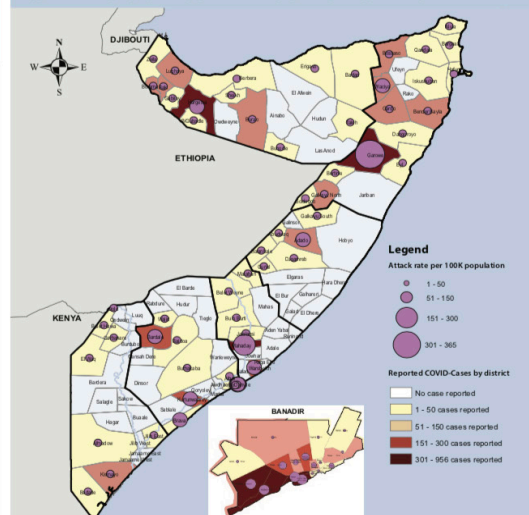
KEY INDICATORS

	27 DECEMBER – 2 JANUARY 2021	16 MARCH – 2 JANUARY 2021
 Suspected COVID-19 cases tested	3 630	81 282
 Laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases	12	4 726
 Reported COVID-19 deaths	0	130
 Recovered cases	27	3 639
 Close contacts identified	67	11 940
 Case fatality rate (CFR)	0	2.8%

EPIDEMIC CURVE OF LABORATORY-CONFIRMED CASES, DEATHS AND CASE FATALITY RATE OF COVID-19, SOMALIA, 16 MARCH - 2 JANUARY 2021



COVID-19 CASES IN SOMALIA AS OF 2 JANUARY 2021



Please access to Federal Ministry of Health's COVID-19 dashboard for updated information:
<https://moh.gov.so/en/covid19/>

7. Press freedom

Much like previous years, 2020 was a terrible year for press freedom in Somalia. According to the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), two journalists were killed and four others injured across the country. Authorities at the federal and state levels have also arrested 56 journalists and have closed five media houses.¹²³ Taken together, these acts of violence and arbitrary arrests have put Somalia at the top of the Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) Global Impunity Index for the fifth year in a row.¹²⁴

In their annual report, the SJS noted that despite assurances by President Farmaajo about reform to the Somali Penal Code, arrests and harassment against journalists continued. They also noted that the attorney general had failed to appoint a special prosecutor on crimes against journalists as he promised. "If fulfilled, this could have reduced attacks against journalists and could have ended the impunity for journalists' killers," the report said.¹²⁵

8. External relations

In 2020, Somalia's relationship with several key countries took a turn for the worse. In December, Mogadishu severed diplomatic ties with Kenya, accusing its neighbor of meddling its internal affairs.¹²⁶ The announcement by Somalia came only one day after president Uhuru Kenyatta received president Muse Bihi of Somaliland in Nairobi. The Kenyan government described the meeting as "official", though it stopped short of describing Somaliland as a nation.¹²⁷ At an IGAD summit a few weeks after diplomatic relations were cut, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia and President Ismail Guelleh of Djibouti tried to mediate between President Farmaajo and President Kenyatta. The two presidents agreed to a fact-finding mission by IGAD, which visited both countries in early January 2021.

Comprised of Djiboutian and Ethiopian security and diplomatic officials, the IGAD fact-finding mission assessed five grievances lodged against Kenya concerning what Somalia described as an infringement upon its sovereignty. In its final report, the commission faulted Kenya for violating Somalia's airspace in 2019 when Mogadishu closed all air traffic to Kismaayo, the de facto capital of Jubbaland. However, the commission exonerated Kenya of all other complaints and said these grievances "do not appear sufficient to justify a diplomatic separation between Kenya and Somalia".¹²⁸

123 See "State of Press Freedom in Somalia in 2020" (Feb. 2021). SJS. Accessed at: <https://sjsyndicate.org/2021/02/03/state-of-press-freedom-in-somalia-in-2020-threats-and-violence-against-journalists-on-the-rise-with-total-impunity/>

124 See "Getting Away with Murder" (Oct. 2020). CPJ. Accessed at: <https://cpj.org/reports/2020/10/global-impunity-index-journalist-murders/>

125 See "State of Press Freedom in Somalia." Ibid.

126 Dahir, A. "Somalia Severs Diplomatic Ties with Kenya." (Dec. 2020). New York Times. Accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/15/world/africa/somalia-kenya.html>

127 See "Bilateral Talks Between Kenyan and Somaliland Delegations." (Dec. 2020). <https://www.president.go.ke/2020/12/14/bilateral-talks-between-kenyan-and-somaliland-delegations/>

128 Mukami, M. "Somalia Rejects Probe Report on Tiff with Kenya." (Jan. 2021). Anadolu Agency. Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-rejects-probe-report-on-tiff-with-kenya/2124821>

The Somali government said the report was one-sided and accused Djibouti of bias.¹²⁹ In response, Djibouti defended the report as “professional and impartial”, adding that its only objective was to help the two neighboring nations resolve their differences amicably.¹³⁰

8.1 Souring relations with Djibouti

Following the IGAD report, Somalia sharply criticized Djibouti for being biased and for falling short on brotherly expectations.¹³¹ It was a highly unusual criticism against Djibouti, a nation widely respected by most Somalis for being a brother country. Somalis credit Djibouti for hosting the 2000 national reconciliation conference in Arta—a process that ultimately helped revive the Somali state after 10 years of absence from the international stage. And Djiboutians credit Somalia for playing a key active role in their independence from France in 1977.

8.2 Close ties with Ethiopia and Eritrea

Somalia continued to strengthen its relationship with Ethiopia and Eritrea. In January, the leaders of the three countries met in Asmara and voted to focus “on two main and intertwined objectives of consolidating peace, stability and security as well as promoting economic and social development”.¹³² Since Ethiopia’s historic rapprochement with Eritrea in 2018, the three countries have forged a bloc in the Horn of Africa and have often framed their growing relationship as part of an economic integration agenda. Somalia even abstained in an Arab League vote supporting Egypt in its intensifying dispute with Ethiopia over the Nile river’s grand renaissance dam known as the GERD.¹³³

In January 2021, it’s alleged that the Somali government had sent hundreds of young men to Eritrea to be trained for the Somali security forces. Dozens of Somali parents said they feared their children were killed in the Tigray conflict.¹³⁴ Both Somalia and Ethiopia have refuted the reports.¹³⁵ However, the Somali government has confirmed that it sent troops to train in Eritrea. Dozens of parents said their sons were lured to Eritrea on the false promise that they will be working as security guards in Qatar, a rich Gulf nation and a close ally of the federal government.¹³⁶ Doha said that it is investigating allegations that its country was used as a decoy to recruit young Somalis.

129 Ibid.

130 See “Djibouti Says Fact-finding Mission on the Situation Between Somalia and Kenya was Impartial.” (Feb. 2021). Somali Dispatch. Accessed at: <https://www.somalidispach.com/latest-news/djibouti-says-fact-finding-mission-on-the-situation-between-somalia-and-kenya-was-impartial/>

131 Mukami, M. “Djibouti: Mission to Somalia-Kenya Tiff ‘Professional’” (Jan. 2021). Anadolu Agency. Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/djibouti-mission-on-kenya-somalia-tiff-professional/2126290>

132 See “Leaders of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia Vow to Deepen Ties.” (Jan. 2020). Xinhua. Accessed at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-01/28/c_138737839.htm

133 See “Somalia Remains Neutral Over Egypt-Ethiopia Dam Dispute.” (Mar. 2020). Radio Dalsan. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-eritrea-security-idUSKBN29X1F5>

134 Barise, H. “In Somalia, Mothers Fear Sons Were Sent to Ethiopia Conflict.” (Jan. 2021). AP. Accessed at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-somalia-mothers-fear-sons-were-sent-to-ethiopia-conflict/2021/01/22/38061c1c-5c8b-11eb-a849-6f9423a75ffd_story.html

135 Khalif, A. “Ethiopia and Somalia Deny Somali Soldiers Fighting in Tigray Region.” (Jan. 2021). The East African. Accessed at: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/ethiopia-and-somalia-deny-somali-soldiers-fighting-in-tigray-3265590>

136 Sheikh, A. “Anger in Somalia as Sons Secretly Sent to Serve in Eritrea Military Force.” (Jan. 2021). Reuters. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-eritrea-security-idUSKBN29X1F5>

“The State of Qatar condemns any abusive and duplicitous recruitment of any individual who was falsely told they were moving to Qatar for employment opportunities. The State of Qatar stands against such practices and urges all governments to investigate such abuses that make up human trafficking,” read a statement by the Qatari government.¹³⁷

8.3 Relations with others

Somalia’s relationship with other key countries remained largely the same. The relationship with the UAE remains frozen following the spat in 2018, a year after the Gulf crisis.¹³⁸ The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Somalia also remains cold to the point where Riyadh refused to accept the diplomatic credentials of the Somali ambassador-designate who was appointed by President Farmaajo in May 2019.¹³⁹ Still, Somalia and Saudi Arabia give the appearance that they are cooperating in different fields. In fact, Somalia joined an obscure, Saudi-led alliance on the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The Council of Arab and African States Bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden was formed in January in Riyadh with the aim of coordinating on security against unspecified threats.¹⁴⁰

On the other hand, Somalia’s relationship with Turkey and Qatar is growing and strengthening. Ankara trains more Somali security forces than any other country involved in the security sector. More than one third are trained by Turkey in TURKSOM, its military base outside of Mogadishu.¹⁴¹ The Turkish-trained police and military are considered among the best in the Somali security sector. The military unit Gorgor (Eagle) and the special police unit Harm’ad (Cheetah) are widely recognized as capable, and Ankara provides weapons to them. However, as the two units were deployed by the FGS to some member states to tame government rivals. The move was seen as politically motivated. Opposition groups have urged Turkey to stop arming these units until after the elections so that they’re not used to “rig the polls”.¹⁴²

Western countries rarely get involved in the intricate internal affairs of Somalia. The United States and European countries provide the largest humanitarian, military and economic support to Somalia, mainly through UN agencies, international organizations and AMISOM. In December 2020, the outgoing Trump administration ordered the withdrawal of some 750 American forces based in Somalia, mainly out of the Billidogle air force base in Lower Shabelle. The decision was seen as “untimely” by many Somalis, given the crucial role that these forces played in degrading al-Shabaab’s capabilities and training and mentoring Danab, Somalia’s most elite force.¹⁴³

137 AlSharif, F. “Qatar Issues Statement on Case of Young Somalis Tricked Into Fighting in Eritrea.” (Jan. 2021). Doha News. Accessed at: <https://www.dohanews.co/qatar-calls-for-investigation-in-case-of-somali-youth-tricked-into-fighting-in-eritrea/>
138 For a deeper understanding of this relationship, read “Somalia and the Gulf Crisis.” By Crisis Group. Accessed at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/260-somalia-and-gulf-crisis>

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9. Conclusion

The year 2020 was marked by political upheavals relating to the upcoming federal elections. Because the electoral disputes remain unsolved, the year ahead could be even more difficult if the political leaders don't find a common ground and champion free and fair elections. 2021 is crucial for Somalia's peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts, as major settlements on the outstanding issues must be reached. Everything will depend on the electoral process and its outcome. The role of external actors will likely be felt more acutely in 2021 as election season comes.

HERITAGE

I N S T I T U T E