



Politics

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Somaliland Alert: Parliamentary, municipal elections to be held on May 31; allot for disruptions, avoid election-related facilities

Please be advised

- According to an official notice released by the Republic of Somaliland President's Office, municipal and parliamentary elections are slated to take place nationwide on May 31.
- As of writing, further details on polling station opening times and locations remain unclear, however, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) has reportedly completed the voter registration process and expects over one million voters to participate.
- Only three political parties have been sanctioned to participate in the election and have candidates in the race, namely the ruling Peace, Unity, and Development Party known as Kulmiye, the main opposition Waddani Party, and the Justice and Welfare Party (UCID). The Somaliland Constitution bars independent candidates from participating in elections.
- Official sources indicate that approximately 250 candidates are slated to run for 82 available seats in the lower house of parliament, known as the House of Representatives (HoR), and that over 950 candidates will contest for 249 local council seats across Somaliland's six regions.
- The Kulmiye party currently holds 28 seats in the Upper Chamber of Parliament, while the UCID holds 21 seats. The 33 remaining seats were occupied by the United Peoples' Democratic Party (UDUB) until 2011 when the party was dissolved. The number of seats held by the Waddani Party remains unclear, but a total of 42 seats are needed for a party to win a majority in the HoR.
- According to a notice released by the NEC on May 22, each party is allocated a day to hold public gatherings and rallies across the country from May 23-28.
- A separate notice released by the Limited International Election Observation Mission (LIEOM) on May 24 indicates that a team of 12 international observers were invited by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) to monitor the election and have arrived in Hargeisa ahead of election day.
- Additionally, reports from April 25 indicate that Sool Region's Las Koreh, Badhan and Dhahar districts were not included on the parliamentary list due to fear of potential clashes with Puntland forces who have deployed to the area in an attempt to disrupt the elections.

POLITICAL PARTIES IN SOMALILAND

KULMIYE

Peace, Unity, and Development Party

Leader: President Muse Bihi

History: Formed in 2002, came to power in 2010

Key Points: Controls parliament, mayors in key cities including Hargeisa



UCID

Justice and Welfare Party

Leader: Faisal Ali Hussein

History: Formed in 2011

Key Points: Garnered 4% of the vote in 2017 presidential elections



WADDANI

National Party

Leader: Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi

History: Formed in 2012

Key Points: Came in second in presidential elections in 2012 and 2017



Assessments & Forecast

1. Somaliland has held presidential elections on a regular basis since it declared independence from Somalia in 1991. While parliament members are elected to five-year terms under the Constitution, acting MPs have held office since 2005 due to continued term extensions. The repeated postponement of legislative elections has been attributed to logistical difficulties, population displacement, and disputes over the electoral commission, with the Waddani party accusing President Muse Bihi of appointing NEC members who are biased toward the ruling camp. In this context, while political tensions have heightened in recent years, the slated elections have been highly anticipated and further cement Somaliland's reputation of democracy and political stability despite the country not being recognized as independent.
2. Somaliland's political landscape is dominated by clan and sub-clan power dynamics, with traditional clan leaders regularly elected to the HoR. Therefore, while the electoral model is based on the one-person-one-vote doctrine, clan practices are deeply embedded in the country's democratic institutions and continue to evolve to remain prominent within the electoral system. **FORECAST:** Though long-standing clan rivalries may impact the political system and heighten tensions during electoral periods, clan violence is relatively rare throughout Somaliland and is unlikely to threaten the upcoming elections. In this context, the elections are expected to commence peacefully and to see a relatively high turnout given the number of registered voters. However, despite the fact that certain clans are more prevalent within the political system, since the Kulmiye party and UCID currently hold nearly the same number of seats in the HoR, it remains unclear whether the Kulmiye and its associated clans will succeed in maintaining their legislative majority in the upcoming polls.
3. The ongoing electoral process has notably revived tensions between Somaliland and Somalia's northern Puntland State over the disputed Sanaag and Sool regions situated along their shared border. Though Somaliland's NEC completed its voter registration process in the Sanaag and Sool regions in January, the government's subsequent decision to remove Sool's Las Koreh, Badhan and

Dhahar districts from the electoral list denotes the administration's intent to ease border tensions with Puntland, while projecting an image of legitimate control over the area. This move likely stemmed from the government's concern about Puntland's ability to promptly deploy security forces throughout the border areas, which heightens the chances for a direct military confrontation. **FORECAST:** While it appears that Somaliland's actions have temporarily defused election-related tensions in Sool's Las Koreh, Badhan and Dhahar districts, a recent announcement by Puntland Interior Minister indicates that the state will initiate its own voter registration process in Sool's Las Anod District in time for Somalia's general elections, which risks fueling further hostilities.

4. This situation not only highlights Puntland's intent to establish itself as an active stakeholder within Somalia's federal electoral process, but also illustrates Puntland's intent to delegitimize Somaliland's authority and downplay its ongoing electoral process in the Sool Region. **FORECAST:** In this context and given Puntland's attempts to challenge Somaliland's governance of the Sool Region, Somaliland may deploy additional security forces along its border with Puntland and will likely remain on high alert as the elections approach. These reinforcements are also expected to secure the Sool Region against attacks or attempts by independent separatist groups to disrupt the electoral process given that Khatumo State elements allegedly targeted UCID party offices in Sool's capital on May 24. Despite these efforts, this recent attack, along with Puntland's aggressive actions in the border region, suggest that the elections may see further security incidents or irregularities. For instance, tensions in the border area could motivate attempts to disrupt voting and vote counting in Sool's bigger cities and towns where polling is still slated to go ahead. Additionally, given that communities in the Somaliland-Puntland border region hold varying allegiances, there remains a heightened potential for clashes to erupt in disputed areas in the days leading up to or following the polls.
5. **FORECAST:** In addition to these security risks, there remains an underlying potential for al-Shabaab militants to launch attacks during the elections in Somaliland. While al-Shabaab is heavily entrenched in southern and central Somalia, the group is known to operate on a limited basis in Somaliland, with its last activities reported in October and December 2020 in Sanaag Region, when militants claimed to have seized control of several localities. Though no major incidents have been reported since, given the group's tendency to capitalize on electoral periods to garner further support, it is plausible that militants will attempt to launch attacks on government targets or election facilities in the coming days. Given this threat, security is likely to be bolstered in the vicinity of NEC facilities, polling stations, and outside other government buildings on election day in an attempt to thwart any security incidents. Nonetheless, the situation across Somaliland is likely to be tense but stable as elections approach and in the days immediately after the polls.

Recommendations

Those operating or residing in Somaliland on May 31 and over the coming days are advised to allot for disruptions and to avoid election-related facilities such as polling stations given the slated polls and their latent potential for small security incidents.