



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

NURTURING DEMOCRACY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA: SOMALILAND'S FIRST ELECTIONS, 2002 - 2005

SYNOPSIS

A decade after the former British protectorate of Somaliland severed ties with the rest of Somalia and declared independence, the fledgling state took the next steps toward democracy by holding direct elections. This transition occurred over the course of four years and three elections, during which the people of Somaliland elected district councils in 2002, a president and vice president in 2003, and a parliament in 2005. Somaliland's democratic elections, the first in the Horn of Africa since 1969, were landmark achievements, as traditional social and political mechanisms legitimized the results and reinforced stability in the aftermath. The inexperienced and under-resourced National Electoral Commission successfully navigated the development of political parties, avoided the potential for violence when the margin of victory in the presidential election was only 80 votes, and managed an improved parliamentary election by introducing innovations that made the electoral process operate more smoothly. By avoiding violence and building consensus for peaceful, democratic transitions, Somaliland's first elections highlighted a mix of traditional and democratic innovations conducted in a resource-poor environment.

Richard Bennet and Michael Woldemariam drafted this policy note on the basis of interviews conducted in Somaliland during October 2010. For a detailed look at the establishment of civilian government in Somaliland from 1991 to 2001, see the companion case study, "Navigating a Broken Transition to Civilian Rule."

INTRODUCTION

On 19 April 2003, the results of Somaliland's first presidential election arrived from regional offices at the headquarters of the National Electoral Commission. Shukri Ismail, the lone woman among seven commissioners, said she was "shocked" by the tabulated results. The acting president and candidate from the United Democratic

People's Party, Dahir 'Riyale' Kahin, had beaten Ahmed 'Silanyo' of the Kulmiye party by a mere 80 votes in an election with over 488,000 voters. "We thought something was wrong," Ismail recalled. "We couldn't announce this immediately. We had to go back and check again. We rechecked and rechecked. Still, 80 votes. ... I was shivering. People were expecting us to announce."

Kulmiye supporters gathered outside, waiting for the results and celebrating what they anticipated would be a victory for their candidate. “We said to ourselves, ‘This is it. If we don’t say the results, people will think we have done something. ... We won’t leave this building alive,’” Ismail said.

Somaliland, an autonomous region in the northwest of Somalia, declared independence in 1991 after the overthrow of Somali dictator Siad Barre and a 10-year civil war. The Somali National Movement (SNM), the rebel organization that seized power from Barre in Somaliland, initially had spurned the idea of an independent republic. However, the repressive tactics of Barre’s southern-dominated government during the civil war led to calls for a sovereign state.

The drive for independence had historical precedent, as Somaliland had possessed the status of an independent country for six days between the departure of its British colonizers and its voluntary union with southern Somalia in 1960. During the 1990s, an interim government transitioned to civilian leadership, and democratic institutions slowly emerged amid a fragile mix of clan politics and scarce resources.

With an estimated three million people drawn from three major clan families—the Isaaq, Harti/Darood, and the Dir—and various sub-clans, Somaliland stood in an increasingly undemocratic and dangerous corner of the world. Indeed, Somalia to the southeast devolved into chaos as clan-based militias fought over political power. But Somaliland managed to hold a referendum on a democratic constitution, establish political parties that did not break along clan lines, and conduct free and fair elections for district councils, the presidency and parliament.

Given the context of the SNM’s armed struggle against the previous regime and the tensions between the clans that had existed throughout the previous decade—even

breaking into a civil war between 1994 and 1996—the narrow margin of victory for the United Democratic People’s Party (*Uurka Dimuqraadiga Umada Bahawday*, or UDUB) in the 2003 presidential election seemed sure to spark a violent response from supporters of the losing Kulmiye party. And yet Somalilanders, invoking a combination of democratic and traditional mediation norms, managed to avoid violence. This case study documents the operational and political challenges that Somaliland and its new National Electoral Commission faced, and the strategies they employed to keep the country on the path to a more mature democracy.

THE CHALLENGE

On 31 May 2001, 97% of those who voted in Somaliland’s first nationwide referendum approved a newly drafted constitution. The referendum set in motion a timetable for holding democratic elections, the first in the recent history of the independent but internationally unrecognized country.

A variety of challenges, both operational and political, accompanied this step toward democracy. Somaliland’s government lacked the institutions and procedures necessary to conduct free and fair elections. The political system seemed more suited to traditional clan-based politics than multi-party democracy. In fact, many conjectured that Somaliland’s relative stability was due to its willingness to spurn elections in the years following independence, in favor of a system of rule in which periodic conferences of clan elders used traditional negotiating strategies to decide on the structure of government and distribution of power. Elite bargaining was about to give way to messy mass democracy.

Having proclaimed independence from the rest of Somalia in 1991, Somaliland moved toward a constitution and direct elections on the initiative of its second president, Mohamed Ibrahim Egal. When the council of

clan elders (the *Guurti*) selected Egal at a landmark conference in Borama in 1993, his mandate was for a short transitional term. Nine years later Egal was still president. The constitution concentrated power in the executive branch, and many opposing leaders saw the move toward elections—including the creation of an independent election commission in December 2001—as yet another tool that Egal could use to bolster his standing and prolong his rule.

Against the backdrop of Egal's consolidation of power, other political leaders formed alliances to oppose the president. But with Egal's death in May 2002, the doors of political opportunity opened for political actors from a variety of clans. Mohamed Fadal of the Social Research and Development Institute, a Somaliland non-governmental organization, explained, "[Egal] died and there was nothing to fight about. At a certain point Somaliland had all these forces that were prepared to fight against Egal, and now had no one to fight against. And that was the mood which made possible the political parties to be formed, the elections to be formed. There was no strongman to fight against." Leaders embraced the elections as an affirmation of independence and a step toward democracy and, by extension, international recognition.

The new National Electoral Commission (NEC) had no election experience. In accordance with the election law, the president nominated three of the seven commissioners while the *Guurti* and civil society leaders nominated two each. All had to be approved by Parliament. Ismail, one of the two commissioners from civil society and the only woman of the seven, described her confusion and disbelief upon hearing that she had been selected. A friend told Ismail that her that a radio newscast name had mentioned her name for a position. "I had no idea what the commissioners were supposed to do. ... It was an exciting experience," she said.

An exile who returned to Somaliland during the tense period of clan conflict in 1995 to found a prominent local NGO, Ismail had the respect of many in the community, but she worried that her organizational experience with NGOs might not translate to the tasks of an election commissioner. Ismail recalled that when she read the job description, she said, "No, no, this is not for me." But Abdilqadir Jirde, a veteran member of Parliament and deputy speaker of the House of Representatives, persuaded her to reconsider. In a society where traditional clan structures affirmed and promoted patriarchy, opportunities for women to hold high public positions were rare and Ismail would not let the opportunity pass. "I said, 'I have no experience,' and [Jirde] said, 'You don't need experience; it's just like a knife on a melon.'"

Because the commission lacked the financial resources to hire and train a large staff, it faced the daunting task of mobilizing a workforce without offering appropriate compensation. This problem was especially significant in remote areas, where identification and training of potential polling-station staffers was difficult. The commission did not have the vehicles necessary to cover the challenging terrain, and many remote areas did not have the technology to allow easy communications with the commission's headquarters in Hargeisa. And even when the commission managed to identify and mobilize election staff outside of the urban areas, the staff lacked the training and supporting infrastructure to carry out their assignments. The lack of permanent or fixed addresses, the cross-border movement of nomadic herdsmen, high levels of illiteracy and poor roads all contributed to these operational difficulties.

The establishment of political parties created a major challenge to the prospect of free and fair elections. The constitution stipulated that only three political parties could contest the presidential and

parliamentary elections and that the composition of those parties could not break along clan or regional lines. This provision aimed to avoid the political gridlock of 1969, when more than 60 parties had contested Somali national elections. Jirde, a former deputy speaker of Parliament, noted that no single clan was big enough to dominate any one of the three parties. “Limiting the number of political parties was a way of saying that no clan should have a party on its own. In order to become successful, you have to have a coalition of clans. No clan is big enough now to dominate the political scene,” he said.

Following the approval of the constitution, Parliament had to validate political organizations. Egal was swift to found the UDUB in August 2001. Five others followed suit. The NEC decided to use the results of district elections, scheduled to elect members to 23 councils across Somaliland’s six regions, to determine which three parties could contest the presidential and parliamentary votes. Of the six political organizations that entered the council races, the UDUB and Kulmiye were expected to garner the highest totals. None of the remaining organizations appeared to have the upper hand in the contest for the third spot on the national ballot.

Three other challenges loomed large. First, none of the political organizations in 2002 had experience with campaigns, and this lack of technical and political election expertise, compounded by low levels of voter education, complicated the task of the NEC. Second, because the government did not have the resources to carry out a census, no roll of voters existed, and there was no agreement regarding the best way to establish some form of registration in the short period before the election. Third, drawing district boundaries proved controversial. Opponents protested attempts by Egal’s governing party, the UDUB, to add new districts and draw

electoral lines that would increase its political influence.

In a compressed time frame, the commission had to tackle these issues and pave the way for the subsequent presidential and parliamentary votes.

FRAMING A RESPONSE

When they convened for the first time in December 2001, the commission members confronted another challenge. They learned that the district elections were scheduled to take place just a few days later. Clearly it was impossible to manage this important event successfully with no time to prepare. Delay might create the impression that the incumbent party wanted to block the elections, but the risks associated with a poorly managed ballot created equally strong concerns. The members’ first act in office was to postpone the district contest.

The commissioners then set out to organize their work. They wrote their own internal code of conduct, which made all deliberations strictly confidential and required the commissioners to call for Parliament to dismiss any member who violated this provision. They selected as chairman Ahmed Ali Adami, a seasoned administrator who had served as the head of the Somali Port Authority, Somaliland’s minister of health, and Somaliland’s minister of labor under Egal.

Unity was vital to the commission’s independence and its success in gaining the confidence of all political parties. The commissioners decided to travel to most events together, issue statements together and refrain from any individual interviews or sharing of personal views. Both Ismail and Adami emphasized that the only way to gain the support of the political parties was through extensive negotiation, and negotiations could be effective only if all members of the NEC maintained a consistent position on important issues. As chairman, Adami emphasized the

need for consensus before any actions were taken. Modestly, he claimed it was a “miracle” that the commission gained the support of all parties. However, his persistent negotiation, motivated by the consensus rule, underlay the sustained agreement among members and helped ensure that the commission presented a unified, consistent and objective message.

Although the government supplied most of the resources and funding for the elections, the European Commission also contributed and sent consultants from Europe and elsewhere in Africa to aid in the preparations, specifically in areas related to the training of roughly 3,000 election workers. The United Nations and most bi-lateral donors, except for a few states in the European Union, refrained from offering assistance because of concerns that overt aid for a separatist movement might draw the ire of the government of Somalia in Mogadishu.

With the district-council elections less than a year away, the commissioners knew they did not have time to create an electoral register. For the purpose of operational planning, they decided to use the government estimate of 1.18 million voters who had participated in the constitutional referendum.¹ This estimate was likely inaccurate, as subsequent polls showed roughly half of that number voting. Confusion arose because the constitution gave citizenship to any descendant of a person resident in the territory of Somaliland before its union with Somalia in 1960. As a result, citizenship status was unclear for refugees from southern Somalia, nomadic peoples who frequently crossed back-and-forth into Ethiopia, and the large diaspora spread around the world. The commission attempted to verify voter eligibility on Election Day by enlisting the help of local elders. They also decided to use indelible ink to mark voters, in an effort to reduce multiple voting.²

Somaliland’s civil society played a key role in voter education. An informal grouping of

individuals who had helped to establish basic services in the early 1990s following independence, they encouraged rural populations to vote and provided details on how to cast a ballot and how to implement other operational procedures. The NEC directed much of this work, and local NGOs held community forums to facilitate these discussions. The commission and the NGOs also trained polling-station observers from each party.

On 15 December 2002, a year after the selection of the commission, more than 440,000 voters elected 332 district and municipal councilors across Somaliland. Election Day passed without major violence, despite threats that derailed voting in some eastern districts where the sovereignty of Somaliland was disputed. The turnout was lower than expected. However, without a prior registration campaign to help count eligible voters, it was possible that the commission had based its expectations on flawed estimates and that actual participation rates were high. Foreign observers certified the election as transparent and free.³

A week later, the commission declared that of the six political organizations vying for the three party slots for the national elections, the UDUB, Kulmiye, and the Justice and Welfare Party (known as the UCID) had won. That the UDUB received the greatest share of votes and Kulmiye came in second was no surprise. But the UCID’s margin of victory was a mere 1,500 votes over the fourth-place group, and the party failed to obtain 20% of the vote in any region, a point that many Somalilanders used to illustrate the shortcomings of the three-party system.

Through mediation among sub-clan elders and political bargaining among the parties, the three losing organizations joined the ranks of the three newly accredited parties. In the nascent electoral system, this assimilation was possible because serious ideological and

programmatic differences between the major parties had yet to emerge.⁴ Although the Kulmiye party gathered support from former SNM fighters, the UDUB represented stability and the UCID carried more of the youth vote, all three parties agreed on the central issue of Somaliland independence.

Because the Isaaq clan represented the clear numerical majority in Somaliland, and each party had to show support across Somaliland's various regions, minority non-Isaaq clans could not form their own parties and hope to survive politically. This reality helped enfranchise minority groups, as the major Isaaq sub-clans courted each of them. Isaaq sub-clans offered these minority clan members prominent positions in their parties. Looking ahead to the presidential election, all three parties carried a member of a minority clan on their tickets.

Now that Somaliland had successfully navigated its first district elections, the political parties shifted their focus to the presidential race. The government's term was due to end in February 2003, but the NEC's delay of the district elections had pushed the presidential election back three months, to April 2003 from January.

Parliamentary elections remained a more distant prospect. The NEC originally planned to hold simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections. However, two obstacles dogged the effort to move forward on the parliamentary contest. First, the Somaliland constitution had codified the elders, or Guurti, as the upper house in a bicameral Parliament. The process for selecting the Guurti remained uncertain. Second, without a census, it was difficult to determine how many representatives each region should have in the lower house, the House of Representatives. The NEC and several well-positioned civil society groups, many of whom actually hosted these complex negotiations in the homes of their members,

succeeded in getting all parties to agree to extend Parliament's term by two years, to provide more time to draft and ratify a parliamentary election law.

GETTING DOWN TO WORK

The National Electoral Commission immediately mobilized to organize the presidential vote. This time, Somaliland would not have significant outside financial assistance. The European Commission had supported the district council elections as part of a global program on decentralization and accountable local government. The presidential vote did not fit that rubric, and international donors worried that any support for the presidential election could be viewed as recognition of Somaliland's sovereignty and an implicit broader endorsement of separatist movements.

The bulk of funding for the presidential election, about US\$1 million, would have to come from the Somaliland government itself. The requisite financing came from taxes on goods and services that moved through the main port at Berbera. Somaliland's meager resources would require careful planning on the part of the government; unforeseen funding gaps would not be easy to fill. However, the financial commitment raised the political stakes, encouraged buy-in and further legitimized the vote in the eyes of the politicians and the people.

During the four months between the district council vote and the presidential elections, the NEC worked hard to make the campaign period, the polls, and the count work smoothly. First, the commission scrambled to build on the experience of the district polls and improve operational effectiveness. The commissioners reasoned that better training would help poll-station workers explain ballots to voters, prevent inadvertent compromise of ballot secrecy by inexperienced citizens, and eliminate duplicate voting. The commission

increased the number of polling stations and moved staff between regions, aiming to limit fraud by positioning staff members far from their home areas.

Second, individual members of the commission traveled around the country to visit with clan leaders and party officials and to negotiate the details of the process. “Everyone should know what we are doing. Transparency was the number one priority as a commissioner,” Ismail said. The greatest challenge was staffing the local electoral staff and navigating clan dynamics involved. “Sometimes it takes a whole day—a whole day—to appoint one local electoral chairman or vice chairman. You have to have patience,” Ismail said. She credited commissioners such as Adami, who had talents for negotiation and consensus building, as vital to the process. Commissioners traveled often to their own home regions to help build consensus on the details of the electoral procedure. When the time came to print ballots, the commissioners themselves traveled to Dubai and London to get the work done and bring the ballots back to Somaliland.

Third, the NEC took several steps to ensure that party behavior in the campaign period did not trigger violence. The commission worked with the political parties to develop a code of conduct.

The NEC also established an Integrity Watch Committee to monitor the media and the parties. When limited resources and training rendered the committee toothless, the commission itself assumed many of the committee’s responsibilities, including managing negotiations with media outlets to ensure balanced coverage and setting specific days for each party to spread its message and hold rallies. On those days, the other parties were not allowed to campaign.

On 14 April 2003, Somalilanders again went to the polls, and almost 500,000 voters cast ballots for president and vice president in

an election that was widely viewed as a close contest between the two dominant parties, the UDUB and Kulmiye. Leading the UDUB ticket was Dahir ‘Riyale’ Kahin, who had been Egal’s vice president and had assumed the presidency after his death. Riyale came from the Gadabursi, a minority clan. By contrast, members of the powerful Isaaq sub-clans led the other tickets. Ahmed Mohamed Mahamoud ‘Silanyo’ was Kulmiye’s candidate, a member of the Habar-Ja’lo sub-clan of the Isaaq and a former SNM leader who had fought for Somaliland’s independence in the 1980s. The UDUB’s campaign emphasized continuity, while Kulmiye represented business interests and carried the support of many former SNM fighters. The parties shared similar program agendas.

On voting day, the mood around the country was jubilant, with voters and politicians alike eager to project a positive image of democracy for Somaliland, hoping that international recognition might follow a successful vote. Voters braved extreme heat and traveled great distances to wait in lines outside remote polling stations. Although the process was not perfect, there were few incidents. All three parties engaged in some illegal activities, such as driving supporters to the polls. Duplicate voting occurred in some places, where voters found a way to remove the supposedly indelible ink. However, observers agreed that the polling process was transparent and free.

The count itself took several days, as ballot boxes traveled from the districts to the center. In the streets of Hargeisa, Kulmiye and UDUB supporters both celebrated their anticipated triumph. Kulmiye leaders had told their supporters that they could expect a victory, based on their own informal estimates from the polling stations. As a result, Kulmiye supporters comprised the majority of those gathered in the streets. Inside headquarters, Adami reminded everyone of the internal code

of conduct and insisted that all commissioners leave their mobile phones in the room if they were to leave the NEC office, even to go to the restroom.

A challenge awaited. As the tally concluded, regional vote totals showed a UDUB victory over the Kulmiye party by a margin of merely 80 votes. “We were shocked, of course,” Adami said. “We left the computer and tried to do it manually.” Recounts validated the original result.

What to do? The chairman of the Guurti advised Adami to postpone the announcement of the results for a few more days, in order to allow the people to calm down. But Adami and the rest of the commission refused, worried that any additional delay would reflect poorly on the impartiality of the commission’s numbers and possibly foment deeper problems. The government supplied vehicles and armed escorts to take the commissioners home the evening before the scheduled announcement, worried that low-level rioting might be directed at the NEC. Adami refused the escort because he did not want to seem partial to the government.

The next day, unexpectedly heavy rains dispersed the crowds, and the commissioners assembled to announce the results to the media. The government instituted emergency rule to keep the peace.

Silanyo appealed to his supporters for calm, despite calls from his fellow Kulmiye members to take up arms and establish a rival government. A former chairman of the SNM and a witness to what war had done to his country, Silanyo showed restraint, publicly stating that he had no intention of turning Somaliland into Mogadishu. What was more, most Somaliland nationalists, including Silanyo, recognized that if Somaliland were to be a viable state, minority-clan candidates like Riyale would have to win national elections. Somaliland’s politics could not be an all-Isaaq affair. Silanyo affirmed the legitimacy of the

NEC but challenged the results in the manner mandated by the constitution, through an official appeal to the Supreme Court. He took this step although he knew that Riyale had appointed the members of the Supreme Court and the Court might not prove impartial.

After three days of deliberations, the Supreme Court affirmed the results of the election, declaring the UDUB victorious. The 11 May court ruling actually generated further confusion, however, because it increased the margin of victory to over 200 votes without adequate explanation. The NEC stood by its numbers. Its final tallies gave the UDUB 205,595 votes (42.08% of the vote), compared with 205,515 votes for the Kulmiye (42.07%). The UCID party received 77,433 votes (15.85%).

Five days after the Supreme Court’s decision, Riyale was sworn in for an additional five years. But the dispute resolution process was not over. The clans appealed to the Guurti to help mediate further conversations between the Kulmiye supporters and the government. The Guurti’s actions helped to legitimize the results. Three weeks later Kulmiye conceded.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Many worried that the UDUB’s grip on power would signal the end of multi-party democracy for Somaliland. Riyale consolidated his control in the weeks and months that followed. The Ethiopian government and many prominent members of Somali civil society encouraged the Riyale to bring Silanyo and Kulmiye into a coalition government, but Riyale did not, perhaps because he worried about managing a divided government.⁵ Growing concern that the winners would “take all” heightened the importance of holding parliamentary elections and building legislative oversight in order to preserve the health of the multi-party system.

Organizing the parliamentary elections

filled the next months with challenges. Disagreements over the distribution of parliamentary seats had caused the NEC to hold the parliamentary elections separate from the presidential vote. But the sitting members of Parliament, who were selected by elites from each of the clans, had no incentives to write themselves out of office and now posed an additional obstacle. “They wanted to extend their time, remain on the chair, collect their salary. They were indifferent to this democratization process,” Adami said. Riyale’s government also had little incentive to speed an election that would empower the opposition. Thus preparations for the parliamentary elections dragged out far longer than the six months the NEC had proposed, and the yearlong timetable for the elections stretched to two years.

It was not until January 2005 that Parliament finally agreed on the number and distribution of seats and the parties signed the code of conduct prepared by the NEC, along with regulations from the Guurti that called for a detailed electoral register as a precondition for the vote. The delays from Parliament pushed the date back to September 2005.

In the interim, the election commissioners attempted to learn from the lessons of the previous two elections, as well as from visits to other countries. Shukri Ismail credited a trip to South Africa to meet with the election commission there as a landmark development for the NEC. Though the NEC had taken previous trips to consult with commissions in Jordan, Egypt and Nairobi, none imparted the insight that the South Africans could. These insights focused primarily on the role that the commissioners should play in voter education, the managing of politics along with the process, and the sensitivities surrounding the commission’s dealings with the media.

The commissioners had to put these lessons to work. When the dates of the

parliamentary election were finally set, finance and logistics both proved problematical. In the early months of 2005, the commissioners had to print 1.3 million ballot papers, distribute 1,500 ballot bags and equip 985 polling stations and the accompanying 4,000 polling-station staff, 6,000 party agents and observers, 3,000 police, and 700 domestic observers. They also had to train poll workers. At the time of the presidential election, the NEC had overseen the training of thousands of poll workers. The polling staff had disbanded, because they were not paid regular salaries. Aside from the seven commissioners, only three or four full-time staff remained.

To its credit, the NEC continued to innovate. It took several additional steps to dampen the risk of violence. The commission drafted a new code of conduct with the help of the political parties.⁶ It replaced the toothless Integrity Watch Committee with an Election Monitoring Board that could mediate disputes. It worked to ensure balanced reporting.

To reduce the chance of disputes over results at individual polls, the NEC required the party observers at each polling station to sign and verify the results. During the presidential election, the observers had reported back to their party leaders about the results, informally inflating their party’s internal vote estimates and thereby inflating expectations from party officials. Having each party sign off on the polling placed the responsibility on the parties to internally regulate their expectations.

ASSESSING RESULTS

When Somaliland finally held its parliamentary election on 29 September 2005, 670,000 voters cast ballots—180,000 more than in the presidential election two years earlier.

The UDUB maintained its control over the House of Representatives, garnering 39% of the vote. Kulmiye and the UCID followed

with 34% and 27%, respectively. Though the UDUB emerged victorious with 33 MPs, the opposition parties carried the majority of the seats, Kulmiye with 28 and the UCID with 21, forming a counterweight to Riyale's hold on power.

Despite the lack of voter registration, multiple voting in certain polling areas, complicated and often public balloting, and some political party violations of the code of conduct, international observers marked the election as "reasonably free and fair."⁷ The observers reported a widespread commitment by voters and election staff to abide by the electoral law, recognition of the value of the elections and the democratic process, calm and organized queues, equal access to polling stations for men and women, a meticulous and transparent counting process with few discrepancies, and large and enthusiastic voter turnout.⁸

REFLECTIONS

All three elections featured the celebratory atmosphere of voters who were proud of their independent Somaliland and its democratic principles. This pride and the desire to send a signal about the future may have helped produce a peaceful result. Ahmed Silanyo's willingness to abide by the constitution was critical to success. Many

thought that Silanyo believed strongly in the democratic principles and felt that his time would come. Silanyo recognized that the image of a minority candidate winning a presidential election would go a long way toward reassuring non-Isaaq clans that Somaliland was a place of equal opportunity. He was rewarded in 2010 when voters elected him to be the fourth president of Somaliland, sweeping the UDUB from power.

The unity and independence of the first electoral commission were critical for the new democracy. "We worked step by step, and we succeeded," commission Chairman Ahmed Ali Adami said. "We were fair. We were not inclined to anybody. We were trying to perform our duties independently as a commission." This ethos established the legitimacy of the commission as an independent body and set a benchmark for the public to judge the performance of future electoral commissions.

In holding elections, Somaliland chose to superimpose democracy on top of clan dynamics rather than trade traditional politics for democratic principles. Constitutional and traditional mediation formed equal parts of negotiations both before and after the elections, as Somalilanders used consensus building to legitimize and secure the fragile new system.

Notes:

¹ Bradbury, Mark. "Becoming Somaliland." London: Progressio, 2008. Page 187.

² Ibid., 187.

³ Ibid., 189.

⁴ Ibid., 189.

⁵ Ibid., 202.

⁶ Ibid., 205.

⁷ Abokor, Adan Yusuf and Steve Kibble. "Further Steps to Democracy: The Somaliland Parliamentary Elections, September 2005." London: Progressio, 2006. Page 5.

⁸ Ibid., 12.

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