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PUNTLAND LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS AND THE ROLE OF POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ever since its establishment as an autonomous state in 1998, the Puntland State of Somalia has experienced a protracted and fitful democratic transition. More than twenty years on, robust democratic institutions have failed to develop in Puntland, and the region's hopes for democratic governance remain beset by numerous ongoing challenges. Despite difficulties, however, public support for free and fair multi-party elections remains high, and political leaders have demonstrated a clear desire for the same. In light of this, the passing of the Political Associations Law in 2012 has proven particularly promising. Founded in a logic of participation and with the express aim of bypassing enduring clan-based antagonisms, political associations have been seen by some to carry the potential to accelerate Puntland's flagging democratic transition. It is in consideration of this potential that the following study explores the role of political associations in Puntland's democratization process.

After first (in §1) outlining the context and trajectory of democracy in Puntland, this study traces (in §1.1) the history, structure, and evolving role of political associations in the region. Subsequently, (in §1.2) we elaborate a multi-method exploratory research design to study the role of political associations in pre- and post-electoral contexts, combining quantitative and qualitative components as well as including an extensive literature review.

Our key findings are presented and analyzed in §2. We found that that establishment of political associations is closely linked with the reanimation of Puntland's democratization process. Despite their popularity and potential as mechanisms of popular and grassroots democratic participation, however, we found that political associations face numerous challenges face if they are to develop into more dynamic political institutions. We determined that the chief problem facing political associations was their lack of funding and resources needed to conduct political activities, including campaigns, rallies, and voter education initiatives. Additionally, our analysis demonstrated that despite maintaining some influence over political associations, clan-related considerations have become increasingly marginal in the decision-making of Puntland's citizens. This finding highlights the potential for political associations to generate issues- and needs-based political discourses and identities, and to circumvent embedded clan antagonisms. In §3 we recapitulate our findings before offering (in §4) a number of recommendations. In the absence of consistent financial support from the government, our findings suggest the need for political associations to design and implement extensive fundraising programmes, both locally and internationally among the Somali Diaspora. We suggest the need for political associations to observe the 30% quota for female representation, in order to ensure that they capture the full range of their constituents' interests and needs. Additionally, we suggest the need for political associations to accept

greater responsibility in civic education and public awareness raising campaigns.

Our research further reinforces optimism in the potential of political associations to engender democratization in Puntland. By adopting a more multifaceted function – as not only a vector for political participation, but also political education and collaboration – these organizations may develop into more complex and useful tools of democratization.

1. BACKGROUND

The Puntland State of Somalia, an autonomous regional state in the northeast of Somalia, was formed in August 1998 by traditional elders and members of regional civil society. The 1st Puntland president, Vice president and Charter was adopted during the Garowe Constitutional Conference (GCC) by 469 regional delegates, they also agreed upon the number sixty-six for representatives to be selected for Parliament. Though Puntland state was established in part to transcend traditional clan antagonisms and to develop robust modern democratic governance – as stipulated in the charter adopted in 1998 – the process of democratization would prove to be protracted.

Though the 1998 charter envisioned multi-party elections to be held following the end of the first government's term, concrete measures to develop constitutional provisions for elections would only be taken in 2008. It was then that a constitutional review process conducted under President Adde Muse produced a draft constitution which elaborated frameworks for substantive democratic reforms, including the introduction of multi-party elections. This draft constitution was later adopted following a constituent assembly vote under President Farole's administration. Between 2009 and 2014 the Farole administration continued this prolonged trend of democratization by further introducing legal instruments requisite to the establishment of enduring democratic – especially electoral – institutions.

The completion of a new draft provisional constitution and the formulation of key electoral laws such as the Local Council Election Law in 2012 were especially notable developments within this period (PDRC, 2021). More relevant to the purposes of the present study, however, was the approval of the Puntland Electoral Commission Law in 2011 and the Political Associations Law in 2012 by the region's parliament. The Electoral Commission Law established the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC), whose mandate is to conduct and administer the overall electoral processes. The Political Associations Law – approved in June 2012 and amended three months later in September – outlined provisions for the registration of political associations and parties. Shortly after the amendment of the Political Associations Law, TPEC began the registration of the first political associations in Puntland. By March 2013, six such associations had been registered and begun activities. It's worth mentioning that, of the six PAs, only three did register for the first local council elections that were suspended 2 before their planned date on 15th July due to anti-election public uprising in parts of Puntland regions.

In the aftermath of the suspension of the democratization process, the Puntland voted unanimously to return to the clan-based electoral modal of selecting new members of parliament who in turn will elect the next president of Puntland

on January 8th, 2014. Right after, the PDRC conducted its first public perception survey to gauge their perception on a resumption of the process under the new administration. It is worth noting that 85,8% of the respondents back then were in favor of the establishment of TPEC-II within the first six months of President Abdiweli's mandate. 91% of the respondents were also willing to cast their votes if it does happen.

First forward a few more years, PDRC again undertook a Public Perception Survey study earlier this year, in 2021. The survey aimed to assess public views on the democratization process in Puntland, the challenges confronting the process, the available opportunities, and the experiences to be learned from prior attempts to reinforce democratic trends. The initial phase of the Public Perception Survey focuses on assessing and gauging two three fundamental aspects of the democratization process.



These included citizens' level of awareness, their willingness to participate in the democratic elections, as well as their expectations of the electoral process.

Democracy, the multi-party system, and one-person-one-vote (OPOV) are new concepts to the Somali people in general. Therefore, extensive, and in-depth research is necessary to understand how Somalis can effectively prevail in the face of entrenched systems and attitudes which may be inimical to democratic processes. The second phase of the study explores the role of political associations, which constitute the bedrock of a democratic system and a main pillar within Puntland's overall political establishment. This is done by examining the theme from pre- and post-election perspectives. In addition, this study analyzes public perception and expectations, as well as how individuals relate to political associations. This study aims to provide critical insights into democratic transitions – both in Somalia and more broadly, across Africa – as well as offer valuable local political context in the form of empirical analyses of popular attitudes towards democracy.

1.1 Formation of Political Associations

The transition to a democratic process based on political associations has not been an easy process in Puntland. It has been challenged by concurrent legal,

administrative, and infrastructural public priorities vying for the state's limited resources. The bottom-up approach of governance was nevertheless an urgent priority, especially considering its acknowledged and widely studied function in promoting sustainable, effective, and representative governance. A previous PDRC report noted that "two main areas of law that require urgent strengthening for democracy to take deeper root in the region are: The Puntland provisional constitution, and laws governing the formation of local councils," (Roots for Good Governance, PDRC, 2006).

The introduction of political associations, as an alternative political system set off competition among clans vying for representation in the political arena. These clan rivalries often impede the political process, and sometimes may escalate to the point of violence. Indeed, just before the first democratic local council elections in 2013 "there was violence in Qardho and Galkayo towns, leaving at least three people dead and resulting in the indefinite postponement of the elections," (Sidra Institute , 2016).

Beyond clan-related tensions, an additional pressure also came in the form of bureaucratic sluggishness at the federal level. Because of the formal interconnectedness of regional and federal governance, difficulties at the federal level inevitably have indirect effects on regional governments. To wit: "the attention and interest of the Puntland citizens and the politicians has shifted from the local election to the federal election. In addition to that, the political interest of politicians, which is intrinsically attached to the federal elections has shifted from local to federal level. Due to these disruptions, TPEC is obliged to amend its plans and activities." (Annual Report, TPEC, 2020).

Despite these challenges, the current administration led by president Said Abdullahi Dani managed to renew efforts to revitalize the flagging democratization process. Soon after assuming office, the administration nominated the members of the transitional electoral commission (TPEC), which was subsequently approved by the parliament on the 16th of November 2019 (Somali Public Agenda, 2021).

The below table summarizes the chronological order of the democratization process in Puntland:

1.1.1 Chronology of the democratization process in Puntland from 2009 to 2021

#	Date	Descriptions of the activity
1	November, 2019	Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) was approved by the Puntland parliament.
2	December, 2019	Political association registration initiated.
3	Match, 2020	Political association registration closed.
4	16-31 Match, 2020	This was determined by the period of vetting.
5	August 2020	August 2020 TPEC revealed that 10 political associations met the legal requirements to register. To contest the upcoming election.
6	Aug- Sept, 2021	Submission list of local government election candidates.
7	Sept, 2021	Certification and publishing of local government election candidates.
8	Sept- October, 2021	Sending of observers, the list local government elections.
9	Sept- October, 2021	Supply of voters' cards
10	24Sept to 23 Oct 2021.	local government election campaigns exposed and ends.
11	October 1-5, 2021	Vetting and approval of observers and Political association representatives list local government elections.
12	23 Oct 2021	Final campaign period
13	25 Oct, 2021	Election Day
14	25 Oct, 2021	Election successfully held as planned

Source: Somali Public Agenda 2021. And TPEC (2020) Annual Report. * PDRC Research team

Substantive efforts have been made in the formation and registration of political associations, as well as the design of an electoral model that has been tested in an early local election to be held in the preselected districts of Qardho, Eyl and Uffayn on the 25th of Oc-

tober 2021. It is hoped that these three districts serve as a test for the viability of the electoral model ahead of state-wide local government elections expected to take place in 2022. Initially, there were 17 PAs registered, the list decreased at the prequalification stage and vetting process. 11 PAs were finally certified while two of them joined with other PAs leaving 9 PAs to join the early elections of October, 2021.

In Puntland, there are currently nine registered political associations which are qualified to contest at the local council election as political parties in the next State parliamentary elections for the Puntland House of Representatives. These are:

1. Youth Political Association
2. Justice and Equity Political Association
3. Mideeye Political Association
4. Horseed Political Association
5. Mustaqbal Political Association
6. Kaah Political Association
7. Labour Political Association
8. Ifiye Political Association
9. Truth and Justice Political Association



The possibility of this number reducing through merges or dissolution is high because of lack of financial means to sustain with the organization's operational running costs and political campaign outreaches. Many of them moved from the premises they have started with their initial organizational establishments and operation in Garowe and few of them have physical presences in outside Garowe. There had also been times that majority of the PAs (including Kaah) have

requested from TPEC to postpone the date set for the voter registration and elections to take place. On both occasions, their main complaint was lack of financial resources and early preparations for which they couldn't participate in demanding registration and election exercises in outside districts. TPEC and prominent civil society organizations, advocated for a bailout plan to which the government granted 9 PAs with 10,000 US dollars to reach out to and mobilize with supporters during the voter registration exercise.

Initially, the political associations were seen by many as being too under-developed. Lacking genuine constituencies, grassroots members, or a body politic characterized by robust political identities, political associations were perceived as largely being based around clan-membership, lacking clear structures and programmes. In focus group discussions across Puntland, participants often said they believed that most people did not understand the differences between the political associations but did identify with leaders of the associations who were members of their clan. Though political associations have become increasingly effective and mature, they nevertheless require time to ensure the entrenchment of a culture of political representation and participation (SaverWorld, 2014).

1.2 Methodology

To get a better understanding of the role of the political associations in Puntland, this study employed an exploratory research method, using primary and secondary data. Since the role of political associations has not been researched before, the exploratory method was selected as suitable for the collection and analysis of study data.

The study employed a combination of tools to gather primary data. The qualitative component of our research was derived primarily from key informant interviews, mainly targeting senior members of political associations. Additionally, two focus group discussions were used. These were comprised of selective and informed participants from various sections of society, i.e., women, traditional elders, youth, women, minority groups, business community and religious scholars. The aim was to maximize the participants' engagement and capture the full diversity of opinions among FGD members.

The quantitative component of the study made use of KOBO Collect, a data collection application comprising an integrated set of tools, accessible on smartphones. The application facilitates the building of study forms and the collection of interview responses. University students were trained in the administration of the tool and deployed in the three districts of Eyl, Uffayn and Qardofor data collection, as part of the post-election survey. A total of 544 randomly-selected individuals in the three districts were asked pre-arranged questions exploring the role of the political associations during the elections. The main criterion for selecting the respondents was their eligibility to vote; being of or above the age of 18.

Furthermore, the study conducted an extensive literature review to compile the relevant background information. Among the sources of the secondary data are the political associations' programs (manifestoes), their campaign programs, constitutions, and existing laws of political parties in Puntland. Emphasis was also placed on the assessment and review of the political associations' primary documents as institutions.

For the qualitative and the quantitative components of the study, three sets of core questions were prepared to guide the process:

1.2.1 Key Informant Interview Questions (Pre-election)

1. How are the political associations in Puntland formed?
2. What are the existing rules and laws for the political associations?
3. Where do they receive their funds from?
4. What are the opportunities and challenges for the political associations?
5. How do they deal with different social groups such as youth, women, and minorities?

1.2.2 Focus Group Discussions Questions (Pre-election)

1. What do you think of the political associations in Puntland?
2. What are the roles of the political associations?
3. Where do you see Puntland political associations in politics?
4. How do Puntland political associations interact with their supporters/constituents/ each other?
5. What do Puntland political associations do in addition to political competitions and campaigns?

1.2.3 Public Perception in Eyl, Uffayn and Qardho Questions (post-Election)

1. How active were the PAs outreach programs during the election campaign?
2. Through what medium did the PAs connect with voters and supporters?
3. How did the PAs win/acquire supporters?
4. How did you see the relationship with the political associations during the election campaign?
5. Were the political associations observing campaigning ethics?
6. How did you choose the political association you voted for?
7. Did you get voter education/information?
8. Was it difficult for you to identify your affiliated Political Association during voting?
9. Were the PAs calling out for voters to vote on election day?
10. Did you register to vote?
11. Did you vote?
12. Why did you not vote?

1.2.4 KII questionnaire (post-Election)

1. How did the PAs select their candidates for local councils?
2. What makes this PA different from other associations in terms of principles and social value?
3. Are there any capacity building/training availed to the members or the leaders of the PA?
4. Are there any challenges you faced during the campaign and voting? (Associations

and elected members)

5. Why did you choose to run for your PA and council? (Elected members only)

1.3 Profile of Respondents

Pre-Election Data KI

#	Individuals interviewed	Political Association	Position
1	1	Mideeye PA	Head of the political wing
2	1	Ifiye PA	Direct General
3	1	Truth and Justice PA	Member of Parliament.
4	1	Mustaqbal PA	Direct General
5	1	Equity and Justice PA	Regional representative
6	1	Kaah PA	Secretary of awareness and information
7	1	Labour PA	Chairman

Pre-Election Data FDG

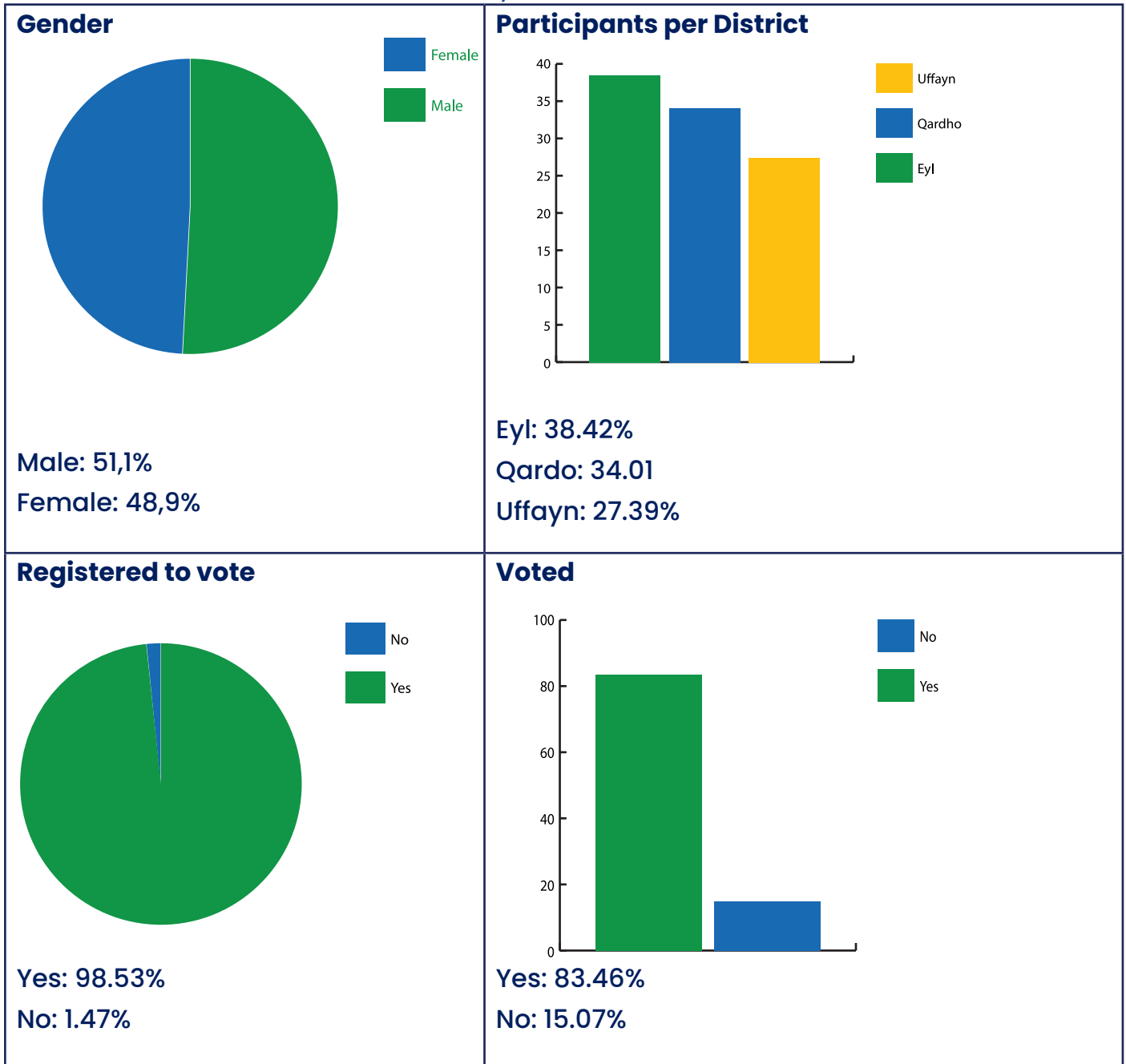
#	Categories	Focus Group discussion 1	Focus Group discussion 2	Gender of participants	
					Female
1	Academics	3	3	5	1
2	Media	2	1		3
3	Political Association	2	2	4	
4	Ministry of Interior	1	1		2
5	Traditional Elders		1	1	
6	Universities		1	1	
7	Youth	1	1	1	
Sub Total		9	9	12	6
Grand Total		18		18	12

Post-election Data (Qualitative KIIs)

#	Individuals interviewed	Political Association	Position
1	Male	Equity and Justice PA	Eyl Chairman
2	Male	Kaah PA	Religious Scholar and Eyl Chairman
3	Female	Kaah PA	Candidate for Eyl
4	Female	Equity and Justice PA	Candidate for Eyl
5	Female	Kaah PA	Candidate for Eyl
6	Male	Equity and Justice PA	Uffeyn Chairman
7	Male	Mideeye PA	Uffeyn Chairman
8	Male	Kaah PA	Candidate for Uffeyn
9	Female	Kaah PA	Candidate for Uffeyn
10	Male	Equity and Justice PA	Candidate for Uffeyn
11	Male	Mideeye PA	Candidate for Uffeyn
12	Male	Kaah PA	Qardho Chairman
13	Male	Kaah PA	Candidate for Qardho
14	Male	Kaah PA	Candidate for Qardho
15	Male	Mideeye PA	Candidate for Qardho
16	Female	Mideeye PA	Candidate for Qardho



Post-election Data (Quantitative Survey)



In the post-election data collected, the number of male and female interviewees was nearly equal. Deliberate efforts were made to ensure gender parity in our interview respondents. Of the 544 participants surveyed, 277 were male and 266 were female.

On a per-district basis we interviewed 209 individuals in Eyl, 185 in Qardho, and 149 in Uffayn. The number of respondents is slightly higher in Eyl, however this does not mean there were more people eligible in Eyl, merely that it was easier for our research team to reach out to people there. Qardho, on the contrary is a big city, where some of the data collectors had a hard time finding willing participants. Finally, in Uffayn, many of the citizens left because of heat and drought, which resulted in a reduced number of participants.

Finally, it is worth noting that of the 544 participants, 536 completed their registration

process while 454 participants voted during the early elections in the three districts.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 Establishment of the current Political Associations

Over the past decade, public perception of political associations has undergone significant transformation, particularly with regard to what they stand for, and how they can represent the shared values of different groups of people. According to the findings of this study, people have come to accept the political associations as the only way to overcome the oft-colliding interests of clans vying for political representation. Fed up with the clan-led system of politics, respondents show a strong preference for transition toward a democratic system of elections. In a Public Perception survey done by PDRC in early 2021 at 22 districts in Puntland, 72% of the 2,548 people interviewed stated they would vote if democratic elections were held.



It was against the backdrop of such a strong public will that TPEC, the constitutional body mandated with the administration of elections in Puntland, concluded the registration of 11 political associations in June 2020 which would contest in the local government election. This represents a major recent step towards the achievement of more enduring democratic traditions, processes, and institutions. Though its democratic transition may be characterized as protracted or fitful, it remains clear that political associations constitute a compelling opportunity for both formal political

competition as well as informal, local political participation and representation.

Most of the political associations were formed through a broad-based and agenda-driven process that provided a representative picture, in terms of tribal, regional, political stakeholders' composition and inclusiveness. The lack of participation from all regions, clans and political groups was what the 2013 attempted process had suffered the most.

Despite variations, the political associations in Puntland are, to some extent, similar in terms of structure, vision, institutional principles, how they are managed, and how they acquire supporters or funding. All of them function in a context in which public awareness is increasingly growing and groups by and large excluded from politics are awakening to demand political participation. In addition, the emergence of political associations had profound social, political, and cultural impact in Puntland. It supplanted, to a large extent, the long-established methods of decision-making mechanism at the grass root level, where the clan elders were central to the political system.

A comparative analysis of the profiles of Puntland's political associations reveal commonalities in their formation. For many, the idea to establish or join a political association is as a means to reach long-term goals through political alliance and common vision rather than through the traditional clan-regulated power sharing system. Differences nevertheless exist in the specificities of their political programs and the long-term goals which they aspire to achieve, ranging from good governance, security and the rule of the law, equality in political participation, fighting corruption, and justice and equality in social and economic development.

Analysis also reveals that their establishment has been a participatory process in which social groups have equal opportunity: academics, youth, women, traditional elders, minority groups, and the internally displaced communities (IDPs). Of these, the study identified youth, minority clans, women and the IDP communities as groups particularly affected by the emergence of political associations, as they had previously been predominantly underrepresented in participatory political processes.

According to study participants, the advent of political associations in Puntland spawned a sense of ownership and shared identity beyond clan associations or group interest. It encouraged young male and female candidates, some with university qualifications, to take initiative in pursuing political participation.

“As a young woman, I see participation in politics one of my fundamental rights. It gives me the opportunity to address the challenges my community faces with my knowledge and commitment.”

Mideeye PA, Candidate for Qardo.

With respect to the timing of the emergence of political associations, some of the study participants indicated that they came at the right time and will increase opportunities for political participation. They asserted, however, that they must represent public interest and, as the linking bridge between the public and the government, all of them must conform to the rules and regulations of the country.

In addition to the above, the role and essence of political associations are manifested in the common citizens' awareness of them by means of their public engagement and their open political contestation. During the local government elections in Eyl district, a young female voter reported:

“It is the first time in my life that I exercise my citizenry rights. At last, I have the freedom to vote for whomever I want. This is an unprecedented accomplishment and a lifechanging step toward a better tomorrow for us all.”

2.2 Sources of Funding and Resource

As a state in a post-conflict setting, Puntland state has numerous urgent priorities, ranging from the provision of basic social services and security to the establishment of durable political stability. Members of political associations interviewed in this study indicated that, among the many pressing issues which they expect the government to address, the allocation of resources for the political associations is a priority, since a reliable funding source is a lifeline for the survival of such entities, and therefore equally critical for the survival of Puntland's democratization process. This perspective is reinforced by a survey conducted by PDRC in June 2021 in which 36% of the respondents identified financial resources as “one of the main challenges confronting the democratization process in Puntland.”

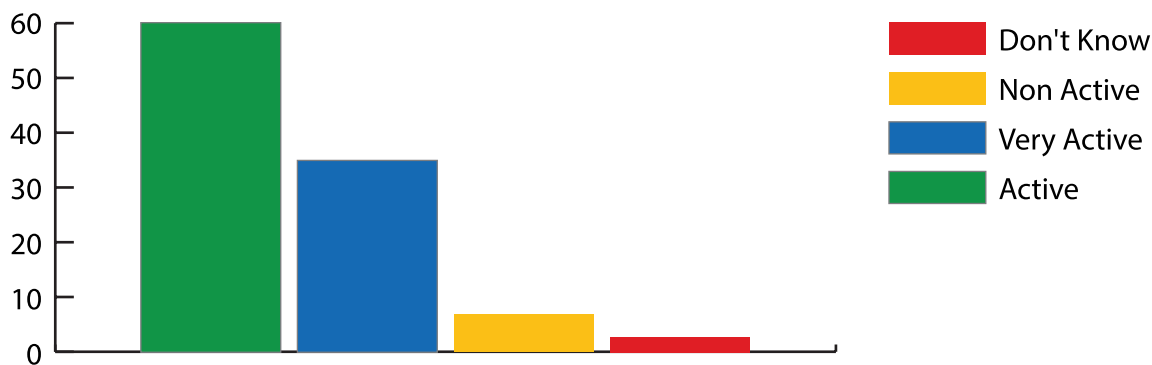
This challenge was reiterated during the interviews with senior members of the political associations. They stated that they depend mainly on financial contributions from their members and permanent committees. They also acknowledge that the 10,000 USD one-time cash injection from the government was helpful for their administrative needs, but their expectation remains to be for continued financial support.

2.3 Views on Political Associations' activity pre-elections

This theme was looked at from different angles during the post-election perception survey done in the three early election districts. First, the participants were questioned about the activeness of the PAs during the election campaign. Subsequent-

ly, we took noted of the outreach method used by PAs to attract and connect with voters. Additionally, we asked participants about the relationship between the PAs during campaigning and their observation of campaign ethics. Finally, we completed the theme by asking participants if they had received voter education.

2.3.1 How active were the PAs outreach programs during the election campaign?



Most of the participants (96,69%) believed the political associations were active in their districts during campaigns, with 326 (59,93%) saying they were active and 200 (36,76%) saying that they were very active. A small minority of 15 participants responded with not active (2,76%). We found that only 5 of the 9 political associations were campaigning and engaging actively within the districts; this was reflective of the results from the early elections as well.

2.3.2 Through what medium did the PAs connect with voters and supporters?



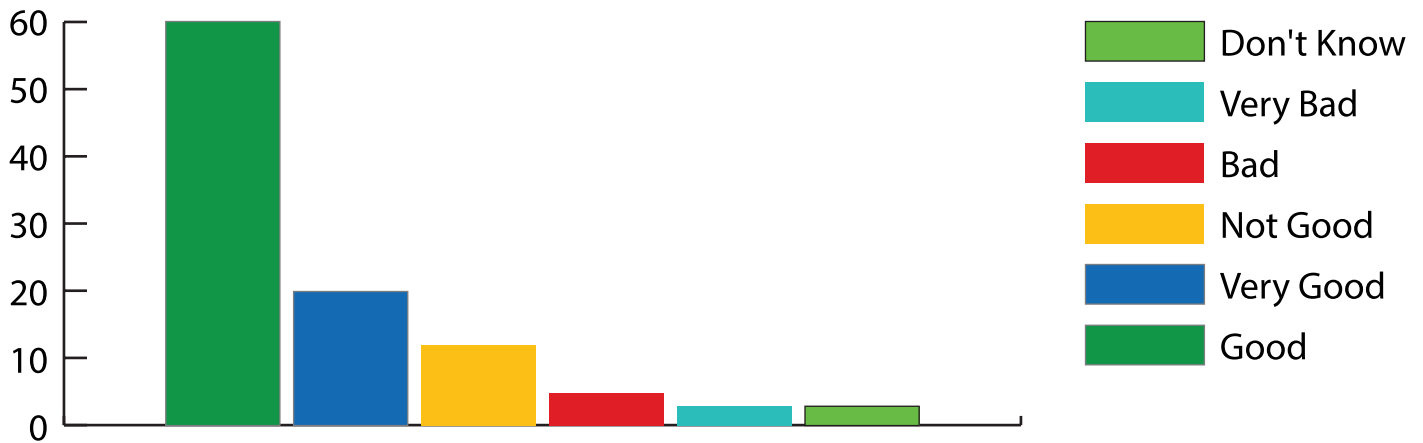
One month prior to election day, the political associations mostly used meetings, slogans, and social media to connect with voters and supporters. 449 of the respondents (82,54%) believed PAs used selected meetings to gather supporters, while 218 of them (40,07%) said it was through social media. The preferred methods of outreach began to change following the commencement of the official campaign period on the 26th of September. During this period each political association was given three occasions to campaign in the three districts. As such all the PAs gathered their supporters

through rallies as stressed by 457 of the participants (84,01). Another occasion presented itself in the form of debate forums organized by TPEC in the three districts. The multifaceted nature of campaigning required political associations to choose representatives that were equally capable of passionately arguing the merits of their political programme as they were of leading complex organizations. Of the respondents, 33,09% found these forums to be important in connecting PAs with potential voters or supporters. Street advertisements were also seen as an effective method of by 32,46% of respondents; posters followed closely with 27,94%, and finally radio, tv and slogans with respectively 14,89%, 7,72% and 4,41% of respondents noting their importance.

According to the key informants, most of the PA representatives interviewed shared that they selected the candidates for the list based on knowledge, influence, and leadership skills. The minimum requirement was a primary school certificate. Some were selected based on their long-time experience in public service, and respect within the community. While the representatives believed that tribe was not an influence in the selection, it is worth noting that though limited compared to previous power-sharing mechanisms, tribal representation was still a factor in the list forwarded by the PAs. Finally, another shift we noted was the increased commitment by the PAs to include women and minority groups within the lists.

The political associations were competing to gain supporters by providing services to the districts. Some PAs believed that they provided tangible contributions, as such their social value was higher. Addressing the basic needs of the communities in terms of health, education, and access to income was an area of competition for the PAs but also the areas where many promises are made to attract supporters. The ruling party stressed that being the first administration to make OPOV a reality makes them stand out from all and as such gain more support.

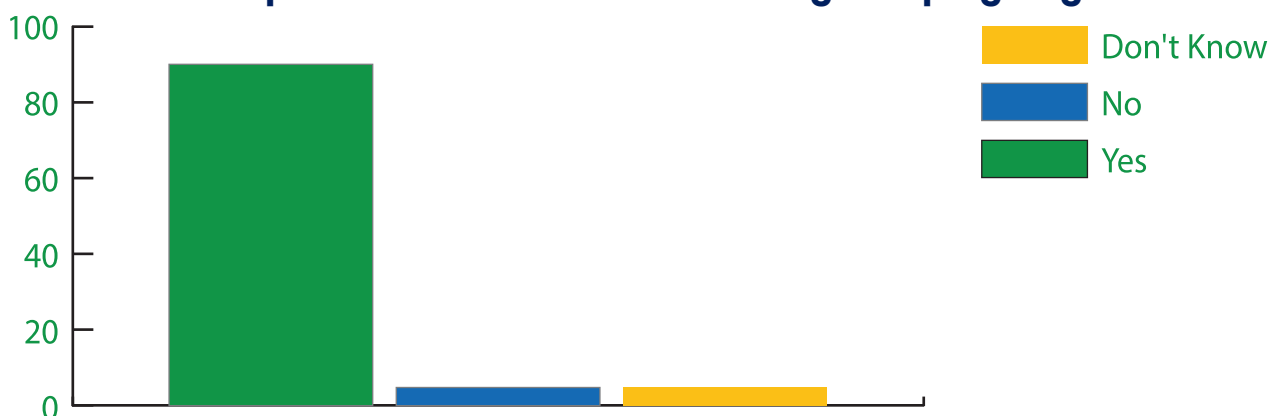
2.3.3 How did you see the relationship between the PAs during the election campaign?



Out of the 544 respondents, 449 (72,54%) responded positively to this question, with 327 (60,11%) responding with “Good” and 122 (22,43%) with “Very Good”. Indeed, prior to and during campaigns there were no major clashes or tensions reported between PAs. Each respected the days of campaigning shared by TPEC, gave each other space to campaign and reach constituents apart from Kaah, the ruling government’s party who was later fined by TPEC after investigation. There have also been several PAs who issued a joint statement to complain about numerous irregularities and misconducts in the day of elections and on the election outcomes and accused TPEC of unprofessionalism and constitutional breach, and the government of using the public funds and facilities for own political campaigning and vote-buying. In Qardho there were tensions between Kaah PA and Equity & Justice PA but this did not escalate. 68 of the respondents said “Not Good” (12,5%), 13 “Bad” (2,39%), 7 “Very Bad” (1,29%) and 6 (1,1%) did not respond.

All in all, the political associations demonstrated a great capacity for collaboration. This was particularly before campaigns as they would release statements together, meet on occasions to advise TPEC and at times they would reject decisions as an entity. During campaigns, there were no opposition rallies or disturbances. Some of the KIs shared pressure from other PAs during campaigning and election day, however there were not official complaints.

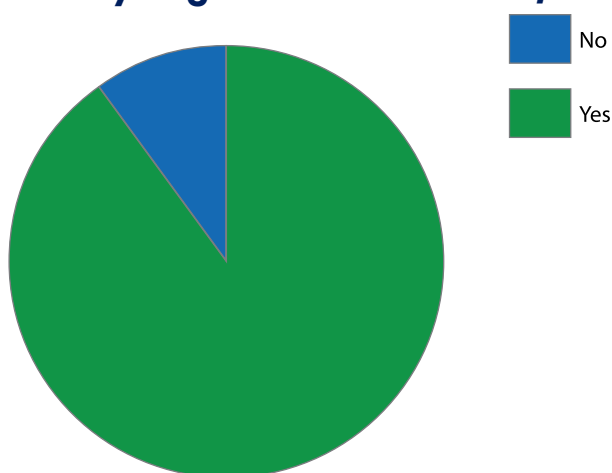
2.3.4 Were the political associations observing campaigning ethics?



According to art. 22 of the Local Council Act, the campaign begins for the PAs when they submit their lists (art. 21). The campaigns last 24 days and end 48 hours before election day. As mentioned previously it is also within the mandate of TPEC to share the campaigning schedule with an equal number of days for each PA (art. 24). TPEC successfully fulfilled their mandate and shared the dates for each PA, as well as informed the PAs of the rights and ethics that they were all required to observe during the campaigns. These included (i) each PA being able to use their days to conduct campaign rallies in all districts such that they are only allowed to do campaigns on appointed days; (ii) the campaign period extends from 26 September to 22 October for all PAs, (iii) public properties such as stadiums, public squares, state radios may be used for campaigning, however, other government assets cannot be used; (iv) there cannot be more than one big rally in each location; (v) billboards, leaflets and campaigns materials must be approved by TPEC and are not allowed to be posted on mosques, government offices and transportation, diplomatic centers, and IOs locations; (vi) anyone charged with using public funds for political purposes will be brought before a court of law; (vii) the leader of the PA is responsible for the acts of its campaigners or supporters such as instability, robbery and insecurity; (viii) supporters are forbidden from carrying weapons or wearing police/army uniforms; (ix) finally, each district has a designated location for rallying.

Regarding the information provided below on campaign ethics, 496 of the respondents (91,18%) believed that the PAs respected the ethics, while 26 of them (4,78%) responded no and 21 (3,86) responded Don't Know. While the citizens responded yes in the majority, some PAs were accusing the government's PA of using government assets for the campaigning, however none made an official complaint.

2.3.5 Did you get voter education/information?



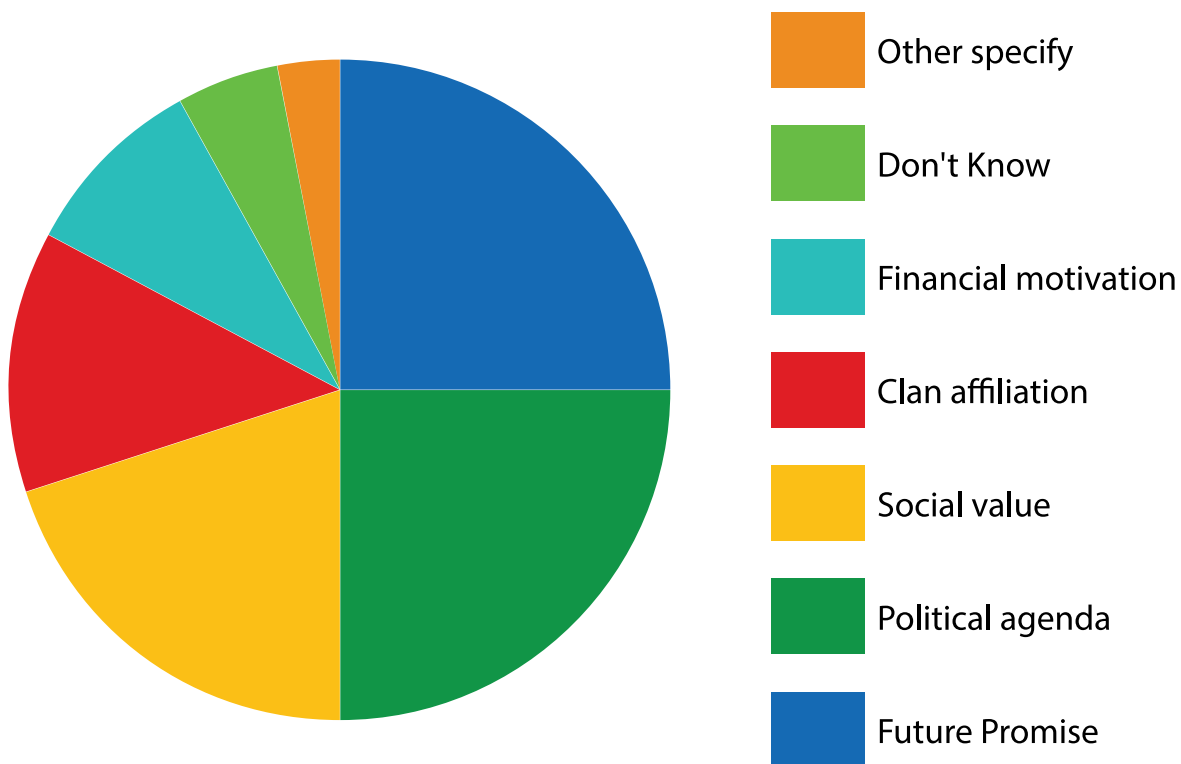
Voter education falls under the mandate of TPEC, however civil society organizations as well as the PAs have also conducted or overseen voter education. 489 (89,89%) of the respondents received some form of voter education, while 54 (9,93%) of them did not. The PAs mostly focused on showing the voters how to recognize their logo and name as well as how to vote properly. These kinds

of interactions were considered to be a form of voter education by our study.

The members of the PA in the early election districts shared to have received capacity building trainings by their PA and civil society. Despite the variety of means used to educate voters, many members nevertheless stressed the need for civil society and TPEC to launch intensive voter education campaigns in the remaining districts in order to reduce the challenges during voting day.

2.4 Views on how Political Associations’ got supporters

2.4.1 How did the PAs win/acquire supporters?



According to 389 participants of the survey (71,51%), the PAs got voter and supporters because of the promises they made during campaigns, the second closest category of 285 (52,39%) thought that the political association’s agenda was the reason.

“I was 4th in the list for my PA. I decided to run for this PA on the basis of their political program and principles that I share with me.”

Mideeye PA, Candidate for Uffeyn

Social value of the leaders of the PAs came in close with 255 out of 544 participants (46,88%).

“I choose my PA because it was the best in terms of social value in my district. Also, they made this long-awaited democratization process and elections happen in

Puntland.”

Kaah PA, Candidate for Uffeyn

An important milestone which confirms the previous perception survey¹ was that only 99 (18,2%) of the participants said that PAs got voters and supporters through clan affiliation:

“I run for office because I could see that it was the right opportunity for a young man like myself. It was the right opportunity since in the past the traditional elders used to select council members on clan basis. Not it is not like that anymore.”

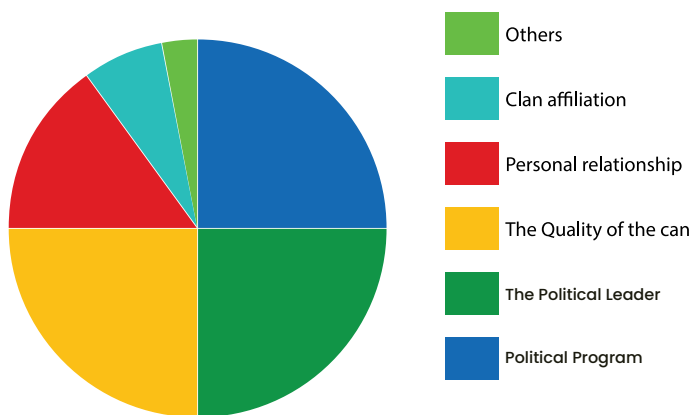
Kaah PA, Candidate for Uffeyn

“I chose my PA for the opportunities it grants youth, irrespective of clan affiliation. It basis its selection on knowledge, competence and public respect.”

Mideeye PA, Candidate for Qardho

Another 90 (16,84%) stressed that money influenced the decision to support or vote for a particular PA. For this reason we asked interviewees how they came to select the political association they had voted for?

2.4.2 How did you choose the PA you voted for?



While the previous question focuses on what the participants thought was key for PAs to get supporters, this question is directed towards them and what motivated them to vote for a certain PA over another. A little above half of the participants 293 (53,86%) voted after being content with the PAs agenda, while another 284 (52,21%) were satisfied with the leaders of the PAs (previous history, leadership, personality). The voters were also provided with the opportunity to know who were on the PAs list. This motivated 194 (35,66%) of them to vote for the PAs that had the candidates that they thought worthy. One fifth of the participants, 119 (21,88%), said that a personal relationship with either the leaders, candidates or supporters influenced the PA that they voted for.

¹ On what basis do you assess, or would you elect a political association? 72% political agenda, religious affiliation 16%, news on media/social media 10%, clan affiliation 4%, friendship 4%, and other reason 20%

Finally, a small minority of 42 (7,72%) chose to give their vote because of clan affiliation.

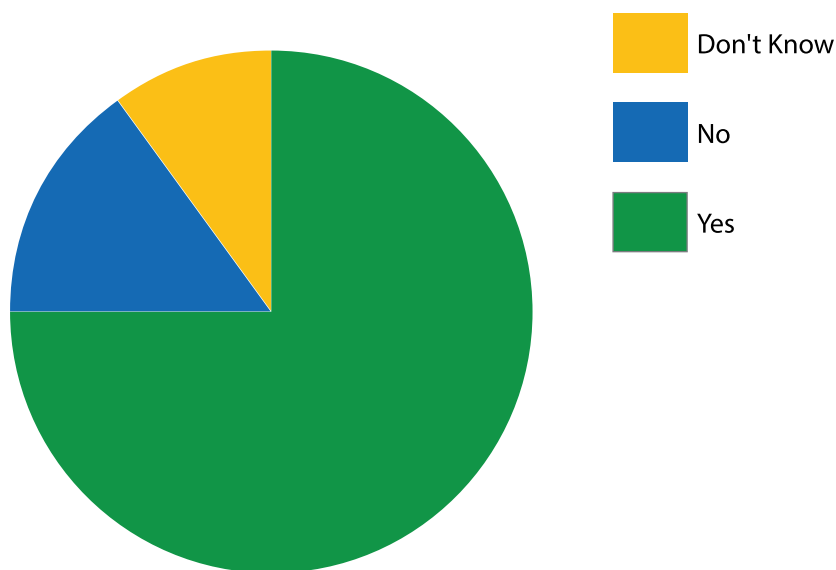
The desire and tendency to do away with clan-politics is clear. The multi-party system promises to provide citizens with a more issue- and needs-based political process. This was particularly clear in Eyl where the political associations PAs whose leaders were from majority clans in Eyl won with lesser seats. This demonstrates the political associations' need to be creative in their agenda, promises and use of financial resources to attract votes. Clan affiliation alone is proving less and less sufficient as a means of establishing an active and committed constituency.

2.5 Political Association's on election day

The majority of political associations were present in every polling station of each district. Their role included observation of the electoral process, provision of support to voters, and approval of the counts and reporting to their leaders. This not only allowed the voting process to proceed freely and fairly, but also limited the number of complaints vis-à-vis results. Furthermore, it provided the political associations with the opportunity to gather information on the successes and challenges of the process, potentially critical to the improvement of their work in the remaining districts.

This section closely looks at what the participants thought of the performance of the PAs regarding calling out for voters, as well as their role in identification of PA within the voting ballot.

2.5.1 Were the PAs calling out for voters to vote on election day?



For this question, 459 (84.38%) of participants responded with "Yes", 38 of them (6.99%) said "No", and 46 of the participants (8.46%) did not know. PAs were calling voters to vote however the study does not specify which of them were most active.

2.5.2 Was it difficult for you to identify your affiliated PA during voting?



From the 544 participants from the three districts, 190 of them (34.93%) had difficulties in identifying the PA they want to vote for, while 354 (65.07%) did not have that problem.

However, from the observations of the early elections, the number of voters who were illiterate and needed support to cast their ballot was high. A tension arises between the problem of illiteracy and the secrecy of the ballot, as some voters might be asked to share which PA they are voting for aloud before being directed towards the representative of said PA. There are no studies providing evidence to the number of real illiterates and the ones who were providing evidence for their ballot

2.6 Challenges and Opportunities of the PAs

Like any other processes, the transition to a democratic system based on political parties and one-person-one-vote elections is accompanied by challenges as well as opportunities. The participants of this study, individuals, and members of focus group discussions, were asked to identify the main challenges and opportunities that directly influence the role of the political associations in Puntland.

The participants identified lack of financial and human resources and poor public awareness as two of the most fundamental challenges facing the effectiveness of political associations. The question of financial resources in particular limits the capacity of the associations to reach out to more people, especially constituencies located in remote areas. Inadequate funding also constrains their capacity to acquire human resource or staff skilled in political association management.

Another major challenge that the study revealed is the continued clan influence in the role

of the political associations. The people interviewed underlined that the clan elders, despite ongoing democratic processes, continue to exert pressure on and influence the political associations in the nomination of candidates. On the other side, in the selection of candidates, the associations are inclined to consider how much weight a potential candidate, male or female, has in the community, the traditional elders included, for securing political support.

A portion of the study respondents argue that involvement of clan elders in the democratic process is not only justifiable, but necessary. They base their argument on the clan elders' revered status in society, additionally rationalized by a comparatively poor public awareness of the multi-party system. There is a hybrid perception in which some people tend to identify the political associations with the clan identity of their leaders and senior members. The impact of this individualization tends to polarize supporters' choice of political associations.

Contrary to the commonly held perception, clan elders see the role of the political associations as a source of relief for their difficult social responsibility. In election time, political contenders engage in fierce competition over clan elders' endorsement, overloading them with political matters, draining them of the energy and time they are expected to spend on their traditional clan business. According to an elder met in Hasbahalle village, in Eyl district, most of the clan elders find comfort in the democratic process, despite having to give up their authority in politics:

“The existence of political associations removes from our shoulders the huge burden of deciding who can run for public leadership, which is a responsibility that causes happiness to the few we endorse and resentment to many we keep out!”

Despite above challenges, the engagement of political associations had direct impact on elevating the social and political status of youth and women, both as voters and as candidates. In the recent local elections in Eyl, Qardo and Uffayn, out of the 87 contested council seats, 23 women emerged victoriously. Through the political associations, educated women are intensifying their struggle to hold senior positions in the local government.

Faduma Abdulahi Shire is a candidate from Mideeye political association. She is running for local council seat in the district of Uffayn. A distinguished member of her community, Faduma has the goal of becoming the mayor of her district. Asked what inspired her to challenge the status quo, she commented:

“Since the traditional elders did not have a role in the elections, I did not have to waste time negotiating with them. Now I am running for mayorship in my district. How else would a woman challenge the status quo and run for mayorship without a political association?”

An uncontested viewpoint among the participants of the study, as substantiated by PDRC survey on Public Perception, is a general lack of civic awareness of the democratization process as well as the function and role of the political associations. One of the recommendations from that survey was for “the government, TPEC and other stakeholders – primarily civil society and the media – to conduct an extensive civic and voter education campaign throughout Puntland.”

The role of the political associations is deteriorated by the combined effect of poor public awareness, a communication gap, and a high rate of illiteracy. During the recent local government elections, a substantial percent of the 1,134 non-completed votes has been



attributed to functional illiteracy. This was so, despite the political associations attempt to educate voters on how to locate their associations’ symbols when casting vote.

In respect to the opportunities, the most visible opportunity for the democratization process in Puntland, as well as for the political associations, is the political commitment of the current administration to implement the multi-party system. Evidence of this commitment, according to the study participants, is the early establishment of TPEC. Apart from government commitment, participants identified public will for change and participation in politics as the driving forces that push the democratization process against stiff challenges. The existence of ensuring security in Puntland is

also recognized as creating an environment conducive to the expansion of the geographic scope and influence of political associations and their political campaigns.

Other relevant, but less direct, challenges against the role of the political associations which the study discovered include the lack of a constitutional court for settling potential election disputes, the close similarity of the political programs of the associations causing confusion among voters, and the concentration of political associations' registration centers in the main towns.

3. CONCLUSION

The resumption of the democratization process under the leadership of President Said Abdullahi Deni led to the early local council elections of Eyl, Qardho and Uffayn on the 25th of August 2021. The early elections allowed the citizens, TPEC and the Political Associations to test the new waters of democracy. This study closely examined the role of Puntland's political associations before and during said elections. Below are the key findings:

- The establishment of the current political associations is closely linked to the resumption of the democratization process. All the PAs are quite similar in their structure, vision, and institutional principles. The management and search for supporters and funding is also very similar; however, differences persist in the political programs and long-term goals of, as well as the promises made by political associations. Furthermore, all PAs have been established through a participatory process, and they all have key figure heads that are recognized and linked to the PA.
- All political associations complained of limited resources for their campaigning and activities. Their sources of funding/resources depend mainly on contributions from members and permanent committees. After recommendations from PDRC and TPEC, the government promised as support to the PAs \$10,000 monthly injection, however the promise was fulfilled only once.
- Prior to the early elections, the PAs were connecting with supporters and voters through meetings, slogans, and social media; 82,54% of the participants of the survey shared that meeting were the main avenue used by PAs, 40% shared that it was through social media. A month leading to election day, the PAs started extensive campaigning in the three districts through rallies (84%), debate forums (33%), street ads (32%), posters (27,94%), and finally radio, tv and slogans with respectively 81 (14,89%), 42 (7,72%) and 24 (4,41%) respondents.
- Most of the participants (96,69%) believed the political associations were active in their districts during campaigns, with 326 (59,93%) saying they were active and 200 (36,76%) saying that they were very active.
- The study further suggests that the PAs selected candidates for their lists based on knowledge, influence, leadership skills. Surprisingly, there is a belief that tribe was not an influence in the selection, it is worth noting that though limited compared to previous power-sharing mechanisms, tribal representation was still a factor in the list forwarded by the PAs. Finally, another shift is the increased commitment by the PAs to include women and minority groups within the lists.
- Regarding the relationship between PAs, 72,45% responded positively. It is worth noting that associations often collaborated, particularly before campaigns as they would release statements together, meet on occasions to advise TPEC and at

times they would reject decisions as an entity. During campaigns, there were no opposition rallies or disturbances that have been reported.

- Election's ethics were maintained and respected in large by all PAs. While no official complaint was forwarded some PAs accused the government's association of using government funds for campaigning.
- Some of the PAs provided capacity building to their members and candidates, and most of them contributed to voter education by teaching the citizens their logos and names for identification purposes.
- According to a large majority of respondents (71,51%), PAs attracted voter and supporters as a result of the promises they made during campaigns, while a plurality (52,39%) thought that the political association's agenda was the reason. The social values of the leaders of the PAs was also perceived to be important (46,88%), with clan affiliation (18,2%) and money (16,84%) also considered to have influenced voter decisions.
- All nine political associations were present in every polling station of each district. Their role included the observation of the electoral process, the provision of support to voters, and the approval of the vote counts.
- The number of voters who were illiterate and needed support to cast their ballot was high. This has revealed a latent tendency arising from the nature of the secret ballot, as some voters may be asked to share which PA they are voting for aloud, before they could be directed towards the representative of their preferred PA.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and analysis from the survey, KIs and FGDs, PDRC proposes the following recommendations to the political associations:

1. The PAs have to reassess their internal policies and commit more to the participation of policy formulation. They should work alongside TPEC to draft and impose guidelines.
2. The PAs should take a more active role in civic education and public awareness raising campaigns, currently being undertaken by civil society organizations and TPEC.
3. The PAs should create and implement extensive fundraising mechanisms, both locally and internationally (Somali Diaspora) to address the huge financial gap, which limits their political outreach program.
4. The PAs should observe the 30% women quota within their institutions.
5. TPEC should institutionalize the 3:1 model to make it binding and compulsory on the political associations.
6. The existing Election Law must be formally reviewed to give consideration and quota to the minority groups.
7. International donors should support the PAs in terms of capacity building and technical expertise in respect to PAs management.
8. The PAs should demonstrate more social responsibility by contributing to general security, restraining from and denouncing all potentially harmful acts that may lead to insecurity including misinformation and disinformation.