

A SURVEY OF PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

# ON DEMOCRATIZATION AND LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS IN PUNTLAND



PUNTLAND DEVELOPMENT & RESEARCH CENTER

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Development &  
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[www.pdrconsomalia.org](http://www.pdrconsomalia.org)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 1998, traditional elders and local leaders came together for a consultative process that created the foundation of the autonomous Puntland State of Somalia. Apart from consolidating security and overcoming the chaos and lawlessness that prevailed in the region after the downfall of the Somali national state, the fundamental purpose for establishing Puntland state was to transcend the clan dominance and constitute a modern system of government based on democracy and a multi-party system of governance. While the efforts and commitment of Puntland stakeholders to institutionalising governance led to considerable state infrastructure, however, clan-based political structures have remained dominant.

Since then, six presidential selection processes, in which traditional elders (Isimo) selected 66 members of parliament who then elected the President, Vice President, and Speaker, were held between 1998 and 2019. All of these selection processes were characterized by a relatively peaceful transfer of power and continuity of state functions. Further institutionalisation of the democratic process in Puntland was embarked on in 2005 through a draft constitution which was later adopted following a constituent assembly vote during President Farole's administration. The draft constitution received overwhelming approval in 2012 with 472 votes from 480 delegates voting for its adoption.

Building on this success, Puntland made good headway towards elections during President Farole's administration (2009-2014) with the enactment of the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission Law, establishment of the first Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC), adoption of Local Council Election and Political Associations Laws, formation of first political associations and technical and operational preparations for local council elections in 2013, although the process stalled due to a spike of violence in protest against the elections.

Subsequently, President Abdiwali Gaas' administration (2014-2019) made a strong pledge of commitment to the resumption of the democratization process of Puntland. He appointed a new TPEC and formed a dedicated ministry to underpin the transition to a multiparty system. However, delayed resumption of the democratization process, loose political commitment and inadequate financial support, among other factors, rendered the democratization process stagnant during President Gaas's administration.

With a new administration in office in 2019, commitment to the democratization process seems to have taken root once more in Puntland. The revival of the process is one of the top priorities of the incumbent President Said Abdullahi Deni. With the third TPEC taking office in the first few months of the current government's term, the Puntland administration plans to hold early local council elections in 3 districts (Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn) in July 2021, prior to the general local council elections slated to happen in February 2022 with the participation of 9 registered political associations<sup>1</sup>. The government and the TPEC believe that these early elections are critical to gauge the nation's preparedness for the transition from the clan-based political system to democratic system of governance.

It is against such a backdrop that Puntland Development Research Centre (PDRC) conducted this public perception survey on the democratization process in Puntland in 22 districts<sup>2</sup> with the participation of randomly selected 2,548 respondents representing all sectors of society. The primary objectives of the perception survey were to gauge citizens understanding of the democratization process, and their readiness and willingness to participate in the elections.

The survey revealed that a vast majority of respondents in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn (85%) are aware of the early local council elections planned to take place in July 2021 in their districts. The survey also found that a clear majority of respondents (1,879 out of 2,548 respondent or 74%) are not members of any political association, however, an overwhelming majority of respondents (77%) are planning to vote in the upcoming local council elections. The desire to vote in the upcoming local council elections is prevalent across different demographic groups with more coastal, rural, and urban populations (86%, 80% and 74% respectively) than nomadic (59%) willing to vote in the upcoming local council elections.

Another compelling finding from the survey is that respondents would choose a political association based on a political ideology (72%) rather than clan affiliation (4%). This is a clear indication of people's aversion to the current clan-based political system. Moreover, respondents have made several propositions to advance women's participation and representation in local councils which include, among others, a legislated women's quota (46%) targeted awareness and mobilization (37%), financial support to women candidates (19%) and having

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<sup>1</sup> Urur Siyaasadeedka Cadaaladda iyo Sinaanta, Urur Siyaasadeedka Dhalinyarada, Urur Siyaasadeedka Horseed, Urur Siyaasadeedka Ifiye, Urur Siyaasadeedka Kaah, Urur Siyaasadeedka Mideeye, Urur Siyaasadeedka Mustaqbal, Urur Siyaasadeedka Run iyo Cadaalad and Urur Siyaasadeedka Shaqaalaha

<sup>2</sup> Baargaal, Badhan, Banderbayla, Bocame, Bosaso, Buhoodle, Buraan, Burtinle, Carmo, Dhahar, Eyl, Galdogob, Galkacyo, Garowe, Gumbax, Hadaaftimo, Jariiban, Qardho, Taleex, Ufeyn, Waaciye and Widhwidh



women in leadership positions in political associations (15%). Equally important, the survey respondents viewed insecurity (37%), limited political buy-in from the part of government (19%), insufficient time (18%) and low capacities of TPEC (16%) and political associations (12%) as the most threatening challenges that could derail the local council election process in Puntland.

This report chronicles the main findings from the survey along with analysis on key issues pertaining to the upcoming local council elections and overall democratization agenda of Puntland. The report also presents recommendations for the way forward. PDRC believes that the findings of this survey will stir a genuine public and policy debate around local council elections and will help identify actionable strategies to address potential impediments to successful local council elections in Puntland.

# 1

## BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

In 2014, PDRC conducted a perception survey involving 1,525 respondents in 12 districts in Puntland with the aim of measuring public perceptions and support for the revival of the democratization process which was stalled at the time, as well as to explore the potential challenges that could face the democratization process in Puntland. The findings of this survey were promising with 86% of respondents being in favour of the resumption of the democratization process and 91% of respondents intending to vote if elections were held.

Now six years later, the dream of elections in Puntland is once again a possibility. PDRC, with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), however, found it relevant to undertake another public perception survey that will highlight the views of the public towards democratization process and planned local council elections while also identifying challenges, opportunities, and lessons learnt that would inform the evolving democratization efforts.

It is of paramount importance that public perceptions and views are taken into consideration to ensure smooth and successful transition to functioning democracy. PDRC greatly hopes that the survey findings will serve as a basis for public dialogue and in support of the ongoing democratization policy- and decision-making processes.

Below are the specific objectives of the survey:

- ▶ To gauge public perceptions on the planned one-person one-vote elections in Puntland.
- ▶ To explore the potential opportunities and challenges facing the democratization process.
- ▶ To assess public awareness and willingness to participate in the planned local council elections.
- ▶ To weigh possible strategies that could strengthen women's participation in local council elections.
- ▶ To understand public participation/membership in the existing political associations.

## 1.1 Methodology

The survey was conducted in-person between 1<sup>st</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> March 2021 in 22 districts<sup>3</sup> out of the 50 districts of Puntland. 2,548 respondents were interviewed by a team of 24 university students consisting of equal numbers of men and women. In honour of its participatory action research approach, PDRC applied participatory polling<sup>4</sup> techniques in this exercise. A standardized questionnaire was developed in consultation with key political and societal stakeholders and used to guide the interviews.

Prior to the data collection, the enumerators were trained on data collection skills using the Kobo toolbox. The training also encompassed sessions on how to build a rapport to collect accurate and in-depth information as well as safety measures against Covid-19 and self-care sessions meant to reduce the likelihood of exposure to the pandemic of either enumerators or participants. Other important sessions including ethics, objective questioning, obtaining consent and confidentiality were covered during the training.

To select the sample size, the closest population estimation was that of 2015 issued by the Puntland Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. With those numbers available, PDRC used a standard sample size calculator<sup>5</sup> which systematically determines the sample size of any target population. According to the model, a population of 4,284,633 people can be represented by a sample size of 385 respondents. It was crucial, however, to scale up the calculated sample size to compensate for the possible design effect caused by using a convenience sampling method.

In this regard, PDRC decided to reach at least 2500 people to ensure precision and coherence. The 2500 target were proportionately divided according to the current population of Puntland's nine regions and a sample of 22 districts<sup>6</sup> were drawn from all regions purposely since they accommodate a cross section of Puntland communities and based on their convenient accessibility. The selected districts also represented important demographic characteristics of Puntland

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<sup>3</sup> Baargaal, Badhan, Banderbayla, Bocame, Bosaso, Buhoodle, Buraan, Burtinle, Carmo, Dhahar, Eyl, Galdogob, Galkacyo, Garowe, Gumbax, Hadaaftimo, Jariiban, Qardho, Taleex, Ufeyn, Waaciye and Widhwidh

<sup>4</sup> Participatory Polling is an innovative action research methodology through which the public is consulted on policy-related issues, using a questionnaire that has been designed with the contribution of societal and political stakeholders. The results then serve as a basis for public dialogue and in support of the policy-making process.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Baargaal, Badhan, Banderbayla, Bocame, Bosaso, Buhoodle, Buraan, Burtinle, Carmo, Dhahar, Eyl, Galdogob, Galkacyo, Garowe, Gumbax, Hadaaftimo, Jariiban, Qardho, Taleex, Ufeyn, Waaciye and Widhwidh

communities, including location and type of community (such as urban, rural, nomadic, and coastal populations).

With the sample size and district selected, the enumerators were divided into 6 groups with specific locations, itinerary and numbers to cover. Each team, led by a PDRC researcher, went its way, and would interview people not less than 18 years of age they encountered, introducing some randomness into the selection process. The respondents were found through a variety of means including encounters in the streets, marketplaces, social services points, mosques, and workplaces.

The survey respondents included urban, rural, nomadic, and coastal people. The inclusion of these categories was crucial to establish possible different viewpoints and mindsets between the groups, as well as to identify key challenges each group perceives concerning the democratization process. Furthermore, there was a concerted effort to ensure that views of both genders are adequately reflected in the survey.

## 1.2 Focus Group Discussions

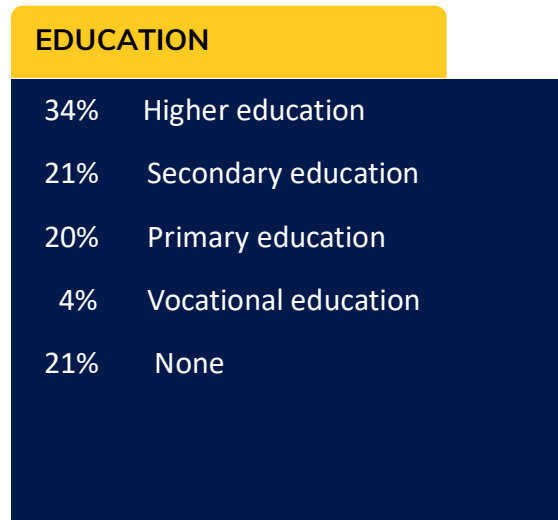
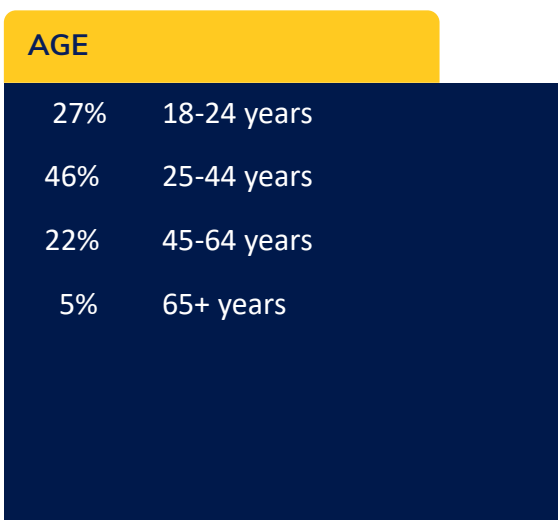
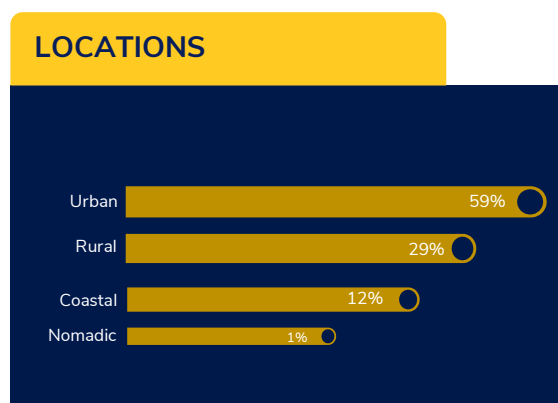
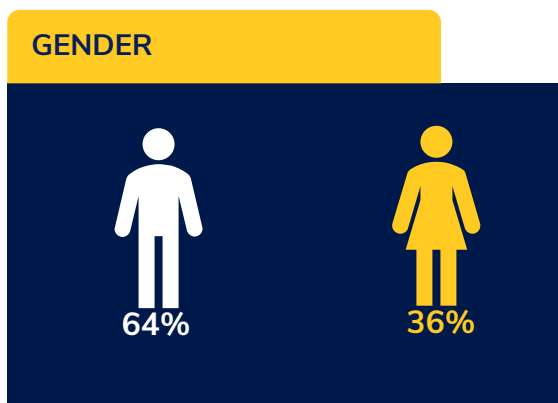
PDRC conducted six Focus Group Discussions (FGD) parallel to the individual interviews comprising of 41 well-informed personalities representing the different segments of society (youth, women, traditional and religious leaders, professionals, businesspeople, Civil Society Organizations, government officials and marginalized groups; Internally Displaced Persons and People with Disabilities) in Eyl, Bocame, Galdogob, Qardho, Badhan and Ufeyn.

Three of the FGD locations namely Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn are the districts where early elections are planned to happen in July 2021. The FGDs were used to collect qualitative information to supplement the quantitative findings of the survey as well as to substantiate the information given by the survey respondents. During the FGDs, participants took part in moderated discussions and answered to the below set of questions pertinent to the evolving democratization and election process.

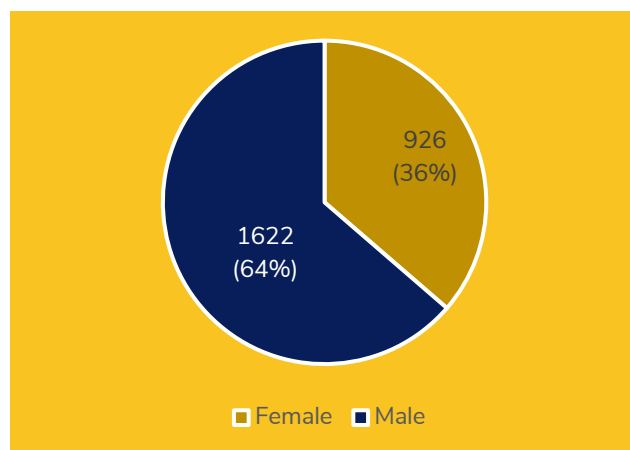
- ▶ What progress is being made to enable/further local council elections?
- ▶ How do you think of the planned early local council elections?
- ▶ What are the challenges and opportunities surrounding the local council elections? How these can be tackled?
- ▶ What would strengthen your trust in the ongoing electoral process?

- ▶ How can women’s participation and representation in the local council elections be strengthened?

### 1.3 Profile of Respondents



In this survey, more male than female were interviewed (64% vs. 36%). Despite efforts made to reach out to equal number of both genders through deployment of gender-balanced survey teams and instructions given to interview an equal number of women and men, encounters with men on the streets, markets, workplaces and social services points were more prevalent



hence a large number of male interviewees. Of the 2,548 surveyed persons, 1,622 were men and 926 were female.

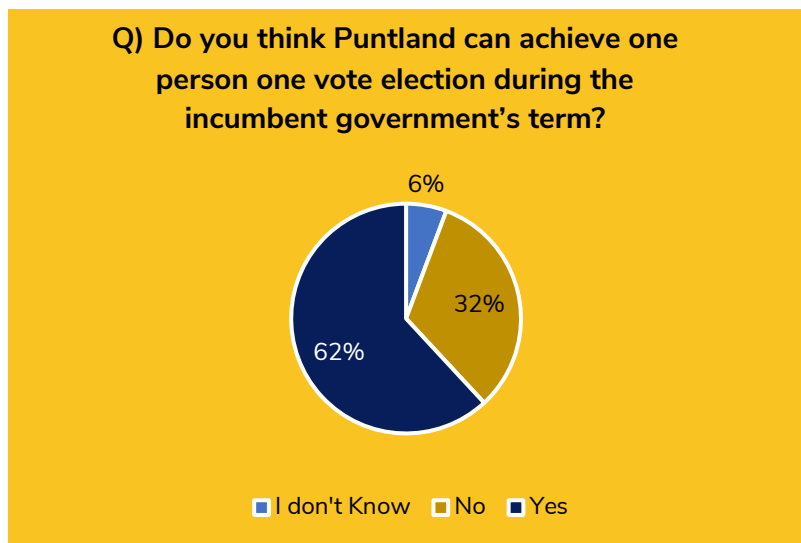
Most of the respondents, around three in five or 59%, were urban inhabitants, one in three or 29% were rural inhabitants and one in five or 12% were coastal inhabitants. Age wise, 27% of respondents were between the age of 18 and 24 years, nearly half of respondents or 46% were between the age of 25 and 44 years, 22% were between the age of 45 and 64 years and 5% were of above 65 years of age. An overwhelming majority of respondents have some education (34% higher education, 21% secondary education, 20% primary education) with one in five or 21% with no education at all. This could be explained to the fact that 59% of respondents were urban dwellers hence have better access to education.

# 2

## KEY FINDINGS

### 2.1 Views on the timeliness of the election process

The main finding from this theme was that there is a high level of optimism among respondents regarding the possibility of holding elections during the current government’s term, ending in January 2024.



Three out of every five respondents (62%) are of the opinion that a one-person one-vote election can be achieved during the current government’s term. This view was equally held among respondents of both genders, different age groups and between urban, rural, and coastal settlements. One in three (32%) held the opposite view, thinking that one-person one-vote election can’t be achieved before January 2024. This latter view was evenly held across different demographic groups surveyed.

Moreover, the FGD participants in Qardho, Ufeyn, Badhan, Eyl, Bocame and Galdogob were optimistic about the current election process. They unanimously agreed that the ongoing electoral process seems to be more promising than previous attempts as evidenced by the early nomination of TPEC and the progress being made by TPEC despite the multiple challenges surrounding the election process.

### 2.2 Opportunities that will enable successful implementation of elections

Respondents who thought that elections can be achieved before the end of current government’s term (62%) were further asked about the existing opportunities that will enable successful implementation of one-person one vote

elections during the current government's term. The most common answers given are as follows:

- ▶ 56% public tired of the clan-based political system
- ▶ 36% government commitment to holding the elections
- ▶ 31% existence of political associations
- ▶ 11% capable TPEC in charge of the process
- ▶ 10% lessons learnt from previous stalled elections in 2013

FGD participants noted additional opportunities which would enable successful local elections in Puntland. Lessons from the Puntland decentralization process which prompted the existing local councils, the prevalent desire of people to transcend the clan-based election system and the existence of coherent societal fabric and traditional authority which could prevent pre- and post-election violence were described as an important recipe for successful elections by the FGD participants.

### **2.3 What could prevent elections to happen during the current government's term**

Those who didn't think that one-person one vote elections can be achieved in the current government's term (32%) were asked what they thought would prevent them from taking place. Below are the most common answers given:

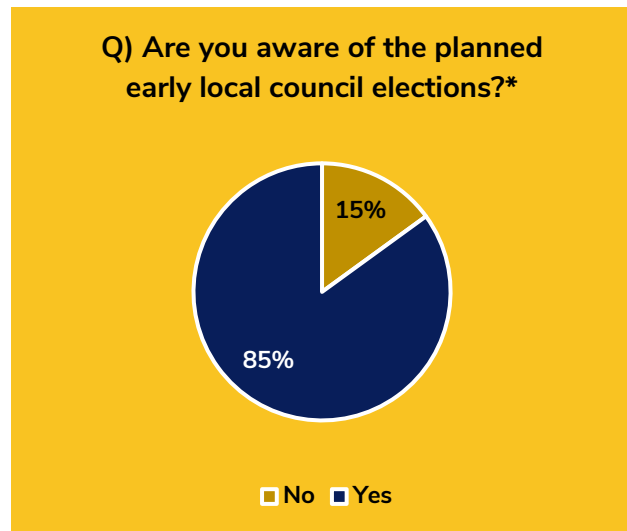
- ▶ 36% government is not committed to the process
- ▶ 36% election process is not ready
- ▶ 23% security will not allow
- ▶ 19% communities/clans are not willing to have elections
- ▶ 16% financial resources are not adequate
- ▶ 15% citizens awareness is low



## 2.4 Awareness on early local council elections

Respondents in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn, where early local council elections are planned to happen in July 2021, were exclusively asked if they are aware of the planned local council elections in their districts.

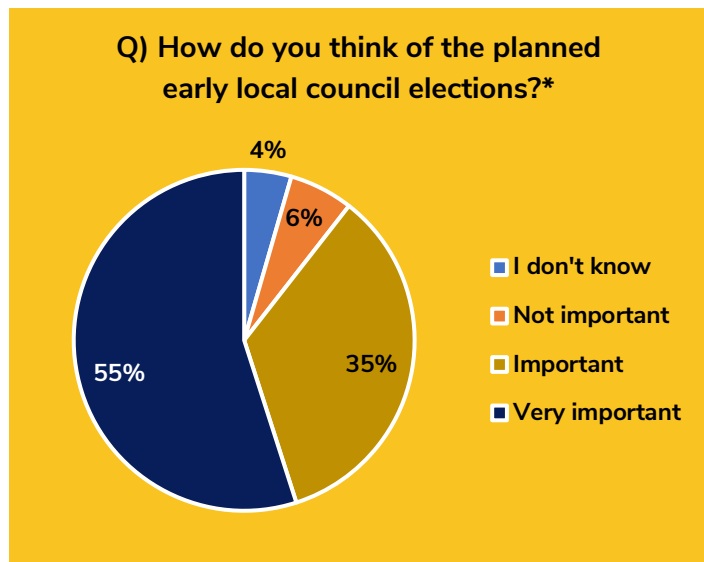
A vast majority of respondents in these three districts (85%) knew about the planned early local council elections, in contrast with 15% who did not know about the planned early local council elections.



\*This question was asked respondents in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn only

The level of knowledge of early local council elections was almost the same among respondents in the three districts (Qardho 82%, Eyl 86% and Ufeyn 88%). No difference in awareness level by gender was reported, but knowledge was considerably higher among the youth (86%) compared to the older people (62%). This can be attributed to the prevalent use of social media by the youth and a growing interest of youth in the changing political dynamics of Puntland and Somalia in general.

Related to the above question, respondents in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn were asked about the importance of the planned early local council elections in their districts. A vast majority of respondents said they are important (90%) than not important (6%).



\*This question was asked respondents in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn

Participants of the FGDs in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn also shared their contentment with the process commencing early. They also expressed a

great deal of confidence in TPEC’s professional conduct and trustworthiness, mentioning that the current elections are more promising than the 2013 attempt.

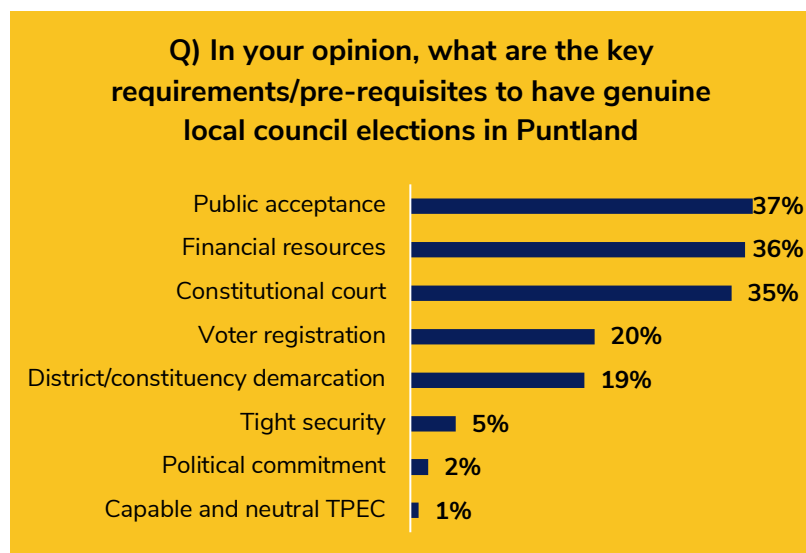
Speaking of the early local council elections, the participants of the FGDs unanimously welcomed piloting early elections in fewer districts, describing the initiative as a wise decision for the process in order to draw lessons and understand the possible challenges which might have to be addressed before wider, state-wide elections are held. As one FGD participant in Qardho put it “it is the easiest way to enable people elect their local leaders and a path-finding initiative for wider elections in Puntland”.

Another FGD participant in Galdogob said “only a minority of the Somali people have a recollection of what it means to vote, since the last time elections took place in Somalia is more than 50 years ago. The early elections are therefore good lessons for the people to principally and technically understand their basic constitutional right which is to vote”.

Some FGD participants, however, raised the concern that the concept of early elections would be derailed if people see it as a government attempt to test how effectively it can influence subsequent elections in the remaining districts. The FGD participants stressed that fairness and transparency on the part of the government are required to safeguard the election process.

## 2.5 Pre-requisites to have genuine local council elections

As well as looking specifically at the potential opportunities that could enable successful implementation of one-person one-vote elections, the survey was also meant to assess priority areas that are necessary to ensure genuine local council elections in Puntland. Responding to this, the survey participants identified several requirements/pre-requisites worth addressing to ensure attainment of credible local council elections in Puntland. These requirements/priorities are as follows:

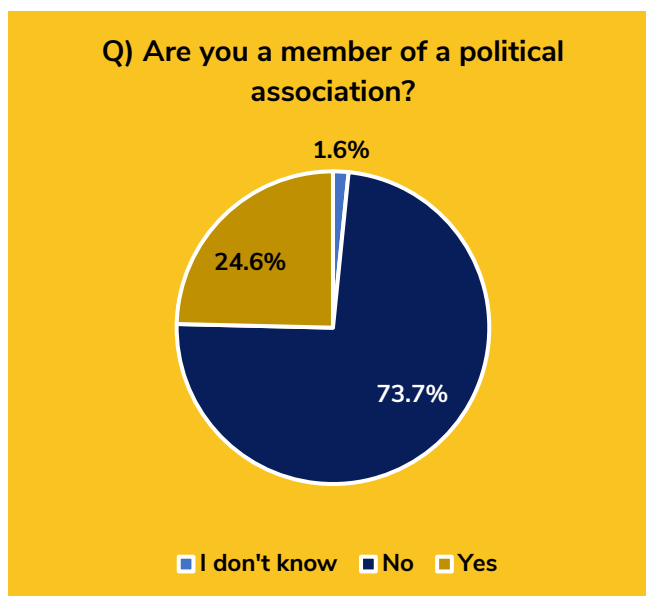


- ▶ 37% public acceptance
- ▶ 36% financial resources
- ▶ 35% constitutional court
- ▶ 20% voter registration
- ▶ 19% district/constituency demarcation

This was asked as an open-ended question where the interviewers recorded the responses, and the answers were coded post-interview. Nevertheless, public acceptance was the most suggested pre-requisite to have genuine local council elections in Puntland followed by the need to have adequate financial resources and to establish the constitutional court. As unanimously agreed upon by participants in the FGDs, and in conformity with the findings from the quantitative component of the survey, public acceptance is the gateway to successful implementation of local council elections. They envision government buy-in of the process as an essential factor in securing public commitment.

## 2.6 Political associations activeness and membership

Another important objective of this survey was to gauge the effectiveness of existing political associations (9)<sup>7</sup> as well as their membership and inclusivity. In this regard, respondents in all locations were asked if they are members of a political association. An overwhelming majority of respondents (74%) said they are not members of any political association, in contrast with 25% who said they are members.



The low membership of respondents in political associations is quite reasonable given the low mobilization of communities from the part of political associations compounded with the remoteness or inaccessibility of some of the survey

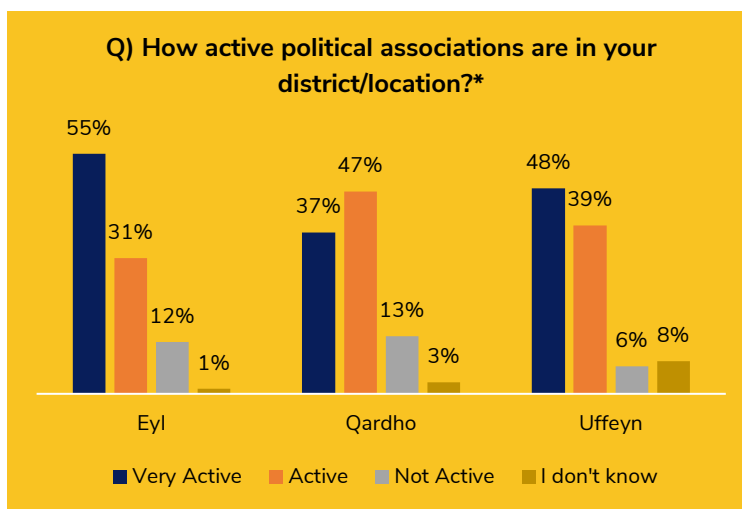
<sup>7</sup> Urur Siyaasadeedka Cadaaladda iyo Sinaanta, Urur Siyaasadeedka Dhalinyarada, Urur Siyaasadeedka Horseed, Urur Siyaasadeedka Ifiye, Urur Siyaasadeedka Kaah, Urur Siyaasadeedka Mideeye, Urur Siyaasadeedka Mustaqbal, Urur Siyaasadeedka Run iyo Cadaalad and Urur Siyaasadeedka Shaqaalaha

locations hence limited footprint of political associations, and more importantly due to the nascence of the democratization process in Puntland.

In theory though, the concept and virtues of having membership in political associations are made less appealing to most of the public by the absence of systematic, comprehensive, and long-term civic education programs. In the current democratization context of Puntland, and Somalia in general, civic education programs are focused on and prioritized in the run-up to elections rather than through a holistic electoral cycle approach that continuously informs the public about citizen rights and responsibilities in the democratisation process

No significant difference in membership in political associations by age, gender and educational level was reported, but membership was considerably higher in coastal areas (46%) compared to rural and nomadic settlements (18%). It is worth mentioning that Bosaso, despite being the largest urban city in Puntland is also considered as coastal with large number of survey respondents (8.4%) living in this town hence increased membership in coastal areas.

Responding to a question related to the political associations' activeness in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn, where early local council elections are planned to take place in July 2021, respondents in the three districts said that political associations are very active (47%), active (39%) and not active (10%) in their districts. This implies that political associations



*\*This question was asked respondents in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn only*

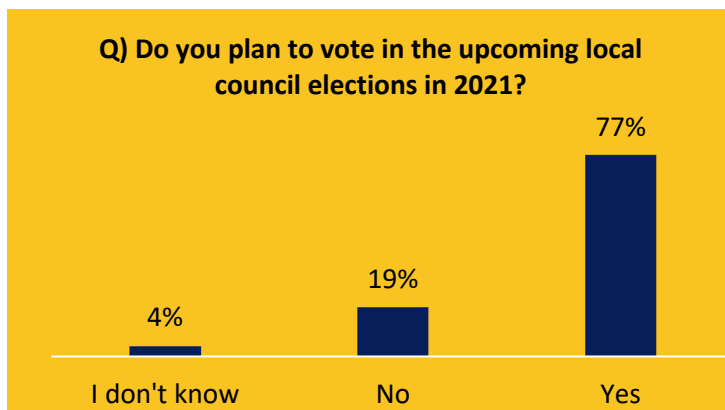
are generally active (86%) in the three districts. However, this does not necessarily mean that political associations are active in other districts where low presence of political associations and limited political activities were mentioned by the FGD participants, and according to observations by the survey team.

Participants of the FGDs also noted that political associations lack the financial means to conduct with extensive outreach awareness campaigns and argued that

it is the utmost importance for government to support them<sup>8</sup> at least in the initial phases and avoid favouring government association over the opposition in using public funds and means for political campaigning.

### 2.7 Intention to vote in the upcoming local council elections

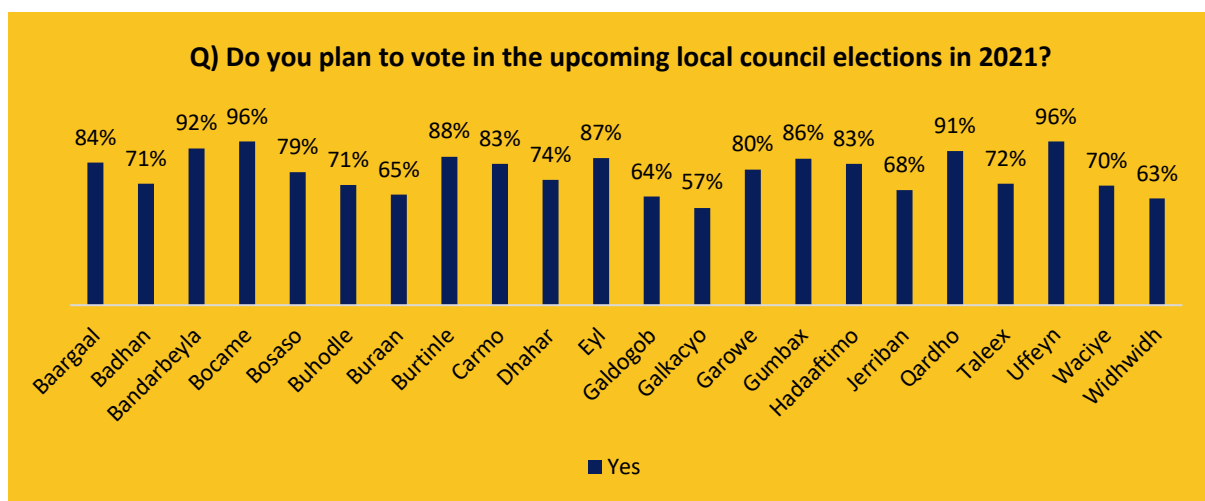
According to the electoral roadmap of TPEC, Puntland plans to hold state-wide local council elections in February 2022. To this regard, participants in all survey locations were asked about their intention to vote in the upcoming local council elections. An overwhelming majority (77%) said they plan to vote, in contrast with 19% who said they will not vote.



This is considerably lower than the 2014 survey finding which showed that 91% of respondents were willing to vote if elections are held. The decline can arguably be attributed to the delayed resumption of the democratisation process by the then President Gaas which killed the momentum. However, the attainment of democratic elections though profoundly enshrined in the Puntland’s first charter and current constitution remains a dream with many already losing interest in such a long-awaited aspiration. Further delays or failure to hold one-person one-vote elections in the current government’s term constitute a major blow to the very existence of Puntland state.

<sup>8</sup> The government has so far provided a financial support of 10,000 USD to each political association ahead of the voter registration exercise in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn as well as equal access to government media for public outreach purposes

The intention to vote in the upcoming local council elections was persistent across demographic groups with more men than women planning to vote (81% vs. 72%). Intention to vote is slightly higher in youth (18-24 years); 82% compared with older people (65+ years); 63%. The survey also noted a significant difference in the intention to vote among different settlement locations with 86% of coastal respondents, 80% of rural respondents, 74% of urban respondents and 59% of nomadic respondents intending to vote. Though the willingness to vote in the upcoming local council elections is substantial across different settlement locations, the slightly lower rate of intention to vote among nomadic populations is quite reasonable given the low awareness among this hard-to-reach group.



The survey also found that intention to vote in the upcoming local council elections is considerably high across all surveyed locations with many districts (Bargaal, Banderbayla, Bocame, Burtinle, Carmo, Eyl, Garowe, Gumbax, Hadaaftimo, Qardho and Uffeyn) showing a high rate of intention to vote (80%+).

Region-wise, the survey revealed that intention to vote is lower in Mudug region, though still significant, compared to other regions (Galkacyo 57%, Galdogob 64% and Jariiban 68%). In contrast, the 2014 survey showed a high rate of intention to vote in surveyed Mudug districts (Galkacyo and Galdogob).

Respondents in Sool, Sanaag and Cayn regions have shown similarly high interest to vote in the upcoming local council elections of Puntland despite other electoral processes and political campaigns ongoing in Sool region during the survey period as observed by the survey team.

Unlike the survey results, the FGD participants in Bocame have shown a great dissatisfaction with Puntland political system and complained about a continuous betrayal and marginalization being perpetrated against Sool, Sanaag and Cayn communities by elected leaders of Puntland. They blamed Puntland government

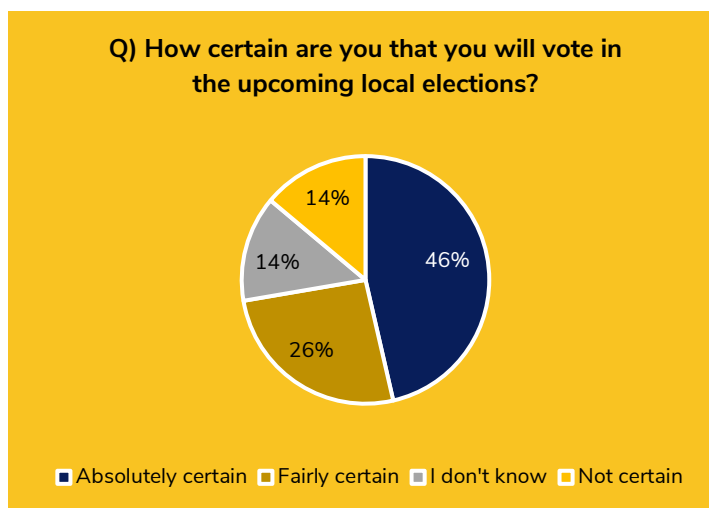
for downplaying the importance of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn regions as evidenced by the exclusion of Bocame and other districts in these regions from the planned early elections despite many of them being accessible or controlled by Puntland.

Those respondents who are intending to abstain from the upcoming local council elections will do so because according to their belief elections will not take place (27%), they are not interested in the election process (23%), the process is not inclusive (15%) or due to other reasons (35%).

It is worth mentioning that some FGD participants expressed fear that the upcoming federal level elections may interfere the local elections by shifting public attention and participation.

### 2.8 Voting certainty

Survey respondents were asked about how certain they are to vote in the upcoming local council elections. Responses were characterized as absolutely certain, fairly certain, not certain and don't know. Nearly half of the respondents (46%) said that they are absolutely certain, a quarter of the respondents



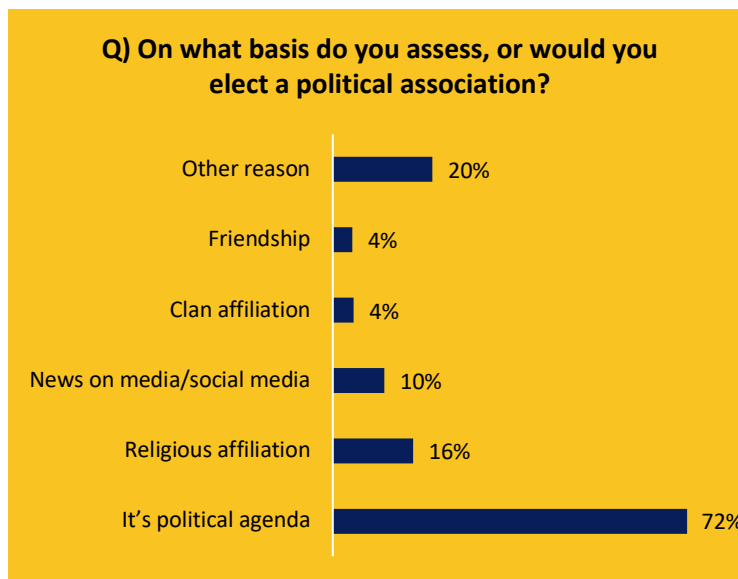
(26%) said they are fairly certain while 14% of the respondents said they are not certain that they will vote in the upcoming local council elections. More male (76%) than female (66%) and more youth<sup>9</sup> (78%) than older people<sup>10</sup> (55%) were certain to vote in the upcoming local council elections.

<sup>9</sup> Youth is referred to those between 18-24 years of age

<sup>10</sup> Older people is referred to those of 65 years of age and above

## 2.9 Choosing a political association

Respondents were asked to characterize the grounds on which they would assess or choose a political association or party. More than seven in ten (72%) said they will choose based on their political agenda, 16% said based on their religious affiliation, 10% said based on news on media, 4% said based on clan affiliation or friendship while others (20%) stated other reasons to join a political association.

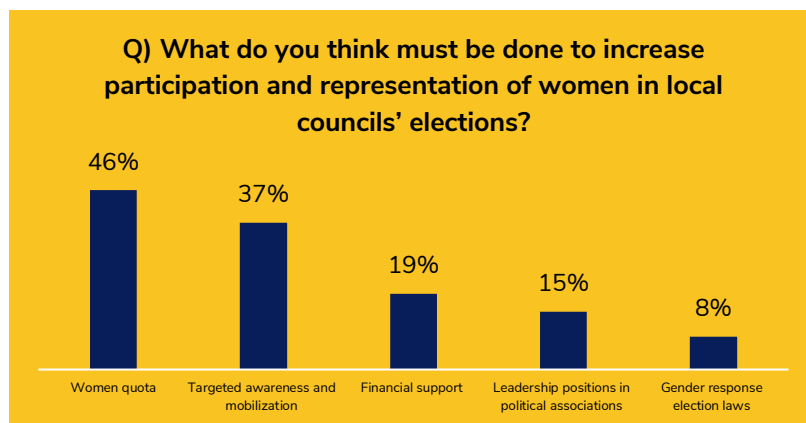


This was asked as an open-ended question where the interviewers recorded the responses and the answers were coded post-survey. From this finding there is strong desire and tendency to do away with the current clan-based politics towards issue-based political discourse and perhaps a system of democratic governance.

With the concept of democratization and formation of political associations being new to Puntland, FGD participants, however, noted that local supporters and volunteers are not necessarily mobilized based on political ideologies and party principles hence keep switching between the political associations.

## 2.10 Increasing women’s participation and representation in local council elections

Despite affirmative actions<sup>11</sup> introduced to increase women’s political participation and representation, women in Puntland continue to be politically marginalized and



<sup>11</sup> 2007 Presidential Decree allocating 30% of local council seats to women and the 2016 federal election procedure upholding the same allocation for women in federal parliament.

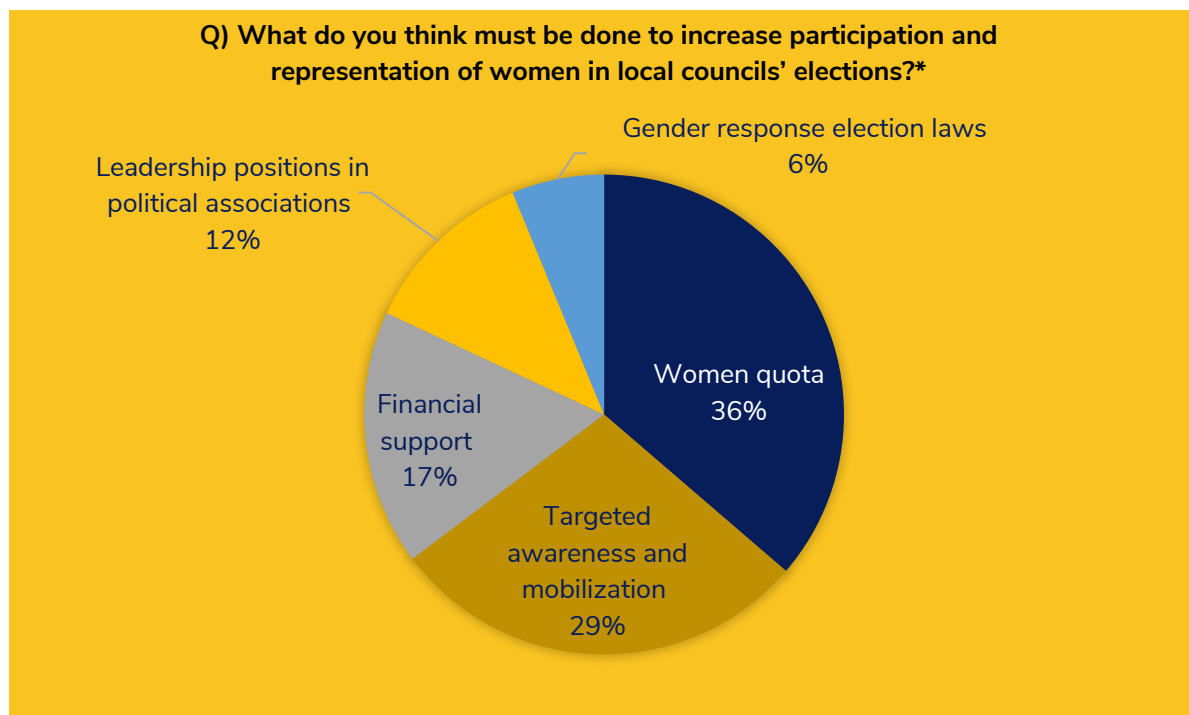


underrepresented in all decision-making arenas. Currently, there are two female members out of 66-member parliament and roughly 17% women representation in local councils in Puntland<sup>12</sup>.

Notwithstanding the above, the survey also aimed to explore actionable strategies that could strengthen women’s participation and representation in local council elections. Respondents suggested that a legislated quota for women (46%), targeted awareness and mobilization (37%), financial support to women candidates (19%) and having women in leadership positions in political associations (15%) should be done to improve women’s participation and representation in local councils in Puntland.

This finding, however, differs from strategies proposed by the 2014 survey respondents who suggested that public awareness raising (32%), mobilization of women (22%) and one-person one-vote elections (18%) are the best strategy for improving women’s political participation and representation. A comparative analysis will reveal a growing public tendency towards legal apportionment for women’s participation in politics in the face of various social and economic factors.

Ironically, the views of female respondents almost conform to that of overall survey respondents as shown in the below chart.



\*These are the responses given by female respondents only.

<sup>12</sup> Source: Department of Gender, Ministry of Women Development and Family Affairs, Puntland

The FGD participants agreed that adoptable and enforceable laws for women's representational quota or affirmative actions are needed as well as engagement and advocacy with political associations, parliamentarians, traditional elders, and all influential stakeholders to get support and buy-in for women's inclusion. Describing the status quo and the need to have legalized women's quota, a female participant in Ufeyn FGD literally said *"in the Somali cultural perspective, men are the hosts in the governance system while women are their guests and at the mercy to the apportionment and sanctions men make!"*.

Other FGD participants also reiterated that women are largely unorganized and less interested to vie for political positions despite the bottlenecks. They suggested that massive women's awareness-raising and mobilization is needed to enable them to meaningfully participate in the election process. Furthermore, the FGD participants suggest that more women must register in the political associations and compete for seats in the local council elections.

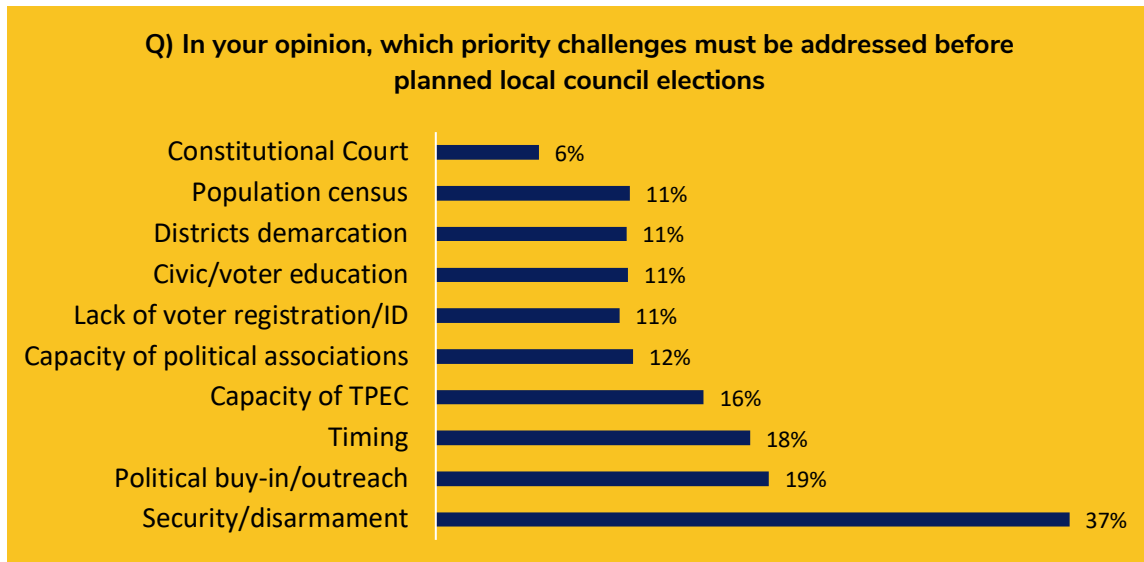
Speaking of the possible strategies to empower women, an FGD female participant in Badhan said *"women to lobby for policy change and mobilize resource for campaigns to promote their agenda and priorities. They should also cooperate and unite in promoting their cause and join the process early on since they often linger behind and therefore miss opportunities"*

Another workable strategy suggested by the FGD participants is creating women's platforms, thereby expanding their sphere of influence while also establishing strong alliance with others including men who are in favor of women's participation in leadership. It is worth mentioning, however, that some political associations have already started to address the challenge of increasing women's participation separately by ensuring their participation in party leadership.

### **2.11 Immediate challenges to the planned local council elections**

The survey respondents were asked about the key priority issues and challenges to focus on in the lead up to the planned local council elections. According to the responses given, security emerged as the most threatening challenge (mentioned by 4 in 10 or 37%), followed by low political buy-in and outreach (mentioned by 1 in 5 or 19%), insufficient time (mentioned by 1 in 5 or 18%), capacity of TPEC (mentioned by 1 in 5 of 16%) and capacity of political associations (mentioned by 1 in 10 or 12%).

Nevertheless, this finding noticeably matches with a similar finding in the 2014 survey which suggested that security (24%), low public awareness (21%), lack of population census (9%) and insufficient time (8%) are the most threatening challenges that could derail the democratization process in Puntland.



Moreover, the FGD participants noted several challenges including the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic, arms in the public hands, low public awareness, absence of population census and district demarcation, insufficient financial resources and limited access to information causing a widespread disinformation and misconception. The multiplication of districts from the 21 districts that existed in 1998 to 50 districts in 2021, was heatedly debated by the FGD participants describing it as a timebomb and an imminent threat to election security and Puntland’s social cohesion.

Some FGD participants also expressed fear that the new system [electoral system] would favor some clans over others thereby leading to further disintegration and alienation of marginalized communities. An FGD participant in Eyl said “political associations should keep tribal issues in check and be aware of the risk it holds should such representational imbalances take place between clans and sub-clans”. He further recommended establishing a conflict resolution mechanism to oversee and control such matters at the local level.

The participants of the FGDs also expressed that protracted political standoff between Puntland and the Federal Government of Somalia and any attempt from Puntland’s political leadership to vie for national leadership positions in the upcoming federal elections could negatively impact on Puntland’s democratization process by diverting attention, interest and commitment to accelerate the election events within the agreed roadmap.

# 3

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the survey has revealed a positive outlook from the part of respondents regarding the advancement of democratization process in Puntland. This is more so because of the renewed commitment by the sitting government led by President Deni and the gradually evolving electoral processes spearheaded by TPEC. The recently concluded voter registration in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn in preparation for the early local council elections planned to happen in these districts in July 2021 is a good indication, reassuring the prospect of the long-awaited one-person one vote elections in Puntland. Below is a summary of key findings from this survey:

- ▶ The survey found that 62% of respondents are hopeful that one-person one-vote elections will take place before the end of the current government's term, ending in January 2024. Moreover, there is a strong aversion to the clan-based political system which has been highlighted as an opportunity to do away with the current clan-based political system by the survey respondents.
- ▶ A vast majority of respondents in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn are aware of the early local council elections planned to take place in their districts (85%) while 90% of respondents saw it important to measure the nation's readiness to democratic transition.
- ▶ Respondents in the survey made several propositions and priorities worth focusing on to ensure genuine elections are held in Puntland. According to their views, public acceptance and buy-in to the process (37%), financial resources (36%) and formation of constitutional court (35%) are to be prioritized.
- ▶ Though participation in political and electoral processes cannot necessarily be determined by the level of political association membership, however, a clear majority of respondents (74%) are not members of any political association. This is an indication of low participation in political and election processes by the grassroots. This also shows the need to amplify

interventions to improve political associations' presence and effectiveness in all locations with special attention to peripheries.

- ▶ The survey found that younger groups between the age of 18-24 and 25-44 have better awareness on early local council elections (on average 87%) compared to older groups of 65+ years (62%). In addition, youth (18-24) are more intended and certain to vote, 82% and 78% respectively, compared to older groups of 65+ years with 63% intention to vote and 55% certainty to vote in the upcoming local council elections. Youth (16-24) are also more represented in the current political associations (24%) compared with the 65+ year group (14%).
- ▶ An overwhelming majority of respondents (77%) are planning to vote in the upcoming local council elections, however, there is a decline from the 2014 baseline survey (14 points lower). Despite attributions, it seems that many citizens have lost hope or interest to participate if elections are held. Nevertheless, the desire to vote is prevalent across the surveyed demographic groups with more coastal, rural, and urban populations (86%, 80% and 74% respectively) than nomadic (59%) willing to vote in the upcoming local council elections. Ironically, the survey found higher intention to vote rates in Sool, Sanaag and Cayn regions than in Mudug region. Neither the survey nor the FGD could determine the reason behind low intention to vote rate in Mudug region, and this is something that could be looked at in future perception surveys.
- ▶ Another imperative finding from the survey is the basis of which respondents would choose a political association. Respondents said they would choose or select based on political ideology (72%) rather than clan affiliation (4%) despite the absence of publicly shared political programmes or manifestos from the part of political associations. However, this is a clear manifestation of people's aversion to the current clan-based political system.
- ▶ Moreover, the survey explored opportunities and strategies to improve women's participation and representation in local council elections. The survey respondents said that women quota (46%) targeted awareness and mobilization (37%), financial support to women candidates (19%) and having women in leadership positions in political associations (15%) are the best strategies that could strengthen women's participation and representation in local councils. This view was similarly held by the female respondents themselves. In addition, the survey found that slightly less females than males (72% vs. 81%) are planning to vote in the upcoming

local council elections despite being equally represented in the current political associations' membership (25%). It's also worth mentioning that almost an equal number of male and female voters (49.5% and 50.5% respectively) have been registered during the recent voter registration campaign in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn in preparation for the planned early local council elections in these three districts<sup>13</sup>.

- ▶ The survey finally found that there are several daunting challenges that could derail the election process if not properly addressed or dealt with well in advance. According to the respondents' view, insecurity (37%), limited political buy-in from the part of government (19%), insufficient time (18%) and low capacities of TPEC (16%) and political associations (12%) are the most threatening impediments to successful local council elections in Puntland.

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<sup>13</sup> According to a TPEC press release dated on 28/06/2021, a total of 46,187 voters (49.5% male and 50.5% female) were registered for the planned early local council elections in Qardho, Eyl and Ufeyn.

# 4

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and analysis from this survey and FGDs, PDRC proposes the following recommendations to the election stakeholders, primarily the Puntland government, TPEC, political associations, civil society, and the international community:

- ▶ The government should uphold its leadership, political buy-in and commitment to the democratization process. It needs to do so by maintaining genuine and continuous outreach and engagement of traditional, religious, and political actors, peripheral communities, and the public at large. Failure to hold elections in the current government's term would permanently shatter the long-awaited dream of Puntlanders to achieve universal suffrage.
- ▶ The government should introduce a comprehensive security plan prior to the upcoming local council elections. The plan should factor in security-related challenges to holding peaceful elections including potential inter-district border conflicts and measures to address prevailing communal grievances specifically in Sool and Cayn regions.
- ▶ The government, TPEC and concerned stakeholders— primarily civil society and media— should implement a coordinated and comprehensive voter education and awareness raising campaign to inform the population about their roles and responsibilities in the election process. Targeted awareness to women, nomadic communities and older people are of paramount importance to ensure their active participation in the process. Media, including government-owned, should uphold ethical and fair reporting standards during elections.
- ▶ The government should prioritize addressing key challenges to local council elections which include potential insecurity or violence, insufficient financial resources, low public buy-in and support to the process, formation of the constitutional court and strengthening capacity of TPEC. Capacity of political associations as well as their expansion and effectiveness in all localities should be prioritized as well.

- ▶ TPEC with the support of government should adopt credible safeguarding measures to ensure the integrity of elections including election fraud policy and civil society oversight over election processes. Robust compliant mechanisms are to be in place to ensure that all election-related complaints are addressed in a fair and transparent manner.
- ▶ TPEC with the help of government should advocate for and introduce gender-responsive election laws and regulations including legalized women quota in part lists. The government should also cooperate with concerned stakeholders– particularly civil society and women’s groups – in initiating awareness raising and mobilization, consensus-and capacity-building programmes targeting women. Where possible, resources should be mobilized to support women political aspirants- and campaigns.
- ▶ Political associations should promote viable political ideologies and issue-based political discourse and should come up with well-defined political manifestos to clarify their policies. Where needed the political associations should seek necessary capacity-building support to develop their manifestos and advance their institutional development.
- ▶ Political associations should come up with women inclusion strategies thereby providing conducive avenues for women to join political associations and subsequently compete for local council and parliamentary elections.
- ▶ Political associations should expand their political programme and outreach by engaging and addressing priorities of nomadic and rural communities being large segments of Puntland society, and should also underpin civic and voter education awareness efforts across all communities.
- ▶ Traditional leaders should keep clan agendas out of the electoral process and should promote smooth transition from clan-based political system to multiparty political system. Advocacy with traditional leaders as well as awareness raising programme targeting elders should be maintained to ensure their buy-in and support to the process.
- ▶ Youth, women, and minorities should mobilize their constituencies and take the lead in promoting inclusive election processes by committing themselves to meaningfully participate in the election process. Civil society and other civic platforms should also promote increased participation of women and youth in the election process.



## About the PDRC

Puntland Development & Research Centre (PDRC) is a successor body of former War-torn Societies Project International (WSPI), which operated in Puntland during 1997–99. On October 30, 1999, the center was founded as an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute dedicated to peacebuilding, promotion of democracy and respect for human rights.



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