

Somaliland at a Crossroads: **The November Election That Will Determine Our Nation's Future.**

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As Somaliland approaches the pivotal November 13, 2024 presidential and multiparty elections, the stakes have never been higher as our nation faces an unprecedented crossroads. Despite decades of peace and self-reliance, Somaliland faces threats from internal divisions and multiple external actors conspiring to sow doubt and discord in the elections. If Somaliland succumbs to election-related violence, it risks losing everything it has built and accomplished over 34 years, including the hopes and dreams for international recognition and its growing economic partnerships. While Somaliland has built a legacy of democracy and stability in a turbulent region, these gains are now at far greater risk than previous elections combined.

In recent years, Somaliland has made commendable strides toward becoming a democratic beacon of hope in the Horn of Africa. Since reclaiming its independence from Somalia in 1991, Somaliland has held multiple elections that, despite delays, have largely maintained peace. However, as regional tensions and conflicts rise, internal enemies and external forces including Somalia, Egypt, Eritrea, Djibouti and Turkiya, reportedly continue to disrupt Somaliland's stability. These countries perceive Somaliland's democratic and economic growth, the Ethiopia-Berbera port partnership, and its independence aspirations as a threat to their interests. Egypt's Nile interests, for instance, align with growing Ethiopian influence in the region, while Somalia seeks to "reassert territorial claims" over Somaliland inciting violence in Sool and Sanaag regions by bribing and encouraging armed tribal groups to exploit political divisions within Somaliland. For Djibouti, if Berbera emerges as a strong trade alternative for Ethiopia, it could disrupt its near-monopoly on Ethiopia's trade, reducing its heavy reliance on Djibouti. If the trade volume through Berbera increases, revenues from port tariffs, taxes, and related services would contribute to Somaliland's GDP growth.

So, these external actors have motivations tied to regional power dynamics and their hidden-agendas is to exploit internal divisions within Somaliland, particularly among the Issak clan and other communities, to delegitimize the election outcome and instigate a violent post-election conflict facilitating an irreparable damage to Somaliland's reputation as democratic country that deserves the international recognition it briefly enjoyed as an independent country before it voluntarily united with Somalia (it withdrew from that dysfunctional union in 1991).

Somalia backed by Djibouti, Eritrea, and (Egypt and Turkiya both supplying Somalia with plenty of modern sophisticated military equipment and personnel), seek to undermine Somaliland's independence by fuelling misinformation campaigns and exploiting clan divisions within Somaliland to create an atmosphere of suspicions around election integrity. By questioning the legitimacy of the electoral process, these hostile forces intend to foster distrust and potential rejection of the results by the opposition factions creating a cycle of accusations possibly leading to widespread violence, chaos and anarchy throughout the country.

Evidence suggests that these external actors in collaboration with internal support are attempting to provoke opposition factions into rejecting the results of the election. This interference risks dividing Somaliland's citizens, weakening the country internally at a time when unity is paramount. Similar tactics have been observed across the region, where misinformation and propaganda through social media have been deployed to fuel internal conflicts, as seen in Ethiopia's Tigray crises.

Several geopolitical rivalries also underpin the root causes of the current crises. The MOU agreement with Ethiopia has turned Somaliland into a strategic player in the Horn of Africa, challenging Djibouti's dominance and potentially challenging Egypt's hold on the Nile basin narrative as well.

Another factor is clan divisions in Somaliland's politics. Political parties, often drawn along clan lines, is susceptible to both internal and external manipulation. Historical grievances and clan-based politics increases the risk of division, especially when amplified by narratives of election interference or election rigging.

Somaliland has carved out a democratic path, despite lacking international recognition, With multiple peaceful transitions of power and growing economy bolstered by the Berbera Port, it has demonstrated strong resilience. However, past elections have not been without challenges. Delays and controversial extensions of incumbents' mandates, and political disagreements have so far tested Somaliland's commitment to democracy. For instance, presidential election were delayed for nearly two years due to technical and political reasons, and the House of Elders often extended presidential terms beyond their mandates, sparking public frustration and opposition dissatisfaction. These delays have previously threatened to undermine Somaliland's democratic image, making this upcoming election even more critical for upholding democratic principles and norms for election integrity. In this crucial election, both internal and external enemies are ready poised to exploit these historical vulnerabilities to stir distrust and incite division, destabilize Somaliland and prevent it from gaining international recognition.

So far, Congratulations to the Somaliland Electoral Commission for a job well-done on building solid guardrails to protect the fairness of the electoral process from start to finish. But the logistical and political pressures of holding this high-stakes election, perhaps one of the most consequential elections in Somaliland's existence since 1991, have recently intensified, with external interference compounding pre-existing tensions and animosities. Somaliland's

commitment to democracy and peaceful transition of power is under severe pressure, and any post-election conflict could be exploited by these enemy actors.

My article aims to warn Somaliland's leaders, citizens, and political factions of this well-orchestrated plot by its enemies to destabilize our democracy. Therefore, I urge all Somalilanders to patriotically protect our democracy, to remain vigilant against internal and external interference, and to remember the hard-fought freedoms and the hard-won unity that brought us this far. To avert disaster and protect our future, immediate actions are incumbent and essential upon all of us Somalilanders, to promote unity across clans and parties. I also urge our citizens regardless of political or clan affiliations to prioritize national unity and stability and reject provocations, even amid election irregularities.

Political leaders, business figures, and community elders must take the lead to prioritize national unity over tribal affiliations. Somaliland's political factions need to honour their moral duty to honour the peaceful acceptance of results and prioritize national stability, setting aside partisan differences for the greater good. Informing the public about the risks of external interference can foster resilience. Educators, journalists and social media figures, and civil society leaders should focus on debunking social media rumour-mongers and enlighten and educate Somalilanders about the value of democratic continuity and the importance of a peaceful electoral process and a peaceful transfer of power as we witnessed in recent US elections.

The government, with the support of international partners, should establish mechanisms to identify and counter misinformation, particularly around claims of election fraud. Real-time fact checking and clear communication from electoral commission could mitigate the impact of false narratives designed to undermine election credibility.

Looking at other nations, Somaliland can observe the dangers of contested election irregularities leading to prolonged violence and instability. Ethiopia's internal conflicts and recent transitions in Sudan serve as cautionary tales of how political disputes can escalate when foreign actors intervene. By learning from these examples, Somaliland can prepare for the potential fallout and strengthen its internal resilience.

Despite challenges, Somaliland has managed relatively peaceful elections since its first democratic election in 2003, a record that shows support among powerful nations for its quest for international recognition. We must remind ourselves of this achievement which helps to reinforce the importance of maintaining a peaceful electoral process, regardless of the results. Today, Somaliland stands at a crucial juncture. In this election Somaliland's unity, peace, prosperity, and international recognition depend on a peaceful transfer of power and a collective commitment to the future. Finally, Somaliland's moment of truth in this election will be tested on November 13, 2024. Our civic duty to safeguard our democracy and unity against external threats is on the line at the crossroads. Now, the choice before its citizens and leaders is either to protect our democratic legacy and pursue the path to international recognition and prosperity or risk plunging the nation deep into a future of instability.

