



ASSESSING ELECTORAL TRANSPARENCY, PARTY GOVERNANCE, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

MOGADISHU'S FIRST DIRECT LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS



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Executive Summary

The Mogadishu local council elections held on 25 December 2025 represent a historic milestone in Somalia's political transition. For the first time in over five decades, citizens exercised direct suffrage to elect local representatives — a fundamental shift away from the elite-mediated governance structures that have long defined Somali political life. In doing so, these elections signal a broader reconfiguration of political legitimacy: from negotiated elite consensus to popular mandate.

Yet the transformative potential of this moment was not fully realized. Of 923,220 registered voters, only 233,314 cast ballots — a turnout rate of 25.27 percent.¹ Nearly three in four eligible citizens did not participate. This gap is not incidental; it is analytically central to understanding what these elections achieved and what they failed to deliver.

Key Electoral Statistics

Registered voters:	923,220 ²
Ballots cast:	233,314
Voter turnout:	25.27%
Non-participation:	74.73%
Survey respondents:	328 citizens; 6 political parties; 1 Electoral Commission

Critically, this report finds that low turnout cannot be attributed to logistical failure or insufficient electoral administration capacity. The Electoral Commission conducted a procedurally orderly process, and access constraints were cited by only a small minority of respondents. Instead, abstention reflects a systemic participation deficit rooted in three interacting dynamics:

- Information disorder — approximately 90 percent of respondents encountered challenges related to unclear information, active misinformation, or insufficient civic education.
- Institutional trust deficits — 72 percent of respondents expressed weak or moderate confidence in the electoral process or its governing institutions.
- Political disengagement — reinforced by an opposition boycott that reduced electoral competitiveness and dampened voter motivation.

These findings point to a deeper political economy dynamic. Somalia's governance history has been shaped by the 4.5 clan-based power-sharing framework, in which political authority is negotiated among elites rather than delegated directly by citizens. While direct elections are designed to shift power toward the electorate, low turnout risks reproducing the very elite concentration this reform was intended to dismantle — by narrowing the participating electorate and concentrating influence among organized political actors.

In summary: the Mogadishu elections were procedurally credible but socially underperforming. The central challenge ahead is not the mechanics of election administration — it is transforming electoral processes into trusted, understood, and genuinely meaningful civic experiences for Somali citizens.

¹ The figure of 923,220 registered voters is drawn from the National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission's official records and is used consistently throughout this report as the primary administrative data source. The Supreme Court ruling of 8 March 2026 (Case No. MS/DD/1/2026) cites a figure of 918,890 registered voters — a difference of 4,330. This discrepancy likely reflects a difference in the point in the registration process at which each figure was recorded (e.g., pre-verification versus post-verification rolls). Both figures are presented here for transparency. The discrepancy does not materially affect the turnout rate or any of the analytical conclusions drawn in this report.

1. Introduction and Context

The reintroduction of direct elections in Mogadishu constitutes one of the most consequential political developments in Somalia's recent history. For decades, governance has been structured around indirect electoral systems in which clan elites negotiate political outcomes, with limited scope for direct citizen voice in leadership selection or accountability. The 4.5 power-sharing model — which distributes political representation across the four major clan families and a composite fifth grouping — has provided a measure of elite stability, but has done so at the cost of popular legitimacy.

1.1 Legal and Institutional Framework

The legal basis for the December 2025 elections was established by Electoral Law No. 28, enacted on 23 November 2024 — just two days before polling day. This law defined the institutional architecture for Somalia's direct local elections, setting out the mandate and authority of the National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (“the Commission”) as the body responsible for administering, certifying, and announcing electoral results. The law also established a clear two-stage validation mechanism: the Commission holds authority to certify results at the administrative level, while the Supreme Court of the Federal Republic of Somalia — through its Electoral Division — holds the exclusive authority to grant final, irrevocable legal validation.

Under Article 73 of the same law, the Supreme Court holds jurisdiction over all electoral disputes. Any voter or registered political party wishing to challenge the results was required to do so within seven days of the Commission's official announcement. This time-bound legal framework is significant: it provides finality to the electoral process, ensuring that results cannot be contested indefinitely, while still affording a meaningful window for legitimate legal challenge. As detailed in Section 5.1 of this report, that window closed without any challenge being filed — a fact that the Supreme Court subsequently confirmed and relied upon in issuing its unconditional validation of the results on 8 March 2026.

The 2025 local elections are therefore more than an administrative exercise. They represent a deliberate attempt to reorder the foundations of political authority: shifting legitimacy from the negotiating table to the ballot box. In this sense, the elections carry significance that extends well beyond the local council seats contested — they are a test of whether Somalia's democratic transition can acquire genuine popular roots.

Democratic legitimacy, however, is not achieved through the mere existence of voting mechanisms. It depends fundamentally on meaningful citizen participation. The substantial gap between the number of registered voters and actual turnout raises the defining analytical question of this report: why did 74.73 percent of registered voters choose not to participate? Was this a failure of electoral administration? A consequence of political manipulation? Or does it reflect something more structural — a citizenry not yet convinced that elections matter?

This report addresses that question through four analytical lenses: electoral transparency and institutional performance; political party engagement and competition; public perception, awareness, and trust; and the broader political economy of democratic participation in Somalia. Together, these frameworks offer a textured account of both what went right in December 2025 and what remains profoundly incomplete.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative inputs from key institutional actors. A citizen survey captured 328 responses, and was supplemented by qualitative responses from six political parties and one submission from the Electoral Commission. This triangulation across three distinct actor categories — citizens, political parties, and the administering institution — provides a more complete picture of electoral dynamics than any single data source could offer.

2.2 Data Collection

The survey was conducted online, using a non-probability sampling approach. Responses were drawn primarily from urban, digitally connected populations in Mogadishu. While this methodology limits full statistical generalizability to the broader electorate, it provides strong indicative insights into the perceptions and behavioral motivations of an engaged, connected segment of the citizenry — a population whose abstention is particularly significant given their relative access to information and civic resources.

2.3 Analytical Approach

The analytical approach describes how the data collected was examined and interpreted to produce the findings in this report. Rather than simply describing what respondents said, the analysis sought to identify patterns, test whether different data sources told a consistent story, and draw out the implications of the evidence for understanding low voter turnout. The goal was to move from raw survey responses and institutional submissions to grounded conclusions about the causes and character of the participation deficit observed in the December 2025 elections.

The primary analytical tool was descriptive statistics — that is, counting and comparing responses to identify which factors were most frequently cited, and calculating proportions to express findings in percentage terms. This approach was chosen because it is transparent, replicable, and appropriate for a sample of 328 citizen respondents. It does not claim to establish causal relationships in a formal statistical sense, but it does allow the research team to identify the dominant patterns in the data and compare them systematically across different respondent groups.

In practical terms, the analytical approach works as follows: survey responses were tabulated to identify the frequency and proportion of each answer, allowing the research team to determine which factors — information deficits, trust gaps, political disengagement — were most commonly cited across the respondent population. These quantitative patterns were then interpreted alongside the qualitative inputs from political parties and the Electoral Commission, which provided institutional context and helped explain the dynamics behind the numbers. Where the qualitative and quantitative data pointed in the same direction, the finding was treated as particularly robust. Where they diverged, the divergence itself was treated as analytically meaningful and noted accordingly.

Several survey questions permitted multiple responses per respondent, which accounts for aggregate response counts exceeding the sample size of 328. For example, the question on barriers to participation yielded 336 total responses — an outcome that is analytically meaningful in itself, indicating that voter abstention is multi-causal rather than attributable to a single dominant factor. Throughout this report, where percentages are presented for such multi-response questions, they reflect the share of total responses rather than the share of respondents, and this is noted where relevant.

2.4 Limitations

The non-random sampling design, perception-based nature of survey responses, and limited number of institutional inputs all impose constraints on the conclusions that can be drawn. Findings should be treated as indicative rather than definitive. Nonetheless, the consistency of patterns across citizen, party, and institutional data sources strengthens confidence in the core findings. Where multiple independent data streams converge on the same conclusion, that conclusion is considered robust for analytical and policy purposes.

3. Electoral Participation and Turnout Analysis

A turnout rate of 25.27 percent is the defining statistical fact of the Mogadishu elections. Whatever else these elections achieved procedurally, three quarters of the registered electorate did not engage. Understanding the composition of this abstention is essential to interpreting what the election results mean and what interventions are required before the next electoral cycle.

Survey data identifies three primary drivers of non-participation. The figures below show both the raw response count and the percentage share of total responses (377 responses from 328 respondents, as the question allowed multiple selections):

Factor / Indicator	Finding
Lack of awareness or information	126 responses (33.5%)
Mistrust in the electoral process	86 responses (22.9%)
Political disengagement	85 responses (22.6%)
Logistical or access barriers	23 responses (6.1%)
Other reasons	56 responses (14.9%)

Note: Percentages reflect share of total responses (376), not share of respondents (328). The question permitted multiple selections per respondent, reflecting the multi-causal nature of abstention. Figures are rounded to one decimal place.

These figures carry an important implication: participation barriers are primarily perceptual and structural, not logistical. Citizens did not fail to vote because they could not reach polling stations or lacked documentation. They abstained because they were unconvinced, insufficiently informed, or disengaged from a political process they did not feel spoke to their interests or was credible enough to merit their participation. This finding has significant implications for how election support programming should be designed — investment in polling infrastructure, while valuable, will not resolve a participation deficit rooted in trust and information.

Notably, survey data also indicates that 76.3 percent of respondents reported moderate or higher levels of awareness of the elections. The fact that awareness did not translate into participation underscores that knowledge of an election is a necessary but insufficient condition for turnout. Awareness alone, in the absence of perceived electoral credibility and meaningful political alternatives, does not produce participation.

4. Public Perception, Information, and Institutional Trust

4.1 The Information Environment

Access to clear, accurate, and timely information is a foundational condition for informed electoral participation. In the Mogadishu context, the information environment surrounding the

December 2025 elections was deeply compromised. Survey responses identified three distinct but related challenges, collectively experienced by approximately 90 percent of respondents:

Factor / Indicator	Finding
Absence of clear, accessible electoral information	31%
Exposure to misinformation or conflicting narratives	30%
Inadequate or poorly targeted voter education	29%

The near-universal prevalence of information challenges — across all three dimensions — is striking. It suggests that the information deficit is not a marginal concern or the experience of a minority: it was a defining feature of the electoral environment for the vast majority of citizens. An electorate that cannot access reliable information about candidates, processes, and stakes is structurally disadvantaged in its capacity to participate meaningfully, even where the formal conditions for doing so exist.

The misinformation dimension warrants particular attention. At 30 percent, exposure to conflicting or false narratives was almost as prevalent as the simple absence of accurate information. This suggests an active information disorder, not merely a passive communication gap. In environments characterized by high social media penetration and fragmented media ecosystems — as is increasingly the case in urban Mogadishu — misinformation can spread rapidly and is difficult to counter without coordinated, authoritative communication from trusted institutional actors.

4.2 Institutional Trust and Electoral Credibility

Beyond information, public trust in the institutions administering elections is a critical determinant of participation. In contexts where citizens doubt the integrity of electoral processes, even well-informed voters may rationally conclude that their participation will not influence outcomes — or may even serve to legitimize a process they consider compromised. The survey data reveals precisely this trust deficit:

Factor / Indicator	Finding
Perceive low institutional credibility	38%
Perceive moderate (qualified) credibility	34%
Express strong confidence in the process	28%

Taken together, 72 percent of respondents expressed weak or only moderate confidence in the electoral process. This is a significant finding, particularly given that the Electoral Commission itself reports the elections as peaceful, well-administered, and logistically effective — an assessment largely corroborated by political party respondents. The divergence between institutional self-assessment and public perception is itself a key analytical finding: procedural quality and perceived legitimacy are not the same thing, and they do not automatically move together.

This trust deficit is unlikely to be resolved through administrative improvements alone. It reflects accumulated skepticism toward Somali governmental institutions more broadly — skepticism shaped by decades of conflict, elite bargaining, and governance exclusion. Rebuilding institutional trust requires sustained, transparent engagement over multiple electoral cycles, not technical fixes applied in the run-up to a single election.

5. Electoral Transparency and Institutional Performance

The Electoral Commission's account of the December 2025 elections is broadly positive: polls were conducted peacefully, logistics were managed effectively, and the overall process proceeded in an orderly fashion. This account is largely consistent with the qualitative inputs received from political parties, the majority of which acknowledged procedural fairness even where they had concerns about the broader political context.

These are meaningful achievements, particularly given the complexity of organizing the first direct local elections in over fifty years in an environment marked by ongoing security pressures and limited state capacity. The fact that the Electoral Commission delivered a functional, non-violent electoral process should be recognized as an institutional accomplishment.

However, procedural performance and perceived legitimacy are distinct dimensions of electoral quality, and the Mogadishu elections reveal a significant gap between them. While institutions delivered a technically credible process, public perception diverged sharply: 72 percent of survey respondents expressed weak or only moderate confidence in the process. This gap — between institutional delivery and public trust — is arguably the central electoral governance challenge in the Somali context.

Core Finding: The Transparency–Perception Gap

Electoral administration was procedurally sound. However, credibility is not simply a function of procedural correctness — it also depends on visibility, communication, and public understanding of how the process works. Where citizens cannot observe the process directly or access clear information about its integrity, perception will be shaped by prior mistrust, rumour, and the absence of authoritative counter-narratives. Closing the transparency–perception gap requires not only doing things correctly, but communicating that things were done correctly — proactively, accessibly, and through trusted channels.

Specific institutional improvements required for future electoral cycles include strengthened public communication strategies, enhanced transparency mechanisms such as publicly accessible results verification, deeper community engagement throughout — not just during — the electoral period, and greater autonomy for the Electoral Commission from executive influence. Each of these dimensions affects how the institution is perceived as well as how it performs.

5.1 Judicial Validation and the Absence of Legal Challenges

On 8 March 2026, the Supreme Court of the Federal Republic of Somalia — sitting through its five-member Electoral Division under the chairmanship of Dr. Abuubakar Axmed Cali — issued its ruling on Case No. MS/DD/1/2026, formally and unconditionally validating the results of the Mogadishu local council elections. The ruling was issued in response to a petition filed by the National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission on 8 March 2026, requesting final legal certification of the results it had already announced. The court's decision rests on three analytically distinct pillars, each of which is relevant to the assessment presented in this report.

First — procedural completeness. The court confirmed that no electoral challenge was filed against the results by any voter or political party within the legally prescribed seven-day window established under Article 73 of Electoral Law No. 28. This is a significant finding that goes beyond mere procedural formality. Even the political parties that had boycotted the elections — and who were vocal critics of the process in the lead-up to polling day — did not

exercise their legal right to challenge the results. The legal record is therefore clean in a manner that public perception data alone does not capture. Citizens may have harboured doubts about the process, yet no organised political actor judged those doubts sufficient to mount a formal legal contestation.

Second — constitutional grounding. The court explicitly grounded its validation in the principle of popular sovereignty as enshrined in the Somali Constitution — noting that the formal inauguration of elected members is directly tied to this constitutional foundation. This is not merely administrative confirmation; it is a constitutional affirmation that the elections represent a legitimate exercise of the Somali people’s sovereign will. By invoking this principle, the court elevated the elections from a technical administrative event to a constitutionally anchored democratic act — precisely the kind of legitimacy signal that this report identifies as necessary to close the transparency–perception gap.

Third — institutional authority and finality. The court confirmed the legal chain established by Electoral Law No. 28: Commission certifies, Supreme Court validates irrevocably. The ruling formally closes the legal lifecycle of the December 2025 elections. No further challenge can be mounted; no further legal uncertainty remains. The results — with Caddaaladda iyo Wadajirka securing 177 of the 390 contested seats, followed by Towfiq (49), Ramaas (42), and seventeen other registered parties sharing the remainder — now carry the full force of constitutional and judicial authority.

The Supreme Court’s ruling adds an important dimension to the central analytical finding of this report. The Mogadishu elections were procedurally credible and are now judicially validated — yet public trust in electoral institutions remains low. This gap between legal legitimacy and perceived legitimacy is not a contradiction; it is a challenge. Legal validation is a necessary but insufficient condition for democratic consolidation. The task ahead is to translate the constitutional and judicial recognition of these elections into the kind of civic legitimacy that citizens feel in practice — through better information, greater transparency, and sustained engagement between electoral cycles.

6. Political Party Engagement and Competition

Somalia’s political parties are still relatively nascent institutional actors, operating in a context where clan networks have historically served as the primary organizing structures for political mobilization. The 2025 elections provided an important test of whether formal party structures could meaningfully engage voters and build the kind of broad-based coalitions that democratic competition requires.

Political party responses indicate that engagement efforts were made: parties organized public rallies, conducted door-to-door campaigning, and utilized media outreach. These are the building blocks of competitive democratic politics, and their deployment represents progress relative to the indirect electoral cycles of previous years.

6.1 Structural Constraints on Party Mobilization

Nonetheless, party engagement was materially constrained. Resource limitations restricted the geographic reach and intensity of campaign activities, particularly in areas peripheral to the political center. Voter awareness remained insufficient, suggesting that party outreach failed to penetrate large portions of the electorate — an outcome consistent with the 126 respondents who cited lack of information as a reason for abstention. Time constraints also limited preparation and the development of substantive policy platforms that might have differentiated parties in voters’ minds.

These structural limitations matter because political parties are a primary vehicle through which citizens connect to democratic processes. Weak party institutions produce weak

electoral engagement. Investment in party development — including organizational capacity, policy research, and field mobilization — is not merely a political concern; it is an electoral participation concern.

6.2 The Opposition Boycott

The most consequential political development shaping the electoral environment was the decision by several major political parties — aligned with prominent opposition leaders — to boycott the elections entirely. This boycott arose from disputes with the Federal Government and President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, reflecting unresolved tensions within Somalia's political settlement that existed prior to and independent of the local electoral process.

The impact of the boycott on turnout and legitimacy is difficult to quantify precisely, but its directional effect is clear. It reduced electoral competitiveness, narrowed the range of political choices available to voters, and sent a signal — to a citizenry already inclined toward skepticism — that the elections were politically contested rather than universally accepted as legitimate. For voters whose participation was already conditional on a sense that the process mattered, the boycott provided a further reason to abstain.

Analytical Note: Boycotts and Democratic Legitimacy

Electoral boycotts are a recognized form of political contestation, but they impose systemic costs on democratic development. When significant political actors withdraw from participation, the resulting electorate is necessarily narrower and less representative, the mandate conferred on winners is weaker, and the signal sent to ordinary voters about the value of participation is negative. Addressing the conditions that lead to boycotts — including grievances about executive interference, procedural fairness, and the inclusivity of political institutions — is therefore not only a political task but an electoral governance imperative.

7. The Political Economy of Low Turnout

The findings of this report must be situated within the broader political economy of Somali governance. Somalia's political system has been shaped over decades by the logic of elite bargaining — most formally expressed through the 4.5 clan-based power-sharing framework, in which political authority is allocated among elites as the outcome of negotiation rather than popular election. In this system, citizens have historically been objects of political representation rather than its active agents.

The transition to direct elections is, in principle, a fundamental challenge to this logic. Direct suffrage transfers, at least formally, the source of political authority from elite consensus to popular mandate. This is precisely why the elections of December 2025 are historically significant — and precisely why the participation rate matters so much. An election in which 25 percent of registered voters participate does not, in practice, effect the power transfer that direct suffrage is intended to achieve.

Low turnout under conditions of elite political competition produces a predictable outcome: organized political actors — who can mobilize reliable voter blocs through clan networks, patronage, or party machinery — disproportionately influence results. The mass of disengaged citizens, meanwhile, cedes the electoral arena to these actors by default. The formal architecture of direct democracy is thus populated by a political dynamic that resembles elite-mediated governance more closely than it resembles popular accountability.

The Participation–Legitimacy Equation

Electoral reform without genuine mass participation risks producing a system in which elections exist formally but elite concentration of influence persists substantively. This outcome would represent not merely a missed opportunity but an active risk: it could consolidate cynicism about electoral politics among a citizenry that has already internalized skepticism toward state institutions. Averting this risk requires treating electoral participation not as a secondary concern — a metric to improve over time — but as a first-order condition for the democratic transition to succeed.

8. Synthesis: A Systemic Participation Deficit

The evidence assembled in this report points to a consistent and interrelated set of findings. Low turnout in the Mogadishu elections is not explained by any single factor, nor does it result primarily from logistical or administrative failure. It reflects the operation of three mutually reinforcing deficits:

The information deficit — experienced by approximately 90 percent of respondents across dimensions of unclear communication, misinformation, and inadequate civic education — undermined voters' capacity to make informed decisions about participation. The trust deficit — with 72 percent expressing weak or moderate confidence in electoral institutions — undermined voters' motivation to participate, even where information was available. The engagement deficit — expressed through weak party outreach, opposition boycott, and the broader absence of a compelling political offer — removed the positive incentives that might otherwise have overcome informational and trust barriers.

These three deficits interact and reinforce one another. Weak information erodes trust; low trust deepens disengagement; disengagement concentrates political influence among organized actors; concentrated influence further alienates citizens from a process they perceive as captured. The result is not simply a low turnout figure — it is a systemic failure of participation that, left unaddressed, will reproduce itself across future electoral cycles.

The paradox at the center of these elections is worth stating plainly: the Mogadishu elections achieved what they set out to achieve procedurally, and yet they fell short of what they needed to achieve democratically. Conducting an election is not the same as building an electoral democracy. The former is a technical accomplishment; the latter is a social and political one that requires sustained investment in the conditions under which citizens come to see elections as genuinely worth participating in.

9. Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations are grounded in the specific findings of this report and are oriented toward measurable improvement in electoral participation, institutional trust, and information quality in advance of Somalia's next local electoral cycle. They are presented in order of strategic priority.

9.1 Establish a Continuous Civic Education Programme

Civic education that is mobilized only in the run-up to elections cannot address the depth of the participation deficit documented here. A sustained, institutionally anchored civic education programme — operating between as well as during electoral periods — is required. This programme should be designed to address both the informational dimension (what elections are, how they work, why they matter) and the motivational dimension (connecting electoral participation to tangible governance outcomes that citizens care about). Priority should be

given to reaching populations with historically low engagement, including women, youth, and residents of peripheral urban districts.

9.2 Develop an Integrated Electoral Communication Strategy

The near-universal prevalence of information challenges — affecting 90 percent of respondents — demands a qualitatively different approach to electoral communication. The Electoral Commission, in partnership with civil society and media actors, should develop an integrated communication strategy that establishes a single authoritative information source for electoral matters, proactively pushes credible information through trusted community channels, and deploys rapid-response mechanisms to counter misinformation in real time. This strategy should be developed well in advance of the next electoral period and should be tested and refined through community engagement before deployment.

9.3 Implement Proactive Trust-Building Mechanisms

Rebuilding institutional trust requires more than technically sound administration — it requires visible transparency. The Electoral Commission should consider publishing accessible accounts of key electoral processes, including voter registration procedures, candidate verification, and results tabulation. Community observer programmes, inviting citizens to directly observe electoral processes at every stage, would contribute meaningfully to trust-building. These mechanisms will not produce immediate results; trust is rebuilt incrementally, across multiple interactions, over time. Early and sustained investment is therefore essential.

9.4 Create Conditions for Full and Inclusive Political Participation

The opposition boycott that preceded the December 2025 elections is a symptom of unresolved political tensions within Somalia's evolving settlement. Addressing these tensions lies primarily in the political domain rather than the electoral administration domain — it requires dialogue, negotiation, and the construction of political agreements that give all significant actors sufficient stakes in the process to participate rather than opt out. Donors and international partners can constructively support this by conditioning electoral support on demonstrated progress toward inclusive political dialogue, and by providing technical assistance for the development of a legal and institutional framework that provides credible guarantees of electoral independence.

9.5 Strengthen the Electoral Commission's Institutional Capacity and Independence

The Electoral Commission's credibility is foundational to the credibility of elections as a whole. Strengthening the Commission's institutional capacity — including staffing, financial resources, technical expertise, and communications capacity — is a prerequisite for improved electoral performance. Equally important is the Commission's perceived independence from executive influence. Structural reforms that enhance the Commission's legal autonomy, combined with transparent appointment processes for its leadership, would contribute meaningfully to public confidence. International partners should prioritize institutional strengthening as a core component of electoral support programming, rather than focusing narrowly on election-day logistics.

9.6 Strengthen the Internal Democratic Governance of Political Parties

Data collected during this assessment revealed a significant governance concern within Somalia's political party landscape: the majority of parties that participated in the December 2025 elections did not conduct internal elections to select their candidates. Instead, candidate lists submitted to the Commission were compiled by party chairs in consultation with a small inner circle, without any formal internal democratic process. This practice undermines the integrity of the electoral chain from its very first link. When party candidates are not themselves

the product of democratic selection, the democratic mandate that elections are intended to confer is compromised at source.

This finding is particularly significant given the broader political economy context documented in Section 7 of this report. Somalia's democratic transition aims to shift political authority from elite negotiation to popular mandate. If political parties — the primary vehicle through which citizens engage with electoral democracy — are themselves governed by elite concentration rather than internal democratic accountability, the transition risks reproducing at the party level the same exclusionary dynamics it is designed to dismantle at the systemic level.

The Electoral Commission, in consultation with civil society and international partners, should develop and enforce minimum standards for party governance as a prerequisite for electoral registration and participation. These standards should require parties to: conduct transparent internal candidate selection processes with documented procedures; maintain membership registers accessible to their own members; and demonstrate that nominated candidates have been selected through a process that extends beyond the party leadership. Capacity-building support — including training, model governance frameworks, and technical assistance — should be made available to help nascent parties develop the internal structures necessary to meet these standards. Democratic governance must begin within parties, not only between them.

10. Conclusion

The Mogadishu local council elections of December 2025 occupy a genuinely historic place in Somalia's political development. The reintroduction of direct suffrage after more than five decades represents a meaningful commitment to democratic governance and a tangible challenge to the elite-mediated political structures that have dominated Somali politics. That commitment deserves recognition and continued support.

At the same time, these elections demonstrate — with considerable clarity — that the formal introduction of democratic mechanisms does not, by itself, produce democratic outcomes. A 25 percent turnout rate is not a rounding error or a first-cycle anomaly to be explained away; it is a signal that the relationship between Somali citizens and their electoral institutions remains fragile, conditional, and in need of sustained repair.

The path forward is neither technically complex nor politically impossible — but it requires a different kind of ambition. The ambition not only to conduct elections, but to make them matter: to build the civic knowledge, institutional trust, and political inclusion that transform voting from a formal right into a genuinely exercised one.

Somalia's democratic transition will be measured not by the procedural quality of individual elections, but by whether successive electoral cycles deepen participation, widen representation, and generate governance outcomes that citizens recognize as connected to their choices. The December 2025 elections established a foundation. The Supreme Court's unconditional validation of those elections on 8 March 2026 — confirming that no legal challenge was filed by any voter or party, and grounding its ruling in the constitutional principle of popular sovereignty — formally closes the legal chapter of this electoral cycle. The civic chapter, however, remains very much open. What is built on this foundation depends on the decisions made, and the investments committed, in the years immediately ahead.



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