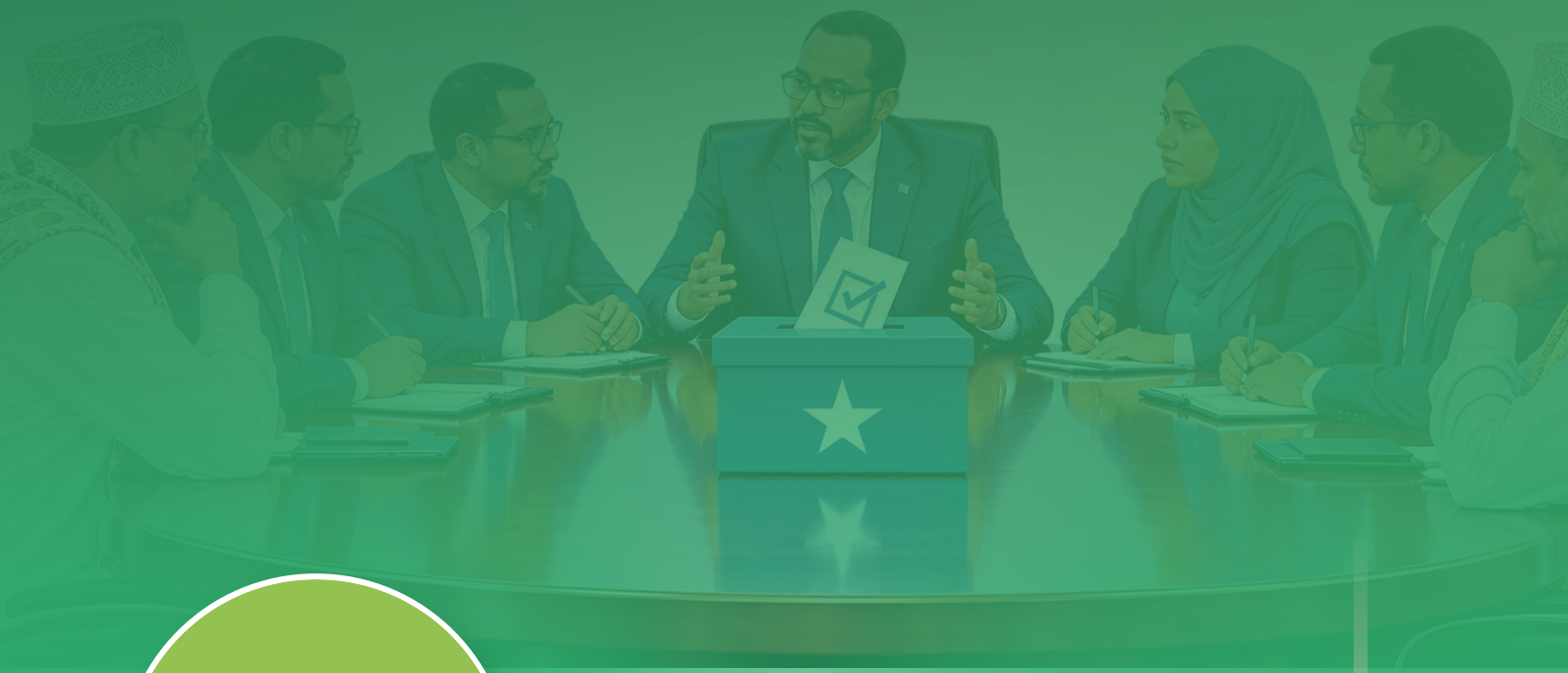
INDEPENDENCE HOUSE POLICY BRIEF

14 NOVEMBER 2026

BEYOND THE STAND-OFF:

A CALL FOR STRUCTURED **DIALOGUE,** COMPROMISE AND A CREDIBLE ROAD **TO ELECTIONS IN SOMALIA**





Independence House
Voice of law & freedom

independencehouse

Independence House Policy Brief | 14 November 2026

Key messages

The dispute reaches well beyond election dates. Mandates, the electoral model, the independence of the judiciary and the assurances that would make any deal hold are all contested at the same time.

Each side raises concerns that the other has to answer. The Federal Government wants elections held on a firm timetable under the March 2026 amendments. The opposition wants consent, a legally secure mandate and a neutral process. Neither agenda can be delivered by one side alone.

The talks scheduled for 14 to 18 November should end with a signed, time-bound agreement, or at minimum an agreed procedure, a facilitator and a calendar for the next round. A communiqué of good intentions will not be enough.

Independence House urges both sides to act on four points this week: attend on a without-prejudice basis, agree on a standstill over the judiciary, stand down armed mobilisation, and keep the Somali-led process supported by the good offices of friendly partners.

Introduction

Somalia is in the most serious political stand-off since the 2021 term-extension crisis. A disagreement over constitutional interpretation has become a contest over who holds legitimate authority, how the next election will be run and whether the courts can referee. It is unfolding as the UN political mission has closed (UNTMIS ended on 31 October), the future of the African Union mission is uncertain, Al-Shabaab remains capable, and tension has turned violent in several federal member states. The closure of the mission, which the Federal Government itself requested, puts the responsibility for the next steps squarely on Somali leaders.

The latest escalation came on 4 November, when President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud removed Chief Justice Baashe Yusuf Ahmed and named Ibrahim Idle Suleiman in his place. The presidency said it acted on complaints from judges and legal professionals. The opposition, led by the Somali Future Council, called the move a coup against the judiciary. The following day a five-judge panel of the Supreme Court issued a ruling that the government rejects as legally ineffective. The President then invited four groups to national talks in Mogadishu from 14 to 18 November.

Independence House does not take a position on which constitutional reading is right. That question cannot be settled by communiqué, by decree or by a single institution that one side no longer accepts. It can only be settled by a political agreement that both sides can defend to their own supporters. This brief sets out where each side stands, why earlier rounds of talks have not produced a settlement, and what a workable agreement would need to contain.

Where Things Stand

Date	Development
March 2026	Parliament approves constitutional amendments that extend federal terms from four to five years and move towards direct elections. Puntland and Jubaland reject the process.
12 October	Former President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed petitions the Supreme Court over the amendment process and the extension of mandates.
Mid-October	The National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (NIEBC) announces parliamentary elections for 15 April 2027 and presidential elections for 15 May 2027. Opposition groups reject the timetable.
26 October	The presidency invites the Peace and Life party, the Somali Future Council, the National Unity Forum and a civil society coalition to talks on 14 to 18 November.
4 November	The President removes Chief Justice Baashe Yusuf Ahmed and appoints Ibrahim Idle Suleiman.

Date	Development
5 November	The Supreme Court panel finds that the term extension does not apply to current office holders, declares post-expiry exercise of power void, limits the Cabinet to caretaker business, gives the parties 30 days to agree an electoral model and orders elections within 90 days. It also declares the Chief Justice's removal void.
6 to 7 November	The Office of the State Attorney General says the judgment has no legal effect and disputes the composition of the panel. Suleiman takes the oath before the President.
14 November	Talks open. The main opposition actors have announced no formal position on attendance. The Peace and Life (Nabad iyo Nolol) party has shown little resistance to the Villa Somalia format and is expected to take part. The UK, the US, the EU and Türkiye are reported to be engaging the parties behind the scenes.

Attendance was still unsettled at the time of writing. The recommendations below apply whether the full opposition is present from the start or joins at a later stage.

Understanding the Crisis: Two Cases That Both Deserve a Hearing

Public debate often reduces the crisis to a quarrel over dates. The positions reported so far show a wider set of grievances and concerns on each side.

The Federal Government and its allies	The Somali Future Council, Puntland and Jubaland
The March 2026 amendments were passed by Parliament and lawfully extend mandates to 2027. Elections must happen, and the one-person, one-vote commitment should not be allowed to slip another cycle. The Supreme Court judgment is disputed on standing, on the use of the court's interim jurisdiction and on who sat on the panel. The Chief Justice was removed following complaints about the administration of justice, and the courts need reform. The NIEBC timetable gives the country a concrete path and should be the basis for talks.	The amendments were adopted without consensus and concentrate authority. Mandates expired in April and May, so the government cannot set the rules for its own re-election. The dismissal of the Chief Justice days after he took up the opposition petition looks like interference with a pending case, and the 2026 text prescribes a removal procedure that was not followed. The NIEBC timetable was announced without consultation. Any dialogue needs a neutral facilitator and a halt to unilateral election steps. Hosting at Villa Somalia does not meet that test.

Each list contains a point of substance. A government that wants a firm timetable is right that open-ended delay damages the country, and the commitment to direct elections answers a long-standing public demand. An opposition that asks for consent and a legally secure mandate is right that elections run under rules only one side accepts will produce a result that half the country disputes. Independence House asks both sides to read the other's list as a set of problems to solve rather than a set of positions to defeat.

The Judicial Dimension

The removal of the Chief Justice has changed the nature of the dispute. Until early November there was at least a shared expectation that the Supreme Court might be a forum for resolving the constitutional question. That expectation is now contested. The government says the removal followed legitimate complaints and that the ruling is flawed. The court says the removal was void and that the presidency acted to interfere with a case before it. One legal analysis notes that the 2026 text sets out its own procedure for removing and appointing a Chief Justice, involving the Supreme Judicial Council and both houses of Parliament, and that the procedure was not followed. Whatever view one takes, a country in which both the executive and the judiciary have declared each other's acts void has no neutral referee left. That leaves negotiation as the only route that works.

The immediate danger is further unilateral action. A rival bench, a second swearing-in, security deployments around court buildings or an enforcement attempt of any kind would harden positions at the moment the talks open.

Why Previous Rounds Have Not Delivered

Earlier engagements between the Federal Government and the opposition produced meetings and statements but no settlement. Several patterns recur and should be designed out this time.

No agreed agenda or facilitator. Parties arrived with different understandings of what was on the table and whose role it was to keep the process moving. No written record. Verbal understandings were later disputed. Contested points were deferred. Mandates, the electoral model and security arrangements were left for "future discussion" while other issues were agreed. Unilateral moves continued during talks. Timetables, appointments and election preparations went ahead, and each such step was read by the other side as bad faith. No follow-up mechanism. There was no calendar, no monitoring and no consequence for missing a commitment.

The UN political mission ended its mandate on 31 October at the request of the Federal Government, which considered that the transition had run its course. That decision is a matter of national ownership, and this brief does not question it. It does mean that the informal weight the mission carried in keeping parties at the table is no longer there, and that Somali leaders now carry that responsibility themselves.

The UK, the US, the EU and Türkiye, the group often described as the quartet, are reported to be engaging the government and opposition figures behind the scenes. Their influence is considerable and, used with discretion, may help bring the parties together. Independence House sees their value in quiet good offices: encouraging attendance, helping the parties find common ground on procedure, and encouraging both sides to honour what they sign. The process itself should remain Somali-owned and Somali-led.

Somalia's political fragmentation is occurring against a backdrop that raises the cost of failure.

Armed confrontation. Federal and Jubaland forces have clashed since late 2024. In August 2026 heavy fighting in Galkayo saw Puntland forces take over camps of the federally aligned Puntland Security Force. Also in August, fighters loyal to former Southwest leader Abdiaziz Laftagareen, who was removed in March over a dispute about the state's election, attacked Baidoa, with dozens reported killed. The government has accused him of links to Al-Shabaab, an allegation his side has not accepted. There are also reports of tension between the Hawadle community and the Hirshabelle administration over local elections.

Al-Shabaab. The group retains operational capacity and gains from every episode in which federal and state forces turn on each other. Reports of local understandings between the group and aggrieved communities show how quickly political grievances can become security openings. Uncertainty over the future size and funding of the African Union mission adds to the risk. The ongoing conflict and political discord in Somalia have created conditions that allow Al-Shabaab to expand its territorial control. Disagreements among political leaders not only push some parties and dissatisfied politicians to seek alliances with Al-Shabaab, but also provide the group with space to build agreements with local communities. This normalization of interaction further entrenches Al-Shabaab as a significant threat to both the survival and stability of the Somali state.

Competing mediation tracks. Overlapping initiatives led by different capitals would give Somali leaders a way to avoid compromise by playing one partner against another. A single coordinated track avoids that risk.

Somalia must avoid a situation in which domestic political actors increasingly seek external political, financial or security support to strengthen their positions against one another. Such an environment could undermine national sovereignty and make the resolution of domestic disagreements even more difficult. External partnerships are important for Somalia's development and security. However, they must be guided by a coherent national interest rather than competing political agendas.

Recommendations

The recommendations are sequenced so that the first four can be agreed within the 14 to 18 November window, and the remainder set out what should follow within 30 days.

1. Meet on a without-prejudice basis

Attendance at the talks, wherever they are held, should not be read as accepting or rejecting any party's position on the amendments, the expiry of mandates or the legitimacy of any office holder. Each side can place its reservations on record. This removes the question of venue and recognition as a precondition and allows discussion to start on substance. Where the Future Council or others object to Villa Somalia, a neutral venue, or sessions chaired by an agreed third party, would be a reasonable accommodation, and the government can agree to it without conceding anything on legal position.

2. Keep the process Somali-led and welcome the good offices of partners

Respected elders, religious scholars and civil society figures should chair the sessions, since they hold public credibility across political lines. Friendly partners, including the UK, the US, the EU and Türkiye, can support the process through their good offices: using their access and influence to encourage attendance, to bridge differences on procedure and to encourage both sides to implement what they agree. This does not require a formal mandate or any external authority over the outcome. It does help to have the partners speak with one voice and work through a single channel, so that neither side can play one capital against another. Such an arrangement respects the government's interest in a Somali-led process and gives the opposition the reassurance it has sought that the talks will be fair.

3. Agree a standstill on the judiciary

Both sides should commit for the duration of the talks to take no further step on the leadership of the Supreme Court, no enforcement action in respect of the 5 November judgment and no public declaration that the other side's institutions are void. The leadership question should then be referred to an agreed process, either the removal and appointment procedure laid down in the 2026 text, or a panel of respected jurists acceptable to both sides. The agreement should set a date for establishing the Constitutional Court and should guarantee the safety and independence of sitting judges.

4. Agree a security standstill

Leaders should publicly commit to keeping the army, police and intelligence services out of the dispute and to refraining from armed mobilisation. Local ceasefire arrangements should be agreed for Baidoa, Galkayo and the Hiiraan areas, with monitoring by agreed observers. Public statements by senior figures that threaten force or invite it should stop.

5. Resolve the electoral model first and the dates second

The electoral formula, the voter registration approach, the handling of areas where the federal system is disputed and the way complaints will be resolved all drive the timetable. A technical committee with equal representation for the government and the opposition, together with the NIEBC and independent electoral experts, should present options within 21 days on an electoral model and, for areas not ready for direct voting, a phased or mixed arrangement. The NIEBC timetable should be treated as a working baseline that can be adjusted by agreement, neither as a fixed commitment nor as void. The gap between the court's proposed timeline and the commission's dates is a matter of weeks or months and can be bridged by negotiation if the model is settled.

6. Address the mandate question through a time-bound transitional understanding

Whichever legal reading prevails, a political settlement can fix a date certain for the end of current mandates tied to the agreed election calendar. It should also include caretaker commitments for the transition: no major new appointments or contracts, no further constitutional change without agreement, equal access to state media and the neutrality of security institutions. This allows each side to preserve its legal position while giving the country certainty about when power will be contested.

7. Put the agreement in writing and build in follow-up

Any understanding should be set out in a signed text, with agreed public statements after each session. An implementation committee, co-chaired by the facilitators, with friendly partners invited to attend as observers, should review progress

against the agreement at 30 days. Each commitment should have an owner and a date. Civil society, religious leaders and the business community should be named as independent witnesses to the agreement. The business community in particular has an interest in a stable transition and can support the practical costs of the process, provided it does so neutrally and without favouring either side.

What Independence House Asks of Each Party

Party	Specific asks
Federal Government	Attend and negotiate in good faith, with a delegation that has authority to agree. Accept a facilitation arrangement that gives the opposition confidence in the process. Refrain from further steps on the judiciary and on election logistics while talks continue. Be ready to adjust the NIEBC timetable, and to discuss caretaker commitments, if an electoral model is agreed.
Opposition (Future Council and others)	Engage in the process, or set out a clear and time-bound pathway to joining it, rather than staying away while conditions are debated. Accept that a timetable and a model are needed, and put forward concrete proposals on both. Refrain from parallel institutional arrangements and from the mobilisation of armed supporters. Keep Puntland and Jubaland at the table as part of any national solution.
Friendly partners (UK, US, EU, Türkiye)	Continue to use their good offices and influence to encourage attendance and a negotiated outcome. Coordinate through a single channel and give both sides the same message. Support, and avoid directing, a process that Somalis own.
Civil society and religious leaders	Chair or co-chair sessions and act as witnesses. Monitor implementation and report publicly on progress against the agreed calendar.

Conclusion

Somalia has spent years building institutions, rebuilding security forces and regaining international confidence. Those gains are real and they are exposed. A stand-off in which each side has a defensible case and no neutral court to hear it is the kind of situation in which compromise is the only way to protect either side's interests.

The measure of this week will be what leaders carry out of the room. If they leave with a signed text, a facilitator, a calendar and a standstill on the judiciary and the security forces, the next five months can lead to elections. If they leave with statements alone, the 30-day window set by the court, the NIEBC timetable and the patience of the public will all run out together. Independence House calls on the Federal Government and the opposition to choose the first outcome, and on Somalia's friends to support them in doing so.

Independence House
Voice of law & freedom

INDEPENDENCE HOUSE POLICY BRIEF

14 NOVEMBER 2026

independencehouse