

East, Southern and Central Africa Observatory

Executive Summary

The Somali Non-Election of 2026. Constitutional Crisis and Political Violence

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Executive Summary

This Note analyzes the major political crisis currently facing Somalia under the administration (2022–2026) of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (HSM), whose term expired on May 15, 2026. At the root of this crisis is the constitutional reform launched at the start of his term, aimed in particular at establishing elections by direct universal suffrage ("one person, one vote"), strengthening presidential powers, and extending the terms of federal institutions from four to five years. While the government presented this reform as an essential step toward the country's democratization, the opposition viewed it as a maneuver designed to allow the president to remain in power.

The 2012 Provisional Constitution, adopted after years of civil war, had established a balance between federal institutions and member states while limiting the president's powers. Although all stakeholders acknowledged the need to revise this text, the method employed by HSM has been hotly contested. The opposition denounced a non-inclusive process, carried out without genuine consultation with the federated states and the main political forces. It also criticized the creation of a National Electoral Commission controlled by the executive branch and the extension of current terms of office.

Thanks to a solid parliamentary majority and the backing of some regional leaders, HSM ultimately succeeded in passing the constitutional reforms. This political success can be attributed to his mastery of institutional power dynamics, the loyalty of his prime minister, and his ability to forge alliances, including, according to critics, by "buying" the support of politicians. However, these successes have deepened political divisions. Several opposition coalitions have formed to challenge the legitimacy of the reforms and to refuse recognition of the presidential term's extension beyond May 2026.

The crisis quickly spread to relations between the federal government and certain federal member states, notably Puntland and Jubaland, which denounced the reforms as undermining the spirit of federalism enshrined in the 2012 Constitution and sought to preserve their autonomy. Other states in the central regions, more dependent on the federal government, supported the reforms, although relations sometimes deteriorated as elections approached (as in the Southwest State). This polarization further weakened Somali institutions and fueled territorial tensions.

The failure of negotiations between the government and the opposition led to armed clashes in Mogadishu in June 2026, resulting in several casualties and displacing part of the population. Each side accused the other of plotting a coup, raising fears of further destabilization at a time when the threat posed by the terrorist group Al-Shabaab remains significant. In this regard, the federal government's focus on constitutional reform has been a boon for the jihadist group, which has regained the upper hand against the Somali army since 2025.

The Note also examines the regional and international dimensions of the crisis, highlighting HSM's diplomatic efforts to strengthen his position. At the regional level, he has consolidated cooperation with Turkey and sought a balance between two major regional rivals, Egypt and Ethiopia. Finally, the Note looks at the case of Somaliland and its quest for independence, a claim reinforced by its recent recognition by Israel. At the international level, the Note highlights certain paradoxes facing the Somali state: near-unanimous support from states and international organizations for the fight against terrorism and for Somali unity, even as the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission (AUSSOM) struggles to secure funding.