

**Research Article**

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# The Effects of Constitutional Non-Consensus and Political Mistrust on Somalia's 2026 Electoral Landscape

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## Abstract

### Keywords

Somalia,  
Constitutional  
Reform,  
Federalism,  
Electoral Readiness,  
Institutional Trust,  
One Person One  
Vote,  
Federal Member  
State

Somalia's constitutional transition represents one of the most significant political developments in the Horn of Africa in recent years. The March 2026 constitutional amendments introduced by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) sought to finalize the country's long-standing provisional framework through the centralization of governance structures, expansion of executive authority, and a transition toward a One Person One Vote (OPOV) electoral model. This study presents an empirical analysis of 118 Somali professionals, academics, and governance stakeholders to evaluate the legitimacy and impact of these reforms. The findings reveal a critical crisis of confidence: 66.1% of respondents identify a lack of trust between the FGS and Federal Member States (FMS) as the primary obstacle to effective federalism. The article examines the systematic polarization regarding the March 2026 parliamentary vote and argues that without broad-based political consensus, the reform process risks becoming a driver of institutional fragmentation rather than a pillar of sustainable democratic development.

## 1. Introduction

Somalia's governance sector is shaped by a distinctive dualism: the aspiration for a centralized, modern democratic state versus the reality of a fragmented, community-based federal arrangement. Following more than 14 years of provisional status, the Federal Parliament

approved a final set of amendments on March 4, 2026, aimed at establishing a permanent constitutional order. This milestone, signed into law by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud on March 8, 2026, introduced a semi-presidential system where the President is elected directly by the people.

Yet this ambition has come at a cost. The very centralization intended to stabilize the state has been perceived by critics as a threat to the fragile federal balance, triggering what some analysts call Somalia's most acute institutional crisis since the founding of the Republic. As the FGS works to rebuild national systems, the 2026 reforms present both a significant opportunity for modernization and a serious challenge to national unity. Their legal procedures make them a potential driver of stability, but their perceived lack of inclusivity makes them a space of potential political harm.

## 2. Methodology

The study used a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. This design was appropriate because it enabled the collection of empirical data from respondents at a specific period during Somalia's constitutional crisis.

The paper also employed descriptive statistical analysis to examine perceptions regarding federal trust, institutional inclusivity, and the role of the National Consultative Council (NCC). All data collection was governed by strict ethical protocols designed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

The data underpinning this study were drawn from empirical research project involving 221 Somali professionals, civil servants, and governance experts.

Data collection employed structured questionnaires designed to capture and authenticate stakeholder perceptions during the 2026 constitutional crisis.

## 3. Discussion of Findings

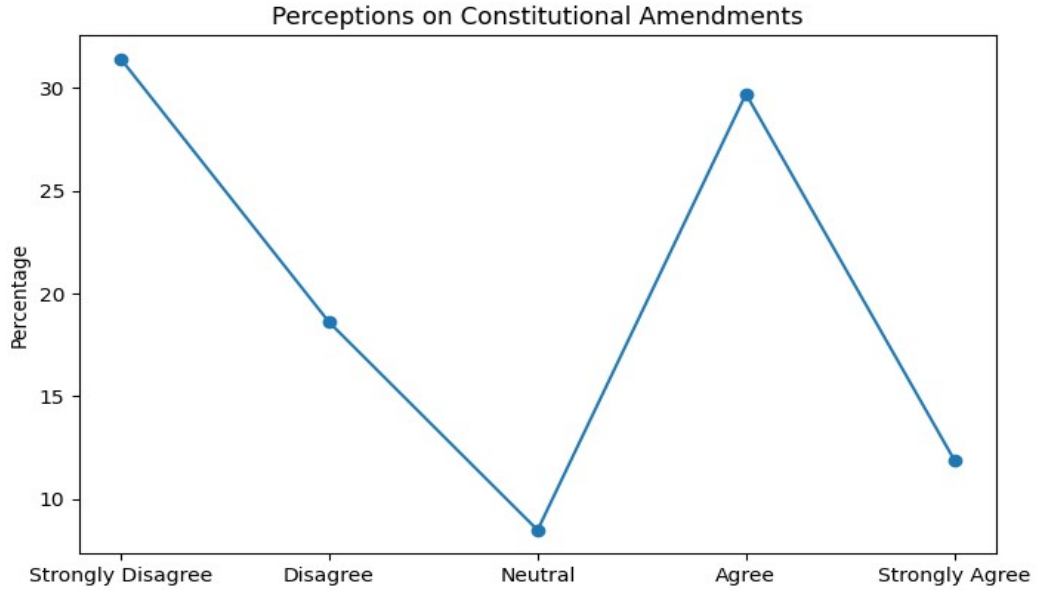
### Situational Context and Demographics

The demographic profile of Somalia's governance stakeholders reflects the country's concentration of intellectual and political capital. The educational attainment of the respondents—with over 85% holding at least an undergraduate degree—demonstrates a high level of expertise in evaluating constitutional issues. However, professional experience reveals a sharp divide: while a significant portion of the "old guard" (35.6%) brings historical context, nearly 30% are newer professionals navigating a post-2012 federal landscape.

Politically, the system operates in a state of extreme mistrust. Some 66.1% of stakeholders cited the lack of trust between the FGS and FMS as the single greatest barrier to progress, far outweighing concerns over donor dependence (20.3%) or constitutional ambiguity (13.6%). This trust deficit creates a structural trap for the implementation of the 2026 amendments; without consistent cooperation between the capital and the regions, the legitimacy of the reforms remains contested by actors like Puntland, Jubaland and the opposition Somali Future Council.

### Constitutional Legitimacy and the Procedural Deficit

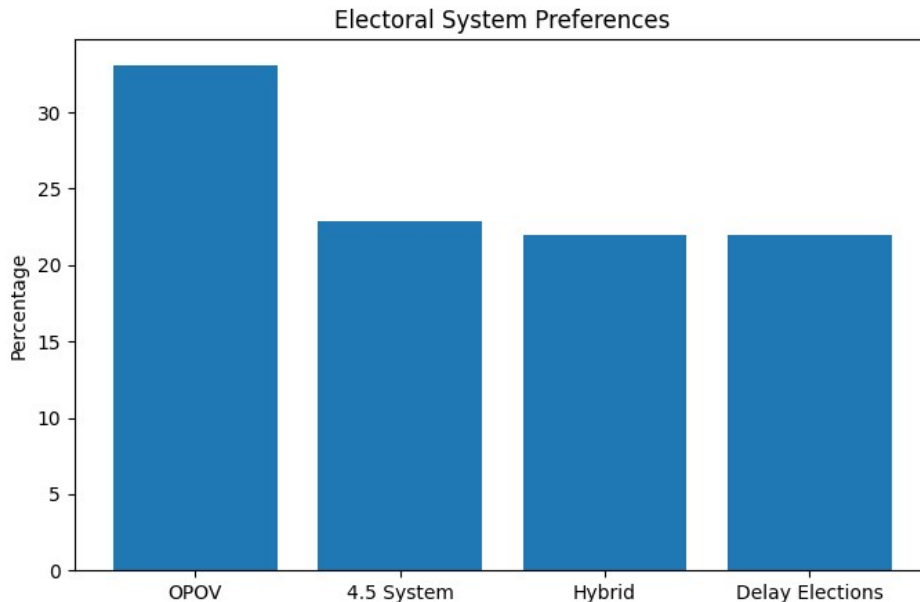
Perceived legitimacy is perhaps the most immediate and visible expression of institutional friction in the Somali federal system. The mapping of stakeholder opinions found that 50% of respondents either "disagree" or "strongly disagree" that the March 2026 parliamentary vote met legitimacy requirements. This sentiment is echoed by reports of some FMS withdrawing cooperation and opposition groups threatening parallel procedures.



Institutional inclusivity is a further structural barrier. With many respondents viewing the National Consultative Council (NCC) as exclusionary or dominated by executive interests, the platform for intergovernmental negotiation has weakened. This perceived dominance effectively forecloses the possibility of a "cooperative federalism" model. The consequences are felt most acutely in the high "strongly disagree" rate regarding the 2026 vote, a sentiment that directly suppresses national cohesion and reinforces regional resistance.

### Electoral Provision: Systems and Readiness Gaps

The proposed electoral transition in Somalia is overwhelmingly focused on the One Person One Vote (OPOV) model. This shift, supported by legislation such as the National Electoral Law approved in late 2024, is intended to move the country away from indirect clan-based arrangements. This focus has deep democratic significance for Somali aspirations for accountability.

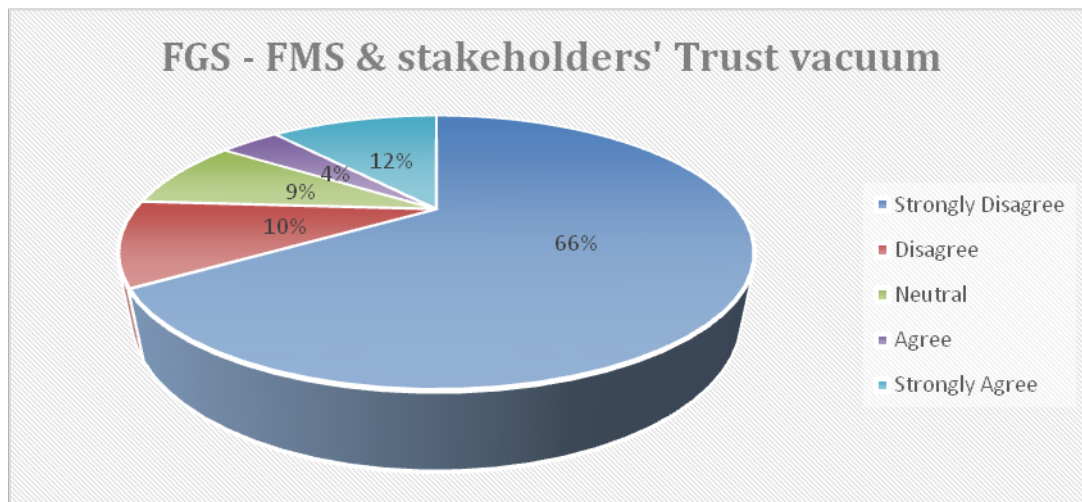


However, its implementation faces immense hurdles. The research found that nearly half of all participants disagree that Somalia possesses the institutional or security infrastructure required for OPOV. Analysts note that weak state institutions and the presence of extremist groups like Al-Shabaab continue to fill governance gaps, deterring the mobility and safety required for national polling. Only 33.1% of respondents prefer an immediate shift to OPOV, while the remainder is split between the traditional 4.5 clan-

based system (22.9%), a hybrid model (22%), or delaying elections entirely (22%).

### The Safeguarding and Trust Vacuum

The 66.1% trust deficit between the FGS and FMS is compounded by adjacent institutional failures: low confidence in the political neutrality of electoral institutions and a lack of clear dispute resolution mechanisms. Together, these gaps constitute what might be described as a total protection vacuum for the federal arrangements.



In a post-conflict society, the stakes of this vacuum are especially high. Regional fragmentation and the risk of parallel governance structures are not hypothetical concerns; they are documented realities, with armed clashes already noted between federal and state forces in regions like Puntland, Jubaland & the overthrown south West president Vulnerable transition processes particularly those involving the centralization of natural resource control and executive power are disproportionately exposed to these risks.

## 4. Recommendations

The evidence assembled in this study makes clear that the challenges facing Somalia's constitutional sector are structural. Addressing them requires the Federal Government to move decisively toward a comprehensive consensus-building framework; so that the paper suggests: -

- The government should initiate an inclusive dialogue involving all FMS, opposition actors, and civil society to restore the "political consent" required for constitutional legitimacy & electoral procedures to avoid crises and parallel processes.
- Neutral actors should facilitate negotiations to bridge the trust gap between the Federal government and the regional states.
- Somalia should adopt a phased approach, perhaps beginning with local-level direct elections to build institutional capacity before national universal suffrage.
- Ambiguous provisions regarding resource management and power sharing must be clarified through inclusive negotiation rather than executive decree.

## 5. Conclusion

The 2026 constitutional changes signify a critical contradiction in Somalia's progress toward state-building. Initially, it solidifies a long-anticipated shift from temporary clan-based 4.5 indirect elections to a lasting democratic framework, establishing a directly elected presidency and the commitment to One Person One Vote.

The practical data collected from 221 Somali professionals and governance specialists presents a bleak scenario. With 66.1% of stakeholders citing intergovernmental mistrust as the main obstacle to advancement, and half of the respondents disputing the procedural legitimacy of the March 2026 parliamentary vote, the crisis is not just political but also perceptual. The lack of trust between the Federal Government of Somalia and its member states establishes a structural dilemma.

This disconnect is most evident in the suggested electoral transition. Although universal suffrage holds substantial democratic importance, almost half of the participants question whether Somalia has the necessary institutional or security framework needed for its execution.

That only 33.1% support an immediate transition to one person one vote, while most are divided among the conventional 4.5 system, hybrid approaches, or outright postponements, indicates a practical prudence developed from real-world experience. The ongoing presence of Al-Shabaab, ineffective state institutions, and a lack of defined dispute resolution processes create what this study refers to as an overall protection void for the federal structure.

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