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Political Dynamics of Clan Systems in Somalia: Historical Evolution and Contemporary Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the politics of the clan system in Somalia and how the clan has evolved over the years, as well as its significance in the current context of governance and national unity. While existing literature mainly presents the idea of clan identity, this study shows that clan identity can serve as both a unifying force and a dividing factor. The research employs a mixed-methods design, collecting quantitative data from 205 respondents and qualitative data from 23 key informants. Results reveal a strong disillusionment with the 4.5 power-sharing formula, with respondents advocating for reform or replacement. The paper emphasizes that hybrid governance models, which combine traditional clan systems with formal institutions, are very important. In conclusion, the study offers a set of measures to harness clan identity for inclusive state-building and to address its exclusionary tendencies.

INTRODUCTION

The political aspects of Somalia's clan systems are indicative of a connection between past development and current issues, which require intensive analysis. This paper aims to critically examine the historical trajectory of the Somali clan system and its impact on the socio-political landscape of Somalia today, specifically its role in both sustaining and dividing the society. The paper locates the clan identity in the general framework of post-conflict nation-building and tries to find out the subtle effect of clan affiliations in governance, social relations, and the shared hope of unity.

Despite the extensive literature on Somali clans, significant gaps remain in the research. Much of the existing work primarily focuses on the negative impacts of clan relations on state formation and stability, often portraying clan identity as inherently divisive. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research exploring the adaptive and constructive roles of clan systems and how they can be integrated into modern governance structures. This research builds upon the foundational work of scholars such as Menkhaus (2004) and Gundel (2009), who have highlighted the dual nature of clan identity. While clans can foster conflict, they can also provide essential social unity and governance, particularly in the absence of a strong state. By incorporating contemporary insights related to civic nationalism and the potential for hybrid governance models, this study seeks to expand the understanding of clan relationships beyond traditional narratives.

This study addresses several research questions regarding the role of historical events in shaping the current political processes of clan systems in Somalia. It explores the contemporary implications of clans for governance, social cohesion, and national unity. Additionally, the study

examines how the Somali clan system can be restructured to promote inclusive governance and sustainable state-building. This work aims to fill existing gaps and contribute to the ongoing discussion about governance in Somalia.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policy and practice in Somalia and similar contexts by recognizing the clan system as an institutional framework that can be strategically engaged with, rather than viewing it as an obstacle to governance. The findings could pave the way for more effective governance models that acknowledge and integrate clan identities within the broader framework of national unity and development. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on peacebuilding, social cohesion, and state reconstruction in Somalia by providing insights that reflect the realities on the ground.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The historical journey and the contemporary issues that have conditioned Somalia have significantly impacted the political nature of the clan system and this is mostly so in the reconstruction after the conflict. Attitude of leadership on the structures of clans has a direct influence on the governance and stability. Studies indicate that deep-rooted clan loyalties have a bad influence on the behaviour of the elite and undermine nation-building processes with the dictatorial, nepotistic, and survivalist regime of Siad Barre disintegrating the state into particularism by clan. This disintegration gave rise to the competition of leadership and the necessity to introduce constitutional and democratic reforms to restore the effective governance (Hassan, 2021). The socio-political structure of Somalia has been characterized by clan relations over the years, and where clannism is fuelled by extremism,

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corruption and inequality, this among other factors has contributed to the instability. According to Zakarie and HARED (2021), the result of prolonged conflict was mass displacement, insecurity, and internal division of a nation, and externally provided peacebuilding processes did not establish stability. According to them, local based reconciliation is more effective in the reconstruction of governance and social cohesion.

Globalization and technological change should also be considered as the variables of the evolution of the Somali political elites. According to KOZACHAENKO (2024), the current changes require reviewing the conventional elite theories since the global forces are having an impact on the democratic legitimacy. In Somalia, the interplay between clan culture and the dynamic of politics determines elite behaviour and politics. The Somali cultural narratives also shape political and moral values. According to Sharma and Saxena (2025), the changing fairy tale motifs mirror the issues of the society and can encourage the morality, which provides the means of challenging the patriarchy and promoting democratic subjectivity.

Another factor that puts governance at risk is moral decadence. According to Oni and the Polish Academy of Sciences (2024), the deterioration of ethical norms is associated with inequality, instability, and globalization contributing to greater social fragmentation and crime. The issue of moral devaluation should consequently be addressed in enhancing political stability. Traditionally, clans have been the units of government in Somalia which were modified in the colonial and post-independence interventions without abandoning their essential elements (Menkhaus, 2007). The five biggest clan families; Darood, Hawiye, Dir, Digil-Mirifle, comprise fluid and hierarchical forms that had historically controlled access to resources and political power through xeer and elders councils (Lewis, 2002). The colonial preference also continued to instill looting and influenced subsequent conflicts (Besteman, 1996).

Historical Evolution of Clan in Somalia

The Somali clan system is a deep rooted kinship-founded social structure whereby individuals are descended to a shared ancestor through a patrilineal segmentary lineage structure that defines identity, social relations, resource access, conflict management and political behaviour (Lewis, 1988; Hinds, 2013; Metz, 1992; Hammond, 2013). On the most general level, the Somali society is divided into the Samale and the Sab, which are symbolically connected to Aqil ibn Abi Talib of the Quraysh and thus with the blood of the Prophet Muhammad (Korotayev and Khayrullin, 2024). The pastoralist clans of the Samale are Dir, Darood, and Hawiye who speak the Maxaa tiri dialect and control the northern and central parts. The Sab include the Digil and the Mirifle also referred to as the Rahanweyn who are primarily agro pastoralists in the inter riverine south and speak the Maay dialect (Fox, 2015; Korotayev and Khayrullin, 2024). Such divisions

are the result of historical settlement, mode of livelihood, and political marginalization, as pastoralist clans usually possess more political power in the past (Korotayev and Khayrullin, 2024).

Somali social structure is based on a lineage, language, ethnicity, and territory, and the pastoralists are more committed compared to urban dwellers (Hammond, 2013). The structure of clan is in form of families, clans, sub clans and dia paying groups that have mutual responsibility and compensation (de Waal and Mayall, 1995). Xeer is a traditional legal system under which the elders settle disputes and preserve social order that governs the system and is a decentralized governance which has led to stability in places like Somaliland and Puntland where traditional rule is integrated with the contemporary governance (Ali, 2016; Hoehne, 2015).

Clan politics were formalized by colonial regimes which established fluid clan territories and post independence period especially under Siad Barre redefined clan politics. Although he did not support clannism, Barre made himself pro-Marehan sub clan and marginalized the rest, particularly the Isaaq, which further divided society (ACAPS, 2025). The state breakdown gave rise to clan militias and the 4.5 formula that gave political representation to the large clans and strengthened the politics of zero sum (ACAPS, 2025). There is also a hierarchy where a caste like hierarchy disadvantages the groups of people who include Midgan, Tumul, Bantu, and Benadiri (Samad, 2002; Hinds, 2013). The studies have found that clan systems are not necessarily divisive but become a challenge when they are manipulated by the elites or they are sidelined in the state building processes and to have a lasting peace it is important to appreciate and incorporate Indigenous systems of governance (Gundel, 2009; Lewis, 1988; Hoehne, 2015).

Colonial Powers and the Clan System

European colonialists interacted and altered the precolonial African social and political systems to gain administrative control that has permanent impacts on government, provision of social goods, and social trust. They varied in approaches significantly. British indirect rule tended to absorb already existing chiefly institutions, enabling them to operate under different forms, whereas French direct rule tended to oust Indigenous authority with centralized bureaucracy (Lee, 2022). These variations justify why precolonial political centralization is associated with increased trust in chiefs and improved infrastructure in Anglophone Africa, but not in Francophone regions but also with infrastructure benefits (Lee, 2022).

The colonial policies transformed the Indigenous governance through the fixation of the fluid clan and ethnic identities into strict categories and disrupted land tenure in favor of welfare and resource extraction which became the foundations of the extractive institutions (Pillon and Sodter, 1991; Heldring and Robinson, 2012). In decentralized state systems like Somalia and Sierra Leone, colonial rulers drew strict boundaries and artificial

chieftaincies undermining the social unity and establishing a ground on which post independence would not proceed smoothly (Heldring and Robinson, 2012). In centralized countries like Rwanda, colonialists strengthened ethnic cleavage by administrative identity categories that later led to the violence (Heldring and Robinson, 2012).

There is still debate as to the survival of colonial legacies. Other researchers focus on the long term impacts (Heldring and Robinson, 2012; Moran, 2024), and Maseland (2018) also believes that the colonial features, including the presence of settlers or the length of the administration, cannot be considered explanatory factors after three decades. This perspective states that modern development trends are more and more precolonial and geographically determined such as disease environment, agricultural potential, and latitude (Maseland, 2018).

Colonialism was not in fact homogenous but heterogenous and related to local systems. Even though Indigenous governance was interfered with and inequalities ingrained (FemNorthNet, 2016), it has a debated long term developmental effect. According to Heldring and Robinson (2012), there is no more developed nation in the Sub Saharan Africa due to the colonization process, and Maseland (2018) claims that the African states are slowly breaking these bonds.

In Somalia, the colonialists transformed the clan institutions by forming strict categories which were convenient to administration (Ingiriis, 2018). The process of forcible consolidation of independent polities of autonomous clan based in one state in 1960 disregarded historic regional plurality and proved unsustainable (Ingiriis, 2018). The further disenfranchisement of Indigenous governance was through centralization post independence under the rule of Siad Barre and the models of state building by outside powers (Elmi, 2013). Conversely, other areas like Somaliland and Puntland established stability by developing hybrid systems that incorporated xeer, elders, and contemporary systems (Gaas, 2018; Menkhaus, 2004). These strategies are based on the adaptive clan identities that facilitate security and welfare of the people (Menkhaus, 2004). The emergence of the localized clan polities since 1991 indicates the restitution of the precolonial patterns of governance, indicating that the sustainable peace in Somalia can be achieved by reinforcing the Indigenous systems instead of using external templates only (Ingiriis, 2018; Elmi, 2013; Gaas, 2018).

Post-Independence and State-Building

Since the attainment of independence in 1960, the successive Somali administrations had tried to repress the clan identities to promote a united nationalism of the Somali people. But the military government of Siad Barre (1969-1991) began to rely more on the patronage of clans and marginalized some groups, especially the Isaaq in the north and sparked clan-based opposition that led to the civil war and disintegration of the state in 1991 (Compagnon, 1998).

Broadly speaking, there are conflicting opinions about the reasons for state collapse in Somalia. The paper by Guudle and Ozev (2019) examines the political economy of Somalia during the authoritarian administration of the so-called Scientific Socialist Siad Barre (1969-1991), and states that it was the instrumentalization of clan identities, mismanagement of the economy, and hyper-militarization of the regime that led to state collapse, rather than primordial clan divisions. The authors criticize traditionalist accounts that pin the collapse of Somalia on the country's inborn clannishness, but take an instrumentalist approach, focusing on elite manipulation and the devastating effects of socialist policies to be implemented with Soviet assistance. They show how the government of Barre centralised power, eliminated democratic institutions, redirected investment towards security and administration and the promotion of anti-clan rhetoric and at the same time favouring his own Marehan subclan, which only further aggravated grievances and the armed opposition. The paper argues that Somali Scientific Socialism was not really an ideological effort but a survival mechanism of the regime, which eventually resulted to economic breakdown, rampant murder and disintegration of the state by 1991.

Hassan Mudane (2018) claims that the regime of one of the repressive authoritarian states, Siad Barre, turned into the trigger of the full-scale civil war. Barre centralised power at first by overthrowing the government in a military coup, and advancing ideologies of Scientific Socialism, backed by the Soviet Union, which led to the abolishment of democratic institutions and suppression of political opposition. Even with the rhetorical commitment of national unity and anti-clannism, the regime systematically controlled the definition of clan identities, favouring his own Marehan subclan and discriminating against others, especially the Isaaq in the north, by targeting them through selective violence and economic marginalization. This instrumentalization of clan politics, coupled with economic mismanagement, hyper-militarization and the dissipation of state legitimacy, contributed to the rampant oppositions and the eventual disintegration of states by the year 1991. Mudane emphasizes that the civil war did not just follow primordial differences between the clans but rather it was a consequence of conscious state policies and elite politics within an ever-repressive and exclusionary regime.

Certain stories dispute that Somalia is Failed State. The analyses compiled by the National Civic Forum, 2010, argues with the traditional accounts of the Republic of Somalia as an ungoverned or failed state; rather, the authors emphasize the adaptability and resilience of civil society and informal institutions in the face of the lack of a central government. The paper proposes that Somali societies have produced market-oriented solutions in areas like telecommunication, finance (e.g., hawala remittance systems) and education by establishing grass-roots entrepreneurial and clan-based governance systems. It underlines how the civil society in Somalia,

including elders, business associations, religious leaders, and networks of diaspora, has not been a deterrent; rather, it has been playing an active role in promoting the localized governance, service delivery, and conflict resolution. The authors criticize the top-down externally imposed models of state-building as being detached with realities in Somalia and propose policy approaches that are sensitive and responsive to indigenous mechanisms of order, accountability and economic innovation as the key to a sustainable peace and development.

Clan Systems in Contemporary Politics

The use of clan system has been a major factor in the politics of Somalia, the social organization, modes of governance, and conflict patterns. To most Somalis, affiliation to the clan is a major form of identity which takes precedence over loyalty to the country in many cases. In the year 1991, Somalia disintegrated into clan regions following the fall of the central government. Without the national government, clan elders and militias took power by relying on the strength of clan solidarity (tol) to obtain their authority and security (Menkhaus, 2007). It was also at this time that regional governments began to form, including Somaliland, which was dominated by the Isaaq clan, and Puntland, which was dominated by the Majeerteen sub-clan of the Darood. The two areas incorporated the representation of the clan in their government systems.

The importance of power-sharing and especially the 4.5 formula has been a factor in contemporary Somali politics, even though power-sharing was meant to be a short-term arrangement after the civil war. This system that was formally unveiled in the peace conference in Arta in 2000 came up with a multi-party system and universal suffrage. After a provisional constitution was adopted in 2012 that also favors a multi-party system and universal suffrage (reflected in the 0.5 group), the 4.5 system has survived.

Although this system has ensured that certain clans are represented, it has also ensured that there is a preserved elite, hindered meritocracy, and discrimination based on gender due to the value of patriarchy (Somali Dialogue Platform & Somali Public Agenda, 2023). Moreover, the formula has institutionalized clan identity in the institutions of the state and it is the one that has weakened the legitimacy of the elders of the clan, blocked one-person-one-vote elections, and created exclusion and tokenism. These problems pose great challenges to the democratization and good governance process in Somalia. In 2004, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) came up with a formula of 4.5 that is used to divide the seats in parliament, where four large clans, which constitute the majority, receive 4 points, and the other 0.5 is allocated to minority clans (Hoehne, 2015). Even though this formula was in the name of inclusivity, it institutionalized clan identities in institutional politics, in most cases against merit and nation-building as ruler.

In Somalia, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS)

which was established in 2012 continues to use a clan-based political structure. The interim constitution equally recognizes the representation of the clans in the Upper House of Parliament where each of the federal member states has an equivalent number of seats regardless of the number of people, reaffirming back to clan-based federalism (Ingieris & Hoehne, 2013).

The elections are indirect and clan based. In 2016, 2021-2022, the model of a clan representative was arranged, the elders decided on the representatives, who, in their turn, elected legislators, who chose the president. Though this system reduces the possibilities of mass violence, it has been accused as one of the systems that enable the elite to grab positions, corruption, and marginalization of women and the young population (Bradbury, 2019).

The 4.5 system developed in post-civil war Somalia in 1991 to replace the failed state was a clan-based political power-sharing system which allocates parliamentary representation to 5 categories, in which the four major clan families (Darood, Dir, Hawiye and Digil-Mirifle) and a fifth (minority clans) category have an equal share in the political weight of any one of the major ones. The system itself was initially designed in the form of a transitional system to offer a stable ground by offering inclusive representation where each of the four main clans is given 49 seats, and minority groups are given 29 seats, and a place of women nevertheless, a new form of representation was the system which has given a stronghold of the clans in the state institutions. Using the pastoralist and socially based context of Somalia, where the clan has always been a means of identification, security and a method of resolution of interpersonal conflicts, this formula has been used to enhance the loyalty of clans above the allegiance of the nations, political hierarchies and the marginalization of communities and minorities, and women. Consequently, the scholars indicate that it is necessary to go beyond the 4.5 system to not only eradicate the systemic inequalities (Brosius, 2021) but also move to the system of governance that relies on merit, universal suffrage, and a fully open political choice (Jama, 2018). The problem of such clan dynamics has been critical to the creation of social cohesion and inclusive democratic leadership considering that Somalia requires national cohesion and proper state building (Ken-Anaukwu, 2023).

Moreover, reform in the security department is also influenced by the clan affiliations. Somali National Army (SNA) is often regarded as being split based on the clans, and this fact weakens its effectiveness against non-state actors like Al-Shabaab (Williams, 2018). Clan militia, e.g., the Ma'awisley in the central Somalia, on the other hand, have played a critical role in the war against the Al-Shabaab, which shows the dual nature of the concept of clan mobilization as a force of instability and provider of local security.

The resilience of the clan politics is a significant problem to the state-building and democratization as well as the human rights. The institutions of the people are normally

compromised by the loyalty based appointments which are not anchored on competence but rather on clans. Still, minority clans and marginalized communities, like Bantu and Benadiri communities, are systemically excluded (UNDP, 2020).

The influence of the identity of the clan on the social and political life of the present-day Somalia remains a standard of personality security, access to resources and political behaviour, respondents rank it as important or very important, and they say that it makes a strong influence on their political views (Hussein, M. A., 2025). Clan politics, no matter how central it is, have encouraged systemic inequity as the respondents have lamented political marginalization by being clan members at the expense of the minorities and thereby loses its credibility in state institutions. The absence of substantive appreciation of various clan identities, especially the political representation and economic sustenance is enumerated as the causative factor of instability which is further exacerbated by the old historical scores, which, perhaps, was not reconciled since the era of the Siad Barre that is still the source of inter clan resentment and mobilization (Hussein, 2025).

Despite the fact that the traditional institutions like *xeer* (customary law) plays the role of localized means of governance and dispute resolution in the vacuum created by weak state institutions, it also poses a hindrance towards the establishment of a single national system of law. Also, federalism that was to embrace the differences of the clans has instead reinforced clans rule, promoted the conflict, and separated the authority, which has served to create further rivalry in the resources and power as opposed to national solidarity (Hussein, 2025).

However, there are scholars, who think that the clan organization can be used to benefit. Mediation in the local conflict and reconciliation through Local conflict resolution institutions, such as *shir* (clan assemblies) have worked well on the local conflict (Ahmed & Green, 1999). Moreover, the civic nationalism of the local civil society organizations is being spread more than the clan identity particularly among the urban young people and diaspora.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is based on the segmentary lineage model that was popularized by Evans-Pritchard. This anthropological hypothesis states that the societies were arranged around systems of unilineal descent, a system of corporate lineage segments, and residence patterns in accordance with the kinship, are more likely to conflict as a result of inherent requirement to mobilize in defence of the lineage counterparts. It has been demonstrated that segmentary lineage societies are far more conflictual, in all manifestations (civil, non-civil, localized intra-group), more frequent. Most importantly, such conflicts become more retaliatory, more enduring, and increased in scale, which confirms the theoretical mechanism according to which minor conflicts develop into bigger ones due to nested alliances between kinship (me against my brother;

my brother and I against my cousin...). Hence, it is possible to mobilize fast and in scale in conflict using segmentary lineage organization, which is a central structural source of violence in Africa and perhaps elsewhere (Moscona,, Nunn and Robinson, 2020).

Segmentary lineage model one type of political organization typical of stateless societies - societies with no centralized power, no formal bureaucracy, and no formal institutions of coercion. Political order is achieved by means of kinship and unilineal descent in such societies, with social organization structured into nested and opposing parts (e.g. lineages in clans). The model works under the following principle: smaller segments tend to feud amongst themselves, but they all consolidate when fighting another larger segment. This relationship allows the regulation of conflicts via fusion and fission along the lineage, and such relationship mechanisms as blood feuds, exogamy, and cross cutting ties are used to balance tension and ensure equilibrium (Indira Gandhi National Open University).

The research is based on the theory of clan identity as a paradoxical but essential force in Somalia society. The research focuses on the development of the Somali clan system an institution that historically was based on nomadic pastoralism and which was organized around substantial patrilineal descent groups into a political institution of the foundational and functionally equivalent kind as seen in contemporary polities. The study challenges the dual nature of clans as protective networks in the society and a cause of fragmentation especially in the post-state-collapse period, whereby clan affiliations have been formalized in the governance process such as the 4.5 power-sharing formula.

Research Gaps

The politics of clan structures in Somalia is a complex interplay of historical development and modern challenges that requires thorough analysis. Kozachenko (2024) provides essential background information about the political elite and emphasizes the need to reevaluate traditional approaches through the lens of global factors. This perspective is particularly relevant in Somalia, where politics have historically been dominated by clan-centered systems. The development of these systems within the context of globalization and technology remains underexplored, especially regarding the influence of transnational organizations and international bodies on local clan dynamics. Understanding these interactions is crucial for explaining the legitimacy crises faced by political elites in Somalia, particularly in the context of postmodernism and external influences.

Although the article by Barabash (2020) can be viewed as an individual work on political changes in Latin America and the Caribbean, it has provided a comparative perspective within which one can examine the situation in Somalia. These issues of identity and self-awareness in these areas echo with the Somali setting, where clan allegation plays a significant role in affecting political

behaviour and governance. Nevertheless, what exactly ought to be the response to the question of how the processes of clan identities interplay with contemporary state-making and legislation in Somalia is poorly covered. Liang and Wu (2024) dwell upon the idea of preserving cultural heritage, and the significance of traditional procedures in modern conditions is highlighted. This theme is also relevant to the Somali culture, with clan systems being one of their cultural aspects and heritage. But the modern issues that these systems have to deal with like urbanization and globalization is something that requires further discovery. The insight into how clans change the old ways in order to keep their culture relevant in the fast-evolving world may be of great benefit on the sustainability of Somalia identity.

The interrelation of these works supports the research to emphasize the necessity of multidimensional analysis of the dynamics of the clan in Somalia, including the contribution of the political changes, the preservation of the cultural heritage, and the influence of globalization. This comprehensive knowledge will be the stepping stone of even stronger ways of governing the people in a manner that honours them and incorporates their clan identities in the larger context of national cohesiveness and development.

Research Objectives

The overall objective of this paper is to critically examine the historical evolution and contemporary political dynamics of the Somali clan system to understand its dual role as both a source of resilience and a driver of fragmentation, and to inform context-sensitive pathways for inclusive governance and sustainable state-building in Somalia.

Specifically, the paper aimed to:

- Trace the historical trajectory of the Somali clan system—from its pre-colonial foundations as a segmentary, patrilineal kinship structure through its transformation
- Investigate the institutionalization of clan in contemporary formal and informal governance
- Explore the functionality of clan identity in Somalia
- Assess Somali public and elite perceptions of the legitimacy, relevance, and future of clan-based political organization
- Propose alternative governance models that move beyond rigid clan primacy

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the political dynamics of clan systems in Somalia in a comprehensive and analytically robust manner. By integrating the statistical breadth afforded by quantitative data with the contextual and interpretive depth generated through qualitative inquiry, the methodological approach enables a multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The design was

intentionally developed to capture both the prevalence and distribution of attitudes among a diverse Somali population and the nuanced, historically situated interpretations advanced by individuals with substantive experience in Somalia's socio-political context. Conducted between 1 June and 15 July 2025, the research comprised three mutually reinforcing components: a structured online survey, in-depth key informant interviews, and an extensive systematic review of relevant literature.

Quantitative data collection commenced with the administration of a self-completed online questionnaire designed to generate standardized evidence on perceptions of clan influence, preferences regarding governance arrangements, and interpretations of historical developments. The instrument included demographic variables, such as age, gender, region of origin, and occupation; Likert-scale items measuring perceived clan influence across five domains of formal politics; agreement-scale statements addressing clan identity and functionality; and multiple-choice items concerning preferred pathways for reform. The survey produced 205 complete and analytically usable responses. Respondents were selected through stratified distribution across professional networks, academic institutions, civil society organizations, diaspora associations, and government-affiliated bodies. This stratification supported representation across salient population dimensions, thereby strengthening external validity while also accommodating the logistical and security constraints associated with conducting research in Somalia.

Survey data were subsequently imported into statistical software for cleaning, coding, and analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, were employed to summarize respondent characteristics and patterns of response. To assess measurement reliability, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for multi-item constructs, including "clan as a barrier to unity" and "support for hybrid governance." Constructs achieving $\alpha \geq 0.70$ were retained for subsequent analysis. In addition, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine bivariate relationships, such as the association between perceived clan influence in public resource allocation and support for reform of the 4.5 power-sharing system, with statistical significance established at $p < 0.05$.

The qualitative component consisted of 23 in-depth interviews with participants purposively selected based on professional expertise, institutional authority, or community influence. The sample included current and former government officials, clan elders, academics specializing in Somali studies, civil society actors, journalists, diaspora leaders, and a representative of an international governance organization. This purposive sampling strategy facilitated access to information-rich cases capable of elucidating historical continuities, contemporary governance challenges, and policy-related trade-offs. Interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes and were conducted via Zoom, WhatsApp, or face-to-face

where security conditions permitted. All interviews were undertaken with informed consent. An interview guide aligned with the survey themes provided a framework for

systematic inquiry while allowing sufficient flexibility to explore emergent issues. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated

Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	123	60%
Female	82	40%
Location		
Inside Somalia	154	75%
Somali Diaspora	51	25%
Role		
Government Official/Politician	74	36%
Academic/Researcher	48	23%
Civil Society Activist	26	13%
Student/Youth	22	11%
Businessperson	14	7%
Clan Elder	10	5%
Journalist	8	4%
Other	3	1%

where required. The transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis using a hybrid coding strategy, whereby initial codes were derived deductively from the research objectives and additional themes were generated inductively from the empirical material. Coding was conducted iteratively, with constant comparison used to refine conceptual categories and strengthen analytical rigor. Representative quotations were selected to illustrate prevailing patterns as well as salient points of divergence. Throughout the research process, an extensive review of the literature provided the theoretical and historical foundation for the study. Drawing on peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, policy reports, and primary historical documents, the review situated clan dynamics within broader debates on colonialism, state formation, and post-1991 governance in Somalia. It further informed the development of research instruments and supported theoretical triangulation, particularly through the comparison of primordialist and instrumentalist interpretations of clan.

Finally, to enhance validity and policy relevance, the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated at the interpretation stage through a complementarity-based triangulation strategy. Survey results identified dominant trends and statistically significant associations, while key informant interviews provided explanatory depth, historical contextualization, and critical reflection. This methodological triangulation ensured that empirical patterns were not interpreted in isolation but were instead situated within their broader socio-historical context, thereby producing a holistic, credible, and policy-relevant understanding of the political dynamics of clan systems in contemporary Somalia.

Table 2: Clan Influence in Formal Politics

Domain	High/Very High Influence (%)
Presidential & parliamentary elections	98%
Formation of Federal Member States	95%
Allocation of public resources (jobs, budgets, aid)	91%
Security and justice provision	93%
Relations with neighbouring countries	87%

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Empirical Results

Demographic Profile (N = 205)

According to Table 1, the sample size of 205 contains 60 and 40% males and females, respectively, which means that there is a significant representation of the genders. A huge percentage (75) of it is found within Somalia and 25 percent is found within the Somali diaspora. Professionally, the highest number (36 percent) belongs to the category of government officials and politicians, and the second in number (23 percent) are academics and researchers, which indicates that there is a high presence of people involved in the governing community and research. The diversity is also brought by civil society activists (13%), students/youth (11%), businesspersons (7%), clan elders (5%), journalists (4%), and few others (1%). This distribution shows a variety of views which might be used to develop the knowledge of the clan

relations and their effects on the modern Somali politics.

Perceived Clan Influence in Formal Politics

According to Table 2, clan systems exert a very strong influence on various aspects of political life in Somalia. A significant majority of respondents (98 out of the total) acknowledge high levels of clan influence in presidential and parliamentary elections. Additionally, 95 percent agree that clan relations significantly shape the Federal Member States, while 91 percent believe that clan affiliation is crucial for the distribution of social amenities, such as employment, budget allocations, and aid. Moreover, 93 percent emphasize the role of clans in security and the delivery of justice, and 87 percent recognize its impact on their relationships with neighbours. This considerable influence underscores the importance of clan identity in both historical and contemporary governance in Somalia. Respondents perceive the influence of clans as overwhelming in formal political processes. The data confirms that clan dominance remains prevalent in official government affairs, with almost all respondents (91-98%) ranking clan influence as high or very high regarding elections, the formation of federal states, resource distribution, and the provision of security. This aligns with historical and academic narratives (Menkhau, 2004; Ingiriis, 2018), which suggest that in the absence

security within the clan networks. The historical context of the failure of the state which was worsened by the military rule of General Siad Barre created a security dilemma as different clans armed themselves against any threats that they perceived to be posed by their neighbours. The conflict perpetuation mechanisms based on clan affiliations have made it difficult to achieve the goal of national unity and proper governance (Makhubela, 2016).

Attitudes Toward Clan Identity and Functions

Table 3 shows a deep-rooted ambivalence of the respondents in Somalia with regard to clan identity. Most people (63%), find that the identity of the clan is rather significant and more important than national identity in individual and communal belongings. Also, 89 percent of people concur that clans are important in offering necessary social protection and 85 percent of people believe that clans are important in ensuring social order. Nevertheless, the impact of the negative connotations of the clan arrangement is also well-apprehended, as 77% of the respondents explained that clan identities undermined national unity, 82% stated that it facilitated corruption and nepotism, and 73% said it had a harmful effect on the participation of youth and women. This duality indicates the practicality of the role of clans in guaranteeing security and social bonding, and also the realization of the difficulty of the clans to the overall national integration and fair rule.

The two aspects also mirror lived experience in that clan provides short-term safety and fairness (via xeer and elders) at the expense of meritocracy, inclusiveness, and national unity. One Hirshabelle respondent said to me: clan is the cement and the glue that binds the society as well as the wedge that separates it.”

Key informants confirmed that clan identity in Somalia serves as a primary component of social organization as well as a complex network of relations that has a tremendous impact on both personal and social experiences. In its pure form, clan affiliation is not a symbolic source of pride; it is a life blood, which provides some defence, allows entry to social networks, and grounds people within a collective historical and cultural history. Large clan groups are not only the demographic category but are also the bearers of rich oral tradition and intergenerational stories that keep the culture alive, and many Somalis hold it close to their heart.

However, this highly inculcated sense of belonging comes with great complications. Although the clan structures could be used as a means of conflict resolution and social unity, they can also be perceived as the source of political fragmentation. The instrumentalization of clan identity in the ruling system is often an activity that exacerbates the division in the society instead of creating national unity in a country where the civil conflict has taken long. A prominent example of this process is the 4.5 power-sharing formula, according to which the four large clan families and a minority coalition were given representation in politics. This system is structured in such a way that it is said to be inclusive, but in reality, it usually establishes the

Table 3: Clan Identity and Functions

Statement	Agreement (%)
Clan identity is more important than national identity	63%
Clan provides essential social protection	89%
Clan helps maintain social order	85%
Clan hinders national unity	77%
Clan enables corruption/nepotism	82%
Clan undermines youth/women's participation	73%

of a powerful central state, clan networks often replace formal institutions. However, this dominance is not celebrated; it is endured.

Key informants restated that the formation and influence of civil militia gangs in Somalia is unavoidably associated with the inception of the central government in 1991- a critical point that triggered the disintegration of state power and the formation of clan-based military groups. With the state disintegration emptied by oppressive and clanizing policies of the military rule of General Siad Barre, the clans needed to form militias, which were largely identified as self-defence, and used the existing kinship networks to recruit, provide logistical support and legitimize the militia.

The development and influence of the civil militia groups in Somalia according to Makhubela 2016 occurred as a result of the fall of the central government in 1991. These militia groups that were usually connected to different clans came up as a response to lack of state authority and

existing hierarchies and may discriminate against smaller or less politically powerful groups.

The shades of clan identity are complicated further in the diaspora. Somali people living in other countries often have to play between the challenges of cultural alienation and negotiation between their traditional backgrounds and the requirements and expectations of the host countries. Clan identification is in some way a life and death matter to a lot of them as they seek to find a sense of stability and belonging in the face of this disorientation. However, this dependence on the relations between clans brings its own paradox: on the one hand, it may enforce the community bonds internally and give emotional and practical support, but on the other hand, it can protect the social integration and the emergence of more inclusive and cross-clan or transnational identities. Studies point to the dualism of the clan. Clan identity is one of the pillars of social organization that provide individuals with a sense of belonging that is both very profound and also provides practical means of protection, mutual support and continuity of culture. The Somali clan system is based on centuries-old nomadic pastoralist traditions, with major patrilineages being perpetuated by complex oral genealogies linking the current generations to a common ancestral past (Ken-Anaukwu, 2023). Clans were used in the past as social and political institutions in managing resources, in dispute resolution under customary law (xeer) and in collective security. A major problem, though, with this ingrained system, is that as much as it creates internal unity, it can equally segregate society especially when the clan affiliations are politicized. The institutionalization of the clan identity in the governance system, especially with the 4.5 formula of power sharing, is an example of how the idea of trying to make sure that the majority are represented can unintentionally reinforce hierarchies and place minority groups at a disadvantage. Somali negotiates such intricate identities within the diaspora as these people face cultural dislocation; to most of them, these ties to clan represent a critical source of connection to the heritage and community, but also can make the process of integration and the development of a more inclusive national or transnational Somali identity more difficult (Ken-Anaukwu, 2023). In such a way, the clan identity is always dynamic and paradoxical, at the same time holding and dividing, preserving the traditional and modern.

Clan Influence in Daily Life

As a rule set of expected behaviour, the key informants related that in normal life, individuals tend to have the reactions of other individuals considered depending on the clan affiliations. As an illustration, a community member indicated that people could explain the behaviour of their neighbour based on the concept of a clan loyalty, which plays distinct roles in shaping the decision-making process, including whether to offer assistance during the needy situations or to solve conflicts peacefully. Personal choices can be determined by the expectation of how

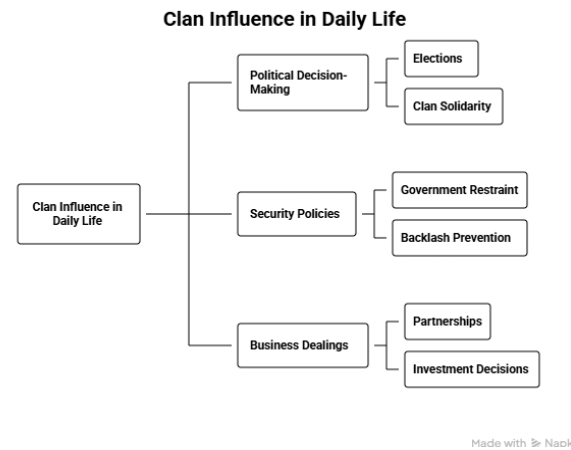


Figure 1: Clan Influence in Daily Life in Somalia

Table 4: Perception on 4.5 Political System

Statement	Agreement (%)
The 4.5 system ensures fair representation	39%
Clan-based appointments undermine meritocracy	86%

their clan will respond to them and this encourages societal unity and lessening division.

Also, the relationships of clans play a significant role in explaining alliances and antagonisms in politics. When politicians decide, they are usually expecting the reaction of their tribal or group. As an example, a leader can evade some policies that may attract retaliation of the clans that he/she disagrees with but instead compromises in favour of the larger clan interests. This expectation does not only concern immediate responses, but also long-term relations and building trust.

The take into account of clan loyalty has a strong influence on political strategies as it can be seen in

Strengths and Weaknesses of Clan-Based System

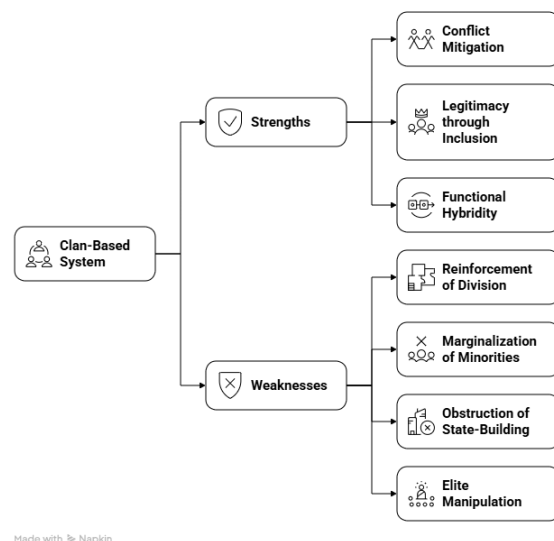


Figure 2: Strengths and Weaknesses of 4.5 Clan-based Political System

Figure 1. In some instances like in elections, the focus of candidates is usually their clan base to ensure they get votes because they understand that it is possible to have collective actions like rallying or mobilization against a rival candidate. In case a candidate is seen as betrayal of the clan interests, he might not only be retaliated politically, but also socially.

When it comes to security, the expectation of clan retaliations is very significant in policy formulation. Making security plans, leaders may think of the possibility of actions being taken that may trigger clan-based revenge. As an example, the government forces can be restraint in operations so that they do not irritate some clans, as they know that retaliation may upset the state more than before.

As far as business is concerned, alliances may make or break partnerships and negotiation through affiliations of clans. Businesses in most cases coincide with clans to take advantage of sharing resources and assistance. An example is that a business venture might have more chances of succeeding when supported by a stronger clan since this would be a guaranty of protection and entry into local networks. The foreseen aid or resistance of the clan can play an important role in decision making on investments and market strategies,

Views on the 4.5 Power-Sharing System

According to Table 4, most people consider the 4.5 system as discriminatory and isolating. The political order, the 4.5 formula of power-sharing, in Somalia, post-1991, is becoming unpopular. It guarantees fair representation according to only 39 percent and 86 percent say that it weakens meritocracy because of clan-based appointments. More importantly, the largest block among all respondents, 52 percent, picks Reform or reform the 4.5 system as their priority of the policy. This is a turning point: the formula which previously was perceived as inevitable and necessary to be included is now discussed as an obstacle to state-building.

The key informants have highlighted that tribalism in Somalia is a socio-political institution that is well entrenched, and it highly influences the management of government, social practices, and economic opportunities. The existing clan loyalties tend to override the loyalty to the state and this results into a disjointed politics with clan interests destroying the building of a unified national identity and effective governance. To them, as much as the historical basis of tribalism has assured them of security and community, it is also a major problem to the formation of the state, especially with the power-sharing system based on clans (4.5 clan system) that encourages corruption and inefficiency.

The institutionalization of governance within Somalia by clan as indicated in Figure 2 shows a two-sided reality whereby on one hand, it provides the critical stabilizing functions whereas on the other, it continues to generate deep structural problems. The strengths are that the

Table 5: Proposed Reforms

Reform Preference	Frequency	Percentage
Reform or replace the 4.5 system	107	52%
Invest in national identity campaigns	42	20%
Support hybrid governance (clan + formal institutions)	31	15%
Promote youth and women's political participation	18	9%
Let Somalis lead without external interference	7	4%

4.5 power-sharing system helped to avoid the complete marginalization of the major clans and reduced the level of large-scale inter-clan warfare common in the 90ies (National Civic Forum, 2010); the system conferred a sense of legitimacy on the weak institutions of the state due to its formal recognition of the interests of the clans in the society where political trust is so deeply rooted in kinship (Elmi, 2013); that in the regions such as Somaliland and Puntland,

Nonetheless, these gains are undercut by serious flaws: the 4.5 formula institutionalises political competition as a zero-sum game between lineage groups by excluding merit and national unity, marginalising minority communities, such as the Bantu, Yibir, and Midgan, to an inferior position of 0.5, and by exclusionary, politically competitive politics, politically elites gain access to power and resources at the expense of the common good (National Civic Forum, 2010; Ingiriis, 2018).

The post-1991 governance structure of Somalia formally institutionalizes clan representation by the 4.5 formula of power-sharing, a political formula that gives the four major clan-families of the country equal voice, namely, Darood, Hawiye, Dir (including Isaaq) and Digil-Mirifle with the minority groups getting half a share as a block. This mechanism came up in the Arta peace process in 2000 as a pragmatic mode of including everybody when there seemed to be deep mistrust in clans due to the breakdown of the Siad Barre regime. It has since been emulated in the election of federal parliamentarians, the appointment of cabinet members and even in leadership in the successive transitional and federal governments.

Preferred Reform Pathways

The preferences of the respondents with regard to the reforms suggest that they strongly want to see the political structure in Somalia to be changed especially with regard to the current 4.5 power-sharing system as shown in Table 5. Most of the (52) respondents are in support of the reform or even an outset of this system which indicates a dissatisfaction with its current framework. Also, 20

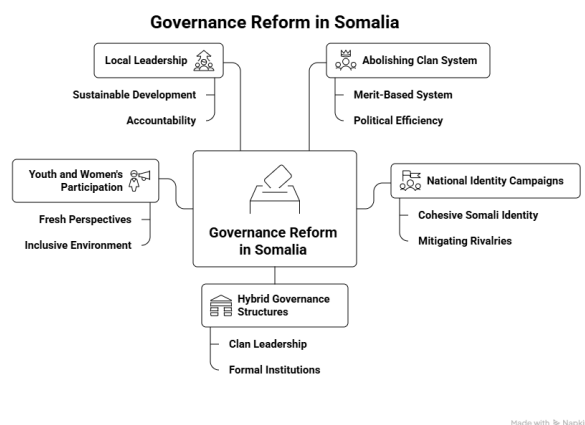


Figure 3: Proposed Governance Reform

percent of them accept the idea to invest in campaigns of national identity, which implies a movement towards building more integrated national consciousness. Hybrid, a blend of clan systems with formal systems receives 15% support indicating of the reality that clans will always stand in the governance. In the meantime, youth and women political involvement is encouraged by 9% of the respondents and only 4% want Somali to be allowed to be in control without outside interference. The findings highlight a general tendency in the area of inclusive governance reforms in order to respond to the dynamics of clans and pursue national unity.

The general view of the 23 key informants is a strong suggestion that the governance structure in Somalia needs reforms and especially the elimination of the 4.5 clan system. Most of them complained that the current system, originally meant to give fair representation among the clans has in fact promoted inefficiency and divisions which in turn hamper the national cohesion.

The informants unanimously said that the 4.5 formula of power sharing needs to be changed or scrapped completely. They pointed out that the belief of clan membership over merit has contributed to the disintegrated political dimension where political authority is in most cases based on the merit of nepotism and not merit. The move to merit system would not only make the political system efficient but would also foster a feeling of national pride and unity among all Somali. In keeping up with these

reforms, informants emphasized that there was need to invest into national identity campaigns in order to establish cohesive Somali identity that cuts across clan lines. These campaigns are regarded as essential in creating trust and collaboration between different communities that will help in reducing the existing deep-rooted competition that has been a long-standing personal vice among Somali communities.

Another recommendation provided by the informants was that a transitional framework could be a hybrid governance model that would integrate the leadership of the clan and formal institution. This strategy considers the value of the traditional system of governance but incorporates it into a more formal political system. It seeks to exploit the already existing clan dynamics to use to their advantage, which will enable co-operation between the formal and informal systems of governance. Also, the informants emphasized the need to facilitate political involvement of the youth and women. Their participation is regarded to be crucial towards introducing new visions and innovative ideas into the process of governance. Through empowerment of these groups, Somalia can have a more inclusive political landscape that represents a wide range of interests of the people. Finally, the necessity of Somali to take charge of their governance without outside influences spread like a wildfire. According to key informants, the local ownership is vital towards sustainable development and good governance. A scenario where Somali are able to influence their own politics will create a sense of accountability and strength which will ultimately result to a stronger and more cohesive country.

Institutional Integration and Civic Education

Table 6 indicates that the respondents agree on the hybrid, inclusive, and civic based reforms that consider the perennial roles of the clans, albeit the dysfunctions. Instead of demanding a complete abolition of the clan structures, respondents agree with a new hybrid system that incorporates the customary law (xeer) into the national justice system (90%), and also those that support inclusive reforms in constitution to govern the diversity of clan (92%). Also, 83 per cent are of the idea that civic education can be used to curb the excessive use of clan identity. Such a vision, which is consistent with views of such scholars as Gaas (2018) and Elmi (2013), should capitalize on the credibility of the clan systems but reduce their exclusivity to encourage a more context-specific approach, which is balanced between the traditional practices and the demands of modern governance.

Generational and Diaspora Patterns

The criticism of clan structures and the 4.5 power-sharing model in Somalia are intensified in younger, urban, and diaspora respondents, which suggests that the attitudes towards national identity have changed with a generation. Children and young people are especially interested in the abolition of the 4.5 system with youth being twice as

Table 6: Clan Integration into Governance

Statement	Agreement (%)
Traditional xeer should be integrated into national justice system	90%
Civic education in schools can reduce overreliance on clan	83%
Inclusive constitutional reform is best path to manage clan diversity	92%
Clan will remain central to Somali politics for the foreseeable future	78%

likely to support this idea as opposed to elders. Although 63% of the total number of respondents think that clan identity is more significant than national identity, this proportion declines to 48% of those aged less than 35, an indication of a slow but noticeable change to civic nationalism. Diaspora, though it appreciates the functionality of clans, show more support to national identity campaigns (20 percent) than 17 percent in the people living in Somalia as a result of experiencing less a society where clan-based identities are emphasized.

Among young and students, 68 percent would prefer to reform or change the 4.5 system and 73 percent would admit that the clan politics detract youth involvement in politics. Also, 64 percent give more importance to national identity campaigns which depicts a need to have wider engagement in the society. Conversely, diaspora respondents indicate 59% support of reforming the 4.5 system, compared with the 50 percent of their domestic counterparts, which further points out their convergence with more inclusive governance modes.

On the other hand, the elder generation of their clans is rather oriented on keeping the status quo as 80% of them support the idea of establishing hybrid system of governance functioning based on clan models and 90% confirm the role of clan in terms of social protection. The information highlights a country in limbo, where, though clans are practically essential (89% report them as a source of security), they are disapproved in politics, with 82% of the population associating them with corruption and 77% claiming that the group stifles national cohesion. The validity of the 4.5 system is questioned and more than half of the respondents expressed that the system needs to be changed. The ideal future is not the one of the clan abolitions but the vision of the institutional hybridity which incorporates *xeer* and the wisdom of elders into a reformed state. It is a pragmatic, context-sensitive vision of the political future of Somalia, based on the new strategies and principles of civic education, constitutionalism and greater youth engagement.

Segmentary Lineage vs. Lived Reality

Segmentary lineage as a concept of academic and policy discourse can be used as a theoretical rubric on which one can explain the Somali society as a set of clans that are able to divide into smaller units due to a range of factors, social, political, and economic. But in accordance with the details provided by the key informants, this framework tends to reduce the complexity of the clan politics as encountered by the people in their day-to-day lives. Consequently, two themes developed out of the conversations with the professionals. To begin with, it lacks correspondence with lived experiences. Although the segmentary lineage approach provides few aspects of structure, it does not explain how relationships among clans are fluid and dynamic. In the real world, clan loyalties and rivalries are likely to be caused by modern day issues, personal relations, economies and external political forces which do not necessarily fall under the

segmentary model.

The identity of the clans in Somalia is dynamic, contingent and tactical in nature. According to the observations of Lewis (2002), when it is beneficial, such as in situations of insecurity or limited resources, Somalia's will invoke the ties of the clan, but downplay them in urban, diasporic or work contexts. This was the instrumental application of clan during the civil war that ensued after the toppling of Siad Barre regime in 1991. Even though the war was presented as an inter-clan war, it was actually due to the power vacuum created by the fall of the state and, the leaders of the faction used clans rhetoric to enlist supporters and garner foreign support (Compagnon, 1998).

The case of the United Somali Congress (USC) of Hawiye against Darood supporters of the remnants of the Barre regime was not an eternal clan war but a political war to dominate Mogadishu and the national state apparatus. Likewise, modern violence in central Somalia, commonly described as a clash of clans, is often based on land ownership rights (grazing), land ownership (agriculture), or ownership of trade routes, and clan identifications are deployed to arrange violence (Menkhaus, 2014).

Second, political interference. Political actors have inappropriately used the segmentary lineage framework to support actions or policies. They can push communities to the extremes by pitting them against each other, or against a particular group, by appealing to the reaction of the people down the clan-lines, and gain advantages at the expense of their rivals. Such a reductionist approach may miss the possibility of cross-clan alliances and the intricacies of personal motives and ends up enforcing divisions.

The state practices and collective punishment depending on the membership of a particular clan were also used by key informants which has contributed greatly towards the entrenchment of clan as a major political identity in Somalia. Informants cited historical examples, including acting on collective punishment in specific clans by the Barre government during the civil war, of state behaviours that strengthen identities of the clans. The state, by using special treatment of selected clans to retaliate against them, incidentally, created a clan loyalty as communities afflicted united in their interests to defend themselves against the atrocities they perceive.

Similar tendencies can be traced in the modern contexts. Indeed, whenever state forces participate in punitive performances on the Federal Member States represented by clans, like the restriction of resources in Puntland and Jubaland, it not only enhances the cohesion of the clans but also bolsters the attitude that the clan membership is the only way to survive and be guarded. Such activities force people to be more affiliated to their clan, which is the point of protection and unity against state violence. This dynamic is also perpetuated by the fact that the state uses the nature of the clan affiliation as a way to enforce policies or even as a means to gain support. The leaders tend to organize their clans politically which forms

conditions in which the identity of that clan is reiterated constantly. It may create a vicious circle in which an identification formed by clan is not only a reaction to the outside influences but also a means of political manoeuvring.

Clan's Diminishing Role

Although the concept of clan is widespread in defining the politics of Somalia and informal institutions, known to be the foundation of dispute resolution, customary justice (xeer), social order and even formal procedures like those of peace negotiations and election of federal parliamentarians, informants acknowledged that its scope is not universal. Another important use of clan networks as the infrastructure of economic life: the system of hawala (informal money transfer), telecom providers, and transportation companies often use clan ties to save transaction costs, enforce contracts, and risk management where formal legal systems do not exist.

The salience of clan identity, as Ken-Anaukwu (2023) and other researchers note, is not quite total or ubiquitous; the role of the identified category is less evident in a number of essential contexts. In cities, such as Mogadishu, as an example, the role of clan membership is frequently overtaken by neighbourhood and career identity or political affiliation, because urbanization and several decades of displacement have softened the structure of lineages and created a more flexible, context-dependent identity (Elmi, 2013; Gaas, 2018).

In the same vein, religious movements, also with an ambitious Unitarians like the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in 2006 and subsequently Al-Shabaab, have also attempted to overcome clan affiliations through encouraging a unified Islamic identity, in this case with the UIC with its momentary power consolidation partially credited to its positioning with and not subordination to the clan elders (Gaas, 2018). To most of the Somalis, Sharia has been portrayed as a remedy to the divisive nature of the clans, as a source of alternative legal and social order.

Although in the diaspora, the role of clan networks in channelling remittances or mobilizing political votes will continue to play an important role, trans-clan projects (like organized famine relief, investments in national infrastructure such as universities) show the growing ability to be issue-focused solidarity, bypassing traditional affiliations (Gaas, 2018; National Civic Forum, 2010). Most importantly, new breeds of Somali - young people, civil society, and professional associations such as journalists, doctors and entrepreneurs - are steadily employing their visions of civic nationalism, human rights and inclusive development that directly criticize the primacy of clan logic (National Civic Forum, 2010).

Discussion

This paper will provide a thorough re-analysis of the Somali clan system, there beyond simplistic binaries of either barrier or solution to a more detailed, multi-faceted,

institution which has been informed by the legacies of the past, state instability, and modern aspirations to reform. Based on empirically gathered information and placed within a solid theoretical and scholarly approach, the results confirm the practical oneness of clan remains in the political and social life of Somalia- as a provider of the main means of governance, dispute resolution (xeer), and social safety in a society with no central government. This is consistent with the classical research by Menkhaus (2004), Gaas (2018), and Elmi (2013), who define clan as one of the rational responses to institutional vacuum instead of a cultural fossil. In fact 91-98% of the respondents are aware of the role of clan in governance, an aspect that indicates that it is still legitimate.

The study also supports the segmentary lineage model (Evans-Pritchard; Moscona, Nunn and Robinson, 2020) by showing that it is the process of alliances through kinship, which was segmented into smaller units, that allowed it to mobilize during crises fast. However, it is vital in extending this model by demonstrating that the same kind of logic can be used to encourage resilience, i.e., collective action, social safety nets, and localized systems of justice, especially in post-collapse settings. This is similar to Gundel (2009) and Menkhaus (2004) who hold that clan does not become destabilizing in its essence, rather it is when instrumentalized by elites or marginalized in transplanting into the state-building process.

The work supports the works of Hassan (2021), Guudle and Ozev (2019), and Mudane (2018), which other historians examine how the regime of Siad Barre used the clan identity as a weapon and weaponized the concept of anti-clannism and turned kinship into a means of repression and laid the foundation of further fragmentation in the post-1991 later. Our evidence supports this claim and shows that the modern Somali does not consider clan as a natural source of separation but a functional reaction to state failure-a view also expressed by the National Civic Forum (2010) and Ken-Anaukwu (2023), who aptly describe clan as a dagger wrapped in cloth and folklore.

More importantly, the research contributes to the body of knowledge by recording a major change in the attitude towards the clan between the generations and space, which is mostly under researched in the previous literature. Although Zakarie and Hared (2021) and Ingiriis (2018) attribute the conflict to clan, our data show that youth, women, and communities of diasporas are in a process of redefining identity, putting more emphasis on civic nationalism, professional association, or Islamic solidarity than family. Primacy of the clan is less supported by those under 35 (63 to 48), and only 39 per cent of respondents hold that the 4. 5 formula of power-sharing is fair to all (52 per cent do so now, and most have found the formula exclusionary and outdated). This is a sign of an incipient break with reliance on clan and a rising loss of faith in its political implications: 82% of people relate clan with corruption and nepotism and 77% of the people view

clan as a barrier to unity in the nation.

Instead of demanding the abolishment of clan, however, the respondents demand its reconfiguration in the constitution. The support of hybrid forms of governance is overwhelming: 90% of people in favour of incorporating xeer into the national justice system, 92 per cent in favour of constitutional reform which is inclusive and 83 per cent of those who think civic education can help people to lower their dependence on clan. This is an advanced agreement that good state-building should operate by using endogenous institutions and at the same time vigorously restrain their exclusivism against marginalized communities, such as the Bantu, Yibir, and Midgan, who have long been marginalized by the 4.5 formula (ACAPS, 2025; Ingiriis, 2018).

Lastly, the paper adds to more general theoretical discussions about moral devaluation (Oni, 2024) and elite transformation (Kozachenko, 2024) by demonstrating how the idea of clan-based nepotism is depleting morality, but how this has been challenged by new civic participants, particularly women (40% of all respondents) and youth (11%). The diaspora, in its turn, has a dual purpose: it strengthens transnational clan relations and at the same time creates trans-clan solidarity and new ethical codes (Sharma & Saxena, 2025).

By implication, this study replaces the policy argument of clan and state to how to make functional roles of clan and neutralize its dysfunctions. It disregards failed, Weberian state-building paradigms that habitually lack endogenous legitimacy by focusing on gender-inclusive elder councils, constitutionalizing traditional justice and civic education that fosters the development of critical contemplation of identity. The Somali people are not in the grip of clannism; it is bargaining a post-clan political fantasy- without abandoning its origins.

CONCLUSION

This paper took a critical look at the historical evolution and modern politics of the Somali clan system, and found out that it is two sided as it is both a source of resilience and political disintegration. Based on mixed-method research among 205 survey participants and 23 key informants, this study provides findings that contradict primordialist explanations with their assumption of clans as naturally divisive. Rather, as it has been argued by Menkhaus (2007), clans are a flexible social technology-a mobile idiom of political and economic exchange and not a determinate source of conflict.

The study has identified instrumental ambivalence in that although the respondents recognized that the unity of a nation is subordinated to clan identity, they do need the support of their clan networks to help them resolve disputes and to accredit them economically in the absence of good state apparatus. Most notably, 52 percent insist on revision or abolition of the 4.5 power-sharing formula which were most heavily criticized by young people and diaspora societies, which points out to the generation change to civic nationalism.

Instead of abolition of the clan, the respondents prefer the hybrid types of governance that includes traditional xeer law as a part of national justice systems, inclusive constitutional reforms, and civic education. The paper dispels the myth that draws the distinction between clan and state and proposes tactical interaction with local institutions. Somalia is in transit and is interested in a new social contract of a country where clan is the basis of and not a barrier to national institutions as a result of institutionalizing positive functionalities as well as repressing exclusionary practices.

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