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Freedom Status: Not Free

Aggregate Score: 5/100 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 7.0/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 7/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 7/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 11,100,000

Capital: Mogadishu

GDP/capita: \$549

OVERVIEW

Somalia has struggled to reestablish a functioning state since the collapse of an authoritarian regime in 1991. No direct national elections have been held to date, and the country's territory is divided among an internationally supported national government, the Shabaab militant group, a semiautonomous government in the Puntland region, and a separatist government in the Somaliland region. Political affairs are dominated by clan divisions, and ongoing insecurity has restrained the development of the economy and robust media and civil society sectors. In the absence of an effective court system, impunity for human rights abuses by both state and nonstate actors is the norm.

Key Developments in 2016:

- Indirect elections for the bicameral parliament began in October and continued through the end of the year, by which time most seats had been filled. Clan elders chose members of a limited electoral college, who in turn cast the votes for lawmakers. The resulting parliament was expected to vote on a new president in early 2017.
- The Shabaab militant group continued to carry out regular attacks on military, government, and civilian targets, employing suicide bombings, assassinations, mortar fire, and guerrilla-style assaults. The militants committed numerous human rights violations in areas under their control, though clan militias and progovernment forces were also criticized for violence and abuses against civilians.
- There were more than 1.1 million internally displaced people in 2016, including some 400,000 in Mogadishu.

Executive Summary:

Somalia's internationally recognized government proceeded with a plan for indirect parliamentary elections in 2016, as the security situation and other factors precluded direct national elections based on universal suffrage. Members of the 54-seat upper house were elected by state assemblies, while the lower house was

elected under a system in which 135 clan elders chose 275 electoral colleges, each of which comprised 51 people and elected one lawmaker.

The voting began behind schedule in October, and after a series of further delays, some seats had yet to be filled at year's end. Once the parliamentary elections could be completed in early 2017, the new members would elect a president for a four-year term. Corruption and vote buying reportedly played a major role in the elections. Direct national voting was not expected until 2020 at the earliest.

Although the elections were largely based on clan divisions, legislation signed by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in September would allow formal registration of political parties – for the first time since 1969 – after the completion of the election process. Some political associations had previously operated as de facto parties. Members of the new parliament were obliged to join a party by October 2018.

Somalian civil society has made modest gains in recent years as the government and international troops have reclaimed territory from the Shabaab, an extremist group that once controlled most of southern Somalia. There are functioning universities in Mogadishu and some other cities, and local nongovernmental organizations have been able to conduct a range of activities with international support, depending on security conditions. A relatively dynamic media sector, particularly radio stations and online outlets, has also developed in what remains an extremely inhospitable environment, with raids and arrests at media offices and at least three journalists killed in connection with their work during 2016, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. A new media law signed by the president in January raised concerns about arbitrary or restrictive regulations.

Meanwhile, the Shabaab are still an active presence in the country despite the combined efforts of the Somali military and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The militant group continued to attack both civilian and military targets throughout 2016. Additional abuses – including arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and indiscriminate attacks that resulted in civilian casualties – were reportedly committed by government forces as well as clan militias and AMISOM troops. In this volatile environment, violence against women has continued to escalate, and minors are allegedly recruited by all armed groups. The weak judicial system means that customary or Islamic courts are often the prevailing source of adjudication, particularly in more remote areas of the country.

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Somalia, see [Freedom in the World 2016](#).

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