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Freedom House

Freedom in the World 2022 - Somalia

Not Free

7

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 1 / 40[Civil Liberties](#) 6 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

7 / 100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Note

The numerical scores and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Somaliland, which is examined in a separate report. *Freedom in the World* reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Disputed territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report methodology and FAQ.

Overview

Somalia has struggled to reestablish a functioning state since the collapse of an authoritarian regime in 1991. Limited, indirect elections brought a federal government to power in 2012. By 2016, it had established five federal member states, though these semiautonomous regions are often at odds with the central government. The government's territorial control is also contested by a separatist government in Somaliland and by the Shabaab, an Islamist militant group. No direct national elections have been held to date, and political affairs remain dominated by clan divisions. Amid ongoing insecurity, human rights abuses by both state and nonstate actors occur regularly.

Key Developments in 2021

- In April, Parliament voted to extend the term of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (known as Farmaajo) for two years, ostensibly to let the country prepare for direct elections. International pressure moved Parliament to reverse this decision a month later. Farmaajo repeatedly postponed the presidential election, and the government prevented opposition demonstrations and violently repressed the protests that were held, some of which featured clashes between supporters of Farmaajo and the opposition.
- Indirect, clan-based elections for the lower house of Parliament began in November and were ongoing at year's end. State assemblies' selection of federal lawmakers to serve in the upper chamber took place between July and November.
- In December, Farmaajo attempted to suspend Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble, accusing him of interfering with a land-grabbing investigation and of corruption. Roble accused Farmaajo of attempting a coup, disregarded the president's actions, and attempted to seize control of the military. Roble also claimed that Farmaajo was scheming to prevent a presidential election.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? **0** / **4**

Under the 2012 provisional constitution, the president is elected by a two-thirds vote in the Federal Parliament to serve a four-year term. The president shares executive power with a prime minister, who must have the support of Parliament.

In February 2017, legislators, who were not freely elected themselves, chose Farmaajo as president. Farmaajo’s term expired in February 2021, and the presidential election was repeatedly postponed during the year. In April, Parliament voted to extend Farmaajo’s term for two years, ostensibly to let the country prepare for direct elections, but it reversed this decision a month later after the move was condemned internationally.

In December 2021, President Farmaajo attempted to suspend Prime Minister Roble, accusing him of interfering with a land-grabbing investigation and of corruption. Roble accused Farmaajo of attempting a coup, disregarded the president’s actions, and attempted to seize control of the military. Roble also claimed that Farmaajo was scheming to prevent a presidential election.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 0 / 4

Somalia has not held direct legislative elections since 1969. Members of the 54-seat Upper House are elected by state assemblies. The lower house, the House of the People, is elected under a system in which clan elders choose delegates, who in turn select lawmakers. Upper House elections were begun in July 2021 and completed in November after months of political disputes. Elections for the lower house started in November and were ongoing at year’s end. Opposition groups and observers criticized both sets of elections, alleging political manipulation, improper interference, and vote buying.

Federal member states similarly employ clan-based power-sharing systems rather than direct popular elections to form their legislatures.

A3 0-4 pts

**Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant 0 / 4
election management bodies?**

The electoral framework does not provide for universal suffrage. Balloting is the result of an ad-hoc process based on lengthy negotiations among the country’s main clans.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

**Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political 1 / 4
groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these
competing parties or groupings?**

Legislation enacted in 2016 allowed the first formal registration of political parties since 1969. The National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC) has since registered more than 100 parties. However, because the 2021 parliamentary elections maintained a clan-based system and plans for direct voting were further postponed, the significance and role of political parties remains unclear.

B2 0-4 pts

**Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through 0 / 4
elections?**

The lack of direct elections prevents any group from gaining power through democratic means. The parliamentary elections that began in 2021 were dominated by clan leaders who control the appointment of delegates. Federal states and legislatures provide platforms for some competing forces to exercise influence and authority.

B3 0-4 pts

**Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political 0 / 4
sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?**

Ordinary citizens are largely unable to participate in the political process as voters.

B4 0-4 pts

**Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other 0 / 4
relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?**

Presidential candidates are required to be Muslim, according to the provisional constitution.

The current political system is designed to ensure some representation for the country’s many clans, but the prevailing “4.5” formula gives the four largest groups—the Hawiye, Darod, Dir, and Rahanweyn—eight out of every nine positions, marginalizing all other clans. The system is also affected by intraclan rivalries and dominated by clan leaders, who do not necessarily represent the interests of their respective groups.

Women’s political participation is limited by discriminatory attitudes and hostility from incumbent elites, and the interests of women are poorly represented in practice. The parliamentary framework mandates a 30 percent quota for women’s representation; at the end of 2021, amid ongoing parliamentary elections, 25 percent of filled seats in the two chambers were held by women.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 0 / 4

The government, which is not democratically elected, has little practical ability to implement its laws and policies even in parts of the country it controls. Its basic operations are heavily dependent on international bodies and donor governments. Relations between the federal government and the administrations of the federal member states remain poor.

Critics and rivals have accused President Farmaajo of seeking to centralize power. In August and September 2021, tensions between Farmaajo and Prime Minister Roble increased amid a dispute over the leadership of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA). Tensions escalated again at the end of December when Farmaajo attempted to suspend Roble, with each accusing the other of wrongdoing.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 0 / 4

Corruption is rampant in Somalia, and state agencies tasked with combating it do not function effectively. Impunity is the norm for public officials accused of malfeasance.

A 2019 law called for the creation of state and national anticorruption commissions; the members of the national commission were appointed in April 2021. The government ratified the African Union (AU) Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption in 2020. However, these steps have yet to result in tangible progress toward accountability and deterrence.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 0 / 4

Government transparency is limited. Officials are not required to make public declarations of their income and assets, and oversight procedures for public contracts are not well enforced. There is no law guaranteeing public access to government information.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 1 / 4

While the provisional constitution calls for freedom of the press, journalists regularly face harassment, arbitrary detention, suspension, fines, and violence from both state and nonstate actors. In 2020, the president signed amendments to the media law that included ostensible protections for journalists' rights but also featured vaguely worded provisions criminalizing the dissemination of “false information,” reports that conflict with the “national interest,” and incitement to violence and clan divisions. The law grants the Ministry of Information broad powers to regulate the media.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that the Shabaab killed two journalists in 2021, and the United Nations (UN) recorded the detention of multiple journalists throughout the year. The CPJ and the Somali Journalists Syndicate noted that many of those arrested and harassed were targeted because of their reporting on political tensions around the postponed presidential election.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 0 / 4

Nearly all Somalis are Sunni Muslims, though there is a very small Christian community whose members generally do not practice their religion in public. Conversion from Islam is illegal in some areas, and suspicions of conversion can draw societal harassment throughout the country. Despite containing clauses that promote religious freedom and outlaw religious discrimination, the provisional constitution recognizes Islam as the state religion and forbids the promotion of any other faith.

In areas under their control, the Shabaab use violence to enforce their interpretation of Islam, including execution as a penalty for alleged apostasy.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 1 / 4

Despite limited funding and infrastructure, as well as other challenges, universities operate in major cities. Academics reportedly practice self-censorship on sensitive topics. Islamic instruction is required in all schools except those operated by non-Muslim minority groups. Schools under Shabaab control integrate radical interpretations of Islam into the curriculum.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 1 / 4

Individuals enjoy some freedom of expression in more secure areas of the country, but criticism of powerful figures in the state and society can draw reprisals, and social media posts that touch on sensitive political or religious topics are subject to criminal punishment. Open debate is severely restricted in areas controlled or threatened by the Shabaab.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 1 / 4

Although the provisional constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, security officials require approval for demonstrations and have used violence to suppress unauthorized protests. Some demonstrations proceeded peacefully during 2021, including those in January by mothers who protested in response to reports that Somali soldiers trained in Eritrea had been sent to fight in Ethiopia's civil conflict. However, in February the government banned demonstrations, and police used live ammunition that month to disperse opposition protests against the postponement of the presidential election. Some protests featured violent clashes between supporters of Farmaajo and the opposition.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 1 / 4

Local civil society groups, international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and UN agencies have been able to conduct a wide range of activities in some parts of the country, but they face difficult and often dangerous working conditions. Regional authorities and security forces have reportedly harassed, extorted, obstructed, and attempted to control NGOs and aid groups, and the Shabaab generally do not allow such organizations to operate in their territory.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 1 / 4

Independent labor unions are active in Somalia and have worked to expand their operations and capacity. However, constitutional and legal protections for union activity are not always respected. The Federation of Somali Trade Unions has reported threats, dismissals, attempts at co-optation, and other forms of repression and interference from both government officials and private employers.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 0 / 4

The judicial system in Somalia is fractured, understaffed, and rife with corruption. Its authority is not widely respected, with state officials ignoring court rulings and citizens often turning to Islamic or customary law as alternatives.

In July 2020, the cabinet approved the appointment of five members to the Judicial Service Commission, a constitutionally required body tasked with overseeing the federal courts. Political opposition and civil society groups argued that the appointments were made without proper authority or consideration of the candidates' qualifications and independence.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 0 / 4

The country's police, intelligence, and military services do not observe safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, and their work is undermined by corruption. Clan politics and other external factors often play a role in the outcome of court cases. Military courts routinely try civilians, including for terrorism-related offenses, and do not respect basic international standards for due process.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 0 / 4

The ongoing armed conflict with the Shabaab has featured numerous terrorist attacks on government, international, and civilian targets, as well as indiscriminate lethal violence and excessive force against civilians by government security services, international troops, and various local militias. UN officials documented the killing of hundreds of civilians in 2021, including suicide bombings with civilian targets, clashes between Shabaab militants and villagers, and assassinations. The Shabaab also engage in public executions of those they suspect of working with the government or international forces.

Tensions increased in Galmudug State in October and November 2021 following fighting between the Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama (ASWJ) militia and state and federal security forces. Negotiations to resolve the ASWJ's political status within the Galmudug administration continued at year's end.

The unexplained June 2021 disappearance of an intelligence officer, Ikran Tahlil Farah, contributed to the political conflict between Farmaajo and Robles, with the prime minister attempting to suspend the NISA's leader, a Farmaajo ally, over the case. Tahlil's family alleged that NISA officers were involved in her disappearance, while in early September the agency stated that she had been killed by the Shabaab.

Authorities carry out executions ordered by military courts after flawed proceedings. Detainees are at risk of torture in custody, and perpetrators generally enjoy impunity.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 0 / 4

While the provisional constitution and legal system offer some formal protections against discrimination based on sex, clan, and other categories, they have little force in practice. Women face widespread disadvantages in areas including housing, education, and employment, and members of marginalized clans and some non-Somali ethnic groups suffer disproportionately from economic exclusion and violence.

LGBT+ people generally do not make their identity public. Same-sex sexual activity can be punished with up to three years in prison under the penal code, and individuals accused of engaging in such activity are subject to execution in Shabaab-controlled areas.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, 0 / employment, or education? 4

Travel throughout Somalia is dangerous due to periodic combat, attacks on civilians, and the presence of checkpoints controlled by security forces, militias, the Shabaab, and other armed groups that commonly extract arbitrary fees and bribes from travelers.

Approximately 2.9 million people were internally displaced in Somalia at the end of 2021, having been forced to move due to conflict and insecurity as well as flooding and other disasters.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without 0 / undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4

The provisional constitution guarantees property rights, but securing ownership is complicated by a mixture of formal and informal or traditional systems governing land rights. Procedures for registering property and businesses are impeded by corruption and other barriers, and disputes can lead to intimidation and violence. The Shabaab and other extremist groups manage elaborate extortion and "taxation" schemes, placing tremendous pressure on business owners.

Women do not enjoy equal rights to inherit property and are often denied the assets to which they are legally entitled due to discriminatory social norms.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, 0 / protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4

Forced and child marriages are widespread, and the Shabaab impose forced marriages with their fighters. Individuals can face strong societal pressure to marry or not marry within certain clans. Female genital mutilation (FGM) is extremely common despite a formal ban.

Sexual violence remains a major problem, especially for displaced persons. Perpetrators include government troops and militia members. The UN documented an almost 80 percent increase in rape and other forms of sexual assault from 2019 to 2020.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 0 / 4

Child labor and trafficking in persons for the purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labor are common. Refugees and internally displaced people are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Children are abducted or recruited to serve as fighters by the Shabaab and to a lesser extent by government and militia forces.

ecoi.net summary:

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