

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SOMALI CLAN SYSTEM ON ELECTORAL GOVERNANCE IN SOMALIA

Abdiweli Hussein¹ & Dr. Reginald Nalugala, PhD²

¹ PhD Candidate, School of Arts and Social Sciences, Institute for Social Transformation, Tangaza University, Nairobi, Kenya

² Lecturer, Tangaza University, Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of the Somali clan system on electoral governance in Somalia, focusing on how clan-based structures shaped political participation, power distribution, and decision-making processes. The research explored the role of the 4.5 clan-based power-sharing model, the impact of Xeer (customary law), and the effects of clan alliances on democratic governance. The study employed a qualitative approach, drawing on secondary sources, historical accounts, and case studies to analyze the relationship between clan dynamics and electoral governance. Data was sourced from scholarly articles, reports from international organizations, and Somali government documents. The research revealed that the Somali clan system played a dual role in governance. On one hand, it provided a structured mechanism for representation and conflict resolution, ensuring stability in a fragmented society. On the other hand, it entrenched neopatrimonialism, fostered elite control over political institutions, and limited broader democratic participation, particularly for marginalized groups such as women and minority clans. The study also found that reliance on clan-based governance perpetuated electoral disputes and weakened national unity efforts. While the Somali clan system remained a central pillar of governance, it posed significant challenges to democratic development. Electoral reforms needed to address the balance between traditional governance structures and modern democratic principles. The study recommended policy interventions to promote inclusivity, reduce elite manipulation, and foster a governance model that integrated traditional clan influence with institutionalized democracy.

Key Words: Electoral Governance, Social Structures, Somali Community, Indigenous Philosophy, Neopatrimonial Character

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INTRODUCTION

The interplay between traditional governance systems and formal state institutions has garnered heightened academic attention globally, particularly in fragile and post-conflict nations. Modern election systems strive to guarantee representation, validity, and participation via institutional frameworks, however indigenous systems based on family, clan, or ethnicity persist in influencing political conduct and state legitimacy. In several regions of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, traditional governance frameworks exist—frequently in tension—with state institutions, affecting various aspects from candidate selection to voter mobilization (Logan, 2020). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023) recognizes that whereas traditional institutions provide social order and local legitimacy, they may also jeopardize democratic norms like universal suffrage, gender fairness, and political competitiveness. The examination of clan-based electoral power in Somalia enhances the wider discourse on hybrid governance and the conflict between tradition and democracy.

In the United States, electoral governance is established via federal and state institutions that ensure openness, equality, and voter engagement. Identity politics, especially concerning race, ethnicity, and religion, has been more influential in determining political behavior. Although the United States does not possess formal clan or tribe institutions, polarization and political loyalty grounded in identity reflect some processes seen in clan-based cultures. Mason (2020) asserts that party affiliation has increasingly intertwined with cultural identity, resulting in profound societal divisions and reflecting the impact of identity on political alignment in vulnerable democracies. Furthermore, within Native American communities, familial connections and tribal associations persistently influence voting results, demonstrating that even in established democracies, traditional identification frameworks continue to interact with contemporary political mechanisms (McCool et al., 2021).

China presents a divergent style of centralized administration in which electoral politics is strictly regulated by the Communist Party, allowing little effect from conventional governance systems on election results. Nonetheless, underneath these dynamics, family networks and ancestral clans continue to have informal influence in community leadership, social mobilization, and resource allocation, particularly in rural regions (Zhou & Chen, 2021). Despite the intentional dismantling of official clan structures in China since the Maoist period, research indicates that family and ancestral ties persist in influencing trust networks and local decision-making processes. The Chinese story illustrates that under authoritarian regimes that stifle pluralism, informal kinshipbased arrangements may remain significant, providing insights into the persistence of clan networks despite institutional marginalization.

The convergence of ethnicity, religion, and region with electoral politics in Nigeria has resulted in what researchers term a "ethno-clientelist" system (Akinola & Uzoigwe, 2021). The multi-ethnic makeup and federal structure of Nigeria foster a situation in which political elites exploit ethnoregional affiliations, often resulting in patronage, election violence, and the marginalization of minority voices. Traditional leaders, especially in the northern and southeastern areas, maintain informal sway on political conduct, including voting behaviors and candidate endorsements (Ibeanu & Momoh, 2022). This affects democratic consolidation, since the fusion of traditional authority and elected governance may undermine accountability and national unity. Like Somalia, Nigeria's political environment demonstrates the persistent influence of identity-based systems on democratic processes.

Ghana is often seen as a successful example of electoral democracy in sub-Saharan Africa. Nonetheless, traditional authorities, especially chiefs, continue to have considerable influence on local government and electoral results. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana stipulates that chiefs must maintain political neutrality; nonetheless, their traditional authority often manifests as informal political influence, particularly during elections (Odotei & Awedoba, 2020). Chiefs engage communities, indirectly support politicians, and shape political narratives, especially in rural regions. Ghana has preserved democratic integrity by distinctly

defining the function of traditional authority, presenting a viable example for Somalia on how indigenous systems might be integrated with electoral government without compromising democratic principles (Gyampo et al., 2023).

In Kenya, ethnic identity has significantly influenced election results since independence. Although Kenya lacks a formal clan structure, ethnic blocs operate similarly, with political alliances, appointments, and voting behaviors often dictated by ethnic ties rather than intellectual principles. The inheritance of ethnicity-based politics has resulted in recurring electoral strife and elite appropriation (Cheeseman, Lynch & Willis, 2022). The Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) aimed to mitigate ethnic divisiveness in elections via the proposal of inclusive power-sharing frameworks. The situation in Kenya exemplifies the intricacies of identity politics inside African democracies and how informal structures like clans may obstruct the advancement of issue-oriented, inclusive administration.

Somalia exemplifies how clan groups control election processes at the national level. The Somali clan system, consisting of major clans including Hawiye, Darod, Dir, Rahanweyn, and other minority factions, underpins social organization and political representation. The 4.5 powersharing arrangement—where the four principal clans have equal parliamentary representation and minority clans collectively receive a fractional share—entrenches clan identity inside state government. This system, while providing temporary stability, has entrenched clan-based favoritism, hindered the establishment of national political parties, and disenfranchised women and youth from political processes (Farah, 2023; Heritage Institute, 2024). Furthermore, electoral selection by clan elders diminishes universal suffrage and accountability, establishing an elite-controlled system that is devoid of transparency and widespread credibility. Notwithstanding several international efforts to change Somalia's electoral framework, clan power continues to be a pivotal aspect of political existence, presenting a considerable obstacle to democracy and national cohesion.

Research Objectives

- How the Somali clan system influences electoral governance through its social structures— political, economic, cultural, normative, and theological;
- How roles are allocated and dispensed within the clan to meet community needs;
- How the indigenous philosophy of Xeer affects the ontological and epistemological framework of Somali society and influences politics;
- The gendered implications and neopatrimonial character of clan-based governance in the current political context.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative research approach, especially qualitative content analysis, to investigate the impact of the Somali clan system on electoral government. Qualitative content analysis effectively elucidates meanings, ideologies, and inherent power dynamics present in texts and narratives (Schreier, 2019). It enables the researcher to methodically examine, categorize, and analyze textual material to discern patterns and themes across many sources. This technique is suitable for capturing the intricate interplay between official democratic institutions and traditional clan structures, given the sociopolitical complexity of Somalia's clan-based administration and the fluidity of its election procedures.

The research utilizes a diverse array of secondary materials published from 2015 to 2024 to provide a solid basis for the analysis. This encompasses peer-reviewed journal articles, official reports from international entities including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), African Union (AU), and the African Governance Institute (AGI), in addition to policy briefs and situational analyses from local Somali NGOs such as the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies and Somali Public Agenda. These sources were obtained from academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and institutional repositories. The

incorporation of both global and Somalia-authored articles guarantees a balanced viewpoint, integrating foreign observations and local ideas into clan dynamics and electoral government.

The research further includes insights from anthropological and legal studies on Somalia's customary law system, Xeer, and the ingrained norms within clan dynamics. These sources are essential for comprehending the ontological underpinnings of Somali political structure, whereby elders, customary law, and oral consensus influence communal decision-making and political representation. Legal examinations of Somalia's provisional constitution and transitional election frameworks are used to delineate how formal governing structures endeavor to harmonize clan-based power with democratic ambitions. This study examines the involvement of clan elders in candidate selection, the implementation of the 4.5 power-sharing formula, and the effects of these procedures on electoral fairness and legitimacy.

To guarantee validity and analytical rigor, triangulation was used by contrasting themes derived from several data types—scholarly literature, legal texts, policy papers, and NGO briefs. Coding and categorizing were performed manually, revealing recurring themes like “clan power-sharing,” “electoral fairness,” “gender exclusion,” and “elite capture” throughout the papers. The study examined many views and criticisms to emphasize both the beneficial and adverse effects of clan participation in democratic administration. Ethical issues included honoring the intellectual property of all secondary sources and situating the results within the historical and geopolitical context of Somalia. By anchoring the study in varied and reputable qualitative sources, the research offers an extensive comprehension of how clan structures persist in influencing, limiting, and sometimes enabling Somalia's electoral government.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Clan System and Its Social Structures

Political Structure

The Somali clan system is the foundation of political structure and identity in Somalia. Due to the prolonged absence of a strong central government, clans have established alternative governance frameworks that facilitate the mediation of power and resource allocation. Clans are essential to Somali politics, formalized via the "4.5 formula," a power-sharing system established in the early 2000s after the creation of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). This model allocates power among the four principal clans—Darod, Hawiye, Dir, and Rahanweyn—while the remaining “0.5” signifies minority clans, including the Bantu, Gabooye, and other disadvantaged groups (Hesse, 2019). The formula was originally designed as a provisional strategy to promote peace and avert the hegemony of any one tribe. Nonetheless, it has been ingrained, regulating parliamentary seat distributions, cabinet positions, and significant appointments within the federal government.

The 4.5 formula has effectively reduced inter-clan strife and promoted a measure of political stability, especially after the downfall of the Siad Barre administration; but, it also poses considerable problems to democratic governance. The system favors clan identification above civic representation and meritocratic leadership. In Somalia, political organizations often embody clan loyalties rather than ideological frameworks, complicating the establishment of issue-oriented or programmatic politics (Menkhaus, 2020). This subverts the premise of one person, one vote, which has yet to be realized on a national scale. Attempts to conduct universal suffrage elections have often failed owing to clan-related disputes and security issues. Consequently, whereas the clan system offers a practical basis for political inclusion, it simultaneously reinforces sectarianism and undermines governmental legitimacy.

The consolidation of clan authority has exacerbated elite appropriation of the democratic process. Senior figures and clan leaders often assume the role of kingmakers, selecting candidates for parliamentary and public positions. This dynamic restricts chances for young, women, and nonelite persons, since election

positions are bargained privately rather than disputed publicly (Abdi, 2021; UNDP, 2023). Furthermore, candidates depend on clan allegiance instead of national popularity, which obstructs the emergence of reformist or independent perspectives. In many instances, this has resulted in corruption and vote-buying inside the clan caucuses, with monetary incentives swaying elder recommendations. The outcome is a political culture where responsibility to the public is subordinate to allegiance to clan interests.

The clan-based political structure hampers federalism and state formation in Somalia. Regional states like Puntland, Jubaland, and Southwest have established their own political structures, sometimes controlled by a single clan or sub-clan, hence creating friction with the central authority. These disagreements have obstructed the execution of a unified national agenda and postponed constitutional changes (International Crisis Group, 2022). Disputes around resource management, voting procedures, and security activities sometimes manifest underlying clan rivalries. The existing federal framework is deficient in delineating authority and income distribution among states, hence fostering political instability and hindering national reconciliation efforts.

The Somali clan structure continues to be a double-edged sword in the political arena. Although it guarantees representation and has traditionally reduced overt disagreement, its inflexible frameworks hinder democracy and meritocracy. Somalia must undertake the intricate challenge of altering the 4.5 system to facilitate more inclusive and civic-oriented political involvement while maintaining the support of entrenched clan groups. Efforts to reinforce political parties, empower disadvantaged communities, and implement direct elections must consider the nuances of clan identity while advancing a comprehensive national vision (Heritage Institute, 2024). Reconciling these conflicting imperatives is essential for the enduring sustainability of electoral administration in Somalia.

Social Structure of the Somali Clan System

The Somali social structure is primarily founded on kinship, arranged according to clan and subclan relationships that follow a patrilineal ancestry. The clan serves as the paramount social institution, often surpassing the state's role in issues of identity, justice, and communal obligation (Gundel, 2016; Hoehne, 2015). The extended family, or "reer," is the core of this organization, whereby duties of mutual support, defense, and honor are of utmost importance. This kinship paradigm promotes robust internal cohesiveness and social solidarity within clans, particularly in environments with restricted governmental influence. This cohesiveness fosters exclusivity, leading to distrust towards those outside one's lineage group and impeding wider social integration (UNDP Somalia, 2023).

The clan elders, including Isimo (traditional monarchs), Guurti (council of elders), and Aqils (subclan heads), serve as the guardians of customary power. The elders are pivotal in adjudicating conflicts, implementing Somali customary law (Xeer), arranging dowries, overseeing inter-clan alliances, and coordinating community responses to crises (Harper, 2012; Gundel, 2016). Elder councils are often seen as more legitimate than official state tribunals because of their integration into local culture and their efficiency and accessibility. Nonetheless, their supremacy reinforces a gerontocratic system, when age and prestige supersede innovation or contemporary viewpoints. As a result, youth are often marginalized from significant decision-making processes, while representing more than 70% of Somalia's population (UNFPA, 2022). This marginalization suppresses youth-led transformation and fosters disenfranchisement and radicalism.

The patriarchal structure of Somali culture positions males, especially senior clan members, at the pinnacle of decision-making structures. Women, despite their significant influence in familial and informal networks, are often marginalized from official leadership positions. Cultural taboos and theological interpretations often perpetuate this marginalization, and clan-based representation seldom include women in substantial numbers (El-Bushra & Gardner, 2016). The federal constitution stipulates a 30% quota for women's political participation; however, implementation is hindered by resistance from clan elders and

religious leaders. Minority groups, including the Bantu, Gabooye, and occupational castes (e.g., blacksmiths, tanners, and barbers), encounter heightened marginalization, often being deprived of land rights, inter-clan marriage, and political appointments (Minority Rights Group International, 2021).

Social duties and responsibilities in Somali culture are mostly collectivist, grounded on the principle of *tol* (kin-based solidarity). An individual's social standing is intricately linked to their family's reputation, clan donations, and conduct. This has considerable ramifications for conflict resolution and reparative measures, since collective accountability is maintained by compensation (*mag* or *diya*) provided by the broader clan, rather than alone by the offender (Gundel, 2016; Menkhaus, 2020). Marriage partnerships are established according to clan affiliations, fulfilling both social and political roles. Such agreements are often used to establish alliances, preserve peace, or solidify economic connections. However, this also constrains inter-clan integration and fortifies parochial allegiances.

The Somali social system, although successful in preserving order and identity without a robust state, presents obstacles to social fairness and inclusivity. The focus on patriarchal, gerontocratic, and clan-based systems limits the involvement of youth, women, and minority populations in society advancement. As Somalia progresses towards federalization and democratic reforms, it will be imperative to redefine societal roles and foster more inclusive involvement. Policies designed to strengthen disadvantaged communities, particularly via education and civic participation, must navigate the persistent influence of clan elders and traditional norms (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2024).

Economic Structure of the Somali Clan System

The economic system in Somalia is fundamentally intertwined with clan institutions, which are crucial in the allocation of resources, job opportunities, and access to foreign assistance. In the lack of strong governmental structures, clans often function as the principal organizational entities for economic activities (Gundel, 2016). The Somali economy is defined by an informal, clan-centric structure in which resources including land, cattle, and labor are mostly governed by clan elders, with access to these resources dependent on clan allegiance. In urban environments, clan networks significantly affect access to economic prospects, since people often get employment or contracts via clan affiliations rather than via merit-based or competitive methods (World Bank, 2020). This system results in the accumulation of wealth and opportunity within a select few influential clans, while sidelining smaller or minority clans, hence intensifying economic inequalities.

Patronage and clientelism are fundamental components of the Somali economic framework, whereby economic transactions are significantly influenced by allegiance to clan elders and leaders. Government roles, especially in public administration, are often assigned based on clan loyalty rather than professional skills or competence (Maxwell et al., 2022). This leads to inefficiencies in the distribution of public services, because qualified persons may be overlooked for employment in favor of clan members with inferior qualifications. Moreover, the distribution of state resources and benefits—encompassing security services and infrastructure development—is also affected by clan-based networks. Consequently, economic choices often mirror the goals of powerful clans instead of fulfilling national requirements (Majid & McDowell, 2020). This patronage system sustains a loop of political and economic reliance, exacerbating clan-based inequities.

Foreign assistance and remittances significantly reinforce clan-based economic networks inside the Somali economy. Owing to the deficiency of efficient governmental structures and infrastructure, foreign aid organizations often distribute resources via clan leaders, who serve as middlemen to guarantee security and logistical assistance (Maxwell et al., 2022). This technique enhances the distribution of help in a difficult context, while simultaneously reinforcing the power of clan leaders and establishing an informal government structure rooted on clan allegiances. This may hinder the establishment of a more transparent, state-centric distribution system and unintentionally bolster clan-based governance frameworks. Likewise,

remittances from the Somali diaspora have emerged as an essential economic lifeline, with families and clans relying on these payments for sustenance. Remittances are often allocated according to clan structures, hence reinforcing the clan system as the primary organizing unit in Somali society (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2024).

The state's failure to regulate economic activities or provide a formal economic framework gives clans substantial authority on resource management. This leads to the privatization of essential economic sectors and the inequitable distribution of wealth, with powerful clans often monopolizing access to valuable land, natural resources, and economic prospects. Such disparities might incite animosity and generate discord among clans, jeopardizing the prospects for economic integration and national advancement (Menkhaus, 2020). In rural regions, access to land and water resources is often governed by clan elders, with conflicts settled via traditional judicial procedures that emphasize clan interests above state legislation. This complicates access to key resources for non-clan members, especially underprivileged populations, and perpetuates the economic marginalization of these people.

Ultimately, reliance on assistance and patronage systems not only sustains inequality but also undermines economic progress by obstructing the formation of formal markets and state institutions. For example, the distribution of resources via clan-based intermediaries diminishes the motivation for people to engage in long-term economic planning or sustainable development projects that extend beyond clan bounds. This has resulted in economic stagnation in many regions of Somalia, since development initiatives often fail owing to a deficiency of faith in governmental institutions and the predominant impact of clan politics. In conclusion, while the clan system offers a method of economic organization in a precarious state environment, it also poses considerable obstacles to the establishment of a more inclusive, meritocratic economic framework (Majid & McDowell, 2020).

Cultural Structure of the Somali Clan System

The cultural framework of Somali society is intrinsically linked to clan identity, whereby cultural manifestations and practices function to both conserve traditions and cement the social, political, and economic divides that characterize Somali existence. Loyalty to one's clan is a fundamental characteristic of Somali culture, acting as a key indicator of identity and belonging. Cultural norms underscore the significance of regard and reverence for elders, with each clan possessing a unique array of traditions, rituals, and customs transmitted over generations. Cultural practices significantly influence people's connections and their comprehension of power and authority within the clan system (Kapteijns, 2013).

Oral literature is a paramount cultural expression in Somali culture, both as a medium for historical preservation and a mechanism for political involvement. Poetry, especially the gabay, is integral to Somali cultural life and often expresses the ideals, challenges, and accomplishments of the clan. Gabay serves as a potent medium for political commentary, used to commend leaders and heroes, document the results of inter-clan disputes, or to denounce those seen as violating clan interests (Kapteijns, 2013). These oral traditions, including storytelling and songs, serve not only as creative expressions but also as historical records that provide information about the clan's identity, its relationships with other clans, and its historical successes or failures. Poets and storytellers have considerable power, and their creations are often used to shape public opinion, garner support for or against political leaders, and validate clan-based claims to land or resources.

In Somali civilization, clan relationships are often solidified by cultural rituals like marriages, common histories, and negotiated agreements. Marriage is not just a union of persons but a strategic relationship between families, strengthening connections and guaranteeing reciprocal assistance in times of need. These partnerships are often institutionalized via cultural rites and celebrations, which are essential for sustaining inter-clan cooperation. Collective rituals, including initiation ceremonies for young males, dispute resolution rituals, and community feasts, function as significant means of asserting clan identity and

strengthening solidarity (Harper, 2012). These community gatherings promote cultural continuity and save the clan's collective memory for future generations.

Cultural activities may simultaneously intensify divides among clans. Clans preserve unique cultural identities, and ancient rituals strengthen clan borders while promoting an in-group vs outgroup mindset. Deeply rooted clan rivalries and historical grievances, reinforced via cultural narratives, create a politics of exclusion, whereby underprivileged clans, especially minority groups like the Bantu, are often denied political, social, and economic chances. The divides significantly impact Somali nation-building efforts, since cultural traditions often hinder the promotion of national unity and cohesiveness (Menkhaus, 2020).

The Somali culture's focus on honor and retribution may sometimes perpetuate cycles of strife. Honor is not only an individual attribute but a communal feature of a clan that may provoke violent retribution if deemed compromised. Clan-based revenge murders are sometimes rationalized via cultural narratives that depict these acts as essential for preserving clan honor and respect (Menkhaus, 2020). This focus on communal honor and retribution has traditionally been a catalyst for conflict, although it also serves as a means of dispute resolution within the clan structure. In contemporary governance, this value system conflicts with the need for a rule-of-law framework that surpasses tribal loyalties, obstructing the formation of efficient state institutions.

Normative and Theological Structure of Somali Society

Somali society is regulated by a dual normative framework, whereby both Xeer (customary law) and Sharia (Islamic law) are instrumental in overseeing social, economic, and political affairs. The amalgamation of these two systems is a hallmark of Somali government; nonetheless, the cohabitation of Islamic and customary legal frameworks sometimes exhibits conflicts. Although both systems provide ethical direction and legal jurisdiction, they emphasize distinct modes of social structure and responsibility. Xeer, an orally transmitted system, is the foundation of Somali customary law. It governs many facets of everyday existence, including land disputes and the payment of diya (blood recompense) for harm or death, while also delineating protocols for conflict resolution and inter-clan ties (Harper, 2012).

Xeer functions as a communal social compact in which accountability is distributed among the clan. Clans are jointly responsible for the activities of their members, fostering social cohesiveness and collective accountability that is fundamental to the Somali worldview. This tradition originates from the belief that the honor and dignity of a clan are inextricably linked to the acts of its individual members. The elders (Isimo or Aqils) serve as mediators and adjudicators, interpreting and implementing the rules of Xeer. This method often manifests as negotiated consensus, highlighting conversation and reconciliation as instruments for conflict resolution. The consensual characteristic of Xeer allows it to adjust to changing social conditions, making it a flexible and dynamic system that has endured through generations, despite political instability and the disintegration of formal state institutions (Harper, 2012).

Conversely, Islamic law (Sharia) significantly influences Somali culture, particularly on moral behavior, personal piety, and individual accountability. Somali Muslims adhere to the principles

of Islam, including the five pillars of religion, as well as the directives outlined in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Sharia law regulates personal matters such as matrimony, inheritance, contractual agreements, and criminal jurisprudence. Nonetheless, Islamic tenets of equality and personal accountability often clash with the communal and patriarchal ideals endorsed by Xeer. For example, while Sharia advocates for equality before God and individual accountability for one's actions, Xeer is based on the principle that clan groups, particularly elders, bear collective responsibility for their members, resulting in a more patriarchal framework in social and legal contexts (Hoehne, 2016). The patriarchal foundations of Xeer might sometimes obstruct the complete actualization of the egalitarian values advocated by Islam.

This dual normative framework engenders conflicts between Islamic principles and clan-oriented government. While Islam stresses individual accountability, Xeer accentuates communal clan obligation. For instance, under Xeer, when an individual perpetrates a crime, the clan is obligated to compensate for the offense with diya (blood money). This approach emphasizes collective responsibility for misconduct, which is at odds with Islamic principles that assign individual accountability for acts. Moreover, patriarchy, an essential aspect of Xeer, may contradict the Islamic principle of gender equality in spiritual contexts, despite both frameworks permitting gender-specific responsibilities (Hoehne, 2016). The intersection of Xeer and Sharia, although sometimes synergistic, hinders the endeavor to establish a unified legal system that preserves universal rights and equality.

The prevalence of Xeer in governance reflects the persistent influence of clan-based normative systems, which continue to eclipse the official government institutions in Somalia. Despite the Somali government and its foreign allies striving to establish a formal legal system, the prevailing situation indicates that Xeer and its clan leaders have significant control over communal matters. This is especially apparent in the lack of efficient official institutions in several areas, where customary law persists as the most reliable method of administration and conflict resolution. Xeer's adaptability and profound cultural integration guarantee its status as a fundamental component of Somali political and social life, sometimes overshadowing official legal systems (Hoehne, 2016).

Role Allocation and Dispensation

In the Somali clan system, the distribution of roles is primarily determined by ancestry, seniority, and clan consensus. Leadership positions, such as Ugaas, Boqor, or Isim, are often inherited or attained by exhibiting attributes such as wisdom, dispute resolution, and commitment to the community. Elders, esteemed members of the clan, are tasked with overseeing dispute resolution, diplomacy, and representing the clan in national discussions. These responsibilities, inherited or attained through merit, highlight the need of upholding social order and safeguarding customary rules, such as Xeer (Gundel, 2016). Clan leaders are crucial in decision-making, providing guidance and stability within the group.

In Somali culture, adolescents are often tasked with safeguarding clan resources, such as cattle, or participating in commerce to enhance the clan's economic well-being. These responsibilities are seen as integral to the socialization process, whereby youngsters are taught to maintain clan honor and duty. Despite the youth's involvement in significant activities that benefit the clan, they are often marginalized from leadership and decision-making positions, which are mostly held by elders. Conversely, women are conventionally assigned to domestic and reproductive activities, including home care, child-rearing, and household management. In urban environments and via collaboration with civil society groups, women have progressively contested conventional roles and promoted enhanced involvement in politics and leadership (Ismail, 2021). This transition signifies a transformation in the Somali social framework.

Although community tasks, including military defense and inter-clan discussion, are fulfilled, the system of duty distribution often perpetuates social inequality. Clan identification and gender mostly shape people's social standings, limiting mobility and possibilities according to birthright and gender norms. Nonetheless, the system is not completely inflexible. During crises, like as relocation caused by violence or famine, clans have a notable ability to adjust by redistributing responsibilities to maintain communal survival and cohesiveness. This adaptability underscores the robustness of the Somali clan structure, since duties may be adjusted to address exigencies while preserving a sense of communal identity and cohesion. Nevertheless, these adaptations often function within the limitations of the conventional clan-based framework, maintaining its fundamental structure even under transformation.

Indigenous Philosophy: Xeer

Ontological and Epistemological Influence

The Xeer system, integral to Somali social and political structures, influences both the ontological and epistemic dimensions of Somali existence. Ontologically, Xeer shapes the social reality of its believers via a framework of clan interdependence, whereby individuals' lives are fundamentally linked to the destiny and welfare of their clans. A Somali's identity and well-being are intricately linked to their status within the clan hierarchy. This ontological framework sustains social cohesiveness by obligating individuals to safeguard their clan's interests, settle conflicts internally, and enhance the collective's survival and honor. This reality fosters a profound feeling of collective responsibility, when solidarity and unity take precedence above personal aspirations. The concept of clan honor influences every facet of life, directing personal decisions and acts, including the safeguarding of livestock and the choosing of marital partners (Harper, 2012; Hoehne, 2016). The notion of self in this system cannot be completely grasped without acknowledging its interrelation with the wider clan and its societal standing.

Xeer functions epistemologically via an oral tradition that emphasizes community agreement rather than written law or state-imposed laws. Knowledge and social standards are transmitted orally throughout generations, primarily by seniors, whose knowledge and experience are esteemed. This information transmission mechanism guarantees the preservation of societal norms and practices pertaining to justice, dispute resolution, and moral behavior (Gundel, 2016). Oral storytelling, poetry (gabay), and community discourse are essential in transmitting these standards and preserving the clan's historical continuity. Clan-based knowledge is affirmed and strengthened via agreement, with elders serving as the custodians of tradition and societal wisdom. This system fosters a cultural milieu in which departures from conventional knowledge or practices are seldom tolerated, hence promoting the notion that truth is communal and requires consensus within the society. The epistemic dependence on oral history renders the clan's identity and its social memory essential to identity development and societal cohesion (Kaptein, 2013).

Political Impact

Positive Influence

The Xeer method significantly enhances grassroots legitimacy and local government in areas where official state institutions are either weak or absent. In Somalia, where central authority is often disjointed and ineffectual, Xeer functions as an alternative governance framework, enabling communities to maintain a semblance of order and justice. It empowers local leaders, including elders, who facilitate dispute resolution, make communal choices, and maintain social peace (Menkhaus, 2020). The local legitimacy of these leaders derives from their profound ties to the community, rather than from assigned roles or election mechanisms. This method promotes accountability at the local level, enabling the community to hold leaders responsible via social pressure and collective action. Xeer promotes peace-building initiatives in conflict-prone regions by advocating for reconciliation via discussion instead of violence. The capacity of clan elders to resolve disagreements and facilitate peace among clans, sometimes by blood reparations or ceremonial reconciliation, has been crucial in mitigating the effects of Somalia's protracted hostilities. This focus on conversation and compromise enables communities to preserve cohesiveness and order, even during crises, making it an essential mechanism for sustaining peace in some locations (Harper, 2012; Hoehne, 2016).

Negative Influence

Xeer poses considerable obstacles to the formation of formal state institutions and the cultivation of a cohesive Somali national identity. The most apparent detrimental effect is that Xeer perpetuates clan-based exclusion, particularly affecting minority clans and women, who are often marginalized in decision-making procedures. Leadership positions within clans are predominantly held by senior males, whereas women, despite their significant contributions to the community, are often excluded from political participation and decision-making responsibilities (Gundel, 2016). This exclusion is sustained by the patriarchal framework

of the clan system, which confers more authority to male elders while assigning women to domestic and reproductive roles. Furthermore, the power-sharing framework based on clan identification, exemplified by the 4.5 formula, institutionalizes clan-centric politics inside the state, where governmental jobs are often assigned according to clan membership rather than meritocratic principles. This structure often favors the interests of a select few powerful clans, marginalizing smaller or less prominent factions. As a result, it diminishes the state's ability to cultivate a unified national identity, when devotion to the country prevails over attachment to one's clan (Menkhaus, 2020).

Furthermore, Xeer subverts the formalization of constitutional rights in the framework of contemporary administration. Islamic law (Sharia) stresses individual accountability and equality before God, but Xeer fosters a system of communal responsibility, where the conduct of one person may impact the whole clan. This shared duty often supersedes individual rights, resulting in conflict with constitutional ideals such as personal liberties, gender equality, and minority rights. Although the Somali law may provide equality for women and minorities, the customs and norms enforced by clan elders under Xeer often contradict these rights. Xeer's focus on patriarchy and familial hierarchy often leads to the exclusion of women from property rights, inheritance, and political engagement, hence perpetuating gender inequity (Harper, 2012). These structural challenges impede the complete actualization of a democratic society in which all people, irrespective of gender, clan, or origin, may access equal rights and opportunities under the law.

Gender Relations in the Clan System

The Somali clan system has historically functioned as a patriarchal framework that inevitably limits women's political engagement. The participation of women in Somali political affairs is conventionally restricted, with political authority being held by male clan elders and leaders. Leadership posts, including those in government and parliament, are mostly allocated to males, based on the presumption that men act as the principal decision-makers for their clans. The 30% gender quota in the Somali constitution intended to enhance female participation has had restricted enforcement, often obstructed by clan elders who saw these quotas as a threat to their traditional power (Farah & Lewis, 2022). Notwithstanding these constitutional stipulations, women encounter significant cultural opposition from those who believe that female involvement in politics is antithetical to Islamic principles and clan customs.

Nevertheless, women's responsibilities in Somali culture extend beyond the home realm. Over time, several women, particularly in metropolitan settings and civil society groups, have contested the limiting standards imposed upon them, calling for more gender equality and political participation. These women have emerged as significant champions for women's empowerment and have contributed to grassroots initiatives designed to enhance women's political representation and leadership. They have also endeavored to modify conventional norms and interpretations of

Sharia law to advocate for women's rights in domains like as education, property ownership, and political participation. Notwithstanding this, progress has been sluggish, and traditional attitudes about women's responsibilities in public life continue to pose a significant obstacle to attaining true gender equality in Somali administration.

The Somali clan system's gender disparity adversely affects political involvement and constrains women's economic prospects and social mobility. In several rural and traditional environments, women are anticipated to assume duties as mothers and caregivers, with no assistance or acknowledgment for their achievements outside the domestic sphere. This exacerbates the economic marginalization of women, making them reliant on male relatives for access to resources and opportunities. Despite advancements in metropolitan regions where women are attaining educational and career opportunities, the prevailing cultural perception of women as subordinate to males remains deeply ingrained. The patriarchal structure of Somali culture persists in defining women's responsibilities across all societal dimensions, rendering gender

equality a profound problem that transcends politics and permeates every part of Somali life (Menkhaus, 2020).

Neopatrimonialism and Clan System

The Somali clan system significantly impacts the nation's political and economic frameworks, especially via neopatrimonial activities. Neopatrimonialism is a political system in which public resources, political posts, and state perks are allocated primarily on personal ties and patronage networks rather than merit or public service. In Somalia, governmental roles and economic prospects are often assigned based on clan allegiance rather than personal competence or credentials. Politicians acquire power by obtaining the endorsement of clan elders and guaranteeing the representation of their clan's interests in national discussions, rather than prioritizing policy formulation or governance at the national level. This system promotes a clientelist relationship, whereby resources are distributed to those loyal to the political leader's faction, rather than being given for the common benefit of the nation (Maxwell et al., 2022).

The dominance of neopatrimonialism in Somali politics results in governance and public administration inefficiencies. Clan-based patronage networks foster corruption, since political leaders may prioritize the allocation of state resources to their clans above public needs or national development objectives. This compromises the efficacy of formal state institutions and diminishes the government's ability to tackle systemic issues such as poverty, unemployment, and education. As a result, the state's capacity to execute sustainable development plans is hindered, and accountability within the political system is restricted. Somali politics is mostly influenced by clan-based coalitions rather than policy-based government, hence limiting the prospects for extensive changes and hindering democratic and institutional advancement.

Furthermore, neopatrimonialism perpetuates inequality and marginalization among disadvantaged clans. Patronage networks predominantly function within powerful clans, hence excluding lesser clans or those with diminished political influence from decision-making processes. This intensifies the rift between clans and engenders economic inequalities that are hard to overcome. The neopatrimonial system guarantees that political and economic authority is concentrated within a select few, perpetuating social stratification and limiting resource allocation to those outside the dominating clans. Consequently, disadvantaged groups persistently have difficulties in accessing public services and governmental resources, exacerbating the prevailing political instability and economic disparity in Somalia (Harper, 2012).

Critique of Clanism and Xeer Enforcement

A primary criticism of the Somali clan system is its emphasis on familial bonds at the expense of citizenship, hence impeding the establishment of national political cohesion. On a contemporary democratic framework, political allegiance is often anticipated to be grounded on ideology or policy rather than personal familial connections. In Somalia, political loyalty and allegiance are dictated by clan identification, with leaders often obtaining political power by alignment with their clans. This emphasis on familial rather than national interests leads to a disjointed political system in which ideological parties and policy-oriented government are of little significance. Politicians prioritize maintaining clan allegiance and acquiring clan wealth above tackling national issues like poverty, education, or healthcare. The clan system thus undermines the establishment of a cohesive political platform and hinders the development of democratic institutions founded on collective national ideals (Maxwell et al., 2022).

A notable criticism of the clan system is the disparate and erratic application of Xeer throughout areas, resulting in legal fragmentation and inequity. Xeer, the customary law observed by Somali clans, is governed by elders, with its enforcement differing significantly among clans and regions. In regions with little state presence, Xeer often serves as the predominant legal framework; yet, its implementation may be markedly biased and inequitable, especially towards underprivileged populations. For instance, minority clans and women often lack equal protection under Xeer compared to members of dominant clans, resulting in prejudice and inequality in the administration of justice. This legal fragmentation undermines social

cohesiveness and obstructs the establishment of a cohesive legal system in Somalia. Consequently, disadvantaged populations persistently encounter disadvantages regarding access to justice, property rights, and inheritance (Gundel, 2016).

The inconsistency in Xeer enforcement undermines the rule of law and exacerbates political instability in Somalia. In the absence of a centralized legal system, areas interpret and implement Xeer according to their own clan dynamics, resulting in uncertainty and contradictions in legal results. The lack of a coherent and uniform legal framework engenders a milieu of legal ambiguity, especially for those outside the prevailing clans. This legal fragmentation impedes the establishment of a robust national state and exacerbates political fragmentation, allowing local power structures to prevail over central government. Somalia must combine its ancient legal procedures with a contemporary judicial system that ensures universal rights and safeguards for all individuals, regardless of clan membership (Harper, 2012).

Discussion

Clan as a Double-Edged Sword

The clan system in Somalia is essential for promoting communal cohesiveness and resolving conflicts. Historically, clans have served as the foundation for social structure, with elders crucially settling conflicts and ensuring community members meet their mutual commitments (Gundel, 2016). This has shown particular advantage in a state whose formal institutions have had challenges in establishing legitimacy and authority. In areas with a diminished governmental presence, the clan system often serves as the principal mechanism for administration and law enforcement, facilitating a degree of order and cohesiveness. Clan loyalty offers people a feeling of stability and identity, embodying a communal framework that prioritizes group prosperity above individual demands.

Nonetheless, the clan system has considerable disadvantages, especially regarding governmental legitimacy and inclusion. Although it cultivates a strong feeling of loyalty and solidarity within clans, it may also erode national unity by exacerbating ethnic differences. The clan-centric political framework in Somalia often results in the marginalization of non-dominant groups, cultivating an environment of exclusion and discrimination. This has led to persistent political instability and civil strife, as factions compete for resources and political power driven by clan loyalties rather than overarching national goals. The clientelist characteristics of clan politics promote neopatrimonialism, when patronage networks dictate the distribution of resources and posts, often circumventing meritocratic administration. The patronage system has undermined the legitimacy of state institutions and hindered the implementation of changes that emphasize national growth above clan interests (Maxwell et al., 2022).

The clan system is a crucial social tool for preserving order in Somalia, although it poses a paradox regarding the establishment of a cohesive state. While clan allegiance persists as the principal factor influencing political and socioeconomic results, Somalia will always face challenges in state-building and national unity. To transition into a functional democratic state, the country must reconcile clan-based traditions with a more inclusive and meritocratic system that prioritizes national unity and individual rights (Hoehne, 2016).

Dissonance Between Custom and Constitution

A significant conflict in Somalia's political environment is the discord between tradition and constitution, especially concerning women's rights and election changes. The Somali constitution promises a democratic society prioritizing equality and human rights; nevertheless, the old clan structure is strongly established and conflicts with these contemporary principles. Although the constitution mandates a 30% quota for women in political participation, cultural opposition from clan elders and religious leaders has hindered the successful implementation of these changes. The clan elders, with considerable influence over political affairs, often

emphasize traditional beliefs that exclude women from decision-making positions, so contravening constitutional assurances of gender equality (Farah & Lewis, 2022).

The contrast between traditional and contemporary governing systems is particularly apparent in voting procedures. The clan system governs the choice of political representatives, often marginalizing the electoral system established in the constitution. The patronage-based selection process, in which leaders are appointed based on clan allegiance rather than public vote, subverts the tenets of democratic elections. The discord between the Somali constitution and traditional clan traditions obstructs the establishment of a political system based on election legitimacy and popular sovereignty. The persistence of the clan system will impede the implementation of constitutional measures concerning representation and gender equality.

The widening disparity between traditional beliefs and constitutional ideals not only hinders the advancement of women's rights and electoral reforms but also presents a fundamental obstacle to the evolution of democracy in Somalia. To bridge this divide, a reconciliation is necessary between the traditional standards codified in Xeer and the democratic tenets of representation, rule of law, and human rights. This necessitates collaboration with clan elders, religious leaders, and community stakeholders to guarantee that traditional governance frameworks develop in accordance with the constitutional aspiration for a more inclusive and equitable society (Menkhaus, 2020).

Reconciling Indigenous Governance with Democracy

To advance and establish a stable, democratic state, Somalia must reconcile indigenous governing methods with democratic ideals. Xeer, the customary law regulating most of Somali culture, is intricately linked to the clan system and traditional governing structures. Xeer has functioned as a tool for dispute settlement and societal cohesiveness for ages; yet, its contemporary use often conflicts with democratic concepts such as equal representation, rule of law, and individual rights. Somalia has a significant problem in reconciling two government systems: one rooted on clan loyalty and community accountability, and the other centered on individual rights and universal legal standards (Gundel, 2016).

Somalia must modify its traditional governing institutions to align with the principles of contemporary democracy in order to properly reconcile these two systems. This may need the reexamination of Xeer to guarantee its alignment with democratic principles, including gender equality and individual liberties. Women's involvement in political affairs and economic advancement must be included into Xeer to guarantee their equitable access to decision-making processes. Furthermore, clan-based governance frameworks may transform into inclusive systems that prioritize meritocratic leadership, selecting people for positions of authority based on their skills and capacity to serve the public interest, rather than their clan ties (Maxwell et al., 2022). The future security and democratic progression of Somalia depend on the effective amalgamation of indigenous governing frameworks such as Xeer with democratic principles. Facilitating discourse among traditional elders, government representatives, and civil society will enable Somalia to shift from a clan-based society to a democratic one. This necessitates a progressive evolution of Somali culture, whereby traditional values are maintained but modified to fulfill the requirements of a contemporary democratic state that ensures human rights, the rule of law, and political inclusion for all people (Hoehne, 2016).

CONCLUSION

The Somali clan system has historically been significant in influencing the social, political, and economic frameworks inside the nation. Although it has promoted communal solidarity and dispute resolution, it has also hindered the establishment of a contemporary democratic state. The discord between traditional governance frameworks such as Xeer and the tenets of democratic governance—particularly on gender equality, electoral reforms, and individual rights—underscores the need for reconciliation between these systems. The clan-based political system has eroded state legitimacy, promoted neopatrimonialism, and

exacerbated social marginalization, especially for women and minority groups. Nonetheless, the persistence of the clan system in the absence of a strong formal state infrastructure poses both obstacles and possibilities for state-building in Somalia.

The future of Somalia depends on integrating its native governing systems with democratic ideals. Somali culture must modify traditional institutions like Xeer to meet constitutional principles, including gender equality, inclusive representation, and human rights. This process cannot be imposed from above; it requires a joint effort among traditional leaders, governmental institutions, and civil society. The successful amalgamation of traditional government with democratic principles may provide a paradigm for other post-conflict communities seeking to harmonize indigenous customs with contemporary states.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Advocacy and Education

To promote inclusive government and guarantee the efficacy of democratic reforms, Somalia must provide resources to grassroots initiatives that educate people about their civic rights, the significance of gender inclusion, and the tenets of democratic governance. This should be executed in a manner that honors indigenous governing frameworks such as Xeer while integrating contemporary democratic principles. Public awareness initiatives, community-oriented seminars, and local discussions might enable youngsters, women, and disadvantaged groups to engage actively in political processes. These initiatives must prioritize the eradication of gender-based exclusion and the advancement of equitable participation in leadership and decision-making across all tiers.

Policy Reform and Harmonization

A hybrid legal framework that integrates Xeer with Somalia's interim constitution and international standards, particularly concerning female rights and minority safeguards, is essential for a successful democratic transition. This framework must be established in collaboration with clan elders, civil society representatives, and constitutional specialists. It must resolve the legal discrepancies between customary law and the constitutional assurances of equal rights. The framework might provide a legal conduit that facilitates cultural continuity while advancing democratic norms, including equality before the law and the involvement of all individuals in political affairs. The reform effort must stress gender equality and minority rights, ensuring that clan-based structures do not compromise constitutional and international obligations.

Support Clan Transformation into Civic Institutions

A vital suggestion is to convert clan networks into civic participants instead than guardians of political and social authority. By transforming the role of clans from the principal mechanism of political authority to enablers of inclusive government, Somali society may progress towards a more meritocratic and democratic framework. Clan leaders and elders need to participate in capacity-building initiatives that enable them to serve as facilitators of conversation, conflict resolution, and inclusive government. This necessitates the establishment of venues for inter-clan cooperation and civic engagement, prioritizing public benefit, social fairness, and equitable representation above clan allegiance. Ultimately, converting clan organizations into civic institutions would not only foster national unity but also aid in the transition to a functional democratic state.

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