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What the Murusade Ugaas Coronation Discloses About Somali Politics

The [ceremonial coronation of Ugaas Abdirisaaq Ugaas Abdullahi Ugaas Hashi Faracadde](#) as the traditional leader of the [Murusade clan](#) took place on April 25, 2023 and became an event of national political importance for several reasons, including the estimate of who, when and what have attended this event and the political nature of the issues involved. The event took place in the city of Mogadishu. Ugaas Abdullahi Ugaas Hashi Faracadde became the Murusade clan leader and the Murusade clan also participated in the event. The Somali state media described the event as a gathering for most citizens of Somalia, traditional leaders and officials of the Somali government, while private Somali media described the scene with HSM, Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre, heads of parliament, former heads of state, opposition members, members of the diplomatic, business and religious community and traditional elders of Somalia and beyond. At first glance, this event was a **caleema saar (coronation)**, a traditional ceremony celebrating a senior clan leader taking on a formal role and grant of authority. Soon however, it became apparent that it was more than a Murusade clan ceremonial occasion. Many reports on the ceremony, including Radio Dalsan, observed that the event was a rare occasion on which the political rivals of Mogadishu set aside their differences during the event. In the absence of a semblance of constructive engagement, this is more than could be hoped for in a country where political debate is reduced to warring over changes to the constitution, the timing of elections, the distribution of powers among the states of the federation and the legitimacy of political appointments.

Murusade is a major Somali clan and a branch of the Karanle within the larger Hawiye family. They maintain a significant presence in central Somalia and Mogadishu. In the capital, where national politics and clan dynamics intersect, the crowning of a senior Murusade Ugaas carries implications that extend far beyond the ceremonial

To the global community, the coronation reveals the intricacies of Somalia's political landscape. Clearly, Somalia transcends governance by formal institutions alone. The Presidency, Parliament, Federal Member States, electoral commissions, and judicial and security structures coexist with traditional institutions deeply embedded in clan identity, lineage, elder mediation, and social legitimacy. In this study, traditional authority encompasses clan elders and leaders—notably Ugaasyo, Suldaanno, and Imaamyo—as well as Nabaddoonno, whose legitimacy stems from lineage, recognized social practices, and social confidence, as well as trust in the absence of a formal electoral process.

The essence of the argument is this: the coronation of the Murusade [Ugaas](#) revealed that Somalia's traditional authority structures are among the most important and effective in enabling dialogue, while simultaneously revealing the shortfalls of the formal authority structures in that the formal authority structures, at almost all levels, are still reliant on elders to resolve political disputes. While traditional authority structures might create the conditions for the realization of peace and the end of the violence, they can also be called upon to achieve peace and the end of the violence, but they might legitimize the formal authority structures and impede the necessary changes to the authority structures. The critical question is not whether traditional authority structures are crucial to improving the effectiveness of authority structures in Somalia; they undoubtedly are. The more important question is will they aid the effective authority structures of the Somalia state without becoming a constant and enduring feature of the authority structures of the Somalia state?

Why the Attendance Mattered

The wider the attendance, the more politically significant the coronation was considered. Politicians' participation added the political landscape, while traditional elders provided

customary legitimacy. Government officials added the event's ceremonial significance, while the clergy, business people, diplomats and members of the civil society community broadened the event's significance beyond the ceremony's traditional clan representation, signaling the establishment of a national political engagement framework. The significance of the event was the conceptualization of a framework in which political participants could position themselves alongside each other, even in the absence of consent. The government can call the opposition meetings as rallies; the opposition can call the government meetings as meetings that promote law and order. The federal members can refuse to collaborate with the government. The parliament can use its proceedings to voice opposite views. A traditional ceremony offers a platform to political participants that allows them to position themselves alongside one another, under the socially accepted concepts of order, language and respect; and culture, rather than under formal political compromise.

The traditional leader's installation, particularly in Somali politics, is used to establish the closeness of political rivals. The closeness is significant in a political environment where confidence and, as a result, conversations are the most elusive. For example, a politician may refuse to join a formal negotiation, but is still present at a traditional leader's installation. A former head of state may attend an elders' traditional ceremony rather than a government-sponsored event. An opposition member may look down at a parliamentary proceeding but still accepts the authority of an Ugaas. The timing of the event is what makes it particularly notable. In January of 2026, a parliamentary session on suggested amendments to the Constitution deteriorated into chaos when opposition members of the parliament protested proposed amendments that would allow the extension of parliamentary and presidential mandates. The Associated Press stated that the session was interrupted due to shouting, torn agenda sheets, whistling and a physical altercation.

In March, the controversy grew. It was reported by Reuters that the parliament of Somalia voted to approve changes to the constitution that would allow the president to extend their term by an additional year, delaying future elections. However, many analysts commented that the legality of this was unclear. Somali Public Agenda stated that there was a legitimacy deficit in this constitutional process with the Puntland, Jubaland, the opposition and others not in agreement to the process as it was conducted. In this context, the Murusade coronation provided a rare opportunity to observe various actors in the Somali political theatre come together with many unresolved political conflicts. The coronation in no means provided a solution to the various political conflicts within the Somali nation, but it demonstrated that traditional leaders in Somali society are able to convene multiple actors who are unwilling to use more formal structures to engage with them and to convene them rather than not having the power to convene at all.

This power of convening was manifested within Somalia after the coronation when several media houses reported that traditional elders who were at the coronation in Mogadishu engaged in attempts to mediate the growing political stalemate in Somalia which was as a result of the electoral conflict between the current president His Excellency Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and the opposition political actors. Hiiraan Online further stated that President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud implored the elders to support the one-person, one-vote electoral system. This again shows that the government understands the support of elders plays a crucial role in gaining the general public's acceptance of the electoral system changes. This order of events plays an important role in this context. The coronation was not purely an event of the unification of various tribal leaders. It was a means of creating a framework in which traditional elders were players in a national issue and an event of relevance to the country as a whole. What started this entire process as an event of

a cultural nature is now of national concern with a relevance to the issues of elections, state legitimacy, state mediation and the sovereignty of the state.

Somalia's Hybrid Political Order

To appreciate the significance of the traditional ceremony involved, one must understand Somalia's hybrid political system. Somalia has an official government structure. However, governance consists of integrated entities and power is distributed across the networks of constitution, clan, elders, businesses, religion and security. This is not an arbitrary political system. This is the result of clan representation, state collapse, civil war, negotiated settlements and numerous failed attempts to recreate the country after the collapse of the centralized state in 1991. In 2026, Reuters published that Somalia has experienced conflict and competition between clans following the collapse of the government of Siad Barre. This was the first of many chaotic episodes in Somalia's long, tumultuous and fracture-filled history.

In this environment, traditional systems did not become obsolete. They became critical. Having authority, elders would resolve clashes, negotiate settlements under ex formal state control and orchestrate peace interventions with the cooperation of the free community. Their authority was not modern, formal, or legal, but it was duly recognized and did not fade away. For the international community to understand Somalia, political legitimacy is achieved through formal state authority, clans, elders and civil peace. While the president may be seen as the head of the formal state, the elder is the most important person from the public's standpoint. To see how a customary event could have such monumental importance for a nation, you will need to examine Somalia's hybrid political order. Formal institutions are insufficient by themselves -- political authority manifests through interwoven networks of the formal (elected) office, clan, elder, business and religious and security bargaining frameworks.

This hybrid order is a manifestation of state implosion, civil war, clan representation, established conventions and many efforts to reconstruct national frameworks after 1991. Reuters stated in 2026, Somalia has experienced civil wars and clan rivalry since the collapse of Siad Barre, the collapse of the central state and a concentration of unachievable governance for decades. Customary authority in that context also did not collapse. Rather it compounded. In the absence of formal state mechanisms, elders mediated and negotiated the harmful impacts of **xeer** customary law, managed inter clan relations, represented clans in peace processes and contained violence and help mechanisms of the state. In some instances, elders' authority was not modern and legal, but it was socially recognized. In Somalia, the political recognition that concern the international audience is the elders and clan authority rather than the formal institutions of government. A president may hold constitutional authority, but an elder may hold the trust of the community to make a political settlement socially accepted.

The involvement of elders in state building in Somalia became more defined with the introduction of indirect electoral systems. In the 2016 electoral process, the UN considered 135 elders as the recognized traditional elders who consulted with sub-clan elders in the picking of electoral delegates. These delegates were mandated to participate in the election of the House of the People. Therefore, elders became an integral part of formal political engagement and state building and were no longer an essential socio-cultural element existing outside the state.

Somalia's state is a combination of formal and informal systems. Parliament is a formal and functional institution, although, historically, clan based arrangements dictated the composition thereof. The presidency is a formal and functional institution, although, historically, clan based arrangements and elite negotiations, dictated the composition thereof. The Federation of Somalia member states are

established by law, although the scope of their authority, historically, is a result of arrangements by local clans, militias, commerce and elders.

The Murusade coronation was the first to demonstrate such a system. The formal leaders of the state occupied the ceremony as a political act affirming the social authority bestowed by an Ugaas, as opposed to being guests of the ceremony. The event was a clear demonstration that state authority, even when resorting to its formal constitutional powers, requires traditional authorities.

This does not appear to indicate that traditional authority is in opposition to the state. In many instances, elders have assumed a supportive role in state building. The Somali state media, as well as local reporting, credits traditional elders regarding HSM's remarks at the inauguration as supportive and crucial to the elements of civil harmony, state formation and the building of the nation.

A simple partnership is not enough to adequately describe the nature of the relationship. In carrying out their dual role, traditional elders first assume the role of legitimate third party facilitator. Their presence and influence reduce hostility and tension in an environment where formal institutions are distrusted and where conflict is difficult to manage. They are able to articulate messages in a culturally significant format, deliberate in a manner that is framed as a reconciliation and not a concession and fortify the indirect communication of various political players when direct engagement is too politically sensitive.

Secondly, elders are political brokers. They command the capacity to framework direct political engagement, conflict and resolution in an environment characterized by indirect electoral processes.

This dual role is the essence of Somalia's hybrid political order. Elders are not only custodians of culture. They are active

participants in the political spheres. They can resolve conflicts, but can also be the source of conflict. They can be the means of direct engagement to resolve political conflicts, but can also be the means through which politicians define their role and purpose.

(Clan) Elders as Tools and Risks

In Somali politics, traditional elders hold an ambiguous position of power. They are able to act as mediators, peacemakers and protectors of social order. However, state leaders, opposition, clan elites and businesses can instrumentalize them for their own ends. This positive effect is genuine. During times of crisis, elders can ease tensions where formal bodies are either incapable or unwilling to act. They can construct interpretative frameworks for dialogue in sanctioned terms, while also providing channels to communication. In contexts where trust is in short supply, elders can provide a moral imperative which is otherwise absent amongst the political class.

On the other hand, elders being useful make them open to the same forms of political oppression. This social legitimacy may make them distinct, but politicians may try to make them look the same. They may share an elders' platform to signal support, or invite them to political processes to simulate agreement. They may also manipulate their authority to coerce a settlement endorsed by negotiating elites. This is the dilemma. The traditional authority is capable of resolving the dilemma and controlling the situation. The elders may be used to legitimize political decisions, disguise elite bargaining as national reconciliation and ease legislative restraints. In these scenarios, the elders act as political elites' instruments to legitimize their political decisions, rather than regulating their own agendas.

The potential adverse effects are even more pronounced in electoral politics. Somalia's "4.5" clan power-sharing model serves as a global case study of a representation system

in a fragmented, post-conflict society; however, it inadvertently makes clan identity the primary focus of political life. [In 2025, the Assessment Capacities Project \(ACAPS\)](#) identified a power-sharing arrangement in which the nation's clans and clan-related minorities are allotted a fixed number of parliamentary seats. ACAPS also predicted that violent inter-clan strife, driven by competition for land and political influence, would persist throughout 2025 and intensify as the 2026 elections draw nearer.

Elder clansmen, therefore, become both stabilizers and gatekeepers. In the stabilizer role, elders prevent the outbreak of violent clan cohesion by guaranteeing representation. In the gatekeeper role, elders prevent representation of dissenting voices in the clan, keep the clan elite in power and control the representation of the clan to the outside world. The elder clansmen, therefore, need not be in conflict with the stabilizer role policy of peace. It is the clan elder who precludes the representation of dissenting voices in inter-clan conflicts by approving the representation of outside clans.

The dilemma goes beyond representation within clans. It is a lack of internal accountability in clans. In a resource poor clan, the predominant system of rule is the elders, who are typically male and in many cases associated with the military and are therefore hierarchical. This system therefore ensures that minority groups such as minorities, the youth, the displaced, the urban elites and inter-clan political activists have diminished elder decision making influence. Thus elder mediated politics will most likely produce elite political consensus without the pluralism of the populace.

This is important, as Somalia is trying to move toward more direct electoral politics. In December 2025, Mogadishu hosted local one-person one-vote elections. The Associated Press and Reuters called this a significant departure from Somalia's longstanding indirect elections that rely on clans. However,

both articles noted that elections were also politically controversial. Some opposition members described the elections as being unilateral and politically advantageous for the incumbent government.

That contradiction has center stage in this process. Somalia's drive to move beyond indirect politics is not in contention, but the transition process is. Somalian political actors revert to clan politics, elders and negotiated legitimacy when electoral changes do not take place with the consent of the broader voter base. It is a cycle of formal institutions attempting to reform politics, actors in the reform process contesting the rules, a loss of trust and the subsequent need to negotiate clan elders to mediate. Ultimately, the institutions' underlining weaknesses are unresolved.

In practice, political actors use traditional authority in at least four incontestable ways.

First, elders are utilized to manage crises. Ensuring that violence does not erupt from social conflicts is accomplished by utilizing elders to begin conversations and lessen the tension. Second, elders are used to accomplish elite deals. Once a respected traditional leader gives their endorsement, a deal between elites can then be seen to be a settlement of the community. Third, elders are utilized to control who gets to represent. Within a clan mediated context, elders determine who can be the voice for the community, who is to be the candidate and who is to be removed from the context. Fourth, elders are utilized to delay changes. Those who benefit from politics that are performed at a distance may rely on elder authority to oppose direct governance such as elections, party competition or structures and regulations that weaken their control. This is the dimension of the Murusade coronation that is concerning. Traditional authority has the capacity to convene and manage the nation. In a context where everything is in a state of conflict, the party that can get elders

to support them has the most relative power. Traditional authority becomes a resource in a political rivalry as well as a means of bridging the gaps between the opposing factions.

The Institutional Challenge

Somalia does not need a radical removal of traditional authority from its politics. This sort of plan will not only be unrealistic, but also politically unwise. Community elders remain a politically powerful group due to their ability to mediate conflicts and their status and support in their community. The goal should be creating a framework of Governance in which traditional authorities play a supportive role to formal Governance.

A successful political regime must be able to resolve conflicts in an orderly and predictable way. Disputes from the elections should be resolved through the respective electoral committees, courts, or parliament and negotiations. Conflicts regarding the Constitution should be resolved through the processes and the frameworks that are recognized in politics and law. As for conflicts between the Centre and the federal member states, the relations between the Centre and the federal member states are to be resolved through the relevant institutional frameworks. In the absence or when the political mechanisms are distrusted, the elders become the actors of the politics.

In the short run, this may be reasonable. In the long run, this reliance on traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution become dangerous for the state. This is especially true when you consider that traditional elders may temporarily relieve tensions, but they cannot be a substitute for the mechanisms through the Governance and the state may assume accountability. Vertical governance of the state may be reinforced, but it cannot be a substitute for state governance.

The coronation of Ugas Murusade illustrates this dilemma. It was a celebration of the power of the Somali customary systems

utilizing their governance to convene a meeting, mediate and command the authority of the Somali people across the warring political factions. It was also a celebration of the weaknesses of the Somali systems of formal governance because when the Somali political elite incorporates Somali customary governance, formal governance fails.

The greater challenge is whether Somalia can create a political system where customary legitimacy and constitutional authority can coexist as a stable construct. Traditional leaders can build the trust needed to establish new political institutions. However, the outcomes of those institutions should not be in the hands of traditional leaders to decide in private. Elders should not become unelected veto players and should not disrupt the process of making of binding decisions. Traditional leaders can build trust and reconciliation, but the process of creating new political institutions and the outcomes of those institutions should not be determined in private.

Somalia does not need to choose between tradition and the state, needs to define the boundaries between them.