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Factors Influencing Voting Decisions: Comprehensive Study in Badhan, Eyl, and Qardho Districts of Puntland State of Somalia

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*Politics,
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This study assessed the factors influencing voting decisions in the Puntland state of Somalia. A quantitative research approach was used in this study. The study was guided by three objectives, which included, a) To find out factors influencing voting decisions in Puntland democratic elections, b) To assess the role of clan elders in the voting decisions in Puntland democratic elections, and c) To assess if there are significant relationships between money and voting decisions in Puntland democratic elections. A detailed literature review and a standardized questionnaire were used in data collection. The study contacted 382 respondents who consisted of registered voters in the Qardho, Badhan, and Eyl districts, the data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The study assesses different variables to determine the factors affecting voting decisions including personality traits, political ideology, tribe, media, political parties, and candidate characteristics. A significant majority of respondents (88.48%), acknowledged that a candidate's personality traits played a role in influencing their voting decision. Similarly, when queried about the role of political ideology in their voting decisions, most respondents (88.40%) agreed. Regarding the influence of tribal affiliations on voting decisions, a considerable proportion of respondents (72.51%) admitted that tribe played a significant role. Respondents were also asked about the involvement of clan elders in directing their voting choices, with a noteworthy 88.74% stating that their clan elders did not instruct them to support a specific political party. Furthermore, all respondents (100%) affirmed that they had not accepted money in exchange for their votes. This suggests that financial factors did not directly influence the voting decisions of respondents. However, a majority (60.99%) reported that they had either witnessed or heard of instances where money was exchanged for votes during elections in Puntland. This indicates that while respondents themselves were not personally affected by vote buying, they were aware of its prevalence in the electoral process. The study recommends that transparency in political funding, strengthening independency media, enhancing civil engagement, combating vote buying, and promoting inclusivity and diversity are necessary for shaping the democratic process in Puntland as well as improving voting decisions.

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INTRODUCTION

Voting decisions lie at the core of democratic societies, determining the composition of governments and the policies that govern our lives. However individual choices made at the ballot box are influenced by many factors that shape the decision-making process. Investigating and comprehending these factors is essential for gaining insights into voter behaviour and the intricacies of elections. By examining these factors, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of voter behaviour, the strategies employed by political parties and candidates, and the broader implications for democratic processes. Ultimately, grasping the factors that impact voting decisions is crucial for promoting informed citizen participation, enhancing electoral integrity, and upholding democratic ideals of representation, accountability, and civic engagement (Waiphot Kulachai, 2023).

In August 1998, the formation of the Puntland State of Somalia took place as a result of a determination by both traditional and political leaders. This decision followed the inability to achieve national reconciliation through various attempts. Initially, the legitimacy of the administration was grounded in a sequence of conferences sponsored locally, where the traditional council of elders (Isimada)

played a significant role. (statistics., 2003). Puntland State is situated in the eastern part of Somalia and shares borders with the Northwest regions to the west, the Gulf of Aden to the north, the Indian Ocean to the southeast, the Central regions to the south, and Ethiopia to the southwest (statistics., 2003).

Article 44 of the Puntland constitution states that all citizens who meet the criteria required by law have the right to vote and to be elected and members of the House of Representatives and the District Councils shall be elected by direct vote. It further states that voting for these offices shall be in a fair and free manner regulated by the law and conducted by an autonomous institution of Puntland State, vested with constitutional powers. Additionally, it indicates that voting shall be known to all, individuals, by secret ballot and free from interference (government., 2009). However, for the past 25 years, traditional elders/leaders have served as the cornerstone of Puntland's political landscape. Beyond quelling warlordism, elders have functioned as an electoral constituency, providing a platform through which the political elite in the region sought legitimacy. Additionally, they have been a crucial resource for resolving both clan conflicts and political crises, upholding what David

King Leonard referred to as an "everyday order in chaos." (institute., 2022).

The democratization process in Puntland began in 2011, with the government's attempt to conduct one-man, one-vote elections in 2013. During this period, essential electoral legislations were formulated, including the Puntland constitution and laws authorizing the establishment of the Puntland electoral commission. Despite having all the legal frameworks in place and approved by lawmakers, the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC I) initiated preparations for local government elections in 37 districts in Puntland. However, these endeavours faced challenges, and although they could have served as a valuable learning experience, they did not proceed as planned (Assair., 2023.). After the 2013 elections were postponed, democratization struggled for years. A regular nomination process led to the government taking office in January 2014 after the TPEC was ousted. The new government publicly committed to restarting the democratization process, but while he established the second Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC II) in June 2016, it never had the mandate or resources to operate, and the process never progressed towards one-person, one-vote elections (Assair., 2023.).

After its November 2019 founding, TPEC III launched public interaction with CSOs, elders, young, women, and politicians to revive democratization. This was followed by a strategic strategy, legal framework, TPEC capacity building, and political association registration criteria in December 2019. By August 2020, the commission completed political association registration, vetting, and certification, selected the three electoral districts (Eyl, Ufeyn, and Qardho) for early elections, and began civic and voter education campaigns (center., 2022). This established the foundation for the commencement of voter registration by mid-2021, employing a distinctive and budget-friendly biometric approach, which was successfully concluded by September 2021.

Additionally, the commission completed the distribution of voter cards in the three election districts and obtained the ultimate lists of candidates from the political associations. Furthermore, the commission facilitated debates in the three districts for the political associations and disclosed their campaign schedules for the pre-election period spanning from September 26 to October 24, 2021 (center., 2022). This essential effort resulted in the effective execution of elections on October 25, 2021, where numerous Puntlanders in Eyl, Ufeyn, and Qardho exercised their voting rights in a tranquil manner. For most voters, this marked their inaugural chance to select their representatives for more than 50 years in the history of Somalia (center., 2022).

The populace has embraced the electoral proceedings, recognizing that they have the chance to choose their representative, as highlighted by a notable statement from a registered voter.

"I want to join a political association that shares common principles with my own. I will contest for the district council position where I can do a good job of representing my community to improve service delivery within the district." Sahro Mohamed, Galdogob, 19-year-old student (TPEC., 2020.)

Problem Statement

In October 2021, Puntland State of Somalia organized one-man, one-vote elections for local councils, marking a significant milestone. The local populace and the international community expressed admiration and support for this initiative, representing the first instance where individuals had the opportunity to directly elect their local representatives. At the outset, the election process was overseen by local elders who selected local council members using a clan-sharing formula, introducing elements of bias and discrimination. Despite the significance of voting decisions in shaping the political landscape, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of the factors influencing

voters in the Puntland state of Somalia. This knowledge gap hinders the development of targeted strategies to enhance civic participation and ensure informed decision-making during elections. The unique importance of this study is that it has never been implemented in a similar study in the Puntland state of Somalia and the findings will respond to the underlying questions to the future of the Puntland Democratic process.

Therefore, this study underscores the necessity of investigating and comprehensively analysing the diverse factors that impact voting decisions, aiming to contribute valuable insights that can inform policy, electoral practices, and community engagement initiatives to strengthen the democratic fabric of the Puntland state of Somalia.

Objectives of the Study.

The paper examines the factors influencing voting decisions in democratic elections in the Puntland state of Somalia. The specific objectives of this study were:

- i. To find out factors influencing voting decisions in Puntland democratic elections.

- ii. To assess the role of clan elders in the voting decisions in Puntland democratic elections.
- iii. To assess if there are significant relationships between money and voting decisions in Puntland democratic elections.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out in three cities: Qardho, Eyl, and Badhan districts in the Puntland state of Somalia. The study targeted a population of 54,625 individuals (26,285 for Qardho, 11,837 for Eyl, and 16,503 for Badhan), who were registered voters in these districts for the Puntland State of Somalia for the one-man, one-vote local council elections conducted between 2021 and 2023 (committee, 2023). To ensure a representative sample, the study selected 382 individuals with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, assuming a 50% response distribution, using the Raosoft sample size calculator. As per the below table, the allocation of the sample size per district was based on the registered persons per district.

Table 1: Sample size per district

No	District.	Registered voters.	Sample size.
1	Qardho.	26,285.	$\frac{26,285}{54,625} \times 382 = 184$
2	Eyl.	11,837.	$\frac{11,837}{54,625} \times 382 = 83$
3	Badhan.	16,503.	$\frac{16,503}{54,625} \times 382 = 115$
Total		54,625.	382.

The study employed purposive sampling to choose participants, as this method facilitates the selection of a specific group of individuals or units for analysis. This is also more useful when the researcher seeks participants with characteristics or attributes that are crucial to the research question or objectives. Purposive sampling is also more efficient, especially when the researcher has limited resources, time, or access to a specific group. Purposive sampling enables you to select cases that

will best enable you to answer your research questions and meet your research objectives.

Structured questionnaires served as the primary data collection tool due to their effectiveness, particularly when dealing with large sample sizes or the need for quick comparison of responses and actionable feedback. The instrument's validity was established through expert judgment, with the researchers aiming for a validity coefficient of at least 75%. The University's head of the research and

development centre was consulted for expertise in questionnaire construction. Following the questionnaire evaluation, adjustments were made to align the study objectives appropriately. The formula that was used to calculate the validity of the instrument is:

$$CVI = (\text{no. of items valid}) / (\text{total no of items}) \times 100$$

Robust research design streamlines research operations, making the research process more efficient while also reducing potential risks and deviations that could derail the research process (Waiphot Kulachai, 2023). However, the descriptive research design was employed in the study as an advantage of describing a detailed and accurate picture of factors influencing voting decisions in the Puntland state of Somalia.

Both primary and secondary data collection methods were used to collect relevant data for the study. Primary data was collected from the respondents through a structured questionnaire. Secondary data was obtained from recorded documents, earlier studies, and some publications on the Puntland democratization process. Stata statistical software was employed in the data analysis to generate percentages, frequencies, tables, and statistical conclusions that address the study objectives. Mobile data collection (KOBACollect) was used in the data collection process.

FINDINGS.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.

As shown in *Table 2*, four factors were used to collect the demographic information of the respondents relevant to the study. The surveyed respondents' ages were categorized into six groups. The largest portion falls within the 26-30 age group (30.37%), followed by the 31—35 age group (24.6%) with no respondents aged 51 and above. As for the gender of the respondents, most of the respondents were male (55.5%) while females made up 44.50%. The marital status of the respondents revealed that 128 (33.51%) of them were married, 226 (59.16%) were single, 14 (3.66%) were widows and 14 (3.66%) of the respondents were divorced. Respondents have diverse educational backgrounds with the majority holding bachelor's degrees (53.66%), followed by respondents with (17.28%), secondary level counted for 16.23% while Master's Degrees reckoned for 10.21% with a very small proportion of respondents have primary education (2.62%) and none have a PhD. Regarding their work experience, the majority of respondents (60.99%) have 0-3 years of experience with only a small proportion (2.88%) having 10 years or more of experience.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Variable	N	%
Age	20—25	82 21.47%
	26-30	116 30.37%
	31--35	94 24.61%
	36-40	48 12.57%
	41—50	42 10.99%
	51 and above	0 0%
Gender	Male	212 55.50%
	Female	170 44.50%
Level of education of the respondents	Masters	39 10.21%
	Bachelor	205 53.66%
	Diploma	66 17.28%
	Secondary level	62 16.23%
	Primary	10 2.62%
	PHD	0 0%

Variable	N	%
Experience of the respondents.	0-3yrs.	233 60.99%
	4-6 yrs.	68 17.80%
	7-9 yrs.	70 18.32%
	10--12 yrs.	11 2.88%
	13 yrs. and above	0 0%
Marital status of the respondents.	Married	128 33.51%
	Single	226 59.16%
	Divorced	14 3.66%
	Widowed	14 3.66%

Factors Influencing Voting Decisions in Puntland Democratic Elections.

Data presented in *Table 3* shows the responses of the participants regarding factors influencing voting decisions in Puntland democratic elections. *Table 3* analyses the factors influencing the voting decisions of individuals who participated in democratic elections in the Puntland state of Somalia. 88.48% (338) of the respondents agreed that a candidate's personality traits influenced their voting decision while a small percentage of respondents 11.52% (44) disagreed with this statement. The role of political ideology in the voting decision was asked the respondents with the majority of the respondents 88.40% (338) agreeing on this argument while a small proportion of 11.52% (44) disagreed on this argument.

Furthermore, a considerable proportion of respondents 72.51% (277) agreed that tribe greatly influenced their voting decision, however, a relatively higher percentage 27.49% (105) of respondents disagreed with this statement indicating some variation in tribal influence among respondents. Moreover, 89% (340) of the respondents indicated that money has not influenced their voting decisions while only 10.99% (42) indicated that money has affected their voting decisions, on another angle, 88.48% (338) of the respondents agreed that candidate characteristics like education and experience have influenced their voting decisions while 11.52% (44) disagreed in this notion. Finally, the majority of respondents 70.15% (268) disagreed that media does not influence their voting decisions while a smaller percentage 29.84% (114) agreed with this argument.

Table 3: Factors influencing voting decisions.

Factors	SA	A	SD	D
The candidate's personality traits were the factors that affected my voting decision.	89 23.30%	249 65.18%	0 0%	44 11.52%
The party's political ideology was the factor that affected my voting decision.	89 23.30%	249 65.10%	0 0%	44 11.52%
The tribe of the candidate was the factor that affected my voting decision.	24 6.28%	253 66.23%	0 0%	105 27.49%
Media influence was the factor that affected my voting decision.	14 3.66%	100 26.18%	14 3.66%	254 66.49%
The money (finance) that I received from the political parties has affected my voting decision.	0 0%	42 10.99%	14 3.66%	326 85.34%
The candidate's characteristics (education and experience) were the factors that affected my voting decision.	49 12.83%	289 75.65%	0 0%	44 11.52%

Key: SA = Strongly agree, A = Agreed, SD = Strongly disagree, D = Disagree

Role of Clan Elders in the Voting Decisions In Puntland Democratic Elections.

Data presented in *Table 4* shows the responses of the participants regarding the role of clan elders in the voting decisions in Puntland democratic elections. *Table 4* presents the role of clan elders in the voting decision in Puntland democratic elections. The respondents were asked if their clan elders were instructed to vote for a specific political party, and 88.74% (339) indicated that their clan elders had not asked them to vote for a specific

political party. This indicates that the clan elders have a minimal role in the voting decision. A small proportion of the respondents, 11.26% (43), have stated that their clan elders ordered them to vote for a specific political party. However, some of the respondents indicated that the extent to which clan elders can sway the voting decisions of community members is moderate while a small proportion of the respondents 14 (3.66%) have indicated that elders were not influential at all.

Table 4: The role of clan elders in the voting decisions.

Factors.		N	%
Has your clan elder instructed you to vote for a specific political party?	Yes	339	88.74%
	No	43	11.26%
Clan elders play a significant role in influencing voting decisions during democratic elections.	Strongly agree.	41	10.73%
	Agree.	138	36.13%
	Neutral.	139	36.39%
	Disagree.	64	16.75%
	Strongly disagree.	0	0%
To what extent do you believe clan elders can sway the voting decisions of community members in Puntland?	Very influential.	86	22.51%
	Moderately influential.	182	47.64%
	Slightly influential.	79	20.68%
	Not very influential.	21	5.50%
	Not influential at all	14	3.66%

Relationships between Money and Voting Decisions in Puntland Democratic Elections.

Table 5 exhibits the relationship between money and voting decisions, 100% of the respondents responded that they have not taken money in exchange for a vote. This suggests that the respondents' voting decisions in this context were not directly influenced by financial factors. However, a majority of respondents (60.99%) stated that they have witnessed or heard of cases where money was exchanged for votes during elections in Puntland. This shows that even though they were not personally impacted by vote buying,

respondents were aware of its prevalence in the electoral process.

Overall, the data shows a difference between the perception of money's influence on voting decisions and the actual receipt of financial incentives. Despite not having received any financial incentives directly, the respondents acknowledged that money played a significant role in influencing their voting decisions. This suggests that there is a wider understanding of the impact of money on electoral processes. In addition, a significant proportion of participants stated that they had observed cases of vote buying, underscoring the frequency of this occurrence in Puntland's democratic elections.

Table 5: Relationships between money and voting decisions.

Factors.		N	%
Have you received financial incentives from a political candidate or political party during an election campaign in Puntland?	Yes	0	0%
	No	382	100%
In your opinion, to what extent do you believe money plays a role in influencing voting decisions in Puntland democratic elections?	Very significant.	28	7.55%
	Somewhat significant.	75	20.22%
	Not very significant.	13	3.50%
	Not significant at all.	255	68.73%
Have you ever witnessed or heard of instances where money was exchanged for votes during elections in Puntland?	Yes.	233	60.99%
	No.	68	17.80%

Table 6: Correlation analysis.

	Voting decision	Role of clan elders	Money	Candidate's personality
Voting decision	1			
Role of clan elders	0.107**	1		
Money	0.220**	0.130**	1	
Candidate's personality	0.645**	0.166**	-0.040	1

***. The correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).*

The study examined the strength and direction of the relationship between variables including voting decisions, the candidate's personality, the role of clan elders, and money received from the political parties. The researcher performed a correlational analysis to explore potential associations between these variables, as presented in Table 6.

The correlation between voting decisions and the role of clan elders was found to be very weak and statistically significant ($r = 0.107$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that, while there is a statistically significant association between the role of clan elders and voting decisions, the strength of the relationship is minimal.

Furthermore, a weak positive and statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.220$, $p < 0.01$) was discovered between voting decisions and financial contributions received from the political parties. This implies that financial issues did not play a major role in shaping voting decisions. Most notably, a strong positive and significant correlation ($r = 0.645$, $p < 0.01$) was observed between voting decisions and the personality of the candidate. This finding indicates a strong correlation between the

voter's decision and the personality traits displayed by the candidates.

DISCUSSIONS

The results of the study provide insightful information about the variables influencing voting behaviour in Puntland democratic elections. This somehow feeds with a report written by the Somali public agenda which states that Since its founding, Puntland has operated on a clan-based political structure. Since traditional elders choose the members of Puntland's 66-member parliament, they have significant influence in the governance circles. The realization of a direct vote is being worked towards by TPEC with the support of traditional elders. In isolated villages, respected elders occasionally even served as civic education instructors (Agenda, 2021).

Another overwhelming finding was the role candidate's tribe in the voting decision, 66.23% () agreed and 27.49% disagreed that their voting decision was greatly affected by the tribe of the candidate, another study by PDRC states that the common perception of the election procedure was

significantly impacted by the influence of clan politics. Most of Puntland's voters are illiterate and nomadic, and rather than political platforms and programs, the fledgling political associations were founded on clan loyalty and affiliation (PDRC, 2014). When asked if political ideology played a part in the decision to vote, the majority of respondents 88.4% agreed. While a smaller percentage, 11.52 % disagreed on this notion. Furthermore, a sizable fraction of participants (66.23%) concurred that their tribe had a major impact on their choice to vote. Nonetheless, a comparatively greater proportion of participants (27.49%) expressed disagreement with this assertion, suggesting a degree of variability in the impact of tribe on respondents. Moreover, the participants expressed that their voting choices have not been impacted by financial gain. Rather, a sizable portion of them said that factors like experience and education of the candidates affected their choice of vote. 70.15% of the respondents that media that media has no bearing on their decision to vote while 29.84% of the respondents agreed that media has influenced their voting decisions (6.

CONCLUSION

The study shed light on the intricate dynamics of the electoral system in Puntland by examining the variables that affect voting decisions in democratic elections. First, the study discovered that voting decisions are significantly influenced by political ideology, personality traits, and tribal affiliations. However, respondents also recognized the value of candidates' training and experience, demonstrating a nuanced approach to selection that balances policy considerations with personal traits. Second, there was a perception that money played a significant role in influencing the election's outcome, even though financial incentives had little direct influence on respondents' voting decisions. This emphasizes the necessity of more openness in campaign funding and steps to lessen the impact of money on election procedures.

The study also revealed that clan elders have less of an impact on voters' choices, suggesting a trend toward independent voting. This presents an opportunity to promote civic engagement and give people the power to make informed decisions that are consistent with their values and objectives. In conclusion, the study's conclusions show how complex interactions between a variety of factors influence voters' decisions in Puntland's democratic elections. Stakeholders can contribute to strengthening democratic processes and ensuring free, fair, and inclusive elections in the region by addressing issues like campaign finance transparency, preventing bribery, and encouraging civic engagement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher suggested the following recommendations: Vote buying is concerningly common, as evidenced by the high proportion of respondents who have seen or heard of incidents in which money was exchanged for votes. This problem poses a serious threat to democratic election integrity. Increased efforts are required to prevent vote buying, including public awareness campaigns, stringent enforcement of electoral laws, and civic education that highlights the value of free and fair elections.

While respondents said money didn't influence their choices, their belief in the power of money to influence choices highlights the need for greater transparency in political financing. Better regulation and enforcement can help reduce the impact of campaign money on electoral outcomes by increasing transparency and accountability. While most respondents say that media does not affect their voting decisions, there is no question that the media has a significant impact on public opinion. As a result, it is essential to focus on initiatives that strengthen independent media outlets and promote balanced reporting. By doing so, voters will have access to accurate and diverse information, allowing them to make informed decisions.

The results of the study regarding the influence of tribal affiliation on voting decisions highlight how critical it is to advance diversity and inclusivity in political processes. Establishing a political climate in which candidates are evaluated based on their qualifications rather than their ancestry is imperative. Puntland will become more cohesive and united as a result of this strategy. Because a candidate's personality traits, and a party's political ideology, play such a large role in influencing voters' decisions, education and awareness efforts are essential. These efforts will help voters make informed decisions based on candidates' qualifications, policies, and track records, rather than their personality traits or tribal allegiance.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST.

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research paper.

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