

THE IMPACT OF FEDERALISM ON NATIONAL UNITY IN SOMALIA

**Ibrahim Abdulkadir Ali¹, Ahmed Mohamoud Jama², Abdullahi
Bashir Abdulkadir³, Sara Geedi Mohamed⁴**

Author Details:

*Correspondent Author: Ibrahim Abdulkadir Ali¹ Somali National University, Somalia,
ibrahimabdulkadirali100@gmail.com*

Ahmed Mohamoud Jama², Somali National University, Somalia, e-mail: ahmed.jama@snu.edu.so,

Abdullahi Bashir Abdulkadir³, Somali National University, Somalia, e-mail: maxamedbashiiir121@gmail.com,

Sara Geedi Mohamed⁴ e-mail: zaragedi47@gmail.com.

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ABSTRACT

The research examines the impact of federalism on national unity in Somalia, focusing on its implications for peace building, political instability, and territorial integrity. The study aims to analyze the effectiveness of federalism in fostering national cohesion among Somalia's complex clan-based political landscape. Specifically, it evaluates federalism's role in addressing challenges related to governance, stability, and inter-clan conflicts. A descriptive survey research design was employed, utilizing quantitative methods to gather and analyze data. The target population consisted of 80 individuals, including government officials, political analysts, civil society representatives, and students. A sample size of 67 respondents was determined using Slovin's formula, ensuring statistical validity and representation. The study used structured questionnaires as the primary data collection instrument, emphasizing validity and reliability through pre-testing. Data were analyzed using statistical package for social science (SPSS). The findings reveal that while federalism has potential as governance clan-based divisions, leading to fragmented territorial integrity and political instability, have hindered framework, its implementation in Somalia. The study also highlights the limited success of federalism in peace building efforts, underscoring the need for inclusive dialogue and equitable resource sharing. In conclusion, while federalism offers a pathway toward decentralized governance, its current model in Somalia exacerbates existing divisions. The study recommends policy reforms to strengthen federal institutions, promote national dialogue, and foster unity through inclusive governance practices. Enhanced collaboration among political stakeholders and international support is crucial to address the underlying challenges and achieve sustainable national unity

1. Background of the study

The past half century there has been a significant pressure and move towards decentralization or federalization all over the world. This evolution of federal and decentralized systems has been paralleled by the emergence of new issues, such as environmental protection, the sharing of natural resources among levels of government, corruption, and the impact of federalism and decentralization on national unity (Ahmad & Brosio, 2006). It is worthy to note that states all over the world adopt political arrangements that best suit their nature and composition, and which would facilitate a substantial amount of cooperation among the various segments and institutions, all in a bid to achieve the desired end. One of such institutional arrangements especially for plural societies is the federal option. That is, a form of government where the component units of a political organization participate in sharing powers and functions in a cooperative manner although the combined forces of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity, among others, tend to pull them apart (Daniel, 2015). Globally, the countries that operate under a federal structure include Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States (Law, 2013).

In Africa, few countries operate under a federal system of government, where powers were divided between a central authority and regional or state governments. Nigeria is the most prominent example, with a federal structure that consists of 36 states, each with its own level of autonomy, enabling it to manage local affairs within the framework of a centralized federal government. (Majekodunmi, 2015) Ethiopia also practices a federal system, based on ethnic federalism, where regions are largely defined by ethnic groups, each with significant self-governing authority. South Sudan has adopted a form of federalism to manage its diverse ethnic groups through state governments, though this system is still evolving (Suberu, 2009). These countries use federalism as a means to address ethnic, regional, and cultural diversity, aiming to balance unity with local autonomy; Moreover, Somalia also adopted federalism in 2004 and embarked on its implementation in 2012 (Dahir & Sheikh Ali, 2024) As an initial step, the Transitional Federal Charter for the Somalia Republic was passed in February 2004. As a result, a new government called the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was elected in October 2004. Article 11(1) of the Charter required that "the Somali Republic shall have a decentralized system of administration based on federalism." Sub-sections 6 and 8 of these articles asked the TFG is set to establish a new Ministry of Federal and Constitutional Affairs, along with an Independent Federal Constitutional Commission (IFCC). It took these two bodies nearly eight years to establish a fully-fledged federal constitution for Somalia. On 1 August 2012, a National Somali Constituent Assembly overwhelmingly approved the Somali Federal Republic's constitution, titled Provisional Constitution. Subsequently, the Parliament elected a new president on 10 September 2012 (Mohamoud, 2015). Despite perceived problems and shortfalls, the Somali Constitution enshrines federal principles that satisfy the Somali political leaders, Puntland Government, Somali community elders, Somali Civil Societies as well as the International Organizations who have invested time, energy and resources in drafting or providing commentary on the process that commenced in 2004, Somaliland initiated the process of independent state (Somaliland) that has no interest in joining a federation, where Puntland wanted to join a federation but does so on the grounds that it has the right to rule its own citizens while giving some authority to a federal government, and Galmudug region was a state only in name, but has no government, and has only recently begun establishing state procedures (Editors, 2017).

Federalism is a political organization in which the activities of government are divided between regional governments and a central government in such a way that each kind of government has some activities on which it makes final decisions (Law, 2013). Federalism is a political concept in which a group of members are bound together by covenant (Latin: feuds, covenant) with a governing representative head. The term " federalism" is also used to describe a system of government in which sovereignty is constitutionally divided between a central governing authority and constituent political units such as states or provinces (Griffiths & Griffiths, 2003). Federalism is a system based upon democratic rules and institutions in which the power to govern is shared between national and provincial/state governments, creating what is often called a federation. The term federalist describes several political beliefs around the world. Also, it may refer to the concept of parties; its members or supporters called themselves Federalists (Kramer & Like, 1999). Moreover, A federation may be conveniently defined as a constitutional system which instances a division between central and regional governments and where special or entrenched representation is accorded to the regions in the decision-making procedures of the central government (Aroney, 2006).

On the other hand, National unity is the process of bringing together people from different backgrounds to work for a common good. It can also refer to a sense of harmony or full agreement (McRoberts & McHugh, 1999).

National unity refers to a type of government formed by a group of parties, generally during times of emergency.

These governments are said to be unified by a love of country rather than by political affiliation (Zipf, 1941). National unity is a feeling of being united as a country, especially in times of trouble (Habermas, 1990).

Federalism Legal Definition: A system of government which has created, by written agreement, a central and national government to which it has distributed specified legislative (law-making) powers, called the federal government, and regional or local governments (or sometimes called provinces or states) to which is distributed other, specified legislative powers (Scheiber, 1980).

Sine Somalia adopted federalism in 2012; the country faced many challenges, such as political instability, prolonged conflicts between troubles, and threats of national unity and community cohesion. Therefore, in this research, we will explore how the new system of Federalism affected the national unity of the country and community cohesion in general.

1.1. Problem statement

Federalism defines as a form of governance that supports regional autonomy and accommodates diverse identities (Guzina, 2010). However, in Somalia, its implementation has resulted in enduring repercussions that jeopardize national cohesion. Rather than fortifying territorial integrity and advancing comprehensive government, this political system has expanded clan contentions and territorial disputes, debilitating the country's cohesion as a whole. Clan divisions' authentic foundation, the non-appearance of a characterized government structure, and the uneven political will of federal states and regional authority are the most common reasons for this issue. These components worsen endeavors to achieve social cohesiveness and steadiness by creating political and social fragmentation, where tribalism and clanism took priority over national solidarity. Despite the importance of understanding how Somalia's federalism influences national unity, there is limited knowledge regarding the specific mechanisms by which governance policies effect social cohesion. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the impact of federalism on Somalia's national unity and providing suggestions for creating a more cohesive and stable in Somalia's federal system.

1.2. Specific objectives

1. To examine the impact of federalism on national unity
2. To evaluate federalism's impact on peace building and Political Instability,
3. To analyze the role of clan-based federalism on territorial integrity.

1.3. Research Question

1. What is the Impact of federalism on national unity in Somalia?
2. How the political system of federalism contributed to the ongoing clan-based conflicts and political instability in Somalia?
3. What is the role of clan-based federalism on territorial integrity?

1.4. Significance of the study

The findings of this study will help the federal government Somalia and the federal member states to better understood the impact of federalism on national unity. As well as, the findings of this study are also useful to any potential researchers who interests to make further study on this topic, as literature.

1.5. Scope of the study

The research focused on the impact of federalism on national unity in Somalia. as it determines and examines the extent to which federalism effect on national unity in Somalia. Moreover, the study was conducted out the capital city of Somalia, Mogadishu; because it is the head quarter of the federal government of Somalia.

1.6. Conceptual Framework

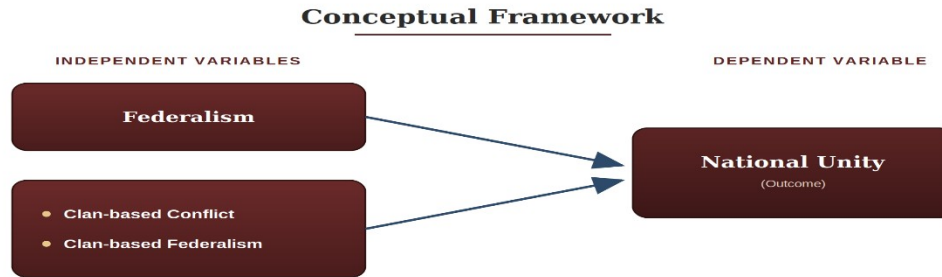


Figure: Relationship between federal structure, clan-based dynamics, and national unity in the Horn of Africa context

2. Literature review

2.1. Federalism theory and concepts

Today's political science literature on federalism appears to have matured to a mature level; advanced comparative studies with a global reach now provide a multitude of useful insights on the characteristics and operations of federal systems of government. Nevertheless, it demonstrates a theoretical fragility that is troubling. Attempts over several decades to find a consensus on the concept's exact meaning have so far been unsuccessful. As Albert Sbragia noted, federalists are unable to agree on a consensus on a single term. Rather, they automatically accept that there are "many overlapping definitions (Law, 2013). However, there are modern definitions of federalism; Federalism is a political system where power and authority are constitutionally divided between a central government and regional or state governments (Ogunnoiki, 2017). This division allows each level of government to operate independently within its defined jurisdiction, fostering a balance between unity and diversity (Ogunnoiki, 2017). Federal systems are typically established in countries with large populations, vast territories, or significant cultural, linguistic, or ethnic diversity (Behnke, 2018). The core idea of federalism is to prevent the concentration of power in one central authority while allowing local governments to address region-specific issues (Hills Jr, 2023). One of the fundamental principles of federalism is autonomy and sovereignty. While regional governments exercise self-rule within their jurisdiction, they are not entirely sovereign in the way that independent states are. This autonomy allows for decentralized governance, enabling regional governments to create policies tailored to local needs and preferences (Helling et al., 2005). Simultaneously, the central government retains overarching authority in matters of national importance, such as defense, foreign policy, and monetary policy, ensuring national cohesion and stability (Amar, 1986). The federal system often adopts the post-conflict countries to manage diversity and rebuild trust. For instance, Iraq and Bosnia-Herzegovina implemented federal structures to address ethnic and sectarian divides (Simonsen, 2005). In theory, these structures offer power-sharing mechanisms that prevent the dominance of one group over others (Simonsen, 2005). However, as Anderson noted (2007), if poorly implemented, federalism can entrench divisions rather than bridge them (Erk & Anderson, 2009). In Somalia's experience, these are mirrors of some of these global challenges but with distinct nuances. Unlike Iraq, where sectarian identities dominate, Somalia's federalism is intertwined with clan dynamics (Qaasster, 2021). According to (dahiye, 2014), the state formation process has sometimes been seen as favoring certain clans, leading to perceptions of marginalization. For example, the tension between the federal government and the Jubaland state illustrates how regional disputes can escalate into national challenges.

Since Somalia adopted a federal structure in 2012, it was a landmark event designed to distribute power and

prevent a return to authoritarianism (Mohamed, 2023). Federalism should foster unity by allowing diverse regions to govern themselves while remaining part of a cohesive national framework. However, Somalia's federal model has, in some cases, deepened divisions. For instance, disputes over natural resource control and political representation have frequently pitted the federal government against regional states, fueling a sense of competition rather than collaboration (Mwangi, 2013). One important issue is the uneven distribution of power and resources. Wealthier or strategically important regions sometimes receive preferential treatment, exacerbating regional inequalities (Mwangi, 2013).

2.2. National Unity definitions and concepts

In its most basic definition, national unity is the sense of solidarity among all citizens, particularly during difficult times (Sevinç, 2022). To put it another way, it is the act of uniting to combat anything that jeopardizes a specific people's human growths (Rodríguez, Velastequí, 2019). This idea characterizes a state in which a nation's citizens increasingly regard themselves as a single people, National unity represents a tactic of creating unity in diversity, One people are united by a number of shared characteristics, including experiences, ideals, and a feeling of patriotism and solidarity that surpasses traditional, primal varied tendencies (Rodríguez, Velastequí, 2019). Other terms associated with national unity include national cohesion, national integration, nation building and social solidarity, to put it another way, the fight for national unity depends heavily on equality and harmony, evenhandedness, fairness, impartiality, justice, and justness are alternate terms for equity (Birhan, 2024). The definitions and explanation of national unity can go on and on, but the many definitions and explanations of this concept alone will not make us realize or achieve its reality (Birhan, 2024). In Somalia, national unity has been a challenge due to historical divisions, clan-based identities, and protracted conflicts, efforts to foster unity have faced numerous obstacles, including competing interests among clans and regional authorities, yet it remains a vital objective for the country's long-term stability and growth (Hussein, 2022). For Somalia to move forward, people need to feel that they are part of one national family, working toward common goals and values, this kind of unity can bring stability and open doors for economic growth, but it is not something that happens overnight it requires genuine effort and commitment from everyone (Elmi & Barise, 2006). Moreover, Somaliland's continued claim of independence illustrates how federal arrangements have failed to integrate all Somali territories into a unified national framework. However, federalism has also enabled power-sharing agreements, such as the 2016 electoral process, where federal member states played a key role in selecting parliamentarians, showing potential for inclusive governance when cooperation prevails. These examples highlight the dual-edged nature of federalism in shaping Somalia's national unity.

2.3. The importance of national Unity

Considering Somalia's decades of political unrest, clan-based conflicts, and brittle governmental institutions, national unity is essential (NCUBE, 2019). Scenarios in Somalia show how the absence of national unity has impeded sustainable development and peace building. For instance, internal conflict and clan rivalries led the state to fall down in 1991, starting a protracted civil war and humanitarian disasters (A, 2005). The Federal Government's inception in 2012 and other peace accords, such as the Arta Conference in 2000, serve as examples of initiatives aimed at reestablishing unity through inclusive administration (Kaburu, 2018). However, ongoing conflicts between the federal government and federal member states show how national integration is still vulnerable by unresolved power sharing and resource control issues. Positive instances, like the relative stability in Somaliland and Puntland, highlight whether localized government methods can promote national cohesion when backed by sincere political compromise and reconciliation (Öberg, 2020). These instances highlight the necessity of resolving past grievances, bolstering state institutions, and encouraging fair political involvement in order to promote national unity in Somalia(Birhan,2024).

2.4. The impact of federalism on National Unity

Federalism in Somalia was a means to address historical grievances, decentralize power, and create a more inclusive political system, theoretically, this system could promote national unity by giving regions and diverse clans a voice within a larger national framework (Abdinoor, 2015). However, in practice, Somalia's federal model has often deepened divisions rather than healing them, power struggles between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and regional states frequently fuel political instability, with federal member states asserting more autonomy than cooperation (Kisilu, 2014). This competition undermines the national identity that federalism is supposed to foster, as loyalty to regional and clan-based entities often outweighs allegiance to the central government (Kisilu, 2014) The federal system, for instance, exacerbated clan division in Somali society by

encouraging each clan to have a unique flag to which they are more devoted than the national flag. The national flag also seems to be losing significance, and the flags of federal member states are more enthusiastic and significant than the national flag.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to examine the impact of federalism on national unity in Somalia. The descriptive approach enables systematic data collection and analysis of respondents' views and perceptions. Quantitative methods were employed. Quantitative data provide statistical evidence. The descriptive survey research design is suitable for this study as it allows for systematic collection and analysis of data from a specific population, enabling researchers to describe characteristics, trends, and relationships (Mohajan, 2020)

3.2. Population of the study

The target population of this study was consisted of 80 individuals, including government officials, political analysts, civil society representatives, and students in Mogadishu. This population was selected due to its direct involvement and influence in matters of federalism and national unity. Their expertise and lived experiences justify their inclusion in the study.

3.3. Sample size

A sample size of 67 respondents was used, representing 83.75% of the target population. This sample size ensures adequate representation while considering possible non-responses. Sloven's formula was used to calculate this sample size, ensuring reliability and statistical validity

Group names	Sample size
<i>Political analysts</i>	10
<i>Civil Society representatives</i>	15
<i>Government officials</i>	12
<i>Students</i>	30
Total	67

The sample size of the study consists of 67 respondents according sloven's formula

Where;

n = Sample Size

N = Target Population

Ne = Margin of error (commonly set at 0.05 for a 95% confidence level

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + \frac{N \cdot Ne^2}{e^2}} \quad n = \frac{80}{1 + \frac{80 \cdot (0.05)^2}{e^2}} = 67$$

3.4. Data collection instruments

The study employed self-administered questionnaire. A self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) refers to a questionnaire that has been designed specifically to be completed by a respondent without intervention of the researchers (e.g. Respondents) collecting the data. The researchers distributed questionnaires to sample government officials, political analysts, civil society representatives, and students. The questionnaire is suitable for this study because it allows for efficient data collection from a large and diverse group of respondents within a limited timeframe. It ensures uniformity in questions, enabling consistent responses that can be easily quantified and analyzed (Iyamu, 2018). Additionally, self-administered questionnaires offer flexibility, allowing respondents

to provide honest answers at their convenience. The researchers used self-administered questionnaire because respondents answer at their suitability.

3.5. Data collection procedure

Data collection was employed to distribute questionnaires to selected respondents and conducting online survey questionnaire with key informants. Respondents were given clear instructions on completing the questionnaires.

3.6. Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software especially in Statistical package for Social Science (SPSS) with results presented in tables, charts.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

The researchers strictly adhere to ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed. Data was securely stored and used solely for research purposes.

3.8. Limitations of the study

- Resource constraints: The study faces limited financial and material resources, restricting its scope.
- Security challenges, we also faced security concerns that hindered us to meet the required and accurate respondents to collect data and fieldwork.
- Limited access to the government officials: there is difficulty in reaching key government officials that may result in incomplete or less authoritative information.
- Limited timeframe: the available timeframe is inadequate to thoroughly explore the topic or gather comprehensive data.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample was predominantly male (71.6%), with the largest age cohort falling between 18–24 years (37.3%). Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (55.2%), and students formed the largest occupational group (40.3%), followed by civil society members, government officials, and political analysts.

Demographic Variable	Dominant Category	Percentage
Sex	Male	71.6%
Age Group	18–24 years	37.3%
Education	Bachelor's Degree	55.2%
Occupation	Student	40.3%

Table 4.1 — Summary of Respondent Demographic Profile (n = 67)

4.2. Key Findings: Federalism and National Unity

Across all thirteen survey items, a clear and consistent pattern emerged: strong majorities of respondents associated federalism, and clan-based federalism in particular, with weakened national unity, deepened clan divisions, eroded territorial integrity, and increased political instability. Opinion levels (combining 'Agree' and

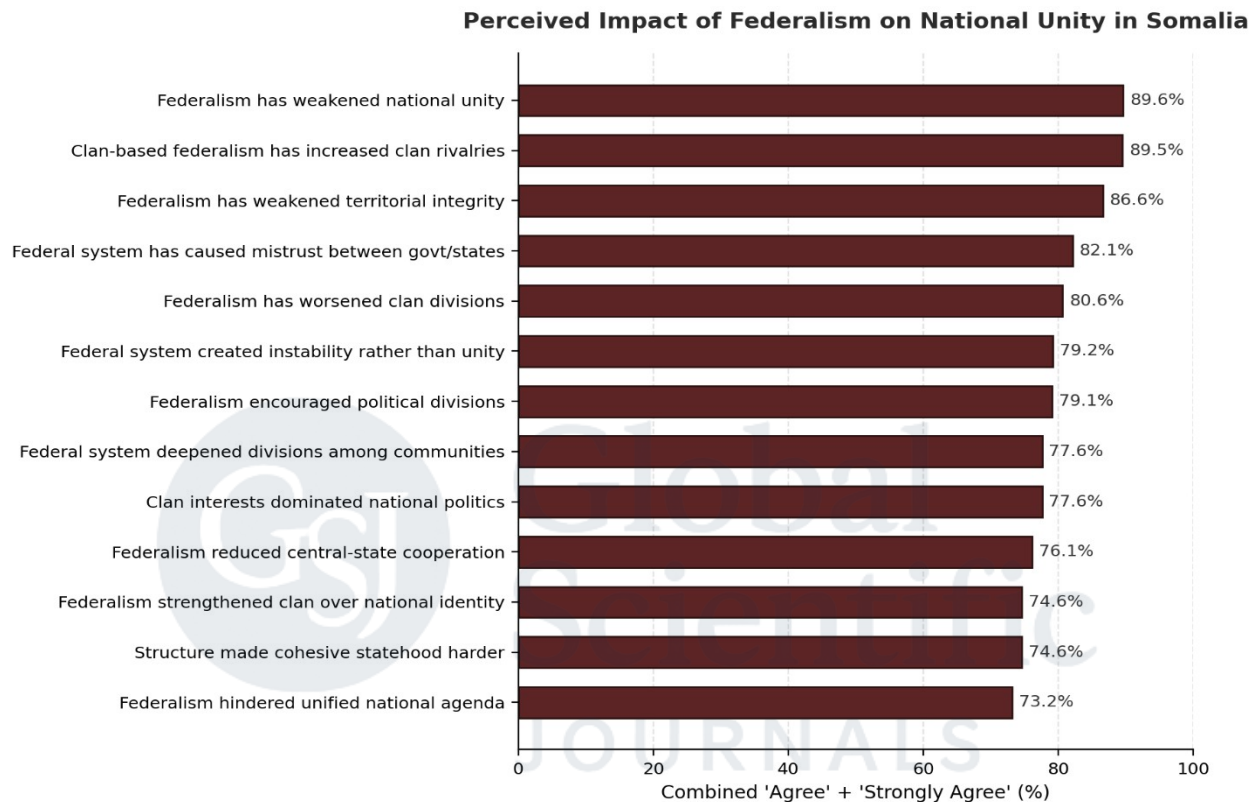
'Strongly Agree') ranged from 73.2% to 89.6% across all measured statements, indicating broad and consistent concern rather than an isolated view.

Survey Statement	Agree + Strongly Agree
<i>Federalism has weakened Somalia's national unity</i>	89.6%
<i>Clan-based federalism has increased clan rivalries and conflicts</i>	89.5%
<i>Federalism has weakened Somalia's territorial integrity</i>	86.6%
<i>The federal system has caused mistrust between the central government and regional states</i>	82.1%
<i>Federalism has worsened clan divisions within Somali society</i>	80.6%
<i>Somalia's federal system has created instability rather than unity</i>	79.2%
<i>Federalism has encouraged political divisions that threaten stability</i>	79.1%
<i>Clan-based interests have dominated national politics</i>	77.6%
<i>The federal system has deepened divisions among Somali communities</i>	77.6%
<i>Federalism has reduced cooperation between central government and federal states</i>	76.1%
<i>The federal structure has made cohesive statehood harder</i>	74.6%
<i>Federalism has strengthened clan identity over national identity</i>	74.6%
<i>Federalism has hindered the formation of a unified national agenda</i>	73.2%

Table 4.2 — Combined opinion Levels Across Key Survey Statements (n = 67)

Figure 4.1 — Perceived Impact of Federalism on National Unity in Somalia

4.3



Summary of findings

The findings indicate significant concerns about federalism's impact on Somalia's national unity. The strongest area of concern was federalism's weakening effect on national unity (89.6%), closely followed by clan-based federalism's role in increasing clan rivalries (89.5%) and weakening territorial integrity (86.6%). These results reinforce prior literature suggesting that federal arrangements, when overlaid on clan-based political structures, tend to exacerbate fragmentation rather than resolve it.

4.4. Discussions

This study examined the impact of federalism on Somalia's national unity from the perspective of 67 key stakeholders, including political analysts, government officials, students, and civil society members. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27, with descriptive statistics presented through frequency tables. The results reveal a strong consensus that federalism, particularly in its clan-based form, has deepened social and political divisions, eroded trust between the central government and federal states, and undermined the pursuit of a unified national identity.

5. Conclusion

The inception of federalism in Somalia's political system was a bold attempt to address historical grievances and balance power among the nation's diverse clans and regions. Yet, the federal system has developed into a divisive structure that has undermined national unity. The findings of this study highlight how clan-based federalism has strengthened local interests, diminished trust between the Central government and member state, and fostered competition over cooperation. Instead of serving as a unifying force, federalism has amplified regional rivalries

and diluted Somalia's national identity. One of the key issues revealed by the study is the dominance of clan affiliations in political and governance structures. This has fueled mistrust between the federal government and member states, creating political instability and weakening Somalia's territorial integrity. Respondents consistently emphasized that federalism has made it harder for the country to function as a cohesive state. Political agendas, often guided by clan loyalties, have hindered the formulation of unified national policies and led to frequent disputes over power and resource allocation.

Despite these challenges, the study also recognizes that federalism retains potential as a governance model for Somalia. Properly implemented, it can address the need for decentralized governance while maintaining a strong national framework. However, achieving this requires significant reforms, trust building among stakeholders, and a shift from clan-based politics to governance that prioritizes inclusivity and national interests. Federalism in Somalia reflects a broader struggle between local autonomy and national cohesion. While this balance is difficult to achieve, it is not impossible. Somalia's experience is a cautionary tale of the consequences of unstructured federalism, but it also offers opportunities for recalibration. The journey to a stable and unified Somalia lies in embracing these opportunities with strong leadership, inclusivity, and a commitment to equity.

5.1. Key Policy Recommendations

The study recommends the following key policies that seems to be tailored to Somalia's ground realities.

- **Facilitate Inclusive National Dialogue:** Somalia must convene a comprehensive national dialogue involving federal member states, the central government, civil society, elders, and youth representatives. This dialogue should focus on rebuilding trust, clarifying the roles of governance structures, and addressing grievances over power sharing and resources.
- **Strengthen Trust through Inter-regional state Collaboration:** Create formal mechanisms for collaboration between federal and state governments, such as intergovernmental councils or mediation committees. These platforms should be designed to resolve disputes, promote cooperation, and establish accountability for shared objectives.
- **Promote Grassroots Participation in Governance:** Federalism in Somalia must move beyond elite-driven processes. Grassroots communities should have a voice in governance through local councils, public consultations, and civic education programs that emphasize unity and collective decision-making.
- **Invest in National Identity-Building Initiatives:** Reclaim Somalia's shared identity by promoting national symbols, history, and cultural pride. Public campaigns, educational reforms, and community programs should emphasize common values and collective goals, reducing the prominence of divisive clan identities.
- **Reform the Federal Framework:** Conduct a constitutional review process that directly involves diverse stakeholders, including marginalized regions and communities. This process must clarify governance responsibilities, resource-sharing mechanisms, and dispute-resolution frameworks, ensuring all parties feel represented.
- **Reduce Economic Disparities Across Regions:** target underdeveloped regions with specific investments in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Equitable resource distribution is essential to address the grievances of marginalized communities and reduce the economic imbalance that fuels regional resentment.

Finally, Somalia's federalism represents both a challenge and an opportunity. While its current implementation has deepened divisions, it also provides a foundation for inclusive governance if reimagined and reformed. Achieving national unity requires a collective effort to prioritize shared goals over narrow interests. This involves strengthening institutions, engaging communities, and fostering leadership that transcends clan allegiances. The path forward demands resilience and innovation. Federalism must be approached not as an unchangeable framework but as a flexible system capable of adaptation to Somalia's unique sociopolitical realities. By addressing its structural flaws and emphasizing inclusivity, Somalia can transform federalism into a unifying force that fosters peace, stability, and sustainable development. The future of Somalia rests on its ability to bridge divides and embrace a shared destiny that reflects the aspirations of all its citizens

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