



Clan, State, and Squeeze: Corruption and fragility in Somalia

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“Corruption is the way of Somalis”: Somali poet, Timo-ade.

Abstract

Corruption is a major impediment to governance, development, and stability, particularly in fragile states. In Somalia, it is deeply embedded within political, economic, and social structures, sustained by weak state institutions and clan-based social norms. This paper examines the nexus between systemic state fragility and clan allegiances in perpetuating corruption, arguing that their interaction creates a self-reinforcing cycle that undermines institutional reform. Drawing on qualitative methods, including a desk review of literature, policy reports, and government documents, as well as informal discussions with key informants, the study traces the evolution of corruption from post-independence bureaucratic inefficiencies to a deeply entrenched system of patronage, rent-seeking, and donor-driven misgovernance. It highlights how social norms, such as hiil iyo hoo – the obligation to support one’s clan – exacerbate nepotism and obstruct accountability. Additionally, it explores how political interference, weak legal frameworks, and ineffective oversight mechanisms have facilitated systemic corruption, eroding public trust and state legitimacy. This paper contributes to the broader discourse on governance reform in fragile states by contextualizing corruption within Somalia’s historical and socio-political landscape.

Keywords: Somali, corruption, governance, state fragility, clan-based politics.

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1 Introduction

The prevailing perception of corruption as a societal ill has not curtailed its global proliferation, nor has it mitigated its entrenchment within governments and societies. As one of the most pressing governance challenges of the contemporary era, corruption undermines nearly all aspects of human life (Kubbe & Engelbert, 2018:1). As Holmes (2006:158) notes, corruption is “the most significant cause of poverty in the contemporary world, particularly in developing countries.” Its impact extends beyond financial misallocation, contributing to inefficiencies, fostering incompetence within bureaucracies, and ultimately eroding economic growth, service delivery, and governance structures (Frank & Schulze, 2003:143; Caiden, 2001; Pyman et al., 2014). Consequently, societies plagued by corruption experience heightened grievances, perceptions of inequality, resentment, and deep-seated mistrust among different segments of the population (Pyman et al., 2014:17; Agerberg, 2022:933).

Somalia is no exception to this global trend, with corruption permeating nearly all sectors of its government. Despite ongoing efforts to recover from decades of civil war, political instability, and economic collapse, corruption remains a formidable barrier to progress. The country consistently ranks among the most corrupt nations in the world, as reflected in Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index. A striking example of this systemic issue is the revelation that, during the 2013/14 fiscal year, 80% of withdrawals from government accounts were conducted by individuals for personal enrichment rather than public service (Ahmad et al., 2022:8). Such instances illustrate the extent to which impunity facilitates the misappropriation of limited public resources, further weakening Somalia’s governance and economic prospects.

While there are commonalities in the causes and consequences of corruption, as well as in the strategies employed to combat it, these factors vary significantly across different national contexts. Some scholars emphasize the role of strong institutions, formal rules, and accountability mechanisms in addressing corruption, whereas others argue that a broader approach encompassing social, economic, political, organizational, and individual-level factors is necessary (de Graaf et al., 2010:13; Mullard, 2020). Without discounting these perspectives, this paper specifically examines the interplay between weak state institutions and entrenched social norms in perpetuating corruption in Somalia. It argues that the systemic fragility of the state, coupled with deeply rooted clan-based social structures, creates a mutually reinforcing cycle that sustains and exacerbates corruption. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for designing more effective anti-corruption interventions tailored to the Somali context.

The methodology employed in this study is qualitative, consisting of an extensive desk review of relevant literature, policy reports, and government documents to contextualize corruption in Somalia. Additionally, informal discussions were conducted with key informants, including academics, senior government officials, and individuals with direct experiences of corrupt practices. These discussions provided valuable insights into the nature, scope, and impact of corruption on governance and society. Furthermore, the author draws on over a decade of professional experience within various Somali government institutions, including the Office of the Prime Minister, offering a unique first-hand perspective on the country’s political and institutional dynamics.

2 Corruption in Post-independence Somali State

The formation of the Somali state in 1960, following the unification of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland, introduced a parliamentary system with democratic structures designed to uphold transparency and accountability. However, these formal institutions proved insufficient to curb corruption, which quickly became entrenched in public administration. The clan-based social structure, characterized by fragmentation and competition for resources, facilitated corrupt practices among political and bureaucratic elites, who sought control over state resources to build patronage networks and consolidate clan-based constituencies (Greenfield, 1995; Wam, 2005; Allen & Gundel, 2017:11). Consequently, public offices became vehicles for personal enrichment, blurring the boundaries between public and private interests, fostering nepotism, and entrenching clientelism.

Political competition in the newly independent state mirrored traditional clan-based rivalries, with divisions, mistrust, and resource competition shaping the political landscape. In the 1969 elections, over 1,000 candidates and 64 political parties, largely representing clan interests, contested 123 parliamentary seats in a country of barely four million people (Seid, 2012:74). This fragmentation underscores the argument that institutional frameworks alone are insufficient to prevent corruption if they do not align with the prevailing social norms and expectations (Robinson, 1998; de Zwart, 2010:37). Widespread corruption, particularly clan-based favoritism, was among the key justifications cited by the military junta when it seized power on October 21, 1969. The coup was met with broad public support, reflecting the population's disillusionment with endemic corruption and their hope for systemic reform (Samatar, 1991; Cox, 2015).

In its early years, the regime launched an aggressive anti-corruption campaign, demonstrating the critical role of political will in tackling corruption (Seid, 2012:74; Allen & Gundel, 2017:12). Government officials at all levels, from senior ministers to junior bureaucrats, faced dismissal and prosecution for corrupt practices (Mehmet, 1971; Cox, 2015). However, the regime's initial successes in combating corruption were short-lived. Following Somalia's military defeat in the 1977–78 Ogaden War and the ensuing economic downturn, the government struggled to sustain salaries at levels commensurate with living costs. This created renewed incentives for corruption, undermining the state's ability to enforce accountability. As a result, bribery, embezzlement, illicit trade, and patronage networks flourished, with senior government officials exploiting their positions to accumulate wealth (Compagnon, 1992:8-9).

Notably, the president's immediate family, including his son and wife, played central roles in large-scale misappropriation of public resources, while kickbacks from foreign contractors became a routine aspect of government operations (Kapteijns, 2013:93). The entrenchment of corruption eroded trust in the government and fueled grievances among various factions, ultimately contributing to armed opposition movements. The first such group, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), emerged in 1978, with similar clan-based militias following suit. These insurgencies framed their struggle as resistance to state capture by rival clans, reinforcing the perception of government corruption as a zero-sum game.

By the time the central government collapsed in January 1991, corruption had reached unprecedented levels, culminating in the mass looting of state assets. Former government

officials and armed militias seized public properties, including hospitals, schools, government offices, and residences of state officials (Kapteijns, 2013). Whereas earlier forms of corruption had primarily involved embezzlement, nepotism, and bribery within formal institutions, the post-collapse period saw the emergence of armed banditry as a dominant means of resource acquisition (Lindley, 2009). Clan-based militias engaged in violent competition for control over state-owned assets, exacerbating an already fragile security situation. The transition to a federal government did little to curb systemic corruption. Decades of statelessness had entrenched a political culture in which public office was viewed as an avenue for personal enrichment rather than public service.

Public perception remains deeply cynical, with many believing that political elites are driven primarily by their pursuit of financial gain rather than governance reform. As one informant noted, “It is money rather than competency that buys any significant public position, from the presidency to premier, minister, parliamentary seat, director general, or even civil servant positions.” This entrenched patronage system has ensured that Somalia consistently ranks at the bottom of Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index since 2006 (Ronan, 2017:1; Ahmed et al., 2022:8). Compounding the issue, international donors have inadvertently facilitated corruption in Somalia. A local anti-corruption organization, Marqaati, reported that in 2020 alone, \$5,936,316.23 in external assistance remained unaccounted for, according to an audit by the Office of the Auditor General (Marqaati, 2022:1).

Over half of Somalia’s budget relies on foreign aid, much of which is siphoned off by corrupt officials before reaching its intended recipients. Despite clear evidence of mismanagement, donor institutions rarely hold Somali authorities accountable, often prioritizing political stability over financial transparency. For instance, a 2018–2019 audit found that only \$13,266,667 of the \$17 million disbursed by the European Union was deposited into the Federal Government’s Treasury Single Account (Heritage Institute, 2021:20). Embezzled donor funds frequently finance electoral campaigns, further entrenching corruption within the political system (Ahmad, 2022:9). The inflow of foreign aid, while intended to support governance and development, has thus contributed to the perpetuation of corrupt practices, weakening incentives for domestic revenue collection and effective service delivery (Ahmad, 2022:8). Beyond enabling corruption within the federal government, international organizations themselves have been implicated in corrupt practices.

Contracts issued by international agencies, including United Nations bodies, are frequently tainted by favoritism and financial improprieties (Majid & Abdirahman, 2024). Despite legal requirements under the Public Finance Management Act (Law No. 17 of December 2019) for all aid to be channeled through the Treasury Single Account, many organizations bypass this mechanism. Furthermore, donor-funded projects intended for Somalia are often administered from Nairobi, with minimal direct oversight or implementation within Somalia itself. In some cases, highly paid international staff oversee multi-year projects without setting foot in Somalia. Additionally, government officials frequently pressure international organizations to employ “technical advisors” affiliated with their networks, ensuring that recruitment processes are dictated by nepotism rather than merit. These structural weaknesses led Marqaati (2022:3) to argue that “every election delayed, every penny stolen, and every injustice committed is endorsed by any donor that does not push for positive democratic change in Somalia.”

As evident above, corruption in Somalia is deeply embedded in political and social structures, operating as a systemic and self-reinforcing phenomenon. The monopolistic and organized nature of corruption in Somalia aligns with broader theoretical perspectives, which suggest that systemic corruption influences institutions and individual behavior at all levels of governance and economic systems. It is shaped by specific socio-cultural environments, making it resistant to conventional anti-corruption measures (Robinson, 1998:3). Addressing Somalia's corruption crisis thus requires a multi-dimensional approach that goes beyond legal frameworks and institutional design, tackling the underlying political incentives and socio-cultural dynamics that sustain it.

3 The Interface Between Corruption and Weak State Institutions

The relationship between corruption and state fragility is mutually reinforcing, with each exacerbating the other's effects. A weak state structure creates an environment conducive to corruption, while corruption further erodes the integrity of state institutions, diminishing their effectiveness (Johnston, 1998; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). While individual ethical considerations, such as personal greed, play a role in corrupt practices, systemic failures—including weak oversight mechanisms and the low probability of punishment—have a more decisive influence on the prevalence of corruption (Tyler, 1990; Mullard, 2020). Certain political systems are inherently more susceptible to corruption, just as some individuals are more predisposed to engaging in it (Holmes, 2006; Pyman et al., 2014; de Graaf et al., 2010). This is evidenced by the strong correlation between institutional fragility and high levels of corruption, as states with weak administrative and regulatory capacities tend to experience pervasive rent-seeking behaviors (Pyman et al., 2016). Conversely, the least corrupt countries consistently rank high in socio-economic development, demonstrating that institutional strength is a critical factor in mitigating corrupt practices (Rubinstein & Maravic, 2010). Thus, any meaningful effort to address corruption must simultaneously address the structural weaknesses that enable it.

The detrimental impact of corruption on governance, economic growth, and stability is well documented. Corrupt political leadership often results in policies that prioritize personal or factional gain over national interest, leading to environmental degradation, rent-seeking opportunities, and systematic underinvestment in human capital (Johnston, 1998; Caiden, 2001; Pyman et al., 2014). Such governance failures diminish public trust, deter foreign investment, and discourage international donors from providing much-needed humanitarian aid (Doig, 2000; Khan & Kuwame, 2000; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). When corruption is deeply entrenched, it creates a self-perpetuating cycle in which individuals lose the moral conviction to resist it, further eroding institutional integrity (Johnston, 1998).

Somalia exemplifies the destructive interplay between corruption and weak state institutions. Institutional frailty provides fertile ground for corruption, which, in turn, weakens state capacity, creating a vicious cycle of inefficiency and rent-seeking. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the country's parliamentary system. Membership in the highest political body is often secured through bribery, with Federal Member State (FMS) presidents, election commission members, and traditional elders serving as key gatekeepers in determining parliamentary representation. The financial stakes involved in these transactions are substantial; for example, at least \$20 million changed hands during the 2016 parliamentary elections, with a single seat reportedly

costing one candidate over \$1 million (Gettleman, 2017). Beyond direct bribery, patronage is another means of securing parliamentary membership, as FMS presidents handpick loyalists to ensure legislative compliance. These corrupt practices inevitably influence parliamentary decision-making, affecting everything from presidential elections to legislative approvals. A particularly striking example occurred on March 30, 2024, when the amendment of four chapters of the Provisional Constitution was approved by parliament after the president allegedly bribed members to push through changes favorable to his political ambitions. The amendments were strongly opposed by key political figures, including former Presidents Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, who accused the president of prioritizing personal ambitions over national interests. The leaders of Puntland and Jubaland regional administrations, Deni and Madobe, have also rejected the amendments.

Given that parliament plays a central role in electing the president and holding him accountable, the impact of corruption extends beyond legislative processes. Political candidates, rather than being assessed on their policy agendas or leadership capabilities, are often evaluated based on their financial ability to purchase votes. Business elites seeking favorable policy environments and foreign governments with vested interests in Somalia—particularly Gulf states and neighboring countries—also engage in these transactions, sometimes transferring significant sums to preferred candidates (Chettleman, 2017; Ahmad et al., 2022).

Clan-based alliances further shape electoral outcomes, as candidates promise political favors in exchange for their clan's backing. By the time a president assumes office, he is already indebted to business leaders, foreign sponsors, and clan networks, which constrains his decision-making. This dynamic significantly influences the selection of the prime minister, as the president prioritizes candidates who will safeguard the interests of his financial and political backers. Subsequently, the prime minister assembles a cabinet not based on merit, integrity, or vision, but rather on political calculations that appease the president, parliamentary factions, and external stakeholders. As a result, corruption becomes a self-replicating system, in which institutions are staffed by individuals who perpetuate the very practices that undermine state functionality. This aligns with broader research demonstrating that corruption at the highest levels of government distorts the entire policymaking process, leading to inefficiencies and systemic failure (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Legal deficiencies further compound institutional weaknesses. The judiciary, which should serve as a check on executive and legislative misconduct, remains structurally compromised. Although Article 106 of the Provisional Constitution guarantees judicial independence, and Article 109(A) mandates that the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) oversee judicial appointments and disciplinary matters, the JSC has not been established. Consequently, executive authorities continue to exert influence over the judiciary, rendering it ineffective as an independent arbiter of justice (Ahmad et al., 2022). Additionally, the judiciary suffers from widespread corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of public trust, further weakening its capacity to hold officials accountable.

The absence of clear legal mandates within executive ministries further exacerbates governance challenges. Until recently, none of the 26 ministries under the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) operate under a clearly defined legal framework that outlines their specific roles and responsibilities. This lack of codified structure allows ministers extensive discretionary power,

enabling them to manage their ministries with little oversight. Without clear benchmarks for evaluating ministerial performance, there is no accountability mechanism to determine whether a minister has engaged in misconduct, neglected duties, or acted beyond their legal authority.

In such an environment, taxation becomes yet another avenue for corruption. Despite limited government service provision, Somali citizens continue to be taxed, but much of the revenue collected is siphoned off by those responsible for collection. Basic services such as healthcare, water supply, education, and electricity have been largely privatized, often with minimal government regulation. This, coupled with the state's failure to provide essential services, has further eroded public trust in the government and discouraged tax compliance (Abshir et al., 2020). When citizens perceive that tax revenue is misappropriated rather than reinvested in public services, they are less likely to comply with tax obligations, further limiting the state's fiscal capacity.

Transparency is a crucial factor in preventing corruption, as it enables public scrutiny and enhances government legitimacy. However, opacity in decision-making processes remains pervasive in Somalia. Many critical policies, budget allocations, and legislative proposals are drafted in secrecy, limiting public and parliamentary oversight. A notable example occurred in 2020 when the Office of the Prime Minister drafted an election bill but printed only a handful of copies, restricting access even among key policymakers. Similarly, on February 21, 2024, the Somali cabinet and parliament approved the Defence and Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement with Turkey within two hours—without reviewing the document's contents beforehand.

Beyond legislative and executive shortcomings, state institutions suffer from physical incapacities, including a lack of skilled personnel, resource constraints, and insecurity. Favoritism and bribery influence hiring decisions, leading to the appointment of underqualified individuals who further undermine institutional efficiency. Resource constraints, exacerbated by financial mismanagement and weak revenue collection, leave institutions unable to perform their designated functions. Additionally, the government's inability to exert control over vast territories—many of which remain under Al-Shabaab's influence—further weakens state institutions and encourages corruption, as officials leverage their positions for personal gain in the absence of robust state oversight (Issa & Iscek, 2019).

Ultimately, visible corruption fosters public grievances, resentment, and a pervasive sense of inequality, all of which erode social cohesion and undermine governance (Pyman et al., 2014; Agerberg, 2022). In Somalia, corruption has had a direct impact on national security, as state security forces themselves engage in corrupt practices, diminishing public confidence. Government soldiers frequently set up illegal checkpoints along major transportation routes, extracting informal “taxes” that rarely make it into state coffers (Abshir et al., 2020). Worse still, some mid-ranking military officers have been accused of colluding with Al-Shabaab by accepting bribes to facilitate the group's operations.

As corruption and weak institutions continue to reinforce each other, Somalia remains trapped in a cycle of governance failure, economic stagnation, and security challenges. Addressing corruption requires more than superficial reforms; it necessitates structural changes that enhance transparency, strengthen legal frameworks, and dismantle entrenched patronage networks.

Without such measures, efforts to rebuild Somalia's state institutions will remain ineffective, perpetuating the conditions that allow corruption to thrive.

4 The Impact of Social Norms on Corruption: clan and religion

While political-economic approaches to corruption emphasize formal institutions, accountability mechanisms, and legal frameworks, these factors alone provide an incomplete understanding of the persistence of corrupt practices (Dong, 2009; Mullard, 2020). Social norms—the unwritten rules that guide and shape behavior within societies—play a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward corruption, influencing what is considered acceptable or unacceptable conduct (Hoffmann & Patel, 2017; Dong et al., 2009). Some scholars go even further, suggesting that social norms and cultural values are the primary determinants of corruption, making its definition highly contextual. Practices labeled as corrupt in some societies may be viewed as entirely legitimate, or even socially obligatory, in others (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Perhaps the most significant factor in determining whether people adhere to formal laws is whether those laws align with existing social norms. Where bribery is normalized—seen as an expected part of daily interactions rather than a moral or legal violation—efforts to enforce anti-corruption laws face significant resistance (Hoffmann & Patel, 2017). In Somalia, this tension is particularly pronounced, as formal governance structures often diverge from deeply entrenched traditional norms. Among the most influential of these are the *xeer*-supported clan system and Islamic sharia, both of which continue to shape governance, social relations, and economic transactions in ways that at times reinforce corrupt practices.

4.1 Clan System

Among the Somalis, the clan institution influences the conduct and attitudes of its members, thereby leaving an enormous effect on every significant issue in life, including resource sharing, political affiliation, and defining friends and foes. It is normally guided by social norms, of which "*hiil & boo*" is the most significant. *Hiil & boo*, which literally mean defending and granting, is the glue that keeps clan members together. It instructs members of the same clan to defend and extend a provision of welfare to one another (Seid 2024). Thus, the rich have a duty to share with the poor among their clan fellowmen, and the liability incurred by one is equally dispersed among adult clan members (Seid & Chotte 2004; Hagman & Seid 2018).

In the absence of central authority, the reliance of the clan on safety and welfare was the optimum choice for individuals (Gundel 2006:7; Sheikh 2017:1). Unfortunately, with little or no meaningful deliberations about the notion of '*hiil iyo boo*' that is deeply entrenched among Somalis, the centralised western modern system and its imagined nation state are applied directly to the Somalis (Doornbos and Markakis, 1994:84). Due to this hodgepodge, "the politicisation of [clan] solidarity worsened after state institutions were established, as clans treated and appropriated this foreign-imposed entity in ways that benefitted the welfare of the extended family rather than the welfare of the entire Somali nation" (Zoppi, 2018:59-60). This localised social contract blocked the creation of a robust social contract at the national level. Up to date, the average Somali man's trust and reliance on his clan for protection and social insurance eclipses his/her trust and reliance on the state, weighing one's loyalty more heavily on the clan than on the state.

Similar to other African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana, Somali public rebuke grand corruption and yet helping one's friend and kin out of the public resources is a moral behaviour from the Somali perspective (Rose-ackerman and Palifka 2016). Almost every adult Somali citizen is aware of the importance of his/her clan to his/her personal safety, wealth, and social position. Equally, s/he is cognizant of others' commitment to the social norms, such as "*hiil iyo boo*", that undergird the clan system. This mindset and the behaviour it shapes are two of the most formidable stimulants of corruption in Somalia. *Hiil & boo* influences citizens to prefer clan affiliation to integrity, national interest, and progressive political programmes when they are supporting a candidate, even though bribery, business interests, and sect affiliation might sometimes trump clan favouritism (Seid, 2024).

In an effort to avoid accusations of state capture by powerful clans, the Somali government has unnecessarily expanded its size, particularly in terms of the number of institutions, to ensure that each clan and major sub-clan is represented by a leadership position. For example, Somalia's cabinet consists of 75 members, a stark contrast to the cabinets of countries like Egypt, the USA, the UK, and Ethiopia, which have only 30, 25, 22, and 22 members, respectively. This disparity is notable considering Somalia's smaller population, less extensive landmass, lower budget, and more limited services compared to these nations. Some scholars argue that there is a link between government size and corruption (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka, 2016).

These institutions are often led by individuals who rise to power not based on their competence or political ideology, but due to their clan affiliation. This results in a mindset that every institution is tied to a specific clan or group of clans. From the president's office to the parliament, you will likely find that the leadership and key positions within most government bodies are dominated by individuals from the same clan or clans as the institution's leader.

Expectedly, politicians who rise to power as a result of clan favouritism promote nepotism and embezzle state resources to advance the welfare of their respective clans simply because they understand they would not have that job without the support of the clan and that they can hardly remain in power without the protection of the clan. As "corruption tends to foster more corruption, perpetuating and entrenching social injustice in daily life" (Hoffmann & Patel, 2017:iv) the civil servants recruited through nepotism and bribery are likely to follow the same pattern. Moreover, due to the *hiil iyo boo* norm guiding them to take care of the extended family, Somali officers tend to accept either bribery or embezzlement not just to make themselves rich but also to sustain any extended family dependents they might have.

Another aspect of "*hiil & boo*" that buttresses corruption in Somalia is its imposition of the duty to protect clan fellowmen regardless of whether the to-be-protected is right or wrong. This aspect fatally undermines efforts to hold corruption culprits accountable, where senior officers and even normal citizens defend their men against the operation of the law and state institutions. Hence, it is gruelling in Somalia to prosecute prominent figures hailing from strong clans, where accusing someone is equated with an attack against the entire clan he belongs to. It is not easy for Somalia's weak institutions to hold someone backed by his clan accountable without creating tension among clans. Clan members' protection of an officer accused of corruption is even fiercer when such an officer abuses the power to advance his clan interests, and that eventually incentivizes corruption.

Due to the apparent widespread of corruption, precipitated partly by the clannish norm of *hiil iyo boo*, majority of Somalis have had the most acute perception of corruption since 2006. Various studies show that both the actual corruption and the perception of its existence influence more corruption. For instance, Dong and others (2009:2) argue that "the more that others are perceived to be corrupt, the higher the willingness to be corrupt". Others argue that when one believes that everybody is doing corruption, doing corruption becomes a rational strategy (Hoffmann and Patel, 2017:3; Agerberg 2022:931).

Brazen daily corruption in Somalia not only entrenches perceptions about the prevalence of corruption but also foments common excuses and justifications in favour of the corrupt practises. Per one of the informants, a common question usually asked by family and friends of a newly employed or appointed officer is '*dhac-dhac ma leedahay?*' which translates as 'is it [i.e., the new job] susceptible to misappropriation?' If the response is positive, the respondent is congratulated for his/her new role. To state the obvious, such behaviour will not only embolden the newly hired person to corrupt but also stimulate others to struggle for a role with '*dhac-dhac*'. Someone in a role with *dhac-dhac* is not only tolerated to enrich himself, but he is also expected to become rich and to be in a position to support his relatives and friends financially. Researches show that "people often find themselves involved in corruption because of peer or superior pressure" (Holmes, 2006: 177-178). Failing to meet expectations might affect the public officer's social status and portray him/her as a weak person who cannot even eat a food on a plate. Thus, it is not strange to see Somali officers, with salary as little as \$500-1000 USD bragging about the mansion houses, armoured vehicles and other wealth they have made from the public positions entrusted to them.

Because of these cycles of perceptions and corrupt practises, Somali citizens' expectations of accessing state resources through non-corrupt means are extremely low. Reflecting an actual or perceived reality, it's usual for a Somali citizen to make a plan for bribing government officers to access basic services provided by the government. Strangely, such bribery is called '*hawl-judaydin*', which literally means 'burden-easing', something called in other jurisdiction with poor institutions famous with unnecessary red tape "greasing the wheels" (Rose-ackerman and Palifka 2016:33). Avoiding to call it corruption or bribery and choosing a fancy term instead has the potential to lure people into it without feeling any guilt.

Such conditions not only create a conducive environment for the corrupt ones but also create a hostile environment for the rare public officers who might commit to integrity. Fear of getting ostracized, losing promotions or even the job could actually push one to corruption (Holmes, 2006), and it can potentially jeopardise the safety of those who do not heed such pressures. Yusra Abrar, former Somalia Central Bank Governor who resigned scared for her life, is a good example of this. Yusra stated that from the moment she was appointed, she was continuously pressured to sanction inappropriate deals (Manson, 2013). Moreover, the author of this paper met and informally chatted with three different people who left their jobs because of social pressure in favour of corruption. One of them said,

"If you do not corrupt, your colleagues and boss will see you as a threat to their nasty behaviour." Aggravatingly, your friends might rebuke you for not benefiting from the chance".

4.2 Sharia Law

Sharia is a set of rules and precepts, primarily taken from the Quran and Sunnah, that embodies instructions governing economic, political, social, individual behaviour, and religious affairs. In the context of Somalia, Sharia is exceptionally important for at least two reasons. Firstly, the population of Somalia is almost 100 percent Muslim, and they see Islam as a legitimate source of normative order. Secondly, the PCFRS gives Sharia supremacy and requires all other laws to be Sharia compliant. Unlike secular statutes, sharia is not in the form of a code that just stipulates plain rules but takes a great deal of time to explain the matter from different perspectives and addresses contextual factors as well as the consequences. For instance, addressing corruption and unlawful enrichment in general, Allah says:

O you who have believed, do not consume one another's wealth unjustly but only [in lawful] business by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves [or one another]. Indeed, Allah is ever merciful to you. (Quran, Surah an-Nisa:29)

In this short verse, Allah is not just setting a rule to prohibit corruption; he also insinuates that corruption is a threat to peace and is likely to lead to killing one another. Then he describes that the reason for the proscription is out of his kindness. Then, in a typical carrot and stick strategy, Allah says in the next verse, "*And whoever does that in aggression and injustice, then We will drive him into a fire. And that, for Allah, is [always] easy*". In another verse, Allah says:

Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and, when you judge between people, to judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you to do. Indeed, Allah is ever Hearing and Seeing (Quran, Surah an-Nisa:58).

Again, Allah does not just prescribe people to uphold these two interwoven virtues—i.e., justice and trust—but also explicitly says abiding by such instruction is in the best interest of mankind. Then he reminds us that he is overseeing mankind. Sometimes sharia addresses corruption committed against specific groups of society. Allah says:

Indeed, those who devour the property of orphans unjustly are only consuming into their bellies fire. And they will be burned in a Blaze [i.e., Hellfire] (Quran, Surah an-Nisa:10).

The verse is another way of saying that even though all forms of corruption are bad and punishable, it is severer when corruption is committed against the vulnerable and voiceless groups of society. The vulnerability of the victims and their inability to speak out is a powerful urge for corruption, and probably that is why the verse singles out that sect of society and uses the strongest terms to herald corruption against them. Apart from the prohibition of corruption in general, sharia addresses specific forms of corruption. For instance, addressing bribery, the prophet Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH) "cursed the one who bribes and the one who takes bribes ... (Sunan Abu Daud: 1336). On kickbacks, Allah says:

And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or send it [in bribery] to the rulers in order that [they might aid] you [to] consume a portion of the wealth of the people in sin, while you know [it is unlawful] (Quran, Surat Al-Baqarah: 188).

Likewise, embezzlement and abuse of power in general are specifically addressed where the prophet PBUH says, "If Allah appointed anyone as a leader of a people and he died while he was still treacherous to his people, Allah would forbid his entry into Paradise" (Sahih Al-bukhari, 7151; Sahih Muslim, 142e). Nepotism is also addressed in many places in the Quran and Sunnah from establishing equality to prohibiting favouritism. The prophet says, "..No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab. Nor does a white man have any superiority over a black man, nor does the black man have any superiority over the white man, except on the basis of piety (Musnad Ahmed: 5/411). As such equality calls for the prohibition of nepotism, the Prophet says, "If anyone helps his people in an unrighteous cause, he is like a camel that falls into a well and is pulled out by its tail." (Sunan Abu Dawud: 5117.

Different studies established the existence of a strong relationship between religiosity and individual's ethical compass which minimises one's propensity to corruption (Rose-ackerman, Susan and. Palifka, Bonnie J. 2016; Zakaria 2018:70). Convinced that religious people have a lower tendency to corruption, large businesses in Somalia prefer the recruitment of religious people (Allen & Gundel 2017). The existence of social norms—Sharia in the case of Somalia—that inspire community members with integrity could be a tailor-made tool to "influence beliefs and attitudes in a desirable direction that might be conducive to anti-corruption reforms" (Agerberg, 2022:930).

Even though contextual factors will always remain relevant, anti-corruption efforts are likely to have the greatest chances of success if they are built upon injunctive social norms (Hoffmann & Patel, 2017:vii). Strangely, in Somalia, there are conflicting social norms. On the one hand, the clan system, especially the "*hiil iyo hoo*" norm it embodies, is conducive to encouraging corruption, while on the other hand, sharia fervently tries to uproot all forms of corruption. The loyalty of an average Somali man, allegedly, goes in both directions. But the good news is that the clan system and its *xeer* relies on sharia for legitimacy and claims to reflect it. Thus, anti-corruption efforts can use sharia to promote integrity within the clan system and achieve harmonised social norms that can be effectively used against corruption.

5 Conclusion

Corruption remains a fundamental impediment to Somalia's institutional stability, sustaining a cycle of state fragility that has persisted since the country's independence in 1960. The entrenched nature of corruption not only prevents the state from functioning effectively but also played a significant role in the deterioration of institutions prior to the collapse of the central government. This historical trajectory underscores the mutually reinforcing relationship between corruption and weak state structures, wherein institutional fragility both enables and is exacerbated by pervasive corruption. In addition to institutional vulnerabilities, the persistence of corruption is also rooted in social norms, particularly the *hiil iyo hoo* principle embedded in Somalia's clan system. This norm legitimizes nepotism and protects individuals from legal accountability based on clan affiliations, further weakening state institutions. Given this reality, anti-corruption efforts must account not only for the structural weaknesses of governance but also for the socio-economic and cultural conditions that perpetuate corrupt practices.

A comprehensive anti-corruption strategy should incorporate the following key measures: (1) expanding research into the socio-political drivers of corruption, as effective interventions

require an empirical understanding of the mechanisms through which corruption persists; (2) developing contextually relevant messaging that illustrates the human cost of corruption and its direct impact on public welfare, delivered by individuals and institutions with credibility; (3) leveraging the legitimacy of Islamic jurisprudence to challenge clan-based protectionism, demonstrating how sharia principles of justice and welfare can serve as viable alternatives to *hiil iyo hoo* without disrupting social cohesion; (4) designing social security and welfare programs that function independently of clan structures to reduce individual dependence on kinship networks for economic security; (5) promoting civic engagement in governance processes, particularly in the planning and monitoring of public projects, while ensuring that citizens are informed of their rights and avenues for accountability; and (6) undertaking institutional reforms focused on strengthening financial oversight, judicial independence, and public sector integrity through transparent recruitment, merit-based promotions, and limits on discretionary authority.

In a nutshell, reducing corruption in Somalia requires an integrated approach that goes beyond conventional legalistic interventions. The interaction between governance structures, economic conditions, and social norms must be addressed holistically to create sustainable pathways toward institutional resilience and public accountability.

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