

## Polity IV Country Report 2010: Eritrea

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Polity:</b></td> <td>-7</td> <td>-7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Democ:</b></td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Autoc:</b></td> <td>7</td> <td>7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Durable:</b></td> <td colspan="3">17</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Tentative:</b></td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	<b>Polity:</b>	-7	-7	0	<b>Democ:</b>	0	0	0	<b>Autoc:</b>	7	7	0	<b>Durable:</b>	17			<b>Tentative:</b>	No			<div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>Authority Trends, 1993-2010: Eritrea</b></p> </div>
Score:	2009	2010	Change																						
<b>Polity:</b>	-7	-7	0																						
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<b>Durable:</b>	17																								
<b>Tentative:</b>	No																								
SCODE	ERI	CCODE	531	Date of Report	1 June 2011																				
<b>Polity IV Component Variables</b>																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	1	4	2	4	2																				
<b>Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)</b>																									
End Date			Begin Date																						
			24 May 1993 (Ind.)																						
<b>Polity Fragmentation: No</b>																									
<b>Constitution</b>	(1997; not yet put into effect)																								
<b>Executive(s)</b>	President Isaias Afworki (PFDJ); first assumed power with Eritrean independence 24 May 1993																								
<b>Legislature</b>	Unicameral: National Assembly (104 seats; 60 appointed and 44 representing the Central Committee of the ruling PFDJ party)																								
<b>Judiciary</b>	Supreme Court																								

### Narrative Description:<sup>1</sup>

#### **Executive Recruitment: Designation (3)**

Executive recruitment within Eritrea remains a designative act within the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ, formerly the Eritrean People's Liberation Front). President Isaias Afworki, leader of the PFDJ, has dominated political life in Eritrea since the country's military defeat of Ethiopian forces in 1991 and the subsequent internationally monitored referendum on independence held in 1993. While the PFDJ/EPLF has long claimed that they would establish a multiparty democracy in Eritrea, the government has delayed its stated program to hold democratic presidential elections. Elections that were originally scheduled for 1997 were postponed until 1998 when, confronted by increasing military tensions with Ethiopia, they were postponed indefinitely.

#### **Executive Constraints: Slight Limitations (2)**

Despite the rhetoric of democracy in this country, political authority in Eritrea remains highly centralized. The PFDJ holds virtually unlimited power in this country. Under the leadership of President Afworki, the

<sup>1</sup> The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

PFDJ has established a single-party system in which opposition voices in the legislative and judicial branches of government have been largely silenced. In 2001 eleven top-level party officials were sacked from their government posts and subsequently arrested for criticizing the president and calling for increasing political accountability and reform.

**Political Participation: Restricted Competition (2)**

After thirty years of war, the EPLF led Eritrea to political independence from Ethiopia in 1991. In the wake of this military success, the EPLF has established a hegemonic political system which has minimized both ethnic factionalism and democratic participation. During the three decades of conflict the EPLF actively sought to downplay the ethnic differences among its followers (which consisted of members from nine linguistically related ethnic groups) and strengthen Eritrean nationalism. The end result of these nation-building efforts has been the relative absence of politicized ethnicity during the past decade. Contributing to the internal stability of Eritrean politics in the post-independence era has been the decision by the EPLF/PFDJ to limit virtually all forms of organized political opposition. While the PFDJ has claimed that its ultimate goal is the creation of a democratic Eritrea, so far popular participation in the political process has been limited. The organization of political participation in this country has, for the most part, followed Museveni's "Ugandan model." While public debates and popular referendums are held, there continue to be no legal opposition parties in Eritrea. Press freedoms are severely curtailed and civil society is clearly subordinate to the dictates of the ruling party.

Like other North African countries, Eritrea is split almost evenly between Muslims and Christians. While long viewed as a model of peaceful coexistence, nevertheless, in recent years cracks in this harmonious arrangement seem to be surfacing. Contributing to the increasingly factional nature of politics in Eritrea has been the war with Ethiopia and the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Sudan, the growing influence of Islamic opposition movements, and an increasing resentment in the Eritrean lowlands of a perceived "colonization" by Christian highlands. The Tigrinya ethnic group, which has its historic ties to the highlands of the country, are perceived as the socially dominant group in the country. Of the nine ethnic groups in Eritrea, most speak Semitic or Cushitic languages. The Tigrinya and Tigre make up some 80% of the total population and speak distinct, yet mutually intelligible, versions of the Semitic language. The minority Afar and Kunama ethnic groups have argued that they continue to be the subject of systematic government repression and harassment. The ethnic Afar reside mainly in Northern Ethiopia but can also be found in Eritrea and Djibouti. The Kunama, for their part, reside in the west of the country and have historically resisted attempts by the central government to integrate them into national society. Since 2001 factional rifts have also begun appearing within the ruling PFDJ, the only legal party, as the president tries to figure out who is loyal and who is not. While political tensions have been found within the PFDJ since the 1970s, in recent years a crackdown on internal dissent and the pursuit of party purification has become more widespread.

Most opposition political activity continues to take place outside of the borders of Eritrea, in neighboring Ethiopia. Over 50,000 Eritrean refugees reside in Ethiopia, one-third of who are reported to be former government soldiers. The only opposition movement of any significance operating inside Eritrea is the Eritrean Islamic Jihad. This armed Islamist group, formed in the early 1980s and supported by the likes of the Sudanese government and Osama bin Laden, operates covertly in the western lowlands and northern mountains of the country. The group feeds off the festering alienation of the country's Muslim youth, who are increasingly aggrieved by the perceived economic domination of Christian immigrants in the western lowlands and the persistent lack of Muslim representation in the top political and military institutions of the state.