

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Ethiopia

<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>Polity:</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>3</td> <td>3</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>15</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	Polity:	1	1	0	Democ:	3	3	0	Autoc:	2	2	0	Durable:		15		Tentative:		No		
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SCODE	ETI	CCODE	529	Date of Report	1 June 2011																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	2	4	3	3	3																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date		24 May 1991		Begin Date																					
				15 August 1995																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1994																								
Executive(s)	Prime Minister Meles Zenawi (TPLF); initially elected by the lower house of parliament 1995; most recently reelected 10 October 2005																								
Legislature	Bicameral: Council of People's Representatives (547 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 23 May 2010) Ethnic-based parties affiliated with the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF): 543 Other parties: 3 Non-partisans: 1 Council of the Federation (117 seats; representing regional councils, professional sectors, and minority nationalities)																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Transitional or Restricted Elections (7)

For most of the 20th century one man, Haile Selassie, dominated the political arena in Ethiopia. Declared regent in 1916, king in 1928 and emperor in 1930, Haile Selassie controlled executive power uninterrupted (with the exception of the brief period of Italian annexation of during WWII) until he was deposed in a military coup organized by junior officers and enlisted men, referred to as the Derg, in 1974. The Derg attempted to dismantle the Amhara aristocracy, nationalize economic holdings, and broaden popular

¹ 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.

participation. However, disagreements regarding the reorganization of the country resulted in rivalries among the movement's leadership. A subsequent military coup in 1977, led by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, eliminated much of the leadership of the Derg and resulted in the establishment of a one-party Marxist state in Ethiopia directed by Mengistu. Widespread repression, famine, and mismanagement marked the 14-year rule of the Mengistu regime and sparked violent resistance. By the end of the 1980s the Mengistu regime was under intense military pressure from the Tigray-dominated Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).

In May 1991, the EPRDF advanced on Addis Ababa, forced Mengistu to flee the country and established a broad based interim government led by Meles Zenawi. The EPRDF, along with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and other armed opposition factions, established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). The TGE was mandated with the task of establishing a new democratic constitution and paving the way for national elections. However, within a few years all major opposition voices to the EPRDF had left the TGE and the interim government's commitment to the formation of a truly competitive multi-party democracy had begun to wane. The elections for Ethiopia's first popularly chosen national legislature were held in May 1995. While some thirty-nine political organizations participated in these elections, in reality most of these groups were either insignificant political actors or fronts for the EPRDF. Claiming that the TGE had impeded their ability to effectively participate in the political process, all major political opposition to the EPRDF, including the Omoro Liberation Front (OLF) and the All-Amhara People's Organization (AAPO), boycotted these elections. Despite this boycott, international and non-governmental observers concluded that the elections, which produced a landslide victory for the EPRDF, were generally free and fair. The leader of the EPRDF, Meles Zenawi, assumed the post of prime minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in August 1995.

Since the return of electoral politics to Ethiopia in 1995, executive recruitment continues to be plagued by opposition party fractionalization and political interference by the ruling EPRDF. Much like the elections of 1995, the May 2000 legislative elections took place in a non-competitive environment. In over eighty percent of the constituencies candidates connected with the ruling EPRDF ran unopposed due to the extreme political and financial weakness of the opposition parties. Moreover, serious irregularities took place in southern regions where voter registration difficulties were noted and detention of political candidates was also reported. However, despite these continuing problems, Ethiopians currently enjoy greater political freedoms than at any point in their state's long history.

In May 2004 6,000 opposition supporters held a rally in capital to demand a fair vote in the general elections scheduled for 2005. In preparation for these elections, fifteen opposition parties came together to form an alliance, the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), under the leadership of Merara Gudina. In September 2004 Prime Minister Zenawi agreed to allow international observers to monitor the 15 May 2005 general elections, which were plagued with irregularities and resulted in violent protests. Although the Carter Center reported that most of the 2005 results were credible and reflected generally competitive elections, other international observers disagreed. The EPRDF emerged victorious from these elections with 327 of 546 seats, leaving incumbent Prime Minister Zenawi safely in control.

Executive Constraints: Slight to Moderate Limitations (3)

Throughout Ethiopian history, spreading back thousands of years, politics in this country have been dictated and dominated by absolutist rulers. While the establishment of electoral politics in Ethiopia in the mid-1990s has weakened this authoritarian impulse, it has by no means eliminated it. Executive authority in Ethiopia is currently vested in a prime minister selected by the dominant party in the legislature. Given the hegemonic position of the EPRDF in legislative elections since 1995, the legislature has placed very few constraints on the chief executive's powers. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, along with a handful of senior advisors, dominates policy formulation in this country. Moreover, while the country's judiciary shows signs of independence, nevertheless, it continues to be constrained by a chronic lack of resources and widespread corruption. Indeed, after reports surfaced in 2006 of a police massacre involving the deaths of 193 opposition party protesters, the courts convicted opposition party leaders for inciting the violence that led to the police crackdown.

Political Participation: Factional/Restricted Competition (6)

While over 70 different ethnic groups can be found in Ethiopia, three major ethnic groups constitute over 70% of the total population. The Muslim Omoro, or Galla, peoples reside mainly in the east and south of the central plateau and comprise about 40% of the total population. The Christian Amhara and Tigrayan

peoples, residents of the northern central plateau, constitute over 30% of Ethiopia's population (Amhara 25%; Tigrayan 8%). The Amhara have long been the dominant ethnic group in Ethiopia, their cultural hegemony was solidified during the Selassie and Mengistu regimes as non-Amharas were actively excluded from positions of political and economic power. As a response to the discriminatory policies of these regimes, widespread ethnic unrest by the Tigrayans, Eritreans, Oromos, Afars, and Somalis gradually eroded central authority in Ethiopia and, ultimately, culminated in the overthrow of the Mengistu regime and the subsequent secession of Eritrea from the Ethiopian state.

Since the overthrow of the Marxist dictatorship in 1991, politics in Ethiopia have been dominated by the EPRDF, which is, in turn, dominated by Tigrayan elites. The EPRDF is a coalition of several ethnic-based parties, the main four being Prime Minister Mele's Tigray People's Liberation Front, the Amhara National Democratic Movement, the Oromo People's Democratic Opposition, and the South Ethiopia People's Democratic Movement. While the EPRDF oversaw the reestablishment of ethnic-based federalism in Ethiopia in 1994, most non-Tigrayan ethnic groups view this *de jure* devolution of power with great suspicion. The Amhara view the new federal structure (which includes ten ethnic-based administrative districts) as an attempt by the Tigrayan-dominated ruling party to dismantle their hegemonic position within the national government. Moreover, most southern ethnic groups, including the Omoros and the Ogaden Somalis, see the government's regionalization plan as simply a ploy by the new Tigrayan elite to replace the Amharas as head of the national government without actually devolving any real power to the regions. They argue that the regional and local administrative districts created by this new federal structure continue to be dominated by supporters of the EPRDF who, in fact, simply serve as intermediaries for national government directives. Thus, while the government has actively encouraged the division of the country into distinct ethnic units, it has simultaneously sought to destroy those ethnic organizations that are independent of the EPRDF (including the Oromo Liberation Front and the All Amhara People's Organization). What distinguishes the ethnic policy of the EPRDF from its predecessors, then, is simply the language of democracy and ethnic diversity. Behind this liberal facade, ethnic organization, chauvinism and discrimination remain integral components of the Ethiopian political system. Opposition boycotts of elections have become commonplace, and the government continues to repress, sometimes violently, protests and other forms of political dissent. In 2006, for example, reports surfaced that the government-controlled police forces in Addis Ababa had massacred 193 protesters following the contested results of the 15 May 2005 elections.

Democratic political participation in Ethiopia continues to be hindered by poverty, civil conflict, ethnic fractionalization and the people's unfamiliarity with basic democratic concepts. In recent years thousands of citizens have been victims of "unlawful killings," many at the hands of the government's security forces and rival tribal groups. The most serious "tribal" conflicts are occurring between rival Afar and Issas groups competing over scarce water resources in the Afar region of the country. However, serious "tribal" unrest between other groups has also been observed in the regions of West Itarerge, Gambella and Tepi as tensions over land rights and reprisal killings have escalated in recent years. Many political observers of Ethiopian politics have identified the government's policy of establishing a federal system along ethnic lines as the source of the rise of tribal conflicts across the country. With encouragement by the United States, Ethiopian troops entered neighboring Somalia, in support of the struggling Transitional Government, in order to push a newly established Islamic regional government out of Mogadishu and the southern portion of Somalia. While initially successful in forcing out the Islamic militants that had seized control of the south, they have not been able to stabilize the region nor establish effective control. Islamic forces regrouped to challenge the Transitional Government; the situation has also triggered serious unrest in the volatile Ogaden (ethnic-Somali) region of Ethiopia in 2007.

International election monitors from the European Union deemed the May 2010 legislative elections to be flawed. In these elections the ruling EPRDF won a massive landslide victory in a campaign marred by significant harassment of opposition candidates and supporters and limits on independent media voices. The EPRDF won 499 of the 547 available parliamentary seats, opposition or independent candidates won two seats, and EPRDF-allied parties won the remaining seats. In 2005 the EPRDF won 327 seats, down from 479 in 2000. Despite these credible claims of electoral bias, compared to the 2005 contest, these polls took place in relative tranquility and, according to African Union observers, largely reflected the will of the people. While the EPRDF has seen its popular legitimacy wane in recent years as a response to the protracted military tensions with neighboring Eritrea and Somalia, nevertheless, its heavy investment in urban economic and social infrastructure, combined with the strong economic performance of the country under their political tenure, has effectively enabled the ruling party to continue to mobilize

the vote in its favor with only limited electoral malpractice and political repression. In an effort to challenge the hegemonic position of the EPRDF, in July 2008 the Ethiopia Federal Democratic Forum (UEDF), the main opposition party, joined the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement, the Somali Democratic Alliance Forces, and the Union of Tigrayans for Democracy and Sovereignty to found the Ethiopian Democratic Unity Front or simply Medrek, a new coalition of opposition parties and activists. Its poor performance in the 2010 election demonstrates that while the EPRDF may not be as popular as it once was, the ability of opposition parties to challenge its dominance remains weak.