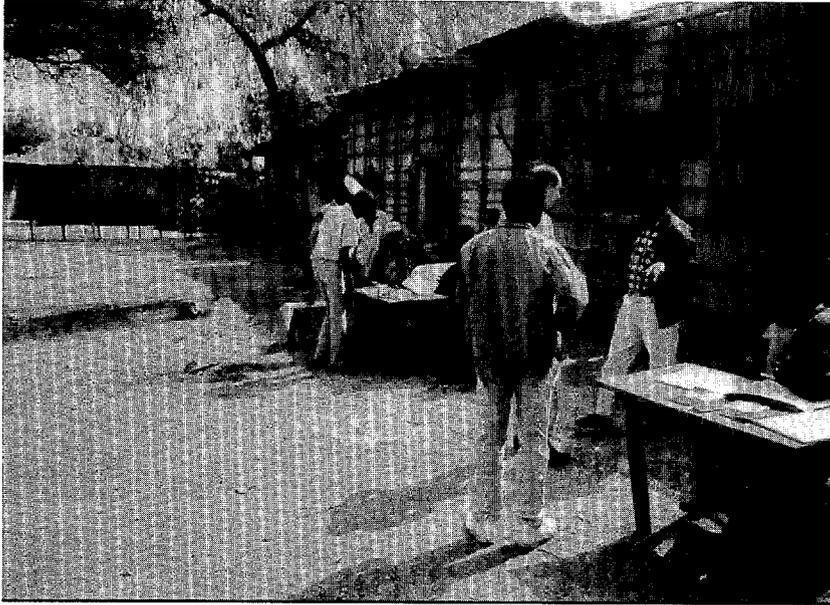


FROM BULLETS TO BALLOTS

ETHIOPIA'S TROUBLED COURSE TO DEMOCRACY

**ELECTORAL
ASSISTANCE TO
POSTCONFLICT SOCIETIES**





Ethiopia's Troubled Course to Democracy

In 1974 this ethnically diverse nation underwent a revolution, changing, in a relatively bloodless coup, from an imperial to a Marxist state. The new regime's repressive policies failed, however, bringing on its overthrow—and calls for popular government. But Ethiopia has found the road to democracy a rocky one, with regional elections in 1992 actually perpetuating a system of single-party rule.

Background

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), an umbrella group of six rebel armies, overthrew the military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam in May 1991. Just over one year later, the interim EPRDF administration conducted regional elections that defined the future course of the Ethiopian political transition and the nature and extent of its democratic outcomes. This report argues that these June 1992 elections profoundly and adversely affected the course and outcomes of the Ethiopian political transition. The reasons have to do not only with the election campaign

Photograph of voting in Ethiopia, courtesy of International Foundation for Election Systems.

Contents

Report written by John W. Harbeson, professor of political science, City University of New York.

Background	1
The Transitional Pacts	7
Failed Transition	8
Electoral Institutions and Processes	10
Aftermath	14
Lessons and Recommendations	17

and processes themselves but also with the flawed strategic planning and preparations for the elections.

This evaluation draws lessons from this experience not only for Ethiopia but for societies elsewhere in Africa and beyond. The Ethiopian case melds important singular features with circumstances common to all war-torn societies. More than in many other cases, the issue in Ethiopia has been how to reconcile partners in a fragile coalition of victors on the course and conduct of the transition more than how to achieve a modus vivendi between victors and a defeated government. At the same time, in Ethiopia as in other war-torn societies, initial elections following hostilities have had an important bearing on the future shape of the postwar polity. In the Ethiopia case, none but fringe elements will defend the vanquished Mengistu regime. However, among the government's most significant opponents are those who ardently defend national unity and a strong

central government as upheld by Mengistu: They view such guiding principles as more in keeping with the historic working definition of the Ethiopian state than the new regime's vision of an ethnically decentralized, almost confederal postimperial state. At the same time, others alienated from the new regime believe it has betrayed the commitment to ethnic self-determination advanced by this vision.

Antecedents: Poverty, Imperialism, Authoritarianism

Embracing 55 million citizen, Ethiopia is one of the most populous countries in Africa. It is as well one of the poorest countries in the world, having a per capita income of approximately \$100.

Two decades after Mengistu and his colleagues ended the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie, ostensibly to liberate the people of Ethiopia from penury perpetuated by feudalism and autocracy, little has changed. Although the EPRDF government has recently reported encouraging rates of economic growth, these must be sustained and widespread before ordinary Ethiopians will begin to experience real improvements in their standard of living.

A Nation of Farmers, Herders

Ethiopia's economy is more agricultural than any other in the world, at 60 percent. Most Ethiopians scratch out a living by farming or herding, using the most rudimentary technology. The vast majority live a day's *walk* or more from the nearest all-weather road.

Access to print and electronic media is concentrated in a few major cities, principally the capital, Addis Ababa. Access to educational and health facilities is among the most restricted in the world, and these two resources are similarly concentrated in the capital and a few other major cities. One of the few positive achievements of the Mengistu government (1974–91) was some expansion in literacy levels and in school facilities, if not notably in the *quality* of education at any level.

Ethiopia is one of the oldest continuously functioning polities in the world, with roots dating back well into pre-Christian times. For much of its long history prior to 1974, Ethiopia was governed by monarchs presiding over a quasi-feudal socioeconomic structure. It is one of two countries in Africa that European countries failed to colonize fully, notwithstanding their diplomatic machinations to that end. (During World War II, Italy did occupy Ethiopia, as well as the now independent country of Eritrea.)

Ethnic, Cultural, Religious Diversity

Indeed, Ethiopia itself was an African empire. Perhaps three quarters of its present land area and a substantial majority of its population were incorporated into Ethiopia by the conquests of Emperor Menelik II (1886–1913). Consequently, Ethiopia has been a land of enormous cultural diversity, much of it only partly examined by anthropologists.¹

Superimposed on this cultural diversity has been religious diversity: Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, the now disestablished official religion of the Ethiopian emperors, claims the adherence of perhaps 40 percent of the population. A large proportion—possibly a majority—of the population confesses Islam, particularly in the regions brought into the empire

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¹ The present regime tends to use the term *nationalities* to describe ethnic communities. To avoid confusion, this chapter will use *ethnic communities*, reserving the term *nationality* for whatever degree of pan-ethnic political identity may exist within Ethiopia's currently recognized international boundaries. This choice of terms implies no downgrading of the significance of ethnic communities' desires—or of their eligibility—for political self-determination.

Since the mid-1800s, ethnic groups have intermingled more than in most other sub-Saharan countries.

by Menelik's conquests. The vast majority of Ethiopian Muslims have been of the politically and religiously moderate Sunni persuasion. Today, though, the government worries about the possible incursion of Islamic fundamentalist influences from Sudan and Somalia.

The government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is conducting a comprehensive census, the first of its kind in more than a generation. Consequently, detailed current demographic as well as socioeconomic data are in short supply. What is available should be used with caution. With that caveat, the Oromo people, who live mainly in the east and south, are probably the most numerous at perhaps 30 percent of the population. The culturally and politically dominant Amhara make up about 20 percent. The Tigre, concentrated north of the Amhara, account for 10 percent. All are principally plow agriculturists or pastoralists.

In modern times (that is, since the mid-1800s) ethnic groups have intermingled more than in most other sub-Saharan countries. This is despite the garrisoning of predominantly Amharan armies on the lands conquered by Menelik and the forced resettlement, under Mengistu, of Tigreans and other northern Ethiopians in these same regions. Long-distance markets have brought together peoples as diverse as the Christian, agricultural Tigre and the seminomadic, nominally Islamic Afar at the Mekele market, in the north.

During Haile Selassie's reign, some voluntary migration brought peoples from overpopulated, agriculturally marginal lands in Tigre to more promising regions in southern Ethiopia. Agricultural workers from highland Ethiopia manned commercial agricultural enterprises located in the lowland homelands of the Afar and other pastoral peoples. And non-Amhara peoples, notably among the Oromo communities, have acquired the language, religion, and culture of the Amhara, assimilating and identifying themselves with this elite ruling community.

However, the Amhara, and to some extent Tigre and other peoples, retain political and socioeconomic predominance over other ethnic communities, most of which were brought into the empire by Menelik's conquests. The Tigre predominate in the present ruling coalition and are generally considered to have been part of the ruling coalition in modern times. But many Tigreans felt themselves to be junior partners in the coalition who have something in common with the peoples conquered by Menelik. These underlying ethnopolitical realities have become more visible and explicit since the imperial era. Mengistu exploited ethnic divisions in waging unrelenting war against the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. He sharpened those divisions them by his forced resettlements.² And the current government has given ethnicity still greater salience in attempting to design a postimperial state that replaces historical ethnic domination with ethnic self-reliance and interethnic equality.

² A 1987 "constitution" issued by the Mengistu government professed to offer Ethiopian peoples a measure of ethnic-based self-determination, but on paper only.

Defining Ethiopia

Conflict in Ethiopia in modern times essentially has been over the definition of Ethiopia itself. Four interrelated issues dominate this conflict. The first issue is whether and on what terms a pan-ethnic Ethiopian nation has emerged and survived within the empire created by the conquests of Menelik II. Though never technically part of Mengistu's empire, Eritrea has brought this to a contemporary focus. After World War II, the United Nations sanctioned a federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia. But Haile Selassie had a different vision. Employing his estimable skills in patrimonial personal rule, the emperor succeeded in abrogating that arrangement in favor of Eritrea's full incorporation into Ethiopia—part of his general strategy of achieving increased centralization.

In taking this measure, the emperor unraveled a compromise between Eritrean independence and incorporation that loosely conformed to a historical basis of the Ethiopian polity. The compromise was a tacit one, involving de jure centralized authority in the person of the emperor and substantial de facto allowance of decentralization, affording substantial day-to-day self-determination for regionally based potentates. The result of the unraveling was the birth of the Eritrean liberation movement, which three decades later won its independence on the battlefield, against the armies of Mengistu Haile Mariam.

The second issue was the viability and acceptability of the underlying socioeconomic foundations of the imperial political order. Haile Selassie allowed his government to ignore and attempt to cover up a devastating famine concentrated in the Tigre and Wollo regions in 1972 and 1973. Brought to the world's attention by a BBC television documentary, the famine and the coverup ignited a torrent of international outrage. These events also engendered revulsion in progressive Ethiopian groups, both civilian and military. Such groups decried the failure of the government not only to deal with the famine but also to curb inflation, alleviate endemic poverty, and provision ordinary soldiers—all as civil servants helped themselves to substantial salary increases.

A wave of demonstrations and strikes over these grievances early in 1974 forced the emperor's cabinet to resign, an event unprecedented in the country's political history. Rather than quell the protests, the resignations emboldened the demonstrators and strikers. They attacked the foundations of the emperor's regime itself: autocratic rule resting on inegalitarian, quasi-feudal socioeconomic systems unacceptable in a continent engulfed by populist nationalism, African socialism, and one-party democracy.

The third and fourth issues were whether and how to democratize and how to effect a political transition resulting in the fashioning of at least minimal working consensus on the

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foregoing issues. The 1974 protests took on the dimensions of a genuine grass-roots revolution, especially in urban areas. They were animated less by African socialism and one-party democracy than by the ideals of Western-style liberalism: individual civil, political, and property rights, and democracy. As they did so, a 120-man council of military officers formed to assume leadership of the revolution, with apparent tacit popular consent. The committee was impelled by issues of economic development and by concern over the integrity of the nation (it proclaimed the goal of Ethiopian First). It was particularly concerned about unresolved tension with secessionist Eritrea and with irredentist Somalia over the future of the Somali-inhabited Ogaden region of southeastern Ethiopia.

The Derg (Amharic for “committee”), as the military council was known, supervised the dismantling of the emperor’s government. The emperor was removed from power in September 1974, and a “transitional” administration was installed. It pledged to eradicate the quasi-feudal socioeconomic foundations of the old regimes of the emperor before overseeing a return to civilian rule. But over the next four years, the Derg metastasized into Mengistu’s military dictatorship. That transformation resulted from a continual bitter,

violent conflict over the issues principally of 1) negotiated versus military solutions to the Eritrean conflict, and 2) immediate versus deferred civilian rule—both within the Derg itself and between the Derg and civilian groups that had led and supported the popular uprising. Mengistu’s violent insistence on the latter course in each case prevailed.

At the same time, Mengistu attempted to convert profound socioeconomic reforms—notably rural and urban land reforms—prompted initially by a spirit of democratic socialism and local level self-determination into experiments in Soviet-style collectivization and statist “development.” Perhaps ideologically inspired initially, this metamorphosis became a means to more immediate military imperatives: Somalia’s military démarche to reclaim the Ogaden in 1977, which required major Soviet military assistance to rebuff, and the growing costs of sustaining the military campaign against increasingly effective liberation armies during the 1980s.³ The Mengistu regime’s militarization of “economic development” in the service of the increasingly costly, demoralizing, and unsuccessful Eritrean campaign was a major contributor to the emergence of the EPRDF and its ultimately successful effort to unite most of the country behind the overthrow of Mengistu in 1991.

³ The Somali war crystalized a unique Cold War “do-si-do,” with Somalia evicting as its military patron the Soviet Union, which then became the patron of Ethiopia, and Ethiopia dismissing the United States, for more than 20 years its principal source of military and economic assistance; the United States then gravitated to support of Somalia against Soviet-supported Ethiopia.

The Transitional Pacts

The victory of the EPRDF and its allies precipitated the country's present political transition, in which the 1992 regional elections have proved to be *the* defining event to date. Two agreements defined the course the transition was supposed to take. On the eve of the EPRDF's victory, its representatives met in London with the residual legatees of Mengistu (who by then had flown to exile in Zimbabwe) under the auspices of then-U.S. assistant secretary of state Herman Cohen.

At that conference, Cohen chose to bless the inevitable (the EPRDF's victory) in the interest of preventing bloodshed when the capital fell. Claiming to have been invited to the meeting by Cohen, an ethnopolitical group called the Oromo Liberation Front was bitterly disappointed to be told the EPRDF's military predominance on the ground took precedence over a coalition conquest that would establish a foundation for coalition transitional governance. At the same time, Cohen signaled to the EPRDF it would enjoy continued U.S. support only on condition that it undertook to democratize Ethiopia. "No democracy, no cooperation" was his message.

The second pact took place in July 1991 between the victorious EPRDF and its coalition partners. Most notable among these was the Oromo Liberation Front, which purports to represent a family of peoples in southern Ethiopia who together may constitute a plurality of the country's population. Certainly the front represents at least a plurality of those

people brought into the empire by Menelik's conquests. EPRDF hastily formed other "parties" to "represent" peoples in regions outside its own core base. These "parties," often identified as people's democratic organizations, were to function as satellite parties of the EPRDF in the forthcoming regional elections. Their participation burnished the appearance of the conference, and the pact it produced, as multiparty achievements.

In point of fact, however, the parties were to function as auxiliaries of the EPRDF, facilitating its emergence as a *de facto* single-party transitional and posttransitional regime. Formation of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization prior to the end of the war contributed powerfully to what has proved to be an irreconcilable fissure between the EPRDF government and the Oromo Liberation Front.

At the same time, cadres of Mengistu's Workers Party of Ethiopia were excluded. Parties that had warred with the EPRDF during the military campaign, as well as with Mengistu in the early years of his regime, were excluded. Prominent Amhara attended as individuals, though the major party formed to represent Amhara interests came into being only after the conference. Thus, the communities of the culturally and, formerly, politically dominant Amhara lacked an organized voice at this crucial conference to press their prevalent opposition to the EPRDF's ethnically decentralized, confederal vision of postimperial Ethiopia.

This Addis Ababa conference produced the Transition Charter,

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which was to guide political developments for precisely two years—that is, until January 1994. The charter reconstituted the participants as a transitional government. That government was organized as a Council of Representatives in which all the political movements were represented roughly in accord with the estimated size of their essentially ethnically defined constituencies. The interim head of state was to be Meles Zenawi, the military and political leader of the EPRDF. He and his administration were to be answerable in general but largely unspecified ways to the Council of Representatives.

The Transition Charter committed the country to radically decentralized, regionally based government and to a full range of basic human rights. It specified a transition of fixed duration beginning with a stipulation that elections for local and regional councils “shall be held within three months of the establishment of the Transitional Government, wherever local conditions allow.” In addition, the Charter provided for elections for a Constituent Assembly to ratify the draft constitution establishing the new Ethiopian state and providing for national parliamentary elections. The latter were to be held at the conclusion of the transition.

Flawed Elections And a Failed Transition

The 11 months between the Addis Ababa conference and the June 1992 regional election witnessed the fracturing of the multimovement consensus (expressed in the Transition Charter) over three intertwined issues. They were 1) implementation of the ethnic-based self-determination the charter had proclaimed, 2) encampment of movement armies, and 3) election preparations.

Ethnic Regionalism

In November 1991 the EPRDF issued a map portraying administrative regions dramatically reconfigured along ethnic lines. The new map was highly controversial for conflicting reasons. Amhara communities objected strenuously to the plan as a blueprint for the Balkanization of Ethiopia. They resented being obliged to emphasize their Amhara identity at the expense of their Ethiopian identity, conveniently glossing over their political dominance under the emperors. The Oromo Liberation Front, for its part, remained skeptical that the EPRDF was genuine in its commitment to ethnic self-determination. The skepticism was, in important ways, to be realized—and to some degree become self-fulfilling.

Little noted at the time were the long-term implications of the EPRDF's new administrative map on prospects for multiparty democracy at the national level. The EPRDF marked off administrative regions to coincide generally with established

spheres for the ethnically defined politicomilitary movements that overthrew Mengistu. In doing so, the EPRDF in effect reinforced a preexisting barrier to *nationally based* competitive political parties. The redrawing discouraged existing ethnically defined movements from transforming themselves into national political parties for the purposes of 1) reaching across ethnic lines to build national coalitions and 2) developing issues along lines that crosscut ethnic divisions. Conversely, the EPRDF encouraged all politicomilitary movements, including the EPRDF itself, to remain as is—that is, what they had been on the battlefield.

Encampment and Security Forces

The encampment of movement armies obliged all the politicomilitary movements to address an issue the Transition Charter failed to address. That issue was the restoration of civil order, on which the successful conduct of the regional elections depended. With the collapse of the Mengistu regime, the country was left without a politically neutral civilian police force. In its place were only the armed forces of the politicomilitary movements, notably the EPRDF and the Oromo Liberation Front. Thousands of soldiers from Mengistu's fallen armies were at loose ends, and the country was awash in weapons easily accessible to anyone with a little money. The charter contained no language on the formation of a civilian police force nor on creating either an ethnically integrated police force or army. The Council of Representatives issued two proclamations to deal with the security problem.

Proclamation 9 of 1992 provided for the creation of police and security forces “armed with the participation of the people residing in the locality.” Especially important, the proclamation directed that “the State Defense Army and the armed personnel of organizations shall be confined to proper camps and shall be barred from day-to-day police and administrative activities.” The proclamation stipulated, however, that “*except those assigned on regular duty*, other members of the State Defense Force shall . . . be kept in military camps allocated to them” (emphasis added). In February 1992 the EPRDF and the Oromo Liberation Front recognized the need to strengthen cooperation under the provisions of proclamation 9. In the most important provision, the parties agreed to the “garrisoning [of] *all* armies as soon as possible in accordance with the decisions of the Council of Representatives with the necessary guarantees” (emphasis added).

Thus, the two documents directly conflicted with one another. While the joint declaration decreed the encampment of *all* armies, implicitly including the EPRDF, proclamation 9 created an exception for certain units of the State Defense Force (“except those assigned on regular duty”).

Meanwhile, proclamation 8 gave the State Defense Army the power to define and bring under control any “major subversion . . . endangering the charter. . . .” Neither proclamation defined a distinction between civilian police and state defense force functions. That omission in effect left the EPRDF army to take on both roles. These legal ambiguities over the encampment of armies and formation of security forces fueled bitter misun-

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derstandings that were to help prompt the Oromo Liberation Front and other movements to withdraw from the regional elections. Their withdrawals foreshadowed what has become the enduring estrangement of the EPRDF from its former Transition Charter partners and from the processes and outcomes of the transition as a whole.

Election Preparations And Outcome

In preparation for the elections, the EPRDF acted decisively to define its Transition Charter partners, notably the Oromo Liberation Front, and other politicomilitary movements as electoral opponents. The EPRDF had defined the elections in ethnic terms by redrawing the country's regional boundaries. It had placed its army in a preferred position relative to the forces of the other movements. Now the EPRDF intensified a strategy of creating auxiliary ethnically defined political organizations to compete with its erstwhile collaborators, a strategy it had begun in the later stages of the military campaign.

A prime example was the EPRDF's formation in 1990 of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization. Created as a means of extending the EPRDF's military position in the countryside, the EPRDF employed the Oromo People's Democratic Organization as an electoral organization to rival the Oromo Liberation Front in elections as it had on the battlefield. Similar people's democratic organizations were established in other ethnically defined regions. The Oromo People's Democratic Organization and other people's democratic

organizations were to enjoy the organizational, military, and financial muscle of the EPRDF in this electoral competition, creating gross inequality in the political arena was commensurate with preexisting inequalities on the battlefield.

Electoral Institutions And Processes

The National Election Commission came into being in December 1991. It was composed of 10 members of the Council of Representatives representing the major political groups within the council. The commission oversaw all aspects of the 1992 elections. The EPRDF issued proclamations 9 and 11, establishing the legal and institutional framework for the elections. The commission then issued a comprehensive set of rules for implementing these proclamations.

Setting Up An Elections Infrastructure

Proclamation 9 established the administrative foundations for the election, provisional administrations at regional, *wereda* (district), and *kebele* (precinct or ward) levels that were to function pending the formation of permanent governmental organs at each of these levels. It established guidelines for the 1) disbanding and disarming of the remnants of Mengistu's armies, 2) registration and encampment of armies attached to political movements represented in the Council of

Representatives, 3) creation of police and security forces at regional levels, and 4) arrest of those refusing to surrender arms or be encamped. Members of the provisional administrations were to be elected in accordance with the directives of electoral executive committees composed of representatives of “concerned organizations” and members of “neutral” organizations.

Proclamation 11 of February 8, 1992, established the electoral structures and regulations for the regional and wereda levels. This proclamation instituted electoral commissions at the regional, zonal, wereda, and kebele levels under the National Election Commission. Along with the National Election Commission itself, these bodies were to be accountable to the Council of Representatives. The council defined 1) the powers and duties of these commissions 2) the eligibility requirements for candidates and voters, 3) procedures for voter registration, 4) procedures for candidate nominations, and 5) campaigning guidelines.

Proclamation 11 also specified voter eligibility: 18 years of age, Ethiopian citizenship, two years’ residency in the constituency where the citizen expected to vote “except where he had left that constituency as a result of political persecution, or to engage in an armed struggle against the previous regime, or to study or work elsewhere.” Barred from voting were former members of the Mengistu regime’s pseudocivilian party (the Workers Party of Ethiopia) and any member of the “security or of the armed forces who has not undergone the reeducation process of the Rehabilitation Commission,” in addition to those serving sentences

or certified as insane. A key provision of the voting registration procedure was the requirement that citizens state their “nation/nationality”—that is, their ethnicity.

Proclamation 11 ordained similar qualifications for candidacy. However, it added more restrictive “positive” qualifications: 1) threshold age of 21, 2) ability to “communicate in the language of the nation/nationality in which he seeks to become a candidate,” and 3) residency in the constituency for five years. Candidates were required to obtain 500 signatures for wereda-level candidacies and 1,000 for regional candidacies. These were subsequently reduced dramatically to 350 and 50, respectively, in the middle of the campaign. Originally, candidates were to be required to register 30 days in advance, but observers reported that this requirement in effect vanished with candidacies being accepted right up to election day, at least in some areas. A similar fate thus befell the requirements that candidacies be publicly confirmed through the media 20 days in advance of the election and that appeal of rejected candidacies be at least 10 days before the election.

Logistical Difficulties

The first stage of the election process was the holding of “snap elections” in about 450 of 600 weredas at the kebele level. There, public meetings were to be held to elect representatives of the two major political forces to administer elections at that level. From the kebele committees, similarly composed wereda committees were to be elected and,

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from the wereda committees, regional ones. Opposition parties complained loudly that the EPRDF took advantage of obvious logistical difficulties, compounded by attempted hasty implementation, to establish its dominance at the kebele and wereda levels in ways that grossly violated the provisions of its own proclamation 11. There were charges, however, that the Oromo Liberation Front behaved similarly in the areas it controlled.

No complete national voter register was ever compiled for the 1992 regional and regional elections. Logistical difficulties plus alleged and confirmed incidents of EPRDF intimidation would have rendered any complete registry of doubtful legitimacy. Voter registration books were late arriving in many places, and the instructions were often lacking. Election officials experienced difficulties in determining which individuals associated with Mengistu's security forces or his Workers Party of Ethiopia had been rehabilitated and were therefore eligible to vote. Observers noted many instances of EPRDF intimidation of voters suspected of affiliation with the Oromo Liberation Front.

In some communities, women lacked cultural encouragement to vote, though there was little evidence that electoral officials did anything but encourage women's participation. In some areas hardest hit by fighting, however, the percentage of women voters was much higher than that of men. Voters identifying themselves as "Ethiopian" rather than by their ethnic affiliation were denied registration whether because of honest but legalistic election officials' interpretations or because of an unwritten

policy to exclude those ignorant of, or opposed to, the EPRDF's vision of ethnic federalism.

A much later voter registration effort, conducted by the National Election Board (successor to the National Election Commission under revised electoral legislation) produced a total registration of 13,462, 256 within 503 parliamentary constituencies.

Irregularities, And Intimidation

The impartiality and competence of the electoral committees at kebele and wereda levels were severely undermined by irregularities during the snap elections: the suspected EPRDF affiliations of "independent" members, instances of EPRDF harassment of voters and dominance of the public meetings, and opposition party withdrawal in the face of alleged EPRDF intimidation. In areas where kebele elections could not be held or the elections were thrown out for process violations, committees were assembled in an ad hoc fashion. Nominally they were elected by voters without regard to party balance as stipulated by the regulations, but reportedly they were often simply installed by the EPRDF. In some areas electoral committees formed so late that they were in effect nonfunctional.

Screening candidates with respect to proclamation 11 criteria proved impossible in many regions, not least because the requirement for candidate certification well in advance of the elections all but collapsed in some areas. The same confusion regarding interpretation of proclama-

tion 11 strictures with respect to Mengistu-era personnel that tarnished voter registration also afflicted candidate registration. No formal list of candidates was ever assembled, meaning that the legality of the candidate rosters under proclamation 11 guidelines remained highly suspect and unverifiable. Observers recorded numerous instances where prospective candidates were challenged on trumped-up charges and denied permission to register as candidates.

To its credit, the National Election Board relied on locally manufactured pouches rather than conventional wood or metal ballot boxes. Observers reported the pervasive presence of campaign propaganda in the vicinity of polling places. They noted the intimidating presence of EPRDF security forces in and near voting places in several regions, thus raising questions about the significance of turnout figures. In some areas, out of confusion and insecurity concerning the voting process, voters were seen entering the ballot booth in groups and filling out their ballot cards after collective discussion. Observers noted scattered instances of unauthorized handling of ballot cards. Allocation of symbols to parties and candidates was a subject of great controversy between the EPRDF and opposition parties over the impartiality of the distribution process.

Many errors occurred in marking ballot cards. These included signing between two candidate symbols, switching wereda and regional ballot cards, and returning ballot cards unmarked out of confusion over how to use them. Balloting was impeded by long lines and lengthy delays, lack

of adequate election materials for the electoral committees, and use of Amharic in areas where other languages predominated. In the spirit of the EPRDF's vision of the postimperial Ethiopian state, additional money and more time might have enabled the National Election Commission to have these materials translated at least into major local languages. Although there were few serious complaints about postelection handling of the ballot boxes, procedures for transmitting them to central locations were extremely loose. That opened up the entire process to potentially unchecked corruption.

The EPRDF created a Police Force Organization Commission to put together a politically neutral police force to guard the electoral processes. This force was not fully operational in all regions on election day. But EPRDF troops were present during and preceding election day, often in clear violation of hard-won encampment accords, overshadowing the effects of this initiative. Voters and candidates, especially of opposition parties, were intimidated by their presence.

Six factors contributed to these tragically flawed elections: 1) the major logistical difficulties of mounting an election in such a large country with minimal transportation and communications infrastructure; 2) insufficient lead time to complete electoral preparations and processes; 3) insufficient progress in demilitarizing the countryside *prior* to electoral activity; 4) insufficient transformation of all militarized movements into civilian political parties *prior* to the beginning of electoral processes; 5) insufficient civic education for voters and local election officials concerning

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election regulations and processes; and 6) failure of the political organizations to reach consensus on rules of political competition to undergird those laid down formally in election proclamations and regulations.

Aftermath

The EPRDF capitalized on what international observers were to describe as a less than free and fair electoral process in order to enhance its de facto political hegemony. That drove the Oromo Liberation Front to decamp its armies and mount a short, futile military challenge to the EPRDF. Despite the efforts of former president Jimmy Carter and others, the EPRDF and the opposition parties have never reconciled since these elections. During the remainder of the transition, most opposition parties resigned or were expelled from the Council of Representatives. Incensed by perceived departures from the principles of the Transition Charter and the shattering of the interparty consensus upon which it was constructed, the opposition parties have attacked the transition's legitimacy. All efforts to reconcile the parties have proven fruitless, including those of Jimmy Carter.

Perpetuating One-Party Rule

Thus, the lasting outcome of these elections was the de facto single-party state that continues today. That is notwithstanding 1) the EPRDF's formal completion of the transitional process through revision of the electoral laws based on the experience of the 1992 elections, 2) the

election of a constituent assembly and its ratification of the newly drafted constitution in 1994 and 1995, and 3) the holding of elections to the new parliament in June 1995. These legal foundations of a democratic state have carried only limited significance, since they rest not on the foundations of multiparty consensus but only on the military and political hegemony of the EPRDF.

Moreover, civil society in Ethiopia is in a weak position to hold the EPRDF government accountable. Churches have shown little inclination to play the active role they have in Kenya, South Africa, and Latin America. Trade unions are quiescent and have not established independence of the government. The post-Mengistu era has spawned numerous private media, but they have been afflicted by intense internal rivalries largely rooted in alleged or real association of their leaders with either the Mengistu or EPRDF regimes. Not surprisingly, therefore, the EPRDF government's human rights record, while much superior to that of the old order, has been mediocre at best.

International Electoral Assistance

The flawed nature of Ethiopia's 1992 elections prevailed even though all parties appeared to welcome international assistance in support elections that would be free and fair. Former president Jimmy Carter was instrumental in putting President Meles in touch with the National Democratic Institute. In November 1991, the institute sent a three-person team to Ethiopia to outline the requirements for free and fair elections and a strategy for mounting

The EPRDF capitalized on what observers described as a less than free and fair electoral process.

successful regional elections as well as areas of possible international assistance. Specifically, the parties appeared to welcome the prospect of a substantial team of international observers to monitor the elections.

Twenty bilateral donors plus the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) contributed just over \$5 million to the National Election Commission in direct cash contributions, in-kind contributions, and support for teams of international election monitors. USAID/Ethiopia's midterm evaluation of its Democracy and Governance project estimated Agency contributions to the June 1992 elections at \$1.375 million.⁴ USAID project obligations for the 1992 elections plus \$500,000 for *postelection* civic education represented 50 percent of funds for the Mission's Five Year Democracy and Governance project prior to its amendment and enlargement in 1995.

The key international assistance component was the provision of foreign observers. Of 240 observers from 20 countries plus the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations, the United States provided the largest number (75), followed distantly by the United Nations (24), and the OAU and Germany (18 each). Though most of the observers were from abroad, 95 were local residents. Other assistance included vehicles, tents, radios, computers, rations, cash contributions of \$2.12 million from nine countries, and staff to the Joint International Observer Group, which coordinated external electoral assistance.

The group consisted of 23 donors and 8 international organizations. Within the group 12 donors plus the UN Development Program and the OAU constituted what was known as the Restricted Donors' Group. It met at least every three weeks, headed by the Canadian high commissioner. These two groups supported the Donor Contact Working Group, which met several times each week. Chaired by the UK high commissioner, the group included in addition the United States, Sweden, and the UNDP resident representative. The Donor Contact group directed the work of the joint observer group secretariat headed by the United Kingdom deputy chief of mission.

Unrealized Objectives

Observers generally judged the regional elections to have been significantly less than free and fair and to have fallen considerably short of the goal of instituting political competition according to the precepts of democracy and the rule of law. In the eyes of the international observers as well as opposition parties, the EPRDF failed to establish a clear but difficult distinction between its obligatory role as an above-the-fray guardian of the embryonic multiparty democratic election process and its role as the dominant participant in it. Credible evidence of widespread intimidation of voters, candidates, and parties marred the entire electoral process. Although some of these allegations applied to the Oromo

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⁴ This figure appears to conflict directly with the National Democratic Institute's estimate of \$850,000.

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Liberation Front within the limited areas its cadres controlled, by far the bulk of these allegations and of the credible evidence of intimidation applied to the EPRDF.

Observers were divided as to the causes and implications of these flaws. The mildest criticism of the process attributed the flaws principally to the daunting array of logistical difficulties involved in conducting elections in a poor, war-torn country. Observers noted that post-Mengistu Ethiopia was still a freer, more democratic place than it had been under the old order. The harshest critics viewed the flaws as reflecting the EPRDF's determination to win at all costs, perpetuating the same northern-based imperialism that the EPRDF claimed to be eradicating. Intermediate between those positions were those who faulted the EPRDF for allowing these flaws to occur but stopped short of impugning its motives. In a separate statement for its 16 observers, the Heinrich Boll Foundation of Germany concluded that the results of the election in the areas they observed "should not be taken as a free and fair reflection of the democratic will of the people."

Reflecting on the 1992 elections, the National Democratic Institute concluded that they "did not achieve their proclaimed objectives," which included 1) competitive participation; 2) overcoming logistical obstacles to viable elections, the failure to do so resulting in a "seriously impaired . . . electoral process"; 3) moderation of ethnic differences; and 4) "education of a majority of the population regarding the nature of genuine, multiparty elections."

Simply put, however, international assistance made it possible for Ethio-

pia to conduct the 1992 regional elections. The most visible aspect of this assistance was provision of the legions of international observers. This was key to confirming the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the processes in the eyes of the EPRDF, opposition parties, the donors themselves, and perhaps to some extent Ethiopian voters as well. In principle, Ethiopia could have conducted the election in some fashion without the observers. But given the country's endemic poverty and its general postwar disarray, Ethiopia would have been hard pressed to mount the election process without the ballots, radios, vehicles, computers, and the direct financial and staff support that the donors supplied.

Lessons and Recommendations

1. *Take the time to do the elections right.*

The 1992 regional elections in Ethiopia were postponed once but should have been delayed still further. The Meles regime understandably resisted diplomatic entreaties for a second postponement on the grounds that the approaching rainy season would soon make it impossible to conduct the elections. But in retrospect it would have been better to have postponed the elections until after the rainy season. The encampment accords between the EPRDF and at least the Oromo Liberation Front were too fragile and insecure to permit organizing properly for the elections in many areas of the country. But those areas were the very ones where the legitimizing, conflict-resolving properties of

elections were most needed. Consequently, the preparatory steps were conducted haphazardly or not at all in the most important areas. Whether or not the EPRDF welcomed, hid behind, or even engineered continuing instability in order to strengthen its position, the circumstances on the ground made it possible for the EPRDF to do so and created the *perception* it had done so.

2. Use the carrot of substantial electoral assistance to leverage agreement from at least all the major politicomilitary movements on a realistic schedule for carrying out electoral preparations.

In the elections of 1992, it is not clear that the donor countries themselves had realistic assessments of what was required when they entered into negotiations with the EPRDF administration on electoral assistance. It is fairly evident that both the EPRDF and its opponents lacked a realistic appreciation of the difficulties electoral preparations would involve. Donor-financed experts should work jointly with the contending parties to appraise these requirements to arrive at a consensus on realistic electoral plans. In these negotiations, issues and points of contention can be anticipated and resolved in advance.

3. Although they should be largely sequential rather than simultaneous processes, war repair and election preparations should be linked in policy planning and implementation.

Demobilization and encampment of troops should be linked not only to employment-generated programs and reforms but to political participation as well. Troops should see demobilization as a means to both

civilian employment and real political involvement. It is especially important for the armies of rival political movements to make the transition from military to peaceful civic competition. The greater the success in helping combatants make this transition, the greater the prospects for secure peace and successful democratic consolidation. Such planning should also include training of a neutral police of sufficient size, one that integrates individuals from all major armies.

4. Consider whether particular circumstances indicate the wisdom of conducting initial multiparty elections later rather than earlier in the democratization process.

In certain war-torn societies, the delay of elections to a later date may be beneficial for democratization. In Ethiopia, the 11-month period between convening the Transition Charter conference and the regional elections was insufficient for demobilizing the armies and reintegrating them into civilian life. It was similarly insufficient to convert armies into political parties, to fashion a multiparty agreement on the rules of political competition, to overcome the logistical and organizational obstacles to achieving free and fair elections, and to craft a Transition Charter that will guide the parties comprehensively and realistically through the complexities of simultaneous state reconstruction and democratization.

5. The greater the importance to the United States of free and fair elections and peace in a given country, the more the United States should be prepared to monitor the process and exercise leverage to prevent and penalize violations of the peace

Donor-financed experts should work with contending parties to arrive at a consensus on realistic electoral plans.

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agreement and agreed-on electoral plans.

This recommendation is far easier to articulate than to implement. And there is an underlying conundrum. It is that the more U.S. interests are involved, the greater the stakes in the United States' attempting to impose sanctions for violations of peace and electoral agreements; conversely, the less important the country involved, the less the justification for the effort involved to impose sanctions. Nor is it a simple matter to suspend or cancel elements of assistance once the flow of resources has begun, even assuming that the United States (alone or in concert with other donors) can identify leverage adequate to sanction effectively.

Nevertheless, a pattern of abuses on the part of all parties in the 1992 Ethiopian elections, but particularly by the EPRDF, took place throughout the campaign preceding the elections themselves. Although it is possible that greater abuses were prevented by whatever diplomatic representations may have occurred, to all appearances these representations were ineffective in preventing abuses of election processes to which substantial donor resources had been committed. One possible sanction might include extra "level playing field" assistance to nonoffending parties. Depending on the importance ruling and opposition parties place on international certification of elections as free and fair, withholding international observers might be one effective sanction that could be imposed late in the runup to election day.

6. An essential step in the transition from war to peaceful electoral compe-

tition in war-torn societies is the conversion of politicomilitary movements to genuine political parties.

The major participants in the elections had made at best incomplete transitions from politically driven armed forces to electorally centered political parties. Free and fair elections cannot proceed to the extent the competing organizations conduct the campaigns as though they were armies at war. The objectives, the organizational structures, the behavior, and the strategy and tactics of politicomilitary movements—all these need refashioning to effect such transitions.

7. Parties need to conduct successful negotiations and reach agreement among themselves on what represents free and fair electoral competition.

Implicit in this recommendation is the proposition that what is "free and fair" is not simply a matter of applying internationally defined standards but of gaining agreement among competing parties themselves on the meaning of the term. Supplementary provisions or some modifications of these international standards may be appropriate in the circumstances of individual countries. Quite apart from inadequacies in the Ethiopian legislation at the time, and the problems caused by insufficient implementation of encampment agreements, the ruling and opposition parties in the 1992 Ethiopian elections never really engaged each other—let alone reached agreement—on what they meant by free and fair electoral practice. This lack of communication contributed to the pattern of events leading to elections that fractured irretrievably the interparty consensus achieved with the Transition Charter.

8. *Devote more emphasis to non-governmental civic education.*

Under the circumstances, there was little alternative to primarily official civic education centered on the elections. No one would claim that it was sufficient in either quantity or quality, or that heavy reliance on officially sponsored civic education is adequate or appropriate. If the sequencing and timing of elections within the framework of overall democratization had been adjusted as suggested above, more time and opportunity would have been available to build civil society capacity to conduct civic education with external assistance as needed.

9. *Use existing media capacity for elections.*

Realistically, media capacity in the early stages of democratization, especially in war-torn societies, is a given for the short to medium term. Whatever capacity exists, public or private, electronic or print, should be utilized to strengthen civic awareness and enable the parties and candidates to project their messages. But it is probably unrealistic to think that often very limited capacity, notably in

Ethiopia, can be strengthened in time to be of increased value to initial elections. That's true even if the elections are held later in the democratization process as recommended.

10. *Emphasize electoral administration as a career.*

It is wholly understandable, particularly when time is short and resources are finite, that the emphasis of electoral assistance should be on a particular electoral event. However, to the extent possible there should be greater emphasis on helping host countries develop career paths in electoral administration. Although volunteers are indispensable and, properly, they predominate in numbers, it does appear that there may be benefits in placing greater emphasis on training of a cadre of electoral professionals for such tasks as maintaining and computerizing electoral records, training volunteer electoral officials, maintaining registration records, organizing registration campaigns, managing electoral financial resources, organizing and operating election appeals processes, providing electoral legal advice, and managing election logistics.

What is "free and fair" is not simply a matter of applying internationally defined standards.