

**AN EVALUATION
OF THE JUNE 21, 1992
ELECTIONS IN
ETHIOPIA**

**NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC
INSTITUTE FOR
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

**AFRICAN-AMERICAN
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An Evaluation of the June 21, 1992 Elections in Ethiopia

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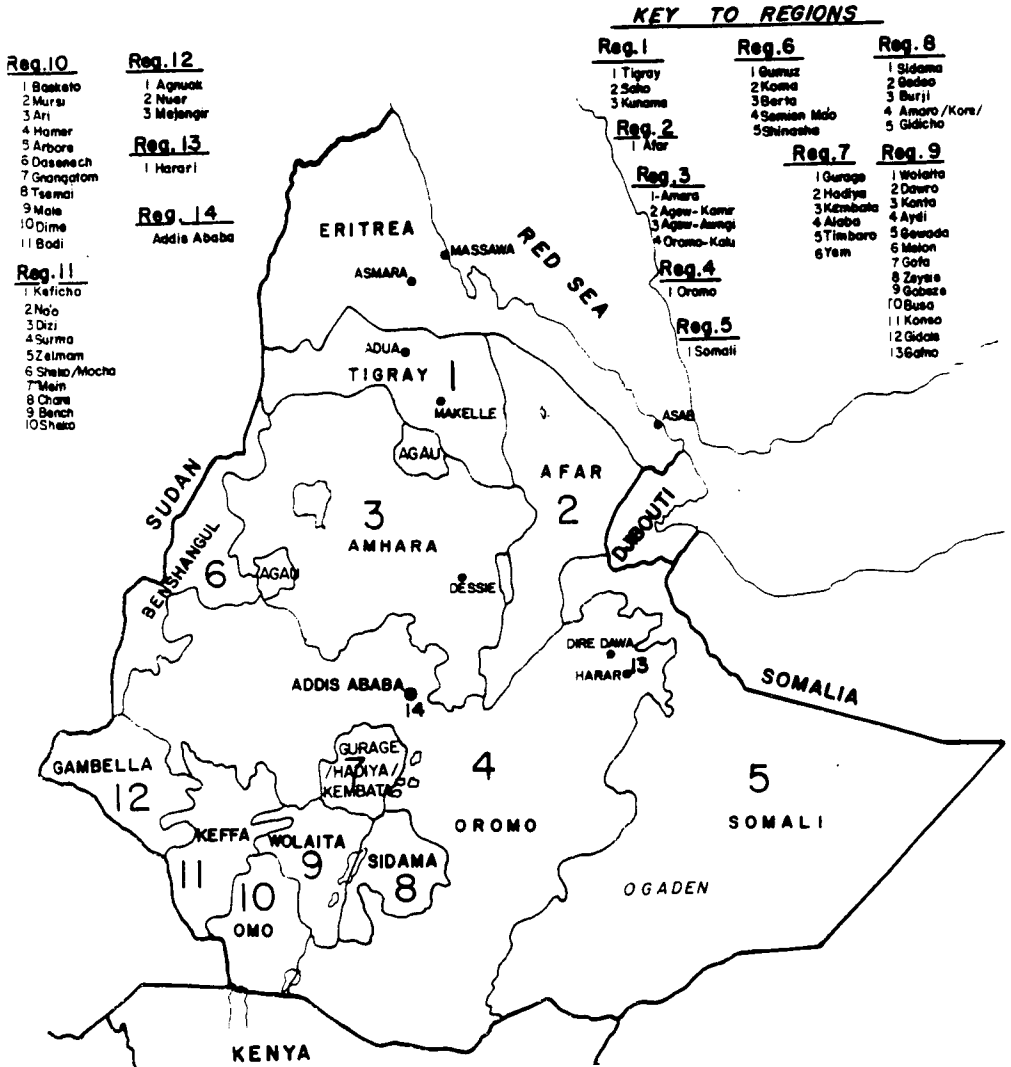
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Administrative Regions for the Transitional Period



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Larry Garber, NDI Senior Associate for Electoral Processes, served as the principal author and redactor of the study. Edmond Keller, who served as AAI's field director for the Ethiopia observation project, Clark Gibson, Curtis Vredenburg and Christopher Fomuyon drafted individual chapters of the report and commented on the various drafts. At NDI, Executive Vice President Kenneth Wollack, Public Information Director Sue Grabowski, Senior Program Officer Eric Bjornlund and Program Officer Steven Griner edited the study. AAI Executive Vice President Steve McDonald, AAI Vice President Carl Schieren and Terrence Lyons of the Brookings Institution also reviewed the draft. Grabowski and Griner were responsible for organizing the appendices.

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Glossary of Abbreviations and Terms

AAI - African-American Institute: a United States-based organization, which sponsored a 70-member international team for the June 21 elections.

Contact Group: an advisory group designated by a restricted donors group of 12 countries, the U.N. Development Programme and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) that determined policy for the JIOG (see below); included the ambassadors of Canada, Sweden and the United Kingdom, the United States chargé d'affaires and the United Nations resident representative, although other diplomats and representatives of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations often participated in contact group meetings affecting the monitoring exercise.

Council of Representatives: an 87-member body established pursuant to the National Charter (see below) as the interim national legislative body in Ethiopia; until June 1992, when several parties withdrew, included representatives of 29 organizations.

EPDM - Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement: an Ethiopian party that participates in the EPRDF coalition (see below) and is prevalent in the Amhara regions of the country.

EPLF - Eritrean People's Liberation Front: the principal Eritrean group fighting the Mengistu regime during the 1980s and, since May 1991, the dominant group in the Provisional Government of Eritrea.

EPRDF - Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front: a coalition of several groups formed in 1989 to fight against the Mengistu regime and, since July 1991, the dominant group within the TGE (see below).

IAG - Inter-Africa Group: an Ethiopian civic organization whose leaders returned from exile following the overthrow of Mengistu Haile Mariam and which conducted an independent study of the June 21 elections.

JIOG - Joint International Observer Group: the umbrella arrangement for all observer groups present in Ethiopia for the June 21 elections; JIOG included nationals of 23 countries and representatives of several intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations.

Kebele: the smallest unit in Ethiopian administrative structure; the country includes more than 30,000 *kebeles*.

National Charter: adopted in July 1991 by the Democratic and Peaceful Transitional Conference in Ethiopia; sets forth the interim government arrangements until a new constitution is adopted and national elections held.

NDI - National Democratic Institute for International Affairs: a Washington-based political development institute, which has organized technical assistance programs in Ethiopia since November 1991 and which was responsible for producing this study.

NEC - National Election Commission: a 10-member body appointed in December 1991 to plan for and implement the regional, local and "snap elections" (see below).

OAU - Organization of African Unity: a regional body comprising all African states; sponsored an 18-member observer team comprising principally OAU staff and African ambassadors based in Addis Ababa.

OLF - Oromo Liberation Front: the second largest group in the Council of Representatives until its members left in June 1992;

withdrew from the election process on June 17, four days before the elections.

OPDO - Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization: a party affiliated with the EPRDF, was established to counter the OLF claim to represent the Oromo people.

Regions: political units; pursuant to Proclamation 7, adopted in January 1992, Ethiopia was divided into 12 regions and two chartered cities, with each region theoretically dominated by a particular ethnic group; the June 21 elections were designed to establish elected regional councils, which would be authorized to exercise some autonomy in promulgating legislation and implementing policy.

Snap Elections: akin to open town meetings, they were designed ostensibly to provide an administrative structure for the conduct of regional and local elections; occurred at the *kebele* level beginning in mid-April and continuing through early June.

TGE - Transitional Government of Ethiopia: entity responsible for implementing government policy; formed in July 1991, comprising representatives of several parties, but dominated by the EPRDF and its affiliates.

Wereda: an administrative unit that comprises several *kebeles*; there are 600 *weredas* throughout the country; the June 21 elections were for *wereda* and regional councils.

WPE - Workers Party of Ethiopia: established in 1984 as the sole political party in the country; more than half-a-million Ethiopians reportedly were members before the ouster of Mengistu.

Preface

The June 21, 1992 regional and local elections in Ethiopia generated considerable interest within the international community. More than 200 observers from 23 countries responded to the invitation of the National Election Commission and visited Ethiopia at the time of the elections. The African-American Institute (AAI) organized the United States segment of the Joint International Observer Group (JIOG). The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), meanwhile, agreed to conduct an overall evaluation of the Ethiopian election process.

Since its founding in 1983, NDI has supported the development of democratic institutions in more than 60 countries. In Africa, NDI programs have included: a study of the United Nations role in the Namibian transition; comprehensive evaluations of the election systems of Senegal and Cameroon; a multi-faceted monitoring effort of the October 31, 1991 Zambian elections; a series of conferences and workshops for political party leaders and domestic election monitors in East, Francophone and Southern Africa; and a series of 27 civic education workshops in 17 South African cities.

NDI's involvement in Ethiopia began in November 1991, when a three-member team visited the country to advise the government on electoral matters. The trip was arranged in response to a request from Ethiopian President Meles Zenawi to former U.S. President

Jimmy Carter, who had visited Ethiopia in early November. At the time, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), citing the timetable set forth in the National Charter adopted in July 1991, sought to schedule regional and local elections within two months.

The NDI team met in Addis Ababa with President Meles and his key legal advisers, members of the Council of Representatives, leaders of civic organizations and representatives of the diplomatic community. While in Ethiopia, the team prepared a document outlining a series of electoral options for consideration by the Council's Committee on Elections and Nationalities. The team subsequently prepared a survey report that highlighted the positive improvements in Ethiopia following the May 1991 ouster of President Mengistu Haile Mariam. The report also noted the myriad challenges facing the TGE in developing a democratic election system, particularly given the decades of war that afflicted the country, the consequent mistrust among parties, the ambitious nature of the plan to reorganize the country's administration and the limited infrastructure capabilities.¹

In January 1992, NDI — in conjunction with the Inter-Africa Group (IAG), an Ethiopian civic organization whose leaders returned from exile following the overthrow of Mengistu, and with the cooperation of the newly formed National Election Commission — organized a one-day symposium for 30 members of the Council of Representatives. The seminar focused on issues relating to electoral administration, campaign organization and security.

NDI representatives again visited Ethiopia in mid-May to consider program possibilities in the period preceding the regional and local elections. After consulting various Ethiopian officials and representatives of the international community, NDI committed to preparing a report that would analyze the Ethiopian electoral process and would suggest future political development programs in Ethiopia. The United States Agency for International Development (AID) agreed to finance this effort and AAI agreed to provide the raw data collected by its observers in the field.

¹ National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, *Ethiopian Trip Report: NDI Elections Advisory Team*, p. 1 (1991).

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For the June elections, the NDI evaluation team included: Christopher Fomuyon, a Cameroonian lawyer, currently studying in the United States; Larry Garber, NDI Senior Associate for Electoral Processes and a participant in the November and May missions to Ethiopia; and Clark Gibson, a doctoral student at Duke University who worked with NDI in Zambia. The team was in Ethiopia from June 9-30 and, for the days immediately preceding the elections, was joined by NDI Senior Program Officer Eric Bjornlund.

NDI conducted its evaluation of the Ethiopian electoral process in cooperation with AAI, a private, United States-based organization. Since 1953, AAI has pursued a mission of fostering development in Africa, principally through programs of human resource development and improved mutual understanding between Africans and Americans. During the past two years, AAI supported African democratization by organizing an election observer mission to Benin and hosting conferences in Africa and the United States on various aspects of political pluralism and governance in Africa.

Responding to the invitation of the TGE and after obtaining funding from AID, AAI sponsored a 70-member delegation to observe the elections, subsidized a local Ethiopian monitoring effort initiated by the Inter-Africa Group and provided NDI with a sub-grant that permitted preparation of this evaluation report. The AAI delegation included academic experts, former Peace Corps volunteers in Ethiopia, and other individuals who had spent considerable time in the country (see Appendix I). U.S. Representative Donald Payne (D-NJ) and Joseph Duffey, president of American University in Washington, D.C., co-chaired the delegation. AAI's field director was Edmond Keller, professor of political science and director of the African Studies Center at the University of California at Los Angeles, president of the African Studies Association, and a longtime specialist on Ethiopia.

Many of the AAI delegates arrived in Ethiopia in early June. Soon after their arrival and following a review of the various forms prepared by AAI and the United Nations, they were dispatched, together with observers from other countries operating under the auspices of the Joint International Observer Group (see Chapter 5), to one of 15 hubs located in various regions of the country (see Appendix II). The observers met with regional party and election officials, reviewed preparations for the elections and observed the

local political environment. In some regions, the observers arrived in time to monitor the “snap elections” (see Chapter 3), which were still underway, while in other regions the observers were able to obtain reliable information regarding the snap elections from individuals who participated in them. The observers encountered logistical hurdles and a tenuous security situation that impeded the monitoring effort and, in some regions, required the withdrawal of the observers before election day.

Most of the international observers remained in the field for two weeks. Given the length of their stay, they were competent to evaluate many, but certainly not all, of the claims and counterclaims presented by the different parties and individuals in the days before the elections. The observers also collected a plethora of valuable, first-hand information, which was communicated to AAI and the JIOG secretariat through daily phone contacts, post-election debriefings and extensive written reports. These field reports, many of which responded to the specific issues listed in the NDI evaluation questionnaire (see Appendix III), form the basis for the information included in this report. In addition, excerpts from some of the more comprehensive written reports are included as appendices.² The NDI evaluation team also benefitted from information provided by the IAG’s Ethiopian Free Elections Group, which conducted a parallel evaluation effort and hosted a post-election debriefing session.

The Ethiopian transition process highlights the challenge of balancing the desire for an immediate democratic transition with the reality of initiating a democratic transition in a country with a limited democratic experience, an underdeveloped civil society and high levels of illiteracy. More important, since the second half of Ethiopia’s transition process lies ahead, a review of the important choices that have been made, especially the plunge into regional and local elections, allows for consideration of possible mid-course alterations. The lessons that emerge from the Ethiopian experience since the overthrow of Mengistu are discussed in the penultimate chapter of the report.

² Due to concerns regarding possible recrimination, several observers requested that their reports not be attributed. These requests have been respected. Consequently, quotations from observers in the text are simply ascribed to AAI observer field reports.

This evaluation differs in a few respects from a traditional election observer report. Once several major opposition parties withdrew from the elections on June 17, technical and administrative problems affecting the elections became less significant. The report reflects this reality, in devoting less discussion to issues relating to electoral procedures and observed irregularities than is the case with other election observer reports prepared by NDI. Instead, this report emphasizes the state of Ethiopia's democratic institutions and the possible options for strengthening them. While the report is candid and forthright in recounting the considerable criticisms of the June 21 elections, it does so in the hope that substantial opportunity still exists to redress the problems and thereby increase the prospects that more competitive elections might be staged in the future.

The first chapter provides an overview of the Ethiopian electoral process and highlights several problems that beset the process. To place the elections in context, the second chapter briefly reviews recent Ethiopian history. The third chapter offers a national overview of the electoral process, while the fourth chapter describes this process as it unfolded in different regions of the country. The role of the international community in supporting the electoral process is assessed in chapter five. The sixth chapter reflects on the Ethiopian transition process as it has unfolded to date. The final chapter evaluates the state of civil society in Ethiopia, suggests various political development programs that might strengthen Ethiopia's fragile and nascent democratic system and recommends specific changes with respect to electoral procedures.

Chapter 1

Overview

In July 1991, less than two months after the ouster of Mengistu Haile Mariam, whose brutal regime had ruled Ethiopia since 1977, political groups met to draft a new national charter. The “Democratic and Peaceful Transitional Conference of Ethiopia” established the TGE whose principal mandates were to prepare a new constitution and schedule national elections within two-and-a-half years. On July 22, the conference participants unanimously approved the Charter, which was effective from that date forward.

Article 13 of the Charter authorized regional and local elections within three months, wherever local conditions allowed. These elections, in the words of the Charter, were designed to empower Ethiopian national groups by decentralizing authority and by creating a federal structure of government. This approach reflected the historical experience and political platform of the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which dominates the TGE. The goal of decentralization also enjoyed the official, if somewhat ambivalent, endorsement of important tactical partners in the TGE, most notably the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which sought autonomy in “Oromia.”

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The elections also were designed to serve three additional goals. First, the TGE believed that regional and local elections would help resolve the armed conflicts among and within the different contending ethnic groups; these conflicts have plagued the southern regions of the country, especially the eastern and western sectors of the Oromo region, since shortly after the July 1991 Transitional Conference. Second, the TGE hoped that the elections would provide regional and local governments with a popular mandate and sanction the replacement of the non-elected administrators designated by the TGE. Finally, the elections were envisioned as a demonstration of the TGE's commitment to political pluralism.

To realize this last goal, and to assist in lessening tensions and in raising popular confidence in the electoral process, the TGE welcomed the presence of international observers for the elections. The TGE also solicited material and technical assistance from the international community in support of the electoral process.

Planning and preparation for the elections encountered several formidable challenges. Ethiopia's predominantly peasant society, overwhelmingly illiterate, has little collective experience with the formal structures of democratic government, exists in a poor state of economic development, and is just emerging from years of war and famine. Additional impediments to creating a meaningful electoral system include: intensified intra-ethnic mistrust and violent conflict; the wide availability of weapons; a gross disparity of power between the EPRDF and all other movements; the lack of genuine, functioning political parties; a public administration woefully ill-prepared to conduct formal elections across Ethiopia's large territory; and, perhaps most important, considerable ambivalence regarding the TGE's proposed electoral transition to a new, ethnically-based federalism. Some Amhara political leaders, for example, asserted that the TGE's experiment implied the sacrifice of an Ethiopian national identity and effective central government. Alternatively, certain quarters within the OLF believed that the proposed ethnic federalism would merely co-opt the OLF into yet another northern-dominated system, and that Oromos would thereby forfeit an historic opportunity to achieve true sovereign independence for Oromia.

Not surprisingly, the three-month timetable for regional and local elections set forth in the Charter could not be maintained; ultimately, the elections were scheduled for June 21, 1992, 11 months after the

adoption of the Charter. From late 1991 until shortly before the June elections, discussions between the EPRDF and the OLF to defuse armed conflict dominated political life in Ethiopia. Other initiatives, including drafting a new constitution, were placed on hold until after the regional and local elections were concluded.

By early May 1992, sufficient progress appeared to have been made in encamping fighters. However, given the delays, little time remained before the onset of Ethiopia's rainy season to permit proper preparations for elections. The result was the haphazard and partial June 21 regional and local elections.

Election Process

The June 21 elections did not achieve their proclaimed objectives.

- *Competitive participation, for the most part, did not occur.* Virtually all fledgling parties lacked the organizational capacity to compete effectively against the EPRDF's overwhelming local military and administrative power. This stark imbalance left opposition parties vulnerable to EPRDF manipulation, and contributed to the charges and countercharges of intimidation, violence, fraud, detention and administrative malpractice. The disparities further encouraged many parties — particularly those already ambivalent about, or outright opposed to, reorganizing Ethiopia according to ethnic nationalities — to discredit the electoral process rather than aggressively work to improve the process.

Ultimately, several political parties, including the OLF, the All Amhara People's Organization (AAPO), the Ethiopian Democratic Action Group (EDAG), the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO), and the Gideo People's Democratic Organization (GDPO), withdrew from the election process. In the face of these departures, voters in several regions could only select individuals designated by the EPRDF and its allies, rather than choose candidates from slates presented by competing parties.

Final election results reflected the consequences of the disparities and the withdrawals: 1,108 of the 1,147 regional assembly members elected (96.6 percent) are members of the EPRDF or its affiliate organizations. What began, ostensibly at

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least, as a multiparty affair ended in, what appeared to be, the consolidation of one-party rule.

- *Acute administrative and logistical shortcomings seriously impaired the electoral process.* In many regions, local election commissions were not formed according to the timetable established by the National Election Commission (NEC), registration materials arrived late, and no effective control was exercised on the distribution of election paraphernalia. Notwithstanding the more open political atmosphere, the more voluntary and far less coercive nature of voting, and the evident enthusiasm exhibited at many polling sites, many voters, especially those in areas where EPRDF conflicts with other parties were most intense, experienced little difference between the June 21 elections and the one-party elections conducted during the Mengistu era.
- *The elections failed to resolve the nagging ethnic problems concentrated in the southern regions of the country.* Indeed, in the Oromo-third of Ethiopia, aborted attempts at elections ushered in a new, more uncertain and problematic phase in Ethiopia's struggle with ethnic aspirations. The OLF not only withdrew from elections on June 17, but one day later decamped 15,000 fighters, abrogating an April encampment accord. Shortly after the elections, the OLF withdrew from the Council of Representatives, OLF ministers resigned from the TGE and the OLF closed its Addis Ababa compound. During the month of July, a limited war began in the Oromo region. Within a brief period, the EPRDF army stripped the OLF forces of their heavy equipment, seized control of all Oromo towns, forcibly re-encamped several thousand OLF fighters and reduced OLF force levels to below 5,000.

A peace commission comprising several prominent ambassadors made repeated efforts to revive OLF-EPRDF talks, including one mediation mission in mid-July dispatched to the eastern Oromo region to meet with the OLF General Secretary. However, these efforts proved futile in achieving a reconciliation among the former TGE partners.

- *Finally, despite what may have been the TGE's best intentions, the voting exercise did not educate a majority of the population regarding the nature of genuine, multiparty elections.* Even

before the last-minute withdrawal of various parties, only limited campaign activity occurred anywhere in the country. Ethiopians witnessed little, if any, debate concerning the political, economic and social issues central to their country's future.

The media, in particular, were not used effectively to explain the significance of the elections to the population, to describe the procedures for registering and voting, or to discourage intimidation by supporters of the contesting parties. Rather, the government-controlled media were employed extensively for propagandistic attacks upon the OLF and other opposition parties; comparable vitriolic assaults, aimed at the EPRDF, were broadcast on OLF-controlled radio stations.

International Observer Effort

Responding to invitations from the NEC and with the encouragement of virtually all political parties, more than 200 international observers were present in Ethiopia for the elections. The observers operated under the umbrella of the JIOG, which was established by several diplomats and U.N. officials to coordinate the observers designated by the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), various governments and two nongovernmental organizations. United Nations-designated personnel acted as the JIOG secretariat (see Appendix IV).

The JIOG observer operation represented a unique and innovative approach to coordinating an international monitoring effort. However, the short time-frame in which the JIOG operation was initiated precluded a reliable assessment of logistical and administrative needs, at times resulting in confusion and disorganization. The conceptualization, staffing and delivery of basic inputs for the operation relied overwhelmingly upon ad hoc initiatives involving several key embassies and nongovernmental organizations.

In addition, the JIOG operation suffered from a failure to identify the precise role to be played by the observers and their sponsoring organizations. The JIOG was envisaged by its initiators as a civilian peacekeeping operation, whereby observers would be dispatched throughout Ethiopia for extended intervals, chiefly to encourage a reduction in tensions during the period preceding the elections. Given this initial conception, the systematic gathering and analyzing of data was seen as a lesser priority and, consequently, little attention was

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directed, at the outset, to how information collected by the observers would be used by the organizers of the observer operation. Later, several observer groups within the JIOG preferred to play the more traditional role of election evaluators, issuing post-election statements that helped shape opinion regarding the efficacy and legitimacy of the overall process. Other groups, including several embassies that sponsored observer teams and the OAU, chose to communicate their findings in confidence to the TGE.

In a post-election statement, the African-American Institute delegation, which contributed the largest contingent of observers to the JIOG effort, declared that the June 21 elections “fell considerably short” of fulfilling the purpose of “empowering through the vote all of Ethiopia’s nationalities within a new pluralistic political system” (see Appendix V). In a similar vein, a German observer group sponsored by the Heinrich Boll Foundation concluded that, given the observed harassment and administrative problems, the election results “should not be taken as a fair and free reflection of the democratic will of the people” (see Appendix VI).

In reaction to the criticisms presented in the AAI statement, President Meles acknowledged “that the election process was flawed in many ways,” but asserted that the elections represented an “important first step towards establishing a democratic political process in Ethiopia” (see Appendix VII). To his credit, President Meles reiterated the TGE’s “commitment to discuss and address the findings of all international observer teams in Ethiopia” and expressed a willingness to “redress any irregularities, even to the extent of repeating elections in some areas should that be necessary.” On July 27, 1992, the Council of Representatives adopted a proclamation authorizing the establishment of an Election Review Board, which was mandated to review all aspects of the election process and to nullify election results where grave irregularities occurred.

Summary

To the disappointment of many Ethiopians and their friends in the international community, the June 21 elections represented a sterile, surreal and wholly formalistic affair. Voter registration occurred, but it did not serve the goal of placing on the voter rolls the vast majority of eligible voters in an open and transparent process. Candidates were designated for specific offices, but no genuine

competition among candidates or parties existed. Ballots were printed, but no meaningful control was exacted regarding their distribution. Voters went to the polls, some waiting in the inevitable long lines, but few understood the significance of the elections or the difference between these elections and those that occurred during the previous regime. For election officials and voters alike, the June 21 elections did not serve as an effective educational exercise.

Given these shortcomings, the June 21 elections did not contribute directly to Ethiopia's development as a democratic state. At best, the elections were premature, especially for the southern half of Ethiopia. Less kindly judged, the elections were ill-conceived, dubious and counterproductive in their contribution to the democratization of Ethiopia. The elections, moreover, exacerbated existing tensions, reinforced the hegemonic power of the EPRDF while marginalizing other fledgling parties, and were a central factor in the withdrawal of the OLF from the TGE and the return to war in the Oromo region. Finally, the elections created new "political facts" — EPRDF-dominated regional and district assemblies — that will remain controversial in regions where the elections are mired in doubt and suspicion.

From this perspective, the June 21 elections offer sobering lessons for Ethiopia and countries in similarly unfavorable circumstances, regarding the dangers of organizing hastily executed elections as the lead element in a democratization strategy. The elections revealed the need for careful administrative preparations prior to the scheduling of first elections, the importance of developing effective civic education programs, the high expectations of donor countries providing support to an uncertain election process and the nature of the international community's observation of elections under difficult circumstances. The challenge will be to transform these lessons, together with the TGE's rhetoric and the observed desire of a majority of the population to live in a pluralist society, into programs and policies that permit the emergence of a genuine, multiparty democracy in Ethiopia.

Chapter 2

Contextual Setting

A. Geography, Demography and Social Structure

Ethiopia is strategically located adjacent to the Red Sea in the northeast quadrant of the African continent. The country is relatively large in area, twice the land size of France. Ethiopia's ecology – comprising thick, green forests, lush highland plateaus, tropical lowlands, and expansive deserts – is as varied as its population, which is the third largest on the African continent.

The more than 50 million Ethiopians represent approximately 80 distinct ethnic groups and speak more than 70 languages. The largest single ethnic group is the Oromo people, who account for between 30 and 50 percent of the total population. Most of the Oromo population can be found in the south-central part of the country, but Oromo enclaves are also located in the west, central and east-central areas. The second largest ethnic group is the Amhara, who constitute between 15 and 20 percent of the total population. Tigrayans, the third largest group, account for just under 10 percent of the total. The rest of the population includes the numerically smaller but nonetheless significant “southern” ethnic groups (Hadiya, Gurage,

Wolayta, Sidama, Omo); the Afar peoples who inhabit the northeastern part of the country, adjacent to Djibouti and the Republic of Somaliland, and ethnic Somalis who occupy the vast, arid and desert Ogaden region to the east and south.

The Tigrayans dominated politically during the mid-to-late 19th century; since that period until 1990, the Shoan Amharas have exercised control over Ethiopia. Historically, this political supremacy was complemented by the religious hegemony of Orthodox or Coptic Christianity, the state religion until 1974. Upward mobility required adoption of the Amhara-Tigre culture, language and religion.

Currently, it is estimated that approximately 50 percent of the population, including a majority of the Amharas and Tigrayans, identify themselves as Orthodox Christians. Most other ethnic groups adhere either to Islam (about 40 percent), or some form of Protestantism or animism (less than 10 percent combined).

Amharas and Tigrayans occupy the highland core of Ethiopia. Historically, the predominant economic activity in this area has been the subsistence cultivation of grains, mainly a form of wheat known as *teff*. Traditionally, land was communally owned, but members of the aristocracy and nobility claimed rights to a certain amount of the surplus produced by those who shared the communal land rights.

In the more recently incorporated peripheral areas of the south and southwest, which were conquered during the latter part of the 19th century, all land was either crown land or church land. The former was distributed to representatives of the crown who were posted to the ever-expanding, distant reaches of the Ethiopian empire as a form of remuneration for their service.

In most cases, the relationship that developed around land and agricultural production in the periphery was akin to that between lord and vassal, with the lord drawn from the Amhara, Tigre or some "Amharized" ethnic group. The vassals tended to be largely Oromos or members of smaller ethnic groups that inhabited the periphery.

After World War II, Ethiopia's economy grew more capitalist and shifted emphasis toward the international market. In the process, the relationship between lord and vassal grew increasingly exploitative. This imbalance heightened, particularly among many of the newly incorporated peoples, a sense of resentment and moral indignation against those considered responsible for their exploitation.

B. Historical and Political Background

To fully comprehend the 1992 regional and local elections, the historical context in which these elections took place must be understood. The Ethiopian state traces its history back more than 2000 years. However, the modern state was not born until the mid-19th century when Emperor Tewdros reconsolidated a political entity that had all but ceased to exist.

During the preceding centuries, various segments of the nobility had divided the territory of Ethiopia and ruled their autonomous domains. Tewdros restored central control and direction. He was followed by emperors Yohannes, Menelik II, and finally Haile Selassie I, who assumed the throne in 1930 and reigned for the next 44 years. The modern Ethiopian empire-state flourished for roughly 120 years, coming to an end with the overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974.

By the time the geographic boundaries of the modern state had been internationally established in the mid-1800s, Ethiopia extended far to the west, south and east, and several ethnic groups had been incorporated into the state. Most notable among these groups were the Oromo people, along with the Afar and segments of the Somali nation. The Afars and Somalis are significant not so much in terms of their numbers, but because they occupy territories of strategic importance and rich in economic potential.

The empire-state maintained control of territories incorporated during the mid-1800s by force of arms and exploited both the land and the people of these areas. In the periphery, imperial authority was exercised by the emperor's army and through *ketemas*, garrison towns, which were erected throughout the country and became increasingly important in administering Oromo and Somali areas. These towns housed soldiers dispatched to certain areas to act as "watchmen" for the crown, as well as to maintain law and order. The contrast in social and economic status between the indigenous populations and the agents of the state was exceedingly sharp.

During this period, no meaningful efforts were undertaken to integrate the indigenous populations into the expanded political system, except to impose forcibly the Amhara-Christian culture upon them and to extract economic resources from them. This exclusionary and exploitative rule, in large measure, inhibited the

development of an Ethiopian national identity among the people of the southern periphery.

In 1895, the Italians colonized Eritrea, which is located on the Red Sea and is inhabited principally by Tigrayan-speaking peoples, at the very time that the modern state of Ethiopia was evolving. The Italians coveted highland Ethiopia as well, but were unable to obtain control over the empire-state. In early 1896, Italy suffered a resounding defeat at Adowa by the forces of Emperor Menelik II, marking the most notable instance where a European power was defeated during the late 19th century scramble for African colonies.

Less than 40 years later, under the leadership of dictator Benito Mussolini, the Italians finally succeeded, for a brief period of five years, in establishing a presence in Ethiopia. However, in 1941, a combined force of British and Commonwealth troops, along with Ethiopian guerrilla patriots, brought the Italian interlude to an end.

For about a decade following the defeat of the Italians, the British governed Eritrea directly. In 1953, Britain formally turned over the reins of governmental authority in Eritrea to Ethiopia. A year earlier, the United Nations, yielding to the strong pressures of the Ethiopian government, which was vigorously supported by the United States, mandated that the former Italian colony and Ethiopia be federated. In 1962, Ethiopia formally annexed Eritrea, making it the country's 14th province and signaling the formal onset of the Eritrean struggle for national liberation.

Successive Ethiopian regimes during the modern era have failed to resolve the nationalities question. Groups like the Oromo, the Somali and the Eritrean have claimed the right to self-determination. These groups and others question the validity of their inclusion in the Ethiopian state. They consider the Amhara and Tigre elites who have governed their territories as nothing more than "black colonialists."

Under Haile Selassie, Ethiopia's economy depended heavily on coffee production. Most of the coffee was farmed in areas occupied by the Oromo people and characterized by landlord-tenant relations, mostly between Amhara-Tigre settlers and Oromo tenants. Few state resources were devoted to delivering social services to these areas. The same pattern was repeated in the Afar area, which was targeted by Haile Selassie for the development of large-scale agri-business enterprises, as well as in the Ogaden, which was valued mainly for its potential oil deposits. For the most part, Haile Selassie repressed

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sentiments for self-determination among the Oromo, Somali and Afar throughout his reign. Principally for geopolitical reasons, the United States provided Haile Selassie's government with large amounts of military and economic assistance.

When Haile Selassie was overthrown, nationalist sentiments were unleashed. The new military government indicated that it would strive to find an acceptable solution to the various claims of Ethiopia's nationality groups. Divisions emerged within the new government, however, regarding the demands of Eritrean nationalists, who continued to pursue an independent Eritrea. Following the murders of those members of the new government most sympathetic to Eritrean independence, the new regime, with Mengistu Haile Mariam as the undisputed leader, attempted to crush the Eritrean liberation movement once and for all.

Between 1976 and 1978, Ethiopia was nearly torn apart as serious armed challenges to the state were waged not only in Eritrea, but also in the Ogaden, and at the center, by groups opposed to the regime on political grounds. In a climate of escalating human rights violations and internecine warfare, Ethiopia's superpower patron, the United States, attempted to force the increasingly radical regime to moderate its policies. However, this move failed, and the two countries severed relations in April 1977. Ethiopia immediately turned to the Soviet Union as an alternative source of military assistance, which allowed the now Marxist-Leninist regime of Mengistu to consolidate power.

In September 1984, Mengistu established the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) as the country's sole political party. The WPE's proclaimed goal was to transform Ethiopia into a Marxist-Leninist state. A new communist-inspired constitution was adopted in 1987, which reflected this orientation.

Throughout the Mengistu era, Ethiopia's human rights record was among the worst of any country in the world. Prisons were constantly filled with individuals arrested for political reasons, as the government sought to brutally repress all forms of dissent. The government also exercised tight control over the political processes, judicial functions, the media, labor and education. The dismal performance of the economy, coupled with excessive taxation and recurrent mass-conscription drives, fed further popular discontent. Mengistu's plans, announced in March 1990, to liberalize the

economy and introduce multiparty politics proved too late to stop the complete collapse of the regime.³

C. The Origins of Transition

From the late 1970s to the late 1980s, various ethnically based movements emerged in opposition to the Mengistu regime. These movements included the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Afar Liberation Front (ALF), the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), the largely Amhara-based Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ethiopian Democratic Officers Revolutionary Movement (EDORM) and the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP). These movements did not achieve much success until several of them coalesced in 1989 under the leadership of the TPLF into a united front known as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The ALF, WSLF and the OLF, however, never formally joined the EPRDF coalition.

In 1987, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the TPLF agreed to coordinate their military strategies. After 1989, the OLF also began coordinating some military activities with the TPLF and the EPLF, although relations remained quite strained. The EPRDF, meanwhile, created its own Oromo affiliate, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), from the ranks of soldiers who either had defected from the Mengistu army after an abortive 1989 coup or were prisoners of war. Similar organizations affiliated with the EPRDF were created to incorporate other ethnic groups.

In 1989, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter initiated efforts to broker a peace between Mengistu and the EPLF in Eritrea. The Italians made similar overtures with respect to the TPLF and the Mengistu regime. However, these diplomatic initiatives were overwhelmed by the rapidly declining military position of the Ethiopian forces and by Mengistu's apparent loss of political will. Even as plans were underway for an all-parties peace conference in London, the EPRDF tightened its encirclement of the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, and the EPLF closed in on the Eritrean capital of Asmara.

³ See generally, S. Morrison, "Ethiopia Charts a New Course," *Journal of Democracy*, pp. 126-27 (July 1992).

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Finally, in late May 1991, the United States government secured the departure of Mengistu to exile in Zimbabwe. The ensuing power vacuum set the stage for the EPRDF's triumphant entry into the capital and for the EPLF's assumption of complete control over Eritrea with a limited amount of bloodshed. With no recognized central authority, the country was thrown into a state of near anarchy. EPRDF forces moved quickly to fill the void left by the complete collapse of an army that had recently numbered more than 500,000 troops. The United States endorsed the EPRDF action in the hope that it would result in the quick restoration of public order and prevent additional bloodshed.

The EPRDF leadership immediately sought to establish a broad-based transitional government. A conference was convened for this purpose in July 1991, with the participation of the OLF, the Afar Liberation Front (ALF), and several Somali organizations. Those excluded from the conference included groups most opposed to the EPRDF's leadership role, such as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement and the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF).

The Transitional Conference prepared a National Charter, which was signed by representatives of 27 political movements. The Charter authorized the creation of an 87-seat Council of Representatives and the establishment of the TGE. The Charter comprises five parts and 20 articles, covering issues such as basic democratic rights, foreign policy, the composition and structure of the TGE, the transitional program and the legality of the Charter. The Charter is designated as the supreme law of the land for the "duration of the transitional period," which was projected to be no more than two-and-a-half years. Significantly, the Charter articulates the TGE's commitment to the principles set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Perhaps the Charter's two most important articles are Articles 2 and 13. Article 2 asserts the right of self-determination for all of Ethiopia's nationalities and the preservation of national identities and self-government within the context of a federated Ethiopia. Article 13 provides that:

There shall be a law establishing local and regional councils for local administrative purposes defined on the basis of nationality. Elections for such local and regional councils

shall be held within three months of the establishment of the Transitional Government, wherever local conditions allow.

Under the Charter, the TGE is composed of the president's and prime minister's offices and an ethnically mixed, 17-member Council of Ministers. The EPRDF holds the largest single bloc (32 of the 87 seats) in the Council of Representatives, which is responsible for promulgating legislation decreed during the transition. The OLF, until its withdrawal from the TGE immediately following the elections in June 1992, held the second largest bloc in the Council with 12 seats. Eighteen southern parties collectively account for 30 seats in the Council. Altogether, 29 political organizations were represented in the Council of Representatives.

In a bold and controversial departure from the policies of past regimes, the Transitional Conference committed the TGE to honor the outcome of an internationally monitored referendum on the future of Eritrea. Since that time, the TGE and the Provisional Government of Eritrea have developed close working relationships in both the economic and political spheres.

The political transition is taking place at the same time as the TGE is attempting to restructure the economy (see below) and society, and amid continuing ethnic tensions. The growth of ethnically based armed groups have complicated the process of transition and reconciliation. For example, in the year following the overthrow of Mengistu, the OLF increased the ranks of its military wing by an estimated three-fold from its maximum strength of about 8,000 in 1991. This expansion was made possible by the attraction of new recruits in areas heavily populated by the Oromo and by the incorporation of Oromo who had formerly served in Mengistu's army. In mid-1992, according to one estimate, roughly half of the 29 movements represented in the Council of Representatives supported armed wings.

Proclamation 8, adopted in January 1992, designated the EPRDF army "as the State Defense Army for the Transition Period." The proclamation also authorized the establishment of regional police forces, which in the absence of regional governments, were subject to TGE control. In Oromo areas, tensions developed between the EPRDF and Oromo forces, sometimes erupting into near civil war.

In preparation for the regional and local elections, the Council in April promulgated an encampment accord that confined all armed

groups operating in the country to specified quarters. This policy held negative implications for areas in which OLF forces were well represented.

Securing encampment proved a difficult task. The EPLF attempted to broker an agreement between the EPRDF and the OLF at Mekele in early 1992. But, not until April was an encampment accord was finally achieved. The agreement called for confining the OLF into eight major camps and 16 smaller ones. The EPRDF forces were assigned to eight camps and 64 garrisons in the Oromo-dominated Region 4. However, in those areas of Region 4 where the EPRDF forces were needed to maintain law and order, the accords authorized such a role. The whole encampment process was monitored by tripartite commissions, comprising three-member teams, each including a representative of the EPLF, the EPRDF and the OLF.

Eventually, enough political stability was achieved to permit "snap elections" in April 1992 in 450 of Ethiopia's 600 administrative *weredas* (districts). Although these elections realized only partial success, with some results being canceled or disallowed, the TGE forged ahead with plans for regional and local elections in June, before the onset of the rainy season.

D. Economic Conditions

The emperors who fashioned the empire-state of Ethiopia were considered modernizing autocrats. Nonetheless, when Haile Selassie I was overthrown in 1974, the country was characterized by illiteracy, poverty and underdevelopment. Ethiopia supported less than 10,000 kilometers of all-weather roads and a monoculture economy, which depended upon coffee exports for about 85 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings. Less than 1 million young people were formally enrolled in school from the elementary to the university levels.

On the eve of Ethiopia's first revolution in 1974, 70 percent of the country's economic activities were clustered in the highland capital city of Addis Ababa and in Asmara, the principal city in the then-province of Eritrea. Rural industries, to the extent they existed, were concentrated in Shoa Province and in the Awash Valley. This pattern did not change much during the 17-year rule of Mengistu Haile Mariam, despite his Marxist-Leninist orientation.

After a rocky beginning, the Mengistu regime introduced slight improvements in the quality of life. The feudal land tenure system was swept away, with the state seizing all rural and most urban land and property. In the countryside, rural producers were granted an amount of land deemed sufficient to meet basic family needs or to satisfy market demands as determined by the state.

Impressive gains were made in several areas of social policy. The illiteracy rate dropped from 90 percent in 1974 to 40 percent in 1987. The availability of formal educational opportunities and access to professional health care also increased dramatically during the first 13 years of the Mengistu regime. Nonetheless, the patterns of inequality that characterized the imperial era persisted during the Mengistu period.

In a November 1988 speech before the Central Committee of the Worker's Party of Ethiopia (WPE), Mengistu announced a package of reforms intended to promote private-sector investment in industry, mineral exploration, agriculture and tourism. The full thrust of the New Economic Policy (NEP) was unveiled in March 1990, at the 11th Plenum of the Central Committee of the WPE.

The NEP provided for a mixed economy, characterized by the participation of state, private and cooperative sectors in managing and controlling the economy. Also, the NEP conferred upon state enterprises the managerial autonomy necessary to allow them to operate much in the manner of private enterprises. These reforms signalled the end of the regime's attempt to develop a centrally planned economy and to control the means of production, distribution and exchange.

Despite these dramatic changes, the Mengistu regime failed to revitalize the economy. Foreign investors did not rush to Ethiopia, and the domestic economy remained based primarily on food production and distribution.

When it assumed power in the spring of 1991, the TGE inherited an economy in shambles (see Appendix VIII). Per capita income was less than \$130 per year, making Ethiopia one of the poorest countries in the world. International export earnings had dropped to their lowest levels since 1974, and the foreign debt, excluding money owed to the Soviet Union, exceeded 53 percent of the country's Gross National Product. Food production was unable to meet the country's

needs even in non-drought years. The country, meanwhile, had experienced two major famines during the previous seven years.

A primary reason for this economic stagnation was the fact that war had come to dominate Ethiopian life. Thus, many Ethiopians expected that the end of the civil war would generate significant peace dividends, but this anticipated economic windfall did not materialize. Real military expenditures dropped only a few percentage points. The rest of the defense budget derived from grants and loans, which simply disappeared with the withdrawal of Soviet military aid. In addition, the demobilization of the Ethiopian army further swelled the already massive ranks of the unemployed.

Increased smuggling and an over-valued currency contributed to the bleak economic picture in the immediate aftermath of Mengistu's ouster. Moreover, the country's economy seemed to be drifting out of control in large measure due to the void created by the deterioration of the former state bureaucracy and the TGE's inability to establish its administrative authority throughout the country.

The TGE initiated significant reforms aimed at producing a more market-oriented economy. The reforms included restructuring tax collection, depreciating the currency to reflect more realistically its value on the international market, reducing the size of the bureaucracy, privatizing some state-controlled enterprises and liberalizing rules for foreign investment.

In February 1992, the TGE and the World Bank reached an agreement on the terms of the Emergency Recovery and Reconstruction Project (ERRP), which represented a 30-month, \$600 million multi-donor package. However, further talks were required to secure the commitment of additional resources from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. By June 1992, on the eve of the regional and local elections, the first installments of the ERRP package had yet to arrive. Consequently, the TGE was unable to use the much needed foreign assistance to invest in development projects that would have demonstrated its commitment to a "new deal" for all Ethiopians.