

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	116
Land:	Etiopien
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	"Ethiopia"
Udgivet:	12. december 2006
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	2007

Ethiopia (2006)

Polity:

No polity available

Political Rights:

5

Civil Liberties:

5

Status:

Partly Free

Population:

77,400,000

GNI/Capita:

\$90

Life Expectancy:

48

Religious Groups:

Muslim (45-50 percent), Ethiopian Orthodox (35-40 percent), animist (12 percent), other

Ethnic Groups:

Oromo (40 percent), Amhara and Tigrean (32 percent), Sidamo (9 percent), other (19 percent)

Capital:

Addis Ababa

Additional Info:

[Freedom in the World 2005](#)

[Freedom of the Press 2005](#)

[Nations in Transit 2004](#)

[Countries at the Crossroads 2005](#)

Overview

Ethiopia's defining political event in 2005 was the May election for the lower house of parliament, the House of People's Representatives, which resulted in a major increase in representation by opposition candidates. The ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and its allies won 327 seats, while the two main opposition parties took 161 seats, up 12 seats from the previous parliament. The EPRDF maintained its hold on power, and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was reelected by the House of Representatives. Notwithstanding their significant gains, opposition parties vociferously argued that interference and fraud in the electoral process deprived them of victory. Street demonstrations led to violence, excessive use of government force, and widespread arrest-including leading opposition figures on treason charges. A continuing drought and the prospect of renewed violence with Eritrea over its long-running border dispute were also major issues of concern during the year.

One of the few African countries never to have been colonized, Ethiopia ended a long tradition of imperial rule in 1974, when Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in a Marxist military coup. Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam subsequently became the leader of a brutal dictatorship that was overthrown by a coalition of guerrilla groups, with leadership from the northern Tigray region in 1991. These groups were spearheaded by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), itself an alliance of five parties, and Zenawi Meles became prime minister.

The EPRDF government instituted a transition period that resulted in the appearance of democratic institutions. In the May 2000 national elections, the EPRDF gained a landslide victory against a weak and divided opposition, after which parliament reelected Meles to another five-year term. Opposition parties and some observers criticized the government's conduct of the vote, stating that the polls were subject to government interference, that media coverage was significantly tilted in the EPRDF's favor, and that opposition supporters were subjected to harassment and detention. However, the opposition was able to engage in some criticism of the government in the media during the official election campaign, and a series of unprecedented public debates were broadcast over state-run radio and television during the electoral campaign.

A dispute over the border with neighboring Eritrea resulted in open warfare from 1998 until 2000. In the wake of the bloody conflict, the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), a mediating body established to draw up a new border, announced its decision, which included assigning the town of Badme to Eritrea in April 2002. The boundary commission's decisions were supposed to be binding on both sides, but Ethiopia formally rejected the EEBC decision. The result is an indefinite postponement of the physical demarcation of the new border.

Considerable focus in 2004 was centered on the upcoming national elections. Critics of the government, who argued that the playing field was seriously imbalanced in favor of the ruling coalition, cited draft press and nongovernmental organization (NGO) laws that potentially could be used by the government to further inhibit the NGO sector. A leading NGO in restive Oromia state was closed by the government. In addition, guerrilla activity continued by the Oromo Liberation Front and other groups amid intimidation of regime opponents, especially in the southern Oromo-dominated region.

In early June 2005, the initial announcement of election results-indicating a victory by the ruling coalition-sparked calls of fraud and violent street protests in the capital, Addis Ababa, an opposition stronghold. Gunfire from security forces killed 42 people and wounded more than 60 others. More than 4,000 people were arrested. The government subsequently imposed a ban on demonstrations in the capital and, in September, arrested additional opposition supporters.

After considering challenges to the election results, in September the National Electoral Board officially declared that the ruling EPRDF had won a total of 327 seats. According to the board, the opposition, led by the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), won a total of 161 seats-12 more than in the previous parliament. The governing coalition also won elections for eight of nine regional parliaments.

Ethiopia also suffered through a serious drought in 2005. The lack of rain in the southern part of the country left some 1.75 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The agency also warned that a crisis loomed in the northeastern Afar region of Ethiopia.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Ethiopians cannot change their government democratically, although the 2005 election marked a potential step forward in the development of the country's democratic political culture. In addition to widespread internal dissent, the European Union and other observers stated that these elections did not meet international standards. By contrast, however, former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, who led a team of observers at the May 15 polls, concluded that despite serious problems-including poor voter-registration lists and significant administrative irregularities-the polls essentially represented the will of the Ethiopian people.

The 2005 national election was the third since 1991. Previous elections included polling for local officials (1992), a Constituent Assembly (1994), and regional and national legislatures (1995 and 2000). These resulted in allegations from opposition parties and civil society of serious irregularities, including unequal access to media, biased election officials, lack of transparent procedures, a flawed election law, and a partisan National Electoral Board. The ruling EPRDF proclaimed the 2000 elections "free and fair" and used its overwhelming victory to consolidate power. Regional elections in 2001 were marred by killings, candidate harassment, voter intimidation, and allegations of ballot-box stuffing.

The EPRDF has been in power since 1991, although six other major parties and numerous smaller ones participate in the political system. The country's legislature is bicameral, and executive power is vested in a prime minister, who is selected by the House of People's Representatives. The 1995 constitution has a number of unique features, including decentralization based on ethnicity and the right to secession. The government has devolved some power to regional and local governments. However, the reality differs from what is constitutionally mandated, seriously limiting the right of the people to select their government in practice. In 2003, the central government acquired additional powers to intervene in states' affairs in situations where public security was deemed to be at risk.

More than 60 legally recognized political parties are currently active in Ethiopia, although the political scene continues to be dominated by the EPRDF. While opposition parties claim that their ability to function is seriously impeded by government harassment, observers note that opposition parties have at times also failed to comport themselves in a fashion consonant with a democratic political culture. For example, some parties have supported, either directly or indirectly, armed resistance to the government.

Ethiopia was ranked 137th out of 159 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index. The government has taken a number of initiatives to limit corruption, although it has also been accused of participating in corrupt practices.

The press is dominated by state-owned broadcast media and government-oriented newspapers. Opposition and civic organizations criticize slanted news coverage. A number of privately owned newspapers exist, but they struggle to remain financially viable and also face intermittent government harassment.

Both Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) criticized repressive actions by the Ethiopian government against the press in 2005, including harassment, arrests, and the revocation of press credentials. The CPJ stated that harassment and intimidation of the media had increased as coverage of opposition complaints about irregularities on polling day and in vote counting increased. A draft press law was widely criticized by press freedom groups in 2004 as further chilling the press environment; it was not enacted in 2005. Issues of concern include restrictions on who may practice journalism; government-controlled licensing and registration systems; harsh sanctions for violations of the law, including up to five years' imprisonment; excessively

broad exceptions to the right to access information held by public authorities; and the establishment of a government-controlled press council with powers to engage in prior censorship.

The government announced in 1999 that private FM radio stations with a range of approximately 95 miles around Addis Ababa would be permitted. No licenses have yet been issued, although the government has notified three media groups with links to the EPRDF that they have been short-listed to receive licenses. Under the draft press law, cross-ownership of newspapers and FM stations would not be permitted. This provision has drawn criticism from the independent media, which argue that, in practical terms, the provision would limit freedom of expression. There is extremely limited internet usage, mainly in the major urban areas.

Constitutionally mandated religious freedom is generally respected, although religious tensions have risen in recent years. The Ethiopian Coptic Church is influential, particularly in the north. In the south, there is a large Muslim community, made up mainly of Arabs, Somalis, and Oromos.

Academic freedom is restricted. In recent years, student strikes to protest various government policies and to seek an end to police brutality have resulted in scores of deaths and injuries and in hundreds of arrests, including arrests of prominent human rights leaders. Student grievances include perceived government repression of the Oromo ethnic group. Many students were killed, injured, or arrested as a result of protests against the May 2005 election.

Freedom of assembly and association is limited, although a large and increasing number of NGOs are active. However, NGOs are generally reluctant to energetically discuss issues and advocate policies that may bring them into conflict with the government. A draft NGO law, which includes a provision permitting the government to arbitrarily close NGOs at any time, is opposed by much of the civil society sector. In 2005, the government threatened to ban the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA), an umbrella body representing more than 250 international and local charities, because of alleged "political bias" expressed in CRDA criticisms of the government's response to postelection protests.

According to the Workers' Group of the International Labor Organization (ILO), severe restrictions on the rights of trade unions exist. The labor law only authorizes one trade union in companies employing more than 20 workers. Government workers in "essential industries," a term that is broadly defined, are not allowed to strike. The Confederation of Ethiopian Unions is under government control. The law governing trade unions states that a trade organization may not act in an overtly political manner. Some union leaders have been removed from their elected office or forced to leave the country. All unions must be registered, although the government still retains the authority to cancel union registration.

The judiciary is officially independent, although there are no significant examples of decisions at variance with government policy. The competencies of

police, judicial, and administrative systems at the local level are highly uneven. Some progress has been made in reducing a significant backlog of court cases.

The government has tended to favor Tigrayan interests in economic and political terms. Politics within the EPRDF have been dominated by the Tigrayan People's Democratic Front. Discrimination and repression against other groups, especially the Oromo, has been widespread.

In October the government announced the establishment of a women's affairs ministry, and in recent years legislation has been passed designed to protecting women's rights in a number of different areas. In practice, however, women's rights continue to be routinely violated. Women have traditionally had few land or property rights, especially in rural areas, and few opportunities for employment beyond agricultural labor. Violence against women and social discrimination are reportedly common. Societal norms and limited infrastructure prevented many women from seeking legal redress, particularly in rural zones. While illegal, the kidnapping of women and girls for marriage purposes continues in parts of the country.