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Freedom Status: Not Free

Aggregate Score: 12/100 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 6.5/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 7/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 6/7 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 101,700,000

Capital: Addis Ababa

GDP/capita: \$619

Press Freedom Status: Not Free

Net Freedom Status: Not Free

Trend Arrow: ↓

Ethiopia received a downward trend arrow due to the security forces' disproportionate and often violent response to massive, primarily peaceful antigovernment protests in the Oromia and Amhara regions, as well as an emergency declaration in October that gave the military sweeping powers to crack down on freedoms of expression and association.

OVERVIEW

Ethiopia is an authoritarian state ruled by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which has been in power since 1991 and currently holds every seat in Parliament. Multiple flawed elections, including most recently in 2015, showcased the government's willingness to brutally repress the opposition and its supporters, journalists, and activists. Muslims and members of the Oromo ethnic group have been specifically singled out. Perceived political opponents are regularly harassed, detained, and prosecuted – often under the guise of Ethiopia's deeply flawed Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation drastically impeded the activities of civil society groups.

Key Developments

- Hundreds of people were killed in a crackdown on antigovernment protests that took place

primarily in the Oromia and Amhara regions throughout much of the year. The Ethiopian government admitted to at least 500 deaths since the protests began in November 2015, while some human rights organizations report that there were at least 800.

- Thousands of people have been detained in connection with the protests, and reports of mistreatment, including torture, while in custody are rife.
- In early October, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn announced a six-month state of emergency that gives the government sweeping powers to deploy the military, further restrict speech and the media, impose curfews and movement restrictions, and monitor communications.
- Throughout the year, the authorities disrupted internet and mobile phone networks, and temporarily blocked social-media platforms and certain news websites, in an effort to prevent people from organizing and communicating about the protests.

Executive Summary

Ethiopia was wracked by protests throughout much of 2016, a result of widespread and growing discontent with ethnic and political marginalization and repressive rule by the EPRDF. The largely peaceful protests were frequently put down violently by the security forces. The demonstrations had begun over ethnic and land rights in November 2015 in the Oromia region, and intensified in 2016, with significant additional protests in Addis Ababa and the Amhara region.

In January, the government withdrew the contentious Addis Ababa Master Plan, which had been the rallying point for Oromo protesters who alleged that thousands of farmers would be displaced from their ancestral lands to make way for the capital's expansion. However, the announcement did little to staunch larger discontent with the EPRDF, and demonstrations took on broader antigovernment dimensions and appealed to Ethiopians across ethnic lines. The protests were regularly met with excessive force by the police and the military, including the use of live ammunition and tear gas against crowds. Tens of thousands of people were detained in police sweeps, and reports of mistreatment, including beatings and torture while in custody, were widespread. Among those arrested or charged were leaders of the opposition Oromo Federalist Congress, including party chairman Merera Gudina and deputy chairman Bekele Gerba. In October, the government admitted that more than 500 people had been killed in connection with the protests since November 2015, though some rights organizations reported that the true figure is at least 800.

In early October, the government announced a nationwide six-month state of emergency, enacting sweeping powers to deploy the military, restrict speech and the media, impose curfews and movement restrictions, and monitor communications. According to some estimates, nearly 24,000 Ethiopians were detained under the state of emergency, although about 10,000 were released in December. The demonstrations subsided in the wake of the emergency decree, but the government has taken little action to address the grievances of the protesters.

In September, the government pardoned some 700 prisoners in its annual gesture, including 135 Muslims who had been convicted on terrorism charges. However, key religious, ethnic, and political leaders, as well as at least 16 journalists, remained behind bars, and a number of new arrests occurred in 2016; countless other political dissidents are still facing terrorism charges in lengthy and ongoing trials.

Tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea reached a boiling point in June, when the two militaries skirmished at the northern border town of Tsorona before returning to an uneasy peace.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 4 / 40*A. Electoral Process: 1 / 12*

- A1. Is the head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?
 A2. Are the national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?
 A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair?

Ethiopia's bicameral parliament is made up of a 153-seat upper house, the House of Federation, and a 547-seat lower house, the House of People's Representatives. The lower house is filled through popular elections, while the upper chamber is selected by state legislatures; members of both houses serve five-year terms. While the lower house's seats are equal to a fixed number of constituencies, the upper house's seats are adjusted in proportion with the population. The lower house selects the prime minister, who holds most executive power. The president, a largely ceremonial figure, serves up to two six-year terms and is indirectly elected by both houses. Hailemariam has served as prime minister since 2012, and Mulatu Teshome as president since 2013.

As in past contests, Ethiopia's 2015 parliamentary and regional elections were tightly controlled by the ruling coalition, the EPRDF, with reports of voter coercion, intimidation, and barriers to registration. Elections were held on time, and official results were released within a month. The opposition lost their sole seat in parliament, as the EPRDF and its allies took all 547 seats in the lower house. Both the opposition party coalition Medrek and the Semayawi Party, also known as the Blue Party, voiced serious concerns about the ruling party's behavior leading up to and on election day, and ultimately rejected the election's results.

The African Union (AU) was the only international organization to send election observers to Ethiopia's 2015 contest, and it declared elections "peaceful and credible," but noted irregularities including voter coercion and inconsistent poll hours. The European Union (EU) was not invited to observe, with EU officials noting that the EPRDF had rejected recommendations it issued following the 2010 elections.

Following massive nationwide demonstrations, the government announced in October 2016 that it would reform the country's electoral laws to allow for more inclusive governance; the details of the plan are not yet public.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

- B1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?
 B2. Is there a significant opposition vote and a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?
 B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?
 B4. Do cultural, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

Opponents of the EPRDF find it nearly impossible to operate inside Ethiopia. In the lead-up to the 2015 elections, opposition party members were intimidated, detained, beaten, and arrested. Three opposition members were killed in the aftermath of the elections, though the Ethiopian government denies opposition claims that the killings were politically motivated.

Both the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) party, formerly represented by one seat in parliament, and the Semayawi Party alleged that the EPRDF used procedural technicalities to block their candidates' registration. Opposition parties also repeatedly questioned the independence of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia.

Authorities frequently invoke antiterrorism legislation against dissenters. Bekele, the deputy chairman of the opposition Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and an advocate of nonviolent protest, was charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation in April after being arrested in late 2015; like many other ethnic Oromos critical of EPRDF authorities, Bekele stands accused of belonging to the banned Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). In December, Merera, the OFC chairperson, was arrested for allegedly meeting with Berhanu Nega, a leader of Ginbot 7 – considered a banned terror group by the Ethiopian government – while abroad. Closed court proceedings surrounding an investigation into the matter were ongoing at year's end. In May, Yonatan Tesfaye, the former Semayawi spokesperson who was arrested in 2015 after criticizing the EPRDF on Facebook, was charged with plotting terrorist acts on behalf of the OLF. In April, former Gambella regional governor Okello Akway Ochalla, a Norwegian citizen, was sentenced to nine years in prison under provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation after being illegally rendered from South Sudan in 2014; Okello had fled Ethiopia and sought asylum in Norway in the wake of the 2003 Gambella massacre, in which government forces had killed hundreds of ethnic Anuak people in Gambella town.

Political parties in Ethiopia are often ethnically based. The country's major ethnic parties are allied with the EPRDF, but have no room to effectively advocate for their constituents. The EPRDF coalition is comprised of four political parties and represents several ethnic groups. The government favors Tigrayan ethnic interests in economic and political matters, and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) dominates the EPRDF. The 1995 constitution grants the right of secession to ethnically based states, but the government acquired powers in 2003 to intervene in states' affairs on issues of public security. Secessionist movements in Oromia and the Ogaden have largely failed after being put down by the military.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

- C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?
- C2. Is the government free from pervasive corruption?
- C3. Is the government accountable to the electorate between elections, and does it operate with openness and transparency?

Ethiopia's governance institutions are dominated by the EPRDF, which controlled the succession process following Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's death in 2012. The EPRDF continues its tight hold on Ethiopian politics under Hailemariam.

Despite legislative improvements, enforcement of corruption-related laws remains limited in practice, and corruption remains a significant problem. EPRDF officials reportedly receive preferential access to credit, land leases, and jobs. Petty corruption extends to lower-level officials, who, for example, solicit bribes in return for processing documents. In April 2016, Hailemariam put forward a bill authorizing the creation of a federal attorney general, who would handle corruption cases and report directly to the prime minister. It was approved in May, and Getachew Ambaye was appointed to the position soon after, relinquishing his post of justice minister. In December, about 130 people, including government officials, were arrested on corruption charges.

Civil Liberties: 8 / 40 (–3)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 2 / 16 (-1)

D1. Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression?

D2. Are religious institutions and communities free to practice their faith and express themselves in public and private?

D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free of extensive political indoctrination?

D4. Is there open and free private discussion?

Ethiopia's media are dominated by state-owned broadcasters and government-oriented newspapers. Privately owned papers tend to steer clear of political issues and have low circulation, and journalists operating inside the country practice self-censorship. Defamation is a criminal offense, and a 2008 media law increased fines for defamation and allows prosecutors to pursue cases without complaints from aggrieved parties. The law also allows prosecutors to seize material before publication in the name of national security. A cybercrime law passed in June 2016 criminalized online speech deemed defamatory or pornographic, and outlined penalties for internet service providers that knowingly host such objectionable material. Activists expect that the law will be used against EPRDF opponents.

The Ethiopian government maintains the ability to censor critical or opposition websites and monitor dissidents' electronic communications. The state of emergency announced in October 2016 specifically banned people from listening to or watching broadcasts by Ethiopian Satellite Radio and Television (ESAT) and Oromo Media Network (OMN), both of which are based abroad. Localized internet and phone blackouts were regularly reported following mass demonstrations. Social media and messaging applications including WhatsApp and Twitter became largely inaccessible in parts of Oromia starting in March 2016, and sporadic cuts to those and other social media outlets were reported throughout wider areas on numerous occasions later in the year. Mobile internet was unavailable for more than a week immediately following the state of emergency declaration.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Ethiopia holds at least 16 journalists behind bars – the second-highest number of jailed journalists in sub-Saharan Africa. Restrictions are particularly tight on journalists perceived to be sympathetic to the ongoing Oromo and Amhara protests and, historically, protests by the Muslim community. In September 2016, Yusuf Getachew, editor of the now-defunct *Ye Muslimoch Guday* (Muslim Affairs) publication who was convicted on terrorism charges in 2015, was pardoned. In March, Yusuf's colleague, Solomon Kebede, received a sentence of several years' imprisonment in connection with coverage of 2012 protests by Ethiopia's Muslim community; however, he was freed in April. Two Bilal radio journalists who had also reported on Muslim protests – Khalid Mohammed and Darsema Sori – were convicted on terrorism charges in December, but had not been sentenced by year's end.

Negere Ethiopia editor in chief Getachew Shiferaw was arrested in late December 2015 and not charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation until May, violating a provision that says authorities can only detain a suspect without charge for four months. His charges were later downgraded from terrorism to inciting violence. Oromo Radio and TV anchor Fikadu Mirkana was arrested in 2015 and charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, though he was released in April 2016. In May, *De Birhan* blogger Zelalem Workagenehu was sentenced to five years and four months in prison for purportedly plotting to overthrow the government. Two others that he was arrested with were acquitted, though they were immediately re-arrested and detained temporarily. In November, Zone 9 blogger Befeqadu Hailu was arrested; he was released with thousands of others in December after completing indoctrination sessions while incarcerated.

Foreign journalists also experienced harassment in 2016, particularly while reporting on contentious subjects including Ethiopia's drought and ongoing antigovernment demonstrations. Journalists with

Bloomberg News and the American Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and their Ethiopian assistants were detained while reporting outside of the capital in March and August, respectively.

Due to the risks of operating inside the country, many Ethiopian journalists work in exile. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), since 2010 the Ethiopian government has developed a robust and sophisticated internet and mobile framework to monitor journalists and opposition groups, block access to unwanted websites or critical television and radio programs, and collect evidence for prosecutions in politically motivated trials.

Musicians perceived to be sympathetic to protesters – particularly Oromo musicians – have experienced targeted harassment and censorship. In late 2015, Oromo singer Hawi Tezera was temporarily detained, during which time she was reportedly tortured, following the release of a song considered antigovernment.

The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but the government has increasingly harassed the Muslim community, which comprises about 34 percent of the population. (About 44 percent of people in Ethiopia are Orthodox Christian, while about 19 percent are Protestant.) In 2015, 18 Muslim activists who were arrested following 2012 protests over alleged government involvement in the Muslim community's affairs were sentenced to prison terms of between 7 and 22 years on terrorism charges. The activists maintain their innocence. In September, 135 Muslims who had been convicted of crimes under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation – including Yusuf of *Ye Muslimoch Guday* but excluding many of the protest leaders – were among those released in a mass pardon marking the Ethiopian New Year holiday. In December, 20 Ethiopian Muslims were found guilty of terrorism charges in connection with attempts to win the release of jailed members of the Ethiopian Muslim Arbitration Committee – a group of religious leaders who had attempted to negotiate with the government on behalf of the Muslim community.

Academic freedom is often restricted in Ethiopia. The government has accused universities of being pro-opposition and prohibits political activities on campuses. There are reports of students being pressured into joining the EPRDF in order to secure employment or places at universities; professors are similarly pressured in order to ensure favorable positions or promotions. The Ministry of Education closely monitors and regulates official curricula, and the research, speech, and assembly of both professors and students are frequently restricted.

Students have consistently been at the forefront of antigovernment protests and as a result make up a significant proportion of those who have been arrested, beaten, and killed in the unrest. Security officials have forcibly entered Ethiopian schools and universities to make arrests, sometimes intimidating or detaining minors who were involved or perceived to have been involved in the unrest; schools in the affected regions have been closed at times due to the ongoing crisis. In October 2016, outspoken blogger and Ambo University lecturer Seyoum Teshome was arrested on unclear charges, and held for two months before being released.

The presence of the EPRDF at all levels of society – directly and, increasingly, electronically – inhibits free private discussion. The EPRDF maintains a network of paid informants, and opposition politicians have accused the government of tapping their phones or monitoring their electronic communications. On October 4, Zone9 blogger Natnael Feleke was arrested with two friends after criticizing the government in a public restaurant. They were released days later.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

E1. Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion?

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations?

E3. Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalents, and is there effective collective

bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?

Freedoms of assembly and association are guaranteed by the constitution but limited in practice. Organizers of large public meetings must request permission from the authorities 48 hours in advance. Applications by opposition groups are routinely denied and, in cases when approved, organizers are subject to government meddling to move dates or locations. The October 2016 state of emergency banned all "assembly or protest" without prior approval.

Demonstrations erupted in late 2015 after land was cleared for an investment project linked to the controversial Addis Ababa Master Plan, which envisioned the expansion of the capital into parts of Oromia State. Protests quickly spread throughout the region and continued throughout 2016, even as the government abandoned the Addis Ababa plan in January. Security forces responded to the demonstrations with overwhelming force, including by firing tear gas and live ammunition into crowds. By mid-year, demonstrations had spread to Amhara Region. During a particularly bloody weekend in August, at least 100 people were killed across Amhara and Oromia, including at least 30 people in the northern town of Bahir Dar. In October, a stampede reportedly started by security forces' firing of tear gas into a crowd at the Irreecha religious festival in Oromia killed at least 55 people. Throughout the year, some protesters were responsible for property damage and looting, including the targeting of at least 11 mostly foreign-owned factories and a tourist lodge in the wake of the Irreecha incident.

Tens of thousands have been arrested in connection with the protests, many of whom were held for months without charge. In October, 2,000 people were released from detention, and in December, another 9,800 were released, though the government has indicated that some 2,500 people will be tried for their role in the unrest.

In March, 20 Addis Ababa University students were arrested for an unauthorized protest in front of the American Embassy and 11 were later convicted under Ethiopia's criminal code, though they were released for time served.

The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation restricts the activities of foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) by prohibiting work on political and human rights issues. Foreign NGOs are defined as groups receiving more than 10 percent of their funding from abroad. The law also limits the amount of money any NGO can spend on "administration," a controversial category that has included activities such as teacher or health-worker training. NGOs have struggled to maintain operations as a result of the law.

Trade unions rights are tightly restricted. Neither civil servants nor teachers have collective bargaining rights. All unions must be registered, and the government retains the authority to cancel registration. Two-thirds of union members belong to organizations affiliated with the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, which is under government influence. Independent unions face harassment, and trade union leaders are regularly imprisoned. There has not been a legal strike since 1993.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16 (-1)

F1. Is there an independent judiciary?

F2. Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Are police under direct civilian control?

F3. Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies?

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

The judiciary is officially independent, but its judgments rarely deviate from government policy. The 2009

antiterrorism law gives great discretion to security forces, allowing the detention of suspects for up to four months without charge. The October 2016 announcement of a six-month state of emergency further expands these powers, including by allowing lengthy detentions without charge and the nationwide deployment of the military.

Hundreds of people were killed in the crackdown on antigovernment protests that took place primarily in the Oromia and Amhara regions throughout much of the year. The Ethiopian government admitted to at least 500 deaths since the protests began in November 2015, while some human rights organizations reported that there were at least 800. A June 2016 report by the government-run Ethiopian Human Rights Commission found that security forces had used "proportional" force in responding to protests in Oromia, but had used "excessive" force against participants in a November 2015 protest in Amhara involving the Qimant people.

Conditions in Ethiopia's prisons are harsh, and detainees frequently report abuse, including regular reports of torture, especially in Ethiopia's notorious Maekelawi and Qilinto prisons. CPJ and Ethiopian sources reported that former *Feteh* editor Temesgen Desalegn, who was convicted on defamation charges in 2014 and sentenced to three years in prison, has been denied medical care and family visits. In January 2016 and again in July, Bekele and other Oromo political prisoners went on a hunger strike to protest their treatment in prison, including allegations that they were denied medical attention and access to legal counsel and their families. In September, a massive fire broke out at Qilinto prison, where a number of prominent political prisoners were being held. Witnesses reported gunfire after the fire broke out, and at least 23 inmates were killed in the incident. In November, a court charged 38 inmates with starting the fire.

The federal government generally has strong control and direction over the military, though forces such as the Liyu Police in Somali Region sometimes operate independently.

Repression of the Oromo and ethnic Somalis, and government attempts to co-opt their political parties into EPRDF allies, have fueled nationalism in the Oromia and Ogaden regions. Persistent claims that government troops in the Ogaden have committed war crimes are difficult to verify, as independent media are barred from the region.

Same-sex sexual activity is prohibited by law and punishable by up to 15 years' imprisonment.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16 (-1)

G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of travel or choice of residence, employment, or institution of higher education?

G2. Do individuals have the right to own property and establish private businesses? Is private business activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, political parties/organizations, or organized crime?

G3. Are there personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family?

G4. Is there equality of opportunity and the absence of economic exploitation?

While Ethiopia's constitution establishes freedom of movement, it has been increasingly restricted through curfews and road closures in Oromia and Amhara Regions, where mass demonstrations have taken place. Protesters and political activists released from detention are often freed on the condition that they regularly check in with local police. Also under the state of emergency, refugees are forbidden to leave camps without "necessary authorization," and foreign diplomats were temporarily banned from traveling more than 40 kilometers (25 miles) outside of Addis Ababa. Free movement through the Somali Region

remains limited. Under the state of emergency, businesses are prohibited from closing, as commerce strikes were initially used as a form of protest.

Private business opportunities are limited by rigid state control of economic life and the prevalence of state-owned enterprises. All land must be leased from the state. The government has evicted indigenous groups from various areas to make way for projects such as hydroelectric dams. It has also leased large tracts of land to foreign governments and investors for agricultural development in opaque deals that have displaced thousands of Ethiopians. Up to 70,000 people have been forced to move from the western Gambella region, although the government denies that the resettlement plans are connected to land investments. At least four people, including police officers, were killed in June 2016 during a clash between residents of a neighborhood of more than 30,000 houses in Addis Ababa, and police who entered the sector to demolish homes, which authorities said had been constructed illegally. Evictions have taken place in Lower Omo Valley, where government-run sugar plantations and hydroelectric dams have put thousands of pastoralists at risk by diverting their water supplies. Activists report that the December 2016 inauguration of the Gibe III dam on the Omo River will affect hundreds of thousands of farmers and fishers living downstream. Journalists and international organizations have persistently alleged that the government withholds development assistance from villages perceived as being unfriendly to the ruling party. Displacement resulting from the appropriation of land has driven much of the resentment behind recent antigovernment protests, and demonstrators have attacked foreign businesses perceived to be the recipients of unfair distribution of land by the Ethiopian government.

Women hold nearly 39 percent of seats in the lower house, 32 percent in the upper house, and three ministerial posts. Legislation protects women's rights, but these rights are routinely violated in practice. Enforcement of the law against rape and domestic abuse is patchy, and cases routinely stall in the courts. Female genital mutilation and forced child marriage are technically illegal, though there has been little effort to prosecute perpetrators. In 2015, Ethiopia enacted the Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants, which criminalizes human trafficking and enacts stricter penalties for child trafficking. Trafficking convictions have increased in recent years, though the U.S. government continues to urge its Ethiopian counterparts to more aggressively pursue trafficking cases. Many children continue to work in dangerous sectors and lack access to basic education and services.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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