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# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

Ethiopia's domestic politics have produced violence and continuing tension over the past two years. The deep shortcomings in the country's democratization and state-building processes may remain unresolved as the worsening instability of the region takes precedence. This report was commissioned as part of the Political Transitions in Africa project managed by Dorina Bekoe at the United States Institute of Peace.

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**The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.**

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*Lahra Smith*

## Political Violence and Democratic Uncertainty in Ethiopia

### Summary

- The pardon and release of thirty-eight political detainees, mostly from the leadership of the main opposition party, may give impetus to political negotiations in Ethiopia after more than two years' crisis and stalemate.
- Contentious and previously unresolved national issues, such as land and economic development; the institutional and constitutional structure of the Ethiopian state; and the best way to ensure equality of ethnic and religious communities, were brought to the fore during the past election cycle. However, after the election, much-needed national dialogue on these matters ended. It must be reinvigorated now that the political opposition's leaders have been freed.
- Citizen discontent has grown with the caretaker administration in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa and repressive local administrations. Elections for city and local government must be held. Further delays will undermine any democratic progress.
- The current Parliament includes members of several opposition political parties, though not the leaders who were imprisoned. Both the ruling party and the main opposition parties should make as many visible and meaningful concessions as possible to their political opponents.
- Ethiopia's military intervention in Somalia in December 2006, its ongoing military presence in that conflict, and its unchanged, tense border stalemate with Eritrea have contributed to growing violence in the Horn of Africa and stymied domestic democratization.

### Introduction

Global efforts to combat terrorism and the pressure to implement democratic reforms have collided in Ethiopia in recent years. The contradictions and challenges in these objec-

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tives became even more apparent after the country's flawed 2005 elections and a violent crackdown by Ethiopian security forces. In addition, sizable Ethiopian diaspora communities in the United States and Europe have changed the dynamics of international engagement, both in the elections themselves and in post-election disputes. Domestic pressure groups, concerned governments, human rights organizations, and Ethiopians abroad exerted strong pressure on international donors to end or limit funding of the regime. Meanwhile the Ethiopian government exercised significant regional influence by invading Somalia in December 2006. At the same time it burnished its image as an important ally in Washington's war on terrorism.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and his party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), have deftly manipulated internal and external threats. At various times regional involvements in Somalia and Eritrea have provided useful distraction from deteriorating domestic politics and human rights violations by state security. More than two years later, the contested election of May 2005 and the even more contentious post-election standoff between the ruling party and opposition parties remain pivotal to understanding both Ethiopia's internal political situation and other important conflicts in the region, particularly in Somalia.

Approaching the third round of multiparty elections in spring 2005, analysts were guardedly optimistic that these elections would advance the democratic process the country had undertaken in the fifteen years since the Derg military dictatorship fell. Yet the election results caught political analysts and many Ethiopians off-guard, not only because of the surprisingly strong showing of opposition political parties, but also because of the rapid descent into violence and political division that followed a peaceful and well-attended voting day. Since then both domestic and regional politics have deteriorated, and regional conflict and authoritarian governance have increased.

The elections suggest that sharp divisions among political elites in Ethiopia and among the various ethnic and regional communities have been salient since at least 1991, when the Derg fell. Under the ruling party rural voters have made small but significant economic and sociocultural gains (such as autonomy for ethnic groups in language choice). Material improvements in social services and rural infrastructure have surpassed those of previous regimes in modern Ethiopian history.<sup>1</sup> At the same time local government authorities and institutions have become increasingly repressive, particularly in the countryside.

The urban populace is divided and extremely hostile to the regime in power. Advances in the cities and towns, while impressive, have failed to keep pace with the expectations of a restive and politically engaged voting population. Finally, much of the sizable and politically active Ethiopian diaspora is extremely hostile to the prime minister and the EPRDF leadership. It aggressively seeks to undermine the regime through public rallies in western capitals and new technologies such as the Internet.<sup>2</sup>

In many ways these three communities—urban, rural, and diaspora—have such divergent interests that no one political party could hope to appease them all. The EPRDF certainly has not managed to. Its primary base of support outside the Tigray region comes from rural areas, particularly those that have been historically excluded and least developed.<sup>3</sup> It has shown itself willing to use lethal force, belying the rhetoric of democracy that distinguished it from previous regimes. Since the disputed 2005 elections and a brutal crackdown by the ruling party's security forces, opposition political parties have fragmented, unable to maintain a coalition that might effectively challenge the EPRDF under current electoral and institutional structures. Some of the largest ethnic communities, particularly the Oromo and Somali, have little if any political representation and are subject to regular and violent human rights abuses. Finally, insecurity throughout the Horn of Africa, and Ethiopia's role as both instigator of instability and regional enforcer, puts it at the center of a rapidly developing regional crisis.

## The Political Transition of the 1990s

Ethiopia's political transition began in the early 1990s with the fall of the socialist military dictatorship of the Derg and the flight of its leader, Mengistu Hailemariam. Under both the imperial government of Haile Selassie and the Derg, the ruling elite closely managed electoral politics despite efforts by students and grassroots movements to bring about meaningful social and economic reforms. After 1991 the EPRDF leadership made radical changes to the institutional structures of the Ethiopian state, primarily through the writing of a new constitution. Most notable among the political changes of this period were the establishment of a federal arrangement centered on ethnolinguistic identities, the 1993 Eritrean referendum on independence, and the scheduling of multiparty elections.<sup>4</sup>

The armed forces of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) then reorganized into the EPRDF and converted their military victory into a political one. The EPRDF has controlled the political process since that time. Early attempts at a constituent assembly, while symbolically significant, were marred by withdrawals of key elites representing distinct ethnolinguistic and regional communities, particularly the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the politically important diaspora groups. These groups have continued to contest the institutional and constitutional arrangements made during the transitional period.

Despite the establishment of a multiparty system, the EPRDF has remained the dominant party throughout the past fifteen years. The failure of previous election cycles to usher in democratic change is attributable to a lack of meaningful choices for voters. In the 1992, 1994, and 1995 elections the major opposition political parties refused to participate, citing ruling party domination of the media and the party registration process.<sup>5</sup> Some of the major opposition parties did decide to participate in the 2000 and 2001 elections, but they were fragmented and unable to challenge the ruling party effectively. In the 2000 national elections the opposition won only twelve seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives.<sup>6</sup>

Many of these political parties represented distinct local constituencies, and few had national constituencies. In each of the elections claims of intimidation were widespread and many were substantiated by international observers. As late as 2004, experts concluded, "There are a few opposition political parties but these are largely weak and ineffective in challenging the dominant EPRDF and offering alternatives to the electorate.... Most are urban based."<sup>7</sup> For all these reasons citizens were generally apathetic about the possibility of voting to bring about meaningful change and did not engage in national electoral politics.

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## The May 2005 Election

The national election in May 2005 represented a substantial change. By fall 2004 opposition political parties had formed coalitions based on differing policy perspectives and nationalist visions. The main political parties—including the EPRDF, the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), and the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), as well as smaller parties such as the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM)—campaigns on specific promises and policy positions. The relative success of opposition political parties after a short organizing period indicates openness in the political process that was unprecedented in the country's modern history, as well as deep resentment toward the EPRDF that had been building for some time. The ruling party and opposition reached an agreement on a formula to allocate access to important state-controlled media sources, including TV and print media. International aid supported civic education. In the days before the election large political rallies were well attended and peaceful.

***Public debates between high-profile candidates of the main political party coalitions provided a forum for discussion of some of the most controversial and important political issues.***

The ruling party blocked the opposition's attempted alterations of the electoral law, including a change from plurality voting to proportional representation. However, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) did establish important joint political-party forums at all levels to resolve disputes, and these were most effective in the pre-election period. Despite the high-profile expulsion of several international-observer missions and personalities, the presence of the African Union, the European Union, and the Carter Center observer missions, complemented by local observers, added some legitimacy to the exercise. Televised debates, also broadcast on the radio and reported in the state-owned and private press, offered refreshing new sources of information for voters.

For the first time public debates between high-profile candidates of the main political party coalitions provided a forum for discussion of some of the most controversial and important political issues, including land ownership, economic development, language and education policy, and ethnic self-determination. Particularly important were provisions of the Constitution, including Article 39, which grants "self-determination up to secession" for members of ethnic communities, and those relating to land, which has been collectively owned by the people of Ethiopia and managed by the state since the fall of the imperial government in 1974. There is still a pressing need for sustained national dialogue on these issues, which were introduced by the main political party's leadership during the 2005 election but remain unresolved.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) were quite effective during the critical pre-election phase through general voter education and information dissemination about the political parties and candidates as well as the electoral process. Most notably, a consortium of thirty-five CSOs, called the Election Observation Coalition and led by a local NGO, the Organization for Social Justice Ethiopia (OSJE), won a landmark high court case in early May 2005. It permitted the deployment of local observers at polling stations for the first time. The OSJE served as the coalition's secretariat. The OSJE's founder and director, Netsanet Demissie, is now detained, charged with supporting opposition party leaders in trying to overthrow the constitutional order, although neither he nor other civil society activists, such as Daniel Bekele of ActionAid, are leaders of any political party.

The coalition won the case in the Federal High Court, but the NEBE—a body empowered to oversee the election process but criticized by many as biased—appealed and succeeded in stalling the process until two days before the election.<sup>8</sup> This delay effectively prevented the coalition from fielding local observers outside major urban areas near Addis Ababa.

The impact of this legal victory cannot be underestimated; it gave national civil-society groups a formalized role in monitoring elections and promoting democratization, and showed remarkable independence by Ethiopia's judiciary. This judicial independence has not continued during the tense post-election period. EPRDF involvement in the recent and ongoing trials of civil society activists, journalists, and opposition politicians appears to be considerable. At the same time, as widely reported in the media, the May 2005 legal victory gave a strong signal to the electorate about how this election might be quite different from preceding ones. It is clear that this legal case was at least as important in the pre-election period as other signs of increasing democratization, such as media access for opposition political parties and rallies by all political parties.

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Voter turnout was high, and observer missions reported only minor irregularities, particularly in urban areas. The opposition went from twelve seats in the 547-member Parliament to 173 seats in one election cycle.<sup>9</sup> However, the EPRDF held onto its parliamentary majority, which it has used to block debate and push through legislation it favors. The main opposition parties dispute the final results and the NEBE investigations. But the panic and brinkmanship of the main contenders quickly undermined the gains of the pre-election period and even of Election Day. With the ruling party and the main opposition party, the CUD, both claiming victory before counting was complete and a ban on demonstrations in Addis Ababa beginning on election night, a violent confrontation could have been avoided only if the government had shown restraint, which it did not. Demonstrations in early June and again in late October and early November led to violent

crackdowns by security forces and the deaths of 193 civilians and six security officers and the arrests of tens of thousands of others.

## **Contentious Issues Unresolved by Electoral Politics**

Despite the institutional, legal, and civil society gains of the 1990s and the strong showing by the main opposition coalitions in the 2005 elections, the post-election period saw a rapid deterioration in state-society relations. Elite acrimony, public suspicion, and urban citizens' rage led to street demonstrations, strikes, and subsequent strong-arm tactics by state security forces. Lacking any "elite pact," Ethiopia struggled through the rest of 2005 and all of 2006 with periodic violence and polarized elite politics.

Ethiopia's institutions and rules are highly contested and the democratic transition of the early 1990s was incomplete. The political platforms of key opposition political parties, most notably the CUD coalition, challenged several articles and provisions of the 1995 Constitution. Although the Peace and Democracy Conference in 1991, the charter of the transitional government, and the Constituent Assembly in 1994 were all supposed to draft a new political compact to govern a newly democratizing country, much of the 1995 Constitution represents primarily the EPRDF's vision for Ethiopia. As the ruling party ignored or marginalized key groups resisting these institutional and societal changes, the opportunity for national dialogue on the structures of Ethiopian citizenship was lost.

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the principal group representing the Oromo people, withdrew from the process early on, and the ruling party has never allowed it to return to formal participation. With the OLF now banned, Oromo citizens have few alternative channels to influence Ethiopian politics. State security forces have repeatedly harassed and subjected them to increasing political violence over the past fifteen years. Although rural Oromo voters are by far the largest bloc of voters, their aspirations and concerns were significantly underrepresented in the 2005 election. With only the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) and the Oromo National Congress (ONC) taking up their political concerns, including harsh local administration in rural areas, Oromo concerns continued to be ignored.<sup>10</sup> And the political crisis following the elections has been primarily an EPRDF-CUD dispute, reflecting both parties' lack of concern about Oromo issues.

In addition, elements of the urban elite and the Ethiopian diaspora with emotional and historic commitment to the unity and territorial integrity of the Ethiopian polity failed to reach a compromise with the EPRDF leadership during this period. Disputes over the 1995 Constitution, while varied in nature, underlie election-related violence since the 2005 elections and suggest that the absence of an elite pact represented a deeper fracture in the Ethiopian polity than may have been realized at first. Unresolved tensions were reflected in the CUD focus on port access, privatization of land, and other constitutional revisions that would eliminate, or at least undermine, important components of ethnic federalism as guaranteed in the present Constitution.

Important social divisions exist alongside policy differences. There is a divide between rural and urban communities, as well as among ethnic and religious communities in some cases. Ethiopia's extreme poverty and its history of deep ethnic, linguistic, and religious divisions have led to a bifurcation between rural voters' and heterogeneous urban voters' calculations of economic and social gains. Analysts knew of this division, which is quite common throughout Africa, but the Ethiopian elections show its potential to produce winner-take-all results that lead quickly to violence.

With few exceptions, urban Ethiopians—particularly those in large cities like Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa—rarely have the opportunity to make regular visits to rural communities and are mostly unaware of the policy preferences and strategic calculations of rural voters. At the same time ethnic communities, even in urban areas, are somewhat segregated, at least socially, through ethnically and regionally based mutual-aid societies and the overlap of religion and ethnicity. Urban citizens do not understand many of the

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reasons these communities would have voted for the ruling party and therefore are apt to dismiss the vote results as rigging. The absence of dialogue among Ethiopia's citizens, particularly the lack of grassroots support for the urban political elite, has led opposition elites and urban voters alike to dismiss the impact of the EPRDF's policies on the voting patterns of rural communities.

The opportunity has been lost for extended national dialogue on contentious issues, particularly those related to specific controversial provisions of the Constitution. Pre-election debates raised deeply emotive and fundamental disagreements over the post-1991 governance structures, putting them on the national agenda for the first time. But the election results and the subsequent crackdown by EPRDF security forces stifled that dialogue. The ruling party has become increasingly authoritarian, reversing previous gains in media and personal freedoms, suppressing dissent, and punishing urban voters with new taxes and restrictions on civil and political rights. Unresolved political tensions among various communities across the country have been left to simmer without an outlet for dialogue, negotiation, and compromise. Almost none of the political elites of either the ruling party or the main opposition parties have suggested areas of potential agreement or compromise. The implications for the future of the Ethiopian polity and for future election cycles are mostly dismal.

***Unresolved political tensions among various communities across the country have been left to simmer without an outlet for dialogue, negotiation, and compromise.***

## **Civil Society Involvement in Politics**

Since the 2005 election the landscape of participation has changed considerably. The role of civil society as an intermediary between the state and its citizens is fundamental to democracy. Democratization must include not only multiparty elections, but also protection of individual and community rights, a vibrant private press, and the freedom to form associations and advocacy and interest groups. Civil society was an active participant in pre-election and Election Day activities, facilitating debate and creating opportunities for civic and voter education and participation. However, post-election violence and the state's response have severely undermined impressive gains in civil-society participation in democratization processes.

Conditions for Ethiopian civil society in the post-election period have deteriorated alarmingly. In the sweep of arrests following the October and November 2005 demonstrations and strikes, the authorities targeted and charged civil society leaders and political figures with criminal offenses against the Constitution. The ruling party's unwillingness to distinguish among the various actors—notably political party leaders and the private press, teachers' associations, and human rights and development organizations—reflects its general intolerance of free expression. The pattern of repression suggests that any political activity perceived to be in favor of democratic openness will be viewed as anti-regime. It is certainly a signal to civil society, including labor, students, interest groups, and others, that political activity in the country is severely circumscribed.

Later in 2007 a revised NGO law is expected to be presented in Parliament. Among other provisions, it will undoubtedly include regulations regarding NGO participation in future electoral activities, an issue of considerable contention in the 2005 elections. Clearly the EPRDF would like to see NGOs limited to social service and development, as opposed to civic education and human rights activities. Not only would this be a significant restriction on civil society, it could negatively affect democratic development in the country. NGOs have played a vital role in citizen and voter education, particularly as local administration has become increasingly repressive.

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In addition, the promising democratic openness toward the media during the pre-election period has been entirely reversed since 2005. Immediately following the election, the government imposed a nearly complete media blackout that continues up to the present. The only exceptions are the state-owned media and a couple of the more reputable

private newspapers like *Addis Fortune* and *The Reporter*. In general Ethiopian citizens rely on the powerful but often highly inaccurate rumor mill. Rather than extending negotiated access to state-controlled media for opposition political parties and civil society, the ruling party tightened its grip on the private press, creating a substantial gap in coverage. Thus the EPRDF has precluded transparency and encouraged the rumor network. The government has also blocked controversial diaspora Web sites and all SMS text messaging, further fueling urban Ethiopian resentment. The authorities have worsened the situation by arresting several prominent private newspaper editors and publishers since the election-related disturbances. The international NGO, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), now lists Ethiopia as the world's worst backslider on press freedom and second only to Eritrea as the leading jailer of reporters.

## Detentions and Trials

Two waves of major urban violence took place in June and November 2005. It is now confirmed that at least 193 people died and hundreds of others were injured. By most estimates, tens of thousands were detained, many released without charge after some months, and some charged later with criminal offenses. Most credible reports estimate about 30,000 people arrested; it is unknown how many are still detained or facing charges. They included members of various opposition political parties who refused to take their parliamentary seats when the House of Peoples' Representatives opened in September 2005. Subsequent legislation stripped them of their parliamentary immunity. In addition, several journalists and civil society representatives were arrested and later charged with a range of crimes, some in absentia. Delays and postponements marked the court proceedings. Of the initial 111 "high-level" political detainees, twenty-eight were freed in April 2007, when the court ruled there was no case against them.

After the majority of the remaining defendants refused to enter a plea or mount a defense, the Federal High Court found thirty-eight senior opposition members guilty of serious offenses in June 2007. Although the prosecutor's office sought the death penalty, the sentences handed down were life in prison for CUD political leaders and from eighteen months to eighteen years for journalists. However, through the intervention of an informal group of Ethiopian elders (*shimagelles*), negotiations on the release of the convicted high-level detainees went on for many months in 2006–07. The political opposition leaders submitted a letter requesting pardon to the Board of Amnesty, which approved their requests.

Ethiopia's president, Girma Wolde-Giorgis, pardoned thirty-eight CUD leaders on July 20, 2007. On the same day Prime Minister Meles gave a press conference where he clarified the terms of the pardon, saying the thirty-eight had admitted engaging in activities to undermine the Constitution and the government. Just weeks before, the Ethiopian Parliament had passed a motion declaring unoccupied seats vacant and calling for by-elections for those seats in early 2008. Although the pardon restores the political rights of the CUD leaders to vote and stand for election, it now appears they will have to run again for their seats in Parliament and on Addis Ababa City Council, which the CUD had won unanimously in 2005.

Among those not released, in addition to possibly thousands who have been detained in rural areas, are two members of civil society, Netsanet Demissie and Daniel Bekele. Human rights lawyers and anti-poverty campaigners, both refused to sign the pardon document admitting wrongdoing because they contended their activities were legal and in promotion of the Constitution, not against it. Unlike other political party leaders and journalists, the two have stated their intention to present a defense since the start of the proceedings. Their defense, which began in June 2007, has already been delayed and should continue to be followed by the international community.

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A parliamentary commission of inquiry into post-election disturbances was established in December 2005. After eight months' work the eleven-member commission concluded that 199 individuals had died, including six members of the security forces. However, word of political pressure on the commission led to a leaked report that placed blame on Ethiopian security forces for using excessive force. The chair and deputy chair, and at least one other commission member, fled the country, citing political intimidation and harassment by the ruling party. The official report included the figure of 193 civilian deaths, far above previous government estimates, but did not conclude that excessive force had been used, rather that the actions of the security forces were "legal and necessary." Parliament endorsed the report in March 2007, with only the majority vote of the EPRDF. Opposition MPs called for the government to pay compensation and apologize to the victims, and for those guilty of the killings to face trial, which is unlikely to happen.

## The Political Opposition

The situation has become considerably more fragile since the 2005 elections. Throughout the summer and fall of 2005 CUD leaders debated participating in Parliament pending the outcome of electoral fraud investigations by NEBE and the courts.<sup>11</sup> It was clear that the broad coalition of political parties under the CUD umbrella had divergent objectives and tactics in mind. The split in CUD led to the creation of the Coalition of Unity and Democracy Party (CUDP), whose members did take their seats when Parliament opened in September 2005. CUDP is now registered as a party with the NEBE. Other opposition parties also experienced leadership challenges and internal splits, although the ruling party was surprisingly able to contain any internal dissent. By mid-2006 those in the CUD who did not support the decision to work within Parliament formed a new coalition, the Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (AFD), with groups such as the OLF and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). This new coalition has been mostly inactive, and the basis for these groups to work together is extremely tenuous. Among other demands, the AFD has called for an all-inclusive national conference in Ethiopia.

The future of electoral politics in Ethiopia depends in no small measure on the continued participation of the opposition political parties now in Parliament. In May 2006 the EPRDF signed a cooperation agreement with the two main opposition parties that did take their seats, UEDF and OFDM. In numerous instances all or most of the opposition has disagreed with the ruling party on particular issues. Majority voting rules mean that opposition votes rarely have resulted in policy changes, but they have recorded sizable numbers against actions of Parliament. These have included removal of immunity for Parliament members who did not take their seats, the appointment of a caretaker administration in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia in late 2006, and the report of the commission that investigated the post-election violence. In some cases, opposition MPs have walked out of Parliament in protest, refusing to vote, and in others they have chosen to have their negative votes registered. In the case of the inquiry commission into the post-election violence, the opposition was concerned that the final report was not independent. The opposition has registered its disagreement in each instance with legislative or policy proposals of the ruling party, and these have been reported regularly in the private press. For example, in an interview in the November 25, 2006, issue of *The Reporter*, the CUDP leadership charged that the EPRDF's legislative majority blocked discussion and obstructed minorities' participation. CUDP's parliamentary whip, Temesgen Zewde, noted the lack of a "culture of negotiation."

The effectiveness of the now-sizable opposition in Parliament, even if only in highlighting policy differences and challenging ruling party legislation, represents a notable step toward democratic openness, though far short of what a vibrant democracy would demand. Where the EPRDF has not blocked them, international donors have also become involved by providing valuable training to new MPs and political party leaders, to make the most of the potential of the third Parliament.

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How will the ruling party address citizens who, through their voting, demonstrated that they do not support some or all of the EPRDF's policy positions? In the three years remaining before the next election, scheduled for 2010, can citizens be convinced of the ruling party's sincerity in light of its use of extreme force after the 2005 election? Urban voters are particularly important. In spring 2007 the EPRDF began holding a series of forums with Addis Ababa residents to discuss ways that the caretaker government and the party could address lingering problems. The effectiveness of these efforts will be measured in the next election cycle, but sentiment in cities like Addis Ababa is highly discontented, particularly over the additional taxes and limits on personal freedom imposed by an unelected city government.

Finally, how will the recently released CUD leaders and the ruling party deal with each other in the coming months? The release of the thirty-eight has removed a major stumbling block to political progress in the country and may have defused a tense situation that has persisted for two years. It has the potential to return the leaders of segments of Ethiopian voters to active political life, resuming the debates over the future of the Ethiopian polity. However, the refusal of CUD leaders to take parliamentary seats in 2005 and the conditions of the pardon requiring them to stand for reelection, possibly in 2008, mean that a showdown is inevitable. It is not at all clear if the ruling party has cowed urban voters and other supporters of the CUD so much that the opposition cannot win reelection. Even more, the commitment of both parties' leaders to negotiation and compromise is absolutely essential to turn the pardon and release into a step toward national reconciliation and not just another period of tense stalemate and political brinkmanship like the one in summer and fall 2005.

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## **Human Rights**

Human rights concerns have grown since the 2005 elections. Mass detentions and use of force by security forces have characterized the period. Human Rights Watch found that the federal police, together with local officials and militias, had used various measures, from denial of fertilizers and seeds to detention and special courts, to suppress dissent and punish rural communities that had voted for the opposition. Some Oromo elites have withdrawn their support for the government, charging systematic repression of their people. The opposition party leadership in the OFDM has charged repeatedly that security forces are targeting Oromo citizens, carrying out killings and illegal detentions in West Wellega zone and elsewhere. Since the May 2005 elections the number of defections of mid- to high-level government officials, including several prominent judges, army officers, diplomats, a few members of Parliament, and journalists, has risen.

In April 2007 armed members of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) carried out a major attack on a Chinese-run oil site in eastern Ethiopia in which seventy-seven people died—sixty-eight Ethiopians and nine Chinese. Since that time violence has increased against the Somali inhabitants of the Somali regional state in Ethiopia (also called the Ogaden). The ONLF has called for a United Nations fact-finding mission to investigate reports that the Ethiopian government is blocking food aid to large parts of the Somali region and committing war crimes, including forced relocation of inhabitants and political retribution against the families of suspected ONLF rebels. Inaccessibility has made it difficult for aid agencies to reach needy recipients and nearly impossible for media outlets and human rights organizations to investigate these serious allegations.

***Violence has increased against the Somali inhabitants of the Somali regional state in Ethiopia.***

Finally, instances of ethnic violence, while still relatively few, remain of great concern. Ethnic clashes in Gambella in 2003 led to the deaths of perhaps hundreds of Anuak people and some security forces and members of highlander communities living in the affected areas. Some 40,000 people remained homeless in Gambella region following the conflict. In June 2006 conflicts between Guji and Borena communities in the wake of changes to administrative boundaries in Oromiya and Somali regional states claimed at least 100 lives

and displaced at least 35,000 people. The underlying causes and contributing factors in these conflicts, which are historic and resource-based, have not been addressed, and the likelihood of future clashes is quite high. Legislation passed in 2003 allows the federal government to intervene in instances of human rights abuses in regional states, thereby undermining the powers of the regions.<sup>12</sup>

## **Evolving Religious Dynamics**

A localized religious conflict in a village outside the southwestern city of Jimma in September 2006 highlighted the possibility of rising religious tensions in the country, as did the escalating conflict between Somalia's Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) and the Ethiopian government in fall 2006. The Jimma violence received wide media coverage both in Ethiopia and abroad. Accounts of the incident vary; apparently the bonfire at the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian ceremony of Meskel in one community sparked a conflict with neighboring Muslims worshiping in the mosque. At least eight people died, many others were injured, and homes and churches were burned. This incident suggests that the much-touted peace and religious pluralism of Ethiopia is at best tenuous, although it has multiple and contradictory causes.

***The much-touted peace and religious pluralism of Ethiopia is at best tenuous.***

First, it is increasingly evident that religious identity has been a more contentious feature of the political transition process in Ethiopia since 1991 than analysts may have realized. The ruling party's success in formerly disadvantaged regions of the country is partly attributable to greater religious tolerance and pluralism. Muslim communities in Ethiopia were historically recognized as part of the Ethiopian polity, but they always had worshipped on the margins of the formal Ethiopian state, which was explicitly Orthodox Christian. At various times in modern history, Ethiopia's Muslims have faced systematic forms of discrimination, ranging from "benign neglect" to outright persecution and forced conversion to Orthodox Christianity. The state has been so closely linked to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) that journalists and politicians alike continue to call Ethiopia a Christian country, despite national census figures showing that Christians and Muslims are roughly equal in number.

***National census figures show that Christians and Muslims are roughly equal in number.***

The constitutional guarantees of religious equality have resulted in ethnic and religious communities developing religious institutions and their symbols (through mosque and community center building, for example) to a greater extent than previously. This development has not been without conflict. Although many Ethiopian citizens strongly defend the historic peace between Muslim and Christian communities, they are uncomfortable with the visible growth of Muslim worship. Religious conflict is yet another manifestation of the contested nature of the political institutions that emerged from the post-1991 transition.

This divergence of opinion over the role of religious communities reflects broader issues of Ethiopian citizenship and national identity. The 2005 elections seemed to trigger little explicit discussion of religion, although it echoed in public debates over language and land policy. However, the rise of religious and nationalist rhetoric by the UIC leadership accompanied the growing strength of the Islamic Courts movement in neighboring Somalia throughout 2006. They called not only for a "jihad" against Ethiopian "invaders" but even for Ethiopian Muslims (not only Ethiopian Somalis) to rise up against their "Christian" oppressors. The international media's uncritical acceptance of this portrayal of the UIC movement as Muslim jihadist and the Ethiopian state as a legitimate Christian state has fed a simmering but potentially disturbing trend toward conflict among religious communities inside Ethiopia. In particular, the EPRDF regime and many Ethiopians were quite comfortable framing the dispute as a Christian-Muslim conflict, although anti-Ethiopian sentiment among Somalis has little to do with religion and much to do with Somali nationalism.

The incident in Jimma received substantial media coverage partly because of the simmering conflict with the UIC, as the Ethiopian government and international community

sought justification of what was clearly a well-planned intervention by Ethiopian forces in December 2006. Aside from its regional implications, the conflict suggests a smoldering tension among religious communities inside Ethiopia. Political elites may play a less important role, as individual communities and groups of citizens contest the nature of Ethiopian citizenship in their interactions with members of other ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities. Notably, both Muslim and Orthodox Christian leaders took bold and decisive action to quell the religious nature of the Jimma conflict, and this may explain its apparently peaceful resolution. One can hope that the major religious communities will promote peace among their followers and that political elites will do the same. But it is likely that at the local level religious identity will continue to be a critical indicator of the success of the democratic transition process. Greater attention by the state and the international community to ensuring that religious and political leaders use their influence for democratic ends will determine the extent to which these conflicts remain local and Ethiopia's religious communities work together peacefully.

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## **Regional Conflicts: Somalia and Eritrea**

The interplay between domestic politics and regional conflict in the Horn of Africa is of critical importance. Interstate and regional conflicts in the region lead neighboring states to support their neighbors' dissident and armed groups; at the same time internal conflict weakens various states' ability to exert power and influence over their neighbors. For instance, internal dissent in Ethiopia and Eritrea after the 1998–2000 war between the two countries weakened ruling parties in both states. This weakening undoubtedly prevented them from taking conciliatory steps to resolve the ongoing border dispute. This missed opportunity, caused partly by these internal divisions, has created a highly unstable stalemate and a real possibility of war reigniting. As a recent commentary on the region notes, the Horn of Africa is the "hottest conflict zone in the world."<sup>13</sup>

Ethiopia has sought to play a leading role in the region. Such predominance has brought the country closer to the United States, particularly in the war on terrorism, which has led to a steady increase in military and security cooperation with its powerful ally. Ethiopian cooperation with U.S. intelligence and security objectives in the Horn of Africa has given the regime access to important resources and relative freedom to deal with domestic political groups as it wishes. Finally, Ethiopia has reinforced its historic role in the region as hegemon and competitor with regional powers like Egypt through its ventures in neighboring countries like Somalia, where it seeks to prevent a strong and threatening state from developing.

Relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea have deteriorated in certain respects since the Ethiopian elections. The deadlock over border demarcation remains, despite threats and efforts at talks by the Ethiopia-Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC) and various international witnesses to the 2000 Algiers Agreement, which brought the war to an end. The Eritrean government has restricted troop movements by the UN monitoring force (UNMEE), conducting aerial surveillance inside the Temporary Monitoring Zone (TMZ). These actions have led the UN Security Council to extend UNMEE's mandate in six-month increments and to reduce troop levels from 3,200 to 2,000 in January 2007. The Security Council recently extended the mission to January 2008.

For its part Ethiopia insists that it accepts the EEBC ruling in principle but demands further dialogue on crucial issues like the town of Badme, which the EEBC granted to Eritrea but Ethiopia still claims. Ethiopian troops have been deployed in the region and military exercises are ongoing. Eritrea regards Ethiopia's offers of dialogue as evidence of intransigence and a lack of international will to enforce the EEBC ruling. Its position is that nothing short of border demarcation on the ground is tolerable.

This conflict, in turn, has translated into support for dissident and armed rebel groups by both Eritrea and Ethiopia. Eritrea has been active in supporting Ethiopian opposition

***Relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea have deteriorated since the Ethiopian elections.***

elements and contributing to rising regional tension. Eritrea provides material and training support to several anti-EPRDF dissident groups, most notably the OLF and ONLF. A United Nations report in May 2006 concluded that Eritrea was providing material support to anti-Ethiopian and pro-Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) groups in Somalia, a claim Eritrea denied at the time. Since the rout of the UIC in early January 2007, some of its most influential leaders have turned up in Asmara, Eritrea's capital.

Rhetoric from both Ethiopia and Eritrea was exceedingly inflammatory in summer and fall 2006, as events in Somalia moved toward regional conflict. Ethiopia accused Eritrea of several bombings and isolated incidents of urban violence throughout Ethiopia in 2006, and both countries use the word "terrorism" to describe the activities of the other. In spring 2007 the kidnapping of five Europeans and eight Ethiopians in the remote Afar region quickly degenerated into a dangerous war of words between the two countries, with Ethiopia accusing the Eritrean government of kidnapping the tourists and Eritrea denying it. Eritrea hosts the wing of the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (ARDUF), which claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and seeks to wage armed combat against the Ethiopian state.

Events in Somalia have fueled the intensifying rhetoric. In summer 2006 Ethiopia—a supporter of the peace process sponsored by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia—began moving troops into western Somalia to bolster the Baidoa-based government of President Abdullahi Yusuf. Thousands of trained forces were reported on the Ethiopian side of the border. On December 24 Ethiopia launched a coordinated air and ground war inside Somalia. The Ethiopian forces quickly routed the UIC militias, most of which fled into Kenya. Violence quickly erupted, especially in Mogadishu, suggesting that the UIC loyalists intended to fight the TFG. The Ethiopian troop presence itself is a major source of grievance to UIC militias, Hawiye clan members, and other Somali groups.

Ethiopia's stated intention was to defend the TFG from the forces of the UIC until an African Union (AU) peacekeeping force could deploy. Throughout fall and winter 2006, AU countries reluctantly pledged troops, but none deployed. About 1,300 Ugandan troops arrived in Somalia in March 2007 as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The UN Security Council endorsed the AU mission in February, but it is unclear whether a United Nations mission will be involved.

Sporadic demonstrations in Mogadishu against the Ethiopian troops in January 2007 were followed by escalating incidents of violence throughout the spring. It is not entirely clear who is leading them, although the TFG and Ethiopians say UIC loyalist militias are responsible. By late March Mogadishu was the scene of the worst violence in fifteen years. At least 400,000 Somalis have fled the city and not yet returned, and estimates put the dead at around 1,500. The TFG has reluctantly agreed to hold a clan-wide reconciliation conference, the international community's major condition for continued donor assistance. The TFG insisted on a disarmament campaign in Mogadishu before the conference, but opponents saw this as an attempted consolidation of its military power. International mediators have tried to facilitate mediation talks, particularly between the Darood clan (dominant in the TFG leadership) and the Hawiye clan (dominant in the now-dismantled UIC). After repeated delays the National Reconciliation Conference (NRC) opened in late July with a spike in violence and a number of parties missing.

Chief among Hawiye clan leaders' demands was a withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, but this does not appear likely. Ethiopian helicopters and troops moved into Mogadishu in March, 2007, nominally to support the TFG forces. The Ethiopian government says it is withdrawing forces gradually but gives no figures. Most accounts suggest that the numbers of Ethiopian troops inside southern Somalia are substantial, at least in the thousands. Chances are slight that the number of Ethiopian troops will be reduced anytime soon, since the AU has been slow to promise or send reinforcements. The anti-TFG elements (whether UIC supporters, anti-Ethiopian nationalists, or other types of armed opposition

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groups) were already mounting significant resistance to the TFG government and the Ethiopian troops that sustain it. As a result disarmament is a nonstarter and national reconciliation a slim hope.

Regional conflicts, including those the Ethiopian state instigates or exacerbates, will probably continue to dominate Ethiopian politics for the foreseeable future. Regional politics could overwhelm the domestic situation if conditions in Somalia deteriorate even more (a likely scenario) and Ethiopian military forces are bogged down in heavy fighting, or if conflict re-erupts with Eritrea. Neither possibility is far-fetched, though it seems unlikely that Ethiopia will instigate a new war with Eritrea on its own. However, since a relatively peaceful region would force the ruling EPRDF to confront domestic opposition in a more transparent and systematic way, regional stability is not in the EPRDF's interest.

Particularly of note here is the limited influence of Ethiopian opposition parties and civil society on foreign policy matters. Not since the 1998–2000 war with Eritrea has the country been so focused on foreign policy, but the greatest leverage in influencing the war effort is from the international community, especially the United States. It is understandable that the Ethiopian opposition and civil society should focus on domestic issues, including their own survival and future legislative changes that might affect their ability to participate in the democratic process. But the lack of a domestic constituency to represent alternate views on foreign policy gives the EPRDF a free hand, at least in the short term.

Although it is difficult for citizens to influence foreign policy throughout Africa, it is striking to note the vociferous and rather effective opposition to any Kenyan involvement in Somalia by members of the Kenyan opposition and private press. In Ethiopia concerned citizens, who might have been expected to support an Ethiopian military effort to secure the important border with its volatile neighbor, have shown strikingly little support for the Somalia intervention. Since the EPRDF has not convinced citizens that its stated objectives in Somalia are genuine, they openly voice sympathy and concern for Somalis. Ethiopia could easily become embroiled in a regional conflict that citizens do not support, partly because of the lack of countervailing forces in policy formulation or implementation.

## Issues in 2007 and Beyond

The resolution of a number of critical issues could significantly affect the political situation in Ethiopia and the Horn. Domestic and regional considerations may threaten the fragile peace that has prevailed inside Ethiopia since the May 2005 elections. Resolution of these matters could consolidate the ruling party's hold on political power.

1. **Trial of political detainees nationwide and the future of those pardoned.** The pardon and release of thirty-eight political detainees, mainly from the leadership of the CUD, may give impetus to political negotiations in the country. However, the situation remains tense and uncertain. The ongoing trials of civil-society leaders and the political detentions and charges of human rights abuses in remote parts of Ethiopia, particularly the Oromiya and Somali regions, will continue to shape international and domestic perceptions of the EPRDF's commitment to democracy.

Several scenarios are possible, and none is particularly optimistic. The police crackdown in 2005 and the long trial of important figures in politics, the media, and civil society have undermined the legitimacy of the EPRDF government. Addis Ababa city government in particular has suffered, as all of its elected officials, including the mayor-elect, Berhanu Nega, were among those detained and tried. A caretaker government has been in place, but since Addis Ababa is undeniably the heart of anti-EPRDF sentiment, loyal CUD supporters are surely not satisfied in any way by a temporary and appointed, not elected, city government. As recently as April 2007 the EPRDF was holding talks with Addis Ababa residents. But for faithful supporters of the CUD,

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particularly those who view the CUDP as betraying the party's mandate by taking seats in the Parliament, the by-election can be expected to be the most important sign of a return to democratic politics. Even with heightened security and a chastened population, citywide disturbances and some violence are an expected consequence of any delay in the by-election or decision by the CUD leaders not to stand.

2. **The national census.** The Constitution requires that a national census be conducted every ten years. The last national census in Ethiopia took place in 1995. Few expected the 2005 census to go forward as the elections drew closer, in light of the logistical challenges both events represented. The government announced relatively early in 2005 that the census would be postponed one year to allow national authorities to devote all resources to the election. The census began in May–June 2007, with all teachers in the country assigned to the task. Delays until November were anticipated in Afar and Somali regions.

Not only is the information derived from a national census of vital bureaucratic and administrative importance in a decentralized state such as Ethiopia, it is an invaluable planning tool for many groups and organizations, including international and domestic aid organizations working throughout the country. Few doubt that Ethiopia has undergone dramatic urbanization, as well as demographic shifts among ethnic and religious communities. In particular, figures for two distinct groups, the Oromo and Muslims, can be expected to be the most sensitive and important. Both groups have routinely been undercounted in past censuses, and their numbers are a matter of significant dispute. Current and accurate data will assist the Ethiopian government as much as civil society organizations and international partners. The delay, while understandable in light of the country's limited resources and the tremendous undertaking a national census represents, has undoubtedly had negative impacts on the country's development planning and implementation.

At the same time, conducting the census not only is a logistical challenge in a poor and predominately rural country but could be highly political. For instance, Nigeria's census in 2006 sparked riots, primarily over religious identity. Prior censuses in Ethiopia have not sparked significant violence, and as long as the National Census Commission continues to be led by competent, apolitical professionals, the next census should be primarily a technical and bureaucratic undertaking. Financial and technical assistance to ensure that this is the case are highly recommended.

3. **The Ethiopian millennium.** September 2007 marks the start of the new millennium in Ethiopia, owing to its use of the Julian calendar. The government has planned a number of substantial projects, including theme parks, concerts, and cultural heritage events. It is hoped that thousands of Ethiopians abroad, as well as foreign tourists, will visit the country at New Year's Eve in mid-September 2007 and throughout 2007–08. Clearly the Ethiopian government wanted to resolve the political standoff before these important events, both to maximize the number of international visitors and encourage positive media coverage. Heightened security through September is probably unavoidable, but it is also possible that the high-profile nature of the millennium events could be used as justification for security crackdowns or other violence.
4. **Woreda and Kebele elections and the revised electoral law.** Shortly after the 2005 national and regional legislative elections *woreda* (district) and *kebele* (village or local) elections were to take place. They were postponed soon after the elections. Nearly all parties agreed in late summer 2005 that the political and logistical challenges of holding these elections at the time were insurmountable, and a critical opportunity was lost. In addition, the electoral law is under revision. The opposition would like to see changes that give it greater leverage, including the ability to nominate at least some members of the election board. Further delaying tactics suggest that the ruling party has meant to consolidate its hold at the local level, as well as

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signal voters that opposition gains related to the national and regional elections will not be repeated. Central among the concerns is that opposition political parties would boycott future election cycles if they felt NEBE composition and electoral rules did not better address inadequacies or flaws evident in the 2005 elections.

Most recently the EPRDF-dominated Parliament agreed to postpone the woreda and kebele elections until sometime between December 2007 and February 2008, partly because of the 2007 census and pending revisions to the electoral law. This is a somewhat troubling development. Since the World Bank and European Community's decisions to suspend direct budgetary support, most financial transfers to the Ethiopian government have gone through woreda offices. Such transfers are also in line with the government's overall decentralization program. In principle direct budgetary support to the woreda is a positive development, as it is intended to move budgetary capacity and decision making to lower levels of administration. In a related development in November 2006 Prime Minister Zenawi fired the longstanding federal auditor general, who had reported that federal allocations to regional governments were not adequately accounted for.<sup>14</sup> His report and his subsequent dismissal raise serious questions of ruling party interference in the various auditing agencies of the Ethiopian government, as well as the accounting systems in the woreda offices.

But perhaps most important, the kebele is the most direct link to government services for the majority of Ethiopia's population, which is mainly rural and illiterate. Critical development tools that farmers rely on at the kebele level include fertilizer and other farming inputs, as well as schools, clinics, and courts. Elections at the kebele level are a vital part of the democratic structure for most citizens of Ethiopia, arguably even more important than national parliamentary elections. Ethiopians' direct experience of politics, democratic or not, is through the kebele and woreda structures. While providing bargaining chips to political elites in Addis Ababa, continued delay of elections at these levels could be seen as a signal to rural voters that their political concerns are less important. Even more troubling is that opposition political parties will probably not be in a position to field as many candidates, in light of party fragmentation after the violence and crackdown by the EPRDF's security forces. The ruling party is likely to restrict or even prohibit international and domestic observers, considering the active and critical stance most took regarding the 2005 elections, making credible elections highly unlikely as long as it is in power.

***Elections at the kebele level are a vital part of the democratic structure for most citizens of Ethiopia.***

## **The Uncertain Future**

The most important consideration at this stage is the extent to which all sides in the current domestic conflicts refuse to compromise or negotiate. There is blame enough to go around, but the real danger is the idea that politics is not about compromise. Many observers are concerned that the post-election period will reinforce the old habits of political apathy and outright fear that had become so central to Ethiopian political culture and were only beginning to unravel in recent years.

Ethiopia's future democratization hinges on the way the remaining trials of civil society leaders are resolved, the extent of continued political unrest and suppression in rural areas, and the effectiveness of the Parliament as currently composed. If the CUD leaders or the EPRDF do not return to active dialogue on political issues, including a proposed by-election, urban areas in particular will experience a return to violence. If the government clamps down with excessive force, as it did in 2005, it will only reinforce the view that the EPRDF is not interested in genuine dialogue but in punishing the political opposition and all those who voted for it.

At the same time, the conduct of the woreda and kebele elections could provide a chance to restore the government's legitimacy, not only with the international community but also with rural communities on which local leadership and administration have a direct

***The real danger is the idea that politics is not about compromise.***

and often negative impact. A revised electoral law with concessions to the opposition and a more representative and inclusive NEBE could send a positive signal to urban voters and the diaspora alike.

Most important for Ethiopia's political future, however, is the message the government sends about political dissent and political engagement. In a number of respects, the most damaging impact of the past two years will be measured in long-term civic participation and appreciation of the value of democracy. In their assessment of the 2000 and 2001 elections, longtime experts on Ethiopian politics noted that "the planting of democracy" had begun, and that "people have begun to understand what democracy can mean.... The government has allowed and even encouraged the teaching of democratic values and principles to the people. Such knowledge is not without effect."<sup>15</sup> This is even truer now. The generation that enthusiastically voted in the 2005 elections was composed of somewhat optimistic voters who, unlike their parents from the Derg era, believed in the power of the vote and of democracy as an ideal. It is not entirely clear that they still have this faith, led as they are by a caretaker government appointed by the EPRDF and with political leadership bitterly divided and many members detained and charged with serious offenses against the Ethiopian government.

The government and opposition parties must continue their halting but critical efforts to negotiate and compromise. Each side should be seen as willing to cede ground on certain issues. Thus far the ruling party has refused to compromise at all. In particular, opportunities for further national dialogue on the contentious issues of the 2005 elections must be provided as regularly as feasible and appropriate. Without such steps a broad boycott of the 2010 elections by most or all of the political opposition can be expected. This would be nothing short of a disaster for Ethiopia's political progress. It is abundantly clear that large numbers of voters do not support the EPRDF at all. The question now is how the party will convince these voters to change their minds—through democratic persuasion and improved policies or increasing repression and authoritarianism. There has been far more of the latter than the former in the past two years.

Regional entanglements will not persuade these voters either, as they are unconvinced that the motives are genuine or the conflicts unavoidable. No alternate leadership within the EPRDF is apparent, and no indications exist that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi will step down in 2010 even if a replacement is waiting in the wings. Delivering on the promise of ethnic federalism as an institutional and constitutional arrangement to address Ethiopia's diverse and divided polity cannot be accomplished without viable elections.

The most controversial elements of the 1995 Constitution, including ethnic self-determination and land policy, as well as practical and emotive issues such as port access, involvement in regional conflicts, and ruling party dominance of business and privatization, will not go away, as much as the EPRDF might wish them to. The 2005 elections should have demonstrated to the ruling party the need to better inform citizens of the varied opinions of different groups in the country, rather than assuming that voters could be cowed into submitting to a vision of national citizenship not shared by all. Critical constituencies such as the Oromo should be meaningfully engaged by all political parties, and Oromo policy concerns such as land and agricultural policy, human rights, and reform of repressive local administration must be addressed. Religious and political leaders alike must make fostering interreligious cooperation and understanding an active priority, not assume that they are historical realities. At the same time the diaspora must be constructively engaged so it does not continue to spoil efforts to build a democratic state. This will be challenging in light of a lack of will and credible leadership on both sides, but even small steps in this direction could go a long way. Ethiopia's democratic transition is deeply troubled and quite uncertain at this stage.

***Opportunities for further national dialogue on the contentious issues of the 2005 elections must be provided as regularly as feasible and appropriate.***

***Religious and political leaders alike must make fostering interreligious cooperation and understanding an active priority.***

## Recommendations

Possible policy and diplomatic interventions by international actors, particularly the United States and large multilateral donors, are quite limited. Domestic policy recommendations are as follows:

- The trial of the high-level political detainees has been the primary obstacle to the resumption of routine politics in the country. The government and leadership of the opposition, particularly the CUD, should be encouraged and supported to restart long-term dialogue on contentious political topics, including participation in Parliament and future elections, particularly for city government and local administration.
- Sustained international scrutiny of remaining trial proceedings, including those of civil-society activists Netsanet Demissie and Daniel Bekele and those detained in rural areas for election-related activities, will put the requisite pressure on the EPRDF to ensure a just and peaceful resolution.
- A new National Election Board must be appointed, and the new chairman must be highly regarded, not only by the EPRDF but among major opposition figures. Provisions to allow greater opposition party involvement in the composition of the board will go a long way toward building trust among political parties, particularly for the 2010 election cycle. The government must make woreda and kebele elections a priority. It also should be strongly encouraged and supported with all the necessary resources to conduct a thorough and nonpartisan national census, which must be completed in 2007 and the results disseminated as soon as possible. If the census is delayed—or worse, is incomplete or politicized—it will contribute to further divisions among ethno-regional communities in Ethiopia. In particular, ongoing military actions in Somali regional state should not prevent a thorough and accurate census from being undertaken there.
- The challenge of political compromise among elites, heightened as it has been by the post-election violence and the arrests and trial of the most prominent political opposition leaders, remains the test of future democracy. Influential donor governments, particularly the United States, should pressure the EPRDF to make as many visible and meaningful concessions as possible to opposition parties that have taken their seats in Parliament. Such concessions will show that participating in politics, even in the minority, can produce political gains for constituents. Training for all new members of Parliament and support of the work of Parliament in general could have a significant impact on future calculations of electoral gains by political parties and voters.
- Civil society and the private press have been significantly undermined since the 2005 elections, and yet they are of vital importance in protecting and deepening democracy. These sectors should be supported with resources and international pressure to ensure that the revised NGO law conforms to the norms and expectations of transparency and participation. Forums organized and led by civil society and media groups to facilitate national dialogue on some of the contentious issues of the 2005 election would have a tremendous impact in preparing the electorate for the next legislative elections in 2010, shifting national discourse from winner-takes-all politics to negotiated compromise.

Outside actors have opportunities to affect Ethiopia's regional policies:

- With respect to the Eritrea-Ethiopia border stalemate, the international community must continue to engage with both countries to prevent any future outbreak of conflict. Border demarcation should begin, contingent on continued peacekeeping along the Temporary Monitoring Zone (TMZ) between the two countries.

***The government must make woreda and kebele elections a priority.***

***Civil society and the private press should be supported with resources and international pressure.***

***Ethiopia has a real opportunity to be a force for peace in the region.***

- The practice of arming the enemy's dissident and rebel groups is unlikely to end any-time soon. However, the international community should exert whatever influence it has on both Ethiopia and Eritrea to engage in direct talks on these and other issues and to avoid inflammatory rhetoric that serves no constructive purpose.
- Ethiopia has a vital role to play in Somalia. Thus far that role has mainly been negative, in that the presence of Ethiopian troops reinforces the perceived illegitimacy of the TFG. However, Ethiopia could use its leverage with the TFG leadership to insist that it begin an inclusive and comprehensive peace and reconciliation process as soon as possible, including all relevant constituent groups. Ethiopia has a real opportunity to be a force for peace in the region, and it should be encouraged to use its powerful position to this end.
- International support should be strong for AMISOM and preparations should begin immediately for a transition to a UN force, as it is unlikely that the AU will be able to fully meet the objectives of the mission in the near to medium term.
- Ethiopian forces should withdraw from Somalia as soon as possible to avoid inciting further violence and divisions among Somalis. Domestic pressure from within Ethiopia is unlikely, despite a general lack of support for the conflict, and so international pressure should be unremitting on this point.

## Notes

1. Economist Intelligence Unit, "Country Report: Ethiopia," January 2007.
2. Although some diaspora members support the EPRDF, a sizable majority vehemently opposes the regime.
3. The core of the EPRDF is the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which fought against the military dictatorship of the Derg on behalf of the Tigray people. Loyalty to the TPLF remains strong in Tigray Regional State.
4. Under ethnic federalism the country has been divided into nine regional states primarily based on their inhabitants' ethnicity, as well as two special administrative regions, the multiethnic cities of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. The bicameral Parliament includes a legislative body, the House of Peoples' Representatives, and the House of Federation, which has the responsibility and power to interpret the Constitution and defend the constitutional right of the "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia" to self-determination up to secession. See Kidane Mengisteab, "New Approaches to State-building in Africa: The Case of Ethiopia's Ethnic-based Federalism," *African Studies Review*, 40, no. 3 (1997): 111–33.
5. The 1992 election was for regional assemblies, the 1994 election was for a constituent assembly, and the 1995 election was for national and regional assemblies. In particular, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) withdrew in 1992 and remains a banned party, operating in exile. See Sandra Fullerton Joireman, "Opposition Politics and Ethnicity in Ethiopia: We Will All Go Down Together," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 35, no. 3 (1997): 387–407.
6. Siegfried Pausewang, Kjetil Tronvoll, Lovise Aalen, eds., *Ethiopia since the Derg: A Decade of Democratic Pretension and Performance* (London: Zed Books, 2002).
7. Dessalegn Rahmato and Meheret Ayenew, *Democratic Assistance to Post-Conflict Ethiopia: Impact and Limitations*, FSS Monograph Series 3 (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2004).
8. All members of the opposition have charged NEBE with bias. It should be noted that NEBE's chair throughout the 2005 election period was also the president of the Supreme Court. He and the other board members have now stepped down.
9. The 2005 elections were also for regional state parliaments (under the federal system). The opposition also made significant progress in regional state parliaments. See assessments of the elections by Jon Abbink, "Discomfiture of Democracy? The 2005 Election Crisis in Ethiopia and its Aftermath," *African Affairs*, 105, no. 419 (2006): 173–99; African Union, "Report of the African Union Observer Team on the Ethiopian National Election Complaints Investigation Panels, June 29–July 20, 2005"; Carter Center, "Final Statement on the Carter Center Observation of the Ethiopia 2005 National Elections, September 2005"; European Commission, "Election Observation Mission—Ethiopia 2005. Preliminary Statement on the Election Appeals Process, the Rerun of Elections and the Somali Region Elections," August 25, 2005; European Commission, "Ethiopia Legislative Elections 2005, EU Election Observation Mission Final Report," September 2005; John Harbeson, "Ethiopia's Extended Transition," *Journal of Democracy*, 16, no. 4 (October 2005): 144–58;

- Terrence Lyons, "Ethiopia in 2005: The Beginning of a Transition?" *CSIS Africa Notes*, 25 (January 2006), [http://www.csis.org/component/option,com\\_csis\\_pubs/task,view/id,2670/](http://www.csis.org/component/option,com_csis_pubs/task,view/id,2670/); Lahra Smith, "Implications of the 2005 Elections for Ethiopian Citizenship and State Legitimacy," *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 3, no. 1 (2007), forthcoming.
10. See reports of Human Rights Watch, "Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region" (May 2005) and "Ethiopia: Hidden Crackdown in Rural Areas—Independent Inquiry Should Investigate Rural Violence" (January 13, 2006), <http://hrw.org/doc?t=africa&c=ethiop>.
  11. The NEBE, together with representatives of the main political parties, instituted an ad hoc investigation in summer 2005 to consider charges of fraud and abuse. However, most of these investigation panels found in favor of the ruling party and rarely in favor of the opposition party. Despite the potential of this process to address vote fraud, these panels mainly failed (see Carter Center and EU reports for a discussion of them).
  12. See Amnesty International, "Ethiopia: Prisoners of Conscience on Trial for Treason: Opposition Party Leaders, Human Rights Defenders and Journalists," AFR 25/013/2006 (May 2006); Cedric Barnes, "Ethiopia: A Sociopolitical Assessment," Writenet report for UNHCR (May 2006), <http://www.unhcr.org/home/RSDCOI/44f29d704.pdf>.
  13. John Pendergast and Colin Thomas-Jensen, "Blowing the Horn," *Foreign Affairs* (March-April 2007): 59–74.
  14. Economist Intelligence Unit, "Country Report: Ethiopia" (January 2007): 17.
  15. Pausewang, et al., 239.

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