



## ETHIOPIA

# A Comprehensive Report on Ethiopia's 2026 General Election



*Electoral Period: 1995 to 2026*

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## Part I. The Core Context: Ethiopia's Electoral Architecture

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Having departed from a single party system under the Derg administration, the EPRDF seized power forming a coalition based on ethnic arrangements. The country's definitive move away from a single-party system toward a constitutional multiparty framework has laid an enduring foundation for long-term political pluralism.

However, Ethiopia's post-1991 electoral history is defined by a fundamental and unresolved tension: between institutions designed to manage political competition and an elite political culture that treats power as a zero-sum prize to be seized, not shared.

The formal adoption of a multiparty system under the 1995 Constitution inaugurated seven consecutive national elections spanning 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2021, and 2026. Yet the theoretical assumption that repetitive elections lead to gradual democratization has not held in the Ethiopian case. Each election from 2005 onward reveals a pattern of narrowing political space, institutional manipulation, and the persistent failure to build the shared rules that make electoral competition meaningful.

### 1.1 The Structural Divide

The most analytically significant feature of Ethiopian electoral politics is the persistence of a structural divide that exists simultaneously within the government and within the opposition. This divide separates those who believe that electoral and parliamentary competition is the legitimate and effective path to political power from those who regard confrontational street politics, including protests, strikes, boycotts, and in extreme cases armed resistance, as the only realistic tool. This is not simply a tactical disagreement. It reflects fundamentally different theories of how political power works in the Ethiopian context.

- **Government Confrontational Wing:** Segments within the EPRDF, particularly TPLF-aligned hardliners, fundamentally resented the opposition for daring to challenge their rule. Having waged a 17-year armed struggle against the Derg administration, they viewed power as earned through sacrifice, not transferred through paper ballots. This psychology of sacrificial entitlement permeated the ruling coalition's response to competitive elections.
- **Opposition Confrontational Wing:** Symmetric dynamics existed in the opposition, where influential leaders argued that the EPRDF would never accept a genuine loss and that street politics such as boycotts, strikes, and protests were more effective tools than electoral competition. This wing gained decisive influence after the 2005 post-election crackdown.
- **Electoral Wings on Both Sides:** Reform-minded factions within the EPRDF and participation-oriented opposition leaders consistently sought to use the electoral and parliamentary framework to advance political goals. They were repeatedly outmaneuvered by their confrontational counterparts.
- **Structural Enablers of the Divide:** Weak institutions with no capacity to absorb political shocks; a neo patrimonial political economy where access to resources depended on ruling-party loyalty; ethnic federalism that fragmented potential opposition coalitions; and the complete absence of any prior tradition of peaceful power transfer in Ethiopia's modern political history.

### 1.2 The EPRDF's Origins and Political Culture

The EPRDF came to power in May 1991 after defeating the Derg administration following a 17-year guerrilla campaign. This origin story is essential to understanding Ethiopian electoral politics. A movement that won power through arms was structurally ill-suited to accepting the logic that power could be

transferred through votes. The TPLF was the dominant force within the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) coalition, alongside the ANDM (Amhara National Democratic Movement), OPDO (Oromo People's Democratic Organization), and SEPDM (Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement). Each regional party served as a transmission belt for TPLF dominance in its respective ethnic region.

The 1995 Constitution established ethnic federalism, dividing Ethiopia into ethnically defined regional states and institutionalizing ethnicity as the primary axis of political organization. While useful for EPRDF divide-and-rule purposes, this arrangement was deeply fragmenting for opposition coalition-building.

The 1995 Ethiopian general election was held on 7 and 18 May 1995 (with voting in some regions like Afar, Somali, and Harari held later). It was the first national election under the new Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution, which had been adopted in December 1994.

This election marked the formal end of the transitional period that began after the overthrow of the military Derg regime led by Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991. The ruling EPRDF led by Meles Zenawi had controlled the Transitional Government of Ethiopia. Many major opposition parties (including the Oromo Liberation Front) boycotted the election, citing concerns over fairness, intimidation, and the rules of the transition.

In 2000, opposition parties competed in roughly half of the districts, but the EPRDF claimed most of the seats. No competitive threat materialized in either cycle.

## Part II. The 2005 Election: Ethiopia's Democratic Moment and Its Destruction

The May 2005 parliamentary election stands as the high-water mark of competitive politics in Ethiopia's post-1991 history and simultaneously as its most catastrophic democratic failure.

For the first time, the majority of Ethiopian voters had a real choice. Opposition parties fielded candidates in nearly every constituency. Live televised policy debates aired on state media; massive peaceful rallies drew hundreds of thousands. Polling stations in Addis Ababa stayed open 24 hours to accommodate lines that would not end. The Ethiopian people demonstrated an overwhelming appetite for political participation. What followed gradually eroded those expectations.

547	372	174	Hundreds of
Total Parliamentary Seats	EPRDF Claimed (Disputed)	Opposition Seats Won	Civilians Killed Post-Election

### 2.1 What Made 2005 Different

- **Opposition coalition formation:** The United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), established in 2003 from 15 parties, offered a platform supporting ethnic federalism. The Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), formed in November 2004, campaigned for constitutional amendments, land privatization, and revision of ethnically based federal boundaries. Together they presented the first credible multi-party challenge in Ethiopia's post-1991 history.
- **Televised debates:** The EPRDF agreed to live debates on state media, an unprecedented concession that changed the information environment and demonstrated that the opposition could compete on substance.
- **International observer presence:** EU, US (NDI/IRI), and African Union observers deployed

across the country, creating expectations of transparency that ultimately collided with the post-election crackdown.

- **Unprecedented organizational coherence:** Having failed at coalition-building at least four times since 1993, the opposition achieved a level of coordination not seen before. The AEUP (Association of European Press) alone reportedly claimed 900,000 members.

## 2.2 The Results and Their Disputed Aftermath

NEBE released its final seat allocation on September 5. What had unfolded in the weeks between voting day and that announcement transformed Ethiopian politics permanently.

Metric	Official Result (NEBE, Sept. 5)	Context
EPRDF + allies seats	372 of 547	Disputed by opposition and some observers
CUD seats	109	67% won in Amhara/Addis Ababa
United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) seats	52	79% concentrated in Oromia
Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) seats	11	Primarily West Wollega, Oromia
Total opposition seats	174 (vs. 30 outgoing)	Nearly 6x increase over previous parliament
Complaint districts	299 of 523 (57%)	Opposition and observer-documented irregularities
Seats transferred via reruns	18	NEBE awarded these to EPRDF after disputed reruns
Post-election deaths (inquiry)	Reportedly 193 protesters	Plus 6 police; 30,000–40,000 detained

*Note: Official inquiry figure was 193 civilian deaths. Independent accounts estimated up to 200. Over 30,000 people were detained following the post-election protests, most released in 2006. All top opposition leaders were arrested, including Addis Ababa mayor-elect Berhanu Nega.*

## 2.3 The Chronology of Crisis

The collapse of the 2005 election did not happen all at once. It unfolded through a sequence of decisions by actors on both sides who, at each juncture, chose confrontation over compromise.

- **Election night, May 15:** PM Meles Zenawi declared a 30-day ban on all rallies and took personal command of Addis Ababa police and militia before any official results were announced. A clear signal that the EPRDF had no intention of accepting an adverse outcome.

- **May 16:** The EPRDF claimed victory while NEBE had not yet released official results. The opposition countered with its own victory claims. Both sides circulated unverified partial results.
- **June 7 – November 2005:** Two waves of protest erupted. Government security forces opened fire on demonstrators. The June protests killed at least 36; the November protests killed over 150. A public inquiry confirmed 193 total deaths.
- **October 2006:** Independent inquiry report confirmed the 193 figure but did not find excessive force a conclusion the government used to claim legal justification. Parliament endorsed the report in March 2007.
- **All opposition leaders arrested:** Including Berhanu Nega, Hailu Shawel, and other CUD leadership. They were charged with treason and genocide. Birtukan Mideksa was among those imprisoned, later released, then re-imprisoned in 2005.

## 2.4 The Structural Pathologies Behind the Crisis

The 2005 crisis was not primarily a technical failure, it was a civilizational allure of political culture. Neither the EPRDF nor the opposition had internalized the norms that make competitive elections function: the loser concedes, the winner governs within constraints, and institutions adjudicate disputes. Ethiopia had no prior tradition of peaceful electoral power transfer. The concept of legal democratic opposition was absent from previous regimes and the dominant political culture since elections had always been formalities under previous governments.

- **EPRDF's psychology of sacrifice:** Some within the EPRDF resent the opposition for daring to challenge their rule, given the 'sacrifices' EPRDF militants made in order to overthrow the Derg administration. Some opposition leaders have also suggested that boycotting the next parliament and engaging in protest activities such as strikes may be pursued rather than strategies focusing on electoral and parliamentary competition.
- **Opposition's absence of contingency frameworks:** The opposition coalitions (especially CUD) lacked institutional frameworks for responding to a disputed but partial victory because they had never come close to winning before this inexperience caused an internal split between hardliners demanding full vindication through boycott and moderates urging parliamentary participation, which paralyzed their response and allowed the EPRDF government to define the crisis narrative.
- **Shallow institutions, nowhere to appeal:** NEBE's complaints process was criticized by both the opposition and international observers as non-independent. The judiciary was under government control. There was no credible neutral arbiter. The IFES report noted that NEBE had 'no institutional capacity to handle political crises', it was designed to administer elections, not absorb a constitutional rupture.
- **Meles Zenawi's pre-emptive move:** The immediate ban on rallies and seizure of police command on election night is the single most revealing data point. It demonstrates that the EPRDF's confrontational wing, ultimately led by Meles himself, made the decision to refuse an adverse outcome before any results were confirmed. The election was not stolen in the counting; it was negated at the institutional level.

## Part III. Authoritarian Consolidation: The 2010 Election

The 2010 election was not a contest. It was the formalized announcement of what the EPRDF had decided in November 2005: that genuine electoral competition would not be permitted again.

The EU observer mission found the election fell short of international standards. The United States noted that an environment conducive to free and fair elections was not in place even before Election Day. The EPRDF and allied parties claimed 545 of 547 seats. The opposition retained two.

<b>547</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
Total Seats	EPRDF and Allies	Opposition Seats	International Standards Met

### 3.1 The Mechanisms of Electoral Closure

Between 2005 and 2010, the EPRDF executed a systematic campaign to close every avenue through which the 2005 challenge had been mounted. Each mechanism targeted a specific vulnerability the opposition had exploited.

Mechanism	What It Did	Impact on the Opposition
Post-2005 crackdown	All major CUD leaders were jailed, tried, and many convicted of treason, effectively decapitating the organized opposition.	Leadership decimated. Organizational capacity destroyed. No credible coalition could form before 2010.
Charities and Societies Proclamation (2009)	Restricted international funding for civil society to 10 percent of the budget for human rights activities.	International NGOs that had supported opposition monitoring and voter education were effectively defunded.
Anti-terrorism law (2009)	The broad definition of terrorism enabled prosecution of journalists and opposition leaders as terrorists without requiring evidence of violence.	Chilling effect on all political expression outside the EPRDF. Several journalists fled the country.
Constituency-level intimidation	EU observers documented systematic harassment of opposition supporters. Ruling-party structures controlled access to seeds, fertilizer, and credit in rural areas.	Opposition candidates could not campaign freely in most of rural Ethiopia. Potential supporters faced material retaliation.
NEBE consolidation	NEBE technically managed the process with competence but did not address independence concerns. Opposition complaints were dismissed without neutral adjudication.	The complaints mechanism existed but functioned as a procedural formality with predetermined outcomes.
State-media monopoly	No opposition to state media. The televised debates of 2005 were not repeated. Rural voters received only EPRDF messaging.	Information asymmetry was total in rural constituencies, which represent the vast majority of seats.

## Part IV. The 100 Percent Election: 2015 and the Completion of Hegemony

The May 2015 election produced a result with no precedent in the history of competitive electoral systems. The EPRDF and its affiliated parties won all 547 seats. Ethiopia became, in the formal categorization of political scientists, a de facto one-party state.

<b>547</b> Total Seats	<b>547</b> EPRDF and Allies	<b>94.9%</b> Official EPRDF Vote Share	<b>0</b> Opposition Seats
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### 4.1 Significance Beyond the Numbers

- **Signal to cadres, not voters:** The 100% result was not primarily a message to the Ethiopian public or international community. It was a message to EPRDF party members and affiliated elites: defection is not tolerated, and the party's capacity for total control is absolute. It represented a demand for complete loyalty from every regional affiliate and local official.
- **Death of Meles and power consolidation:** Meles Zenawi died in August 2012. His successors Hailemariam Desalegn as PM, with TPLF figures retaining effective control, faced both a legitimacy vacuum and internal EPRDF tensions. The 2015 election functioned as a demonstration of institutional continuity and hardened control during a period of potential vulnerability.
- **Greater reliance on party stalwarts:** High-level government positions were increasingly filled by trusted party loyalists rather than technocrats or independent figures. Institutional diversity shrank.
- **Opposition strategy collapse:** Some parties boycotted; those that participated won nothing. The lesson drawn by opposition elites, reinforcing the confrontational wing's argument, was that electoral competition was a regime legitimization exercise, not a genuine path to power.

## Part V. NEBE: Institutional Evolution Across Three Decades

The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia was established under Article 102 of the 1995 Constitution as an independent body. For its first three decades, the gap between that constitutional mandate and operational reality could not have been wider. Through five elections under EPRDF governance, NEBE operated as a technically competent administrative body whose independence was systematically compromised. The 2018 to 2019 reform period represented the most significant structural change in NEBE's history. What it accomplished and where it fell short reveals the deeper challenges of institutional democratization in a post-authoritarian context.

Period	Leadership	Institutional Status	Key Developments and Limitations
1995 to 2005	Various EPRDF-era chairs	EPRDF-controlled	Administered largely uncontested or boycotted elections. No credibility challenges arose because no genuine competition existed to test institutional independence.
2005	EPRDF-era leadership	EPRDF-controlled	Complaints process for 299 of 523 districts criticized by opposition and EU observers. Awarded 18 disputed seats to EPRDF via reruns. IFES concluded NEBE had no institutional capacity to handle political crises.

Period	Leadership	Institutional Status	Key Developments and Limitations
2010	EPRDF-era leadership	EPRDF-controlled; technically efficient	The EU found NEBE technically competent but less commendable on independence. Separation of party and state was blurred at the local level. Opposition concerns about neutrality were not addressed.
2015	EPRDF-era (Samia Gutu)	EPRDF-controlled	No meaningful structural reform. NEBE functioned as a procedural rubber stamp for 100 percent EPRDF outcome. Opposition registration complaints were ignored.
November 2018	Birtukan Mideksa appointed	Reform era begins	Former opposition leader and judge. Personally imprisoned by the EPRDF government, she was now asked to serve. HRW described her appointment as a step in the right direction. Her presence itself symbolized the reform commitment.
April 2019	Birtukan Mideksa	Formally restructured	Proclamation No. 1133/2019 enacted. Board reduced from 9 to 5 full-time members serving 6-year terms. Transparent nomination process. Budget autonomy. Board office established by the Board itself, not parliament.
2021	Birtukan Mideksa	Reformed but structurally stressed	Registration delays. Poor cooperation from some state governments. 111 constituencies postponed or excluded. COVID-19 complications. Credibility challenged by opposition boycotts and northern war exclusions.
August 2023 onward	Melatework Hailu	Post-reform continuity	Appointed after Birtukan resigned in June 2023. Ongoing challenges in managing elections in a post-conflict environment with persistent insurgencies.

### 5.1 The 2019 Proclamation: What It Changed and What It Left Unresolved

Proclamation No. 1133/2019 represented the most meaningful change to NEBE's architecture since its establishment. The key structural reforms were as follows.

- **Board size and terms:** Reduced from 9 to 5 members, all serving full-time for 6-year terms, insulating them from short-term political pressure.
- **Nomination process:** A transparent and participatory selection process replaced parliamentary appointment controlled by the majority party.
- **Institutional autonomy:** The Board's office is now established by the Board itself, not by parliament. The Chief Executive is accountable to the Chair, not to the legislature.
- **Budget independence:** NEBE prepares and submits its own budget directly to the House of People's Representatives, removing one key lever of executive control.
- **Staff control:** Employment and deployment of staff is under NEBE authority, not ministry direction.
- **Companion legislation:** Proclamation No. 1162/2019 consolidated electoral law, party registration, and election code of conduct into a single framework, improving legal coherence.

## The 2025 Amendment : Expanding the Digital and Inclusive Frontier

While the 2019 framework built the independent *house*, the **Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Electoral Code of Conduct (Amendment) Proclamation No. 1394** was ratified to upgrade its internal machinery. Drawing heavily from inter-party dialogues and logistical friction points during the 6th General Election, the 2025 law introduced critical adjustments:

- **Introduction of Digital Infrastructure:** For the first time, the law establishes a legal basis for **digital voter registration** and the use of technology in polling stations. This is designed to streamline data governance, mitigate duplicate registrations, and make the complex process more cost-effective.
- **Targeted Inclusivity Mandates:** The amendment specifically alters 26 articles to broaden the political space. It enforces strict mechanisms to increase the representation and safety of women, youth, and persons with disabilities (PWDs) not just as voters, but actively as registered candidates.
- **Candidature and Complaint Resolution:** It directly targets previous bottlenecks by loosening restrictions and addressing historical grievances surrounding the candidature registration process, providing a more transparent, legally defined track for political parties to lodge disputes and appeals.
- **Overhauled Party Financing:** The 2025 text reforms how political parties are funded, aiming for cleaner tracking mechanisms to ensure a more level playing field during active campaigns.

## Part VI. Post-2018: Abiy Ahmed's Rise and Ethiopia's Political Shifts

Abiy Ahmed's rise to power in April 2018 was not an electoral event. It was the product of popular uprisings that began in 2015 to 2016, primarily in Oromia and Amhara regions, against the EPRDF's governance.

The protests, the largest since 2005, forced the EPRDF into an internal succession crisis. EPRDF hardliners lost the argument, while the reformist faction within OPDO prevailed. Abiy Ahmed, an OPDO member with a background distinct from the TPLF's Tigrayan core, was selected as party chairman and prime minister. His selection came from within the EPRDF system but represented a genuine rupture with TPLF dominance within that system.

### 6.1 The Weight of Inherited Structures

Despite Abiy's leadership changes, the EPRDF's administrative machinery, regional party cadres, federal ministry staff, security services, and military officer corps remained largely in place. These were EPRDF-trained officials whose institutional loyalties, informal networks, and career interests were embedded in the old system. Reform announcements did not translate into behavioral change at the implementation level.

Structural Constraint		Nature of the Challenge	Political Consequence
Deep persistence	state	TPLF-staffed officials dominated federal security institutions, military command, and regional administrations. Abiy could announce reform; he could not instantly change who enforced it.	Policies of liberalization were applied inconsistently, with TPLF-aligned officials either resisting or selectively implementing reforms in ways that protected their networks.
TPLF leverage	retained	The TPLF retained near-total control of the Tigray Regional State, a substantial portion of the national military's senior officer corps, and significant influence in federal security institutions.	The confrontation that would eventually erupt in November 2020 was already being structured by this asymmetric institutional retention of power.
Fragile architecture	coalition	Ethiopia's government was a coalition of multiple factions, including TPLF bureaucrats, ANDM, OPDO, and SEPDM, requiring careful balance and continuous power-sharing management.	Every reform Abiy attempted had to navigate factional veto points, slowing implementation and creating opportunities for spoilers to undermine change.
Prosperity centralization	Party	The dissolution of the EPRDF in November 2019 and creation of the Prosperity Party as a single centralized national party was presented as overcoming ethnic fragmentation.	TPLF refused to join the Prosperity Party, treating the move as a unilateral dissolution of the ethnic federal compact they had constructed and were committed to defending.

## 6.2 Rising Ethnic Nationalism and the Path to War

Within months of Abiy's reform opening, interethnic violence surged across multiple regions. The loosening of authoritarian control, without functioning democratic institutions to channel grievances, created a political vacuum filled by ethnic nationalist mobilization.

- **The OLA factor:** The Oromo Liberation Army, the armed wing of the Oromo Liberation Front that rejected the 2018 peace agreement, has conducted sustained operations in western and central Oromia since 2018, representing the most persistent armed challenge to the government.
- **Confronting embedded power structures:** The TPLF's 27 years in power had created deep institutional networks and cadres embedded in every level of regional administration, security sector, judiciary, and business community across Ethiopia. When Abiy moved against the TPLF power, he encountered these networks at every turn.
- **The Tigray War:** On November 4, 2020, following the TPLF's attack on federal military installations in Tigray, the federal government launched a military campaign. After more than two years of devastating conflict, the Pretoria Agreement of November 2022 ended major hostilities but left TPLF internal divisions unresolved and disputed territories contested.

### 6.3 TPLF Internal Divisions

Faction	Key Leader	Strategic Position	Power Base and Current Status
Hardline	Debretsion Gebremichael (TPLF Chairman)	Accused previous leadership of failing Tigray. Demanded return of disputed territories including Wolkait and Raya. Refused compromise with the federal government.	Controls party apparatus, popular mobilization networks, and the Tigray Defense Forces. Represents the continuationist vision of TPLF power.
Conciliatory	Getachew Reda (Deputy Chair)	More willing to engage with the federal government. Pragmatically oriented toward reconstruction and reintegration.	Former head of the Tigray Interim Regional Administration. Currently serves as a federal government advisor and has launched the Simret political movement, positioning himself as an alternative political force within Tigrayan politics.

## Part VII. The 2021 Election: Between Civil War and the Ballot Box

The June 21, 2021 general election was conducted under conditions of complexity. It was arguably the most challenging electoral environment Ethiopia had faced since 1995, and the first election organized by a genuinely reformed NEBE under Birtukan Mideksa's leadership.

46	436	111	410
Parties Contesting	Constituencies That Voted	Postponed Constituencies	Prosperity Party Seats Won

### 7.1 The TPLF's Legitimacy Assault

*The confrontation between the federal government and the TPLF activated political and security networks cultivated during the EPRDF era. Many within the TPLF viewed the post-2018 reforms not as a routine transfer of political authority but as an existential challenge to the political order they had built.*

The TPLF's September 2020 regional election, held in direct defiance of the federal government's COVID-19 postponement, was not an administrative disagreement. It was a deliberate constitutional challenge designed to undermine the federal government by questioning its legislative mandate. The TPLF's leadership had made explicit that it did not regard the Prosperity Party government as the legitimate successor of the EPRDF. Their position was that the ethnic federal order they had constructed required TPLF participation to remain constitutionally valid.

## 7.2 The Instability Cascade: Conflict Zones in the 2021 Election

The 2021 election was not merely confronted by the Northern conflict. It was engulfed in all-directions instability that the TPLF’s open defiance of federal authority and subsequent military actions helped trigger and activate across the country. Having maintained a dominant grip on Ethiopia’s security apparatus, political institutions, and economic networks for nearly three decades, the TPLF’s withdrawal from the center and direct challenge to the federal government unleashed latent grievances and created opportunities for various actors. Additionally, the TPLF activated various sensitive fault lines across parts of the country.

This led to concerted efforts by multiple groups to undermine the federal government’s authority some through renewed or intensified insurgency, others through opportunistic ethnic mobilization and militia activity producing cascading violence and administrative breakdown in several regions simultaneously.

### 2021 Election — Conflict Zones

**Tigray** — Full-scale federal-TPLF war; northern command collapsed; humanitarian blockade; election entirely cancelled in region

**Afar** — Tigray front spillover into Afar; TPLF advance reaches Afar towns including Abala; massive displacement

**Amhara** — Amhara regional forces allied with federal government; some conflict disruption in Wolkait and contested western zones

**Oromia( West )** OLF-OLA insurgency in Wollega zones; electoral disruption in multiple woredas; voter access severely restricted

**Metekel (Benishangul-Gumuz)** — Ethnic militia violence; mass civilian killings; administrative collapse

**Guji-Gedeo (SNNPR/Oromia)** — Ethnic displacement crisis; over 1 million displaced at peak; election Disrupted

**Addis Ababa periphery** — OLF-related security incidents; urban security pressure on capital

**Somali Region — border** — Renewed Oromo-Somali intercommunal violence along border woredas; security pressure on election administration

**Benishangul-Gumuz** — Sporadic ethnic militia activity; lower intensity than 2021 but persistent instability

## 2026 Election — Conflict Zones

**Tigray** — Formal war over (Pretoria, Nov 2022); Eritrean troops violating Ethiopian territory at the invitation of the TPLF; TPLF deregistered; forced conscription reported; deep political uncertainty.

**Amhara (New Major Front)** — Fano insurgency since April 2023; large swathes of rural Amhara outside federal control; ENDF multiple defeats; drone and air strikes confirmed; Fano National Movement

rejects election entirely, calls participants "enemies of Amhara people"

**Oromia — West/Central/South** — OLA crosses 8-year mark; East & West Wollega, Kellem Wollega, Horo Guduru severely restricted; civilian killings and ransom kidnappings documented; ENDF operations

ongoing.

**Al-Fashaga border (Amhara/Sudan)** — Sudan war spillover risks; border permeability increased;

Ethiopian-Sudanese Armed Forces tensions over territory as Sudanese forces seized the border region displacing Ethiopian farmers.

**NB:** *The confrontation between the federal government and the TPLF activated political and security networks that had been cultivated during the EPRDF era. It reflected the party's conviction that it was the principal architect and indispensable guarantor of Ethiopia's ethnic federal system. Many within the TPLF viewed the post-2018 reforms not as a routine transfer of political authority but as an existential challenge to the political order they had built. This perception, coupled with expectations that the movement could eventually recover lost influence and reassert itself at the national level, contributed to a strategy of political resistance, strategic destabilization and institutional contestation.*

### 7.3 Why 2021 Was Not a Repeat of 2015 and Why It Still Fell Short

- **Structural improvements:** The NEBE reforms, new electoral laws, and appointment of Birtukan Mideksa created genuinely better institutional conditions than existed in 2015. Multiple parties participated; 46 registered parties contested seats. Some international observers credited NEBE for 'reasonable performance in difficult circumstances.'
- **Competing Legitimacy Claims:** Rather than participating in the national electoral process, the TPLF sought to challenge the federal government's mandate by conducting its own regional election in September 2020 and rejecting the constitutional authority of federal institutions.
- **Election Amid Active Conflict:** Unlike 2015, which was conducted under relative national stability, the 2021 election occurred during an active civil war in Tigray and amid multiple insurgencies and communal conflicts. The challenge in 2021 was not the absence of competition but the state's ability to conduct an election while confronting simultaneous security crises.
- **Competitive Electoral Environment:** Unlike 2015, when the ruling EPRDF and its affiliates won every parliamentary seat, the 2021 election featured a more pluralistic contest involving various registered political parties including EZEMA and National Movement of Amhara (NAMA).

## 7.4 The Confrontation versus Electoral Politics Divide

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The confrontation versus electoral politics divide is not a strategic choice that elites can rationally resolve through better incentives alone. It is embedded in Ethiopia's political culture, its institutional history, and the accumulated trauma of every electoral cycle since 2005. The divide does not map neatly onto ethnicity, ideology, or generation. It cuts across all of them.

### The Amhara Faction Split and Elite Fragmentation

One of the most significant political dynamics surrounding the 2021 election was the emergence of a divide within the Amhara political elite. Although most Amhara actors supported the war effort against the TPLF, they differed on what should follow. A pragmatic faction aligned itself with the federal government and the Prosperity Party, viewing cooperation with Addis Ababa as the best means of securing Amhara interests, including control over contested territories of Wolkait, Humera and other territories. A more nationalist faction, represented by elements within NAMA, Fano networks, and other Amhara activists, viewed the war as an opportunity to fundamentally reshape Ethiopia's political order and advance broader Amhara demands. While united against the TPLF, the two camps held increasingly different visions of their relationship with the federal government.

A third faction gradually concluded that the principal challenge was no longer the TPLF but the Prosperity Party government. This reassessment created space for tactical understandings and political cooperation with TPLF despite years of conflict and mutual distrust, contributing to the emergence of the so-called "Tsimdo Alliance" consisting foreign actors. The alliance is an informal alignment of anti-Prosperity Party forces that has been associated with cooperation among certain Amhara opposition elements, TPLF-linked actors, Eritrea, and Sudan's SAF.

## Part VIII. The 7th Election (2026)

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Ethiopia's seventh general election, held on June 1, 2026, arrived at a moment of paradox. The country is on the path to consolidate institutionalization than it was in 2021, and yet the geographic, political, and legitimacy dimensions of the election remain critically important.

### What Has Changed Since 2021

- The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) has gained experience from 2021 and introduced improvements like a security classification system for constituencies based on feasibility. It has also rolled out the digital “Mirichaye” voter and candidate registration platform.
- Record voter registration: NEBE reports over 50.5 million registered voters described as a historic high. The registration process ran for one month with both digital and manual systems, a significant logistical improvement over previous cycles. Over 52,000 polling stations have been established nationwide, with special arrangements for internally displaced persons, members of the defense forces, and students.
- A 2025 revision to electoral and political parties law lowered the parliamentary threshold from 15% to 10% of votes in a constituency, aiming to boost representation. Opposition coalitions have formed to improve national reach.
- The African Union (AU) and IGAD are the main (including civil societies) international election

observation missions for the June 1, 2026 vote.

- Ethiopia's governing institutions are more consolidated than they were in 2021. The federal government, electoral institutions, security structures, and administrative apparatus have accumulated experience operating through war, political crises, and post-conflict reconstruction.

### 8.1 Conflict Zones and Electoral Access in 2026

Primary Security Actor			
Region		Electoral Access	Key Risk for 2026
Tigray	TPLF (deregistered as a national party) + lingering tensions with federal government and Eritrean forces inside Ethiopian territory(Tsimdo Alliance)	Unfavorable conditions due to insecurity in all 38 constituencies	TPLF alignment with Eritrea and other anti-Ethiopian actors; recent TPLF moves to unilaterally restore pre-war leadership; forced conscription; Eritrean troop presence raises sovereignty and security concerns.
Amhara	Fano (multiple formations)	NEBE reported 8 constituencies out of electoral process	Insecurity risks creating direct voter suppression pressure.
Oromia (West)	OLA at 8-year mark of operations	Partial / Fragmented access.	Supply chain vulnerability and fluid local security dynamics; lingering friction regarding local resources and localized ethnic displacement corridors.
Oromia (Central/South)	OLA and federal forces in contested territory	Partial access with contested logistics	Ballot distribution logistics breakdown in contested woredas threatened vote completeness.
Benishangul-Gumuz	Ethnic militias at reduced intensity	Mostly accessible	instability with potential for rapid escalation.

Primary Security Actor			
Region	Primary Security Actor	Electoral Access	Key Risk for 2026
Somali Region	Federal forces with ONLF tensions	Mostly accessible	Renewed Oromo-Somali intercommunal violence along border woredas threatened electoral administration.

Afar	Post-Tigray stabilization forces	Largely accessible	Residual displacement from TPLF-era conflict affects voter registration completeness.
SNNPR and South	Federal administration	Largely accessible	Administrative fragmentation caused by creation of new regional states complicated electoral logistics.
Addis Ababa	Federal security (tightly managed)	Full access	Opposition mobilization

### The June 1 Election

Around 40 million Ethiopians cast ballots in the June 1, 2026 general election, according to National Election Board Chairperson Melatwork Hailu, who announced the figure by 8 p.m. local time. Out of over 54 million registered voters, this represents a voter turnout of approximately 74%. The turnout was achieved despite voting being excluded in Tigray's 38 constituencies and disrupted at 143 polling stations in Amhara and Oromia due to security concerns. This makes it one of the highest voter participation numbers in Ethiopia's electoral history despite the country's ongoing tensions and political challenges.

The African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have actively observed the key factors shaping the electoral process, focusing their assessment on public participation, administrative performance, and security-related challenges.

### Election Results

In Ethiopia's 7th general election held on 1 June 2026, the ruling Prosperity Party (PP), led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, secured a strong parliamentary majority. According to the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), which announced the verified results around 21 June 2026, the Prosperity Party won 438 seats out of the approximately 486 constituencies for which results were declared.

This represents roughly 90% of the announced seats and easily surpasses the 274 seats needed for a majority in the 547-member House of Peoples' Representatives. Not all 547 seats were contested, as voting did not take place in the Tigray region and certain parts of Amhara and Oromia due to security concerns.

Among the opposition parties, reports indicate that the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA) won 13 seats, while the National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) secured 6 seats and Medrek won 3 seats. Several smaller parties and independents shared the remaining announced seats, with around 17 parties in total winning at least one seat.

These results give the Prosperity Party a clear mandate to continue governing, with Abiy Ahmed expected to be re-elected as Prime Minister when the new parliament convenes. Turnout was reported as very high.

## Part IX. Final Assessment and Policy Recommendations

### What Should the Arrangements Be After the Election?

With the electoral process concluded and a renewed mandate secured, the next phase should prioritize the strengthening of state institutions capable of navigating domestic fragmentation in a complex regional environment, while steadily transitioning institutional structures toward a democratic governance. The upcoming cabinet formation offers a critical opportunity to prioritize absolute professionalism, strategic cross-agency coordination, and institutional continuity across the core pillars of state authority. Ultimately,

sustainable stability will depend less on transient political arrangements and far more on the resilience of permanent institutions equipped to proactively anticipate challenges, manage systemic risks, and safeguard long-term national interests.

To establish resilient political institutions, the incoming government must carry out a clear-eyed, balanced review of each sector.

Particularly, in framing the core pillars of state institutions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Security Sector, the National Defense Force, and the Strategic Communication Apparatus, it is essential to adopt a clear-eyed approach that openly recognizes both notable achievements and structural shortcomings through an honest assessment grounded in operational reality rather than political assumption. Through such an approach, the state can cultivate a more structured, coherent, and unified institutional architecture.

Consequently, the post-election transition must proceed with measured deliberation to ensure that both policy formulation and personnel selection are completely insulated from transient political cycles. Strategic continuity and absolute professionalism are paramount within these core domains; therefore, should any leadership shifts or administrative reshuffles occur, appointments must be guided strictly by meritocratic expertise rather than political expediency, while policy frameworks must prioritize institutional memory over ad-hoc responses. By maintaining a strict, technocratic division of powers and embedding rigorous internal checks and balances, the administration can fortify these foundational pillars, achieving a careful alignment of professional personnel and long-term policy that guarantees the state can successfully navigate external regional pressures while steadily advancing toward a mature, rule-of-law-based democratic governance structure.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The period following the June 2026 general elections presents a decisive historical window for Ethiopia. The outcome of the election, marked by the formation of a newly mandated government via a parliamentary majority in the House of Peoples' Representatives, offers an opportunity to shift from short-term crisis management to long-term state engineering.

Since the political transition of 2018, the administration has navigated a non-linear trajectory divided into three consecutive phases: transition, consolidation, and democratization. Having navigated the volatile transition phase which was severely challenged by the post-2021 civil war, it can be said that the country has entered the consolidation phase.

The primary characteristic of this current consolidation phase is the systematic replacement of fragmented, EPRDF-era political patronage structures with enduring institutional frameworks. Over the past five years, the frequent shuffling of government positions served as an initial, tactical mechanism to accommodate the personnel of the structural building the new administration was pursuing.

This in part can be used to filter out the previous administrations' structural impediments and inherited risk factors and align administrative personnel with a cohesive reform agenda. However, permanent stabilization requires moving beyond personnel shuffles toward deep, systemic institutionalization.

True institutionalization requires the cultivation of an elite workforce embedded within the state apparatus through strictly meritocratic channels. When state functionality is decoupled from zero-sum ethnic or partisan competition, the government can project authority and foster development evenly.

Furthermore, the historic National Dialogue Conference scheduled for July 15, 2026, provides an unprecedented mechanism to forge an elite consensus, establishing a foundational baseline from which the state can implement structural and institutional adjustments.

To achieve these ends, the incoming administration must reorient its structural formation around actionable

policies.

To mitigate the acute risk of institutional disruption from the entrenched legacy of patronage networks, the government must combine strict anti-nepotism safeguards with comprehensive capacity-building programs. Partnering with neutral international training institutes will help rapidly professionalize middle management, ensuring that state institutions remain resilient and functional amidst shifting political currents.

The upcoming July 15 National Dialogue Conference represents a vital opportunity to codify a shared governance philosophy and rebuild state legitimacy from the ground up. Furthermore, the government should utilize the momentum of the dialogue to execute targeted structural adjustments, creating open-door incentives for non-state armed actors who agree to disarm and participate in the political process.

A highly capable state must possess the regulatory capacity to guide the national economy through profound structural transformations, particularly following recent macroeconomic adjustments, currency liberalization, and market openings. Economic instability directly undermines political consolidation; therefore, key regulatory institutions must be shielded from partisan interference.

### **Final Assessment**

Ethiopia's electoral history from 1995 to 2026 reveals a country that has built the architecture of electoral democracy, constitutions, electoral boards, party registrations, international observation without building its foundation: the shared acceptance by governing elites and operating instead under the cutthroat reality that losing an election means complete political annihilation. Until that foundation is built through institutional trust-building, reduction of neo patrimonial stakes, ethnic political inclusion, and most fundamentally, a successful peaceful power transfer, each election will remain a high-stakes performance rather than a genuine democratic exercise.

The confrontation vs. electoral politics divide is not a strategic choice that elites can rationally resolve through better incentives alone. It is a deeply entrenched pathology woven directly into the fabric of Ethiopia's political consciousness, forged in the ashes of institutional decay and fueled by the accumulated trauma of every single blood-stained electoral cycle since the catastrophic fallout of 2005. Resolving it is the central challenge of Ethiopian democratization.

### **Notes on Sources & Methodology**

*This report was compiled using open-source research from Freedom House, the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, the Journal of Democracy, Al Jazeera, CNN, The Reporter Ethiopia, Chatham House, Africa Practice, Ethiopia Insight, Ethiopia Observer, ARTICLE 19, Africanews, Borkena, Britannica, and Horn Review analysis. Electoral data draws from NEBE records, IGAD, African Union, IFES, and academic sources including the Journal of African Elections. Conflict data references ACLED, Freedom House, and regional monitoring organizations. Analysis reflects developments available through June 1-22, 2026. The report does not represent the institutional positions of any government or organization; views expressed are analytical and research-based.*