

**POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA:  
A PEASANT-BASED DOMINANT-PARTY DEMOCRACY?**

**Report to**

**USAID/Ethiopia**

**on**

**Consultations with the Constitutional Commission**

**28 March - 1 April 1993**

**By**

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**17 May 1993**

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## PREFACE

This report is a product of a visit to Ethiopia and consultations with the Constitutional Commission from Saturday, 27 March to the evening of Thursday, 1 April 1993. Sunday, Monday, Thursday (28-29 March, 1 April) were spent in extensive meetings with Ethiopian officials and intellectuals (including President Meles and the chief of staff of the army) and some members of the U.S. mission (including Ambassador Bass, AID Mission director Pearson, and Steve Morrison). Tuesday and Wednesday (30-31 March) were devoted almost entirely to meetings with Constitutional Commission and Ethiopian guests of the Commission. On Tuesday, I made two presentations on "Conceptions of Democracy: The Role of Elections" and "Democracy, Development, and Stability"; Paul Henze commented on these presentations. On Wednesday, I commented on Henze's two presentations on "Political Parties" and "Ethnicity and Democracy". Extensive and generally lively discussion took place at all four sessions.

This report deals with some of the issues confronting the TGE and the Constitutional Commission. Readers should remember that it is written by someone who has no background in Ethiopian studies and whose only direct exposure to the country was that one week at the end of March.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This report discusses three issues concerning the development of constitutional democracy in Ethiopia:

- (1) What are the prospects for democracy in Ethiopia?
- (2) What would be the most appropriate arrangements for a democratic Ethiopian polity with respect to: (a) its social basis; (b) party system; (c) executive-legislative relations; (d) electoral system; (e) national-regional relations; and (f) ethnicity in government?
- (3) What are some guidelines for consolidating a democratic constitution?

The starting point for any consideration of these issues is the fact that overall conditions in Ethiopia are not favorable to the development of constitutional democracy. Possible Ethiopian political systems include:

(a) some form of non-democratic system, which could be a one-party system, military rule (as under the Dergue), a personal dictatorship (as under Haile Selassie), or some combination of these.

(b) a Western-style two or multi-party democratic system.

(c) a dominant party democratic system.

The first is probable but undesirable. The second is desirable but improbable. The third possibility might be possible and would be desirable. A constitutional system has to reflect the nature of society. There is no point in importing a foreign model, as Latin American countries did with the U.S. model in the 19th century, if that model has no meaningful relation to the society. The constitution then is observed in the breach and eventually becomes a mockery, and constitutionalism itself is discredited. It is far better to have a less democratic constitution that is observed than a more democratic constitution that is not. Effective government is as necessary as democratic government. "In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men," James Madison observed in The Federalist, "the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself."

## II. PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY

When I met with President Meles the first thing he said to me was:

"Professor Huntington, I have read your book, The Third Wave. According to your analysis, countries become democratic after they have become wealthy. Ethiopia is an extremely poor country, very far from a high level of economic development. Does that mean that democracy is impossible in this country?"

I had suspected he would raise this issue, although perhaps not so directly, and had thought about what an honest answer would be. My response was in effect as follows.

The overwhelming majority of the more than thirty-five countries that have shifted from authoritarianism to democracy in the past twenty years have been countries with per capita GNPs of \$1,500-\$2,000 or more. There are good reasons for this. As countries develop economically, their populations become more urban, better off, more literate, better educated, more middle class. A bourgeoisie develops controlling sources of economic power independent of the government. Beyond a certain level of economic development income inequalities (which may have grown in the initial phases of development) begin to decline. Politics becomes less zero-sum as there are more resources to be made available to everyone. All this promotes the development of a democratic political culture favoring compromise, tolerance, and participation. Also, as both the economy and society become more complex, the costs of maintaining authoritarian control over them also increase significantly. As a result of these factors, all high income non-oil countries (except Singapore) are democratic; almost all poor countries (with India a notable exception) are non-democratic; and the transition from one to the other tends to occur when countries move into what the World Bank defines as the "upper middle income" level of development.

With a per capita GNP of less than \$150, Ethiopia clearly lacks the economic base that facilitates movement to democracy. Other characteristics of Ethiopian society also pose obstacles to the creation of a stable democratic system. Most countries that have become stable democracies in the twentieth century have done so on their second try: a Weimar republic precedes a Federal Republic. Ethiopia has had no experience with democracy and if a democratic system were created, maintaining it could prove difficult. In addition, revolutionary governments that come to power through the violent overthrow of dictatorships rarely create stable democratic systems: the only exception, and it is a marginal one, to this rule that I know of occurred in Costa Rica in 1948, when a brief and successful insurgency did lead to a stable democratic regime. Ethiopia is ethnically extremely heterogeneous; this does not necessarily pose insuperable obstacles to democratization but it greatly complicates the problems involved in creating a democratic system. A stable democracy also normally depends on the existence of a substantial "civil society" of associations, business groups, media, labor unions, churches, and other types of interest groups. Apart from the Orthodox Church, most of the elements of civil society seem weak or nonexistent in Ethiopia.

Some factors, on the other hand, are more favorable to the development of democracy. Ethiopia has a long history as an independent state with a sense of national identity. The predominant groups in the society have been Christian (albeit Orthodox) and with a few exceptions (India, Israel, Japan, Sri Lanka, Turkey) long-established democracies have only existed in Christian countries. The existence of a traditional aristocracy at least among the Amhara also could help democratic development. Finally, the external environment is now highly conducive to democratization and the principal external actors with respect to Ethiopia (the United States, European countries, the World Bank) will certainly encourage movement in a democratic direction.

The overall balance of economic, social, and other conditions in Ethiopia, however, is not presently favorable to democratization. Does this mean that democracy of any sort is impossible? Not necessarily. To be sure, development of a Western style democracy, with two major parties alternating in power (on the American, British, German model), does not seem probable. Conceivably, however, some other type of democratic system could be created in Ethiopia. Whether it is or not depends overwhelmingly on the extent to which political leaders want to create an Ethiopian democracy. Political regimes are created not by preconditions but by political leaders. In terms of preconditions, Singapore should be a democracy but Lee Kuan Yew determined that it should have a relatively benign form of Confucian authoritarianism. In terms of preconditions, India should not have become a democracy but Nehru, Gandhi, and the other Congress Party leaders at the time of independence were determined to make it one. Thus, despite the unfavorable conditions, a democratic system conceivably could be created in Ethiopia if the current leaders of the country make that their goal.

The extent to which creation of democracy is a goal of TGE political leaders depends on the depth of their own personal commitment to democracy and the degree to which achievement of democracy is compatible with the achievement of other goals. Presumably these other goals include:

- (1) maintaining themselves and the EPRDF in power;
- (2) maintaining the national unity of Ethiopia (minus Eritria), preventing secessionist movements, and promoting national integration;
- (3) promoting economic development, including increasing agricultural and industrial production and productivity, improving infrastructure, promoting foreign investment, expanding exports, and, most importantly, improving human capital by increasing literacy and through technical training;
- (4) enhancing political order and preventing ethnic and other violence.

Whether or not the introduction of democracy conflicts with the achievement of these other goals depends in large part on the nature of the democratic system that is created.

### III. VARIETIES OF DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS

#### A. Issues

Democratic political systems come in all shapes and sizes. Among the many issues involved in creating a democratic system, at least the following seem relevant to Ethiopia:

1. the social basis of democracy, that is, is it:
  - a. rural based;
  - b. urban based;
  - c. class based;
  - d. ethnic based.
  
2. the party system, which could be:
  - a. a dominant party system;
  - b. a two-party system;
  - c. a multi-party system;
  - d. some mixture of the above.
  
3. executive-legislative relations, where the choices include:
  - a. parliamentary system;
  - b. Gaullist system;
  - c. presidential system.
  
4. electoral system, where the choices include:
  - a. plurality (first-past-the-post) system;
  - b. mixed (run-off or alternative vote) system;
  - c. proportional representation (which may be either moderate or extreme).
  
5. national-regional relations, where the choices include:
  - a. federalism with concurrent authority for national and regional governments;
  - b. unitary state with substantial devolution to regional governments;
  - c. unitary state with little devolution.
  
6. the place of ethnicity in the system, where the choices include:
  - a. explicit ethnic representation in the central government (i.e., consociational democracy);
  - b. ethnically defined regional governments;

- c. no explicit recognition of ethnic groups in the formal governmental structure;
- d. prohibition of ethnic political groupings.

No single universally preferred arrangement exists for any of these topics. Institutional arrangements have to reflect the history and culture of the particular society, its levels of economic development, social structure, ethnic composition, and most importantly, the goals of its leaders. Trade-offs will be involved among these goals: an electoral system or party system that maximizes political democracy, for instance, could have a negative impact on economic development. In addition, of course, the choice of one institutional arrangement in one area (e.g., choice of a P.R. electoral system) may also shape the choice in another area (e.g., encourage a multi-party system).

## B. Models

Historically the two most influential democratic models have been those of Great Britain and the United States. The British model is urban and class based, and involves 2½ parties, a parliamentary system, plurality voting, a unitary state, and very weak ethnically defined regional institutions for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The American model was initially rural-based and includes 2 parties, a presidential system, plurality voting, federalism, and no formal ethnic institutions but much informal ethnic politics. The British model was reproduced with modifications in many of the former British colonies. The American presidential system was copied in Latin America but eventually combined with proportional representation in all countries except Mexico and Chile. This combination encouraged multipartyism and a disjunction between executive and legislative constituencies which have not been conducive to effective decision-making or political stability.

After World War II three other democratic models became popular. The West German model combined 2½ political parties, a parliamentary system, modified proportional representation, federalism, and regional units reflecting historic German states. This system was consciously designed to correct two major deficiencies of its Weimar predecessor. The Weimar republic had an extreme form of proportional representation that produced political fragmentation and instability. The West German constitution provided for partial PR with a 5% threshold for party representation in the legislature. Weimar also suffered from extremists of the right and left combining to bring down centrist governments but then, of course, being unable to form a new government. The West German constitution made this impossible by requiring a "constructive vote of no confidence": a government can only be brought down by a positive vote bringing in a successor government. These two institutional arrangements have been copied in the constitutions of several new democracies.

Another post-World War II model was the system of executive-legislative relations de Gaulle created for the Fifth Republic. A popularly elected president has extensive powers over foreign policy and defense and appoints a prime minister and cabinet. The latter, however, must have the confidence of parliament, which is elected at a different time from



the president. This has twice produced a president and prime minister/cabinet of different political parties. In addition to this Gaullist pattern of executive-legislative relations, the Fifth Republic has also had a unitary state, run-off elections, a multi-party system, and no formal recognition of ethnicity. A Gaullist-type executive has been adopted by Turkey and several East European countries.

An additional post-World War II model is the Japanese dominant party system. This type of party system exists in the new democracies in South Korea and Taiwan and in less democratic forms in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. It is, in considerable measure, the prevailing type of system in East Asia and in somewhat different form has also existed in the long-standing Congress Party dominance in India. In Japan, but not necessarily in these other countries, it has been combined with a parliamentary government, mixed electoral system, a highly centralized state, and the non-recognition and almost non-existence of ethnicity.

These five constitutional models are summarized in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**Democratic Models**

Country	Exec.-Legis.	Electoral System	National-Regional	Party System	Ethnicity
Britain	Parl.	Plurality	Unitary	2-1/2	Limited territorial
U.S.A.	Pres.	Plurality	Federal	2	No formal
Germany	Parl.	Modified P.R.	Federal	2-1/2	No formal
France	Gaullist	Run-off	Unitary	Multi	No formal
Japan	Parl.	Mixed	Unitary	Dominant	No formal

#### IV. A DEMOCRATIC POLITY FOR ETHIOPIA

The problem thus is: What democratic model involving what combination of alternative arrangements identified above will maximize the ability of TGE leaders to achieve the goals of continuation in power, national unity, economic development, and political order? Conceivably several systems could do this. Overall, however, it seems that the conflict between democracy and other goals will be minimized to the extent that the democratic political system:

- 1) is based on and reflects the interests of the peasantry;
- 2) is a dominant party system;
- 3) has a presidential or Gaullist governmental structure;
- 4) has a mixed electoral system;
- 5) is either a federal system or a substantially decentralized unitary system;
- 6) allows ethnic politics but does not formally represent ethnic groups in government.

##### A. Peasant-Based Polity

A political system has to be supported by the dominant groups in society. These may be urban or rural groups; they may be social classes, including the aristocracy, bourgeoisie, middle class, working-class, peasantry; they may be particular ethnic groups. As modernization and economic development occur, the dominant groups in society change. These changes frequently involve first a shift in political power from a rural-based monarchy or aristocracy to urban-based middle-class groups (the "urban breakthrough"). Aristocracies in traditional societies generally do not support democracy. Neither do urban middle-class groups when they first come to power; as their numbers and strength expand, however, they become increasingly opposed to authoritarianism and supportive of a more open political system. The urban middle class has been in the forefront of the movement for democracy in most of the "third wave" countries that have democratized in recent years. In some modernizing countries, however, political power is wrested away from the urban middle class and returned at least in part to rural groups, through a "green uprising" in the form of a violent peasant-based revolution. This sequence from "modernizing monarch" to "urban breakthrough" to "green uprising" (which is elaborated at length in Political Order in Changing Societies; see accompanying Table 2) is reflected almost perfectly in Ethiopia's shift from Haile Selassie to the Dergue to the current EPRDF-dominated transitional government.

As argued above in Section II, most democratic political systems come into existence in countries that have reached relatively high levels of economic well-being and have developed a substantial middle class. They are bourgeois-based democracies, epitomized in Barrington Moore's famous phrase, "no bourgeois, no democracy," which in turn echoed an argument Karl Marx had made 100 years earlier. But is this always the case? Not necessarily. Poor countries normally are overwhelmingly rural, suffer from major inequalities in income and land ownership, and are polarized between a deprived peasant class and a small elite which monopolizes wealth, education, and power. In such societies, democracy is impossible. Democracy may be possible, however, if a poor agrarian society can achieve a relatively equitable pattern of land ownership and create what Robert Dahl termed a "free farmer" society, composed primarily of independent farmers who own their own land and who are free to raise whatever crops they wish either for their own subsistence or for the market. In countries at higher levels of economic development the movement for democracy comes from the cities. In countries at lower levels of economic development, democracy, as Thomas Jefferson argued, rests on the yeoman farmer. The United States became a democracy in the 1830s long before it had reached the levels of economic development and industrialization now thought necessary. Apart from the slave plantations in the South, the United States at that time was overwhelming a society of free farmers. New Zealand, Canada, Costa Rica, and other societies also made the transition to democracy while still primarily rural and at relatively poor. In these cases of countries at low levels of economic development the "green uprising" occurs through democratic means as rural majorities achieve power through the ballot box. (See Political Order, pp. 433-461.)

Creation of a free farmer society often requires a massive land reform program to eliminate absentee landlords, break-up huge estates, and end onerous tenancy relationships. Major land reforms, however, cannot be carried out by democratically elected governments, which in countries where this is an issue almost invariably are dominated by landowners. Therefore an authoritarian government or foreign control (as in the U.S. occupation of Japan and Korea in the late 1940s) is necessary to carry out the land reform that, in turn, is necessary for stable democracy.

**TABLE 2****Political Modernization: Changes in Urban-Rural Power and Stability**

<u>Phase</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>Countryside</u>	<u>Comments</u>
1. Traditional Stability	Stable Subordinate	Stable Dominant	Rural elite rules; middle class absent; peasants dormant
2. Modernization Take-off	Unstable Subordinate	Stable Dominant	Urban middle class appears and begins struggle against rural elite
3. Urban Breakthrough	Unstable Dominant	Stable Subordinate	Urban middle class displaces rural elite; peasants still dormant
A4. Green Uprising: Containment	Unstable Subordinate	Stable Dominant	Peasant mobilization within system reestablishes stability and rural dominance
A5. Fundamentalist Reaction	Stable Dominant	Unstable Subordinate	Middle class grows and becomes more conservative; working class appears; shift of dominance to city produces rural fundamentalist reaction
B4. Green Uprising: Revolution	Unstable Subordinate	Unstable Dominant	Peasant mobilization against system overthrows old structures
B5. Modernizing Consolidation	Stable Dominant	Unstable Subordinate	Revolutionaries in power impose modernizing reforms on peasantry
6. Modern Stability	Stable Dominant	Stable Subordinate	Countryside accepts modern values and city rule

Source: Political Order in Changing Societies, p. 76.

In countries making a transition to democracy, the results of the first or "founding" election tend to vary directly with the country's level of development. It is usually assumed that the incumbent party or group, which may have initiated the transition to democracy, will have major electoral advantages over their only recently legalized and often disorganized opposition. In middle-income countries with substantial urban population and middle classes, however, the outcome is usually a "stunning" election, in which the incumbents lose decisively. (See The Third Wave, pp. 174-192.) In poorer countries that transit to democracy, this is not the case. In such countries, political incumbents are usually able to mobilize the support of the rural majority and defeat the urban opposition. In these cases, the transition to democracy can provide a new basis of legitimacy for the groups which have been in power. If, for instance, Deng Tsaio Peng in 1989 had responded to the students' demands for democracy, called for nationwide elections, and invited in Jimmy Carter and UN observers to insure their honesty, he and the Communist Party would, without doubt, have been returned to power with the overwhelming support of the rural voters, who make up 80% of China's population and who had benefitted immensely from Deng's pro-peasant economic policies. With a somewhat similar situation, it seems highly likely that in a free and honest election in Ethiopia President Meles and the EPRDF would also be returned to power by the overwhelming support of rural voters.

#### B. Dominant-Party System

Democratic party systems vary greatly but may be generally classified as multiparty, two party, or dominant party. The party system a country has is shaped by its social structure, governmental institutions, and, the preferences of political leaders. Parties reflect the principal social identities and cleavages within society. In Ethiopia the principal cleavages appear to be ethnic, rural-urban, regional, and, potentially, religious. Ethnicity certainly will be a major factor for party organization and this could lead to a multiparty system with one or more parties representing each of the country's major ethnic groups.

All-in-all, however, the makings of a dominant-party system appear to exist in Ethiopia and such a system could have many advantages for the country. In a dominant-party system, there is one broad-based party which has wide appeal to a number of groups, regularly wins elections, and more or less continuously controls the government. There are also smaller parties which may reflect particular ethnic, regional, or ideological interests, which are able to elect legislators, but which are unable individually or collectively to control the legislature or to form a government. The rationale for such a system has been well-stated by Goh Chok Tong, currently prime minister of Singapore:

I think a stable system is one where there is a mainstream political party representing a broad range of the population. Then you can have a few other parties on the periphery, very serious-minded parties. They are unable to have wider views but they nevertheless represent sectional interests. And the mainstream is returned all the time. I think that's good. And I

would not apologize if we ended up in that situation in Singapore.

Dominant parties have existed in both democratic political systems (Japan, India) and in less-than-democratic political systems (Mexico, Singapore). The new democracies in Taiwan and South Korea appear to be developing dominant party systems.

A dominant party system has several advantages for a country such as Ethiopia which is both ethnically diverse and which will have to give top priority to economic development. The dominant party presumably would be an extension of the EPRDF with a solid base among the peasantry and some appeal to elements within most of the major ethnic groups. It would provide a framework within which ethnic and regional groups could negotiate and compromise. Its electoral strength and hence assured control of the government would provide the continuity desirable for economic development and to attract foreign investment. At the same time, opposition parties could represent particular regional or ethnic interests and lobby the dominant party on their behalf. Such a system, assuming fair elections and opportunity for opposition parties to campaign, would meet international standards of democratic legitimacy and hence facilitate foreign aid. Whether or not a dominant party system emerges in Ethiopia depends primarily, of course, on the ability of the EPRDF to create a broad coalition of groups within a common political framework.

If a "free farmer" constituency can be created it can provide a secure political base for a dominant party that is responsive to its interests. Since the rural population constitutes the bulk of the population, the party that mobilizes the support of this constituency is also assured of sustained control of government. This support enables that party to withstand the opposition of urban elements, which almost invariably oppose the government in power in every developing country. This opposition may manifest itself in voting, demonstrations, riots, and even possible coup attempts in major cities. With a secure electoral base in the countryside, however, the dominant party can contain such opposition.

### C. Presidential or Gaullist Executive

For most of its history Ethiopia has had a strong executive in the form of the emperor who asserted his power and that of the central government against regional powers. As a highly dispersed, ethnically heterogeneous society, a national executive combining the functions of chief of state and chief of government would still seem to be appropriate for Ethiopia. The president would symbolize the continuity and the unity of the Ethiopian state. With a fixed term, such an office could provide an element of political stability crucial to economic development. A parliamentary system, on the other hand, could lead to more frequent changes of government and hence shifts in policy.

#### **D. Mixed Electoral System**

The electoral system for both president and legislature should be based on the assumption that ethnic parties and ethnic appeals will be central features of Ethiopian politics. The problem then is to enable people to express their ethnic identities and interests in politics but at the same time to encourage interethnic collaboration and multiethnic political appeals by parties and candidates. A system of pure proportional representation would produce a legislature reflecting Ethiopia's ethnic diversity. It would encourage each ethnic group to have its own political party and, in the absence of a threshold, could lead to 20 or more parties having seats in the legislature. This would greatly complicate legislative decision-making and would place a tremendous burden on the chief executive who would have to attempt to put together different coalitions of groups on each major issue requiring legislative action. Depending upon how constituency boundaries were drawn, a straight Anglo-American plurality system, on the other hand, could lead to some ethnic groups being permanent minorities in their districts and having no representation in parliament. Their interests could be neglected by that party or group able to secure a plurality of votes, even though this might be far short a majority.

It would thus seem desirable for Ethiopia to have some form of mixed electoral system which would allow ethnic parties to have a voice but also promote multiethnic coalitions. One simple way of doing this is through run-off elections, which, as in France, could be used for both the president and legislature. Thus, if there were initially four or five candidates from different ethnic parties, those candidates who had some hope of making it into the run-off election would have great incentives to appeal to members of other ethnic groups in the hopes of winning their votes in the run-off election.

Another way of allowing ethnic expression and yet promoting interethnic coalitions would be through the alternative vote system. In this case each voter ranks the candidates according to his or her preference. If no candidate gets a majority of first-place votes then the candidate with the smallest number of first-place votes is eliminated and those ballots are redistributed to their second place choices. This process continues until one candidate does secure a majority of the total vote. Under this system strong candidates have great incentive to appeal for the second-place votes of those voters casting their first-place votes for other parties. In effect, this achieves the results of a run-off election without having to go through the effort and expense of a second election. It is, however, a more complicated system of voting which might produce confusion among illiterate voters.

**TABLE 3****Governmental and Electoral Systems**

Electoral Systems	Governmental Systems		
	Parliamentary	Gaullist	Presidential
Plurality	U.K. Canada India Malaysia Jamaica		U.S. Philippines Chile
Mixed	Japan	France	Sri Lanka
P.R.-Moderate	Germany Sweden Portugal Czech. R. Hungary	Romania Bulgaria	Most Latin American Countries
P.R.-Extreme	Israel Neth. Italy	Poland Weimar	



### **E. Federalism or decentralization**

Given the country's size and regional differences, either federalism or an extremely decentralized unitary state would seem to be most appropriate for Ethiopia. Most large democratic countries (United States, India, Brazil, Mexico, Germany, Canada, Australia) have federal systems. South Africa seems likely to shift from a unitary state to some form of federalism or decentralization. The principal exception is Japan which, however, is both highly homogeneous and very compact.

A major issue in any federal system concerns the number of states or provinces and the criteria for demarking their boundaries. A larger number of smaller states rather than a smaller number of larger states will provide greater opportunity for particular geographic or ethnic groups to control a state, reduce the probability that a significant group could be a permanent minority within a state, and make it more difficult for any individual state to secede. It would also seem desirable either to have the boundaries of states coincide with historical divisions or major physical features. The reasons why state boundaries should not coincide with divisions among ethnic groups are set forth in the next section.

### **F. No formal ethnicity.**

As the above discussion indicates, ethnicity is likely to be central to Ethiopian political parties, elections, and politics generally. Attempts to suppress ethnic identifications or to prevent ethnic political appeals are not likely to be successful. In addition, ethnic politics is likely to be far less disruptive and less violent than religious politics. Some Ethiopian ethnic groups are divided in terms of religion, and such cross-cutting cleavages can contribute to stability. Few things could be more threatening to the Ethiopian political order than a polarization of politics along Christian-Muslim lines.

That political parties and groups should be able to organize on the basis of ethnicity and make ethnic appeals is one thing. That the government should be organized on the basis of ethnicity is something else. Ethnic governmental organization normally takes one of two forms. One is the explicit representation of ethnic groups in the central government, a practice which has received its most sophisticated formulation in the theory of consociational democracy. This theory argues that majoritarian, i.e., Anglo-American, democracy can work only in ethnically relatively homogeneous societies where a real possibility exists for the alternation of parties in control of the government. In a society that is severely divided between an ethnic majority and minority, this system will not work because one party and ethnic group will always control the government and the other ethnic group will always be in opposition. Nor will majoritarian democracy work well where there are three or more major ethnic groups because again the group or coalition of groups that is able to win a plurality of the votes will permanently dominate the government to the exclusion of other ethnic groups. Hence, it is argued, a system has to be worked out to provide for appropriate representation in government of all major groups in society and for the protection of the interests of minority groups.

The advocates of consociational democracy (the most important of whom is Arend Lijphart) build on the experience of the culturally divided smaller European democracies (Switzerland, Belgium, Netherlands, Austria) to argue for the following four sets of arrangements:

- (1) a grand coalition, which will govern the country and include representatives of all major ethnic groups;
- (2) a mutual veto, which means that on issues of fundamental importance any one of these groups can exercise a veto (recognizing that the crucial issue here is determining which issues are of fundamental importance);
- (3) proportionality, that is the allocation of government jobs, contracts, and other benefits among groups roughly in proportion to their numbers;
- (4) segmental autonomy, that is allowing each group to shape those matters which affect primarily its own members, such as questions of education, language, religion, interpersonal relations within the group.

Consociational democracy thus provides for power-sharing among groups at the expense of political competition between groups and within groups. Among developing countries, it has been tried unsuccessfully in Cyprus where the system broke down very quickly, somewhat more successfully in Lebanon where it worked for thirty years, and most successfully in Malaysia where despite strains it continues to operate. A consociational arrangement, in diluted form, is being negotiated as the transitional system for South Africa. At present, however, there seems to be little interest in or need for consociational democracy in Ethiopia. Ethnicity manifests itself in political groupings and regionalism, but not in the demand for formal ethnic representation in central government institutions. This is a condition which should be perpetuated. If, however, demands arise for an ethnic-based central governmental structure, the institutional arrangements of consociational democracy provide one way of accommodating those demands.

Formal recognition of ethnicity can also take a territorial form, which the TGE has endorsed. In the regional and local elections of June 1992 citizens were required to state their ethnic identity when they registered to vote. This attempt to classify people by ethnic background is reminiscent of practices which used to exist in the former Soviet Union and in South Africa. It seems totally contrary to a political process one of whose purposes is to promote a common Ethiopian national identity. It also seems inappropriate in a country in which a substantial portion of the population are of mixed ethnic background or unsure as to which ethnic group they belong to or wish to identify with.

More significantly, the TGE redrew regional boundaries in Ethiopia so as to create "ethnic-based regions where none previously existed." As a result, the RPRDF, "through its actions, made ethnicity the controlling consideration in national politics." (NDIIA-AAI, An

Evaluation of the June 21, 1992 Elections in Ethiopia, p. 69.) Parties and other political groups in Ethiopia will undoubtedly be organized primarily on ethnic lines. Drawing regional boundaries on ethnic lines, however, supplements what is unavoidable with what is undesirable. As indicated in Table 4, there are four possible combinations of ethnic parties and ethnic territorial units. In the United States neither exist, although ethnic groups, identities, and appeals play important roles in politics. If a broad-based, ideological party exists which appeals across ethnic lines, then ethnic territorial units can be tolerated. Or, if non-ethnic regions exist, ethnic parties can be tolerated. The combination of ethnic territorial units and ethnic parties, however, cumulates cleavages and can have a disastrous effect on national unity and political stability. This is well illustrated by the First Republic in Nigeria. State boundaries coincided with the divisions among the three major ethnic groups. The three major political parties were based on those three groups. As a result, each party won control of its region and control of the center was hotly contested among the three ethnic parties. Political, regional, and ethnic identities and cleavages all coincided. This led to intensified ethnic conflict, instability at the center, and military overthrow of the civilian regime.

While it is thus generally undesirable formally to represent ethnic groups in government, it is also generally undesirable to prohibit political parties organized on the basis of ethnicity or religion. Such bans almost invariably lead to the formation of underground organizations which are then tempted to resort to violence to promote their objectives. The fissiparous tendencies that ethnic political parties may encourage can be more effectively countered by structuring the electoral and governmental systems so as to encourage multiethnic appeals and coalitions.

**TABLE 4**  
**ETHNICITY AND POLITICS**

<u>Territorial Units</u>	<u>Political Parties</u>	
	<u>Ethnic</u>	<u>Non-ethnic</u>
Ethnic	Nigeria 1st Republic	India
Non-ethnic	Malaysia	U.S.

#### **IV. INAUGURATING AND CONSOLIDATING A DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTION**

In inaugurating and consolidating a new democratic constitution, five considerations should be kept in mind.

First, a constitution has to reflect a society's basic values, social structure, and level of development. There is no universally good constitution or set of political institutions. Political institutions that work well in one country may prove disastrous in another country. Political institutions that were appropriate for one time in a nation's history may be highly inappropriate at another time.

Two, most successful constitutions have developed gradually over time. Some successful democracies (Britain, Israel) have no written constitution. In others (United States), the written constitution is very brief. This allows for the constitution to be fleshed out and to change over time: while the American constitution has been formally amended only a few times, the Supreme Court in countless decisions has interpreted it and adapted it to changing conditions, so that while the words are still the words of 1789, their meaning is often entirely different from what it was two hundred years ago. A constitution is, as one scholar has observed, "the sense each generation has of the proper distribution of power." It should be thought of not as a document but as a framework or process for orderly change.

Three, constitutions and the institutions they create do make a difference. They can have a decisive influence on the allocation of power and resources, who gets what when and how. Under the British electoral system for instance, the Liberal Democrats and their predecessors have often gotten 20% of the vote but never more than about 2% of the seats in Parliament, and they are not a significant force in British politics. Under the German electoral system, on the other hand, the Free Democrats have rarely gotten more than 10% of the vote but have gotten a comparable percentage of legislative seats and have been a political force in Germany and in every cabinet for decades.

Four, among other differences institutions make is that they create vested interests. Those who have achieved power through one set of institutions will strenuously resist changing those institutions in any fundamental way. Constitutions, in short, are change resistant, and to produce significant change normally requires a major crisis or scandal or the action by an extra-political body (e.g., Supreme Court). This is equally true of "interim" or "transitional" institutions: they too tend to become permanent.

Five, it is often argued that a democratic political culture is a prerequisite to stable democratic institutions. This may be desirable but it is not necessary. Political elites can create democratic institutions and, if those institutions operate effectively, they will become consolidated and stimulate emergence of a democratic political culture. This was precisely what happened in Germany and Japan after World War II. The victorious allies imposed democratic political institutions on those two countries although their political cultures were at that time highly authoritarian and anti-democratic. Democracy worked, however, and, in

particular, produced spectacular economic recovery and growth. As a result, by 1970 the publics in both countries became overwhelmingly committed to democratic values. In large part, this shift in political culture was the result of generational change, the gradual disappearance of the old generation committed to authoritarianism and the rise of a younger generation imbued with democracy. A democratic government that successfully maintains national unity, promotes economic development, and minimizes political instability will over time encourage commitment to democratic values and insure the consolidation of democracy in Ethiopia.