Conflict in Ethiopia: Evaluating Prevention Strategies

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Abstract

The current Ethiopian civil war between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian federal government highlights a continuing trend of ethnic tensions within the country that has led to conflict. Understanding how these instances of ethnic violence have been reduced and examining the effectiveness of these strategies can deliver valuable insights into further work that can be done to prevent ethnic conflict in the country. Firstly, political coalitions, such as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) have shifted policy towards focusing on promoting national unity and peaceful coexistence between different ethnic groups. Straying away from centralization in favor of a federal system in which regional states are granted autonomy based on their culture and belief systems has been another critical effort to decrease ethnic conflict. The current government has also established institutions such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission to monitor human rights abuses and grievances more adequately. Building off of work done by the EPRDF, the current government has also attempted to create dialogue and reconciliation forums at the national and local levels to facilitate discussions between different ethnic groups and resolve conflicts. While these efforts have generated moderate success in preventing ethnic conflict, more work such as building off of the current administration's plan to increase dialogue at the national level is necessary if Ethiopia hopes to reduce the prevalence of ethnic conflict in the future.

Introduction

  Ethnic conflict has been a longstanding issue in Ethiopia, with a history that dates back to the country's formation in the late 19th century. The current estimated population of Ethiopia is 108 Million. According to the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia 2007 Census, the ethnic groups in Ethiopia are distributed as follows: Oromo: 34.4%; Amhara: 27%; Somali: 6.2%; Tigray: 6.1%; Sidama: 4%; Gurage: 2.5%; Welaita: 2.3%; Hadiya: 1.7%; Afar: 1.7%; Gamo: 1.5%; Keffa: 1.4%; Other ethnic groups: 10.3%. Ethiopia's ethnic conflict history is complex and multifaceted, with different groups experiencing different forms and levels of marginalization, discrimination, and violence at different times.

  Some key moments in Ethiopia's ethnic conflict history include the Ethiopian Empire, established in 1889, and largely dominated by the Amhara and Tigray ethnic groups. The 'Red Terror' period during the communist Derg regime, which took place from 1977 to 1978 and targeted political dissidents, intellectuals, and suspected rebels, many of whom were from minority ethnic groups such as the Oromo, Somali, and Afar (Donham, 1999).

  The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of ethnic-based rebel groups, and Tigrayan-dominated rule, that existed from 1991 to 2019, promoted ethnic federalism, and granted some autonomy to Ethiopia's various ethnic groups. The EPRDF coalition consisted of four political parties, namely Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), and Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM). TPLF held a majority of seats in both the House of Peoples' Representatives but fell out of

favor with the federal government in 2018. However, ethnic divisions and conflicts have been a significant challenge for Ethiopia's governance throughout its history, and continue to be so today.

In 2018, the ruling EPRDF elected Abiy Ahmed, a member of the ODP, as prime minister. In late 2019, Prime Minister Abiy championed the dissolution of the EPRDF, and in its place, he formed the Prosperity Party, which included member parties of the former EPRDF, ADP, ODP, SEPDM, plus other EPRDF-allied parties such as the Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP), Benishangul Gumuz People's Democratic Party (BGPDP), Gambella People's Democratic Movement (GPDM), Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP), and the Harari National League (HNL), but notably excluded TPLF. This started a period of tension between the federal government and the TPLF, which culminated in the Tigray War that began in 2020. The Prosperity Party holds 454 out of 547 parliament seats in the current government, namely the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). This started a period of tension between the federal government and the TPLF, which culminated in the Tigray War that began in 2020.

This nearly two years of conflict between the TPLF and the FDRE has ravaged the country in many ways. The conflict has resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths and reports of numerous war crimes, including sexual violence such as rape. Multiple governments have instituted several measures in an attempt to reduce outbreaks of conflict within the country. However, the most recent war begs the question of how effective have these measures been in reducing conflict. Additionally, what can the country's leaders do in the future to go about reducing ethnic conflict?

I argue that creating a more inclusive and open political system in which greater national dialogue is at the center of Ethiopian politics will be critical to reducing ethnic conflicts. While the Prosperity Party has attempted to create national dialogue through the Multi-stakeholder initiative for National Dialogue-Ethiopia (MIND-Ethiopia), the lack of neutrality within the initiative has already tainted its perception within Ethiopian society. This initiative would organize four grand roundtable discussions among different political parties in the country in which topics such as the constitution, historical narratives, and the national consensus will be covered. Discussing such issues will then create a national consultative forum that policymakers can draw upon when making future policy decisions.

This attempt at creating national dialogue will be unsuccessful because the Prosperity Party has failed at adhering to the normative and procedural principles that will build the credibility needed to make the initiative a success. Hallmarks of open dialogue within the country such as inclusivity, transparency, and impartiality have been notably lacking from the initiative's efforts to establish the commission tasked with creating the dialogue. No information has been given to the public concerning the rationale behind the initiative nor what the outcome of the open dialogue will be. Similarly to many attempts at hosting national dialogue, I argue that attempts at hosting national dialogue have failed because they failed to create dialogue at the grassroots level which is the most susceptible to believing their ethnic group is being conspired against.

The work of previous administrations in attempting to eliminate outbreaks of conflict highlights that multiple governments have failed at reducing the ethnic tension

that is paramount in outbreaks of conflict. I illustrate this by examining the negative effect that the policies of Haile Selassie, an emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974, and the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia (Derg), which overthrew the government of the Ethiopian Empire and governed the country from 1974 to 1991, had on relations between ethnic groups. The choice made by these administrations to suppress both the ethnic organizations and identity of Ethiopians has had a disastrous effect at best. Furthermore, policy decisions made by the EPRDF illustrate that replacing national identity in favor of making one's ethnic makeup their primary identity also promotes negative relations between ethnic groups.

Contrary to the choices of these administrations, I aim to show that a middle ground needs to be found between the extreme choices made by these administrations. The Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia and the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's focus on creating a unitary state is an ideal that should be utilized as well as the autonomy and unification prioritized by the EPRDF in their attempts. Generally, future administrations need to ensure that the voices of every citizen at the local level are heard and their issues implemented into the national policy (Halefom, 2022). This can be done in many ways including holding more national dialogue, creating a more open political system, and eliminating the one-party system. Through these attempts, governments can more effectively influence Ethiopians, at the grassroots level, that the government is working in their favor. This is in stark contrast to the previous administrations, discussed in this paper, which has failed to reduce conflict because they have only created discourse with political elites and not the average Ethiopian.

Ethnicity as a Driver of Conflict

Based on prevailing ethnic conflict theory, various factors contribute to the occurrence of ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. Firstly, literature on the matter shows us that a majority of civil wars are predicated on ethnic tensions as, since 1946, more than 64% of civil wars are divided along ethnic lines (Denny and Walter, 2014). Denny and Walter explain that so many civil wars are based on ethnic tension because of grievances, opportunity, and bargaining problems that disproportionately fall along ethnic lines which makes mobilization much easier and more probable. Furthermore, ethnic groups are more likely to have grievances against the state because political power has historically been divided along ethnic lines and groups tend to migrate along ethnic lines. Ethnic groups are also more likely to rebel if they live in concentrated or geographically peripheral areas. Ethnic tension also presents difficulties in terms of bargaining because ethnic allegiances tend to be fixed which makes promises to cooperate across ethnic lines lack credibility.

In addition to these factors, due attention must be paid to the fact that dissatisfaction along ethnic lines can also manifest itself based on high levels of poverty, low levels of economic growth, and poor living conditions (Denny and Walter, 2014). The more impoverishment and hardship that individuals are forced to experience, the more likely they are to view conflict as a means to escape the hardship their environment presents. Discontent can also arise from disparities in power between different ethnic groups within a society and varying access to government positions. Political power divided along ethnic lines is especially seen as significantly more likely to

create grievances if the ruling ethnic groups use their position of power to discriminate against other ethnic groups (Asal et al., 2016). The connection between ethnicity and conflict manifests itself in two ways the first of is being a primordial view in which ethnic differences are ancestral, deep, and irreconcilable and therefore salient and an instrumental approach where ethnicity is a strategic basis for coalitions that seek a larger share of economic or political power. Based on these views, ethnicity functions as a device by which these powers can be restricted to a smaller set of individuals. When ethnic groups are geographically concentrated (which the EPRDF attempted to implement), it makes it much easier to exclude other members of society outside the ethnic group.

Ethnic conflict is defined as a rebellion against the state on behalf of an ethnic group. Esteban et al. put forth the theory that opens civil conflict arises when an existing social, political, or economic arrangement is challenged by an ethnic group (Esteban et al., 2012). Costly actions utilized by ethnic groups such as demonstrations, provocations, bombs, guerilla or open warfare are employed as a means to increase their probability of success. Success, in this scenario, is defined as greater economic and or political power for the ethnic group engaging in these costly actions. This could mean success resulting in the group being able to impose its preferred norms or culture (eg. a religious state, the repression of language, or the banning of political parties). There is also a more private success factor that can be gained from engaging in conflicts such as material benefits from an administrative or political position, tax breaks, directed subsidies, and bias in the allocation of public expenditure and infrastructures.

These theoretical frameworks beg the question of how we can apply ethnic conflict theory to the central question put forth in this project. Horowitz provides valuable insight into the difficulties that must be addressed if the ethnic a conflict is to be reduced. This first problem is one of adoption in which many solutions to inter-ethnic conflict are rarely adopted because these solutions pay little attention to the conditions by which these ideas can be adopted (Horowitz, 2014). Ethnic groups have asymmetric preferences in which the majority want majority rule while minority groups want guarantees against majority rule. General risk-aversion is also a serious problem that potential solutions must circumvent as ethnic politics can be an extremely high-stakes game that motivates ethnic groups to typically stick with what's most familiar. Additionally, negotiators often approach conflict prevention negotiations with biases that commonly favor institutions prevailing in the most successful democracies and are often shielded from the most harmful effects of severe ethnic problems.

Another key problem that applies especially to methods utilized by coalitions, such as the EPRDF, is immobilism in which agreements set forth by coalitions have trouble being adjusted to societal changes. Oftentimes when decision-makers utilize coalitions to solve instances of conflict, they set forth a regime of agreed guarantees in terms of proportional group participation in government and minority vetoes for ethnically sensitive policies. In this case, the problem is that this set of agreements can be very difficult to modify once set forth, which is problematic because modification of said agreements is essential to the success of established guarantees. This is because, while a coalition-based system allows ethnic demands and counter-demands to be made, it also allows for participating groups to block the claims and demands of other

groups. This results in an immobilized system that makes it near impossible for terms of any established guarantees to be put into effect in the public sphere.

Practicum

This project was informed heavily by my experiences in the summer working as an intern in which I had the opportunity to study ethnic conflict outbreaks in various African countries such as Nigeria. The history of ethnic conflict within Nigeria stood out to me as especially interesting concerning this project because of the parallel struggles of ethnic groups in both Ethiopia and Nigeria for power and competition for economic resources. Similarly to Ethiopia, Nigeria also serves as a valuable case study because it utilizes a federalist system of government that sought to encourage political participation from all ethnic groups within the country. In looking at Nigeria as a case study, much can be learned about how ethnic conflict has been attempted to be reduced which we can then use to better understand how Ethiopia can limit its problems of ethnic conflict outbreaks.

With a population of more than 213 million people as of 2021, Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa and its richness in oil reserves allows it to rank as one of the most developed nations in Africa. The country is home to more than 200 ethnic groups who speak over 250 languages but the three main groups for this case study are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo who together comprise a majority of the country's ethnic population. Nigeria's colonial period is of special interest because the boundary demarcation that occurred during this period led to much of the social construction and division within the country. The northern region of the country is home to the

Hausa-Fulani while the western and eastern regions of the country were previously controlled by the Yoruba and Igbo, respectively during the colonial period. In establishing independence, these regions became combined to form what we now know as the singular country of Nigeria.

However, the regional differences between these ethnic groups, before combining, form the basis of the different ethnic identities within the country as identifying with different regions was seen as an effective way to lobby colonial authorities for resources (Jacob, 2012). Demarcation set the stage for strong regionalist pressures toward the introduction of a federalist government which came to fruition in 1954 to replace the colonial administration. This federal system of three regions aimed to recognize the needs and balance the aspirations of the ethnic dominant groups with each region having a strong autonomous government. In addition to the autonomous regions, the central government was tasked with focusing on the more national issues that burdened Nigerian society such as foreign policy, international trade, and national defense.

The problem that resulted from this federal structure is that it did a poor job of incorporating minority ethnic groups into the three established ethnic regions that came to be dominated by the dominant ethnic groups within the country (Anugwom, 2000). Critically, the federal structure also resulted in a disproportionately large northern region that encompassed more than three-quarters of Nigeria's territory and over half its population. This resulted in strained ethnic relations between the North and South of Nigeria as the South feared the power and size of the populous North region while the

North feared the South because the North was economically poorer and less educated than individuals of the Southern region.

This resulted in a struggle for political advantage between the two regions which was worsened further when the Northern party formed a coalition with the Eastern party to hold the majority within the national assembly. Using this power, this new coalition created a fourth federal region, the Midwest region, to disperse the power of the Yoruba's Western region. This power issue coupled with economic mismanagement and labor agitation resulted in a military intervention in January 1966 to restore order and discipline to the country. However, this attempted military coup resulted in a much deeper conflict occurring as the original coup, known as being inspired by the eastern Igbo, led to a counter-coup by members of the Northern region. This resulted in warfare breaking out in which thousands of Igbo were massacred in the North and the Igbo established their independent state of Biafra in 1967.

After the conflict ended and more than two million Biafrans had died, a federal military government took over which sought to centralize state power, strengthen its control over the states, and consolidate the influence of the federal civil servants. This government sought to reduce ethnic tensions by installing nationalist institutions and increasing the number of regions in the federation to 12 and then later to 19. Like the EPRDF, the theory behind this federation was to soothe tension by giving small ethnic groups more opportunities to participate in the country's political system (Leith & Solomon, 2001). While different regimes have taken power since the establishment of this federal military government, the problem of ethnic tension persists.

Nigeria's history of ethnic tensions and conflict can teach us many lessons on how Ethiopia's leadership can most effectively tackle the question of how the country can reduce ethnic conflict. What we primarily learn from the situation in Nigeria is that the issue of solving ethnic conflict is much more nuanced than merely incorporating marginalized ethnic groups into a country's political arena. Rather, demarcation and the geographical establishment of ethnic-based territory, a lack of resources and economic inequality, religion, and the military are primarily to blame for ethnic conflict outbreaks. The military is an especially interesting sector to look at as the military's authoritarian government began inciting ethnic tensions as a means to draw attention away from itself. Similarly to what resulted from the Ethiopian Empire's period of power, ethnic-based militant groups emerged to protect the best interests of different ethnic groups when it became clear that the government was now an enemy.

Tigray Conflict

Before an examination occurs of how effective conflict reduction strategies have been in reducing conflict events in Ethiopia, it is important first to understand the conflicts themselves and their causes. The most recent example of this is the conflict between the TPLF and FDRE. The beginning of this conflict and the history between these two parties can be traced back several decades. The TPLF played a central role in the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition, which took power in 1991 after the overthrowing of the Derg regime. This coalition, which sought to provide political representation for all ethnic groups, gave the TPLF a level of power that they previously lacked. However, this period of good relations between the TPLF and

the current administration ended when they fell out of favor with the federal government in 2018 after Abiy Ahmed assumed power as the Prime Minister. His election into office saw him introduce political and economic reforms that the TPLF viewed as intending to threaten their power and influence within the country.

In recent years, relations between the TPLF and FDRE have degraded further due to rising tensions during March 2020 when the postponement of the national elections, scheduled for August 2020, occurred due to the COVID pandemic. This was seen by the TPLF as a maneuver by the Abiy Ahmed administration to avoid losing power which prompted the TPLF to host its national election. Held in the Tigray region, the election resulted in a formidable victory in favor of TPLF leader Debretsion Gebremichael which was not taken lightly by the Ahmed administration. The delay and subsequent TPLF-led election were seen by both parties as evidence that the other party was illegitimate. The federal government did not recognize the result of the TPLF election and the TPLF now considered the Ahmed administration to be illegitimate due to overstaying its official term (Makonye, 2022). In response to this mutual view of illegitimacy, TPLF representatives ceased to participate in the work of parliament. These events along with numerous other instances led to an escalation of tensions between the two parties which, in due course, resulted in armed conflict breaking out in early November 2020.

On November 3, 2020, the Tigray Special Force (TSF) attacked a federal military base of the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF). While the question of who fired the first shot is widely contested, this event is seen as the introductory attack of the war (Ojakorotu & Erameh, 2022). The TSF claims that this was a pre-emptive operation in

response to federal troops being regrouped to the Southern Tigray border in which the Ahmed administration sought to launch a military operation that would lead to the arrest of prominent Tigray leaders. In response, Ethiopian federal authorities accused the TPLF of orchestrating ethnic violence across Ethiopia to make the country ungovernable and designated the TPLF as a terrorist group. On November 4th, in response, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared a six-month state of emergency in the Tigray region and launched a military operation aimed to stabilize the region from chaotic TPLF leadership. By the 12th of November, the Ethiopian government claimed to have seized the western part of Tigray. The ensuing days saw the main towns in Tigray become gradually occupied by Ethiopian forces and, upon taking control of Tigray's capital city Mekelle, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared the conflict to be over (Amaru, 2018).

However, this declaration motivated the TPLF to increase warfare efforts and use any means necessary to remove ENDF invaders from their territory. On June 28, 2021, more than a year after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed declared the war to be over, the conflict took a striking turn as the TPLF not only retook Mekelle, the capital city of Tigray but also advanced into the Amhara and Afar regions. In partnership with the Oromo ethnic group and their liberation army (OLA), another ethnic group embroiled in tension with the Ahmed administration, the TSF began taking control of several towns near Addis Ababa (Mwansa & Simbila, 2022). Now being in striking distance of the country's capital, the TPLF stated that it considered marching on the capital. In further action, the TPLF and OLA created a coalition aimed at dismantling the federal government administration in favor of a transitional government.

A successful counter-offensive by the ENDF and subsequent negotiations resulted in the declaration of an indefinite humanitarian truce on March 24, 2022, to allow for the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Tigray region. Unfortunately, this truce was broken towards the end of August 2022 which resulted in further warfare occurring between the two parties until November 2, 2022, when a comprehensive agreement to cease hostilities was agreed to between the TPLF and the ENDF which effectively ended the conflict. Numerous war crimes committed by the ENDF and TSF (in which sexual violence became a common occurrence), between 600,000 and 800,000 deaths and a humanitarian crisis in which famine became widespread are the ways by which this conflict should be understood (Chothia & Bekit, 2022).

Ideologically, the key to understanding how to reduce these conflicts is a more nuanced issue than these events would lead one to believe. The 2020 Tigray conflict highlights a more than century-long battle within the country over how power within the country should be shared between the central government and local authorities. One approach has been to utilize a federal approach in which the entirety of the country's multi-ethnic tradition and history is honored under the umbrella of a central government while leaving a great deal of autonomy to different communities to govern themselves. In contrast, another approach has been to unify the state around a central government that will directly work to eliminate any inter-ethnic conflict that presents itself. Regardless, focusing on societal issues such as economic inequality and not necessarily purely ethnicity is the key to reducing conflict in the country.

Ethnic Assimilation

Many governments have attempted to find an answer to the fundamental question of this paper in terms of what is the most effective way to reduce conflict within the country. Examining how the Emperor Haile Selassie, Derg, and FDRE administrations have attempted to limit conflict will provide us with a more extensive understanding of how to approach this issue. Looking firstly at Emperor Haile Selassie's administration, the imperial government of Haile Selassie adopted a policy of assimilation in which he sought to create a homogenous society in which Amharic-speaking, Orthodox Christian culture under a centralized administration was prioritized as the standard (Abbay, 2004). Rather than allow for different ethnic groups to maintain autonomy by speaking their ethnic language (of which more than 80 languages exist in the country) and adhering to different religious principles, citizens were forced to fundamentally change their identity. An example of this is the education system in which Amharic became the only language taught and utilized for instruction.

Before the Ethiopian Empire forced assimilation, educational instruction in a region was based on the more than 80 ethnic languages that exist within the country. A school in the Oromo region would teach coursework in the Oromo language rather than Amharic but this changed once the policy of assimilation was instituted. After the policy change, persons in the Oromo region were taught in Amharic rather than Oromo, and the use of the Oromo language was strongly discouraged which forced the Oromo to abandon their identity in different sectors of Ethiopian society.

This effort by Emperor Haile Selassie's rule was a resounding failure as the inability to properly represent all ethnic groups, linguistically, in public discourse became the breeding ground for much of the ethnic discontent we see today in the country. It is

important to note that a fundamental characteristic of this administration was cultural and structural inequalities which made it difficult for many citizens to achieve financial stability. The inability of this administration to create a society in which every citizen enjoyed the same freedom and ability to generate the finances needed to sustain themselves breed much resentment towards the government. Due to this, the argument could be presented that this approach towards assimilation was a failure before it even started because of how much distaste citizens had towards the Selassie government.

While it is unlikely that soothing much of the structural and cultural inequalities would have made the assimilation approach successful, the approach could potentially be more successful in a culture where these inequalities are less prevalent. Regardless of this, the assimilation policy was a catalyst for many of the ethnic movements we see in the country currently. Many within the country came to understand that ethnic groups could no longer rely on the government and must instead fight for themselves if they intend to preserve their own ethnic culture. This is why groups such as the TPLF, Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) have come to exist and play a central role in Ethiopian conflicts.

A Unitary State

The second governmental attempt to address the national issue of conflict reduction came from the Derg regime, which governed from 1974-1991, which attempted to shift towards a unitary state and work within a framework of Marxism-Leninism (Clapham, 2009). The Derg created twenty-four administrative regions and five autonomous regions, however, no authority was given to these regions

to control themselves. In attempting to reverse much of the harm done by the Selassie administration, the Derg initiated a mass National Literacy Campaign in more than 15 Ethiopian languages. While much of the policy utilized by the regime focused on cultural pluralism, the regime took one critical step against unity by waging a military campaign against ethno-nationalist armed groups (Adamu, 2013). While much of the work done by the regime was effective in reducing ethnic conflict nationally, this decision undid much of the positive progress being made toward ethnic relations.

In response to the campaign, ethnic-based organizations began intensifying their assault on government forces which eventually led to the destruction of the Derg regime's power. While there are positive takeaways from the work done by the Derg throughout their time in power, the regime and their efforts toward ethnic unity were a resounding failure much like the Selassie administration. Focusing on cultural pluralism is a method that future generations should work towards if they intend to reduce ethnic conflict in the country. However, the work of the Derg regime makes it clear that any effort to strip ethnic groups of their identity will lead to outbreaks of conflict.

While the militant nature of these groups does call into question whether future administrations should allow for their existence to continue, it is clear that attempting to eliminate them is an ineffective approach. This is because, as previously stated, these organizations serve as an attempt to preserve the ethnic identity of different groups. Especially because the autonomous regions are not given authority to govern themselves, allowing these groups to maintain some form of power and opposition through these groups is critical. Many of those who oppose these groups have stated that these organizations function as a breeding ground for secession attempts. This

argument has been especially prevalent in the current day against the TPLF which some have argued intends to follow in the footsteps of Eritrea in creating its own country. While this notion should not mean that warfare should be utilized against these organizations, it is important to keep this in mind when discussing whether these groups should be allowed to exist or eliminated.

Ethnic Unity

Seeing the attempts of the previous two administrations result in resounding failures, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), took a more conventional approach to address this issue. The EPRDF prioritized a policy of ethnic federalism as well as cultural, linguistic, and political autonomy at regional and sub-regional levels (Bayu, 2021). In stark contrast to previous administrations, the EPRDF essentially gave complete power to all ethnic groups in governing themselves and maintaining their culture. Structurally, the ethnic federalist system was aimed at providing political representation for all ethnic groups within government so that all ethnic groups would be included in future governmental policy. It is important to note that the head of the EPRDF, Meles Zenawi, was a part of the Tigray ethnic group which called the true intent of the ethnic federalist system into question due to the Tigray being at the center of many ethnic conflict events.

Another key aspect of the EPRDF administration was the utilization of demarcation to give ethnic groups their territory and an increased sense of autonomy. Before the EPRDF assumed power, Ethiopia was divided into 14 provinces or regions, each with its administrative structure. After they took power, the 14 provinces were

replaced by ethnolinguistic-based regions, namely Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), Gambela, and Harari (Abbink, 2006). Since then, there have been changes to the boundaries and composition of the regional states, and there have been some debates and criticisms about the effectiveness and fairness of the ethnic federalism system.

While the EPRDF's plan in theory should have been successful due to giving marginalized ethnic groups a voice within government, there were many challenges created by ethnic federalism that negatively affected ethnic relations. This is primarily because the EPRDF's plan made ethnicity the basis for governance when, previously, it had taken a limited role in governance (Shewadeg, 2019). One problem was the idea of a person having a dual identity because many Ethiopians have mixed identities but this new structure forced them to identify and belong to only one group at a time. Essentially, this system meant that Ethiopians were not allowed to identify generally as Ethiopian but instead, they must categorize themselves through an ethnic group.

This conveyed the message to citizens that their identity was only as valuable as the ethnic group that they were tied to. Ethnic Federalism thus had the opposite intended effect in that it led to Ethiopia's society becoming even more fragmented than it previously had been. Another pitfall of the system was that ethnic boundaries became demarcated which meant that territories that were traditionally shared between different ethnic groups became fixed in favor of a specific group. This greatly limited citizens' access to resources and political power which meant that ethnic conflicts were more likely to occur. Making ethnicity such a central part of Ethiopian society was extremely

harmful in that it provided an opportunity for ethnic elites to exploit their ethnic group for political and economic gain (Yusuf, 2019). Dissatisfied with losing power, these elites began providing their ethnic followers with false information that led group members to believe they were being mistreated and ignored. By using misinformation to incite conflict between different groups, these elites were able to mobilize their supporters more easily for political and economic benefit (Wondimu, 2013).

While ethnic federalism presented a new solution to a decades-long problem, it also created an entirely new set of challenges for ethnic groups. This resulted in the EPRDF's strategy of ethnic federalism is a failure as it created competition between and inside of different ethnic groups which resulted in more outbreaks of conflict (Keil & Alber, 2020). While the attempts of previous administrations were unsuccessful because they disregarded ethnic identity, the EPRDF made ethnic identity the most central aspect of Ethiopian society. This forced Ethiopians to think about their own identity and how their ethnic groups fit into the broader notion of Ethiopian society in a way that they had never had to consider previously. While attempts towards assimilation and suppression represent one extreme towards disregarding ethnic identity, the EPRDF's attempt represents an extreme approach towards the opposite end of the spectrum. Through the EPRDF's failure, it is clear that an approach in which ethnic identity is neither disregarded nor held in high esteem is necessary if conflict is to be reduced in the country.

Application of Theory

After examining the influence of key policy decisions on ethnic discontent in Ethiopia, we can now apply theory to understand why these decisions failed. In the case of Emperor Haile Selassie's policy of assimilation, the failure was due in part to the policy itself, but more significantly to the state of Ethiopian society at the time. As ethnic conflict theory highlights, citizens view conflict as a means to escape the impoverishment and hardship that impairs their daily lives.

During a time when Ethiopian society was dominated by economic and political inequality, we can now come to the understanding that any policy decisions made by Emperor were likely to fail, regardless of their merit, because they paid no attention to the lives of the average Ethiopians. Learning from this, any future policy decisions aimed at reducing conflict in the country must, in some way, address the problem of poor living conditions if ethnic tensions in the country are ever to be reduced. If future policy decisions by policy-makers aim to address the question of ethnic tension by focusing on ethnicity itself, then these policies will always be felt because citizens will still feel the need to engage in conflict as a means to escape the disappointing reality.

The theoretical framework established for why ethnic conflict occurs is also especially relevant to attempts made by the EPRDF to address the central question of this project. Ethnic conflict theory shows us that the demarcation utilized by the EPRDF to give ethnic groups more autonomy was especially harmful because it led to more ethnically concentrated regions which gave a greater opportunity for ethnic discontent to manifest itself within different ethnic groups. More importantly, the work of Horowitz highlights how the utilization of coalitions is generally ineffective in that it leads to immobilism which makes it hard for any governmental action to take effect. Especially in

a system in which great tension exists between different ethnic groups, it is extremely easy to see how ethnic groups such as the TPLF could use their ability to block policies as a revenge-seeking tactic against other ethnic groups.

International Actors

The involvement of organizations such as the African Union (AU) the Ethiopian ethnic conflict provides valuable insights into their potential to reduce conflict. In the Tigray Conflict, the Ethiopian federal government and leaders of the northern Tigray region agreed to a deal that would permanently end more than two years of warfare in large part due to the African Union. Brokered by the AU, the terms of the agreement were a ceasefire and restoration of constitutional order, disarmament, the recognition and holding of new elections, additional international aid, and additional monitoring for human rights violations (Kapur, 2022).

Additional rounds of peace talks and negotiations mediated by the African Union were held most recently in Nairobi, Kenya in March 2022 which resulted in the signing of a Joint Communique. Under this agreement, both parties aimed to address the humanitarian crisis that was created in Tigray as a result of the conflict. This included the release of prisoners, the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Tigray, and an increased effort to provide more humanitarian access to the region. Unfortunately, the TPLF later accused the Ethiopian government of reneging on the agreement established in the Joint Communique which resulted in fighting continuing between the two parties. The United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva has also made a meaningful contribution to the conflict by establishing a fact-finding body that will investigate

allegations of human rights abuses and international crimes in Ethiopia. This move will ensure that those who have used the conflict as a means to engage in behaviors such as large-scale massacres, widespread sexual violence, forced displacement of civilians, pillaging, and destruction of refugee camps will be held responsible for their actions.

While organizations such as the AU have made meaningful progress in reducing conflict within the country, international actors should also be critiqued for a lack of action or taking action too late in the conflict. While the AU should be commended for mediating peace talks between the two parties, their lengthy response time to the conflict opens them up to criticism. It took the African Union's Peace and Security Council more than a year to establish formal meetings between parties during the Tigray conflict. While the United Nations has taken an interest in the conflict from a human rights perspective, the inability of the United Nations Security Council to add Ethiopia to its formal agenda is extremely concerning.

Future Prevention Strategies

A clear lesson from the attempts made by these administrations' efforts to address conflict is that broad changes to how ethnicity is valued within the country are not effective in addressing the issue. A more direct approach is needed with citizens to prevent any dissatisfaction from turning into conflict. Failing to use a direct approach and instead relying on broad policy changes to address what is a very nuanced issue deep within Ethiopian society will only lead to more conflict. Taking the general idea of the EPRDF's unification ideal, providing a means for all to express themselves will allow for no one to feel marginalized and disregarded. This should be done in the form of

holding more national dialogue which will allow for the voices of every Ethiopian to be heard. It's not enough to look at merely the demands of ethno-nationalist forces as that only encompasses a modicum of the issues that lead ethnic groups to consider conflict. We must consider the interests and needs of these Ethno-nationalist forces if we hope to ensure that they have no reason to engage in conflict.

Where many of these governmental attempts fail is that they fail to consider the role of local governments and their autonomy in addressing this central issue. Stripping community members of their ability at the local level to contribute to Ethiopia's political arena in the way that Emperor Haile Selassie's rule had done is a surefire way to create discontent and conflict among community members (Chabal et al., 2005). Establishing an inclusive local administration in which the opinions, interests, and needs of those directly affected by government policy can be considered in a local setting would be ideal. From there, local leaders can bring these concerns en masse to national leaders who can then work to implement the necessary changes to better serve persons at the local level. Generally speaking, a greater focus on depoliticizing ethnicity is necessary if conflict within the country is to be reduced.

Alterations to the current political system will also be paramount to future conflict prevention strategies. Ethiopia currently employs a one-party system at both the regional and federal levels which creates an exorbitant amount of corruption. Even though other parties do exist in name, they are not given a fair opportunity to participate in Ethiopian politics. This is what leads to political elites being able to utilize misinformation as a means to further their own political and economic goals. Especially with ruling political parties being likely to only represent one of the many ethnic groups

that exist within the country, it is very easy for citizens to believe their ethnic group is lacking representation. Much like the previous discourse in this section, the one-party system is yet another example of the Ethiopian government's inability to ensure that the voices of all citizens are heard. When this failure occurs, it makes it extremely easy for these citizens to be manipulated towards engaging in conflict that may not even benefit them.

Concluding Remarks

While there are numerous reasons why different administrations have fundamentally failed in their attempts to reduce ethnic conflict within the country, there is a commonality between the attempts made by these governments. In reducing conflict, different governments have attempted to solve this issue by broadly changing the role that ethnicity plays within the country. Whether by diminishing or making ethnicity insignificant or a fundamental aspect of Ethiopian society, it seems as if these drastic attempts at changing the role of ethnicity are ineffective. While ethnicity will always be an important part of Ethiopian society, future policy decisions should not focus on ethnicity but rather on the relationship that the average Ethiopian has with the country's political system. Furthermore, undoing the damage that previous governments have done to relations between ethnic groups and the Ethiopian government will be essential in reducing conflict. Regimes such as the Derg have played a key role in eroding the trust that Ethiopians have in the political system where future policy decisions will always be met with skepticism no matter how effective an idea may be in theory.

In this paper, I argue that the path to conflict prevention in Ethiopia must involve better integration of citizens politically. What this means is not just relying on the opinions of the elites within these ethnic groups but the opinions of the average Ethiopian who gains nothing financially or politically from giving certain opinions. One way in which this can be done is to increase national dialogue in which citizens are given a platform to have their voices heard so that their needs can be factored into future policy-making decisions. While parties such as the EPRDF have attempted to implement broader national dialogue, their inability to establish neutrality within the minds of Ethiopians has made their attempt at failure.

With many of these actions, highlighting the neutrality of committees responsible for fostering discussion is essential if dialogue-creation attempts are to be taken seriously. For citizens that are already skeptical of the current political landscape, future governments must make transparency and inclusion hallmarks of any future attempts at hosting national dialogue. Creating a more open political system in which multiple political parties are allowed to participate and assume power within the country and eliminating the one-party system will be essential in restoring trust in the country's political system and reducing conflict.

It is abundantly clear that the failures of previous administrations such as Emperor Selassie, Derg, and EPRDF will continue to occur if a drastically different approach is not taken. Efforts from past administrations have illustrated continually that relegating the role of ethnicity nor making it central to Ethiopian society reduces conflict outbreaks. If the outlook of ethnic conflict in the country is to be improved, leaders must step away from the broad policy changes that have defined the Ethiopian government

for decades. National leadership cannot continue to disregard the identity and needs of ethnic groups if it ever hopes to create a safe society for its citizens.

Given that a large portion of Ethiopians are already struggling with poverty, governments must take every possible measure to address this problem and prevent it from exacerbating further.

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