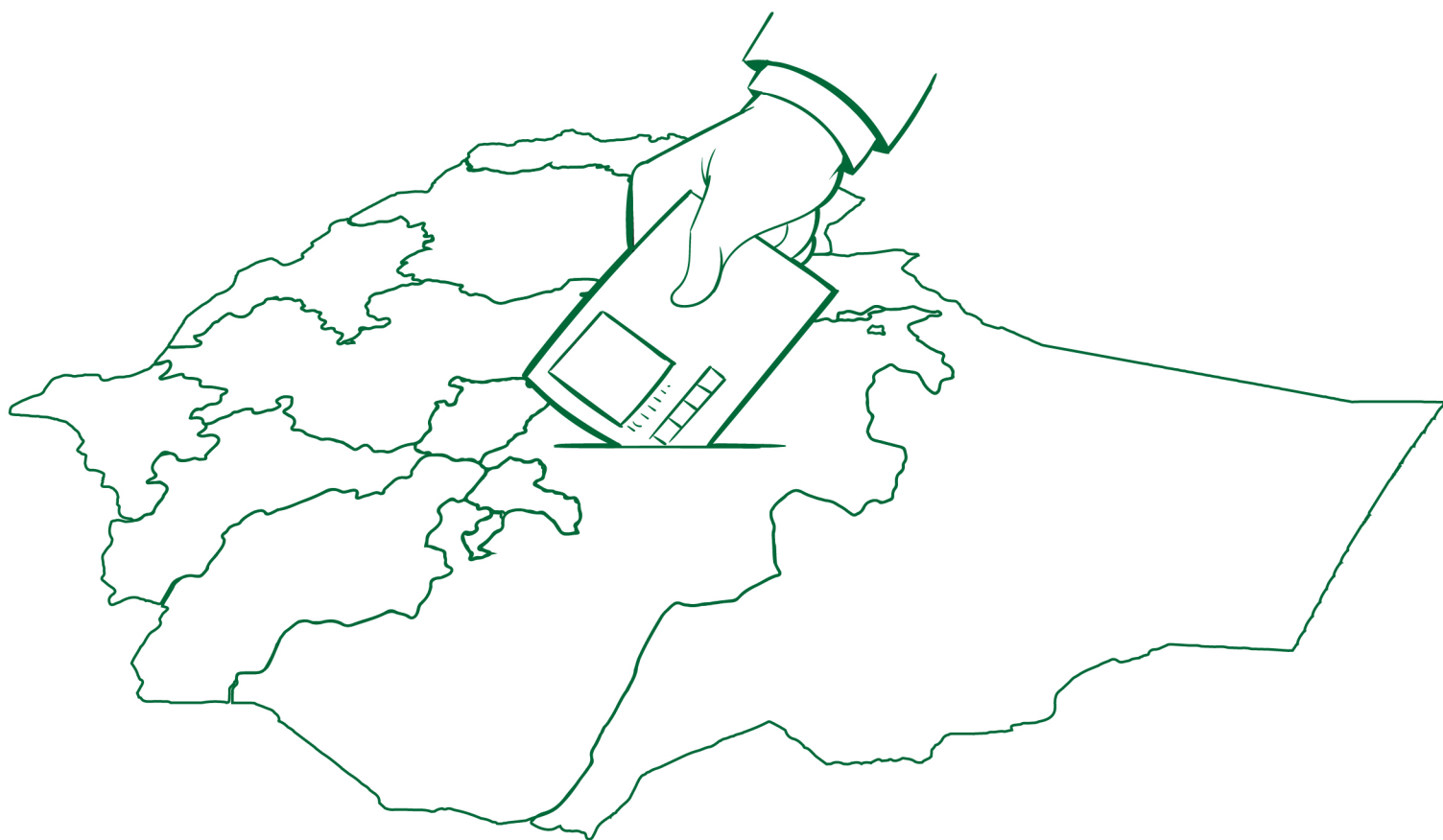


Electoral Constituency Arrangements for Ethiopia's House of Peoples' Representatives: The Impact of Administration Boundary Changes and Absence of Population Census

October 2025



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Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society
Organizations for Elections



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Electoral Constituency Arrangements for Ethiopia's House of Peoples' Representatives

The Impact of Administration Boundary Changes and Absence of Population Census

Prepared for and commissioned by:

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The findings of this assessment study are based on an analysis of available resources, which have been cited in the references. The report is further enriched by the practical experience and grounded understanding of electoral constituency delimitation in Ethiopia.

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Acronyms

Art. – Article

CSOs – Civil Society Organizations

e.g. – exempli gratia, or “for example”

etc. – et cetera, or “and other similar things”

FDRE – Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

FPTP – First Past the Post

HoF – the House of the Federation

HoPR – House of Peoples' Representatives

i.e. – id est, or “that is”

NEBE – National Election Board of Ethiopia

No. – Number

OPOVOV - One Person, One Vote, One Value

Para. – Paragraph

RC – Regional Council

SNNP – Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples

SNNPR – Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples
Region

UN – United Nations



Executive Summary

This critical Study assesses the current Ethiopian electoral constituency delimitations or boundary delimitations in light of two issues: the lack of a recent nationwide population census and the continuous changes to administrative borders. Key informant interviews and desk reviews were used as tools for the qualitative and quantitative research approaches applied in this Study. The Ethiopian constituency delimitation laws and practices are compared to international standards and historical examples from several election periods since 1931.

Ethiopia relies on out-of-date constituency borders that were first established in 1994 using estimates based on a 1984 census. Despite constitutional provisions mandating constituency adjustments based on population census data, no revision has taken place since 1994. Furthermore, due to changes to administrative boundaries, some voters now cast votes in constituencies outside of their administrative boundaries (sometimes in another Regional State), which has also made electoral representation more challenging. Consequently, this may result in malapportionment (unequal representation), a lack of responsiveness and accountability from the representatives, and erosion of public trust in the democratic process.

The absence of transparent and participatory delimitation processes, legal ambiguities regarding delimitation authority and criteria, and the lack of a comprehensive framework to ensure minority representation through special constituencies were identified as some of the challenges witnessed in Ethiopia's constituency delimitation process.

The Study's key recommendations include the urgent need for a national census, well-defined legal requirements and procedures for constituency boundary revision, increased stakeholder consultation, clear standards of minority representation, and the use of reliable interim data in the absence of census data.

Introduction

The foundations of representative government are fair and effective electoral constituencies. Ensuring democratic legitimacy, guaranteeing equitable representation, and giving individuals the freedom to vote for their representatives all depend on the fair and effective delimitation of constituencies. Fair and effective delimitations of constituencies require consideration of different factors (such as geographical and administrative structures, communities of interest, simplicity, etc.) and periodical revisions based on demographic data. In Ethiopia, despite significant changes in administrative structure and demography, the electoral constituency delimitations have remained unchanged since 1994.

This Study examines the impact of Ethiopia's changing administrative and demographic settings on electoral constituencies. In particular, it considers how the timeliness, representativeness, and effectiveness of constituencies are impacted by the two changes. Moreover, the criteria used to create special constituencies and the representation of minority groups are of particular importance to the Study.

The assessment contributes to a critical understanding of Ethiopia's electoral constituency delimitation strengths, weaknesses, and reform opportunities by examining legal and regulatory frameworks, evaluating practical difficulties, and integrating the experience of other countries. It provides recommendations for improving the inclusiveness and integrity of the electoral process.



Objective and Scope of the Assessment

The Study aims to assess the impacts of the changes in administrative boundaries in Ethiopia and the absence of an updated population census on electoral constituency delimitation. In pursuing this general objective, the Study evaluates the effectiveness, strengths, and weaknesses of the current constituency delimitation in relation to citizens' right to equal representation and participation. The specific objectives of the Study are:

- To assess the constituency boundaries in light of the changes in administrative boundaries and demographic shifts since the last general elections in Ethiopia;
- To examine the representation of minority groups in Ethiopia under the existing electoral framework;
- To review international best practices and the practices of other regions of Ethiopia in electoral constituency delimitation, and
- To provide recommendations to enhance the fairness and effectiveness of electoral constituency arrangements.

With a focus on the effects of administrative boundary changes and the lack of a recent population census, this Study assesses Ethiopia's electoral constituency arrangements. Its scope is limited to representations to the HoPR seats as opposed to regional council elections. The scope is limited as such to provide in-depth and focused examination with a manageable scope; however, the study occasionally refers to regional laws and regional council electoral constituencies where it is necessary to explain topics within the scope of the study.

While the Study makes use of the relevant literature, statistics, and expert interviews, the lack of written records and restricted access to region-specific data in some areas limit the research. Thus, the Study is conducted based on accessible legislation, literature, and key informant interviews.

Methodology

The Study applied mixed research methods, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The quantitative component focused on demographic and electoral statistics analysis. The qualitative component of the Study delved into electoral laws, policy documents, literature, and interviews to understand constituency delimitation and its effects on electoral representation in Ethiopia. These methods enable a thorough analysis of demographic shifts (changes), administrative delimitations, legal frameworks, and their effects on electoral representation.

Desk Review

Desk review is the foundational element of the Study, giving an in-depth understanding of constituency delimitation in Ethiopia in order to establish the Study's contextual framework, a critical review of literature, legislation, policies, reports, and pertinent statistical data.

Examining Ethiopia's institutional and legislative structure governing the delimitation of electoral constituencies is a major component of the desk review. Analysis of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia's (NEBE) reports, election laws, and the FDRE Constitution was conducted. The desk review also examined existing research and publications on Ethiopia's election constituency delimitation. This includes reports from government agencies, civil society organizations, and international electoral observation groups, as well as scholarly works and policy papers. Moreover, analyzing demographic and electoral data, such as national census figures, voter registration lists, and past election outcomes, was a crucial component of the desk review.

Key Informant Interviews

Interviews were conducted using purposive sampling. Because of the specialized focus of the Study, interviewees were selected on the basis of knowledge, experience, and active involvement in electoral constituency delimitation, electoral policy, or engagement in works related to civil and political rights. Accordingly, interviews were conducted with election experts and relevant departments of the NEBE.



Data Analysis

The Study was carried out using four stages: exploratory, qualitative, quantitative, and comparative analysis. The exploratory phase lays out the foundation for the research, with the goal of identifying key gaps, difficulties, and trends in constituency delimitation. Ethiopia's constitutional provisions, electoral law, policy documents, previous constituency delimitation reports, and available demographic data, such as census and voter registration data, were reviewed.

The qualitative research aspect of the Study uses interviews and legal analysis to produce detailed perspectives from relevant stakeholders. The semi-structured interviews enabled the opportunity to go further into new topics while following a methodical line of investigation. This phase involved a review of Ethiopia's constitutional provisions, electoral law, relevant policy documents, past constituency delimitation reports, and demographic data such as census and voter registration records.

The quantitative research aspect of the Study includes a data study of constituency boundaries. In order to examine differences in constituency sizes, voter distribution, and population growth trends across time, this stage involved collecting and statistically analyzing secondary demographic and electoral data from the relevant governmental bodies, i.e., the NEBE and the Ethiopian Statistics Service.

The comparative analysis phase broadens the research's scope by looking at constituency delimitation practices during the past six general elections. It also looks into different international practices in electoral constituency delimitation. It assesses the challenges and prospects of Ethiopia's existing electoral system.

Finally, the research has gone through and synthesis (combining information from multiple sources) to ensure data correctness and reliability.

Theoretical and Legal Framework for Electoral Constituency Delimitation in Ethiopia

Overview and Theoretical Framework for Electoral Constituency Delimitation

Definitions and Purposes of Electoral Constituency and Constituency Delimitation

An Electoral Constituency (or just a Constituency) is an “area for which someone is elected as a representative for a parliament¹ or it is a basic electoral unit into which eligible electors are organized to elect representatives to a legislative or other public body.² An electoral constituency serves as both a platform for the political representation of citizens by political parties and a site where they compete to win seats on behalf of voters.³ Under Ethiopian electoral law, a constituency is defined as “an electoral district established by dividing the nation's territories in accordance with the law and in a manner conducive for the execution of elections and for the people to elect their representatives.⁴ Constituency Delimitation’ refers to the process of drawing the borders of the electoral constituencies or electoral district borders. It can also refer to the process of drawing voting areas, such as polling stations, districts, or election precincts, in order to assign voters to particular polling locations.⁵ The majority and plurality electoral systems are most frequently linked to the delimitation of electoral constituencies because they use constituencies to establish geographical units where representatives are elected on a winner-take-all basis.

Single-member electoral constituencies, whereby only one single representative is elected from an electoral constituency, play a major role in both systems. Periodically, these electoral constituencies need to be redrawn to account for population shifts in both plurality and majority systems. Electoral constituencies shall also be revised from time to time under certain mixed and proportional representation systems, such as the single transferable vote system.⁶

Constituency delimitation is a common phenomenon in most electoral systems. Only a few exceptional countries do not delimit constituencies, such as Panama and Georgia, and they follow the List Proportional Representation electoral system.⁷ All other electoral systems, including First Past the Post (FPTP), Two Round, Alternative Vote, Block Vote, Parallel, and Mixed Member Proportional

1 Collins Dictionary, ‘Constituency’ <<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/constituency>> accessed 16 April 2025.

2 Britannica Dictionary, ‘Constituency’ <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/constituency>> accessed 16 April 2025.

3 International IDEA, ‘Electoral Boundary Delimitation’ (27 July 2022) <<https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/electoral-boundary-delimitation>> accessed 19 March 2025.

4 National Electoral Board of Ethiopia Establishment Proclamation, Proclamation No. 1133/2019, Federal Negarit Gazette, 25th Year, No. 71, 2019, Addis Ababa, art 2(6); The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation, Proclamation No. 1162/2019, Federal Negarit Gazette, 25th Year, No. 97, 2019, Addis Ababa, art 2(15).

5 ACE Project, ‘Boundary Delimitation (2nd Edition)’ (2012) <<https://aceproject.org/acc-en/topics/bd/onePage>> accessed 17 April 2025.

6 *ibid.*

7 *ibid.*



systems, necessitate electoral constituency delimitation.⁸

The primary goals of the electoral constituency delimitation process are to ensure the integrity and coherence of administrative regions, establish political, social, and cultural bonds between voters and their representatives, and achieve proportionality in the citizen-to-seat ratio in an electoral constituency in accordance with the “one person, one vote, one value” (OPOVOV) principle.⁹

Principles of Electoral Constituency Delimitation

The integrity of the electoral process and the representative nature of a parliament are seriously threatened by electoral abuses, especially in “gerrymandered” constituencies (where constituency boundaries are purposefully manipulated to favor a particular political organization over its rivals) and “malapportioned” constituencies (where voting constituencies differ greatly in population size).¹⁰

The OPOVOV premise is compromised in areas where malapportionment takes place due to significant population differences across constituencies. Voters in smaller constituencies have disproportionately more power than those in larger constituencies, which results in an uneven allocation of political decision-making authority. This may result in a parliament that does not reflect the will of the people as a whole, which could skew policy decisions and disenfranchise residents of areas with high population densities.

The deliberate redrawing of voting lines for political ends “gerrymandering” can also skew the electoral landscape by giving a certain party “safe seats” in spite of the party’s general popularity. This has the power to effectively determine election results, lessen electoral competition, and restrict the options available to voters. Gerrymandering has the potential to further exacerbate feelings of injustice by splintering groups of interest and distributing the representation of particular groups.

Long-term effects on the legitimacy of the entire delimitation process can result from perceptions of improper manipulation in the electoral boundary design process. Voters’ confidence in the electoral management body and the legislation governing elections is damaged if the electoral constituency delimitations have been purposefully

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ International IDEA (n 3).

¹⁰ Challenging the Norms and Standards of Election Administration: Boundary Delimitation’, in IFES, Challenging the Norms and Standards of Election Administration (2007) 59 <https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/migrate/4_ifes_challenging_election_norms_and_standards_wp_bndel.pdf> accessed 29 March 2025.

altered to promote a particular political result. This could undermine the legitimacy of the democratic process as a whole. As a result, there may be popular unrest and political instability as the validity of the elected parliament and the poll results themselves are seriously questioned. Therefore, a proper electoral constituency delimitation process shall uphold the following principles:

► Impartiality

Delimitation should be carried out by an independent, professional, and non-partisan boundary authority.¹¹ In this regard, several Commonwealth countries have adopted laws that mandate non-partisan commissions to conduct electoral constituency delimitation, whereas, in numerous states in the United States, congressional constituencies are delimited by legislatures.¹² In Ethiopia, electoral constituencies are delimited by the HoF,¹³ which is the second chamber of the Ethiopian Parliament. The role of the NEBE, which is established as an independent¹⁴ and impartial electoral management body (EMB), is limited to preparing a proposal for such delimitation.¹⁵

► Equality

To guarantee that every vote has the same weight, constituency populations or, in the case of multimember electoral districts, the ratio of representatives to voters should be as equal as feasible.¹⁶ On this subject, the UN Committee on Human Rights, General Comment 25, provides that “the drawing of electoral boundaries and the method of allocating votes should not distort the distribution of voters or discriminate against any group and should not exclude or restrict unreasonably the right of citizens to choose their representatives freely.”¹⁷

¹¹ *ibid* 60.

¹² ACE Project (n 5).

¹³ The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 1/1995, Federal Negarit Gazeta, 1st Year, No. 1, 1995, Addis Ababa, art 103(5).

¹⁴ *ibid* 102.

¹⁵ *ibid* 103(5).

¹⁶ Challenging the Norms and Standards of Election Administration: Boundary Delimitation’ (n 10) 62.

¹⁷ UN Committee on Human Rights, ‘General Comment 25, “The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right to Equal Access to Public Service”’ (1996) para 21 <<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/a/19154.pdf>>

accessed 13 April 2025.



➤ Non-discrimination

Minorities should not be discriminated against when constituencies are drawn.¹⁸ The FDRE Constitution provides that minority nationalities and peoples shall be accorded at least 20 seats at the HoPR.¹⁹ Each of these seats is translated into special constituencies in Ethiopia's single-member constituency system. In practice, Ethiopia currently has 22 special constituencies (see Section 1.2.4 of this Study).

➤ Transparency

Constituency boundaries should be drawn transparently, with public consultation.²⁰ Ethiopian electoral law does not mandate public consultation on the delimitation process. It simply orders the delimited constituencies to be “announced to the public 180 days before the commencement of candidate registration.”²¹ Such an announcement comes after the proposed constituencies are approved by the HoF, which does not ensure transparency. In countries such as Canada and Australia, the general public may present oral representations or written submissions to the delimitation commissions, and in other countries, such as the United States, that do not have formal public consultations, the public may challenge a delimitation proposal through litigation.²² Public hearings, written submissions, publication of draft proposals, targeted consultations with specific stakeholders, and opening the possibility of civil litigation would enhance legitimacy and public trust.

➤ Representativeness

Geographical features, administrative borders, and other aspects pertaining to communities of interest should also be considered by the boundary authority as criteria that are pertinent to representation.²³ (See Section 1.1.4. below regarding considerations that need to be taken when demarcating electoral constituencies.)

It should be noted that even if different factors are considered in establishing constituencies to ensure representativeness, the practicability of constituencies for democratic representation may be affected by different factors. For instance, voters who participated in an empirical study provided divided responses in answering who their representatives should serve. The majority believed that HoPR members should serve their constituency, conscience, and/or the constitution; some suggested their political party, Prime Minister, or Speaker of the House, while a few suggested the entire country.²⁴ For a representative democracy to ensure “representation”, elected representatives should reflect the views of their constituencies.

Considerations in Electoral Constituency Delimitation

Different electoral systems take different factors into consideration for electoral constituency delimitation. Some of these considerations include:

➤ Employing Geographical or Topographical Features

Constituencies may be established in consideration of geographic boundaries and geographic size and/or shape. In some cases, these boundaries may be considered along with the boundaries of tribal territories, as seen in the practice of Botswana.²⁵ In Ethiopia, the basis for constituency delimitation is Woreda arrangements with exceptional crossing of Woreda and Zonal boundaries, which were initially created based on linguistic, ethnic, and geographical arrangements. Furthermore, countries such as Kenya consider geographic size or density by setting different quotas for urban centers and sparsely populated areas, among other factors.²⁶ The Constitution of Kenya (2010) art 89(5). Although the current Ethiopian electoral law and practical constituency delimitation have not considered population density for constituency delimitation, delimitations during the imperial era and the Derg regime considered urban and rural population density, as discussed in the coming sections.

¹⁸ ‘Challenging the Norms and Standards of Election Administration: Boundary Delimitation’ (n 10) 66.

¹⁹ The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (n 13) art 54(3).

²⁰ Challenging the Norms and Standards of Election Administration: Boundary Delimitation’ (n 10) 68.

²¹ The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election’s Code of Conduct Proclamation (n 4) 13(1).

²² ACE Project (n 5).

²³ ‘Challenging the Norms and Standards of Election Administration: Boundary Delimitation’ (n 10) 65.

²⁴ Mercy Fekadu, Parliament in Ethiopia (Routledge 2024) 159–160 <<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/oa-mono/10.4324/9781003293163/parliament-ethiopia-mercy-fekadu-mulugeta>> accessed 20 March 2025.

²⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Botswana (1966) art 65(2).

²⁶ The Constitution of Kenya (2010) art 89(5).



➤ Maintaining Territorial Connection and Aligning with Existing Administrative Arrangements

Constituencies should be delimited in consideration of administrative arrangements such as regions, states, districts, zones, cities, etc. Moreover, when merging two or distinct administrative areas to form a single constituency, maintaining the territorial connection or contiguity between the areas is important.²⁷ Ethiopia's constituency boundaries are generally aligned with Woreda arrangements. While exceptions exist for crossing Woreda and Zonal boundaries, the electoral law stipulates that constituencies must remain within regional state boundaries.²⁸ However, the reality might differ as will be discussed later in this Study. Other than this, during the 1994 constituency delimitation, when two or more Woredas joined to establish a single constituency, such a merger was done with adjacent Woredas to keep the territorial connection or contiguity.²⁹

➤ Aligning Communities of Interest

A community of interest is a group of people connected by shared values such as history, culture, ethnic or racial background, religion, language, economic ties, etc. Many countries³⁰ consider communities of interest in demarcating electoral constituencies. The Kenyan Constitution provides that constituencies shall be delimited by taking into account the community of interest, and historical, economic, and cultural ties, inter alia.³¹ Under Ethiopian electoral laws, communities of interest are not required to be taken into account when drawing constituency boundaries; however, the linguistic map of Ethiopia was considered to guarantee that the electoral constituencies reflected both geographic location and ethnic identity during the 1994 delimitation.³²

27 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የመካከል ሥራ መገናኛ (ረቂቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም., p 37.

28 The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation (n 4) art 13(1).

29 የኢትዮጵያ የሽግግር መንግሥት የምርጫ ኮሚሽን, ለሕገ መንግሥታዊ ገባሌ አባላት ምርጫ የተዘጋጀ የምርጫ ክልሎች ዘርዘር (ለተወካዮች ምክር ቤት የቀረበ): ሐምሌ 1985 ዓ.ም., para 5,6,7.

30 Examples include Germany ("coherent area"), Nepal, Pakistan, and Papua New Guinea ("community and diversity of interest" or "homogeneity and heterogeneity of the community"), and Australia (economic, social, and regional interests).

31 The Constitution of Kenya (n 26) art 89(5)(b).

32 Beza Dessalegn, 'Challenges of Ethnic Representation in Ethiopia and the Need for Reform' (2018) 12 Mizan Law Review 13.

➤ Securing Equitable Minority Representation

Countries with significant racial, ethnic, or religious divisions often opt for proportional representation systems or special provisions to ensure minority representation, as single-member district systems can lead to unequal outcomes and potential instability in deeply divided societies. In Ethiopia, as discussed above, the FDRE Constitution provides that minority nationalities and peoples shall be accorded at least 20 seats at the HoPR.³³ The HoF is mandated with the power to set criteria and determine which groups get these 20+ seats after special constituencies are established for them.³⁴ Although a new and clear set of criteria is unavailable now, back in 1994, the HoF established a committee for such purpose, which identified 33 minorities and among which it provided special representation to 22, which had a population above 10,000.³⁵ Mauritius has a similar system where 4 constituencies are reserved for ethnic or religious communities, while Palestine reserves 6 seats for the Christian population and 1 seat for the Samaritans.³⁶ Notably, Pakistan reserves 60 seats for women and 10 seats for non-Muslims, but these seats are divided among political parties proportionally.³⁷

➤ Considering Overall Proportionality

In order for voters to have an equally weighted voice in the election of representatives, constituencies must have an equal or proportional population. Otherwise, if a representative is elected from a constituency with twice as many voters as another one, it would mean voters in the larger constituency will have half the influence of those in the smaller constituency. In this regard, the current Ethiopian electoral law, in theory, provides that the population of the constituencies shall be comparable and the highest average population deviation between constituencies shall not exceed 15%. In practice, the 1994 constituency delimitation, which is still in force, established constituencies with 50,000 to 150,000 population although the population³⁸ would show significant change since then.

33 The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (n 13) art

54(3).

34 The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation (n 4) 13(1).

35 የአናባ ብሔረሰቦች በሕገ መንግሥት ገባሌ አወካክል እንዲያጠና የተወካዮች ምክር ቤት የቋቋመው ጊዜያዊ ኮሚቴ ሪፖርት (1986 E.C.); cited in: Beza Dessalegn (n 32) 14.

36 ACE Project (n 5).

37 *ibid.*

38 የኢትዮጵያ የሽግግር መንግሥት የምርጫ ኮሚሽን, ለሕገ መንግሥታዊ ገባሌ አባላት ምርጫ የተዘጋጀ የምርጫ ክልሎች ዘርዘር (ለተወካዮች ምክር ቤት የቀረበ): ሐምሌ 1985 ዓ.ም. (n 29) para 4.



➤ Facilitating Accessibility (Functionality) and Simplicity

Electoral constituencies should be easy to understand for both voters and electoral administrators. Functionality and simplicity are achieved through geographical coherence and manageability. If all the factors are put into consideration when demarcating constituencies, elected representatives can effectively serve their constituents, and the overall process would be transparent and less prone to confusion or manipulation.

The Legal Framework and Practice of Electoral Constituency Delimitation in Ethiopia

Constituency Delimitation for the House of Deputies (1931 – 1974)

Ethiopia's first constitution, the 1931 Constitution, established a bicameral system comprised of the “Chamber of the Senate (የሕግ መወሰን ምክር ቤት)” and the “Chamber of Deputies (የሕግ መመሪያ ምክር ቤት).”³⁹ While the members of the Chamber of the Senate were to be appointed by the Emperor from among the dignitaries (Mekuanent/መኳነት) who have served as princes, ministers, judges, or army leaders,⁴⁰ the members of the Chamber of Deputies are temporarily chosen by the dignitaries (Mekuanent/መኳነት) and the local chiefs (Shumoch/ሻሞች) “until the people are capable of electing them by themselves.”⁴¹ The 1931 Constitution assumes that the people were not, at that time, capable of electing representatives; hence, elections did not take place immediately. Moreover, there was no law that governed the size, the sessions, and the nature of deliberation of the Chambers. Practically, the Senate had 28 members while the Chamber of Deputies had 56, and the sessions were limited to 3 months due to travel constraints.⁴² However, the parliament was dissolved due to the Italian war. After 1935, during the first two years after the end of the Italian occupation, Emperor Haile Selassie inaugurated the two chambers once again. This time, the members of the Chamber of Deputies were elected through indirect election.⁴³ The constituency delimitation was straightforward. There were 12 provinces at that time, and elders residing in each region elected 5 members for the Chamber.⁴⁴

Therefore, technically, the constituencies used for the election were 12, and they were based on the regional state boundaries during that period.

The 1931 Constitution was later revised by the 1955 Constitution, which maintained the composition of the parliament as the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Senate.⁴⁵ Members of the Chamber of Deputies were elected from ‘electoral districts’ containing nearly 200,000 inhabitants.⁴⁶ Each electoral district elects 2 representatives (Deputies).⁴⁷ Additionally, towns with more than 30,000 inhabitants will be represented by one Deputy and an additional Deputy for each 50,000 inhabitants in excess of the first 30,000.⁴⁸

Based on the above foundation, the first direct election in Ethiopia took place in 1957, whereby 210 Deputies were elected.⁴⁹ The then ‘National Board of Elections’ was able to register 3.5 million voters from the estimated 20.8 million total population of Ethiopia at that time.⁵⁰ For the second and third round elections in 1961 and 1965, the number of Deputies increased to 250⁵¹ while the registered voters were 5.1 million and 3.2 million, respectively.⁵² The number of elected Deputies grew to 268 for the fourth and fifth elections that took place in 1969 and 1973, respectively.⁵³

These were the ‘electoral districts’ used during the five

39 The Constitution of the Empire of Ethiopia (1931), art 30.

40 *ibid* 31.

41 *ibid* 32.

42 John Markakis and Asmelash Beyene, ‘Representative Institutions in Ethiopia’

(1967) 5 Journal of Modern African Studies 193, 203.

43 The Revised Constitution of Ethiopia (1955), art 76.

44 *ibid*.

45 The Revised Constitution of Ethiopia (1955), art 76.

46 *ibid* 93.

47 *ibid* 94.

48 *ibid* 93.

49 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የመካከል ሥራ መንግሥት (ረቂቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 5.

50 John Markakis and Asmelash Beyene (n 42) 208.

51 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የመካከል ሥራ መንግሥት (ረቂቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 5.

52 John Markakis and Asmelash Beyene (n 42) 208.

53 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የመካከል ሥራ መንግሥት (ረቂቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 5.



elections.⁵⁴

Table 1: Electoral Districts for Chamber of Deputies Elections

No.	Provinces	No. of Deputies	No. of Electoral Districts
1	Harerge	22	11
2	Sidamo	20	10
3	Shewa	34	17
4	Begemidir Semen	26	13
5	Bale	10	5
6	Tigray	18	9
7	Arusi	6	3
8	Addis Ababa	10	5
9	Elubabor	8	4
10	Eritrea	32	16
11	Keffa	14	7
12	Wollega	16	8
13	Wollo	26	13
14	Gamo Gofa	8	4
15	Gojam	18	9
Total		268	132

Constituency Delimitation for National Shengo (1989)

Derg (Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia) overthrew the imperial regime to take power in 1974. However, Derg did not establish a parliament for 13 years. In 1987, a national parliament, known as the 'National Shengo,' was established by the Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.⁵⁵ Since the regime did not allow a multi-party-political system, the candidates for the National Shengo were nominated from the Workers' Party of Ethiopia,⁵⁶ which was the party holding power. Elections of members of the National Shengo were held based on the size of the population,⁵⁷ and representation of nationalities had to be ensured⁵⁸ in accordance with the 1987 Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. This has been translated into practice as the National Shengo was relatively more ethnically representative than the previous parliaments in Ethiopia.⁵⁹

The elections for the National Shengo took place in 835 electoral constituencies. In rural areas, one constituency represented 75,000 residents, while in urban areas, one constituency represented 15,000 residents.⁶⁰ Although the country was divided into 30 provinces during the Derg's regime, for election purposes, the country was divided into 16 provinces, adopting the Imperial period's arrangement. Accordingly, these were the electoral constituencies used in the National Shengo elections.⁶¹

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 1 of 1987, art 62.

⁵⁶ *ibid* 64

⁵⁷ *ibid* 64.

⁵⁸ *ibid* 65(2).

⁵⁹ Mercy Fekadu (n 24) 62.

⁶⁰ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ሞርጮች ቦርድ, የሞርጮች ክልሎችን የመካከል ሥራ ማግኘት (ረቂቅ): የካቲት 2006ዓ.ም. (n 27) 6.

⁶¹ *ibid* 5,6.



Table 2: Electoral Constituencies for the National Shengo Election

No.	Region	No. of Constituencies
1	Arsi	30
2	Bale	17
3	Eritrea	64
4	Gamo Gofa	20
5	Gojam	55
6	Gondar	48
7	Harerge	82
8	Elubabor	19
9	Kefa	41
10	Shewa	146
11	Sidamo	60
12	Tigray	40
13	Wollega	44
14	Wollo	60
15	Addis Ababa	105
16	Aseb Administration	4
Total		835

In addition to the National Shengo, Regional Shengo was established for each of the 5 Autonomous Regions⁶² and the 25 Administrative Regions.⁶³ Each Regional Shengo had 100 to 200 members, depending on its population.⁶⁴

Constituency Delimitation for the Constituent Assembly (1994)

After the downfall of the Derg regime, a transitional government was established in Ethiopia in 1991. The Peace and Democratic Transition Conference of Ethiopia, held in Addis Ababa from July 1–5, 1991, led to the creation of the Council of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia.⁶⁵ The Council enacted the Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia.⁶⁶ The transitional government, through its Council of Representatives, adopted a draft constitution that would be later ratified by a Constituent Assembly established by the Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia.⁶⁷ The members of this Constituent Assembly were to be elected through a general election. This necessitated the enactment of the first electoral law in Ethiopia, Proclamation 64/1993⁶⁸, which established electoral constituencies based on Woredas. According to Article 15(2) of this proclamation, the constituencies comprise 100,000 residents each.⁶⁹ A Woreda (district)⁷⁰ will automatically become an electoral constituency on its own if it has 100,000 thousand residents; if the population of a Woreda is less than 100,000, it will join adjacent Woredas to establish an electoral constituency with the goal of achieving 100,000; and finally depending on its size, a Woreda with a population of 100,000 or more will be divided into two or more 100,000-person groups, creating two or more electoral seats.⁷¹

⁶² Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (n 55) art 61.

⁶³ *ibid* 60.

⁶⁴ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የመዝገብ ሥራ መግቢያ (ፈቃድ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 7.

⁶⁵ Mihretu Shanko, 'Democracy's Journey: Unraveling Ethiopian Parliamentary Elections Trends and Changes from 1995 to 2021' (2024) 14 *Open Journal of Political Science* 492, 494.

⁶⁶ Transitional Period Charter of Ethiopia, Peaceful and Democratic Transitional Conference of Ethiopia, *Negarit Gazeta*, 50th Year, No. 1, Addis Ababa.

⁶⁷ *ibid* 11.

⁶⁸ Electoral Law of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 64/1993, *Negarit Gazeta* of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 52nd Year, No. 56, 23rd August 1993, Addis Ababa.

⁶⁹ *ibid* 15(2); cited in: Beza Dessalegn (n 32) 12.

⁷⁰ Woredas were established based on the borders delimited prior to 1974 as stipulated under Article 4(2)(a) of the Proclamation to Provide for the Establishment of National/Regional Self-Governments, Proclamation No. 7/1992, *Negarit Gazeta* of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 51st Year, No. 2, 14th of January 1992, Addis Ababa. The basis for Woredas and National/Regional Self-Governments were the 65 nations nationalities and peoples recognized under Article 3 of the same Proclamation.

⁷¹ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎች እና ጣቢያዎች አመሠራረት: በየደረጃው ለተመደቡ የቦርድ ጽ/ቤት ኃላፊዎች ሥልጠና የተዘጋጀ: ኅዳር 1986 እዲስ አበባ, p 2; cited in: Beza Dessalegn (n 32) 13.



In applying this formula, the electoral constituency delimitation was conducted by overlapping the linguistic map of Ethiopia in order to ensure that the electoral constituencies represent both geographical location and ethnic identity.⁷²

A committee mainly composed of an institution called the “Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities” was tasked to demarcate the electoral constituencies.⁷³ The Committee referred to the draft Constitution, which planned to have 550 seats for the HoPR. As seen in both the draft and the final version of the FDRE Constitution, at least 20 seats out of the 550 shall be reserved for minorities. Taking this note, the Constituent Assembly was established by allocating 525 seats for regular constituencies and 22 seats for minorities⁷⁴ as special constituencies. 33 minorities were identified to qualify for special representation, but only 22 of them had a population above 10,000; hence, the remaining 11 minorities were not accorded special representation.⁷⁵ This means 3 seats were withdrawn from the total 550 seats because there were no other regular or special constituents that would fulfill the population threshold of 50,000 and 10,000, respectively. Hence, the first electoral constituency delimitation, designed for the Constituent Assembly, had 547 constituencies.

The delimitation was finalized by the Ethiopian Provisional Government Election Commission based on a 1984 census and an estimated population projection for 1993.⁷⁶ Based on the projection, Ethiopia's population for 1993 (a year before the election) was set at 53.5 million.⁷⁷ Based on this projection, this formula was used for constituency delimitation:

$$\frac{\text{Total Population}}{\text{Regular HoPR Seats}} = \text{No. of People in a Single Regular Constituency}$$

$$\frac{53,501,854}{525} = 101,900$$

Accordingly, the Commission established 1 electoral constituency for 50,000 – 150,000 people, 2 electoral constituencies for 150,000 – 250,000 people, 3 electoral constituencies for 250,000 – 350,000 people, and 4 elec-

toral constituencies for 350,000 – 450,000 people.⁷⁸

Some Kebeles, found in the boundaries of two constituencies, were split into two and were added to the neighboring constituencies.⁷⁹ The population of some Woredas, which fell short of the 50,000-people requirement and could not join neighboring Woredas, was also added to the neighboring constituencies.⁸⁰ Some Woredas, which could not be combined with other Woredas within their Zone, were combined with Woredas from other neighboring Zones.⁸¹ The final electoral constituency delimitation for the Constituent Assembly election was as follows:⁸²

72 Beza Dessalegn (n 32) 13.

73 *ibid.*

74 የአናሳ ብሔረሰቦች በሕገ መንግሥት ገባዬ አወካክል እንደያጠና የተወካዮች ሞክር ቤት የቋቋመው ጊዜያዊ ኮሚቴ ሪፖርት (1986 E.C.) (n 35); cited in: Beza Dessalegn (n 32)

75 14.

76 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ሞርጫ ቦርድ, የሞርጫ ክልሎችን የማካለል ሥራ ማግኘት (ረቂቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 10.

77 የኢትዮጵያ የሽግግር መንግሥት የሞርጫ ኮሚሽን, ለሕገ መንግሥታዊ ገባሌ አባላት ሞርጫ የተዘጋጀ የሞርጫ ክልሎች ዘርዘር (ለተወካዮች ሞክር ቤት የቀረበ): ሐምሌ 1985 ዓ.ም. (n 29)

para 2.

78 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ሞርጫ ቦርድ, የሞርጫ ክልሎችን የማካለል ሥራ ማግኘት (ረቂቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 9.

78 የኢትዮጵያ የሽግግር መንግሥት የሞርጫ ኮሚሽን, ለሕገ መንግሥታዊ ገባሌ አባላት ሞርጫ የተዘጋጀ የሞርጫ ክልሎች ዘርዘር (ለተወካዮች ሞክር ቤት የቀረበ): ሐምሌ 1985 ዓ.ም. (n 29) para 4.

79 *ibid* 5.

80 *ibid* 6.

81 *ibid* 7.

82 የኢትዮጵያ የሽግግር መንግሥት የሞርጫ ኮሚሽን, ለሕገ መንግሥታዊ ገባሌ አባላት ሞርጫ የተዘጋጀ በወረዳ የመራጭ ሕዝብና የሞርጫ ጣቢያ ብዛት: ኅዳር 1986 ዓ.ም.; and see: የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ሞርጫ ቦርድ, የሞርጫ ክልሎችን የማካለል ሥራ ማግኘት (ረቂቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 10,11.



Table 3: Electoral Constituencies for the Constituent Assembly Election

No.	Former Region Names	Current Region Names	No. of Woredas	No. of Regular Constituencies	No. of Special Constituencies	Total No. of Constituencies
1	One	Tigray	81	36	2	38
2	Two	Afar	27	8	-	8
3	Three	Amhara	128	137	1	138
4	Four	Oromia	224	178	-	178
5	Five	Somali	48	23	-	23
6	Six	Benishangul Gumuz	20	7	2	9
7	Southern Peoples	Formerly SNNPR	95	108	15	123
8	Twelve	Gambella	8	2	1	3
9	Thirteen	Harari	1	1	1	2
10	Fourteen	Addis Ababa	28	23	-	23
11	Dire Dawa	Dire Dawa	-	2	-	2
Total			660	525	22	547

Although the election was planned to take place in these 547 constituencies, it was reported that the elections did not take place in 7 constituencies due to the absence of clear-cut zonal locations and irregularities.⁸³ Based on the results of the election, the Constituent Assembly was established in 1994. Then, the Constituent Assembly ratified the FDRE Constitution⁸⁴ in 1995, which established a parliamentary system of government.⁸⁵

Constituency Delimitation for the HoPR (1995 – present)

After the ratification of the FDRE Constitution, the state structure and form of government were officially proclaimed as a parliamentary system.⁸⁶ It asserts that HoPR is the highest authority of the Federal Government.⁸⁷ The members of the HoPR are elected through universal suffrage for a term of five years.⁸⁸ Ethiopia's electoral system operates on a First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) basis, whereby a candidate with the greatest number of votes wins without the need to achieve a 50+1 absolute majority.^{89 90} Ultimately, a political party or a coalition of political parties with the greatest number of HoPR seats assumes political power and takes over the Executive.⁹¹

The seats for the HoPR are capped at 550, representing 'constituencies' during general elections.⁹² The boundaries of such constituencies are determined by the HoF on the basis of the census results and a proposal submitted by the NEBE.⁹³ This has been reflected in subsequent electoral laws⁹⁴ whereby electoral constituencies are determined based on census results as opposed to the fixed population (50,000 – 150,000 people) for each constituency as previously prescribed by Proclamation 64/1993 for Constituent Assembly elections.

83 Kassahun Berhanu, 'Ethiopia Elects a Constituent Assembly' (1995) 22 Review of African Political Economy 129, 132.

84 The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (n 13).

85 Dieter Nohlen, Michael Krennerich, and Bernhard Thibaut (eds), Elections in Africa: A Data Handbook (Oxford University Press 1999) 375 <https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/archive-files/dieter_nohlen_michael_krennerich_berhard_thibautbook4you.org_.pdf> accessed 15 March 2025.

86 The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (n 13) art 45.

87 ibid 50(3).

88 ibid 54(1).

89 ibid 54(2).

90 The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation (n 4) art 4.

91 The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (n 13) art 56.

92 ibid 54(3).

93 ibid 103(5).

94 See: Proclamation to Ensure the Conformity of the Electoral Law of Ethiopia Proclamation with the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Amendment) Proclamation, Proclamation No. 438/2005, Federal Negarit Gazeta, 11th Year, No. 23, 2005, Addis Ababa; The Amended Electoral Law of Ethiopia Proclamation, Proclamation No, 53



At a proclamation level, the electoral laws which were effective from 1995 to 2007 were the “Proclamation to make the Electoral Law of Ethiopia Conform with the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 111/1995” and the “Amended Proclamation to Ensure the Conformity of the Electoral Law of Ethiopia with the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 438/2005” which cumulatively provide the following about constituency delimitation:

“Without prejudice to boundaries of Regions for the purpose of holding elections, the country shall be divided into permanent constituencies by taking the Woreda as a basis, and which may be readjusted on the basis of population census. Each constituency shall incorporate the nearest average of the Ethiopian population divided by 550 at a given election time. Notwithstanding Sub-Articles (1) and (2) of this Article, the House of People's Representatives may cause minority nationalities that are entitled to special representation to send their representatives, prepare criteria for determining such nationalities. The House of Federation may designate constituencies otherwise than what is stipulated under Sub-Articles (1) and (2) of this Article on the basis of pre-determined procedure. The list of constituencies shall, on the basis of study to be submitted by the Board, be fixed by the Council of Representatives and announced to the public”⁹⁵

From 2007 – 2019, the effective electoral law, at a proclamation level, was the “Electoral Law of Ethiopia Amendment Proclamation, Proclamation No. 532/2007,” whose Article 20(1) reads:

“For the purpose of holding elections, the territory of the country shall be divided into permanent constituencies that may be re-arranged in accordance with census results by taking the Woreda as a basis and without affecting State boundaries. The number of constituencies, which shall be determined on the basis of the population of the country and special representation of minority nationalities and peoples, shall not exceed 550 and shall contain proportional number of people except in the case of constituencies where minority nationalities and peoples are represented.

There shall be constituencies, where in accordance with Article 54 of the Constitution minority nationalities and

peoples whose number is not less than 20 and are believed to require special representation, shall be represented. Minority nationalities believed to require special representation shall be determined in advance by the House of Federation based on clear criteria. The list of constituencies shall be decided and announced to the public by the House of Federation upon the study and report of the Board submitted to the House of Federation”⁹⁶

Finally, the electoral law, at a proclamation level, effective from 2019 onwards is the “Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation, Proclamation No. 1162/2019” whose Article 13(1) reads:

“For the purpose of holding elections, without affecting Regional States' Boundaries, the territories of the country shall be divided into permanent constituencies on the basis of Woreda administration, which may be rearranged based on the census results. The country shall have one representative per constituency to be elected to the House of Peoples' Representatives, where the total number of constituencies may not exceed 550; and the constituencies shall be determined on the basis of population and the number of minority nationalities and peoples with special representation. Except in the case of constituencies for the representation of minority nationalities and peoples, population of the constituencies shall be comparable and the highest number average population deviation between constituencies shall not exceed 15 percent. There shall be constituencies for the representation of minority nationalities and peoples whose number is not less than 20 and which are deemed to require special representation in accordance with Article 54 of the Constitution. Minority nationalities which are deemed to require special representation shall be determined by the House of Federation based on clear criteria established in advance. The Board may issue a directive pertaining to these constituencies. Once the list of constituencies is decided by the House of Federation based on the study submitted by the Board, it shall be announced to the public 180 days before the commencement of candidate registration.”⁹⁷

Simply put, the key features included in Ethiopia's electoral constituency delimitation across the three periods are as follows:

⁹⁵ Proclamation to Ensure the Conformity of the Electoral Law of Ethiopia Proclamation with the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 111/1995; Proclamation to Ensure the Conformity of the Electoral Law of Ethiopia Proclamation with the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Amendment) Proclamation (n 94) art 15(1),(2),(3),(4) and (5).

⁹⁶ The Amended Electoral Law of Ethiopia Proclamation (n 94) art 20(1).

⁹⁷ The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation (n 4) art 13(1).



Table 4: Comparison of Electoral Proclamation Provisions on Constituency Delimitation (1995 - Present)

Feature	1995 – 2007	2007 – 2019	2019 – Present
Effective Proclamation(s) which directly deal with constituency delimitation	Proclamations 111/1995 and 438/2005	Proclamation 532/2007	Proclamation 1162/2019
Basis of Delimitation	Woreda; adjustments based on census.	Woreda; rearrangements based on census; State boundaries respected.	Woreda; rearrangements based on census; Regional State boundaries respected.
Constituency Size	“Nearest average” of population divided by 550.	Maximum of 550; proportional population (exceptions for minorities).	Maximum of 550; comparable population with a maximum of 15% deviation between constituencies.
Minority Representation	The HoPR provides special representation; the HoF can designate differently.	Constituencies for minorities (minimum of 20 members) deemed to require special representation; the HoF sets criteria.	Constituencies for minorities (minimum of 20 members) deemed to require special representation; the HoF sets criteria.
Timeline of constituency announcement	Unspecified timeline; de facto post-approval announcement.	Unspecified timeline; de facto post-approval announcement.	After approval; 180 days before candidate registration.
Remark	-	-	NEBE can issue directives regarding those constituencies.

Despite the legal provisions for rearrangements based on population census results, the current HoPR constituencies have not been substantively revised since their initial delimitation for the 1994 Constituent Assembly, which itself was based on 1984 census projections. After the ratification of the FDRE Constitution, there have been 6 general elections which took place in 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, and 2021. The practice of demarcating the electoral constituencies during these elections, however, was not based on updated population census results. In the course of the 6 elections, there was only one population census conducted in 2007. Yet, electoral constituencies were not revised based on the 2007 elections for subsequent elections. As a result, all six general elections took place based on the constituency delimitation arranged for Constituent Assembly elections in 1994.

The electoral constituencies used in the previous six general elections are as follows:⁹⁸

Table 5: Electoral Constituencies for Elections for HoPR Seats

No.	Name of Region/City Administration	No. of Regular Constituencies	No. of Special Constituencies	Total Constituencies
1	Addis Ababa	23	-	23
2	Afar	8	-	8
3	Amhara	137	1	138
4	Benishangul Gumuz	7	2	9
5	Dire Dawa	2	-	2

⁹⁸ National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), ‘የኖርጄል ክልሎች እና የኖርጄል ጣቢያዎች’ (National Election Board of Ethiopia (Official Website)) <<https://nebe.org.et/am/polling-stations>> accessed 21 March 2025.



6	Gambella	2		1		3	
7	Harari	1		1		2	
8	Oromia	178		-		178	
9	SNNP ⁹⁹	89	108	15	15	104	123
10	Sidama ¹⁰⁰	19		-		19	
11	Somali	23		-		23	
12	Tigray	36		2		38	
Total		525		22		547	

In conclusion, Ethiopia's electoral constituency delimitations throughout different periods can be summarized as follows:

Table 6: Comparison of Ethiopia's Electoral Constituency Delimitations in Different Periods

Period	Legal/Political Framework	Responsible Body (for Delimitation)	Constituency Basis	Delimitation Criteria	Total No. of Constituencies	Notable Features
1931 - 1974	1931 & 1955 Imperial Constitutions	National Board of Elections (later stages)	Provinces and towns	Population size (1955) Electoral districts were designed for 200,000 people.	134 (by 1973) but up to 268 seats	-
1989	1987 Constitution (PDRE)	-	Rural and urban areas	Rural: 75,000 people; Urban: 15,000 people per constituency	835	-
1994	Transitional Charter (1991); Proclamation 64/1993	Ethiopian Provisional Government Election Commission and other mandated bodies	Woredas (districts); "without affecting Regional States' Boundaries"	Standard size: ~100,000 people per constituency (50,000 to 150,000 people) Linguistic & geographic considerations	547	Established 22 special constituencies for minorities. Based on 1984 census and 1993 projections.

⁹⁹ Important Note: before the 6th election, Sidama Region seceded from the SNNPR. Following this, 19 of SNNPR's constituencies were transferred to Sidama Region because these constituencies were found within the newly formed Sidama Region. Therefore, during the 6th election, SNNPR had 104 constituencies while Sidama Region had 19.

¹⁰⁰ Sidama Region was established before the 6th election.



1995 – Present	FDRE Constitution (1995) & Electoral Proclamations	Proposal by: NEBE Approval by: HoF	Woredas (districts); “without affecting Regional States’ Boundaries”	Based on population census and HoF’s approval; no fixed constituency size	550 total (capped by the Constitution) 547 total (in practice) By law: at least 20 constituencies are reserved for minorities. In practice: there are 22 special constituencies for minorities	No revisions have been made to the constituencies since 1994.
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Strengths and Shortcomings of the Electoral Constituency Arrangement of Ethiopia

Strengths

➤ Simplicity, Stability, and Strong Links between Elected Representatives and their Constituencies

The Ethiopian electoral system has a single-member constituency for the HoPR seats. A single-member constituency is an electoral district or a geographical area from which only one representative is elected. As a single-member constituency system, theoretically, it is regarded as simple, stable, and has strong links between elected representatives and their constituencies.¹⁰¹

Single-member constituencies are easy for voters to understand. They also tend to produce a single-party government, which may arguably be an advantage in some cases and may be translated to having governmental stability. This might also be a drawback as it may over-represent the majority party at the expense of other political parties.¹⁰² Furthermore, single-member constituencies may help voters hold constituency representatives accountable and ensure that their constituency’s interest is protected.

➤ Alignment with Administrative Boundaries

Aligning electoral constituencies with administrative boundaries has several benefits. For example, the constituencies will represent geographical communities of interest when the administrative boundaries themselves represent ‘distinct communities of interest’¹⁰³, correspond to the entities that oversee local governmental functions and correspond to social, political, and other non-governmental organizations organized by administrative areas.¹⁰⁴ Ethiopia’s electoral constituencies, when delimited in 1994, applied administrative boundaries of Woredas as a basis for delimitation. Hence, this alignment with administrative boundaries potentially strengthens the coordination and understanding between elected representatives and local government structures. It could further ensure that electoral constituencies represent existing geographical communities of interest.

¹⁰¹ ACE Project (n 5).

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ ‘Distinct communities of interest’ is developed based on common heritage, culture, shared language, or shared religious, ethnic, or racial identity. This is the case in Ethiopia, as in most cases, administrative boundaries for regions, zones, and woredas are established based on ethnic identities.

¹⁰⁴ ACE Project (n 5).



➤ Adherence to the Proportionality Principle and Managed Deviations

One of the drawbacks of basing constituencies on administrative boundaries is that it may adversely affect the 'equality of population' principle discussed above. Up until 2011, for instance, the United Kingdom's constituencies had significant demographic variances because they were strictly drawn to local administrative boundaries; now, the UK has enacted a law that limits such variance to plus or minus 5% between constituencies.¹⁰⁵ For this proportion, most countries consider the total population while Lesotho uses the voting age population, and Belarus considers the number of registered voters from past elections as a base.¹⁰⁶ In Ethiopia, such variance is theoretically managed by the electoral law, which provides that the average population deviation between constituencies shall not exceed 15%.¹⁰⁷ The 15% deviation from the population quota is considered large when compared to other countries such as the United States (almost 0%), Macedonia (3%), Albania and New Zealand (5%), and Belarus and Italy (10%).¹⁰⁸ Considering the challenges in Ethiopia's diverse ethnic identities and vast woreda arrangements, the 15% deviation allowed by the proclamation may be justifiable.

Moreover, some countries, such as Zimbabwe and Singapore, allow deviations up to 20% and 30%, respectively, while Canada allows more than a 25% deviation under extraordinary circumstances.¹⁰⁹ Here, it should be noted that the 15% deviation provided under Ethiopian electoral law applies to ordinary electoral constituencies. As for special constituencies reserved for minorities, they could theoretically deviate more than 15% and up to an unlimited percentile in accordance with the criteria established and determined by the HoF.¹¹⁰

The 15% deviation provided by the Ethiopian electoral law has not been applied yet, as the proclamation was enacted in 2019, and the delimitation has not been revised since 1994. In practice, the 1994 constituency delimitation limited the population of a constituency within the range of 50,000 to 150,000.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation (n 4) art 13(1).

¹⁰⁸ ACE Project (n 5).

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation (n 4) art 13(1).

¹¹¹ የኢትዮጵያ የሽግግር መንግሥት የምርጫ ኮሚሽን, ስህተት መንግሥታዊ ገባሌ አባላት ምርጫ የተዘጋጀ የምርጫ ክልሎች ዘርዘር (ለተወካዮች ምክር ቤት የቀረበ): ሐምሌ 1985 ዓ.ም. (n 29) para 4.

This threshold helps to minimize the population deviation between constituencies. However, it would create big deviations as populations near the threshold. For instance, a constituency may have 50,001 people while another constituency may have a population of 149,999.

Shortcomings

➤ Failure to Regularly Redraw Constituency Boundaries

Single-member constituencies, as opposed to multi-member constituencies, shall be redrawn regularly to maintain relatively equal population size. In single-member constituencies, population changes necessitate the redrawing of the boundaries. However, if the population of a multi-member constituency increases or decreases, the number of representatives elected from that district can be adjusted to maintain proportionality without altering the boundaries.¹¹² With this in mind, the FDRE Constitution has provided that the electoral constituencies are determined or revised based on the national population census, which is conducted every 10 years.¹¹³ In reality, a national population census was conducted only once within the last decades, and even then, the electoral constituencies were not revised. Consequently, the current electoral constituency delimitation of Ethiopia falls short of maintaining equal population size due to the failure to regularly redraw constituency boundaries.

➤ Insufficient Stakeholder Consultation in Delimitation

In Ethiopia, the electoral constituencies were not delimited in consultation with stakeholders and regional state administrations.¹¹⁴ Ideally, a constituency delimitation should be conducted in a participatory manner by engaging the HoF, the HoPR, the NEBE, regional governments, the Ethiopian Statistical Services, the Space Science and Geospatial Institute, academic institutions, political parties, the general public, and courts as a legal recourse for complaints regarding the process or the outcome.

¹¹² ACE Project (n 5).

¹¹³ The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (n 13) art

103(5).

¹¹⁴ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የማካላት ሥራ ማጠቃለያ (ፈቃድ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 31.



➤ Population Threshold and Inter-Zonal Constituency Mergers

When the current electoral constituencies were delimited, a Woreda needed to meet a population threshold of 50,000 - 150,000 to establish a single constituency. Woredas falling below this threshold were to be merged with adjacent Woredas to meet the minimum population requirement. Some Woredas, which could not be combined with other Woredas within their Zone, were merged with Woredas from other neighboring Zones.¹¹⁵ In doing so, one Woreda cannot be merged with another Woreda from another Region. The merger could only cross Zonal boundaries, but never regional state boundaries. Consequently, when a Woreda cannot join any adjacent Woreda to form a constituency without crossing regional state boundaries, it will have its own independent electoral constituency regardless of the population threshold.¹¹⁶ In other words, some Woredas with populations less than the minimum threshold have electoral constituencies because they could not join adjacent Woredas. This has created inconsistency in the sizes of electoral constituencies.

For example, during the 1994 constituency delimitation, Woreda 28 of Sub-city 03 in Region 14 (now Addis Ababa) had a projected population of 32,481,¹¹⁷ but an independent electoral constituency was established for the Woreda since it could not be merged with another woreda for the above reasons.¹¹⁸ Similarly, at the early stages of demarcating constituencies for the 1994 Constituent Assembly election, Yem Woreda, in the former SNNPR, had a population of 39,878 people, but it was accorded an ordinary constituency.¹¹⁹ Now, Yem is accorded a special constituency as opposed to an ordinary one.¹²⁰

➤ Reliance on Pre-1974 Administrative Boundaries in Delimitation and the Persistence of 'Unresolved' Boundaries

At the time of demarcating the constituencies in 1994, there were pending works in establishing and re-establishing Woredas and Kebeles of previous Woredas po-

sitioned on the borders of two regions. Since this work was not complete at the time of constituency delimitation, the population in those Woredas was split into two and joined the adjoining electoral constituencies found in each region.¹²¹ This was done in the Woredas found on the boundaries between Oromia Region and Somali Region such as Legehida (ለገሃዳ), Raytu (ራይቲ), Goro (ጎሮ), Guradamole (ጉራዳሞሌ), Liben (ሊበን), and Moyale (ሞያሌ) whose population was split into two and added to the nearby electoral constituencies inside the two regions.¹²² The same arrangement was made for Habru (ሀርቡ) Woreda, found between the Amhara and Afar Regions.¹²³

This type of electoral constituency delimitation practically affects voter turnout. Voters may feel deliberately disenfranchised if they believe their area has been wrongfully included or excluded from a constituency. This may also cause a distrust in the process by eroding public trust. In this regard, the NEBE has reported that voters in Ijersa Goro (ኢጃርሳ ጎሮ), Goro (ጎሮ), Meyumulu (መዩሙሊ), Legehida (ለገሃዳ), Arero (አራሮ), Afdem (አፍደሞ), and Mieso (መኤሶ) have expressed their discontent during elections due to unanswered questions as to boundaries and electoral constituencies. Some of these ethnic groups¹²⁴ Some of these ethnic groups¹²⁵ refused to vote unless they were integrated into another electoral constituency.¹²⁶

Moreover, the 1994 constituency delimitation relied on the pre-1974 Woreda administrative map.¹²⁷ The Commission, which was entrusted with the constituency delimitation, had to rely on the outdated Woreda arrangement because there was no accurate information on the population and geographical area of newly established Woredas from 1974 to 1994.¹²⁸

¹¹⁵ See Section 1.2.3 above.

¹¹⁶ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የማካለል ሥራ ማግኘት (ረቀቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 31.

¹¹⁷ የኢትዮጵያ የሽግግር መንግሥት የምርጫ ኮሚሽን, ለሕገ መንግሥታዊ ጉባኤ አባላት ምርጫ የተዘጋጀ የምርጫ ክልሎች ዝርዝር (ለተወካዮች ምክር ቤት የቀረበ): ሐምሌ 1985 ዓ.ም. (n 29) 51.

¹¹⁸ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የማካለል ሥራ ማግኘት (ረቀቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 31.

¹¹⁹ የኢትዮጵያ የሽግግር መንግሥት የምርጫ ኮሚሽን, ለሕገ-መንግሥታዊ ጉባኤ አባላት ምርጫ የተዘጋጀ የአፍላ ብሔረሰቦች ልዩ ወክልና (ለተወካዮች ምክር ቤት የቀረበ): ታህሳስ 1986 ዓ.ም.: አዲስ አበባ, para 6; የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የማካለል ሥራ ማግኘት (ረቀቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 31.

¹²⁰ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የደቡብ ብ/ብ/ሕ ክልል የምርጫ ክልሎች ዝርዝር: 2013 ዓ.ም. <<https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/SNNPR%20Constituency%20List%20with%20Number%20of%20Seats%20.pdf>> accessed 20 April 2025.

¹²¹ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የማካለል ሥራ ማግኘት (ረቀቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 31.

¹²² *ibid*.

¹²³ *ibid* 32.

¹²⁴ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የቦርዱን የሰፋት የሰፋትን አምስት ዓመታት እንቅስቃሴና በመጨረሻ አምስት ዓመት የሚያከናውናቸውን ተግባራት አስመልክቶ የቀረበ ጸሀፍ: ሐዳር 1992 ዓ.ም. (n 124) 5.

¹²⁵ NEBE did not made distinction as to which groups refused to vote duty boundary disputes and which groups refused due to discontents regarding electoral constituency delimitations.

¹²⁶ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የቦርዱን የሰፋት የሰፋትን አምስት ዓመታት እንቅስቃሴና በመጨረሻ አምስት ዓመት የሚያከናውናቸውን ተግባራት አስመልክቶ የቀረበ ጸሀፍ: ሐዳር 1992 ዓ.ም. (n 124) 5.

¹²⁷ የኢትዮጵያ የሽግግር መንግሥት የምርጫ ኮሚሽን, ለሕገ መንግሥታዊ ጉባኤ አባላት ምርጫ የተዘጋጀ የምርጫ ክልሎች ዝርዝር (ለተወካዮች ምክር ቤት የቀረበ): ሐምሌ 1985 ዓ.ም. (n 29) para 3.

¹²⁸ *ibid*.



➤ Unclear and Shallow Laws

The current electoral laws of Ethiopia do not answer the following questions regarding constituency delimitation:

Regarding the Delimitation Body:

- Which governmental organ conducts constituency delimitation, and which organs contribute through their expertise?¹²⁹ Which stakeholder groups (e.g., government agencies, civil society organizations, political parties, media, independent experts) should be represented in the delimitation process, and what should be their respective roles and responsibilities?¹³⁰
- How will the independence and impartiality of the delimitation body be guaranteed and protected from potential political influence?¹³¹

Regarding Delimitation Considerations:

- What specific factors, beyond just population size, will be considered when determining the boundaries of constituencies for minority nationalities and peoples with special representation? Will geographical concentration, cultural distinctiveness, or historical factors play a role?

Regarding the Timing and Basis of Revisions:

- Should constituency boundaries be reviewed and potentially revised on a fixed periodic schedule (e.g., mandatorily after each census/10 years), or should revisions also occur based on specific triggering events or reasons?¹³²
- How will significant demographic shifts within an area that occur between official census counts (due to migration, economic development, armed conflict, famine, or other events that cause fundamental demographical changes) be accounted for in maintaining equitable constituency populations?
- Will there be established mechanisms for implementing interim adjustments or considering reliable population estimates and projections in the periods between official censuses to address substantial demographic changes?
- In the event of changes to administrative boundaries (such as the creation, dissolution, or

alteration of Woredas or Regional State borders), what specific legal and procedural steps will be followed to review and adjust existing constituency delimitations to ensure alignment with these new administrative units?

Regarding Complaints and Dispute Resolution:

- Who will have the standing to raise concerns or file formal complaints regarding proposed or existing constituency delimitations?¹³³
- What is the designated body or mechanism for receiving, reviewing, and responding to complaints about constituency boundaries? What procedures will be followed in this process?

Regarding Public Involvement:

- Will public consultation be a mandatory component of the constituency delimitation process? If so, what specific methods of consultation will be employed to ensure meaningful engagement and the incorporation of public feedback?¹³⁴

Regarding Special Minority Representation:

- What are the “clear criteria established in advance” by the HoF for determining which minority nationalities and peoples are deemed to require special representation? The FDRE Constitution mentions this, but it does not specify what these criteria will be.

The same lack of specificity can be witnessed with regional state laws as well. Although the NEBE uses the HoPR electoral constituency delimitation for each regional state's regional council (RC) elections, the number of representatives to be elected in each constituency is decided by the regional states. For the HoPR election, each constituency is represented by one parliament member. However, for RCs and Woreda Councils, one constituency may be represented by any number of representatives as set by the regional state in question.

Using the liberty to assign the number of RC and Woreda Council representatives for each constituency, regional states try to answer representation questions raised by different Woredas within their administrations.

¹²⁹ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የመካከል ሥራ መግደል (ረቂቅ):

የካቲት 2006ዓ.ም. (n 27) 57.

¹³⁰ *ibid* 58.

¹³¹ *ibid* 57.

¹³² *ibid* 57.

¹³³ *ibid* 57.

¹³⁵

¹³³ *ibid* 59

¹³⁴ *ibid* 58.

¹³⁵ Interview with NEBE's Legal Team (3 April 2025).



For example, in the former SNNPR, the regional electoral law specifies how many RC members are elected from each Zone. It also specifies the number of representatives for Zonal Councils, stating that Zones with more than 7 Woredas will have 8 representatives from each Woreda, while Zones with 7 or fewer Woredas will have 10 representatives from each Woreda. It further explains that each Kebele is represented by 5-10 members at the Woreda Councils, depending on the number of Kebeles within the Woredas, while other Kebeles are represented by 10-30 members at the City Councils, based on the level of the particular city. Furthermore, each Kebele Council has 120 directly elected members. This detailed legal framework was acclaimed by the NEBE.¹³⁶

Yet, some regional laws on constituency representation remain imprecise. This is discussed below:

- **Addis Ababa City:** The Addis Ababa Charter¹³⁷ does not explain how many sub-cities and woredas will be established in the city. The Charter and subsequent Proclamations enacted by the City Council do not answer - how many seats should Sub-city and Woreda Councils have? The laws also do not provide how many representatives should be elected for the Sub-city and Woreda Councils from each electoral constituency.¹³⁸
- **Dire Dawa City:** The Dire Dawa City Charter¹³⁹ does not specify the number of seats that its City Council has. Its regional laws indicate that its Kebele Councils will have 300 members, but they do not specify how they are elected, which electoral constituency will be used, and how many members are elected in each constituency.¹⁴⁰

- **Benishangul Gumuz Region:** The Benishangul Gumuz Regional Council has enacted Proclamation No. 171/2020¹⁴¹ that specifies the number of seats in both City and Woreda Councils, which ranges from 60 to 200 for each council based on the population. Accordingly, a Woreda Council may represent 1,000 to 1,700 people in highly populated Woredas, 400 to 999 people in medium-populated Woredas, and 280 to 399 people in Woredas with small populations.¹⁴² The Proclamation also sets the number of people represented by a single member of a City Council and a Kebele Council.¹⁴³ In this regard, the Proclamation has put in place a clear guide for constituency delimitation for City, Woreda, and Kebele Council elections within the Region. Since the Proclamation was enacted in 2020, it is relatively new. Having been late in notifying the updated and specific number of seats in each City, Woreda, and Kebele Councils within the state, the NEBE had to request the production of such information in 2022.¹⁴⁴ The Proclamation also states that the region shall notify the NEBE of changes made to the number of seats in each council.¹⁴⁵
- **Gambella Region:** The administrative laws of the Gambella Region do not clearly provide the manner or criteria to determine the number of seats for the Kebele and Woreda Councils.¹⁴⁶
- **Somali Region:** Several regional Proclamations have been enacted by the Somali Region that determine the number of seats in the City, Woreda, and Kebele Councils. Notably, the Region has amended its laws to reflect the population changes in different Woredas.¹⁴⁷ However, the laws do not specify the criteria for forming new Woredas.

136 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ መርጫ ቦርድ, 'በክልል ሕጎች ላይ የተገኙ ግንቶች እና ክልል-ተኮር ሞክረ ሐሳቦች: 2015ዓ.ም.' 2-3 <<https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/regional-reforms.pdf>>

accessed 16 April 2025.

137 Addis Ababa City Government Revised Charter, Proclamation No. 361/2003, Federal Negarit Gazeta, 9th Year, No. 86, July 2003, Addis Ababa.

138 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ መርጫ ቦርድ, 'በክልል ሕጎች ላይ የተገኙ ግንቶች እና ክልል-ተኮር ሞክረ ሐሳቦች: 2015ዓ.ም.' (n 136) 1.

139 Dire Dawa Administration Charter, Proclamation No. 416/2004, Federal Negarit Gazeta, 10th Year, No. 60, July 2004, Addis Ababa.

140 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ መርጫ ቦርድ, 'በክልል ሕጎች ላይ የተገኙ ግንቶች እና ክልል-ተኮር ሞክረ ሐሳቦች: 2015ዓ.ም.' (n 136) 2.

141 የቤኒሻንጉል ገመዝ ክልላዊ መንግስት የደርክነን ሞክር ቤት ተወካዮች ብዛት ለመወሰን የወጣ አዋጅ, አዋጅ ቁጥር 171/2012፣ የቤኒሻንጉል ገመዝ ክልላዊ መንግስት ልሣነ-ሕግ ጋዜጣ፡

አሰሳ.

142 ibid 5(3).

143 ibid 5(4) and (5).

144 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ መርጫ ቦርድ, 'በክልል ሕጎች ላይ የተገኙ ግንቶች እና ክልል-ተኮር ሞክረ ሐሳቦች: 2015ዓ.ም.' (n 136) 3.

145 የቤኒሻንጉል ገመዝ ክልላዊ መንግስት የደርክነን ሞክር ቤት ተወካዮች ብዛት ለመወሰን የወጣ አዋጅ (n 141) art 7(2).

146 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ መርጫ ቦርድ, 'በክልል ሕጎች ላይ የተገኙ ግንቶች እና ክልል-ተኮር ሞክረ ሐሳቦች: 2015ዓ.ም.' (n 136) 4.

147 ibid 5.



Identifying minorities and rendering them special representation is not an easy task. During the constituency delimitation for the 1994 election for the Constituent Assembly, there were several practical challenges in identifying minorities, such as:

- The Use of Alternative Names: Some nationalities are referred to using different or alternative names. For instance, the nationality called “Suri” is also referred to as “Surma” and “Murle.”¹⁵⁴
- The Use of Collective Names: Some nationalities are often called by a common name, but they are further subdivided into many.¹⁵⁵
- Similarities between Nationalities: Some nationalities may have similar cultures and may speak similar languages.¹⁵⁶
- Lack of Comprehensive Criteria: As opposed to comprehensive criteria that include economic conditions, political participation, population, and other factors, the constituency delimitation process considered only the population of nationalities to determine minorities.¹⁵⁷ The population criterion varies based on the purpose of such classification. Different population thresholds were used for the preparation of a dictionary on nationalities by the then Ethiopian Linguistics Academy, for “Meserete Timhirt” (መሠረተ ትምህርት) by the Ministry of Education.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, for statistical purposes, the then Central Statistical Office rendered groups with populations less than 20,000 people as minorities, while for election purposes, the then Election Commission and the committee established to determine minorities rendered groups with populations of 10,000 to 49,999 people as minorities eligible for special representation.¹⁵⁹

The current electoral law mandates the HoF to determine the minority nationalities that require special representation “based on clear criteria established in advance.”¹⁶⁰

Regardless of the above, the borderline is that minorities may exist and may require special representation. With that in mind, the FDRE Constitution reserves at least 20 seats at the HoPR for minority nationalities and peoples.¹⁵³ The same notion was taken into consideration when the current constituencies were delimited for the 1994 Constituent Assembly election. Accordingly, 22 special constituencies were established and they have been active ever since.

160 The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation (n 4) art 13(1)(d).

54(3).  22



So far, the HoF has not determined and publicized the criteria for the establishment of special constituencies. This continued absence of publicly articulated, clear criteria by the HoF for determining special minority representation creates a policy vacuum. This perpetuates uncertainty, invites politicization, and leaves minority groups without a transparent pathway to secure or understand their representation rights, as starkly illustrated by the West Omo Zone case. On the other hand, it should also be noted that the law also vests the power to issue directives regarding special constituencies in the NEBE.¹⁶¹

The clear criteria to determine special minority nationalities by the HoF are still overdue. The NEBE, on its part, has issued an Implementation Framework for Voter Registration in Special Constituencies.¹⁶² This framework acknowledges NEBE's role in administering elections in special constituencies and ensuring the representation of minority nationalities. It also points out the practical difficulties in ascertaining the eligibility of ethnic identity in these special constituencies.¹⁶³ In addressing these difficulties, the framework provides a self-identification method to register voters in special constituencies. Therefore, voters in special constituencies are registered by declaring or identifying themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic minority group.¹⁶⁴ This entails that non-indigenous residents living within the boundaries of a special constituency are excluded from voting in that special constituency; rather, they will cast votes in a nearby ordinary constituency. For instance, in the West Omo Zone in South West Ethiopia Peoples' Region, there are four HoPR seats divided among the ordinary constituency of Majet (ማጀት መደበኛ) and the special constituencies of Dizi (ዲዛ ልዩ), Meinit (መኒንት ልዩ), and Surma and Zelmam (together) (ሱርማ ልዩ እና ዘልማም ልዩ).¹⁶⁵ While residents belonging to these ethnic groups vote at the three special constituencies, all other ethnic groups residing within the Zone cast their votes at the single regular constituency of Majet Medebegna.¹⁶⁶

The above arrangement in West Omo Zone resulted in practical controversy because the four minority groups took turns during different electoral years to be elected at Majet Medebegna constituency, leaving non-indigenous residents of the zone, such as the Amhara and the Guraghe, disenfranchised.¹⁶⁷ As a result, the Zone is prone to conflicts and electoral irregularities. This situation in West Omo, where some groups feel disenfranchised within the regular constituency due to arrangements in special constituencies, underscores how flawed or unclear delimitation processes for minority representation can undermine the OPOVOV principle for some citizens and fuel intergroup tensions. In the 2021 elections, NEBE had to postpone elections in the Zone since it could not conduct voter registration due to security issues and further conducted a second voter registration due to illegitimate registrations.¹⁶⁸

The NEBE is aware of the challenges in ensuring the representation of minorities. It has been receiving numerous complaints and requests from different nationalities or ethnic groups over the years.¹⁶⁹ After assessing its performance, in 2001, the NEBE recommended that the then-electoral law be amended in a way that would authorize the NEBE to conduct its own research on minorities and present a list of minorities requiring special representation to the HoF for approval.¹⁷⁰ As it stands, there are no legal reforms taken to this effect.

In addressing the question of minority representation, regional states resort to varying the number of seats or representatives to be elected from each constituency for RC elections.¹⁷¹ The NEBE uses the same electoral constituencies for both HoPR and RC elections. The FDRE Constitution envisions a single-member constituency system for the HoPR, to be implemented through a FPTP electoral model. However, the Constitution is silent regarding the electoral system for Regional Councils (RCs). In other words, it has implicitly granted regional states the discretion to adopt multi-member constituencies. In practice, Ethiopia does not follow a purely FPTP system; rather, it employs a mixed electoral system that combines elements of proportional representation with FPTP.

161 *ibid* 13(1)(d).

162 National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), Implementation Framework for Voter Registration in Special Constituencies (2021).

163 *ibid* preamble.

164 *ibid* IV.

165 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የደቡብ በ/ቦ/ሐ ክልል የምርጫ ክልሎች ዝርዝር፡ 2013 ዓ.ም. (n 120).

166 *ibid*.

167 Mercy Fekadu (n 24) 76–77.

168 National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), 'Decision on Voter Registration' <<https://nebe.org.et/en/node/613>> accessed 22 April 2025.

169 Interview with NEBE's Operation Team (14 April 2025); Interview with NEBE's Legal Team (n 135).

170 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የቦርዱን የሰፋት የሰፋትን አምስት ዓመታት እንቅስቃሴ በመጨረሻ አምስት ዓመት የሚያከናውናቸውን ተግባራት አስመልክቶ የቀረበ ጸሀፍ፡ ሐዳር 1992 ዓ.ም. (n 124) 12.

171 Interview with NEBE's Legal Team (n 135).



For example, in the former SNNPR, the ordinary constituency called Qey Afer Medebegna (ቀይ አፈር መደበኛ) includes Bodi (ቦዲ), Deme (ደሜ), Arebore (አርቦሪ), Gnan-gatom (ኛገንጥም), and Mursi (ሙርሲ) for the HoPR election. Residents of all these areas cast votes at Qey Afer Medebegna for a single HoPR representative. For SNNPR's RC, however, the latter five get one representation each, while Qey Afer Medebegna gets three representations; collectively, they will be represented by 8 representatives at the RC.¹⁷²

This does not mean that RCs always address the issue of minority representation. For instance, residents of Shenasha Special Constituency (ሸናሻ ልዩ) in the Benishagul Gumuz Region were among the different groups to raise their concerns to NEBE over electoral representation.¹⁷³ Although Shenasha Special Constituency was accorded one seat at the HoPR, the constituency is not represented at Benishagul Gumuz RC. Voters residing within this constituency cast votes for RC candidates of Wonbera (ወንበራ) or Deba'te (ደባጤ) constituencies.¹⁷⁴

In conclusion, the FDRE Constitution's quota system lessens the concern about the marginalization of minorities. However, the central issue in minority representation in Ethiopia is establishing clear and justifiable criteria for determining which groups should receive special consideration in representation. Relying solely on population size is not enough because, in theory, a group might have a population size that exceeds the minimum required to form a constituency, but such a population might be geographically dispersed and could not form a constituency as a result.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, minority representation should consider a group's overall population size, its ability to form a viable electoral constituency based on its geographic distribution, and other clear criteria.

Impact of Administrative Boundary Changes on Ethiopia's Electoral Constituencies

As discussed under Section 2.2., para. "D" of this Study, the 1994 constituency delimitation, which remains applicable as of now, relied on the pre-1974 Woreda administrative map while there have been significant changes in administrative boundaries since then.

While assessing the major issues to consider before the 2021 general elections, the NEBE identified the change to boundary delimitations as one factor that would impact the electoral process in Ethiopia.¹⁷⁶ However, the assessment by the NEBE focused on the impact of boundary delimitation changes on the NEBE's implementation timelines for the 2021 elections. However, the assessment by the NEBE focused on the impact of boundary delimitation changes on the NEBE's implementation timelines for the 2021 elections.

The Case of Begi Woreda

In 1995, a referendum was conducted in Begi (ቤጊ) Woreda following the territorial dispute between the Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz Regions over the Woreda.¹⁷⁷ The majority vote in the referendum was for Begi Woreda to join the Oromia Region.¹⁷⁸ Accordingly, Begi Woreda was transferred to Oromia, having been administered by Benishangul Gumuz for some time.¹⁷⁹ When demarcating electoral constituencies in 1994, the pre-1974 Woreda administrative map was considered, which coincidentally takes the Begi Woreda as part of the Oromia Region.¹⁸⁰

172 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የደቡብ ብ/ብ/ሐ ክልል የምርጫ ክልሎች ዘርዘር፣ 2013 ዓ.ም. (n 120).

173 Interview with NEBE's Legal Team (n 135).

174 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የቤኚገንገል ጉመዝ ክልል የምርጫ ክልሎች ዘርዘር፣ 2013 ዓ.ም. <https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/BGRS%20Constituency%20List%20with%20Number%20of%20Seats%20_1.pdf> accessed 20 April 2025.

175 Yonatan Fessha, 'Ethnic Identity and Institutional Design: Choosing an Electoral System for Divided Societies' (2009) 42 Comparative and International Law Journal of South Africa 323, 337.

176 National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), 'Assessing the Impact of Changes to the Electoral System in an Election Year' (2021) <<https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/2020-10/NEBE-Electoral-systems-English.pdf>> accessed 25 March 2025.

177 National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), 'Begi Referendum' (1995) 1 <<https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/2020-04/Begi-Referendum-english.pdf>>

accessed 14 April 2025.

178 Fekadu Adugna and Ketema Debele, Conflict and Displacement in Ethiopia: The Case of Benishangul Gumuz Regional State and Konso Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (Research & Evidence Facility 2023) 13 <<https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/files/2023/04/conflict-and-displacement-in-ethiopia-1.pdf>> accessed 13 April 2025.

179 Teferi Mekonnen, 'The Benishangul-Gumuz Region: A Brief Political History, 1991-2001' (2021) LIV Journal of Ethiopian Studies 23.

180 የኢትዮጵያ የሽግግር መንግሥት የምርጫ ኮሚሽን, ለሕገ መንግሥታዊ ገባሌ አባላት ምርጫ የተዘጋጀ የምርጫ ክልሎች ዘርዘር (ለተወካዮች ምክር ቤት የቀረበ)፣ ሐምሌ 1985 ዓ.ም. (n 29) 18.



Therefore, the 1995 referendum did not necessitate a change to the electoral constituency of Begi Woreda. However, this is not the case for other Woredas where the referendum was conducted, as discussed below.

The Case Mieso Woreda

As mentioned above, Mieso (መኤሶ) was among the different Woredas that have expressed their discontent during elections due to unanswered questions as to boundaries and electoral constituencies.¹⁸¹ In 2004, a referendum was conducted in the Mieso Woreda as part of the vast referendum that took place in disputed areas bordering the Oromia and Somali Regions. The referendum resulted in allocating 20 Kebeles in Mieso Woreda to the Oromia Region, while 1 Kebele (Mulu town) was allocated to the Somali Region.¹⁸² The Mieso electoral constituency was established in 1994 under the West Hararge Zone in Oromia Region, taking into account all 21 Kebeles in Mieso Woreda and joining them with Afdem Woreda to make up a population of 101,800 for a single constituency.¹⁸³ Now that Mulu town has parted from Mieso Woreda to join the Somali Region, voters from two different regions will cast votes for the common electoral constituency of Mieso as delimited in 1994.¹⁸⁴ Voters in Mulu town are administratively part of the Somali Region but vote in an Oromia-based HoPR constituency. This severs the link between their local administration and national representation, creating confusion, potentially diluting their collective voice in either region, and challenging the accountability of the elected HoPR member to all parts of this administratively fragmented constituency. Moreover, this arrangement does not confirm with Article 13 (1) of Proclamation No. 1162/2019 that requires constituencies to be delimited without affecting Regional States' boundaries.

181 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የቦርዱን የሰፋት የሰፋትን አምስት ዓመታት እንቅስቃሴና በመጨረሻው አምስት ዓመት የሚያካናወናቸውን ተግባራት አስመልክቶ የቀረበ ጸሀፍ፡ ሐዳር 1992 ዓ.ም. (n 124) 5.

182 Institute for Peace and Security Studies and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, An Anthology of Peace and Security Research (2010) 86 <<https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/aethiopien/07698.pdf>> accessed 10 April 2025; United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 'Assessment on the Role of Women in Peace and Reconciliation in Oromia and Somali Regional States' (2021) 29 <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-08/Assesment%20Report-Role%20of%20women%20in%20peace%20and%20reconciliation_Clean%20V%20Dec%202021.pdf> accessed 10 April 2025.

183 የኢትዮጵያ የሰግግር መንግሥት የምርጫ ኮሚሽን, ለሕገ መንግሥታዊ ገባሌ አገላት ምርጫ የተዘጋጀ የምርጫ ክልሎች ዘርዘር (ለተወካዮች ምክር ቤት የቀረበ)፡ ሐምሌ 1985 ዓ.ም. (n 29) 30.

184 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የመካለል ሥራ ማግኘት (ረቂቅ)፡ የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 32.

The Case of Wondo Genet Woreda

Following the approval of the HoF and agreement with Oromia Region and SNNPR regarding the administration of Wondo Genet (ወንደ ገነት) Woreda, the NEBE conducted a referendum in November 2008 to decide whether the Woreda should be administered under the Oromia Region or the SNNPR.¹⁸⁵ Through the referendum, 4 Kebeles (Busa, Sheshama Kebele, Intaye, and Guto Onoma) were won by the Oromia, while 9 Kebeles (Aru-ma, Eddo, Baja, Chuko, Kela, Abaye, Wotera Kechema, Wosha Soyama, and Gamacho Baja) were given to the SNNPR.¹⁸⁶ Although the administrative boundaries of Wondo Genet Woreda have changed as a result of the referendum, the electoral constituency remains the same as the 1994 delimitation. This means residents of one Region cast votes for a constituency seated in another Region.¹⁸⁷ Similar to the case of Mieso Woreda discussed above, the arrangement in Wondo Genet Woreda severs the link between their local administration and national representation, creating confusion, potentially diluting their collective voice in either region, and challenging the accountability of the elected HoPR member to all parts of this administratively fragmented constituency.

The Case of Gazgibila Woreda

After the electoral constituencies were delimited in 1994, the Amhara Regional State Government revised its internal zonal structure, whereby the Gazgibila (ጋዝገበላ) Woreda, which had its electoral constituency in the Semen Wollo Zone, was integrated into the Seqota Zone for administration purposes. Consequently, voters in Gazgibila Woreda are administered under the Seqota Zone but have to cast votes for an electoral constituency in the Semen Wollo Zone.¹⁸⁸

The Case of Sodo, Dugeda, Eastern Badwacho, and Siraro Woredas

Sodo (ሶዶ), Dugeda (ደግዳ), Eastern Badwacho (ምስራቅ ባደዎች), and Siraro (ሲራሮ) Woredas are found in the boundaries of the Oromia Region and the former SNNPR. When demarcating electoral constituencies in 1994, the population of these Woredas was split into two

185 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, 'የወንደ ገነት ሕዝቦች ሕዝብ-ወሳኝ፡ 2001 ዓ.ም.' <<https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/Wondo%20Genet%20Referendum-Final.pdf>>.

186 Abraham Asnake and Dagne Shibus, 'An Investigation of Causes and Settlement Mechanisms of Ethnic Conflict among Guji-Oromo and Sidama of Wondo-Genet Woreda, Southern Ethiopia' (2019) 8 Review of Research 6 <<https://oldror.lbp.world/UploadedData/7052.pdf>> accessed 17 April 2025.

187 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የምርጫ ክልሎችን የመካለል ሥራ ማግኘት (ረቂቅ)፡

የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 32.

188 ibid



and joined the adjoining electoral constituencies found in each region, as discussed under Section 2.2. (point “C”) of this Study. Through time, the two Regions made agreements as to which Woredas should be administered by which Region. However, the electoral constituencies were not revised in accordance with the agreements of the Regions. As a result, the people residing in these Woredas will have to cast their votes in the previous electoral constituencies, which may involve crossing regional state boundaries.¹⁸⁹

The Case of Sidama Region

The Sidama Zone referendum took place in 2019 and resulted in Sidama's regional autonomy.¹⁹⁰ The Sidama Zone seceded from the former SNNPR to establish the Sidama Region. It took the 19 electoral constituencies found within the Sidama Zone, leaving the former SNNPR with 89 from its 108 constituencies.¹⁹¹ Since the constituencies were maintained, the secession of Sidama from the former SNNPR did not affect the specific electoral constituencies.¹⁹² Hence, voters in the Sidama Region will cast their votes in and for the electoral constituency found within Sidama without the need to cross regional state borders.

The Case of Central Ethiopia, South Ethiopia, and South West Ethiopia Peoples' Regions

The SNNPR, a notably diverse region in Ethiopia, dissolved in 2023. The regional reconfiguration commenced with the establishment of the Sidama Region in 2019. Subsequently, the South West Ethiopia Peoples' Region was established in 2021, resulting in further fragmentation of the former SNNPR. Finally, in 2023, the SNNPR was officially dissolved with the creation of the South Ethiopia Region and the Central Ethiopia Region. According to the NEBE, these administrative changes did not affect the current electoral constituencies.¹⁹³ Including the Sidama referendum to establish its own regional state, all four new regions were established, maintaining the existing zonal arrangements. Hence, voters will cast their votes in and for the electoral constituency found within their Woredas or Zones without crossing the regional state border.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), ‘Sidama Referendum’ (2019) <<https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/Sidama-Referendum-english.pdf>> accessed 14 April 2025.

¹⁹¹ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የሰዳማ ክልል የምርጫ ክልሎች ዝርዝር፣ 2013 ዓ.ም. <<https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/Sidama%20Constituency%20List%20with%20Number%20of%20Seats%20.pdf>> accessed 14 April 2025.

¹⁹² Interview with NEBE's Operation Team (n 169).

¹⁹³ *ibid.*

The Case of Kimant

Kimant (ቅማንት) was not among the 65 nations, nationalities, and peoples recognized to establish national or regional self-government by the National/Regional Self-Governments Establishment Proclamation.¹⁹⁴ After the 2017 referendum, the Kimant was officially recognized as a distinct identity from Amhara, and the Kimant National Administration was established¹⁹⁵ with a total of 69 Kebeles, while several Kebeles are still contested against Lay Armachio, Chilga, and Metema Woredas.¹⁹⁶ Since Kimant is a newly recognized identity, the 1994 electoral constituency delimitation established constituencies in Lay Armachio, Chilga (1 & 2), and Metema,¹⁹⁷ whose few Kebeles are now either under the Kimant administration or in contention. Voters residing in the Kimant administration and the Kimant people have to cast votes in the electoral constituencies previously established. Moreover, the question of a special constituency may be raised by the Kimant people who are minorities in the Amhara-dominated region. However, the representation of minority groups has not been revisited by the HoF since the 1994 constituency delimitation.

¹⁹⁴ Proclamation to Provide for the Establishment of National/Regional Self-Governments, Proclamation No. 7/1992, Negarit Gazeta of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 51st Year, No. 2, 14th of January 1992, Addis Ababa., art 3(1).

¹⁹⁵ The Kimant National Administration Establishment and Organization, Proclamation No. 255/2018, Zikre Hig of the Council of the Amhara National Region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 22nd Year, No. 13, Bahir Dar, art 3.

¹⁹⁶ Dawit Yosef and Fekadu Adugna, ‘The Qemant Ethnicity: Identity Contestations, Negotiations, and Conflicts’ (2020) 5 Ethiopian Journal of Human Rights 124, 140, 141.

¹⁹⁷ የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ, የአማራ ክልል የምርጫ ክልሎች ዝርዝር፣ 2013 ዓ.ም. <<https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/Amhara%20Constituency%20List%20with%20Number%20of%20Seats.pdf>> accessed 12 April 2025.



Impact of Demographic Changes and the Absence of Updated Census Data on Ethiopia's Electoral Constituencies

Demarcating electoral constituencies fundamentally relies on population data. It involves taking geographically defined population units, such as Woredas, to create constituencies with relatively equal numbers of inhabitants. This ensures that the principle of OPOVOV is upheld as closely as possible. The population data used can be taken from comprehensive census enumerations, as is the case for Ethiopia.¹⁹⁸

Reliance on Projection and Outdated Demographic Data for the 1994 Constituency Delimitation

As highlighted previously, the current electoral constituency was delimited based on a 1984 census and an estimated population projection for 1993.¹⁹⁹ Ethiopia's population in 1984 was 39,868,572,²⁰⁰ and the projection for 1993, as used for the constituency delimitation, was approximately 53,501,854. A year later, in 1994, an official population census was conducted, and Ethiopia's population was 53,477,265.²⁰¹ At face value, the 1993 projection used for constituency delimitation and the 1994 official census results are very close. This would suggest that the projection was more or less accurate in terms of determining the total population. However, demarcating constituencies based on a projection has its drawbacks when considering population at regional, zonal, and woreda levels.

There have been armed conflicts and famine in most areas of the country since the 1984 census. Armed conflicts and famine inevitably create demographic change. Many people were displaced from their residences.

As a result, a lot of people registered as residents of a certain area in 1984 were, in fact, residing in a different area in 1993. As pointed out by NEBE, for example, in the Somali Region, the population projection did not account for the ongoing armed conflict in 1993.²⁰² Consequently, the population projection used for constituency delimitation was not factually accurate.

Growing Discrepancy Due to Absence of Updated Census Data

A national population census was planned to be conducted every ten years in Ethiopia pursuant to Article 103(5) of the FDRE Constitution. The Constitution establishes the National Census Commission to conduct the census within a ten-year interval. The National Census Commission, as re-established by the "Census Commission Re-establishment Proclamation No. 449/2005," is composed of members from Federal Ministries, NEBE, the HoF, Regional States, Addis Ababa Administration, and Dire Dawa Administration, while the Ethiopian Statistics Service serves as its secretariat. After the 2007 census, this Commission has postponed the census originally scheduled for 2017 and no census was conducted ever since. Accordingly, only three Population and Housing Censuses have been conducted since 1984. These Censuses reported that Ethiopia had a population of 39,868,572 people in 1984, 53,477,265 people in 1994, and 73,918,505 people in 2007.²⁰³

The NEBE, as entrusted to submit proposals for constituency delimitations, had prepared a proposal to revise the constituencies based on the 2007 population census results.²⁰⁴ The proposal was to divide the total population in 2007 (73,918,505) by the total number of regular constituencies (525), which would result in allocating a regular constituency for every 141,000 people.²⁰⁵ However, the HoF did not endorse this proposal.²⁰⁶ This proposal was conducted as a study and was not made official by either of the institutions.²⁰⁷ The proposal also faced opposition from different sources, leading to its rejection by the HoF.²⁰⁸

198 The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (n 13) art 103(5).

199 የኢትዮጵያ የሽግግር መንግሥት የዋና መረጃ ኮሚሽን, ለሕገ መንግሥታዊ ገባሌ አባላት ዋና መረጃ የተዘጋጀ የዋና መረጃ ክልሎች ዘርዘር (ለተወካዮች ሞክር ቤት የቀረበ): ሐምሌ 1985 ዓ.ም. (n 29) para 2.

200 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Population Census Commission, Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census: Population Size by Age and Sex (2008) 10.

201 i bid.

202 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ዋና መረጃ ቦርድ, የዋና መረጃ ክልሎችን የመካከል ሥራ መገናኛ (ረቀቅ): የካቲት 2006 ዓ.ም. (n 27) 30.

203 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Population Census Commission (n 200) 10.

204 Beza Dessalegn (n 32) 15.

205 ibid.

206 ibid 16.

207 Interview with NEBE's Operation Team (n 169).

208 ibid.



The opposition stemmed from the highly sensitive and politically charged nature of constituency delimitation in the Ethiopian federal system. Revising the constituency delimitations would mean reducing or increasing the HoPR seats allocated for some regional states which would alter the power between regional states in the HoPR. It would also affect parties relying on the support of specific nationalities or regional states because the revision would dilute their voter base.

Ethiopia's population and demographic arrangement have inevitably changed since the 2007 census due to the natural course of demography (birth, death, and migration), armed conflicts, famine, and urbanization. Ethiopian Statistics Service's official estimation suggests that the population of Ethiopia is 109,499,000 as of 2024.²⁰⁹ However, this is not conclusive as it is merely an estimation, and other sources would suggest otherwise. For instance, by the end of 2024, Worldometer²¹⁰ estimated the Ethiopian population at 132,059,767, while the United Nations Population Fund²¹¹ estimated it at 129,700,000.

Hypothetically, if we were to adopt the formula used in NEBE's proposal back in 2007, the recent estimated population of Ethiopia by the Ethiopian Statistics Service (109,499,000) divided by the total number of regular constituencies (525) would suggest that each regular constituency would have close to 208,570 people as of 2024. If we were to take the demographic data projected by Worldometer or the United Nations Population Fund, then each regular constituency would have close to 251,542 or 247,048 people, respectively. . This represents an average constituency size approximately 2.5 times the original ~101,000-person target used in 1994, and significantly exceeds the 150,000 upper limit of that delimitation, indicating severe malapportionment and a stark violation of the OPOVOV principle. Regardless, both the NEBE and the HoF cannot legitimately apply such projections to revise the current constituency delimitation without amending the Constitution.

It is reasonable to assume that some populations would be disproportionately represented due to a lack of accurate information on constituency size.²¹² Furthermore, due to the absence of updated census data, the NEBE faces logistics-related challenges in administering elections. This has been practically witnessed in past elections. For the first general election in 1995, the NEBE used 32,000 polling stations, while for the sixth election in 2021, it had to use more than 49,000 polling stations under the 547 electoral constituencies.²¹³ The absence of updated census data would also result in a lack of accurate information on the number of eligible voters.²¹⁴

Voter Registration Data as an Alternative to Census Data

While census data remains the primary source for constituency delimitation and revision in most countries, including Ethiopia, voter registration data offers a potential alternative, albeit one with its own set of benefits and drawbacks. Accordingly, constituency borders could be established based on the number of registered voters living in specific geographic areas, rather than the entire population of the area.

The use of voter registration could be justified theoretically by the goal of creating constituencies with more evenly distributed voters. This directly addresses the argument that utilizing total population data includes people who are unable to vote, such as children and foreign nationals, by concentrating on those who are eligible and registered to vote. This, by itself, is open for argument because one could argue that non-voters should also be represented.

The quality and comprehensiveness of the registration system itself could affect the applicability of voter registration data as a basis for constituency delimitation. Registration numbers are deceptive unless the system is properly maintained. Registration rolls may be overcounted, for example, if deceased voters or those who have moved out of the district are not included. In contrast, if updates are irregular or a significant section of the eligible population is not registered, registration rolls may undercount the number of eligible voters. Furthermore, depending on voter turnout rates and demographics, the number of voters who cast ballots on election day might differ between constituencies, even with precise voter registration data.

²⁰⁹ Ethiopian Statistics Service, Projected Population for 2024 (2024) <https://ess.gov.et/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Projected_Population-2024.pdf> accessed 29

March 2025.

²¹⁰ Worldometer, 'Ethiopia Population' <<https://www.worldometers.info/>

[world-population/ethiopia-population/](https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/ethiopia-population/)> accessed 29 March 2025.

²¹¹ United Nations Population Fund, 'World Population Dashboard Ethiopia' <<https://www.un.org/data/world-population/ET>> accessed 29 March 2025.

²¹² Mercy Fekadu (n 24) 82.

²¹³ National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), 'የምርጫ ክልሎች እና የምርጫ ጣቢያዎች' (n 98).

²¹⁴ Mercy Fekadu (n 24) 82.



This implies that various numbers of actual voters may participate in an election even in constituencies with the same number of registered voters.

If Ethiopia were to use voter registration data for constituency delimitation, it should be noted that errors or general omissions in the registration process would result in misrepresentation. Census data frequently contains important demographic information, such as ethnicity, which is necessary to ensure the representation of minorities in Ethiopia. This kind of detailed demographic data may not always be available in voter registration data.

The use of voter registration data as a basis for constituency delimitation in Ethiopia depends on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the voter registration system. It may also be challenging to uphold the principles of respecting community boundaries when delineating constituencies if voter registration records lack the comprehensive demographic data that is typically included in census reports. Voter registration data alone may, therefore, not be the most comprehensive or equitable method for Ethiopian constituency delimitation. This is especially true given the importance of ethnic and administrative boundary considerations.



Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

There is an urgent need to modify Ethiopia's electoral constituency arrangements. The country's sociopolitical changes are not reflected in the current constituency administration, which is, by itself, based on out-of-date demographic statistics and administrative boundaries. The electoral equality principle and election integrity are compromised when constituency boundaries are not updated to reflect population shifts.

The revision of constituency delimitation has also been hampered by legislative and procedural uncertainties, such as unclear delimitation rules for minority representation, shallow provisions of the law concerning constituencies, absence of public consultations, insufficient intergovernmental coordination, delay of population census, etc. These factors have resulted in voter disenfranchisement and inconsistencies.

In order to address these issues, Ethiopia shall immediately prioritize conducting a national census, establish a clear institutional and legal framework for revising its constituencies, and take an evidence-based, participatory approach that takes into account the rights of minority communities as well as demographic realities. Otherwise, the democratic system's legitimacy would be further undermined, and the discrepancy between election law and practice would only widen.

Recommendations

In light of the above findings, Ethiopia needs to review and revise different aspects of its electoral constituency delimitation. The current delimitation does not reflect today's population or administrative boundaries, which adversely affects fair representation and election integrity. The recommendations below offer ideal courses of action to ensure a more democratic and legitimate electoral process.

Recommendation 1: Ethiopia should ensure impartiality in constituency delimitation. In Ethiopia, electoral constituencies are delimited by the HoF,²¹⁵ while the role of the NEBE is limited to preparing a proposal for such delimitation.²¹⁶ This undermines the impartiality principle. Drawing on international best practices, Ethiopia should establish a truly independent boundary commission that ensures impartiality. The independent boundary commission could be a task force, a department at the NEBE, or an autonomous 'Boundary Authority' as evidenced in Austria, Canada, New Zealand, and several Anglophone African nations.²¹⁷ The Commission's composition could include non-partisan individuals with backgrounds in election administration, geography, and statistics, and could consider including a member of the judiciary to chair the commission, as seen in Botswana,²¹⁸ India, the United States, England, Wales, Scotland, Canada, and New Zealand.²¹⁹

Specific Recommendation:

- An independent and non-partisan boundary commission or authority shall be established. This body should have constitutionally guaranteed independence and final decision-making authority on technical delimitation matters, separate from political bodies like the HoF. Alternatively, if a fully independent commission is not immediately feasible, as a minimum interim reform, a specialized, operationally autonomous, and technically proficient unit could be established within NEBE, but its proposals would still require a more transparent and accountable approval process than currently exists.



215 The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (n 13) art 103(5).

216 *ibid* 103(5).

217 ACE Project (n 5).

218 Constitution of the Republic of Botswana (n 25) art 64.

219 ACE Project (n 5).



Recommendation 2: Ethiopia should revise its constituency delimitation periodically.

Failure to regularly revise constituency delimitation would result in unequal representation due to population deviations²²⁰ and changes in administrative boundaries. In Ethiopia, while the Constitution provides that the HoF ‘shall’ determine electoral constituencies on the basis of census results,²²¹ which are held every 10 years, the Electoral Proclamation, on the other hand, provides that electoral constituencies ‘may’ be rearranged based on the census results.²²² Here, the wordings of the Constitution and the Electoral Proclamation do not confirm with one another and lack clarity. The Constitution links the determination to the basis of census results, not necessarily that the revision itself is mandated every 10 years. The Electoral Proclamation, on its part, indicates that revision is a discretionary action, not a mandatory one.

The wording suggests that while census results are a mandatory basis for determination (as per the Constitution), the actual revision or rearrangement of existing constituencies based on those results is left to discretion by the Electoral Proclamation.

Therefore, while the census (which provides the basis) occurs at a statutory interval (every 10 years), the revision of constituency delimitation itself is not clearly mandated to occur at a statutory interval due to the “may” clause in the Electoral Proclamation.

Specific Recommendation:

- Revision of constituency delimitation shall be mandated through a statutory interval (e.g., every 10 years).

Recommendation 3: Ethiopia should implement event-based triggers for constituency revision.

The only legitimate justification for constituency revision is a decennial census, which is supposed to be conducted every 10 years. However, it is recommended to adopt additional or exceptional instances that would trigger a review and potential redrawing of electoral constituency boundaries outside of this “regular” cycle. To draw on international best practices, countries such as Macedonia, the Czech Republic, and Germany allow the revision of constituency delimitations when the level of malapportionment or population disparities between constituencies reaches 3%, 15%, and 25%, respectively.²²³ Although Ethiopian electoral law provides that the maximum deviation between constituencies should not exceed 15%, it does not provide a solution if such deviation occurs due to different natural or human-made factors between regular censuses.

Specific Recommendations:

- Legal reform is needed to introduce a threshold for deviation (15%) that should automatically trigger the review of constituency delimitations. This review should be initiated by the independent delimitation body or the NEBE upon receiving certified data from the Ethiopian Statistics Service indicating that the threshold has been breached in a significant number of constituencies. The law should specify the process and timeline for such an event-triggered review.
- The NEBE and the Ethiopian Statistical Services shall be jointly mandated to develop and publish annual population estimates per constituency to detect early signs of malapportionment.

Recommendation 4: Ethiopia should ensure that the right to participate in public affairs is protected during constituency delimitation.

Public access to the delimitation process shall also be ensured. In this regard, the Canadian electoral laws mandate public notices at different stages of the delimitation process, followed by a hearing of representations by interested persons.²²⁴

220 የኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ሞርሌክ ቦርድ, የሞርሌክ ዐደት፡ 2012ዓ.ም. (2025) 17 <<https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/election-cycle.pdf>>.

221 Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (n 55) art 103(5).

222 The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation (n 4) art 13(1).

223 ACE Project (n 5).

224 Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, R.S.C, 1985, c. E-3 (as Amended on January 19, 2019), art 19 <<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/E-3.pdf>> accessed 21 April 2025.



Public access to the delimitation process shall also be ensured. In this regard, the Canadian electoral laws mandate public notices at different stages of the delimitation process, followed by a hearing of representations by interested persons.²²⁵

In Ethiopia, the FDRE Constitution provides that every Ethiopian national, without any discrimination based on color, race, nation, nationality, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion or other status, has the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly and through freely chosen representatives.²²⁶ However, the electoral laws do not mandate public consultation for the delimitation process. The only requirement is to notify the 'decided' constituency map to the public 180 days before the commencement of candidate registration.²²⁷ If the public or any interested party has an objection to the 'decided' constituency map, arguably, the only alternative they may have is litigation, subject to the justiciability of the matter before Ethiopian courts.

Specific Recommendations:

- A legal framework shall be developed that establishes a structured public consultation process. This shall include: (a) timely publication of draft delimitation maps with clear justifications for proposed boundaries; (b) accessible public hearings in potentially affected areas; (c) defined periods for written submissions from individuals, CSOs, and political parties; and (d) a requirement for the delimitation body to publish a report detailing how substantive public concerns and suggestions were considered or why they were not adopted, before a final decision is made.
- The legal framework shall include a clear procedure for submitting grievances on a proposed or approved constituency delimitation to the judiciary.

Recommendation 5: Ethiopia should limit the period for the constituency delimitation process.

The population is not constant. If the constituency delimitation process is lengthy, then there is a potential for population deviations. Therefore, it is generally advisable to complete the process quickly. In some countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, the process takes less than a year, whereas in the United Kingdom, it might take 6 years.²²⁸ Notably, in Canada, with the aim of limiting the delay of parliament approval of the proposed constituency boundaries, the law provides that such a proposal shall be approved or rejected within 60 days after it is tabled in parliament.²²⁹ In Ethiopia, the electoral laws do not limit the time for the delimitation process. But it should be a point to consider in order to mitigate the potential for population deviations in the course of the delimitation process. On the other hand, the process should be participatory and done carefully, given Ethiopia's large population and diversity.

Specific Recommendations:

- The legislature shall introduce statutory limits (e.g., 12-18 months) for completing the entire delimitation cycle, from proposal to approval.
- Decisions (approval or rejection) on proposed constituency delimitation shall be made promptly, and a statutory limit shall be provided for rendering such decisions.

Recommendation 6: The HoF shall develop, adopt, and publicize clearly defined criteria for identifying groups eligible for special representation. The NEBE shall be mandated to participate in the research and mapping of underrepresented minority groups.

The HoF shall, through a genuinely consultative process involving minority representatives, CSOs, academic experts, and NEBE, develop, adopt, and publicize clearly defined, comprehensive, and objectively verifiable criteria for identifying groups eligible for special representation.

²²⁵ ACE Project (n 5).

²²⁶ The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (n 13) 38(1)(a).

²²⁷ The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation (n 4) art 13(1).

²²⁸ ACE Project (n 5).

²²⁹ *ibid.*



These criteria must go beyond mere population numbers to include factors such as geographic concentration/dispersion, historical status, distinct cultural/linguistic identity, and demonstrable patterns of underrepresentation or marginalization. The NEBE shall be mandated to participate actively in the research and mapping of underrepresented minority groups to inform this process.

Recommendation 7: The law should address the procedures to address the misalignment of administrative boundaries with electoral constituencies when administrative boundaries change.

Specifically, legislation should stipulate that upon any official and substantive change to administrative boundaries (such as the creation of new Woredas, significant alteration of existing ones, or regional restructuring), the relevant electoral constituency boundaries must be automatically reviewed for realignment by the [independent delimitation body/NEBE] within a specified timeframe. Any decision not to realign electoral boundaries with new administrative units should require explicit, technically sound, and publicly available justification.

Recommendation 9: The independent boundary body or the NEBE, as the case may be (see Recommendation 1), and other stakeholders shall receive adequate financial, technical, and human resources.

Adequate, predictable, and ring-fenced financial, technical, and human resources must be allocated to the NEBE (and any newly established independent boundary body) and the Ethiopian Statistics Service. This is essential for conducting regular, high-quality national censuses, undertaking complex technical delimitation tasks (including GIS mapping and demographic analysis), managing extensive public consultation processes, and maintaining up-to-date, publicly accessible demographic and electoral boundary databases.



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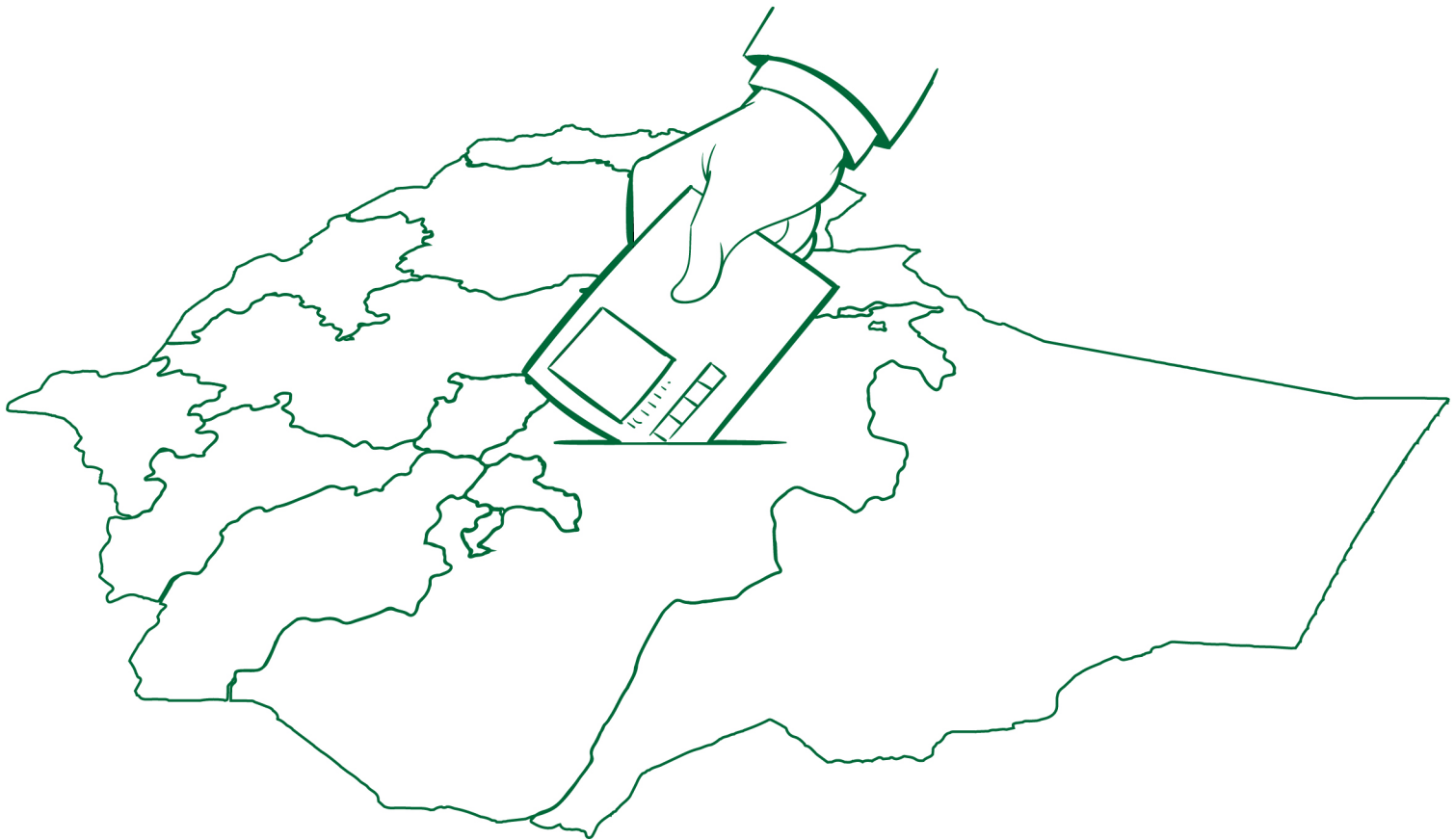
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