



Eritrea — Va-PoReg Country Report

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01/01/1890 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Italy]: Eritrea started to be a colony on 01/01/1890. Ethiopia was integrated into the Ethiopian Empire, while Massawa, the port city was Ottoman territory since 1577 and transferred to Egypt in 1865. The Italians occupied Ethiopia in 1869, after the Suez Canal opened and settled in Eritrea. In 1885, they took control over Massawa leading to a dispute with Ethiopians, who also claimed authority over the port city (Jerven/Strangio/Weisdorf 2021). After three years, the Ethiopians retreated and officially relinquished their claims in Eritrea to Italy in the 1889 Treaty of Ucciali. Eritrea was declared an Italian colony on 01/01/1890 and called Italian Eritrea (Jerven/Strangio/Weisdorf 2021). After the war of 1935-36, Italy occupied Ethiopia and established a unified government for the whole of Italian East Africa that consisted of the Eritrea Governorate, the Ethiopian region of Tigre and Somalia and based in Addis Ababa (Crowder 1984). According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. Both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI classify political liberties as absent. Therefore, the regime in this period is coded as a direct rule colonial regime. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

03/27/1941 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Italy, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]: Italy's defeat in the Battle of Keren led to British occupation of Eritrea after Ethiopian independence. Britain placed Italian Eritrea (along with Italian Somalia, and British Somaliland) under British military administration (Crowder 1984). This period is coded as occupation (by United Kingdom) because Italy formally ceded its claim over the colonies (including Eritrea) by the Treaty of Peace with Italy, signed on 02/10/1947 between Italy and the powers of World War II, which came into effect on 09/15/1947. The military administrations were later gradually replaced by civilian ones, however, there was no agreement amongst the Allies concerning the future status of Eritrea (Crowder 1984, Kibreab 2005). In the meantime, the Eritreans demanded self-determination. A UN commission was dispatched to the former colony in 02/1950. The UN General Assembly on 12/02/1950 decided on a termination of the British military administration of Eritrea by 09/15/1952. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. In addition to that, political liberties were coded as absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI vary for this period. In 1941 political liberties were not really present, from 1942 to 1950 somewhat present and ambiguous from 1951 onwards. From 1942 to 1951, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are limited. At the same time, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 1952, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited.

03/25/1952 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]: The British military administration held parliamentary elections on 03/25 and 26/1952, for a parliament with 68 members. On 09/11/1952, Emperor Haile Selassie ratified a constitution that was put forward by the UN commissioner. The Representative Assembly subsequently became the Eritrean Assembly.¹ This period is not

coded as international mandate because the authority of the British military administration to lead a provisional government was not based on a UN resolution, but the UN had a rather supervising role. Furthermore, the BMA in Eritrea formally ended on 09/15/1952.

09/11/1952 End Indirect Rule Occupation Regime [by United Kingdom, (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under Ethiopia, Autocratic Monarchy]: On this date, an UN General Assembly Resolution went into effect by which Eritrea was established as an autonomous entity within the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown (Crawford 2006: 555). Under this agreement, the Ethiopian government received authority over matters of defense, currency and external affairs (Crowder 1984). Before the establishment of the autonomous unit, the first Eritrean elections were held in March 1952, overseen by the British administration. The Eritrean Representative Assembly opened on 04/28/1952. They got a draft of the Eritrean Constitution on 05/03, and by 05/14, they all agreed on the first part about joining Ethiopia. Over the next two months, they talked about each part of the Constitution. On 07/10, they all agreed on the Constitution with some changes (United Nations Department of Public Information 1996). The elections of 1952 had been limited to direct voting solely in Asmara and Massawa. In other regions, a complex system of indirect elections was employed, with constituencies arbitrarily defined. Determining the desires of the Eritrean populace was hindered, if not made impossible, by the absence of comprehensive records on political factions. Consequently, these factions could make exaggerated claims about their influence. Both the four-power commission and the UN Commission for Eritrea struggled to gauge the strength of these factions and, by extension, the will of the people. Moreover, the situation was complicated by a lack of political awareness among the populace and deep-seated ethnic and religious divisions (Tiruneh 1981). Ato Tedla Bairu was elected as Chief Executive by the assembly on 09/13/1952.² According to the constitution of 1952 (Article 20) the right to vote was limited to males of Eritrean descent over twenty-one, who had maintained residency in Eritrea for at least one year.³ Eritreans of mixed ethnicity were denied the right to vote. Moreover, economic, and educational policies disadvantaged ethnic Eritrean people, and the freedom of the press was severely diminished.⁴ In July 1955, Emperor Haile Selassie made Ato Tedla Bairu step down from his position as Chief Executive. Then, in August 1955, the Emperor chose Asfeha Woldemichael as the new Chief Executive and Idris Mohammed Adem as the President of the Eritrean Assembly.⁵ There is no record of further elections during the period under review. The 1952 elections mentioned here are strictly speaking outside the period but are worth mentioning to justify the classification. For these elections there is no record of the percentage of the population that participated. Therefore, we classify this period as electoral oligarchy. Other typologies lack an independent classification of Eritrea in this period; only LIED provides one and classifies a multiparty autocracy without elected executive. According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held. However, any election during this period are classified as not competitive per LIED. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI score them as neither free, fair nor clean. In addition to that political liberties were absent (LIED). V-Dem's PCLI scores them as not really present until 1957 and as not present from 1958 onwards. From 1953 to 1959, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For the years 1960 and 1961, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. For 1962, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

11/14/1962 End Electoral Oligarchical Autocracy [semi-sovereign, external affairs under Ethiopia, Autocratic Monarchy]/Start Part of Other Country [of Ethiopia, Autocratic Monarchy]: The UN had planned a popular plebiscite after ten years, where Eritrean people could choose between complete union with Ethiopia or complete independence (Tseggai 1976). However, in 1962, Ethiopia went a step further as Emperor Haile Selassie unilaterally annulled the federation agreement, without prompting any response from the UN

(Crawford 2006: 625). The parliament was dissolved, and Eritrea became an Ethiopian province, ruled by a governor-general from Addis Ababa (Crowder 1984). From the early 1980s, the struggle for independence was dominated by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF, informally known as Shabia). LIED does not treat Eritrea during this period. According to our interpretation of V-Dem's PCLI political liberties were absent. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent.

05/29/1991 End Part of Other Country [of Ethiopia, Non-Electoral Transitional Regime]/Start One-Party (Personalist) Autocracy [as de facto independent country]: Briefly after the communist regime broke down in Ethiopia and Mengistu Haile Mariam fled the country, the Eritrean province achieved de facto independence.⁶ Eritrea was from that date on under the control of Isaias Afwerki and the EPLF, an armed Marxist-Leninist organization that dominated the struggle for independence of Eritrea (Lansford 2012b: 446, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b). On 05/24/1993 Eritrea's de jure (legal) independence was formally declared, following an UN-monitored referendum in which the Eritrean people overwhelmingly voted for independence. In 1994, the EPLF transformed into the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and became the ruling, and sole legal political party of Eritrea. The former secretary-general of the EPLF, Afewerki, has ruled the country as president since independence without ever having been confirmed in his office by a popular vote".⁷ While no elections have been held the regime is coded rather as a one-party autocracy than a pure (almost institutionless) personalist autocracy. While there have been elements of a Marxist-Leninist ideology the regime cannot be classified as a communist ideocracy.⁸ According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. From 1993 to 2000, based on Polity5's assessment, the executive faced slight limitations on power during this period. As classified by FH for 1993 and 1994, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. From 1995 to 1998 Eritrea scores from 9 to 10 as not free, which we categorize as rather not free. From 1999 onward a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. Furthermore, since 1993 both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI confirm the constant absence of political liberties. Since 2001, as per Polity5's categorization, the executive experienced minimal limitations on decision-making, placing it in the first intermediate category. Until 2020, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also absent. Since 2021, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are absent. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

One-Party (Personalist) Autocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Ogbazghi 2011)

Notes

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Eritrea#British_administration_and_federalisation

² <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/ethiopiaeritrea-1950-1993/>

³ <https://snitna.com/documents.html>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federation_of_Ethiopia_and_Eritrea

⁵ <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/home/research-projects/dadm-project/sub-saharan-africa-region/ethiopiaeritrea-1950-1993/>

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eritrea_Province

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage; <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/ERI>

⁸ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Eritrea_1997?lang=en; <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/ERI>

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