

# *Ethnicity, Economic Conditions, and Opposition Support: Evidence from Ethiopia's 2005 Elections*

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## *Introduction*

What do the 2005 parliamentary elections reveal about the nature of opposition support in Ethiopia? Although the final election results have been disputed by the major parties, these results do suggest that the race between ruling party and opposition party candidates was highly competitive in most electoral districts. However, there is no clear consensus among students of Ethiopian politics to explain the evident variation in opposition support across the country and especially across its largest regions. Some stress the role of ethnicity in determining support for the various opposition coalitions, while others point to such factors as nationalism and neopatrimonialism.

The puzzle of opposition support in Ethiopia can be generalized to the rest of Africa, where ruling parties manage to win reelection by relying on a set of familiar strategies—distributing patronage, exploiting ethnic cleavages, and employing violence (van de Walle 2003; Adejumbi 2000; Diamond and Plattner 1999). While ruling parties' deliberate manipulation of the electoral arena is well established in the Africanist literature (Takougang 2003; Makumbe 2002; Crook 1997), we still lack a clear conception of the factors that enable opposition parties to build popular support in countries where democracy has yet to be consolidated. We have no adequate explanation for why voters in some electoral districts are more willing to take a risk in opting for an opposition

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party's candidate over the ruling party's, even when it is clear that the government of the day has no intention of leaving office.

To explore this question in the Ethiopian context, I examine the economic conditions that may have influenced opposition support at the level of the electoral district. Two specific aspects of Ethiopia's political development make the study of opposition support particularly interesting. First, the 2005 elections mark the first time that the majority of Ethiopian voters had a real choice between government and opposition parties. Unlike many other African states, which enjoyed a limited period of multiparty politics after independence in the 1960s, Ethiopia did not experience multiparty competition until the 1990s. The notion of legal and democratic opposition was simply absent from previous regimes and the dominant political culture (Gebru Tareke 1991; Clapham 1988; Levine 1974). Nevertheless, while no alternation was achieved through the 2005 parliamentary elections, Ethiopia was transformed from a *de facto* single-party system to a party system with at least two effective electoral parties.<sup>1</sup>

Second, Ethiopia's current institutional organization as an ethnic federal system has primed ethnicity as the principal basis of political mobilization. If we are to see exclusively ethnic voting anywhere, it should be in Ethiopia: the boundaries of the federal states have been drawn to conform to ethno-linguistic settlement patterns in order to produce relatively homogeneous units, and the country's single-member electoral districts (*mercha kilil*) are based on preexisting, relatively homogeneous administrative districts (*woredas*). Both electoral laws and party rules virtually guarantee that voters at the district level will choose between candidates from the same ethnic background.<sup>2</sup> But despite these incentives to coalesce behind a single ethno-regional party, in the 2005 parliamentary elections, voters in the country's largest ethnic regions—Amhara and Oromo—essentially split their votes between the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the two opposition coalitions, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF).

I focus in this article on understanding the district-level determinants of opposition support: What kinds of electoral districts were more likely to choose either the CUD or UEDF over the ruling party?

Is ethnicity enough to explain the variation we see in these parties' vote shares across districts in the country's largest regions? To answer these questions, I use the 2005 electoral data to estimate a regression model of opposition party vote share at the district level. The results of this analysis confirm the importance of ethno-regional identity in determining patterns of opposition support, but they also show that economic conditions play a role in shaping the opposition parties' vote shares within a district. What is more, I find that the CUD and the UEDF were differently affected by economic variables, indicating that opposition support is not homogeneous. The CUD's vote share appears to be highly correlated with the percentage of the population living below the poverty line within a district, but no such relationship exists for the UEDF. Apparently, the CUD and UEDF are not only drawing support from different ethnic constituencies but also from different economic constituencies.

More specifically, I find that, in districts with two-party races between the EPRDF and the CUD, opposition support was significantly influenced by the degree of urbanization, the prevalence of poverty, the type of cash crop grown, and the level of food aid dependence. Within Oromia, CUD support was depressed by a religious (Muslim-Christian) rather than an ethnic cleavage. In districts with three-party races between the EPRDF, the CUD, and the UEDF, I again find that the degree of urbanization, the prevalence of poverty, the type of cash crop grown, and the level of food aid dependence are needed to provide a full account for the variation across electoral districts.

While I use regression analysis to assess the level of support for the two parties within electoral districts, I do not pretend to answer the larger question of who won a majority of seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives. The manner in which the complaints investigation process was managed and the level of postelection violence raise reasonable doubts about the validity of the final election results.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, I am largely able to sidestep this problem by focusing my analysis on a sample of election results announced on 8 July 2005 for 307 districts, which neither the opposition nor the ruling party challenged. I also provide a separate regression analysis based on a sample of the final election results announced on 5 September 2005 for all 547 districts.

I proceed in this article by first outlining the major changes in Ethiopia's party system since 1991. I then analyze the 2005 parliamentary election results to show the extent to which party competition varied in Ethiopia's first genuinely multiparty election. To account for the opposition's unexpectedly strong showing, I review some of the principal explanations offered by students of Ethiopian politics and argue that economic variables need to be inserted in the analysis in order to have a more complete account of variation in opposition support. I move on to analyze the electoral data to show how changes in these economic variables influenced the choices made by voters at the district level. I conclude with a discussion of implications for the development of Ethiopia's party system.

### *Ethiopia's Evolving Party System*

Ethiopia's current party system began to take form in 1991. Elections for a national parliament had been organized under previous regimes, but the country had no prior experience with multiparty politics because they were either strictly forbidden or limited to the official government party.<sup>4</sup> The EPRDF established the legal framework for a multiparty system almost as soon as it came into power, though there is serious disagreement on the extent to which EPRDF leaders intended to actively compete with other parties or to establish a single-party regime (Henze 2004; Pausewang, Tronvoll, and Aalen 2002).<sup>5</sup> What was clear was that the EPRDF set out to create a broad coalition of parties that would link it to nearly every ethno-regional group in the country, even if meant competing with, and even supplanting, its erstwhile allies in the fight against Mengistu Haile Mariam's military-backed regime (1974–91) (Vaughan 2003; Joireman 1997).<sup>6</sup>

As a result of its efforts, the EPRDF faced little to no competition in parliamentary elections held after 1991. Most opposition parties boycotted the first parliamentary elections in 1995, while opposition candidates competed in only about half of the country's electoral districts in the 2000 parliamentary elections. This enabled the EPRDF parties to claim 516 of 547 seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives. Eleven opposition parties shared 18 seats; 12 other seats were won by independent parliamentarians who tended to vote with the opposition.<sup>7</sup>

Opposition party leaders have long complained that government harassment, including imprisonment and killings, prevented them from competing effectively against the EPRDF. But the weakness of the opposition parties themselves further undermined their ability to pose an electoral threat. Divided over questions of ideology and strategy, opposition parties repeatedly failed to articulate clear alternatives to EPRDF policies or to reach out to voters in an organized way. And they had failed to forge broad-based coalitions on at least four different occasions since 1993.<sup>8</sup> However, much of this began to change in the year leading up to the 2005 parliamentary elections. Possibly signaling a shift in the nature of Ethiopian party politics, the opposition began to achieve an unprecedented level of coordination and competitiveness.

The United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) was established as an opposition coalition in August 2003 after two years of consultations culminated in an all-party conference held in Rockville, Maryland. Fifteen parties, five based in Ethiopia and ten based overseas, formed the UEDF for the purpose of challenging the EPRDF in the 2005 elections. The five Ethiopia-based parties in the UEDF were the Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Coalition (SEPDC), the Council of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia (CAFPDE), the Oromo National Congress (ONC), the All Ethiopia Unity Party (AEUP), and the United Ethiopian Democratic Party (UEDP).<sup>9</sup> The UEDF, however, was also an odd alliance, bringing together parties holding contradictory positions on the questions of land and ethnicity—the perennial controversies in modern Ethiopian politics. For the 2005 parliamentary elections, the UEDF parties adopted a common political program and fielded joint candidates in the country's single-member districts.

The UEDF was led into the elections by two veteran opposition leaders. Its chairman was Merera Gudina, leader of the ONC, and its deputy chairman was Beyene Petros, leader of the CAFPDE. These UEDF leaders appeared to have few policy differences with the ruling EPRDF. Being from the historically marginalized Oromo and Hadiya communities, they supported the existing federal structure, coming out in favor of regional self-rule while opposing the idea of secession. And they did not openly oppose either the ethnically based federal system or the existing

policy of state-owned land. Their critiques mainly suggested that the EPRDF's political monopoly had corrupted policy implementation in these areas. As a remedy, UEDF leaders pledged to put in place a transitional government for two years and invite all parties, including the EPRDF, to join them. The purpose of this transitional government would be to promote national reconciliation while laying the foundation for a new democratic system.

The Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) was established as a second opposition front in November 2004 by four parties, including two former members of the UEDF, who left due to disputes over leadership and ideology. The CUD comprised the AEUP, the UEDP-Medhin, the Ethiopian Democratic League (EDL), and Rainbow Ethiopia—Movement for Democracy and Social Justice. Led by Hailu Shawel, the AEUP chairman, and other prominent individuals such as Lidetu Ayelew and Berhanu Nega, the CUD brought together a set of ideologically compatible parties with similar views on the major issues of land and ethnicity. The CUD's principal members, the AEUP and UEDP-Medhin, were among Ethiopia's largest and best organized opposition parties.<sup>10</sup> The AEUP claimed to have nearly 900,000 members across the country, though mainly concentrated in the regions of Amhara and Southern Nations. The UEDP-Medhin claimed to have party offices in many of Ethiopia's major towns, though 60 percent of their members came from Addis Ababa alone. The UEDP-Medhin enjoys particularly strong support among urban youth.

While most Ethiopian parties represent ethnic communities, the CUD sought to distinguish itself in the 2005 parliamentary elections by claiming to group together parties that are multiethnic in membership and orientation. Critics from the EPRDF and other opposition parties alleged, however, that the CUD merely sought to return the country to a system that served the interests of the Amhara. Such critiques were based on the composition of the CUD's leadership, largely ethnically Amhara, and the source of the CUD's campaign funding, much of which came from the diaspora living in the United States and Europe.<sup>11</sup> Others found fault in the fact that some CUD leaders had served as officials in the Mengistu regime, implying that they were somehow complicit in many of the abuses committed during that period.

The CUD parties fielded joint candidates chosen by a committee that reviewed their educational background, gender, place of origin, political activities, and leadership experience related to politics. The CUD platform, presented in its election manifesto issued in April 2005, stressed the coalition's policy differences with the EPRDF. The manifesto proposed a series of constitutional amendments that coalition leaders claimed would enhance individual rights. The CUD specifically promised to amend Article 40 of the 1995 Constitution in order to allow for the privatization of rural and urban lands and a mixed system of ownership in pastoral areas. It also proposed amending Article 39, which provides for the right of peoples, nations, and nationalities to self-determination, including secession. Coalition leaders repeatedly criticized ethnic-based federalism throughout the campaign as a threat to the unity of the Ethiopian state. The CUD claimed to favor decentralization and the recognition of ethnic diversity, but made known its intention to change the ethnically based regional boundaries drawn by the EPRDF.

### ***Patterns Emerging from the 2005 Elections***

The final, though disputed, election results issued on 5 September 2005 awarded the EPRDF and its affiliated parties a total of 372 seats in the 547-member parliament, providing them with more than enough seats to form a government. The opposition won a combined 174 seats, an impressive gain over the 30 seats held in the outgoing parliament.<sup>12</sup> The summary results in Table 1 reflect the broad patterns of support for the major opposition parties. Each coalition appears to have a distinct ethno-regional base: Amhara and Addis Ababa together provided the CUD with 67 percent of its parliamentary seats, while Oromia accounted for 79 percent of UEDF parliamentary seats. By contrast, the opposition parties won only one of the 43 seats in the outlying regions of Afar, Benishangul, Gambella, and Somali.

The 2005 results indicate that the nature of party competition differs markedly from one region to the next. Parliamentary races in Amhara were essentially two-party contests between the EPRDF and the CUD, excluding the participation of independent candidates. Among Amhara's 138 districts, the EPRDF and CUD went head-to-head in 81,

**Table 1. Parliamentary Seats Won by Major Parties**

	<b>EPRDF</b>	<b>CUD</b>	<b>UEDF</b>	<b>Others</b>
Addis Ababa		23		
Afar	8			
Amhara	88	50		
Benishangul Gumuz	8	1		
Dire Dawa	1	1		
Gambella	3			
Harari	2			
Oromia*	109	16	41	11
Somali	23			
Southern Nations	92	18	12	1
Tigray	38			
National	372	109	52	12

Source: National Electoral Board of Ethiopia

\* Arsi Negele's seat goes unfilled due to the killing of a UEDF parliamentarian-elect. A by-election is scheduled for 2007. The Others category includes 1 independent and 10 OFDM representatives from Oromia, and 1 SLM representative from Southern Nations.

or 59 percent, of districts. All 50 opposition seats won in Amhara were claimed by the CUD. In Oromia, not only were districts contested by a larger number of parties than in Amhara, but opposition support in the region also appeared to be more fragmented. With 41 of 177 seats, the UEDF won 23 percent of districts in this region, the largest share among opposition parties. The CUD won 16 seats, 9 percent of all districts, and the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) took another 11 seats, 6 percent of all districts. The OFDM, which fielded parliamentary candidates in Addis Ababa and Oromia on a platform emphasizing a defense of Oromo culture and language, became the only opposition party outside the two main coalitions to gain a significant share of seats. Within Oromia, the OFDM's base of support was concentrated in its leader's home of West Wellega: 6 of its 11 seats come from that zone. The CUD and UEDF essentially split opposition support in Southern



Nations, partly reflecting the ethnic bases of party leadership. The CUD took 18 seats, 15 percent of the 123 districts in the region. Ten of these seats came from Gurage zone, home to the CUD's campaign chairman, Berhanu Nega. The UEDF won in 12 districts or about 10 percent of all seats. Seven of these victories came from Hadiya zone, which is home to the UEDF deputy chairman Beyene Petros.

Ethnicity alone, however, offers no clear guide to the number of parties emerging in Ethiopia nationally or regionally. As shown in Table 2, the number of ethnic groups cannot be axiomatically translated into the effective number of parties.<sup>13</sup> Table 2 suggests that there are two distinct types of party systems emerging within Ethiopia: a competitive party system in the large regions and city-states of the center and a de facto one-party system in the outlying regions. Six of the country's 11 federal states approximate two-party competition, as predicted by standard electoral theories for single-member districts under simple-plurality rules (Cox 1997; Duverger 1954). The three largest states, accounting for nearly 80 percent of the country's population—Amhara, Oromia, and Southern Nations—come close to the predicted two-party average. In fact, Southern Nations, the country's most heterogeneous region, has nearly the same number of effective parties as Amhara, one of the most homogeneous regions, suggesting that representatives from different

**Table 2. Effective Number of Ethnic Groups and Political Parties**

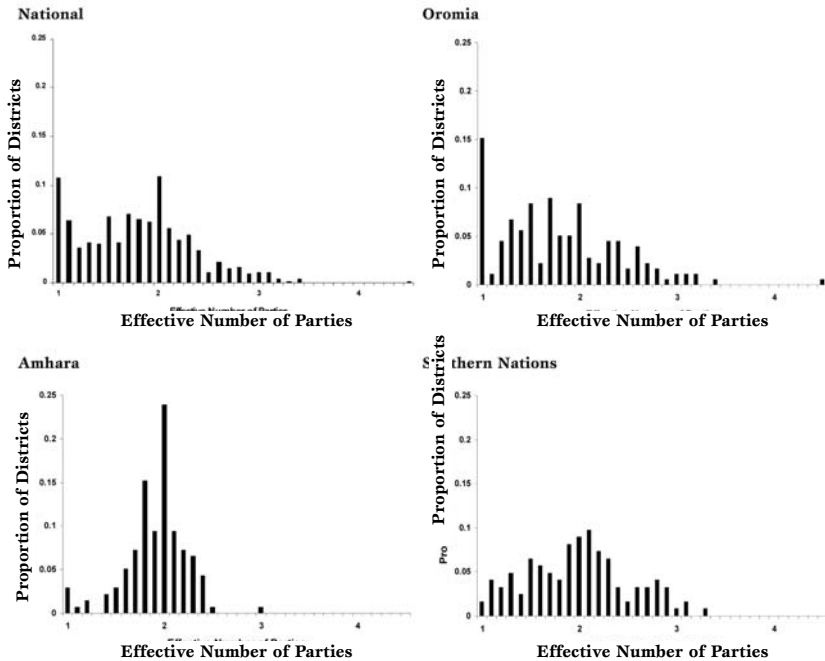
	Effective Number	
	Groups	Parties
Addis Ababa	3.43	1.51
Afar	1.18	1.41
Amhara	1.20	1.87
Benishangul Gumuz	5.26	2.14
Dire Dawa	3.02	2.56
Gambella	4.01	1.28
Harari	2.59	2.28
Oromia	1.37	1.75
Somali	1.09	1.19
Southern Nations	13.04	1.95
Tigray	1.11	1.08

Source: Author's calculations based on 2005 elections and 1994 census.

ethnic groups are confederating into larger, multiethnic parties. The regions with only one effective party are the EPRDF's home state of Tigray and the outlying regions where the ruling party has coopted clan leaders or local elites—Afar, Gambella, and Somali.

Figure 1 provides a more nuanced view of the party system at the national level and for the regions of Amhara, Oromia, and Southern Nations. The national histogram shows that the number of effective parties in district elections has a bimodal distribution. While there are many uncontested districts, there is an equal number of highly competitive districts in which strategic voting is clearly taking place.<sup>14</sup> The region-level distribution of the effective number of parties presents a more complex picture, hinting at the uneven development of party competition across the country. Amhara is clearly the most competitive state, with two effective parties being the modal outcome at the district level and a tight clustering around that number in the distribution. At the other extreme, Oromia's most common outcome is to have one effective party at the district level,

**Figure 1. Effective Number of Parties**



becoming the least competitive of Ethiopia's large states. In fact, Oromia accounted for over half of the 53 uncontested districts in the country.<sup>15</sup> Southern Nations falls in between the other two large regions in the shape of its distribution, though it had proportionally more districts in which more than two parties were competitive. Much of this is due to the presence of regional parties with strong local appeal. In the districts of Sidama zone, for example, the EPRDF and CUD faced fierce competition from the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM).

### ***Competing Explanations for the 2005 Elections***

What do the patterns emerging from the 2005 elections reveal about opposition support in Ethiopia? There is no agreement among students of Ethiopian politics as to why opposition parties performed so well, let alone as to what explains the variation in opposition support across districts. Samatar (2005, 472) insists that support for the opposition was essentially driven by ethnic loyalties and aspirations. Opposition parties cultivated popular support, he suggests, by focusing on identity-based appeals for improved group status: members of the historically dominant ethnic Amhara sought to reclaim their rightful place by turning to the party that campaigned for "the re-imposition of an Amhara/Christian identity," while members of previously subjugated ethnic groups turned to parties aimed at "creating their ethnic Bantustans in which the 'natives' are free from Abyssinian dominance" (467). Clapham (2005) offers a comparable analysis in noting that the main opposition parties drew votes by articulating the prevailing yet contradictory perspectives within Ethiopian politics: the CUD appealed to Ethiopian nationalism, which is strongest among ethnic Amharas and Gurages, while the UEDF appealed to regional identities among ethnic groups, such as the Oromo and Hadiya, which had been discriminated against by previous regimes.<sup>16</sup> However, if opposition parties do derive most of their support from ethnically defined constituencies, neither of these explanations can account for the evident variation seen in opposition support within majority Amhara and Oromo electoral districts.

Harbeson (2005) discounts the role of ethnicity to hypothesize that opposition support was largely galvanized by what appears to be a

growing sense of civic nationalism among Ethiopians, as reflected in popular concerns about the integrity and unity of the country as a whole. The CUD-led opposition ostensibly tapped into the popular sentiment that the EPRDF—in allowing Eritrea to secede, in remaining unable to establish a border solution, or in failing to gain permanent access to the sea—had weakened the country politically as well as economically. Harbeson further suggests that the CUD was able to draw support by attacking the EPRDF's ethnicization of political institutions, exemplified by the Constitution's secession clause, for having undermined national unity. He argues that evidence for the growing support for a common Ethiopian nationality was demonstrated in the electoral gains made by the CUD in areas outside the Amhara heartland. However, this nationalism argument remains underspecified, for Harbeson does not elaborate either on why this issue, among several competing concerns, would influence the decisions of individual voters or on which types of voters, aside from ethnic Amharas, would be most likely to buy into the idea of a single Ethiopian nationality.

Abbink (2006, 180) turns away from ethnic-based explanations in arguing that the EPRDF maintains its political dominance through a neopatrimonial political culture. In fact, he claims that the opposition had “no ethnic agenda per se” (194). Instead, he finds that the ruling party purchased the political support of specific constituencies through the strategic distribution of scarce resources. Those constituencies left out of the EPRDF's patronage network were exactly those that turned to the opposition, namely, urban dwellers and certain business groups. Abbink claims that growing numbers of rural voters backed the opposition after becoming disillusioned with the EPRDF, but is unclear as to whether this was caused by the lack of patronage resources being channeled to their particular localities. Putting the argument somewhat differently, Lyons (2006, 4) suggests that rural voters were revolting against the authoritarian nature of this neopatrimonial system: “Widespread and deeply felt anger about how the EPRDF operated explains a large part of this pattern.” This view suggests that rural voters turned to the opposition because they had begun to chafe under the discretionary nature of the system rather than because they were not receiving enough patronage. But here, again, the explanation fails to

account for the evident variation among rural constituencies; some clearly voted for the opposition, but not all did.

While focusing on how ethnicity and patronage affect support for opposition parties, few students of Ethiopian politics have turned their attention to the role of economic conditions in influencing voters' choices. A straightforward hypothesis could be stated here in terms of the economic vote function: voters satisfied with the incumbent's economic management were more likely to vote for the ruling party (Nannestad and Paldam 1994; Powell and Whitten 1993; Kramer 1971). EPRDF leaders certainly expected their party's economic record, especially when placed in contrast to the previous regime, to mobilize an electoral, mainly rural, majority on its behalf. Annual GDP growth averaged 5.27 percent between 2000 and 2004. The annual average was 5.23 percent for the previous ten-year period, which compares favorably with the 2.37 percent annual average attained during the last ten years of the Mengistu regime.<sup>17</sup> In the year leading up to the election, the EPRDF also presumed that its rural base would be cemented—some 85 percent of Ethiopians live in rural areas (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2004b)—after an unexpectedly successful harvest from the 2004 season. Due to plentiful rainfall and increased fertilizer use, Ethiopian farmers produced a harvest that was 21 percent above the average for the previous five years (Robinson, Lachaal, and Hicks 2005).

But the uneven nature of Ethiopia's economic gains also presented an electoral challenge for the EPRDF—and a potential opportunity for the opposition. The EPRDF, once it came into power, chose to retain the 1975 land reforms, which nationalized all rural and urban lands. EPRDF leaders maintained that privatization would exacerbate inequality and return most farmers to a status quo ante in which they were sharecroppers under an exploitative landlord system. The EPRDF's development policies, however, have not adequately addressed the growing problems in rural areas. According to UN figures, approximately 42 million Ethiopians consume less than the recommended minimum nutritional requirement, while some seven million are dependent on food aid.<sup>18</sup> Ethiopian farmers have become especially constrained by inadequate access to land and inadequate rainfall. Population growth has steadily reduced the average share of land they can cultivate, thereby

limiting their potential household income (Jayne et al. 2001). What is more, the 1975 land reform had kept farmers tied to their small plots of land by stipulating that those who left would forfeit their right to cultivate them in the future (Ethiopian Economic Association 2002). These problems have been compounded by the increasingly erratic rainfall that threatens to create conditions of chronic food shortages in some parts of the country.<sup>19</sup> The opposition seized on all of these problems throughout the campaign, criticizing the EPRDF's agricultural and industrialization policies for exacerbating hunger and increasing poverty.<sup>20</sup>

### *District-Level Analysis*

To assess how economic conditions are influencing opposition support across electoral districts, I estimate a regression model of opposition party vote share using seemingly unrelated regression (SUR).<sup>21</sup> I use a unique dataset that includes data for Ethiopia's 547 single-member districts. The data are based on publicly available information from the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, the Central Statistical Authority, the Central Agricultural Census Commission, and the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2004a, 2003, 1998).<sup>22</sup>

The dependent variable is modeled as the natural log of each opposition party's vote share relative to the EPRDF's vote share.<sup>23</sup> Using a log-transformed dependent variable means that the estimated coefficients cannot be interpreted in a straightforward manner as with ordinary-least squares (OLS). A coefficient must be read as the change in the log ratio for a specific party's vote share associated with a one-unit change in the explanatory variable. However, in the following discussion of the regression analysis, I provide concrete interpretations for coefficients in terms of changes in vote shares rather than the more abstract log ratios.<sup>24</sup>

I restrict the sample for this analysis to electoral districts from the three large regions of Amhara, Oromia, and Southern Nations, mainly because districts in the outlying regions were not competitive and systematic data for those districts are also harder to come by. This is not a considerable loss, since the three states account for 439 of the 547 seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives. I further divide the districts

into two groups and analyze them separately. I estimate one model for two-party races in which only the EPRDF and CUD fielded candidates, and I estimate another model for three-party races in which all coalitions—the EPRDF, CUD, and UEDF—fielded candidates.

The explanatory variables used in this analysis are coded at the district level. The main economic variables are the percentage of the population living below the poverty line, the percentage of the population receiving food aid, the average number of hectares per farmer, and whether the locality is a producer of coffee or *khat*, two of the country's major cash crops. In estimating the impact of these variables, I expect to find that the opposition's vote share in a district increases as the proportion of voters living below the poverty line increases: the poorest districts should be the most likely to be dissatisfied with the EPRDF's economic performance and therefore opt for the opposition. However, the opposition's vote share should decline in districts where the population is more dependent on food aid. I also expect the opposition vote share to be lower in coffee-growing districts, since these farmers enjoy considerable extension services from the government, which most other farmers, such as *khat* cultivators, do not receive; moreover, *khat* is a highly taxed commodity, which may also encourage those farmers to back the opposition. The sociodemographic variables are the district's region, ethnic fractionalization as a measure of local diversity, the percentage of Muslims, and the degree of urbanization. I add an interactive variable to control for the possibility that party support is partially determined by the overlay of Muslim and Oromo identities.

Before I move on to a discussion of the regression models, three caveats are in order. First, the explanatory power of this analysis is limited by the very fact that these multiparty elections were Ethiopia's first. Comparable studies of elections in developed countries attain much of their explanatory power by controlling for a party's vote share in previous elections; that is, Democrats or Republicans in the United States will tend to do well in districts where they already performed well in the past. Second, due to data limitations, the variables used here explain how conditions in Ethiopian districts may affect party support at a fixed moment in time. They show, for example, how party support changes as the percentage of

people living under the poverty line varies across districts. They cannot show how party support is affected by economic changes within a district over the past five years.

The third caveat involves the reasonable doubt concerning the validity of the final election results issued by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) over a period of nearly four months. Final results for the 15 May 2005 elections were not released until 5 September 2005. The principal source of controversy stems from the manner in which the complaints investigation process was handled by the NEBE.<sup>25</sup> Complaints were filed in 299 of 523 districts, that is, 57 percent of all districts contested in the May 2005 elections. The NEBE's management of the investigation process was criticized by opposition parties and foreign observers, especially after 18 seats originally won by the opposition in the first election were awarded to the EPRDF through rerun elections held entirely or partially in 31 districts. Nevertheless, the Carter Center observation mission concluded that the "majority of the district results based on the May 15 polling and tabulation are credible and reflect competitive conditions" (Carter Center 2005). To sidestep problems associated with vote rigging that might affect the analysis of district results, I divide the districts into two samples. The first, "partial" sample uses only the election results announced on 8 July 2005 for 307 districts. The opposition did not challenge these July results—no party had yet gained a parliamentary majority—as they would for those issued on 9 August and 5 September 2005. The second, "full" sample uses the election results announced on 5 September 2005 for all 547 districts, though I have chosen to retain for this sample the original results for the 31 districts in which elections were rerun.

### ***Two-Party Races***

The results presented in Table 3 for both partial and full samples of two-party races show that economic conditions have a significant influence on the CUD's vote share, raising doubts about exclusively ethno-regional explanations for its base of support. The model performs well overall, explaining 71 percent of the variation in CUD vote shares in the partial sample and 51 percent of the variation in the full sample.



**Table 3. Estimated Coefficients Effect on CUD Vote Share in Two-Party Races<sup>1</sup>**

	<b>Partial<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Full<sup>2</sup></b>
District located in Oromia <sup>3</sup>	0.50 (0.36)	0.21 (0.28)
District located in Southern Nations <sup>3</sup>		-1.28*** (0.30)
Ethnic fractionalization	-0.33 (0.68)	-0.29 (0.49)
Muslim population (% total)	0.52 (0.51)	0.01 (0.34)
Muslim population (% total) in Oromia	-2.95*** (0.61)	-2.24*** (0.48)
Urban population (% total)	1.54*** (0.50)	1.91*** (0.41)
Population below poverty line (% total)	0.20 (1.58)	4.34*** (1.02)
Population receiving food aid (% total)	-2.63*** (0.63)	-2.41*** (0.52)
Land access (hectares/holder)	0.45* (0.27)	0.09 (0.22)
Coffee-producing district	-0.03 (0.21)	-0.07 (0.16)
<i>Khat</i> -producing district	0.22 (0.37)	0.94*** (0.24)
Voter turnout (% registered voters)	-2.31* (1.39)	-4.51*** (0.92)
Intercept	1.47 (1.16)	1.67** (0.84)
R <sup>2</sup>	.71	.51
N	84	190

Standard errors are in parentheses. Significance levels: \*  $p < .10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$ .

<sup>1</sup>The models are estimated using seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) with logistic transformation of the dependent variable.

<sup>2</sup>The “partial” sample is based on the uncontested results for 307 electoral districts announced on 8 July 2005. The “full” sample is based on the contested results for all 547 electoral districts announced on 5 September 2005.

<sup>3</sup>The omitted category is Amhara.

Districts where farmers have larger plot sizes, according to the partial sample, seem to favor the CUD. But the interpretation of this variable is not clear-cut. While the CUD's proposals for land privatization might be attractive to farmers with greater land access, it need not be because these farmers are necessarily more productive or have greater assets. Farmers may have greater land access in districts with less productive land—and are therefore relatively poorer than those with smaller plots—so privatization may provide them with a mechanism for benefiting from the sale of their land.<sup>26</sup> This relationship, however, does not appear to hold in the full sample.

According to estimates from the full sample, the CUD gained considerable support in relatively poorer districts. Increasing the percentage of individuals living below the poverty line is associated with an increase in the CUD vote share. Consider a hypothetical district in Amhara in which 42 percent of the population live below the poverty line, the median level in that region, and all other variables are set at their mean values. The CUD's expected vote share would be 52 percent in such a district, according to estimates based on the full sample. Decreasing this proportion of poor individuals to 34 percent—the 25th percentile in Amhara—would reduce the CUD's expected vote share to 47 percent, and thereby the CUD would lose that district to the EPRDF. The partial sample does not replicate this finding. This may be due to the fact that the partial sample includes relatively better off and more urbanized districts when compared to the full sample. The districts where election results were delayed and later disputed tended to be poorer and more rural.

Districts with higher levels of urbanization also favored the CUD, as conventionally expected, though the exact mechanism for this relationship is not clear. In Ethiopia, urbanization is highly correlated with literacy, so voters with more education and greater media exposure may be more open to voting for the opposition. But urban areas are also more likely to be correlated with unemployment, especially among younger voters, which may also explain greater levels of opposition support. Estimates from the partial sample indicate that increasing the percentage of the urban population within a hypothetical Amhara district from the median level of 8 percent to the 75th percentile of 15 percent would increase the CUD vote share from a tentative 52 percent win to a more

secure 55 percent victory, *ceteris paribus*. The same relationship is found in the full sample.

Support for the CUD within a district declines as the percentage of individuals receiving food aid rises. This is one of the strongest predictors in the partial sample, and the relationship holds in the full sample. Ethiopians who depend on the distribution of emergency food relief are evidently voting for the ruling party, but the motivation is not clear: they may do so out of their own belief that only the EPRDF can ensure the continuation of such assistance, or *woreda* officials may have coerced voters into believing that the aid would be withdrawn unless they supported the EPRDF. For instance, estimates from the partial sample suggest that increasing the percentage of individuals receiving food aid depresses CUD support in a hypothetical district in Amhara. In districts where approximately 10 percent of individuals receive food aid, about the average for the region, the CUD's vote share is estimated at 54 percent. However, in a district where the proportion of food aid recipients is 20 percent, as was the case in some parts of East Gojjam, the expected CUD vote share drops to 48 percent, and thus the district is lost to the EPRDF.

While the CUD's vote share was lower on average in districts across Oromia when compared to districts in Amhara, it would appear that much of that difference can be attributed to Oromia's larger Muslim population. Both partial and full samples reveal that the CUD lost ground to the EPRDF in districts with Muslim majorities. For instance, the estimates from the partial sample indicate that in a hypothetical Oromia district with a 34 percent Muslim population, and with all other variables set at their mean values, the CUD would garner only 34 percent of the vote. In a similar Oromia district with a smaller Muslim population of 2 percent, the CUD would be expected to win that district with 53 percent of the vote. But even within Oromia, economic factors could positively influence the CUD's vote share. The economic variables discussed in the context of Amhara districts have comparable directional effects in districts across Oromia and Southern Nations, though their exact effects vary across regions. The results from the full sample further indicate that CUD support was significantly higher among *khat*-producing districts, raising the CUD's estimated vote share from 26 percent in an average

Oromia district to 44 percent in a *khat*-producing Oromia district, holding all else equal. A similar pattern holds true among *khat*-producing districts in Southern Nations.

### ***Three-Party Races***

Table 4 presents the estimated coefficients of the effect on CUD and UEDF vote shares in three-party races with the EPRDF. The variables used in the analysis of two-party races are also employed for the three-party races. Again, the model performs well with the partial sample, explaining 69 percent of the variation in CUD vote shares and 74 percent of the variation in UEDF vote shares. Using the full sample, the model explains 51 percent of the variation in CUD vote shares and 54 percent of the variation in UEDF vote shares.

What immediately becomes apparent from the results shown in Table 4 is that the two opposition coalitions are differently affected by economic conditions: certain variables affect the vote share of a particular opposition party, while other variables produce opposite effects in their vote shares.

Greater land access, as measured by the average number of hectares per holder, is associated with larger CUD vote shares, as in the two-party races. This relationship holds in both partial and full samples. The UEDF, however, is unaffected by this variable. Similarly, the CUD gains vote share in districts with higher levels of urbanization, but urbanization levels have no effect on the UEDF's vote share. In a hypothetical district in Southern Nations where 10 percent of the population is urban, and all other variables are held at their regional mean values, the CUD is expected to win 36 percent of the vote, according to estimates from the partial sample. Increasing the degree of urbanization to 15 percent raises the CUD's vote share to 40 percent, all else equal.

The CUD gains support in relatively poorer districts, as in the case of two-party races, while the UEDF loses vote share in those districts. Consider a three-way race in a hypothetical district in Southern Nations in which the percentage living below the poverty line is 57 percent and all other variables are held at their regional mean values. Based on estimates from the partial sample, the CUD's expected vote

**Table 4. Estimated Coefficients of Effect on CUD/UEDF Vote Shares in Three-Party Races<sup>1</sup>**

	CUD		UEDF	
	Partial <sup>2</sup>	Full <sup>2</sup>	Partial <sup>2</sup>	Full <sup>2</sup>
District located in Oromia <sup>3</sup>	-1.15*** (0.32)	-0.90*** (0.30)	4.02*** (0.36)	3.75*** (0.36)
District located in Southern Nations <sup>3</sup>	-0.80* (0.46)	-1.84*** (0.33)	2.94*** (0.52)	1.60*** (0.39)
Ethnic fractionalization	0.68 (0.65)	0.11 (0.50)	-2.31*** (0.74)	-0.70 (0.60)
Muslim population (% total)	1.29** (0.54)	-0.25 (0.45)	1.23** (0.62)	1.34*** (0.53)
Muslim population (% total) in Oromia	-2.03*** (0.61)	-1.34** (0.59)	-1.44** (0.70)	-1.71*** (0.70)
Urban population (% total)	3.19*** (0.60)	3.61*** (0.57)	0.58 (0.68)	-0.03 (0.69)
Population below poverty line (% total)	5.24*** (1.42)	7.37*** (1.04)	-1.12 (1.61)	-2.30* (1.25)
Population receiving Food Aid (% total)	-1.79 (1.19)	-0.44 (0.94)	-2.78** (1.35)	-2.31** (1.12)
Land access (hectares/holder)	0.93*** (0.31)	0.49* (0.29)	0.51 (0.35)	0.01 (0.35)
Coffee-producing district	-0.37 (0.27)	-0.11 (0.23)	0.11 (0.31)	-0.10 (0.27)
<i>Khat</i> -producing district	0.03* (0.32)	0.05 (0.33)	0.28 (0.36)	0.09 (0.39)
Voter turnout (% registered voters)	-2.86** (1.27)	-0.28 (0.96)	-3.14** (1.44)	-6.64*** (1.16)
Intercept	-1.08 (1.17)	-3.65*** (0.97)	-0.39 (1.33)	3.21*** (1.16)
R <sup>2</sup>	.69	.51	.74	.54
N	73	152	73	152

Standard errors are in parentheses. Significance levels: \*  $p < .10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$ .

<sup>1</sup>The models are estimated using seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) with logistic transformation of the dependent variable.

<sup>2</sup>The “partial” sample is based on the uncontested results announced on 8 July 2005 for 307 electoral districts. The “full” sample is based on the contested results announced on 5 September 2005 for all 547 electoral districts.

<sup>3</sup>The omitted category is Amhara.

share in such a race would be 36 percent and the UEDF's would be 22 percent. If the percentage of the population living below the poverty line increases to 64 percent, the 75th percentile in the region, the CUD's expected vote share rises to 45 percent while the UEDF's falls to 19 percent. Taken together, these results suggest that Ethiopian voters may not only be treating the election as a referendum on the EPRDF's economic record, but that they may also be able to distinguish between the economic programs offered by the opposition parties. In party debates broadcast on television and radio throughout the election campaign, CUD representatives managed to draw sharp distinctions between their own economic proposals and those of the EPRDF, while there seemed to be less difference between those offered by the UEDF and the ruling party.

Higher levels of food aid dependence appear to depress the UEDF's vote share in both partial and full samples, but there is no comparable effect for the CUD in these three-party races. For example, in a hypothetical district in Southern Nations, if 10 percent of the population in a district are receiving emergency food aid and all other variables are held at their mean values, then the UEDF expected vote share is 22 percent, based on estimates from the partial sample. This share falls to 19 percent when the percentage of food aid recipients rises to 20 percent.

Unlike the two-party races between the EPRDF and CUD, regional identity strongly comes into play when the UEDF, a party led by politicians from Oromia and Southern Nations, competes in a district. Among districts with three-party contests, those located in Oromia and Southern Nations voted for the CUD at lower rates than those in Amhara region. Again, the CUD is particularly penalized in Muslim districts in Oromia, though the UEDF suffers no such effect. On the other hand, the variable for ethnic fractionalization, as a proxy for ethnic diversity at the district level, appears to have opposite effects for the two opposition coalitions, reflecting their contrasting campaign appeals regarding ethnic autonomy within Ethiopia. The CUD, which advocated less ethno-regional autonomy, receives a vote bonus as ethnic diversity increases at the district level, while the UEDF's push for greater regional autonomy loses votes as diversity increases.

## **Conclusion**

The May 2005 elections marked a significant evolution in Ethiopia's political development, as the country transitioned from a de facto single-party system to a multiparty system. In a country with no history of democratic competition or peaceful alternation in power, it is no small feat that nearly a third of districts, if election results are accepted as they are, opted for the opposition over the EPRDF.

This article has sought to underscore the fact that ethno-regional factors alone cannot fully account for the variation in party support across Ethiopia's districts. The regression analysis confirms that opposition support in Ethiopia is not merely an ethnic or urban phenomenon. Economic and other sociodemographic factors played a part in determining party choice at the district level. What is more, the regression analysis reveals that the CUD and UEDF are differently affected by both economic and sociodemographic factors.

The finding that economic differences across districts influenced patterns of party support provides new insights into contemporary Ethiopian politics. Rather than assuming that opposition support depends solely on urban and ethnic bases, students of Ethiopian politics must now turn to understanding how economic change is affecting the traditional composition of political coalitions. What should be particularly interesting in the Ethiopian context is this article's finding that economic cleavages within the rural electorate exhibit different patterns of party support and could be further exploited in the future to form cross-cutting cleavages.

## **Notes**

1. The effective number of parties is essentially the number of parties in a country weighed by their size in terms of votes or parliamentary seats. This is one of several quantitative measures used by political scientists to assess the nature of a country's party system (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). For Ethiopia, I use the vote shares for all political parties and independent candidates in the 2005 elections to determine that there are 2.09 effective parties.
2. Proclamation No. 46/1993 distinguishes between national and regional parties. Article 4.3 confers a party with "country-wide personality" if it

has at least 1,500 founding members. No more than 40 percent of these members may be residents of one region. The remaining members must be residents of at least four other regions, and each region must constitute at least 15 percent of the founding members. A party attains “regional personality” if it has at least 750 founding members, and more than 40 percent of its founding members are residents of one region. The law thus encourages the formation of parties that are regional rather than national in scope. This would explain why so few national parties relative to the number of regional parties were registered since 1991, when the current multiparty era began. However, the legal implications of this national-regional distinction remain unclear. There is nothing in Ethiopia’s party or electoral codes preventing a regional party from acting like a national party—for example, operating offices and fielding candidates in other regions. In fact, many regional parties, both government and opposition, compete in areas outside their recognized home region. My interpretation here has been confirmed by the director of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE).

3. I do not doubt that there was electoral malfeasance, but what remains in question is the extent to which it was carried out and whether it affected the final outcome. Only an analysis of electoral data at the level of the polling station can answer these questions. The European Union (EU) Election Observation Mission did collect election results from a sample of 552 polling stations, and that sample suggested that the EPRDF’s vote share was actually lower than the CUD’s vote share. However, the EU’s sample of votes was biased and no reliable inference about fraud can be made from it, since 57 percent of the votes the mission counted were from polling stations in Amhara region alone. If party support varies across regions, as most students of Ethiopian politics agree, then it would be difficult to generalize from such a sample.
4. Emperor Haile Selassie held nonparty elections for the Chamber of Deputies in 1957, 1961, 1965, 1969, and 1973. Single-party elections under Mengistu’s Workers’ Party of Ethiopia were organized for the Shengo in 1987.
5. Article 1 of the Charter of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1991) guarantees citizens the right to participate in political activities and to organize political parties. The Transitional Government of Ethiopia formalized the legal status of parties through the “Political Parties Registration Proclamation No. 46/1993,” later amended by the “Political Parties Registration Amendment Proclamation No. 82/1994.” Political parties can operate and compete in elections only if they are registered with the NEBE. Proclamation No. 46/1993 sets out the legal definition of a political party as well as the requirements for registering with the NEBE.



6. The EPRDF was first organized in 1989 by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), one of the more effective rebel groups fighting against the Mengistu regime, as a vehicle for extending the TPLF's national influence and legitimacy. The EPRDF has since served as an umbrella for the ethnically based parties organized by the TPLF under the leadership of current Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Along with the TPLF, the main partners in the EPRDF represent Ethiopia's largest regions: these partners are the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), and the Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Movement (SEPDM). Six other EPRDF-affiliated parties form part of the government at the federal level and administer their respective regions. These affiliates are the Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP), Argoba Nationality Democratic Organization (ANDO), Benishangul Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front (BGP-DUF), Gambella People's Democratic Movement (GPDM), Harari National League (HNL), and Somali Peoples' Democratic Party (SPDP).
7. Opposition parties claimed to be reluctant participants in the 2000 elections. Article 38 of the "Political Parties Registration Proclamation No. 46/1993" stipulates that a registered party that fails to participate in two national or regional elections can lose its legal status.
8. The Coalition of Alternative Forces for Peace and Development in Ethiopia (CAFPDE) was formed in December 1993 after two peace and reconciliation conferences were held, in Paris and Addis Ababa. The Coalition of Ethiopian Opposition Political Organizations (CEOPO) was established at a September 1998 conference held in Paris. In September 1999, the Ethiopian National Congress (ENC) sponsored its own plan for a united front at a Washington DC, conference. The Joint Action for Democracy in Ethiopia (JADE) was announced by the AEUP, CAFPDE, and ONC in July 2003 in Addis Ababa.
9. The ten overseas-based parties allied with the UEDF include such groups as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON), and the Tigray Alliance for Democracy (TAND), none of which are permitted to participate in Ethiopian elections because, according to the EPRDF government, they have not officially renounced armed struggle. UEDF leaders have countered, however, that these parties never declared war on the existing regime, and they have lobbied the EPRDF government to permit these parties to return to Ethiopia and openly participate in electoral politics.
10. Prior to the CUD's formation, these two parties had held inconclusive merger negotiations.
11. Many of the leaders in the AEUP and UEDP-Medhin first became involved in post-1991 politics through the All Amhara People's Organization

- (AAPO), which was founded in 1991 by Asrat Woldeyes to defend Amhara interests in the ethnic-based political system created by the EPRDF. The AAPO split in 2002 over the question of remaining an ethnically based party or becoming a multiethnic party. The winning faction restyled itself as the AEUP and the losing faction went on to establish a new party under the old AAPO name.
12. The main opposition parties fielded candidates in approximately 84 percent of the country's districts.
  13. I use the 2005 vote shares to calculate the effective number of parties with Laakso and Taagepera's (1979) measure. I use the same method to calculate the number of ethnic groups with data from the Ethiopian census (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1998).
  14. Most of the uncontested seats were concentrated in Oromia (27) and Tigray (17) states. The rest were found in Somali (6), Amhara (4), Gambella (2), Southern Nations (2), and Benishangul (1).
  15. In Oromia, one-candidate constituencies were distributed across several zones, but concentrated in West Wellega (9 districts). The others were found in West Harerge (4), East Wellega (3), East Harerge (3), Illubabor (3), Jimma (2), and one each in Arsi, Guji, and East Shoa.
  16. Clapham, however, maintains a more benign view of the opposition than Samatar. Clapham observes that opposition leaders are mainly liberal intellectuals and cosmopolitan businessmen who have built parties that reflect the main tendencies within Ethiopian society.
  17. These figures come from the World Bank's World Development Indicators.
  18. For these figures, see UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), "Poverty Outlook Reveals Yet Many Challenges," 21 February 2005, <http://www.irinnews.org/>.
  19. For information on rainfall, see Famine Early Warning Systems Network, "Ethiopia: Increasingly Erratic Rainfall," 19 January 2003, <http://www.fews.net/>.
  20. On agricultural policies, see Abebe Tadesse and Fistum W/Giorgis, "Which and Whose Agricultural Policy Is Capable of Breaking the Deadlock?" *Reporter*, 22 December 2004, 16.
  21. Seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) is a method for estimating regression equations that have correlated errors, and is recommended over ordinary-least squares (OLS) for two reasons. First, OLS is inappropriate because vote shares for each party must sum to 1, so they cannot be independent of one another. Second, since each party's vote share falls between 0 and 1, the OLS assumption of an unbounded dependent variable is also inappropriate (Tomz, Tucker, and Wittenberg 2002).
  22. Election results are available at the NEBE website:  
<http://www.electionsethiopia.org>.

23. Vote shares for the major parties are obtained after subtracting annulled votes and votes for independent and minor party candidates from the total vote count in each district. Independent and minor party candidates generally represented a small fraction of the total vote. All independent candidates combined, on average, received about two percent of the total vote within each district. Similarly, minor party candidates received, on average, a combined four percent of the total vote within each district.
24. The simulated values for vote shares were generated with Clarify, a software program that draws 1,000 values for each parameter and provides confidence intervals for point estimates (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King 2001).
25. Another source of uncertainty is due to the high percentage of invalid votes. Nationally, approximately 14 percent of all votes cast were annulled by election officials, meaning they were not allocated to any candidate for various reasons. Ethiopia's percentage of invalid votes ranks it among the worst performers in Africa. I examine data from 42 parliamentary elections held across Africa since 1990 and find that the average level for invalid votes is 3.6 percent. The significance of these invalid votes is linked to their potential impact on the distribution of parliamentary seats among the parties. Of the 523 seats distributed through the May 2005 elections, the number of invalid votes was greater than the number of votes separating the first- and second-place candidates in 93 constituencies. The EPRDF claimed 57 of the 93 seats. The rest were divided among the main opposition parties: CUD 22 seats, UEDF 11 seats, and OFDM 3 seats.
26. I thank Dr. Seife Ayele for providing some insight on this point.

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