



Roadmap Addendum

THE DESIGN OF A CITIZEN-BASED ETHIOPIAN CONSTITUTION

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*According to our Ethiopian Political Transition Roadmap, a genuinely democratic process must aim at restoring peace and forging a democratic constitutional replacement. The proposed Roadmap is predicated on the existence of an effective transitional body that can enforce a durable ceasefire and exercise **constituent power** (the power to create a new constitution). Establishing an elected constituent assembly, or alternatively a constitutional convention led by opposition parties and civic groups, can legitimately bring systemic change by altering the identity of the state, its constituent units, the source of sovereignty, the form of governmental administration, and the federal or unitary bargain itself.*

This addendum addresses a substantive issue in the transition process that should be openly and candidly debated by the Ethiopian people. Our own recommendations are based on a constitutional philosophy that is based on the liberal idea that the free citizen, not exclusionary identity groups or classes, are the sole source of sovereignty or ultimate democratic authority. Our organizing principle, therefore, is equal citizenship based on civic nationalism.

According to the proposed Transition Charter proposed in the Ethiopian Political Roadmap, the transition architecture comprises two phases:

Phase 1 — Committee of the Wise (አገር አድን የጠቢባን መመከርት)

- *Issues the Transition Charter*
- *Oversees ceasefire + DDR*
- *Establishes caretaker government*
- *Conducts a brief National Dialogue*
- *Organizes election of the Transitional Shengo*

Phase 2 — The Transitional Shengo (የሽግግር ሽንገ)

- *Serves as interim parliament + constituent assembly*
- *Supervises the Caretaker Government*
- *Establishes a Constitution Drafting Commission*
- *Provides substantive guidelines*
- *Presents draft constitution for referendum prior to elections*

Ethiopia needs a citizen based constitution to replace an exclusionary, identity group based constitutional order. Sovereignty must be anchored in individual citizens, not ill-defined identity blocs or the elites who purport to speak for them. The new, democratic constitution must solve delegitimizing the Ethiopian state, political fragmentation, authoritarian centralization, polarizing ethnic territorialization, weak institutions, and the lack of equal citizenship.

The central question in constitution making then becomes: “What problem is the new constitution supposed to solve?” Our short answer: “citizen-based constitutionalism” is a superior alternative to ethnonational or theocratic fragmentation. Our model surpasses both coercive assimilation and authoritarian recentralization. The commitment to equal citizenship must be combined with meaningful territorial decentralization, cultural protection, free mobility, and common national institutions. Ethiopia’s new democratic institutions must protect its multicultural communities without turning citizens and territories into the constitutional property of permanently bounded identity groups and their corrupt elites. We believe that Ethiopia and its free citizens are the sole sovereign owners of the democratic constitution which will replace the current exclusionary one..

In this addendum to the Political Roadmap, we spell out in some detail our recommendations for the process and content of constitution-making for a post-PP Ethiopia. A separate addendum will address the selection and mandate of the Committee of the Wise, which will pave the way for an inclusive transition process.

I. CONSTITUTION-MAKING PROCESS (ሂደት)

We define the conceptual pillars and explain how they fit into our framework for transition:

- 1) **A Constituent Assembly [CA]** is a body of representatives elected or selected to oversee the drafting of a Constitution for a country. In our model, the elected National Shengo serves the dual roles of a transitional parliament and a constituent assembly.
- 2) **National Dialogue [ND]** is a structured process in which broad-based representatives of society are consulted about their views on national grievances and priorities with the aim of collectively forging a consensus national agenda of reform of key institutions. By providing wholistic diagnoses of the root causes of recurrent conflict, ND defines the preferred constitutional future of the country that is legitimate, inclusive, coherent, and durable. However, the country is in an in-conflict environment rather than a post-conflict one. In this climate of ongoing civil strife, we recommend a brief ND, if possible, in conjunction with the establishment of the Council of the Wise. We categorically reject the PP-led ND for being unrepresentative and un-independent to forge a consensus national agenda of systemic reform.
- 3) **Constitution Drafting Commission** is an advisory body of political, legal, and economic experts appointed by the CA, and tasked with preparing a new constitution that is based on the substantive contents provided by an appointed committee of the Transitional Shengo (TS).
- 4) **National Referendum on the New Constitution** provides an opportunity for sovereign owners of the State and the Constitution to deliberate on and provide approval of the draft constitution presented by the TS.

5) Parliamentary/Congressional Elections—free and fair elections will be held under democratic electoral laws that are consistent with the new constitution. The TS establishes a transitional electoral commission to implement the rules and security protocols of the referendum and the subsequent elections. These elections conclude the successful transition period, including the sunset clauses for temporary institutions.

II. CONSTITUTION CONTENT (፪ዘ፯)

The more important, and more difficult, task of forging a constitutional blueprint is deciding on the political and economic systems that will be incorporated into the new constitution. Because group or class interests in such a big country are likely to be diverse and conflictual, these decisions must be made with the widest debate possible and with the utmost respect for the country's long history of state formation, and the core values shared broadly by the multicultural society.

We categorize the 18 issues into three and provide our well-considered recommendations: Core Values, Governmental Structure, Others.

2.1. Core Values

1. Individual-citizen rights versus identity-group rights

Where sovereignty ultimately resides is a foundational concept of constitutionalism. Liberalism upholds that the citizen is sovereign, and individual rights are supreme; group rights are derivative. Some collective rights (such language and self-administration) may be recognized to make those individual rights meaningful. The alternative, collective entities are sovereign, is embraced by communist or theocratic societies. In this thinking, group rights (ethnic, class, religion) have supremacy over individual rights.

A reasonable stance is that neither set of rights is absolutely superior in every case. Individual rights are generally treated as the baseline, while collective rights are recognized provided they protect the survival, identity, or autonomy of groups without unjustifiably infringing on the fundamental rights of individuals.

Recommendation: The new Constitution must uphold individual rights as primary and selected group rights as derivative.

2. Representation: Majoritarian versus Proportional

The core trade-off here is between governability and proportionality:

- *Majoritarian systems* prioritize producing clear winners, stable governments, and strong constituency representation, but can yield outcomes where seat shares differ substantially from vote shares.
- *Proportional systems* translate votes into seats more accurately and broadening representation, but they more often produce unstable coalition governments that require negotiation among parties.

Neither approach is inherently superior. Different democracies choose electoral systems based on their social cleavages, political culture, and the balance they seek between effective governance and representative fairness.

Recommendation: Ethiopia, being a nation of demographic minorities, is a good candidate for the system of Proportional voting.

3. Parties: class-based or identity-based

There are two kinds of political parties, whether national or regional in scope:

- *Class-based parties* organize politics around economic interests and redistribution.
- *Identity-based parties* organize politics around ethnicity, religion, language, nationality, or other exclusionary group identities. Most contemporary democracies feature parties that blend both approaches to varying degrees.

However, the challenge for democratic governance is not simply whether parties are class-based or identity-based. It is rather whether legally recognized political organizations encourage cooperation to transcend self-reinforcing social cleavages such as the self-limiting or polarizing ethnicity that is the cornerstone of the TPLF constitution.

Because political ethnicity or politicized religion is inherently exclusionary, it should be scorned and tamed. The right balance between individual rights and group rights will ensure that all communities, especially those who have felt marginalized in the past, gain meaningful political participation as equals.

Recommendation: A good alternative to banning identity-based parties is to force them to incorporate the non-discriminatory clauses of the Constitution and permit membership on the basis of shared goals, regardless of language, ethnicity, or religion. Such parties will wither away over time as they inevitably lose the emotional edge of identity-based mobilization, and increasingly become weak regional or sectarian political actors.

4. Economy: State-led or Private-led

A state-led economy relies on active government direction of investment, industrial policy, and, in the case of Ethiopia, significant public ownership to achieve national economic objectives. A market-led economy, on the other hand, relies primarily on decentralized decisions by private firms and consumers, with prices coordinating economic activity and the government providing a regulatory framework.

Virtually all successful modern economies are *mixed economies*, combining market competition with varying degrees of government ownership and intervention. The issue of restoring and extending private *rist* rights by denationalizing rural and urban land is most pressing: it embraces restorative justice; it eliminates the biggest source of corruption; and it will empower asset-owning citizens to resist abuse by powerholders while enhancing agricultural productivity. The principal question is not whether to have markets or government, but how to balance their comparative advantages to achieve efficiency, equity, resilience, and long-term development.

Recommendation: A market-led and government-assisted private-ownership economy is ideal for Ethiopia.

5. Separation: Church/Mosque and State

Separation of church and state means that religious institutions and government are institutionally independent and that the state does not improperly control religion or, in many systems, establish or favor a religion. The principle aims to protect religious liberty, government neutrality, and freedom of conscience. Democracies implement this principle in different ways, ranging from strict institutional separation to cooperative arrangements or even established religions with robust protections for individual religious freedom.

The constitutional challenge is to balance freedom of religion, equal treatment of citizens, and the legitimate role of religious organizations in civil society without allowing either government or religious institutions to dominate the other.

Recommendation: Keep the separation of Church/Mosque and State.

6. Protection of demographic or electoral minorities

Protection of minorities aims to ensure that democracy combines majority rule with constitutional safeguards for all citizens. These protections may include equal rights, anti-discrimination laws, language and cultural rights, religious freedom, and mechanisms for political participation.

Democracies differ in whether they emphasize primarily individual rights, group-specific protections, or a combination of both. The constitutional objective is to create a political system in which every citizen enjoys equal dignity and legal protection, while minority communities are able to preserve their identities and participate fully in national life without fear of exclusion or domination by the majority. Ethiopia is a nation of ethnic minorities; it does not even have an ethnic plurality. So, protection of minorities and coalition-building are key features of its genuine democracy.

Recommendation: Build-in a robust protection of minority rights as the hallmark of Ethiopian democracy to encourage coalition-building and trust in government.

2.2. Governmental Structure

7. Republican versus constitutional monarchy

Both systems derive democratic legitimacy from elected legislatures and governments but choose different leadership—a directly or indirectly elected president or a constitutionally-limited hereditary monarch.

Supporters argue that republics embody political equality because no office is inherited; allow the head of state to be replaced through constitutional procedures; avoid hereditary privileges; and reinforce the idea that all public authority derives from the people. However, a country can be a republic without being democratic, as in the case of the U.S. before the reforms that granted women to vote and minorities to exercise their rights.

Supporters argue that constitutional monarchies provide a politically neutral head of state; separate the symbolic role of the state from day-to-day politics; offer continuity across changes of government; can reduce political polarization by placing the head of state above party competition. The millennia-old tradition of monarchic rule in Ethiopia may serve as a symbol of national unity.

Recommendation: A republican choice is better. Either will do for Ethiopia because both systems can support stable, liberal democracies. The decisive factors are the strength of constitutional institutions, the rule of law, free elections, and protection of rights—not whether the head of state is a president or a monarch.

8. Presidential versus parliamentary

The fundamental distinction here pertains to constitutional design: Presidential systems separate the executive and the legislature while Parliamentary systems fuse the two.

Presidential systems emphasize separation of powers, an independently elected executive, and fixed terms. Parliamentary republics emphasize responsible government, where the executive is drawn from and accountable to the legislature.

Where the two coexist (cohabitation), often called semi-presidential, a dual executive system can be created whereby the President holds some powers (often foreign policy and defense) and the PM holds mostly domestic powers. To be called semi-presidential, the President must be elected by the public directly or indirectly such as through electoral college established for this purpose. Therefore, unlike the PM (who can be dismissed by a no-confidence vote of Parliament), the President can only be removed through an impeachment process.

The right question to ask then is: "Which executive architecture best reconciles democratic accountability, effective state capacity, nation-building, conflict management, and long-run economic transformation in Ethiopia's historical and political context?" The answer is that a well-designed semi-presidential system is best provided the powers of the president and the prime minister are clearly defined to ensure stability, flexibility, and accountability. The tradeoff between a parliamentary system (which is strongly accountable but less stable if parties are highly fragmented) and a unitary system (which is stable but not sufficiently accountable to localities) must be weighed properly. A pure U.S./French-style presidential system works well where democratic institutions are deeply entrenched, but less forgiving of polarization and legislative deadlock.

Recommendation: Go for the hybrid semi-presidential system with a popularly elected president enjoying clearly defined executive power to avoid a destructive rivalry with the PM.

9. Decentralization: Federal or Unitary

The essence of both for the democracy project is administrative decentralization and local self-government. The main difference is where constitutional authority or sovereignty resides: the national government or the federal regions.

- A unitary state concentrates sovereignty in the national government, which may choose to delegate powers to regional authorities.

- A *federal state* divides sovereignty between the national and regional governments, with each level exercising powers that cannot ordinarily be taken away by the other acting alone.

In practice, many modern states lie along a spectrum. Some unitary states are highly decentralized, while some federations (like today's Ethiopia) have strong central governments. We want neither an over-centralized unitary system (such as the Derg) or a faux federal system (such as that of EPRDF/PP).

Recommendation: In the interest of consolidating the unfinished job of nation formation and accelerating economic development, go for a decentralized and a technocratically capable central government sharing authority with self-governing regional and local governments. Robust decentralization, especially the unitary model, will reconcile these objectives in the light of Ethiopia's experiences with both defective Unitarism and defective Federalism.

10. Regional Territorial Administration: identity-based or geoeconomic-based

- *Identity-based districting* organizes territories around cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or national communities, emphasizing recognition and self-government.
- *Geography-based districting* organizes territories primarily around administrative efficiency, population, and geographic coherence with emphasis on equal territorial governance. Size also matters: administrative centers, with large markets and higher judicial offices, should not be farther than a day's journey for a low-income population.

Neither approach is universally superior. In deeply divided societies, the challenge is to balance recognition of distinct communities with the creation of shared civic institutions that encourage cooperation across group boundaries. Constitutional design, electoral systems, minority-rights protections, and political culture often matter as much as the districting principle itself.

Recommendation: Go for properly apportioned, geography based 25 or so Kifle Hagerat, with population in the range of 3-6 million and Woreda in the range of half a million

11. Parliament/Congress: bicameral or unicameral

- A *unicameral legislature* concentrates legislative authority in a single chamber, emphasizing simplicity, efficiency, and direct accountability.
- A *bicameral legislature* divides legislative authority between two chambers, emphasizing checks and balances, more deliberate lawmaking, and—especially in federal systems—the representation of autonomous federal units in large, diverse societies. The choice often reflects a country's size, constitutional structure, regional diversity, and preference for balancing efficiency with institutional oversight.

Recommendation: Go for a bicameral model, the lower House elected by a one-person-one-vote principle in each electoral district (say, one per 1 million eligible voters) and the Senate (say, two per Kifle Hager).

12. Term limits, if Presidential

Term limits legally restrict how long an individual may hold a particular office. Their principal purpose is to prevent excessive concentration of power and encourage periodic leadership renewal, especially in countries with weak institutions of accountability and concentrated executive power.

In practice, presidential systems are much more likely to have constitutional term limits for chief executives, while parliamentary systems generally rely on parliamentary confidence and elections rather than fixed limits on a prime minister's tenure.

Recommendation: Go for a two-term limit.

13. Constitutional Court

An independent constitutional court is a specialized institution responsible for safeguarding the constitution by reviewing the constitutionality of laws and government actions, resolving constitutional disputes, and protecting fundamental rights.

Its principal function is to ensure that all public authorities—including legislatures and executives—act within the limits established by the constitution. Whether this role is performed by a specialized constitutional court or by the country's supreme court depends on the constitutional system, but in either case the aim is the same: to uphold the rule of law and preserve constitutional government. Ethiopia's House of Federation violates the principle of checks and balances and, as a legislative body, lacks the legal competence to interpret the constitution.

Recommendation: Go for an independent constitutional or supreme court.

14. Impeachment

In a democracy, sovereign voters make choices, but the choices are not always the right ones. The beauty of democracy is that voters can later change their minds by approving better choices, electing better leaders, and recalling egregious violators of the law.

Recommendation: Include an impeachment clause for serious constitutional misconduct or extraordinary crime by the President or senior judges. A supermajority vote by both houses of parliament may be needed to impeach the President and the final judgment is to be passed by the supreme constitutional court.

2.3. Other Issues

15. Languages: Working and Official

- An *official language* has legal and constitutional status. It defines the languages in which the state formally conducts its public business and often reflects national identity and equality among language communities.
- A *working language*, on the other hand, is an administrative tool. It is the language used in the daily operation of government institutions or organizations—at the federal or regional level. The two concepts often overlap, but they serve different purposes: official languages emphasize legal recognition and inclusion, while working languages emphasize practical governance and efficient administration.

Recommendation: Adopt Amharic and English as “federal working languages” for now. Other languages with 4 million-plus speakers, such as Oromiffa, Tigrigna, Somaligna, Afarigna, Guragigna, Sidamigna, and Wolayitigna merit recognition as “official languages” and may also serve as regional working languages. As languages develop and the country becomes richer, more languages should be added to each list.

16. The National Flag

One of the least controversial item should be the tri-color national flag, but it is today. The tricolor is old and widely copied in Africa as a symbol of freedom and independence.

Recommendation: Keep the tricolor.

17. Dual Citizenship/Nationality

Dual citizenship means a person is legally recognized as a citizen of two countries at the same time. Supporters argue that it reflects an interconnected world, strengthens ties with diaspora communities, and expands opportunities for individuals. Critics argue that it can create questions about political loyalty, legal obligations, and eligibility for sensitive public positions.

There is no single international standard. Each country determines its own rules on acquiring, retaining, or restricting dual citizenship, and many democracies permit it while imposing tailored limits for certain government offices or national security roles.

Recommendation: Go for dual citizenship rights without access to the highest or most-sensitive government offices.

18. Kifle-Hager Constitutions

One of the outrages of the TPLF rule is the tolerance, or even encouragement, of *Killil* constitutions that flagrantly violate the federal constitution by granting ownership of the region to one or two ethnicities and denying equal citizenship rights. Othered groups such as the Amhara, however big their presence, are rendered stateless second-class immigrants.

Recommendation: All regional constitutions must be fully consistent with the citizen-based national constitution.

II. COMMISSIONS (የጥናት ኮሚሽኖች)

Deep institutional change requires time-consuming study and deliberation. It also requires safeguards against elite capture of the process, which include transparency rules, prevention of ruling party dominance of commissions, equity in campaign financing, and risk mitigation (sabotage, disinformation).

The charges of these Commissions is to undertake a six-to-twelve-month studies and deliberation on monumental decisions and submit recommendations concerning lasting reconciliation and

appropriate design of state institutions to be incorporated into the new Constitution, its implementing legislation, or the institutional architecture of the new government:

(1) Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation

Building on DDR, this commission develops the right mechanism for collecting evidence on egregious human rights abuses, providing transitional justice, and lasting national reconciliation.

(2) Election Laws

Election laws and an independent electoral commission are critical to ensuring free, fair, and transparent political competition. Laws governing political parties and the apportioning of votes into legislative seats (majoritarian or proportional) are among its most vital charges.

(3) Administrative Boundaries

What will replace the scrapped *Killil* system is not entirely clear. This commission will produce recommendations on how best a citizen-based political and economic system can be designed. The balance of considerations include local history, economic development, optimal population size, minority representation, and the consent of the residents in contested borders.

(4) Land Tenure

The nationalization of land has rendered everyone tenant of the State. This has fostered--especially in urban areas, commercializable farmlands, and mining-rich area--a culture of grand corruption, cronyism, and nepotism. The predictable results are dismal productivity and rising inequality. This commission will recommend a landownership model for an equitable, non-corruptible, and efficient agricultural system and urban housing.

(5) State Assets Reclamation

Over the past 50 years, Ethiopia has flirted with garrison socialism (Derg), state capitalism (EPRDF) and crony capitalism (PP). These have created many opportunities for elites who captured the State to engage in massive and institutionalized corruption. Examples include the huge assets of the ruling families (especially Meles Zenawi and Abiy Ahmed), dominant ruling parties (such as the illegal business empires of EPRDF), and a crony business class (so-called developmental or prosperity capitalists). This commission will recommend how to drain the swamp for good and how to reclaim the stolen state assets—TPLF is said to have stolen over US\$25 billion through various schemes.

(6) Constitution Drafting

Composed of legal experts, political scientists, economists, and respected elders, this commission will draft a citizen-based constitution de novo that is guided by the contents provided by the Interim Shengo.

(7) Population Census

Ethiopian censuses, especially the 2017 census, were willfully manipulated to underestimate the size of populations considered enemies by the ruling party: the Amhara, the Gurage, and Addis Ababa. An accurate national population and housing census count is essential for a fair electoral redistricting. This commission will recommend a workable strategy for conducting a new census to go along with the new constitution.

8) Economic System

Ethiopia has rejected socialism, but it has not found a capitalism that suits its traditions and current level of development. This commission will recommend the kinds of mixed private-ownership and market-led economies worthy of emulation.

9) Civic Education and Citizen Engagement

We care so much about the process and content dimensions of constitution-making because a good constitution, as the basic law and social contract, is the gateway to a free and prosperous society. However, even a paper-perfect constitution does not drag a disempowered or an unwilling citizenry to walk through the door of freedom. Ethiopian citizens must learn to build sustainable peace and accountable institutions, and to have the courage to defend them from the ever-present predatory political class.

In other words, *the citizen-based constitution we recommend in the Roadmap is necessary but not sufficient*. It can be called upon to solve several problems simultaneously: buttress loyalty to the fragile but remarkably resilient Ethiopian state, constrain predation, preserve enough state capacity to govern and provide basic social services, organize credible political competition, and widen access to economic opportunity for all. However, it does not implement itself. Active citizen engagement is therefore foundational for building a capable and accountable government to stave off total collapse as we fight endless wars of all against all.

There is caveat here, too. A strong civil society does not automatically constitute a productively engaged society. Trade unions, ethnic associations, professional organizations, regional governments, business associations, military establishments, peasant organizations, women's organizations, and political parties can also become corrupt, rent-seeking organizations. Ultimately, knowledgeable and courageous citizens, as owners of the state and the government, must be vigilant to ensure the accountability of the rulers to the ruled.

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