

U4 Helpdesk Answer

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Ethiopia: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption efforts

Since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed swept to power in 2018 promising far-reaching governance reforms, first COVID-19 and then the war in Tigray has ravaged the country. With the recent cessation of hostilities agreement brokered with the Tigray People's Liberation Front in November 2022, Abiy has immediately turned his attention to curbing corruption in the country, which he has castigated as a "pest" eating away at the country.

A newly established National Anti-Corruption Committee has already launched a crackdown on government officials alleged to be implicated in corrupt schemes. It remains to be seen how this anti-corruption purge plays out against the backdrop of the fragile peace settlement and Ethiopia's complex ethnic and politicised regional divisions.

This has the potential to be particularly sensitive given the record of previous administrations of using anti-corruption crackdowns as an instrument to curb the influence of political factions and regional authorities perceived to be disloyal to the central government.

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AUTHOR

Matthew Jenkins and S Elsayed (TI)

tihelpdesk@transparency.org

REVIEWED BY

Achiba Gargule (CMI)

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Caveat

The media landscape in Ethiopia is highly polarised and often partisan, with experts consulted for this Helpdesk Answer stating that few news outlets are neutral. The author has attempted to verify news stories included in the paper by triangulating multiple sources, but this did not always prove possible. As such, some of the news reporting should be treated with caution.

Background

After a cessation of hostilities agreement was signed in early November 2022 that appears to have ended two years of armed conflict between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TLPF) and the federal government, Ethiopia stands at a crossroads (UN News 2022). According to researchers at Ghent University, the violence may have claimed up to half a million lives as a result of direct killings, malnutrition and a lack of adequate health care (York 2022). Egregious human rights abuses have been documented on both sides during the conflict (Human Rights Watch 2022), including mass killings as well sexual and gender-based

MAIN POINTS

- Ethiopia is at a crossroads, emerging from a terrible internecine conflict in the north of the country, it faces huge challenges such as climate-related food insecurity, slowing economic growth, ongoing ethnic tensions and widespread corruption.
- While according to some international governance indices, Ethiopia's political regime has made some small steps towards democratisation since Abiy took power, his efforts to transform the country from a decentralised ethnic federal system to a more centralised national republic have not gone unchallenged.
- Abiy has placed great emphasis on anti-corruption as being a core policy priority. In a recent speech to parliament, he castigated many of country's institutions as being riddled by corruption, including the judiciary, law enforcement and state auditors.
- Apparently in an effort to curb high-level corruption, the new National Anti-Corruption Committee has been established at ministerial level, with sweeping powers. However, its remit vis-à-vis existing anti-corruption bodies remains unclear, and there are concerns it may be used to target political opponents.

violence (Davies 2022; Kassa 2022a), while humanitarian supplies have been largely unable to reach northern Ethiopia and millions of people have been displaced (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2022).

The Tigray War has also damaged Ethiopia's economic prospects, which were already concerning in light of significant foreign exchange shortages, high inflation and the fact that after the conflict erupted the country's credit rating was downgraded and the IMF decided to withhold a US\$3 billion loan (BMZ 2022). Not only has the war consumed billions of dollars, but it has also resulted in a dramatic slowdown in economic growth, with the IMF forecasting that GDP growth will shrink to 3.8% in 2022/23, down from 6.2% at the start of the war (Endale 2022a). While GDP growth remains positive, the country is nonetheless one of the poorest in the world, with a per capita gross national income of a mere US\$960 (World Bank 2022a).

The vast population of nearly 120 million people faces numerous challenges, ranging from the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, internecine conflict, ethnic tensions and climatic crises such as floods, droughts and crop failure (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2022). The 2022 drought is the most acute in four decades, ravaging the southern and eastern parts of Ethiopia, while plagues of locusts and the Tigray War in the north of the country have also both contributed to sharply rising food prices. Against this backdrop, the World Bank (2022a) estimates that food insecurity now severely affects more than 20 million people across the country.

Under the terms of the agreement between the TLPF and the federal government, Tigrayan forces will have to completely disarm and federal troops will control key infrastructure in Tigray (Mersie 2022). A previous truce broke down in August 2022 (Burke 2022a), and some analysts think that

the risk of intra-Tigray feuding is high as some factions oppose the terms of the ceasefire (Lu 2022), while other combatants from Eritrea and Amhara are not part of the cessation of hostilities agreement (Burke 2022b). Ethiopian journalists from the Fana Broadcasting Corporation (2022a) have also pointed out that corruption may hinder peacebuilding in the country as powerful individuals are likely to pursue self-enrichment during the political bargaining and reconstruction efforts.

Even if a workable political settlement is found between Ethiopia's various factions, the long-term impact of climate change seems likely to threaten the productivity of the agricultural sector, which constitutes 40% of the country's GDP, 80% of its exports and employs more than 70% of its workforce (USAID 2022). While there are signs that in the wake of the peace deal the IMF is contemplating a new funding programme to help Ethiopia restructure its US\$30 billion debt (Gebre 2022), the prospects for political stability and sustainable economic development are thus uncertain.

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed nonetheless seems intent on reanimating his ambitious reform agenda, which had ground to a halt as first COVID-19 and then civil war engulfed the country. Governance reform and vocal anti-corruption pronouncements have played a prominent role in this agenda.

Political context

Abiy Ahmed swept to power in 2018 after the previous prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned in the face of widespread and sustained popular opposition to repressive government policies and a perceived increase in corruption (The Guardian 2018; Ayele 2020). As an ethnic Oromo, Abiy's election by parliamentary representatives of

the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) marked a seminal moment in Ethiopia's political development as it ended a 27-year period of dominance by the TLPF over national level politics (Bertelsmann Foundation 2022).

The Bertelsmann Foundation (2022) has observed that “the structural ethno-political, ethno-cultural conflict between diverse ethnic groups has marked all of Ethiopia's political regimes to date”. In fact, while the most intense recent conflict has been in Tigray, other regions of the country periodically witness unrest and even insurgency as their inhabitants demand more autonomy and political participation. In December 2022, widespread conflict and repression of opposition groups and student organisations was reported in both Amhara and Oromia (Aalen and Tesfaye 2022; Hochet-Bodin 2022). Similar anti-corruption protests were reported at the same time in the Somali region (Addis Standard 2022a).

According to its constitution, Ethiopia is a multiparty democracy, but between 2005 and 2015 opposition representation in parliament dropped from 30% to zero as the EPRDF, a kind of ethnic federalist political coalition, consolidated its grip on power and established a de-facto one-party state (Ayele 2020). On coming to power in 2018, Abiy Ahmed thus inherited a “highly authoritarian system [which] created breeding grounds for political polarisation and conflict” (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2022).

Analysts also argue that the lack of accountability of political leaders and absence of free and fair elections had permitted “systemic corruption” to thrive in Ethiopia (Demissie 2020). Indeed, independent assessments of EPRDF rule concluded

that “institutions with anti-corruption mandates” lacked constitutional safeguards and operational independence, while the judiciary was frequently exposed to political interference and the capacity of non-state actors to hold officials to account was minimal due to restrictive legislation targeting the media and civil society organisations (Ayele 2020).

The EPRDF was viewed by observers to have established a neo-patrimonial system, “in which individuals gain access to the economy or employment in the public service in return for the political support they give the party” (Ayele 2020).

Previous EPRDF administrations reportedly awarded no-bid contracts, embezzled donor funds and developed sophisticated bribery schemes (Rahman 2018). While a basic anti-corruption legal framework was established under the EPRDF regime,¹ anti-corruption laws were used in a partisan manner; officials loyal to the government were not usually prosecuted for corruption, whereas those perceived to be political adversaries were accused of corruption to penalise them (Bertelsmann Foundation 2022).

Since 2018, the country has been undergoing a complex and violent political transition (Lanfranchi and Meester 2021). After his election by EPRDF members, Abiy announced his intention to implement measures to liberalise the economy and embark on political reforms intended to transform the state “from a decentralised ethnic federal system into a more centralised national republic” (Bertelsmann Foundation 2022). These reforms were accompanied by the release of thousands of political prisoners, pledges to increase government transparency, a loosening of draconian restrictions on media freedom, removing some opposition

¹ For instance, the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission was legally established in 2001 (see Federal Negarit Gazeta 2001), while the Federal Criminal Code

2004 criminalised active and passive bribery, money laundering and bribing a foreign official.

parties from lists of designated terrorist groups, as well as concluding a peace settlement with Eritrea (Evennett 2022; BBC News 2022a).

Abiy also moved to crack down on “old guard” officials believed to have been involved in high level corruption and human rights abuses under previous EPRDF administrations (VOA News 2018a). In late 2018, more than 60 mostly Tigrayan officials from the country’s intelligence and military apparatus were arrested on charges of gross human rights violations and corruption at state-owned enterprises such as the Metals and Engineering Corporation (MetEC) (Addis Standard 2018). The head of the National Intelligence and Security Service was even accused of attempting to assassinate Abiy in June 2018 (VOA News 2018b). In response to these alleged plots and corruption schemes, Abiy ordered the arrest of several political TPLF leaders, generals and heads of regional governments (Bertelsmann Foundation 2022).

The TPLF reportedly viewed this as a targeted and partisan campaign to reduce their influence, and their power further declined when Abiy dissolved the EPRDF to form the Prosperity Party in December 2019, which the TPLF refused to join (Evennett 2022). In defiance of the federal government’s decision to postpone elections scheduled for August 2020 purportedly due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Evennett 2022), the TPLF ran its own elections in September 2020 and, after skirmishes between Tigrayan and federal forces in November, the conflict rapidly escalated (Bertelsmann Foundation 2022).

Some observers have noted that grievances related to corruption contributed to hostilities between the federal government and the TPLF spiralling out of control. Lanfranchi and Meester (2021) pointed out that “a large part of the dispute centre[d] on a struggle to control access to state resources” such as Ethio Telecom, the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia and state-owned enterprises such as MeTEC, all of

which have served as de facto sources of political finance for various political factions. Indeed, Ethiopia Insight (2022) points out that some factions:

“claimed [that the] TPLF had systematically looted the country’s wealth and piled it in Tigray. Every successful Tigrayan businessman was portrayed as corrupt; all Tigrayan businesses both in Tigray and the rest of Ethiopia were presented as having been built at the expense of the Ethiopian public... As early as 2018, calls were being made in public to invade Tigray and ‘bring back’ the supposed wealth that was allegedly stored in the region...as the relations between [Abiy Ahmed’s] newly minted Prosperity Party and the TPLF became increasingly tenuous in 2020, pro-government media outlets intensified the divisive claims of Tigrayan parasitism and TPLF-led embezzlement of Ethiopia’s resources.”

Against the backdrop of conflict, economic slowdown and food insecurity, democratic transition has stalled. Indeed, despite Abiy Ahmed’s early pledges to democratise Ethiopia’s governance structures, the Bertelsmann Foundation (2022) writes that the executive branch and the prime minister’s “unconstitutional advisers have largely undermined checks and balances... the centralised executive is not in practice subject to the law”, noting that Abiy has also dismissed judges who did not support his centralising drive. Indeed, as discussed below, there have been frequent changes in key leadership roles in institutions with an anti-corruption mandate, which has complicated efforts to tackle corruption in a consistent and coherent manner.

More generally, Freedom House (2022) notes that, while the Prosperity Party has attempted to be less opaque than previous administrations, in practice

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it remains unwilling or unable to operate with openness and transparency.

Extent of corruption

Ethiopia scored 39 out of 100 in the 2021 edition of Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index, slightly above the regional average of 33 for sub-Saharan Africa and up from 34 in 2018. As such it ranked 87 out of 180 countries assessed (Transparency International 2022).

The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) by the World Bank (2022b) assess countries according

to six aggregate indicators. Ethiopia’s results in percentile ranks and absolute scores on a scale of -2.5 to +2.5 are presented in the Table 1 below in five-year intervals.

The picture presented by the WGI is rather mixed, with a notable increase in voice and accountability and control of corruption but a marked drop in political stability and rule of law in the last 10 years. This suggests that while the contested political transition since 2018 resulted in reduced government control in parts of the country, most notably Tigray, there have been some openings in terms of accountability to citizens more broadly. Nonetheless, as can be seen by the percentile rank, scores remain poor across the board.

Table 1: Ethiopia’s results on the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators at 5-year intervals

| | 2011 | | 2015 | | 2021 | |
|---------------------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|-----------------|-------|-----------------|
| | Score | Percentile rank | Score | Percentile rank | Score | Percentile rank |
| Voice and accountability | -1.36 | 10.33 | -1.40 | 9.85 | -1.07 | 20.29 |
| Political stability | -1.51 | 6.16 | -1.62 | 7.62 | -2.07 | 4.25 |
| Government effectiveness | -0.51 | 37.91 | -0.66 | 27.88 | -0.61 | 31.25 |
| Regulatory quality | -0.99 | 18.01 | -1.10 | 11.54 | -0.93 | 16.83 |
| Rule of law | -0.74 | 27.23 | -0.49 | 33.65 | -0.61 | 29.33 |
| Control of corruption | -0.67 | 27.01 | -0.42 | 40.87 | -0.40 | 39.42 |

Table 2: Ethiopia's results on a selection of prominent governance indexes

| Governance indices | Ethiopia result |
|---|--|
| Corruption Perception Index 2021 | Score = 39/100, rank = 87/180 countries |
| Freedom House 2022 | Score = 23/100, not free |
| Civics Monitor 2022 | Repressed |
| EIU Democracy Index 2021 | Score = 3.30/10 (authoritarian), rank = 123/167 countries |
| WGI: Voice And Accountability 2021 | -1.07 (on scale from -2.5 to +2.5) (percentile rank: 20.29) |
| Rule Of Law Index 2022 | Score = 0.39/1, rank = 123/40 countries |
| Press Freedom Index 2022 | Score = 50.53/100, rank = 114/180 countries |
| Global State Of Democracy 2021 (Checks On Government) | 0.40/1 (hybrid regime) |

Table 3: Ethiopia's results on anti-corruption indicators from the Ibrahim Index of African Governance

| MEASURE | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | AT '15-'19 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------------|
| Anti-corruption + i | 46.1 | 48.9 | 43.1 | 46.9 | 53.1 | +7.0 |
| Anti-corruption Mechanisms + i | 38.1 | 46.4 | 29.8 | 9.5 | 47.6 | +9.5 |
| Absence of Corruption in State Institutions + i | 57.3 | 58.0 | 58.3 | 63.6 | 67.8 | +10.5 |
| Absence of Corruption in the Public Sector + i | 46.1 | 49.1 | 52.9 | 51.8 | 54.9 | +8.8 |
| Public Procurement Procedures + i | 50.0 | 50.0 | 37.5 | 62.5 | 50.0 | 0.0 |
| Absence of Corruption in the Private Sector + i | 38.9 | 40.8 | 37.0 | 47.0 | 44.9 | +6.0 |

The 2022 TRACE Bribery Risk Matrix places Ethiopia in the “high” risk category, ranking it 144 out of 192 countries assessed (TRACE International 2022). The 2022 Bertelsmann Foundation’s Transformation Index 2022 ranks the country 114 out of 137 countries, with a score of 3.57 out of 10.

According to the latest available edition of the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance published in 2019, broadly speaking Ethiopia seemed to be progressing in terms of control of corruption across

most of the five pillars, but the country’s progress in reducing corruption is likely to have been set back by the Tigray War (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2021).

A recent national corruption perception survey was conducted by the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (FEACC 2021) of 4,018 citizens. It must be noted that the reliability of the data provided by the FEACC is open to question given that the Commission reports directly to the Office of the Prime Minister and is reportedly subject to a high degree of political influence (Ayele

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2020). Nonetheless, the survey revealed that 84.6% of respondents stated that they use acts of corruption to access services provided by public institutions.

The most corrupt institutions were viewed by respondents as being the Transport Bureau, the Ethiopian Electric Utility Office and the Urban Development, Housing & Construction Bureau. A further 51.5% of those surveyed expressed the view that businesses are generally corrupt, and 33.6% thought that the media is corrupt.

Overall, 92% of citizens perceived the level of corruption to be a substantial problem in the country (FEACC 2021). More encouragingly, 53% of respondents believe that the government's willingness to tackle corruption is either higher or much higher than five years ago, while only 24% thought the government's desire to curb corruption has declined in the past five years. However, willingness to report corruption among citizens is low, perhaps unsurprising as 52.1% of those surveyed believed that those who report corruption will be subject to retaliation and harassment (FEACC 2021).

Corruption is certainly a topic that is recognised by the country's political leadership as being endemic, and now the cessation of hostilities agreement with the TLPF has been signed, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has signalled that curbing corruption is the government's top priority. Abiy gave a speech in the Ethiopian parliament on 15 November 2022 in which he described corruption "a pest that eats a country from the inside and depletes its resources," adding that some corrupt officials were colluding with "greedy brokers and investors" to such an extent that corruption represents a threat to Ethiopia's national security (Xinhuanet 2022; Addis Standard 2022b).

Abiy argued that corrupt individuals in senior public positions had used the dual crisis of the

COVID-19 pandemic and the Tigray War to "spread their networks everywhere" (Addis Standard 2022b). Abiy took particular aim at the judiciary and law enforcement, arguing that "the judges are thieves, the prosecutors are thieves, the police are thieves and the state auditors are thieves" (Addis Standard 2022b; Satenaw News 2022).

This rhetoric is not new, Abiy's administration has regularly admitted to the extent and prevalence of corruption in public before. This time, however, Abiy used the speech as a launchpad for the establishment of a new National Anti-Corruption Committee, which is covered in more detail later in the paper. Abiy expressed the view that the new body was needed to counter corruption because efforts to date had been insufficient and overly technocratic, such as trying to strengthen preventive mechanisms like e-services that reduce officials' discretion (Ethiopian Monitor 2022).

The question of whether this demonstrates a genuine will to root out neo-patrimonial and corrupt practices is still unclear, not least as the new committee's mandate vis-à-vis existing anti-corruption bodies like the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission remains unclear.

Forms of corruption

Corruption in Ethiopia comes in different forms. Expressions of grand corruption, such as state capture and kleptocracy have been documented alongside political corruption, rent seeking by officials and petty corruption among low level bureaucrats. Judicial corruption has been explicitly targeted by Prime Minister Abiy and, given the judiciary is likely to play a role in the country's democratic transition and post-conflict period, it is also covered in this section.

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Grand corruption

Analysts had long believed that the “excessive concentration of political, economic and administrative powers” under the EPRDF regime had “led to massive corruption” (Ayele 2020). Cases that have come to light since the dissolution of the EPRDF seem to substantiate that idea.

While one of Prime Minister Abiy’s first actions was to drop charges and pardon people believed to have been prosecuted for corruption on politically motivated grounds (Rahman 2018), investigations launched after Abiy came to power by his new attorney general Berhanu Tsegaye laid bare several high-profile corruption schemes that implicated senior figures in the government, military and state-owned enterprises.

Some of the most prominent revelations involved the TLPF dominated, military-run conglomerate Metals and Engineering Corporation (MetEC), which was active in sectors ranging from agriculture to construction (VOA News 2018a). In late 2018, Major General Kinfe Dagne, the former head of MetEC, was arrested along with dozens of other MetEC officials on charges of mismanagement and wrongdoing related to irregular procurement processes, amounting to billions of dollars, that were conducted without competitive tendering (Bertelsmann Foundation 2022; ESAT News 2018). Officials were accused of embezzling vast sums of public funds for their private benefit (Goshu 2019) and demanding enormous advance payments for construction and infrastructure projects that were never completed (Davison and Tewele 2018). As of March 2022, when former prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn appeared as an online defence witness, the trial into alleged corruption at MetEC was ongoing (Addis Standard 2022c).

In another case from January 2019, the former CEO of TIRET Corporate, Tadesse Kassa, was

arrested on charges of corruption in relation to TIRET Corporate, which functions as “an endowment business empire” belonging to the Amhara Democratic Party (Tesfanews 2019). Arrested alongside Kassa was a former top official in the EPRDF regime, Bereket Simon, who was charged with embezzlement in relation to TIRET Corporate’s Endowment in his capacity as board chairman (US Department of State 2019). Financial audits of TIRET’s companies documented that procedures had been flouted and money misappropriated (Tesfanews 2019). The trial pointed to the existence of high-level corrupt links between business and political elites, and, in 2020, both men were ultimately sentenced by the Amhara Regional State Supreme Court to between six and eight years in prison for corruption (Anadolu Agency 2020).

In a final example, in May 2019, the federal attorney general charged in absentia the former director of the National Intelligence and Security Service, Getachew Assefa along with 25 other suspects on charges of grand corruption and human rights abuses (Xinhuanet 2019). Getachew, who was viewed by some as the “de facto leader of the nation since the death of [prime minister] Meles Zenawi in 2012” (The Africa Report 2021), had been fired by Abiy in 2018 as part of his crackdown on officials implicated in human rights violations and corruption under the EPRDF regime (Addis Standard 2022d). Reportedly, Getachew promptly fled to Tigray, where unconfirmed rumours suggest he might be dead (The Africa Report 2021). In January 2022, 22 other suspects associated with Getachew were granted bail by the Federal High Court (Addis Standard 2022d).

The Bertelsmann Foundation (2022) concludes that, while Abiy’s government “has demonstrated a serious commitment to anti-corruption efforts”, as yet nearly all of the high-profile corruption cases that have come to light have revolved around officials from the previous EPRDF regime, rather

than from Abiy's own administration. More encouragingly, a citizen survey conducted by the FEACC (2021) found that 44% of citizens questioned thought that grand corruption today is lower than it was five years, while 28% believe that corruption has increased over the past five years.

Clientelism and political corruption

Clientelism has long been a feature of Ethiopian politics. Chanie (2007) observed that the EPRDF had intentionally created a system of patron-client relationships to allow the central leadership "to dominate political power and resources throughout society by positioning loyal clients at sub-national levels". The Bertelsmann Foundation (2022) likewise noted that clientelism was a hallmark of political life under the EPRDF, who allotted financial resources and opportunities "according to existing regional clientele networks" based around ethnic-oriented parties in different parts of the country. The leadership of each of these ethnic parties then distributed these resources to their own patronage group.

Other scholarly work has documented how as a result of clientelist relationships between central and regional political leaders, decentralisation in Ethiopia under the EPRDF resulted in higher levels of corruption and state capture (Ali 2021). Ayele (2020), for instance, argues that the neo-patrimonial system that developed under the EPRDF resulted in the "the award by public officials of personal favours, both within the state (notably public sector jobs) and in society (for instance, licenses, contracts and projects) in return for political support". In this context, anti-corruption crackdowns were used to curb the influence of political factions and regional authorities perceived to be disloyal to the central government and its centralising drive.

One example of this system existed in Tigray, where the TPLF was able to construct "an economic empire based on EPRDF patronage, appropriation and large-scale borrowing, with accountability to no one" (Bertelsmann Foundation 2022). Due to TPLF's dominance of the EPRDF, it came to gain control over significant potential sources of political finance, including SOEs such as Ethio Telecom, the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia and MetEC (Lanfranchi and Meester 2021). Resources from these organisations reportedly enabled the TPLF to expand the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), a conglomeration of businesses that the party controlled (Vaughan and Gebremichael 2011). Allegedly, as well as providing private benefits and rents to individual TPLF members, "party leaders could use their control over these companies to allocate favours to allies and selected constituencies in the form of job offers, (sub)contracts, or procurement opportunities" (Lanfranchi and Meester 2021).

The political transition that began in 2018 seemingly disrupted established patterns of control over these economic resources. Access to these key sources of finance to fund political activity became increasingly contested as Prime Minister Abiy sought to wrest control of the federal government.

Abiy's anti-corruption campaign also began to target some of the TPLF's key streams of political finance, notably at MetEC by replacing its leadership, cancelling state contracts awarded to the organisation and prosecuting former MetEC officials (Lanfranchi and Meester 2021). During the Tigray War, the federal government's attempts to undercut the TPLF's sources of finance accelerated, including the freezing of EFFORT's assets and accounts (African Confidential 2020).

Political corruption and clientelism continues to plague other parts of the country too. In Amhara, a scandal broke in March 2022 when it emerged that

members of the Amhara Prosperity Party (APP) had violated the party's financial and asset management regulations to enrich themselves through abuse of the party's loan mechanism. The details came to light when APP member Tsega Arage, the deputy commissioner of the Civil Service Commission wrote to the Control and Inspection Commission of the Prosperity Party, accusing APP leadership of embezzling ETB 60 million (approx. US\$1 million) and illegally disbursing more than ETB 100 million (approx. US\$1.85 million) (Addis Standard 2022e). In response, the APP admitted extensive mismanagement and suspended party members accused of financial irregularities (Addis Standard 2022f). Some observers allege, however, that this was just the tip of the iceberg and that senior leadership within the APP is implicated in the scandal (Nadeem 2022).

The Addis Standard also reported in March 2022 that the federal attorney general had launched criminal investigations against 23 public officials, both junior and high-ranking, suspected of having amassed unexplained and possibly illicit wealth. The attorney general's office had reportedly found large amounts of unregistered assets while analysing the list of officials' declared assets maintained by the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (Addis Standard 2022f).

In a further case from July 2022, the head of the National Disaster Risk Management Commission was arrested on charges of corruption and is alleged by the federal police to have colluded with others to sell food and clothing intended to benefit internally displaced people and used the profits to purchase property (Africanews 2022).

Procurement corruption

Procurement processes in Ethiopia are perceived to be at high risk of corruption, notably in the energy, telecommunications and construction sectors (US

Department of State 2022), though the risk is reportedly lower in the health care and education sectors (Tolessa and Wako 2019). According to the latest available data from World Bank Enterprise Surveys, in 2015, 19.7% of firms surveyed expected to give gifts to secure government contracts (World Bank 2015). A more recent survey by the FEACC (2021) found that 17.4% of 1,099 Ethiopian businesses surveyed believe that contracts relating to government procurement are usually not awarded clearly and transparently.

While the law requires that public procurement is subject to competitive bidding and that bids must be publicised (Federal Negarit Gazeta 2009), in the past large government contracts have been awarded without a bidding process, including to state-owned enterprises affiliated with political factions (US Department of State 2018a). In addition, companies have complained that officials violate the rules of competitive bidding by favouring certain bidders in exchange for gifts, bribes and favours (Global Integrity 2018). The FEACC (2021) study revealed that 34.1% of 915 civil servants questioned agreed that bribes were sometimes or always paid to secure government contracts, while 43% admitted that exceptions to requirements for competitive bidding have been made in practice.

A 2018 assessment of procurement in Ethiopia found that it is difficult for bidders to access eligibility and evaluation criteria "as a result of deliberate concealment and favouritism" (Global Integrity 2018). To address the shortcoming, the Public Procurement and Property Administration Agency (PPA) announced in April 2018 that it would launch an electronic government procurement procedure to improve transparency (Global Integrity 2019). This web platform is intended to host calls for tenders and allow bidders to register and bid online, although it appears information is often incomplete or outdated (see Public Procurement and Property Administration

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Agency 2022). The PPA also maintains an online blacklist of companies that have been disbarred from public procurement processes, and in 2020, around 100 companies were added to the blacklist (Global Integrity 2021). By 2019, it appeared that close to 95% of public procurement processes involved open bidding (Endale 2019).

Despite these new safeguards, procurement scandals continue. In fact, the Office of the Auditor General regularly reports huge amounts of unaccounted and illegal expenses related to public procurement, in the range of ETB 20 billion (approx. US\$370 million) per year (Endale 2019). Researchers for Global Integrity found that public procurement of wheat and pharmaceutical products were affected by “private connections”, while in April 2019 the head of the PPA, Yigezu Daba, was himself charged with corruption, price manipulation and illicit enrichment involving nearly ETB 700 million (approx. US\$1.3 million) (Global Integrity 2020; Kiruga 2019). In another case from 2020, four former Ministry of Education officials were arrested for corruption related to a procurement process to supply textbooks to schools that resulted in the loss of ETB 280 million (approx. US\$5 million) (US Department of State 2020; Ethiopian Monitor 2020), although the case was later dropped due to doubts about the reliability of evidence (US Department of State 2021).

While steps have been taken to improve the integrity of public procurement and penalise some of those responsible for corruption in public contracting under the previous regime, Freedom House (2021) argues that procurement processes still remain opaque and points to the fact that construction contracts related to Meskel Square, Friendship Park and Entoto park “were awarded to companies without full transparency of the tender and decision-making processes”.

Judicial corruption

Historically, the judiciary in Ethiopia has been viewed by observers as unable to act as an effective check on the executive and ensure the rule of law. While Article 78 of the constitution in theory guarantees the independence of the judiciary, the constitution also bestows the House of Federation with the power to interpret the constitution and review legislation, therefore limiting the role of the judiciary to adjudicating on ordinary criminal and civil law cases (Global Integrity 2020).

The independence of judges is compromised by political interference, high levels of corruption, scarce resources and limited operational capacity, the latter being a particular problem in certain parts of the country (Bertelsmann Foundation 2022). A World Bank study from 2012 pointed to a growing trend as the EPRDF consolidated power to make judicial appointments based on political allegiance rather than qualifications or competence, with the result that judicial rulings usually sided with government policy even where this contravened the constitution (Plummer 2012: 14). A decade later, the Bertelsmann Foundation (2022) likewise notes that “judges not loyal to the government run the risk of being replaced by a ‘more suitable’ candidate”.

While the interference of the Prime Minister’s Office in the judiciary is viewed by some analysts as part of the problem (Bertelsmann Foundation 2022), this has not prevented Abiy from strongly criticising corruption in the judiciary in a speech to parliament in November 2022. Abiy listed a lengthy set of corruption problems in the judicial system, including prosecutors accepting bribes in exchange for intentionally losing or dropping cases, abuse of power on the part of court clerks overseeing case management resulting in evidence “disappearing” and a general lack of transparency and ethical standards (Satenaw News 2022). In a recent interview with The Reporter, Mesfin Erkabe,

a member of the parliamentary legal, justice, and democracy affairs standing committee from Abiy's ruling Prosperity Party also pointed to the reportedly widespread practice of "trading justice for money" (Endale 2022b). Erkabe highlighted the issue of "corruption, bribery, and nepotism" in the supreme court, federal high courts and first-instance courts, as well as prisons and police detention centres (Endale 2022b).

Since coming to power, Abiy's administration has taken some steps to improve the system of judicial appointments by nominating judges based on merit and experience rather than party loyalty (Global Integrity 2021). In 2020, two proclamations were approved by parliament that were intended to bolster the independence and accountability of the judiciary, and a code of conduct for judges and new performance standards have been developed to operationalise these proclamations (Global Integrity 2021). In his recent speech to parliament, Abiy also noted that budgetary decisions related to the judiciary have recently been transferred from the executive to the legislative branch (Satenaw News 2022).

However, the continued lack of security of tenure for judges renders it difficult for them to rule against the government; analysts argue that in recent years the judiciary has been used by the state to prevent opposition figures from contesting elections (Global Integrity 2021). Moreover, while there have been some signs of progress at the federal level, the picture is less encouraging at the regional level where judges have apparently been beaten and detained by the police and local officials for not making favourable decisions (Global Integrity 2021).

In FEACC's recent corruption perceptions survey (2021), 57% of the 4,018 citizens questioned expressed the view that the judicial system was not fair, although 89% of those that came into contact with the judiciary indicated that they had not been

asked to pay a bribe to a judge, prosecutor or other court official.

Bureaucratic and administrative corruption

Two notable studies from about a decade ago concluded that Ethiopia had lower rates of petty corruption in basic service delivery than most sub-Saharan African countries, which was partly attributed to lower capital investment in health, education and rural infrastructure compared to other low-income countries (Vaughan and Gebremichael 2011: 29; Plummer 2012: 13). Similarly, a World Bank (2019: xiv) study based on data from the 2016 Ethiopian Civil Servants Survey found that fewer than 3% of civil servants thought that corruption or rent seeking hindered their ability to work effectively.

Recent assessments have been more pessimistic. Ayele (2020) argues that petty corruption is endemic in Ethiopia, and that people engaged in court proceedings frequently give gifts such as cattle to the judge or bribe local administrators in a similar manner. He points to inefficiency in the Ethiopian bureaucracy as the key driver of petty corruption as citizens are incentivised pay speed money, while low wages likewise encourage civil servants to extort bribes (Ayele 2020).

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence of low-level corruption in the Ethiopian public sector. In 2021, for instance, around a dozen employees of the Ethiopian Immigration Nationality and Vital Events Agency were arrested for reportedly issuing passports illegally in exchange for bribes (Ethiopian Monitor 2021). According to the US State Department (2022), Ethiopian and foreign firms "routinely encounter corruption in tax collection, customs clearance, and land

administration” such as demands for bribes in exchange for licences and permits.

Nonetheless, according to data collected by the FEACC (2021), 41% of citizens believe that the extent of petty corruption is lower today than it was five years ago, where only 29% report that petty corruption has increased in the same time period.

There seem to be large discrepancies in the perceived incidence of corruption at different institutions. While 71% of people questioned stated that they had not witnessed any unethical or corrupt practices at health care institutions, more than 60% of the 4,018 survey participants thought that local police were highly corrupt (FEACC 2021). In an effort reportedly intended to reduce petty corruption and organised crime, in 2020, the government introduced new, more secure banknotes and withdrew older notes over a three month period (Freedom House 2021).

Gendered forms of corruption

Ethiopia’s performance on the Gender Inequality Index has been incrementally improving in recent decades, declining from 0.700 in 2000 to 0.520 in 2021 (UNDP 2022).² Despite this positive trend, the country still scores poorly relative to most other countries included in the Index. According to Degefa and Getachew (2022), “patriarchal norms and practices permeate all aspects of the country’s social, economic and political life.”

Gender emancipation was one of Abiy’s stated reform goals, and his first cabinet in 2018 included the same number of men and women (Bertelsmann Foundation 2022: 31). However, after a 2021 cabinet

reshuffle in 2021, women made up only 36% of cabinet posts (Degefa and Getachew 2022).

Currently, women hold 41% of seats in the national parliament (UNDP 2022). However, Degefa and Getachew (2022) point out that women are excluded from key decision-making processes in most political parties. While there have been few comprehensive studies of barriers to women’s political participation in Ethiopia, Degefa and Getachew (2022) point to “political violence, male-coded norms and sexist discourses.” Specifically, they note the practice of women candidates having to exchange sex in order to be allowed to stand as a candidate for a political party (Degefa and Getachew 2022).

Sexual violence has been widely documented alongside other human rights violations during the Tigray War. The conflict also created conditions in which food, medical supplies and fuel ran low in Tigray, which led to a desperate situation in which corruption flourished (Human Rights Watch 2022). Sextortion – a type of corruption that occurs when those entrusted with power use it to sexually exploit those dependent on that power (Transparency International 2020) – appears to have been particularly widespread alongside other forms of conflict-related sexual violence (Mahderom 2022).

Multiple testimonies have been collected that, faced with scarcity and starvation, many women and girls were forced to turn to so-called survival sex, a problem compounded when many of them lost access to their money after banking services in Tigray were cut off by the federal government (Kassa 2022b). Refugees International has recorded how soldiers as well as men in host communities exploit displaced women and girls, coercing them into sexual acts in exchange for food and small amount

² Lower GII values represent a better performance regarding gender inequality.

of cash (International Rescue Committee 2021). According to interviews conducted by IRC with internally displaced persons, this form of sextortion has become common, and 60% of people questioned knew of women and girls who had to exchange sex for food or petty cash (International Rescue Committee 2021).

Legal and institutional anti-corruption framework

Legal framework

International and regional conventions

Ethiopia is a signatory of the United Nations Convention against Corruption, which the country signed in 2003 and ratified in 2007. The second round review of Ethiopia's implementation of preventive measures and asset recovery was scheduled for 2019 and appears to be ongoing (UNODC 2022). According to the UNCAC Coalition (2022), as of May 2022, the government had finished its self-assessment checklist, although nothing seems to have been published so far. In 2020, Ethiopia withdrew its reservation on Article 44 of UNCAC, which relates to the extradition of offenders and has reiterated its commitment to implement all provisions of UNCAC (ENA 2020). However, Ethiopia is not a party to the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions.

At the regional level, Ethiopia signed the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption in 2004 and ratified it in 2007 (African Union 2021). Ethiopia is a member of the East African Association of Anti-Corruption Authorities (EAAACA) and the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG), which

is a regional body charged with implementing the FATF Recommendations. The country is also member of the Asset Recovery Inter-Agency Network for Eastern Africa, a regional platform to pursue asset recovery (Shamalla 2018).

The most recent follow-up to the mutual evaluation report concerning the implementation of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing standards was conducted in 2022. According to the evaluation, Ethiopia is deemed to be "compliant" for 11 and "largely compliant" for 25 of the FATF 40 recommendations. Thus, Ethiopia is no longer subject to the FATF's monitoring process, although the country is judged to require improvements when it comes to applying preventive measures for customers' due diligence, operational law enforcement and ensuring the engagement of the competent authorities in international cooperation (ESAAMLG 2022).

Domestic legal framework

The primary piece of legislation governing corruption in Ethiopia is the Corruption Crimes Proclamation No. 881/2015, which follows the general principles and guidelines applicable in the 2004 criminal code. Rules of procedure and evidence standards pertinent to corruption related offences are stipulated in the Revised Anti-Corruption Special Procedure and Rules of Evidence Proclamation No. 882/2015 (DLA Piper 2022).

Together these laws criminalise major forms of corruption such as active and passive bribery, money laundering and bribery of a foreign official. Proclamation 881/2015 sought to rectify some of the shortcomings of the 2004 criminal code by clarifying which acts constitute corruption. The 2015 proclamation also broadened the definition of corruption to include the private sector (Ayele 2020; UNODC 2015). Despite these laws criminalising private sector corruption, the enforcement of such laws is still rare (Proelium Law LLP 2019).

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Ethiopia: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption efforts (2022)

Ethiopia issued the Assets Disclosure and Registration (ADR) Proclamation No.668/2010 in April 2010 to reduce the risk of conflicts of interest going undetected and facilitate the investigation and prosecution of corruption (Tulu 2020). The ADR obliges a broad range of officials to register and disclose assets that are “under their ownership or possession of themselves or their families and the sources of income and those of their families” (Tulu 2020).

In 2020, the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (FEACC) launched the first online platform for asset registration in Africa. All parliamentarians, political appointees and public officials beyond a certain grade are required to disclose both moveable and immovable assets using the disclosure of asset registration system (DARS). Despite this initiative, a 2020 study on the effectiveness of Ethiopia’s ADR concluded that the law is not adequately designed to counter corruption in Ethiopia due to several shortcomings, including the fact that it does not require evidence that assets were obtained in an illicit manner (see Tulu 2020).

In fact, in recent years, there have continued to be high-profile scandals that pointed to unchecked conflicts of interest (Mengesha 2022). A core weakness has been that, while federal institutions have their own individual codes of conduct that prohibit public officials from using their authority for personal gain, the capacity of such institutions to police conflicts of interest is weak and there is no federal level law to regulate conflicts of interest (Mengesha 2022). To close this gap, the FEACC started in 2022 to draft a new regulation to prevent conflicts of interest in the public sector, though as of August 2022 the draft regulation had not yet been approved by the Council of Ministers (Mengesha 2022).

The Proclamation to Provide for the Protection of Witnesses and Whistleblowers of Criminal Offences was issued in 2011. However, the proclamation is

limited in that it only applies to witnesses who provide information in connection with certain criminal proceedings and does not cover private sector whistleblowers. Ethiopia continues to lack a comprehensive system to shield whistleblowers from retaliation and prosecution (PPLAAF 2018).

Since establishing the Procurement and Property Administration Proclamation No. 649/2009, which for the first time regulated public procurement at a central level, Ethiopia has taken further steps to improve its procurement laws. In 2020, the government adopted the Federal Administrative Procedure Proclamation No. 1183/2020, which observers expect will make the procurement system more transparent (World Bank 2021). A recent study by the World Bank (2021) concluded that the legal framework is “adequately recorded” and the regulations “enshrine basic procurement principles of transparency, efficiency, fairness, and impartiality”.

However, World Bank (2021) analysts also note that there are inconsistencies in the definition of fraud and corruption between the Public Procurement Directive, the Public Procurement Law and the Public Procurement Manual on one hand, and the anti-corruption law and criminal code on the other. In particular, the offences listed under public procurement proclamations conflate administrative and criminal wrongdoing and the penalties differ to those set out in the criminal code.

Moreover, the procurement framework does not stipulate that key procurement documents such as award decisions need to be published and thus does not comply with the level of transparency set out in UNCAC (World Bank 2021). Finally, no data on fraud and corruption in procurement processes is made available by government, and there are coordination problems between federal and regional attorneys general when it comes to prosecuting procurement related corruption.

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As illustrated by the cases described above, in practice, procurement processes continue to be vulnerable to corrupt manipulation. More encouragingly, the federal government is working to improve the electronic government procurement system (e-GP) to strengthen efficacy and oversight of procurement, and a pilot reportedly began in July 2021 (World Bank 2021).

Two final initiatives worth mentioning relate to civil service reforms.

First, a series of reforms referred to as the Change Army were launched under the EPRDF to align party, state and society in support of national development objectives (Miruts and Daba 2022). According to a World Bank (2019) study, the community mobilisation associated with the Change Army improved downward accountability of the civil service and was perceived to have helped constrain rent seeking in public administration, especially in the health sector (World Bank 2019).

Second, in 2020, Ethiopia enacted the Federal Administrative Procedure Proclamation, which enables citizens to challenge the legality of federal agencies' decisions and activities in federal courts. According to the US State Department (2020), this is intended to improve the federal government's transparency and accountability by permitting citizens to pursue administrative redress and monetary compensation where government agencies fail to comply with the law.

Institutional framework

Multiple institutions in Ethiopia have a direct or indirect mandate to curb corruption, including the federal attorney general, the Office of the Federal Auditor General and the Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (FEACC) (Global Integrity 2020).

The FEACC is primarily charged with establishing preventive measures to reduce corruption, as in 2019 its investigative and prosecutorial powers related to potential corruption cases were transferred to the attorney general (Global Integrity 2020). While the auditor general is tasked with scrutinising public finances, the Office of the Ombudsman seeks to prevent administrative abuses by public officials (US Department of State 2022).

The Office of the Federal Auditor General is the only institution with an anti-corruption mandate that is constitutionally established. Although the constitution decrees the establishment of the human rights commission and the ombudsman, their governance, mandates and funding structures are defined by ordinary legislation (Ayele 2020).

The FEACC and the attorney general are established through ordinary legislation and do not enjoy any constitutional protection. The proclamations establishing these institutions allow the executive arm of the federal government to play an important role in appointing and dismissing the heads of these organisations. In fact, the auditor general, the director of the FEACC and the attorney general are recommended by the prime minister and confirmed by parliament, which is typically dominated by the prime minister's party. Only the director general of the ombudsman is appointed without the prime minister's decisive involvement (Ayele 2020). The same is true in terms of resourcing, where the executive branch plays a key role in determining the size of these agencies' budgets (Mezmur and Koen 2011).

In 2021, the federal attorney general, the FEACC and the Federal Police Commission signed a memorandum of understanding aimed at enhancing coordination and information exchange between these organisations (Ethiopian Monitor 2019).

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Despite these efforts and Abiy's fierce anti-corruption rhetoric (see Satenaw News 2022), the Bertelsmann Foundation (2022) concludes that "the political core of the federal executive maintains control over the judiciary and the legislature when it comes to cases of political importance". Indeed, the prime minister's practice of regularly reshuffling ministers and directors of key anti-corruption institutions suggests that the political system remains unstable and not conducive to sustained governance reform.

The Federal Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission

The Federal Ethics and Anticorruption Commission (FEACC) was established in 2001, and its terms of reference were revised in 2005 (Federal Negarit Gazeta 2005) and again most recently in 2021 under Proclamation No. 1236/2021 (Federal Negarit Gazeta 2021). Whereas historically its mandate was restricted to public sector entities, as part of the most recent revision to its mandate in 2021, the commission's jurisdiction has been extended to include private companies for the first time. However, political parties and religious organisations still do not fall within the purview of the FEACC (Federal Negarit Gazeta 2021).

In 2021, the Abiy ordered a cabinet reshuffle that included making the FEACC report directly to the Office of the Prime Minister (Addis Standard 2021). In just four years, the FEACC has reportedly witnessed three changes in leadership. Despite Abiy's moves to distance himself from the legacy of the EPRDF, which reportedly used the FEACC "to target political opponents" (Ayele 2020), it appears that the FEACC remains subject to a high degree of political influence.

Largely to deal with accusations of politically motivated investigations conducted by the FEACC under the EPRDF, the Ethiopian parliament transferred the commission's investigative and

prosecutorial mandates to the attorney general in 2019 (Global Integrity 2020). At present, any complaints or tip-offs the commission receives are supposed to be passed to the attorney general's office for investigation and prosecution (Global Integrity 2021). Some reports suggest that the FEACC is petitioning parliament to have its investigative and prosecutorial mandates returned (The Reporter 2021).

However, currently the commission's remit is limited to leading the national preventive measures against corruption. These include conducting corruption risk assessments, developing codes of ethics for public agencies and SOEs, as well as leading awareness raising campaigns and delivering ethics training (Ayele 2020). The FEACC reports that in the past few years it has been scaling up its activities, perhaps most notably by establishing more than 500 new ethics departments in many federal offices (Addis Maleda 2021).

In addition, the FEACC is mandated to maintain the asset register of public officials, who are obliged under the 2010 Disclosure and Register of Assets Proclamation to declare their assets and financial interests to the commission. In theory, the FEACC is responsible for verifying the accuracy of these declarations. However, observers have expressed doubts that the commission has the necessary manpower, tools or expertise to effectively scrutinise this information (Rahman 2018). These concerns seem well founded given that over 1.5 million officials were said to have registered their assets with the FEACC in 2021 alone (Global Integrity 2021). The refusal to make the data in the asset and interest registry available to the public also means that journalists, civil society groups and citizens are unable to identify irregularities (Global Integrity 2021). The FEACC has nonetheless reportedly begun to refer the names of federal officials who fail to register their assets to the police (US Department of State 2020).

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Finally, the commission accepts reports and information related to corruption from citizens. It appears that the commission is charged with protecting whistleblowers and witnesses, though observers note it is not fully clear whether the attorney general assumed this responsibility together with the FEACC's investigative and prosecutorial powers when these were transferred (Ayele 2020).

National Anti-Corruption Committee

In mid-November 2022, the Ethiopian government declared the “establishment of a national anti-corruption committee to coordinate the government's campaign against corruption” (Xinhuanet 2022). The announcement was explained by Abiy with reference to the grievous threat corruption poses to the country's socio-economic development. The new seven-member committee includes the Ethiopian minister of justice, the director general of National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) and the FEACC commissioner (Xinhuanet 2022).

The mandate of the National Anti-Corruption Committee vis a vis existing anti-corruption institutions is still somewhat unclear. The effectiveness of the committee remains to be seen, not least considering the lack of participation by non-state actors, such as civil society groups or business representatives, and the fact that the seven members of the committee all oversee considerable existing portfolios.

One month into its establishment and the committee is reported to have frozen the assets of suspect bank accounts in addition to freezing the transfer of properties in some regions (Endale 2022c). The committee reportedly started by focusing on sectors such as land and public housing management, security and justice sector, financial sector, the government revenue and customs system as well as service delivery, administration

and government procurement sectors (Fana Broadcasting Corporate 2022b).

The committee issued a statement that numerous senior officials, including the director general of the Financial Security Service Directorate, alongside others from law enforcement agencies, judges and prosecutors have been arrested so far, in what appears to be a premeditated crackdown (Fana Broadcasting Corporate 2022b). It is also reported that regional governments are expected to establish their own anti-corruption committees to conduct evaluations of regional officials (Addis Standard 2022b).

It remains to be seen how this latest anti-corruption purge by the federal government plays out against the backdrop of the fragile peace settlement and Ethiopia's complex ethnic and politicised regional divisions. This has the potential to be particularly sensitive given previous administrations' record of using anti-corruption crackdowns as an instrument to curb the influence of political factions and regional authorities perceived to be disloyal to the central government.

Federal auditor general

The Office of the Auditor General is the auditing arm of the federal government and, as stipulated in the 1995 constitution, it is directly accountable to the House of Peoples' Representatives rather than the prime minister. This has led some observers to conclude that it enjoys a higher degree of institutional independence than the FEACC or attorney general, not least as the prime minister has no power to dismiss the auditor general or their deputies (Ayele 2020). Currently, the post of auditor general is vacant as the prime minister and parliament have been unable to agree on a suitable candidate.

However, the federal auditor general is operationally dependent on the executive given

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that the government sets the organisation's budget (Global Integrity 2020). While the auditor general does frequently denounce inaccuracies in public accounts, analysts have also noted that the auditor general is constrained by a limited budget and it has not been politically feasible to probe into certain politically connected organisations. For example, the auditor general reportedly did not audit MeTEC despite the widely publicised scandals involving high level corruption (Global Integrity 2020).

The Office of Federal Attorney General

The Office of Federal Attorney General was established in 2016 with the intention of “establishing a single, strong law-enforcement and prosecution institution” (Ayele 2020). The attorney general is empowered to investigate and prosecute alleged or suspected corruption perpetrated by public officials, employees at public enterprises and people working for regional administrations who handle federal funds (Ayele 2020).

Asset recovery falls under the leadership of the Office of the Federal Attorney General. While senior government officials have been sentenced for laundering money outside of the country, it is difficult to establish the amounts of assets recovered by Ethiopia due to a lack of transparency, although the known cases indicate the amounts recovered are small (CiFAR 2021). The attorney general is permitted by law to demand banking information about suspects without the need for a court order and can seize assets pending a court order as well as confiscate these assets once a conviction has been secured (Ayele 2020).

Financial Intelligence Centre

The Ethiopian Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC) was established in 2009. Its mandate, as set out in Proclamation No. 780/2013, is to coordinate the

competent authorities and various institutions involved in countering money laundering and the financing of terrorism. In 2019, the FEACC and the FIC signed a memorandum of understanding intended to improve coordination to tackle money laundering and financial crime (US Department of State 2020).

However, a 2022 case study highlighted several challenges the FIC faces in Ethiopia. These include the fact that it gets formal reports only from financial institutions and not land offices, investment consultants or real estate companies. In addition, the FIC falls short due to its failure to conduct regular supervision on branches and subsidiaries to ensure the effective implementation of compliance programmes. Another challenge highlighted is the risk of political pressure exerted by the executive branch on the FIC (Sileshi 2022).

News reports indicate that the director general of the centre, Tewodros Bekele, was arrested in early December 2022 on the orders of the new National Anti-Corruption Committee (Endale 2022c).

Federal Police Commission

The Ethiopian police force has in the past served as a tool of state control and has a record of misconduct and violence (Global Integrity 2019). The Federal Police Officers Disciplinary Committee often fails to properly investigate cases of police misconduct (Global Integrity 2020).

In January 2017, a corruption directorate was established within the Federal Police Commission with a mandate to investigate systemic corruption cases (US Department of State 2018b). As of 2022, there also appears to be an active Anti-Corruption Investigation Unit in the federal police force (Africanews 2022).

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Parliament

Under the EPRDF, the government came to control virtually all seats in the national parliament, and suppressed political opposition by imprisoning dissidents, coercing citizens into joining the party and allegedly committing electoral fraud (Bertelsmann Foundation 2022). Under Abiy, tolerance for parliamentary opposition has grown, and members of parliament from different parties such as NAMA, Ezema and the Gedeo Peoples Democratic Party are represented. While Abiy's Prosperity Party holds most seats in the current legislative period (IPU 2022), members of opposition parties hold seats on standing committees, and parliament has reportedly begun to criticise failings on the part of ministers and federal institutions (Endale 2022b).

Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is an independent federal state body established under the constitution with a mandate to promote and protect human rights (EHRC 2022). In 2019, Amnesty International reported that EHRC operated outside established human rights frameworks and standards when investigating allegations of violations and criticised the commission's methods and findings (Amnesty International 2019).

In 2019, Amnesty International recommended that parliament should revise the proclamation establishing the EHRC to ensure a transparent, inclusive and non-partisan appointment process for the chief commissioner and staff, and strengthen provisions on enforcement of its recommendations. Some improvements were made by Proclamation No. 1224/2020, which made the commission answerable to parliament.

In October 2021, the EHRC's rating by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions for

operation in accordance with the UN Paris Principles was upgraded from grade B (partial compliance) to grade A (full compliance) (EHRC 20221).

The Institute of the Ombudsman of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia

The ombudsman was created by Proclamation No. 211/2000 with the responsibility to "rectify or prevent unjust decisions and orders of executive organs and officials" and encourage efficient and transparent governance in line with the rule of law (Ayele 2020). As such, corruption is taken to fall within the purview of the ombudsman alongside other forms of maladministration (Ayele 2020).

The operations of the ombudsman were amended by Proclamation No. 1142/2019, which granted the ombudsman the authority to make recommendations to other state agencies but does not give powers to make determinations or enforceable orders (Beyene 2020). A recent study found this to be a particular problem with regards to the police force, which can in practice ignore interventions and requests by the ombudsman (Beyene 2020).

Other stakeholders

Media

Under the EDRDF regime, the media was restricted under the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation 590/2008 and Anti-Terrorism Proclamation 652/2009, which were used to detain and prosecute journalists and the opposition as well as censor criticism. Despite the nominal recognition of freedom of the press under Proclamation 590/2008, the law imposed severe restrictions on journalists. Article 43(7) on defamation imposed criminal liability for

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“accusations and defamation against the constitutionally established legislative, executive or judicial authorities” (Ayele 2020).

On becoming prime minister in 2018, Abiy released imprisoned journalists and championed reforms that allowed previously banned media outlets to operate, including the diaspora based satellite TV stations ESAT and Oromo Media Network. While these added to a handful of private media outlets, the state continues to control most broadcasting channels (BBC News 2022b). The draconian media law was revised in 2021 to provide a more liberal legal framework that decriminalised defamation and made some provisions for the confidentiality of journalistic sources (Reporters Without Borders 2022).

In addition, steps have been taken to establish an access to information regime, the absence of which had made the work of investigative journalists working to detect corruption very challenging (Rahman 2018). The new media law requires media outlets to register their details and ownership structure with the Ethiopian Media Authority, which posts the names of owners on its website (Ethiopian Media Authority 2021).

Despite these improvements, the media landscape remains polarised, and the work of investigative journalists continues to be dangerous in the country, with several reported cases of journalists being arrested on vague charges of promoting terrorism or dying in unclear circumstances (Reporters Without Borders 2022).

Civil society

There has been some effort from Abiy’s government to expand civic space for non-governmental organisations, including passing a new framework for civil society organisations (CSOs) under Proclamation No. 1113/2019 and easing restrictions on freedom of assembly

(Freedom House 2022). While thousands of CSOs have registered since then, due to COVID-19 and then the Tigray War that led to some donors to pull out, only a small proportion of these CSOs are very active (CIVICUS 2022). This means that few civil society groups are in a position to support anti-corruption and good governance efforts.

In addition, the federal Civil Society Organisations Agency continues to exercise sweeping powers over civil society groups in Ethiopia. Since the war in Tigray and the accompanying human rights violations, tensions between the federal government and NGOs working on governance and human rights, including international players like Amnesty International, also intensified (Freedom House 2021).

TI Ethiopia

Transparency Ethiopia was established in 2002 as the local chapter of Transparency International. The organisation is one of the very few NGOs working on issues related to the anti-corruption cause in the country. In 2016, Transparency Ethiopia launched its advocacy and legal aid centre (ALAC) aiming to provide legal advice and support to victims and witnesses of corruption (Rahman 2018).

Progress Integrated Community Development Organization (PICDO)

PICDO is a CSO established in Ethiopia with the aim of “contributing to the national efforts in ensuring lasting peace and security, sustainable economic growth, and shared prosperity and social progress in the country” (PICDO 2021). Since the passage of the new CSO law in 2019, the organisation has played a growing role in applying social accountability tools at the community level. In addition, the organisation has expressed interest in actively engaging in the second cycle UNCAC review process and mechanisms through the production of a parallel report (UNCAC Coalition 2021).

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U4@cmi.no

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