

Eritrea

Ethnicity in Eritrea

Group selection

Colonized first by Italy and then administered by the United Kingdom, following the Italian defeat in the Horn of Africa during the Second World War, Eritrea was annexed by Ethiopia in 1952 (¹⁰⁷⁷, 2). Although initial political arrangements under the auspices of the UN had envisioned a significant autonomy for Eritrea within Ethiopia, these provisions were gradually restricted and finally abolished in 1962 (¹⁰⁷⁸, 2). The military struggle for independence was launched in 1958 in reaction to the gradual loss of autonomy and was first spearheaded by the predominantly Muslim Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), which recruited primarily among ethnic Tigre Eritreans (¹⁰⁷⁹, 2). However, the marginalization of Christian Eritreans by Ethiopia led Tigrinya highlanders to increasingly take part into the armed struggle, by the mid-1960s (¹⁰⁸⁰, 2). Yet, criticisms against the perceived domination of the ELF by Muslims led to splits within the ELF and to the founding of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in the early 1970s (¹⁰⁸¹, 2). After two decades of fighting, the EPLF finally managed to capture the Eritrean capital of Asmara in 1991, at about the same time as Addis Ababa fell to the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (¹⁰⁸²: 3). Since 1991 the country has been de facto independent, although this state of affairs was only recognized by the international community in 1993, after a UN referendum on independence (¹⁰⁸³, 5, ¹⁰⁸⁴, 4). In lines with practice, EPR regards the first year of Independence of Eritrea as 1993. Although the prospects of democratization had been perceived at the outset of independence as promising, the country has since become a harsh reclusive authoritarian state under the leadership of President Isaias Afewerki, which does not tolerate any opposition and is deeply suspicious of the international community. In addition, borders disputes with Ethiopia led to a brutal war between 1998 to 2000, which was lost by Eritrea. Recurrent tensions with Eritrea's neighbors have led to military clashes since 2000 (¹⁰⁸⁵, executive summary, 1, 5).

Ethnic identities in Ethiopia may be divided along different dimensions: geographic (highlanders vs low-landers), religious (Christians vs Muslims) and linguistic (Tigrinya, Tigre, Saho, Nara, Kunama, Hidareb, Bilen, Afar, and Arabic) (¹⁰⁸⁶, 138-9). In lines with the coding rules, only the two latter dimensions will be considered

¹⁰⁷⁷ [International Crisis Group, 2010]

¹⁰⁷⁸ [International Crisis Group, 2010]

¹⁰⁷⁹ [International Crisis Group, 2010]

¹⁰⁸⁰ [International Crisis Group, 2010]

¹⁰⁸¹ [International Crisis Group, 2010]

¹⁰⁸⁶ [Bereketgab, 2002]

when assessing the political salience of these identities.

Power relations

1993-1999: Although the academic literature about Eritrea frequently refers to Eritrea's ethnic divisions (see e.g. ¹⁰⁸⁷, 658, 672; also ¹⁰⁸⁸), the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (EPDJ) is consciously trying to stimulate Eritrean nationalism and unity (¹⁰⁸⁹: 648, 655, 663, 669; ¹⁰⁹⁰, 464, 482; ¹⁰⁹¹, 139) following closely its direct predecessor, the rebel organization EPLF, in this regard. Ethnically/religiously based political associations are forbidden, and the administrative reorganization created new provinces which were intended to undermine the latent ethno-regional (self-)identification of the population (¹⁰⁹², 463-4; ¹⁰⁹³, 139).

The emerging political parties before Eritrea's annexation to Ethiopia, however, did exhibit a clear ethnic division of the country, namely between Christians and Muslims (¹⁰⁹⁴, ¹⁰⁹⁵, 666). Also during the independence struggle, there was a politically relevant ethnic division between Christians and Muslims (¹⁰⁹⁶: 8; ¹⁰⁹⁷: 21-22; Horowitz 1985: 253-4) - mirrored in the split within the first Eritrean Liberation Army, the ELF, when Christian elements founded a second, competing organization with predominantly Christian leadership, the EPLF (¹⁰⁹⁸, 141; ¹⁰⁹⁹, 8). The ELF had been "heavily Muslim in membership and orientation" and promoted an "Arab Eritrea" (¹¹⁰⁰, 8; see also ¹¹⁰¹, 23). Significantly, ELF claims were not only for a separate Eritrean state but also against domination of Muslims by Christians (¹¹⁰², 238), and apparently there was a massacre of Christian recruits by an ELF security commander (¹¹⁰³, 24). As a consequence, the Ethiopian government was able to recruit Christian Eritreans to fight against the ELF (¹¹⁰⁴, 23). After the founding of the EPLF, the two organizations even fought sort of a "civil war" against each other (ending with the elimination of the ELF).

Today, this ethno-religious division seems to be latently existing and possibly resurfacing (¹¹⁰⁵, 666; ¹¹⁰⁶, 474-5). But it is hard to assess of how much salience it really is in the national political space of today's Eritrea. There seems to be no national, internally operating (opposition) organization claiming to represent Muslims, Christians or any other ethnic group. However, the EIJM rebel organization which also originated in the split between Muslims and Christians during the independence struggle (¹¹⁰⁷, 78-81) is an Islamist grouping (based outside of Eritrea) appealing to Eritrean Muslims and making clear ethno-religious claims. It condemns the regime in power (or its predecessor EPLF) as "Christian chauvinist" (¹¹⁰⁸, 83-4) and states as its goals the restoring of Islam "to its rightful place of honor in Eritrea" (¹¹⁰⁹, 84) and the establishment of an Islamic state (¹¹¹⁰, 241). Thus, based on this conflict and in the light of the historical religious rift, it is appropriate to see as the main ethnic rift in independent Eritrea the religious division between Muslims and Christians.

¹⁰⁸⁷ [Iyob, 1997]

¹⁰⁸⁸ [Bereketiab, 2002]

¹⁰⁸⁹ [Iyob, 1997]

¹⁰⁹⁰ [Tronvoll, 1998]

¹⁰⁹¹ [Jacquin-Berdal, 2002]

¹⁰⁹⁴ [Ellingson, 1977]

¹⁰⁹⁵ [Iyob, 1997]

¹⁰⁹⁶ [Clapham, 2001]

¹⁰⁹⁷ [Pool, 1998]

¹⁰⁹⁸ [Ofcansky, 2004]

¹¹⁰⁵ [Iyob, 1997]

¹¹⁰⁶ [Tronvoll, 1998]

¹¹⁰⁷ [Medhanie, 1994]

¹¹⁰⁸ [Medhanie, 1994]

¹¹⁰⁹ [Medhanie, 1994]

A special note concerns the (Muslim) nomadic Afar group: The Afar have pursued their own ethno-nationalist agenda through their representative organizations, the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Union Front (ARDUF, with its military wing Ugugumo) and the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization which have made calls for Afar secession/autonomy. While ARDFUF has generally been more active in Ethiopia as opposed to the RSADFO, both groups have generally claimed to represent Eritrean Afars (¹¹¹¹; ¹¹¹², 6). This has led to their political discrimination by the Eritrean state (¹¹¹³). Therefore, 3 politically relevant ethnic groups are listed: Christians, Afar, and Other Muslims.

The population figures given in the U.S. State Department Background Notes (Christians 50%, Muslims 48%) should probably be corrected: The State Department's own "International Religious Freedom Report 2009" for Eritrea states that Muslims make up 50% of the population. Subtracting the 2% with indigenous beliefs (indicated both in the US Department of State 2012 Background Notes and the Religious Freedom Report) from the remaining 50% gives an estimated 48% of Christians. The Afars make up 5% of the country's population, according to the U.S. State Department Background Notes. That leaves the category "Other Muslims" with 45%.

Within the former EPLF – although rather Christian-dominated – Muslims had formed an important part of both the leadership and the ordinary fighters and the organization was essentially multi-ethnic (¹¹¹⁴, 24, 28, 34; ¹¹¹⁵, 12). Equally, its direct successor PFDJ and, more importantly, the cabinet seem to have always included both Muslims and Christians (see information about cabinet members in the "Afrika Jahrbücher" 1993-2003 (¹¹¹⁶; section on Eritrea). Eritrea's very powerful president, Isaias Afewerki, is Christian (Eritrean Orthodox). Therefore, the Christians are coded as "senior partner" and the Other Muslims as "junior partner" for the period between 1993 and 1999. The Afars are coded as discriminated.

2000-2008: Afewerki did continue to rule in an authoritarian way with the 1997 constitution still not implemented. The government exercised strict, unlimited control over the political, social and economic sphere allowing almost no civil liberties (¹¹¹⁷).

Regarding the ethno-religious power distribution, there is no evidence of any significant change between Christians and Muslims. The U.S. State Department's Human Rights Reports of 2008 and 2009 report that some senior government and party officials are members of the Tigre group - which is a Muslim group. The upholding of Islam can also be seen in the fact that Shari'a law can be applied to family cases in Eritrea when both involved parties are Muslims. (Islam is also one of the four legally allowed religious communities in Eritrea, together with Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism and the Eritrean Evangelical Church.) (USStateDepartment)). Thus, the last period (2000-2005) is extended to the year of 2009.

The U.S. State Department's HR Reports report government and

¹¹¹¹ [Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2014]

¹¹¹² [Bertelsmann Country Report, 2010-2014]

¹¹¹³ [Minorities at Risk Project, 2009]

¹¹¹⁴ [Pool, 1998]

¹¹¹⁵ [Turton, 2006]

¹¹¹⁶ [Institut für Afrikakunde, 1993-2003]

¹¹¹⁷ [Freedom House Country Reports, 2007-2013]

societal discrimination against the Kunama group since 2000 (¹¹¹⁸; see also ¹¹¹⁹). The Kunama - allegedly culturally distinct from most Eritrean citizens - have resisted integration into national society, are viewed with suspicion for having backed a rival group instead of the EPLF during the independence war, and are also seen now as opponents of the regime. Thus, a new period is introduced from 2000 on with another politically relevant ethnic group, the Kunama, coded as "discriminated". The Kunama are mainly Moslems (see Joshua Project: <http://www.joshuaproject.net/countries.php?rog3=ER>), and according to the U.S. State Department's Background Notes they make up 2% of Eritrea's population (¹¹²⁰). Thus, from 2000 on, the category "Other Muslims" is listed with a relative population size of 43%.

2009-2013: According to assessments, Kunama and afar people continue to suffer from discrimination by the Eritrean state (¹¹²¹; ¹¹²²). In addition, reports also suggest that ethnic Saho are also target of state-led discrimination. Indeed, according to reports 40 Saho elders (also referred as Saho Muslim scholars) were arbitrarily arrested in 2008 and remain in custody to this day, with no charge leveled against them (¹¹²³, 18, see also ¹¹²⁴, 24). In addition, it appears that members of the Saho people were also the victims of resettlement program, in which land belonging to ethnic Saho was confiscated and reallocated to highlanders. No financial compensation has been offered for the loss of land incurred by the Saho (¹¹²⁵, 17). In reaction to abuses, the National Democratic Front for the Liberation of Eritrean Saho was formed in 2009 (¹¹²⁶) and has waged a low-level insurgency since (¹¹²⁷, 6). The Saho are predominantly Muslims and number around 4% of the population (¹¹²⁸, 24; ¹¹²⁹). In lights of these events, the Saho are therefore coded as politically relevant from 2009 onwards, with a Discriminated power status. Thus, from 2009 on, the category "Other Muslims" is listed with a relative population size of 39%.

Regarding the salience of Christian and Muslim identities, there is no indication suggesting either a strengthening or a reducing of the relevance of these identities for the period. In addition, the coding of the Christians as Senior Partners appears to be justified as Christians (especially highlanders) are perceived as holding a majority of the executive power, while Tigre (Muslims) continue to hold a number of party and government positions (¹¹³⁰, 12-13; ¹¹³¹).

¹¹¹⁸ [United States Government State Department, 2007-2013]

¹¹¹⁹ [Freedom House Country Reports, 2007-2013]

¹¹²⁰ [United States Government State Department, 2007-2013]

¹¹²¹ [United States Government State Department, 2007-2013]

¹¹²² [Freedom House Country Reports, 2007-2013]

¹¹²³ [Bertelsmann Country Report, 2010-2014]

¹¹²⁴ [Amnesty International, 2013]

¹¹²⁵ [Bertelsmann Country Report, 2010-2014]

¹¹³⁰ [International Crisis Group, 2010]

¹¹³¹ [United States Government State Department, 2007-2013]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Eritrea

From 1993 until 1999

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Christians	0.48	SENIOR PARTNER
Other Muslims	0.45	JUNIOR PARTNER
Afar	0.05	DISCRIMINATED

From 2000 until 2008

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Christians	0.48	SENIOR PARTNER
Other Muslims	0.43	JUNIOR PARTNER
Afar	0.05	DISCRIMINATED
Kunama	0.02	DISCRIMINATED

From 2009 until 2013

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Christians	0.48	SENIOR PARTNER
Other Muslims	0.39	JUNIOR PARTNER
Afar	0.05	DISCRIMINATED
Saho	0.04	DISCRIMINATED
Kunama	0.02	DISCRIMINATED



Figure 243: Political status of ethnic groups in Eritrea during 1993-1999.



Figure 244: Political status of ethnic groups in Eritrea during 2000-2008.

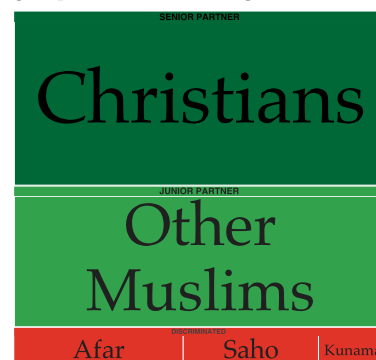


Figure 245: Political status of ethnic groups in Eritrea during 2009-2013.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Eritrea

From 1993 until 1999

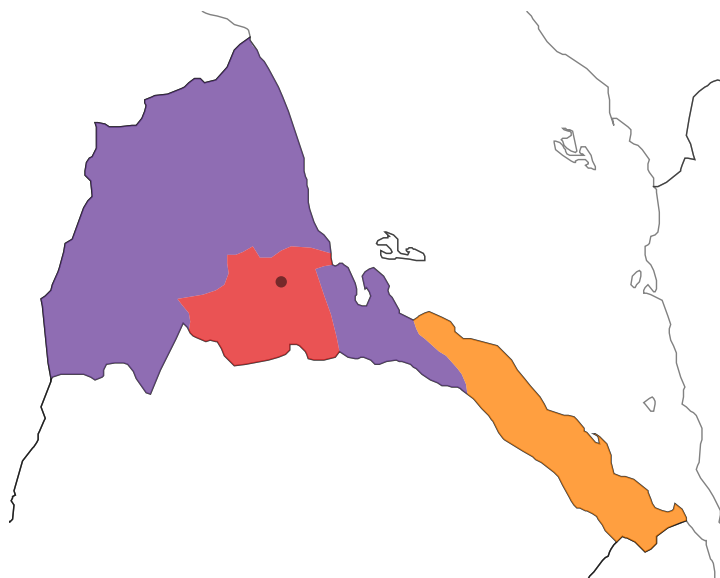


Figure 246: Map of ethnic groups in Eritrea during 2009-2013.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
Other Muslims	81 691	Regionally based
Afar	21 455	Regionally based
Christians	17 486	Regional & urban

Table 73: List of ethnic groups in Eritrea during 1993-1999.

From 2000 until 2008

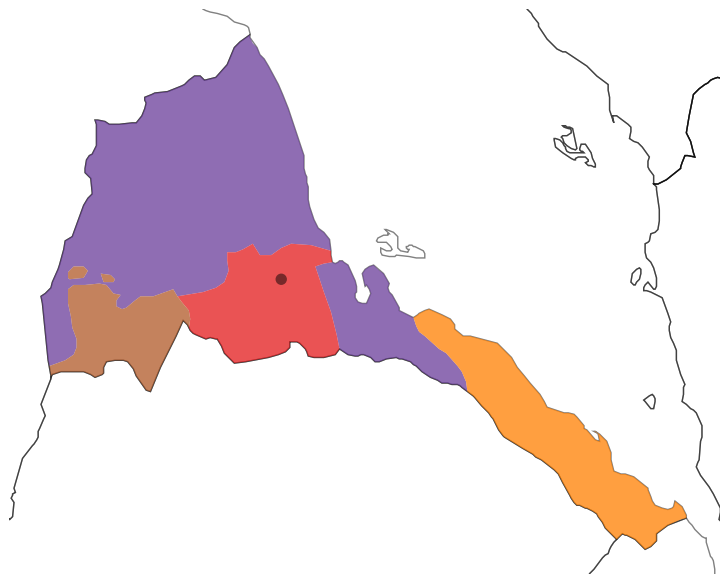


Figure 247: Map of ethnic groups in Eritrea during 2009-2013.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
Other Muslims	69 726	Regionally based
Afar	21 455	Regionally based
Christians	17 486	Regional & urban
Kunama	11 964	Regionally based

Table 74: List of ethnic groups in Eritrea during 2000-2008.

From 2009 until 2013

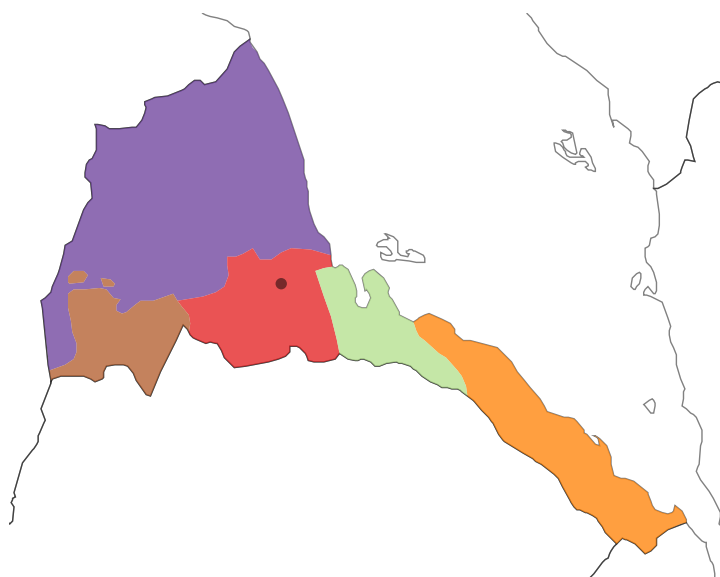


Figure 248: Map of ethnic groups in Eritrea during 2009-2013.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Other Muslims	59 160	Regionally based
■	Afar	21 455	Regionally based
■	Christians	17 486	Regional & urban
■	Kunama	11 964	Regionally based
■	Saho	10 567	Regionally based

Table 75: List of ethnic groups in Eritrea during 2009-2013.

Conflicts in Eritrea

Starting on 1993-12-16

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Eritrea	EIJM - AS		1993-12-16			

Starting on 1998-05-06

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Eritrea	Government of Ethiopia		1998-05-06			

Starting on 2008-06-10

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Djibouti	Government of Eritrea		2008-06-10			