

ERITREA

Afars

Activity: 1993-2020

General notes

- The Afar live in the Afar triangle, a deep valley region that is part of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Eritrea (Minahan 2002: 41). They are mostly Muslim nomadic pastoralists. The part of Eritrea that they live is one of the hottest in the world and suffers from drought and famine. (MRGI) The imposition of nation-state borders during the period of European colonisation divided the Afars and weakened them politically.
- A border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia between 1998 and 2000 saw the Afar stuck in the middle, with both sides playing the Afar off each other (MRGI). The main Afar armed organization, ARDUF called for a ceasefire on both sides, and tried to remain neutral, but many Afar people were displaced (Minahan 2002: 44).
- Eritrea is one of the most repressive regimes in the world. Reports of human rights violations, repression against any political opposition to the ruling party led by President Isaias Afwerki, has led to an exodus of refugees and one of the most totalitarian countries in the world. (Taylor 2015) There is very limited room for any kind of political organization, including space for self-determination of the Afar.

Movement start and end dates

- The Afars of Eritrea, along with the Afars of Djibouti and Ethiopia, formed the Afar Liberation Front (ALF) in 1975. This was the first Afar self-determination movement, though the Afars in Eritrea later came to be represented by the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Union (ARDU) and its military wing, Ugugumo. Since Eritrea did not become independent until 1993, we begin to code the movement under the header of Eritrea in 1993, but indicate that the movement, through the AFDU's involvement in the Eritrean war of independence, was active and violent prior to independence, though non-violent immediately prior to independence (the Afars in Ethiopia are coded with LVIOLSD from 1975-1989, but not in 1991-1993).
- ARDU was against Eritrea's independence, mainly because it would divide Afar territory for which the ARDU continues to claim autonomy. Rather, they sought a union between the Afars of Eritrea and those of Ethiopia in an autonomous entity within a federal Ethiopia. This plan excludes Djiboutian Afars, but this may be a limit imposed merely to appease French sensitivity.
- The Afars in Eritrea were caught between the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and Ethiopia's mainly Tigrean armed forces in their long-standing dispute as each state has attempted to undermine the other by seeking Afari assistance against one another.
- Since the 1990s, a group called Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (ARDUF) was politically active as a rebel group that straddles Eritrea and Ethiopia (Ethio 2007; Haddadi 2012; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000; Minahan 1996, 2002; MAR).
- Another Afar group is the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organisation (RSA-DO), which was formed in the mid-1990s. In November 2012, RSA-DO reportedly "called for [a] public uprising" against the government (see ICG n.d.). The RSA-DO were based in Ethiopia and have received funding from the Ethiopian government (Horne 2017). In August 2014, the RSA-DO stated that its aim was "to topple regime" and called "for new constitution and democratic federalism" (see ICG n.d.).
- Another organization (though based outside of Eritrea) is the Eritrean Afar State in Exile (EASE), which made calls for independence. In June 2018, EASE changed its name to the Eritrean Afar National Congress (EANC), describing itself as a political organization that advocates for self-rule and autonomy, indigenous rights, and constitutional reform (EANC 2022). The group had

earlier called for independence, as per the evolution of its mission statement from EASE in 2014 to EANC in 2018. [start date: 1975; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- Afars in Eritrea are represented by several organizations:
 - o The Afar Revolutionary Democratic Union (ARDUF) and its military wing, Ugugumo. According to the UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia, ARDUF is “said to be fighting for a federal or confederal Afar state”. The same is being written about Ugugumo (OECD 2010).
 - o Another Afar group, the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization, has made claims for both secession and autonomy (ICG n.d.; Minorities at Risk).
 - o A third organization called Eritrean Afar State in Exile (EASE) made claims for independence until, in 2018, it appears to have changed its claim to autonomy (see EANC 2018a; 2018b).
- Overall, claims for both autonomy and independence have been made. It is not clear which claim is dominant, so we code the more radical claim. [1993-2020: independence claim]

Independence claims

- See above. Note: the independence movement emerged in Ethiopia (see Ethiopia). [start date: 1975; end date: ongoing]

Irredentist claims

NA

Claimed territory

- The territory claimed by the Afars in Eritrea is Dankalia, an area in the southern part of Eritrea (Minahan 2002: 41). We code this claim based on a map by the Eritrean Afar National Congress (2019; also see 2018c).

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- We found evidence for casualties in several years, due mainly to a rebel group called RSA-DO. In two years (2008 and 2017), we found qualitative evidence for more than 25 casualties:
 - o RSA-DO claims to have killed at least 250 government troops in 2008 (Tekle 2009).
 - o In October and November 2017, at least six people were reportedly killed and “another roughly 50 people were injured” during protests in Asmara. The violence involved members of RSA-DO – and the violence was corroborated by the U.S. Embassy in Eritrea which “reported gunfire at several locations in Asmara due to protests”. The Eritrean government denied that any casualties occurred instead declaring that what took place was “hardly breaking news” (see Voanews, 2017). According to the RSA-DO, the events led to a series of protests that resulted in the deaths of 28 people and more than 100 injured according.

- We also found evidence for violence associated with RSA-DO in several other years:
 - o On 1 November 2007, RSA-DO rebels reportedly attacked and killed 23 Eritrean soldiers, wounding another 15, and freed soldiers jailed in the Afar region (Reuters, 2007).
 - o On 26 January 2009, RSA-DO reportedly killed “at least 20 government soldiers”, wounding 30 others at a military camp in Denkalya (Tekle 2009).
 - o In October 2011, members of RSA-DO and the Eritrean National Salvation Front reportedly carried out a raid in various locations across southern Eritrea, killing 12 government soldiers and wounding another 15. According to the article “RSA-DO says its operations are in response to Asmara’s refusal to grant autonomy to the Afar” (see Maasho 2011).
 - o On 28 January 2018, members of RSA-DO “reportedly killed six security forces in the Northern Red Sea region”.
- The problem with many of these reports is that they cannot be independently verified (Horne 2017).
- As with other claims of killings or murders, these numbers cannot be independently verified. In many cases, the figures reported stem from the RSA-DO, which systematically over-estimates and exaggerates casualties while the Eritrean government systematically denies there being casualties (Horne 2017). Other sources do report gross human rights violations and systematic violence in Eritrea (see CBC 2017), but overall the evidence is too thin to code for us to code LVIOLSD in any year. Notably, none of our standard sources (in particular, UCDP/PRIO) report a separatist armed conflict. [NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- While governing themselves in largely independent tribes for much of their history, a confederation of Afar sultanates emerged in the 12th century (Minahan 2002: 43). Wars with Ethiopia in the 16th century however, pushed the Afar into the arid desert areas.
- Italian colonisation started when they established a base at coastal Assab in 1869, and created an administration for the region in 1882 (Minahan 2002: 43).
- As the Italians pushed eastwards, closer to Ethiopia, an agreement was reached between the three major powers of the region, and the Afar homeland was split between Italy, France, and Ethiopia in 1896, dividing the area into what is known as the ‘Afar Triangle.’ (Minahan 2016: 8) The Italian part of the Afar triangle is now part of modern day Eritrea, the Afar thus living under Italian colonial rule until 1941. The Afar under the French came under what is now Djibouti, and the lowland Afar part is still in Ethiopian territory.
- From 1941 until 1952 Eritrea was under British administration after Italian defeat in World War II. In 1952, the UN General Assembly decided that Eritrea should be part of a Federation with Ethiopia (Hewitt and Cheatham 2000: 87).
- In 1962, Ethiopian leader, Hailie Selassie annexed Eritrea, and a nearly 30 year war of independence began (Danver 2015: 611). While several resistance groups emerged in this fighting, it was the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) that emerged as the dominant group (Cunningham 2015: 207) taking control of Eritrea in May 1991 (Danver 2015: 611). This was confirmed by a referendum in 1993. (EPR Atlas: 646) According to Minahan, the Afars rejected Eritrean independence as “a further partition of their national territory.” (Minahan 2002: 44) Similarly, Dias and Dorman (2019) state that the Afars of Eritrea “did not embrace the war for independence as their own cause, even if some joined the separatist insurgency.” (Dias and Dorman 2019: 404)
- Eritrean Independence catalysed the formation of the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front (AFDUF) in October 1991, partly because of the creation of another border that would further divide the Afar whose traditional pastoral livelihoods depended on mobility (UCDP). The ARDUF is also active in Ethiopia.
- In 1991 Mengistu was ousted and the government of the People’s Republic of Ethiopia overthrown. The Addis Ababa Transitional Conference of July 1991 (‘Democratic and Peaceful Transitional Conference’) established a transitional government in Ethiopia. The Afar Liberation

Front (ALF) became part of the new ruling coalition government even if it has remained vehemently opposed to the central government. The ALF's participation in the coalition government concerns power access at the center and is thus not coded. However, with the end of the civil war and the ousting of the Derg, a process of decentralization was initiated. The Transitional Charter which worked as an interim constitution acknowledged the right to self-determination for nations and set forth the goal of establishing regional and local administrations based on ethnic lines (Aalen 2002; Ayenew 2002; Assefa and Gebre-Egziabher 2007). This change from a unitary to a federal government is coded as an autonomy concession. [1991: autonomy concession]

Concessions and restrictions

- The Eritrean state pursued a “one-state policy...to create a new-brand of Eritrean nationalism with no or little understanding of diversity” (Yasin 2008: 58) and soon after independence in 1993 reduced the number of provinces in an effort to “improve national cohesion”. According to MRGI, the reduction occurred in 1995 while Yasin suggests 1994. According to EPR Atlas, (2021) this was “intended to undermine ethno-regional (self-)identification of the population.” (EPR Atlas 2021: 647). We code a single autonomy restriction in 1993 to reflect Eritrea's centralizing policy, which reversed an earlier move towards federalization when the Afars had still been part of Ethiopia. [1993: autonomy restriction]
- According to the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea (COI), Eritrean authorities have systematically committed crimes of persecution and eviction against the Afar people in Dankalia since 1991 (EANC 2018c). Concerns about systematic human rights abuses were also raised by the UN General Assembly in May 2013 (UN General Assembly 2013) and the United Nations Human Rights Council (2015). Violations of human rights are not a restriction as defined here.
- We found reports from the United Nations that the Eritrean government has continuously pursued a “land policy that has legitimized forcible displacement and dispossession of indigenous populations and minorities” and that Afar people “have been forcefully evicted” from their land, excluded from access to their livelihood (salt mines and fishing), and no guarantees, compensation or respect for their property rights and traditional way of life have been made (UNHR 2018). Evictions of this kind could be seen as restrictions of land rights, but the evidence we found suggests that these policies were of a continuous nature and therefore are picked up by the above 1993 restriction.

Regional autonomy

NA

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

- [1993: host change (new)]

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Afars
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Afar
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	53103000

Power access

- We draw on EPR, which codes Eritrea's Afars as discriminated against throughout. [1993-2020: discriminated]

Group size

- We draw on EPR, which suggests that Afars make up 5% of Ethiopia's population. [0.05]
 - o Note: The World Factbook reports 4% instead, which suggests a total Afar population of approx. 250,000 (CIA 2022). Afar groups claim a much higher group size of 600,000 to 800,000 (EANC n.d.).

Regional concentration

- EPR codes the Afars as regionally concentrated, though EPR applies a lower bar. MAR also codes the Afars as regionally concentrated and suggests that the Afars make up the predominant proportion of the population of their regional base and that >75% of all Afars in Eritrea live there. Minahan (2002: 41) suggests that Afars make up >90% of the population of their regional base, though the figure also includes areas in neighboring Djibouti and Ethiopia. [regionally concentrated]

Kin

- Minahan (2002: 41) suggests that there are numerically significant (>100k) Afar populations in Ethiopia and Djibouti. This matches information from both MAR and EPR. [kin in adjacent country]

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