



AFRICAN NARRATIVES

A Tale of Two Elections: Conflict in Ethiopia, Stability in Cabo Verde



Author:



Kawthar Ahmed

Political Science Researcher

Published by:

African Narratives



AFRICAN NARRATIVES

Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of the general and legislative elections conducted in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Republic of Cabo Verde (Cape Verde) during 2026. The primary objective is to evaluate how distinct political, institutional, and security environments shape the execution, integrity, and outcomes of electoral processes across the African continent. While both case studies underscore the foundational role of elections as a mechanism for democratic representation, their divergent trajectories demonstrate that the efficacy of electoral procedures remains structurally dependent on institutional stability and the surrounding security climate.

In Ethiopia, the general elections held on June 1, 2026, highlighted a stark tension between technological modernization and localized instability. Despite significant procedural advancements—such as the digitization of voter registries and the pilot integration of electronic identity verification platforms—persistent armed conflicts and deep political rifts in regions like Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray forced the postponement or total suspension of voting in numerous constituencies. Consequently, these disruptions restricted the geographical inclusivity of the ballot and suppressed overall voter turnout, proving that technical proficiency cannot substitute for a stable, secure political environment.

Conversely, the legislative elections in Cabo

Verde on May 17, 2026, transpired within a highly resilient legal and administrative framework characterized by long-term institutional continuity. This stable ecosystem facilitated a peaceful, orderly, and widely accepted transition of the parliamentary majority to the primary opposition party. Independent electoral oversight bodies and clear regulatory structures successfully mitigated systemic friction, ensuring that constitutional institutions continued to operate standardly and that all political actors accepted the certified results.

A broader cross-case synthesis reveals that while digital transformation and administrative modernization represent positive, growing trends across African electoral landscapes, the utility of these technical tools is fundamentally contingent upon independent judiciaries, robust statutory guardrails, and high levels of baseline political trust. Furthermore, the comparison highlights the necessity of expanding and protecting political participation, whether by seamlessly integrating large diaspora communities or by actively dismantling the security and structural barriers that disenfranchise specific domestic regions. Ultimately, this study concludes that democratic consolidation in Africa does not rely merely on the mechanical execution of periodic voting, but on a state's broader capacity to manage pluralism, enforce institutional independence, and maintain a level playing field within a durable constitutional framework.

Introduction

The African continent is currently witnessing rapid, highly divergent political transformations that challenge conventional assumptions regarding democratic transition. This widening variance has reinvigorated critical academic debates surrounding the capacity of periodic elections to generate genuine political legitimacy and foster long-term institutional stability. While certain nations have successfully institutionalized elections as a fluid mechanism for the peaceful transfer of power and the consolidation of mutual trust among competing actors, others continue to confront severe structural, administrative, and security constraints that undermine the efficacy of democratic governance and skew electoral outcomes. Within this shifting paradigm, the macro-electoral events of 2026 offer an ideal analytical window to examine the underlying dynamics of contemporary African democracy.

This report presents a systematic comparative study of the 2026 elections in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Republic of Cabo Verde, treating them as contrasting models operating in vastly different political, social, and geopolitical environments. By bridging East and West African experiences, the analysis addresses a core research question:

To what extent did the 2026 elections in Ethiopia

and Cabo Verde reflect the level of development of democratic practice in Africa, and what was their impact on enhancing political stability and institutional legitimacy?

The significance of this investigation lies at the intersection of its theoretical and applied dimensions. Structurally, it establishes a rigorous analytical model to evaluate how formal electoral designs interact with volatile versus stable domestic realities. Professionally, the study tests the relationship between procedural democracy and substantive political legitimacy, contrasting Cabo Verde's seamless integration of legal processes with Ethiopia's struggle to conduct inclusive voting amidst intense ethnic pluralism and active regional conflicts. Furthermore, it provides a functional framework to assess voter behavior, evaluate the operational independence of state electoral boards, and project the broader future of democratic governance across the continent.

To explore these dynamics thoroughly, the report is organized into four interconnected components. It begins with an in-depth examination of the Ethiopian general elections, shifts to an evaluation of the Cabo Verdean legislative submittal, engages in a multi-variable comparative analysis, and concludes by extracting macro-level policy implications for the future of African governance.



Section I: The 2026 Elections in Ethiopia

The general elections conducted in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia on June 1, 2026, marked a critical, high-stakes milestone in the country's volatile political trajectory following the post-2018 transitional phase. These elections occurred within a highly friction-filled environment, defined by intense institutional debates over the sovereign architecture of the federal system, unresolved historical grievances between peripheral regions and the central state, and acute security crises that have destabilized the nation during recent years.

This section analyzes the direct correlation between technical advancements in electoral administration and the severe geographical and political exclusions imposed by localized warfare. While federal authorities implemented sophisticated operational upgrades to secure the ballot, the persistent lack of physical security in multiple regions deeply compromised the competitive integrity and overall inclusivity of the national process.

I. The Political and Constitutional Environment

The 2026 electoral cycle in Ethiopia was fundamentally overshadowed by a fundamental, ongoing debate regarding the constitutional nature of the federal state and the legal mechanisms required to manage national and ethnic pluralism. Over the preceding years, two diametrically opposed political visions crystallized, creating deep systemic polarization across the country:

• The Unifying Centralist Vision:

Spearheaded by the federal government under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the ruling Prosperity Party, this orientation advocates for a consolidated model of national integration. Rooted in the philosophical concept of "Synergy" (Medemer), it seeks to construct a cohesive,

unifying national identity by strengthening central federal institutions and expanding cross-regional state cooperation, while simultaneously reforming what it views as divisive regional autonomy structures.

• The Regional Autonomist Vision

Championed by a diverse coalition of ethno-regional political forces and local movements, this current maintains that the strict preservation of the 1995 Constitution is an existential safeguard for managing Ethiopia's deep multi-ethnic diversity. These actors adamantly defend the extensive decentralized powers historically granted to individual regions, emphasizing local autonomy and resisting any federal maneuvers toward administrative centralization.

This profound philosophical divide manifested directly in severe security breakdowns across several critical federal territories, directly impeding the logistics of the election. In the Tigray region, despite the signing of the historic Pretoria Peace Agreement in 2022, deep-seated political and administrative disputes persisted between the central government and entrenched local factions, preventing the completion of fundamental preparatory arrangements required to open the polls.

Simultaneously, the Amhara region suffered from ongoing, intermittent military confrontations between federal forces and localized armed groups that had simmered since 2023. These clashes imposed immense logistical and security roadblocks, making it impossible to conduct safe political campaigns or distribute voting materials in vast rural swathes. In Oromia, the active presence of insurgent opposition movements disrupted local governance, leaving election officials unable to secure polling stations or guarantee the safety of voters in several vulnerable constituencies.



Furthermore, the legal and regulatory space surrounding the elections sparked significant international and domestic controversy. The federal government enacted strict regulatory oversight on civil society organizations, independent election monitors, and media outlets, arguing that such measures were vital to maintain national stability and curb the spread of dangerous misinformation within active conflict zones. However, opposition parties and human rights monitoring groups strongly contested this rationale, asserting that the restrictions shrank the public sphere, suppressed open dissent, and heavily diluted political pluralism.

Ultimately, the Ethiopian elections occurred at a problematic crossroads where technical administrative evolution collided with structural violence, making any assessment of the election dependent not just on procedural metrics, but on the fragmented security environment in which it took place.

II. Map of Political Forces and Competing Parties

While the formal roster of the 2026 elections suggested a vibrant, pluralistic contest—with between 42 and 48 registered political parties and dozens of independent candidates entering the race—this numerical diversity masked massive structural inequalities. Glaring asymmetries in organizational infrastructure, financial

resources, campaign spending power, and geographic access severely distorted the competitive landscape. The participating political landscape was bifurcated into two primary camps:

• The Ruling Hegemon

The Prosperity Party operated as the country's most cohesive, financially dominant, and geographically pervasive political apparatus. Leveraging its sweeping control over both federal institutions and regional bureaucracies, the party mobilized an expansive organizational network inherited from the nation's previous ruling coalitions. Its platform focused heavily on projecting economic competence, highlighting robust infrastructural developments, and capitalizing on high macroeconomic growth rates forecasted by international financial institutions. Its messaging combined references to strategic water and regional integration projects with a powerful defense of a unified national identity to rally its base.

• The Fragmented Opposition

In stark contrast, opposition forces were defined by extreme structural fragmentation, narrow ethnic or geographic anchoring, and a severe lack of material resources. The "Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice" party (EZEMA), led by Berhanu Nega, stood out as a prominent trans-ethnic, citizenship-based alternative. Alongside EZEMA were traditional, ethno-regional

opposition entities like the "National Movement for Amhara" (NaMA) and the "Oromo Federalist Congress" (OFC), both of which centered their

platforms on preserving regional autonomy, defending local rights, and resisting constitutional revisions.

[2026 ETHIOPIAN ELECTORAL LANDSCAPE]

PROSPERITY PARTY	OPPOSITION FORCES
Led by PM Abiy Ahmed	Fragmented / Regionally Isolated
National "Synergy" (Medemer)	Trans-Ethnic: EZEMA (Berhanu Nega)
Controlled state infrastructure	Regional: NaMA & OFC
Won 75 constituencies by acclamation	Fractured by security blocks & boycotts

Opposition movements faced severe administrative hurdles and security restrictions that crippled their capacity to campaign effectively outside the capital city of Addis Ababa, particularly within the unstable zones of Amhara and Oromia. This hostile operational environment was exacerbated by the institutional architecture of the electoral system itself. Ethiopia's reliance on a first-past-the-post (FPTP) single-member constituency system naturally penalized small, fragmented parties while structurally favoring the highly entrenched, resource-rich ruling party.

Compounding these structural challenges, prominent political groups like the "Oromo Liberation Front" chose to boycott the process entirely, while the "Tigray People's Liberation Front" was legally excluded by regulators for failing to meet formal compliance standards. As a direct result of these boycotts and exclusions, the Prosperity Party ran completely uncontested, winning by acclamation in approximately 75 electoral constituencies, including 65 seats in Oromia and 10 in Amhara. This lack of genuine, on-the-ground competition turned the electoral exercise into a mechanism that consolidated the ruling party's institutional hegemony rather than a democratic contest.

III. Administration of the Electoral Process and Geographical Representation

The National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) was tasked with executing the 2026 general elections, focusing heavily on upgrading organizational workflows and integrating technical innovations to boost administrative transparency. However, the starkly uneven security landscape across different federal states severely disrupted execution mechanisms, directly compromising the geographical inclusivity of the vote.

1. Technical Development and Voter Registration

The 2026 cycle marked Ethiopia's most aggressive push into digital electoral governance. For the first time, NEBE rolled out electronic portals for candidate and voter registration, enabling self-registration via mobile devices and web platforms. Crucially, the board executed a pilot integration with "Fayda," the national digital identity platform, to verify voter identities and eliminate duplicate registrations.

These technical reforms enabled the successful registration of approximately 54 million voters and the rollout of between 48,000 and 52,000 polling stations nationwide. Nevertheless, this digital transformation hit major roadblocks, including stark regional disparities in basic telecommunications infrastructure, weak cellular networks in remote rural areas, and complex software glitches when integrating disparate local registration databases into a single centralized system.

2. Financing and Technical Support

The massive financial requirements of the election were met through a combination of domestic state funding and international technical assistance. The Ethiopian Parliament allocated a substantial state budget of approximately 10.5 billion Ethiopian Birr to cover primary operational logistics, poll management, and localized staff training across municipal administrations.

Concurrently, NEBE received critical external financial and technical backing from international development partners. Chief among these was the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which managed a donor-backed fund estimated at 7 million USD. This international capital was strategically funneled into building out NEBE's core IT infrastructure, improving field

logistics, and training personnel, while also providing basic compliance workshops for participating political parties.

3. Geographical Representation and Challenges of Electoral Inclusivity

Despite these technical and financial investments, severe regional security crises fundamentally broke the geographical continuity of the ballot. Facing insurmountable physical dangers, NEBE was forced to officially postpone or entirely suspend voting in 46 constituencies nationwide. This reduction altered the institutional makeup of the House of Peoples' Representatives, cutting the number of contested parliamentary seats from its constitutional total of 547 down to 501 seats.

Constituency Disruption Metrics	Figures
Constitutional Parliamentary Seats	547 seats
Constituencies Postponed / Suspended	46 constituencies
Actual Seats Contested in 2026	501 seats
Total Registered Voters	~54 million
Total Polling Stations Established	48,000 – 52,000

This sweeping suspension entirely disenfranchised the Tigray region due to unresolved post-war administrative gridlocks. It also affected a significant number of constituencies across Amhara and Oromia where active warfare made safe polling impossible. In an attempt to rescue voter turnout figures in less volatile areas, NEBE extended voting hours in high-density urban centers and carved out an extra day of balloting specifically to allow internally displaced persons (IDPs) and deployed military personnel to vote. While these adjustments demonstrated administrative adaptability, they could not fix the structural exclusion of entire geographic regions.

4. Electoral Observation and Field Supervision

The 2026 elections saw a significant withdrawal of traditional, high-profile Western international observer missions, leaving continental and

al bodies to lead external oversight. The African Union (AU) deployed a dedicated election observation mission, working alongside a monitoring team from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to evaluate compliance with regional democratic charters.

Domestically, NEBE accredited an assortment of local civil society organizations to monitor polling, ballot counting, and regional tabulation workflows. Preliminary reports issued by the AU and IGAD missions commended NEBE's visible improvements in technical administration and procedural efficiency. However, both missions explicitly noted that the severe localized insecurity and the omission of entire regional populations deeply impacted the overall geographical inclusivity of the process and prevented a level playing field.



IV. Election Outcomes and Political Implications

The final results published by NEBE directly mirrored the structural imbalances characterizing contemporary Ethiopian politics. The ruling Prosperity Party secured a landslide victory across the vast majority of contested constituencies, guaranteeing its right to form the next government and cementing the parliamentary hegemony it established during the 2021 election cycle. Conversely, opposition representation was reduced to marginal levels, with NaMA winning only a small handful of localized seats. This outcome carries profound implications for the future of the Ethiopian state:

- **Regenerating Legalistic Legitimacy:** From a tactical perspective, the federal government successfully utilized the formal execution of the election to project institutional capacity and demonstrate the continuity of its post-2018 political reform agenda. By pointing to high registration metrics and robust voter turnouts within stable, urban bastions like Addis Ababa, the administration sought a domestic and international counter-narrative against criticisms regarding the country's democratic backsliding.

- **The Deepening Consensus Crisis:**

The results exposed an unaddressed gap between narrow procedural compliance and genuine, nationwide political consensus. Because entire demographic blocs and geographical territories—most notably Tigray and significant parts of Amhara and Oromia—were locked out of the vote, the resulting parliament lacks universal national integration. This structural exclusion undermines the election's capacity to build a durable social contract, keeping channels of armed resistance wide open.

- **Constitutional and Federal Re-engineering:**

Armed with an overwhelming legislative mandate in both the House of Peoples' Representatives and the House of Federation, the Prosperity Party now possesses the unchecked legislative leverage required to execute sweeping constitutional transformations. This absolute control could pave the way for a formal rewriting of the ethnic federal framework established by the 1995 Constitution, allowing the regime to shift the country toward a centralized governance model and aggressively project its power over sensitive strategic and regional security fronts across the Horn of Africa.

Section II: The Legislative Elections in Cabo Verde in 2026

On May 17, 2026, the Republic of Cabo Verde conducted legislative elections to fill all 72 seats of its National Assembly. These elections offered a compelling opportunity to study the mechanics of stable, pluralistic party competition within an

island nation that has long served as a model of democratic governance in West Africa—a region otherwise marked by institutional volatility and constitutional setbacks.

[2026 CABO VERDE PARLIAMENTARY MAP]

72 Total Seats

DOMESTIC CONSTITUENCIES	DIASPORA CONSTITUENCIES
(69 Seats)	3 Permanent Seats
Spread across island groups	1 Seat: Africa
	1 Seat: North & South America
	1 Seat: Europe & Rest of World

I. The Political and Party System in Cabo Verde

Cabo Verde's political landscape stands as an advanced baseline of constitutional durability and democratic maturity within West Africa. This system is built upon clear, respected structural and statutory pillars that guarantee a precise separation of powers, vibrant inter-party competition, and seamless transfers of governance.

1. Constitutional Structure and the Executive Relations Network

The 1992 Constitution of Cabo Verde, along with its subsequent revisions, established a hybrid, highly sophisticated semi-presidential governance framework. Executive and legislative competencies are explicitly divided between the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and the National Assembly:

- **The President of the Republic:** Elected directly via universal suffrage for a five-year term (limited to one consecutive re-election), the President serves as the primary symbol of state sovereignty and national unity. The presidency holds substantial constitutional powers, including chief command of the armed forces, high diplomatic representation abroad, restricted

veto power over parliamentary legislation, and the authority to dissolve the National Assembly under extreme constitutional crises. Crucially, the President formally appoints the Prime Minister, but must do so following strict institutional consultations with parliamentary factions, ensuring the pick directly aligns with the balance of power produced by the ballot box.

- **The Prime Minister (Head of Government):** Serving as the chief executive officer of the state, the Prime Minister is selected by the party or coalition that commands a majority within the National Assembly and remains directly, jointly accountable to the legislature. The Prime Minister holds direct authority over formulating and executing macro state policies, managing public administration, issuing executive decrees, and running day-to-day government operations.

This institutional design frequently requires the state to navigate periods of political cohabitation, where the President and the Prime Minister belong to rival parties. Cabo Verde's political elite has demonstrated remarkable sophistication in managing this dual-executive dynamic without triggering institutional gridlock. Prior to the 2026 vote, President José Maria Neves, historically

aligned with the center-left African Party for the Independence of Cabo Verde (PAICV), managed executive affairs alongside a government led by Prime Minister Ulisses Correia e Silva of the center-right Movement for Democracy (MpD). This arrangement maintained checks and balances without disrupting civil service delivery or legislative flow.

2. Party Structure and Competitive Pluralism

The party landscape in Cabo Verde is anchored by a stable, predictable two-party system that has endured since the nation transitioned to multi-party democracy in 1991. Two dominant, well-institutionalized political parties alternate power, both backed by clear ideologies and highly professionalized national organizations:

- **The African Party for the Independence of Cabo Verde (PAICV):**

Positioned on the center-left, PAICV champions social democracy and democratic socialism. Drawing on its historic roots as a national liberation movement, its platform emphasizes expansive social safety nets, state-led developmental investments, and structural poverty reduction.

- **The Movement for Democracy (MpD):**

Positioned on the center-right, the MpD is built upon political liberalism, market economics, and Christian democracy. Its programs prioritize private sector growth, deregulation, the aggressive attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI), and fiscal conservatism.

Operating alongside these two main poles is the Independent and Democratic Cabo Verdean Union (UCID). UCID functions as a conservative third force and a balancing bloc within the National Assembly, preventing party stagnation and ensuring niche ideological factions remain represented.

This multi-party landscape operates under strict judicial supervision enforced by the Constitutional Court. The legal framework includes powerful mechanisms to promote comprehensive social inclusivity, most notably the "Gender Quota

Law". This statute mandates that women must comprise at least 40% of all candidate lists submitted for legislative elections. To further institutionalize this, the state awards direct financial bonuses to political parties that exceed these benchmarks within their internal governance structures, driving progressive political development.

II. Trajectory of the Electoral Process in Cabo Verde in 2026

The execution of the legislative elections on May 17, 2026, demonstrated advanced organizational efficiency and procedural transparency. The process was jointly run by the General Directorate in Support of the Electoral Process (DGAPE) and the National Elections Commission (CNE), leveraging a cutting-edge technological and statutory infrastructure to secure the vote at home and abroad.

1. Digital Transformation and the Technical Role of NOSI

The operational success of the 2026 cycle relied on Cabo Verde's technological infrastructure, with technical oversight led by the Operational Information System Nucleus (NOSI). NOSI modernized the national voter registry by deploying biometric identity verification systems across all islands, successfully preventing voter duplication and registry tampering.

This digital network enabled local polling sub-committees to synchronize data instantly with CNE headquarters. It also provided public digital portals where citizens could instantly look up their designated polling stations, reducing administrative friction on election day. Crucially, this architecture permitted real-time, encrypted transmission of preliminary vote counts directly from local precincts to the media and public within hours of poll closures, boosting public trust.

2. Inclusivity of the Suffrage and Integration of the Voting Bloc

As an island nation with a massive global diaspora, Cabo Verde has structurally integrated its emigrant population into its constitutional framework. The 72-seat National Assembly is split geographically: 69 seats are elected by domestic island residents, while 3 seats are permanently reserved for expatriate citizens. These diaspora seats are distributed across three distinct international zones: one for Africa, one for North and South America, and one for Europe and the Rest of the World.

For the May 17, 2026, polls, the CNE established extensive registration and voting facilities across diplomatic and consular missions in major global capital cities. These regulatory and logistical measures minimized geographic barriers, allowing the diaspora to shape the legislative balance of power and reinforcing their role in national politics.

3. Standards of Transparency and Financial Integrity

While the broader West African region struggled with issues related to illicit political financing and vote-buying, Cabo Verde relied on a strict judicial framework to safeguard the ballot box. The state enforced rigorous financial caps on campaign expenditures, and the Constitutional Court, working with independent financial audit-

ing bodies, monitored party accounts to ensure compliance and prohibit foreign or anonymous donations.

These legal safeguards were supported by high levels of civic awareness. Longitudinal field surveys by Afrobarometer during this period confirmed strong public trust in the institutional neutrality of both the CNE and the judiciary. Furthermore, the constitutional court provided swift, transparent channels to adjudicate complaints, ensuring all disputes were resolved without political interference.

4. Field Oversight and International and Regional Supervision

To reinforce international credibility, the 2026 legislative elections were monitored by domestic civil society networks and prominent international bodies. The African Union deployed a high-level election observation mission to evaluate the entire process, from poll opening to final ballot counting.

Preliminary reports issued by the AU mission praised Cabo Verde's logistical precision and the peaceful, orderly environment of the election. The mission noted that the process adhered fully to international standards of fairness and transparency, recording zero technical or systemic infractions capable of compromising the integrity of the results.



III. Election Outcomes and Their Implications for Governance and Stability

The certified results of the May 17 legislative elections reshaped Cabo Verde's domestic political balance. The opposition PAICV achieved an absolute majority within the 72-seat National Assembly, securing a clear legislative mandate. Conversely, the ruling MpD suffered a significant defeat, losing the parliamentary majority it had held during the previous legislative term, while UCID maintained its position as the critical third legislative bloc.

This structural shift carries major political and economic implications:

• **Consolidating a Regional Model of Stability:** At a time when West Africa is navigating significant constitutional challenges, Cabo Verde provides a clear template for peaceful political transition. This orderly handover reinforced the nation's reputation as a stable democratic anchor on the continent, relying on institutional processes and political dialogue to navigate structural shifts.

• **Managing Political Cohabitation:**

The PAICV's return to a legislative majority introduces a new cohabitation dynamic. Although President José Maria Neves shares historical ties with the winning PAICV, the new balance of power requires careful coordination to appoint a Head of Government who reflects the incoming parliamentary majority. Analysts expect that the country's experienced political leadership will manage this transition smoothly, avoiding governance deadlocks or administrative delays.

• **Economic Continuity and Investment Security:**

Sovereign and political risk assessments issued in June 2026 affirmed that this parliamentary transition would not disrupt Cabo Verde's macroeconomic trajectory. Data indicates a broad consensus between the two major parties regarding private sector support, fiscal responsibility, and attracting foreign investment. The stable institutional transition and the incoming party's commitment to transparency offer strong assurances to international financial institutions and sovereign donors, supporting economic stability and sustainable growth.

Section III: Comparative Analysis Between the Ethiopian and Cabo Verdean Experiences in 2026

This section utilizes a comparative political systems framework to analyze the core similarities and differences between the electoral paths taken by Ethiopia and Cabo Verde in 2026. These two nations offer distinct models of institutional stability, party competition, and security management under very different national circumstances. The comparison is structured across four primary indicators:

1. Level of Political Competitiveness

The 2026 electoral processes revealed a stark

divergence in the competitive dynamics and balance of power in each country. In Ethiopia, political competition was limited by structural and organizational imbalances between the ruling party and a fragmented opposition. The Prosperity Party maintained its dominant position, while opposition groups faced major logistical hurdles, security barriers, and internal divisions. Combined with key party boycotts and regulatory exclusions, this environment led to ruling party candidates running completely uncontested in 75 constituencies, reducing the level of competition across several regions.

In contrast, Cabo Verde featured robust, balanced competition between two established parties—the PAICV and the MpD—operating within a stable pluralistic framework. Campaigns were conducted openly, and the process resulted in a peaceful transfer of the parliamentary majority to the opposition, demonstrating the system's capacity for regular political turnover.

2. Public Participation and Voter Behavior

Voter turnout and participation patterns highlighted different levels of civic engagement and institutional trust. Ethiopia registered approximately 54 million voters, but active participation was heavily disrupted by localized security crises. Active conflicts in Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray forced the closure of numerous polling centers and the postponement of voting in 46 constituencies, leading to uneven turnout across different regions.

Cabo Verde managed a smaller voter registry of approximately 416,000 citizens. Although official data indicated that the abstention rate exceeded 50%, the process was characterized by consistent, orderly voting procedures and widespread acceptance of the final count. Furthermore, Cabo Verde's structural inclusion of its diaspora via three dedicated overseas seats enabled consistent political participation for citizens living abroad.

3. The Role and Efficiency of Electoral Institutions

The independence and technical capacity of the respective electoral management bodies served as a key metric of administrative success. NEBE in Ethiopia introduced modern digital tools, including mobile voter registration and a pilot integration with the "Fayda" national ID platform. However, the board faced persistent scrutiny from opposition factions regarding its institutional independence and its capacity to manage a fair process amid ongoing regional conflicts and widespread constituency suspensions.

Cabo Verde's elections were managed effectively through cooperation between DGAPE, CNE,

and technical support from NOSI. These bodies utilized biometric verification and secure data networks to ensure real-time results transmission. Operating under a clear statutory framework subject to judicial oversight, these institutions maintained high levels of public trust and universal acceptance of the results among political competitors.

4. The Impact of Elections on Political Stability and Legitimacy

The final outcomes of both elections had vastly different effects on national stability and political legitimacy. The Ethiopian elections confirmed the Prosperity Party's control of the legislature, reinforcing its legal position within official state organs. However, because major demographic and regional groups were excluded due to ongoing conflicts, the election did not resolve underlying ethnic tensions or build a broad national consensus, leaving structural security challenges unaddressed.

In Cabo Verde, the election facilitated a smooth, constitutional shift in the legislative majority without disrupting civil peace or state administration. This outcome demonstrated the resilience of the country's democratic mechanisms and its capacity to manage shifting political balances through established institutional channels.



Structural Comparative Matrix of the 2026 Elections

Comparative Indicator	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	Republic of Cabo Verde (Cape Verde)
Type of Political System	Ethnic federalism undergoing a transitional phase toward centralization	Stable semi-presidential system
Nature of Competitiveness	Low and restricted; clear dominance by the ruling party	High and equitable; balanced two-party system
Geographical Inclusivity	Fragmented; exclusion of Tigray and parts of Amhara and Oromia	Comprehensive; complete coverage across all islands and diaspora constituencies
Efficiency of Electoral Management	Technically advanced but faces challenges regarding political independence	High organizational efficiency and full legal and institutional independence
Legitimacy Outputs	Procedural, legalistic legitimacy that left structural crises unresolved	Consensual legitimacy that reinforces stability and the peaceful transfer of power

Section IV: Core Implications of Both Experiences for the Future of Democracy in Africa

A cross-examination of the 2026 Ethiopian and Cabo Verdean elections provides valuable insights into the broader trajectories of democratic transition and political governance across the African continent. As distinct institutional models operating under contrasting security and social conditions, these two cases highlight both key opportunities and structural challenges facing contemporary African democracies.

1. Opportunities for Democratic Transition and Consolidation of Institutionalism

The 2026 electoral outcomes show that the consolidation of democracy on the continent

depends heavily on stable institutional frameworks and clear regulatory guardrails capable of managing political competition peacefully. These opportunities manifest in several distinct ways:

- The Utility of Comparative Models:** Cabo Verde's experience demonstrates that long-term institutional stability, consistent party competition within an agreed legal framework, and reliable channels for inter-party dialogue are critical components for sustainable democracy. This model serves as an important point of reference for states seeking to reform their political architectures and build institutional resilience.

- **Strategic Adoption of Electoral Technology:**

Both nations demonstrated a growing trend toward integrating digital tools into election administration, particularly for biometric verification, online voter registration, and digital results tabulation. These advancements can significantly improve administrative efficiency and reduce procedural errors, provided they are backed by strong legal protections for data integrity and transparency to maintain public trust.

- **Formal Inclusion of Diaspora Communities:**

Cabo Verde's successful integration of its emigrant population through dedicated legislative seats provides a practical blueprint for expanding political participation. Formally connecting the diaspora to national legislative frameworks strengthens the overall inclusivity of the democratic process and deepens representation for diverse civic groups.

2. Political and Institutional Challenges

Conversely, the two case studies highlight significant, recurring obstacles that continue to impede democratic transitions and threaten institutional stability across multiple African contexts:

- **The Disruptive Impact of Insecurity:**

As seen in Ethiopia, persistent armed conflict and severe internal tensions can directly impair a state's capacity to host inclusive, regular elections across its entire territory. These security breakdowns lead to regional disenfranchisement and raise fundamental questions about the overall geographical integrity of the final vote.

- **Asymmetric Resources and Weak Competition:**

A major challenge facing several political systems is the wide gap in organizational capacity, financial resources, and institutional leverage between ruling entities and opposition forces. This structural imbalance often prevents equitable competition and limits the opposition's ability to offer viable, competitive policy alternatives.

- **The Influence of Unregulated Campaign Financing:**

The use of unchecked financial resources and political money to influence voter behavior or distort campaigns remains a persistent challenge across the region. Developing robust legal frameworks and independent audit mechanisms to regulate campaign financing is essential to protect electoral integrity and ensure a fair playing field for all candidates.

3. Lessons Learned from Both Experiences

The comparison yields three critical insights for policymakers, constitutional architects, and regional organizations focused on strengthening democratic governance across Africa:

- **Elections Require a Broader Political Framework:**

The Ethiopian experience shows that technical or procedural success alone is insufficient to guarantee national stability or heal deep societal divisions. Long-term political legitimacy requires independent dispute-resolution mechanisms, structural avenues for continuous political dialogue, and inclusive state policies that address the root causes of conflict.

- **The Critical Importance of Independent Judiciaries and Electoral Boards:**

Both cases underscore that public trust in electoral outcomes depends heavily on the neutrality and independence of management bodies and judicial institutions. When these entities operate impartially and apply the law equitably, the likelihood of universal acceptance of results increases, reducing the risk of post-election instability.

- **Balancing International Standards with Local Realities:**

The comparative findings show that the success of an electoral framework depends not only on adopting international benchmarks but also on its ability to adapt to a nation's unique political, cultural, and social context. Developing durable electoral institutions requires balancing universal democratic principles with a nuanced understanding of domestic institutional realities.



General Conclusions and Future Outlook

The 2026 electoral environments in Ethiopia and Cabo Verde provided an effective baseline for comparative political inquiry using a "Most Different Systems Design". This methodology allowed for a thorough evaluation of electoral performance across two distinct institutional designs, security landscapes, and levels of political stability, illustrating how different contexts influence the generation of political legitimacy.

Based on these findings, the report offers three primary conclusions regarding the future of democratic transition in Africa:

1. The Operational Limits of Procedural Elections in Conflict Zones: The Ethiopian case demonstrates that procedural and technical modernizations are insufficient to build a stable national consensus when implemented amidst active armed conflict or deep ethnic divisions. Physical insecurity directly limits geographical inclusivity, proving that a stable, secure baseline environment is an essential prerequisite for an effective and representative election.

2. The Value of Institutionalized Party Politics: Cabo Verde's experience highlights how durable legal frameworks and independent oversight bodies can effectively manage intense party competition. The smooth shift of the parliamentary majority without institutional disruption underscores the role that party institutionalization and judicial independence play in sustaining democratic stability and reinforcing public trust.

3. The Necessity of Comprehensive Political Approaches: Moving forward, the future of African democratic governance will likely follow a multi-faceted path. While technical upgrades improve registration accuracy and results speed, their effectiveness remains tied to institutional independence. Elections serve as an important mechanism for managing competition, but they cannot replace comprehensive political strategies designed to address structural regional disparities, manage social pluralism, and foster sustainable political dialogue under the rule of law.

Ultimately, the 2026 cycles show that elections across Africa yield diverse outcomes based on their operational environments. While certain states possess the institutional capacity to manage competitive transfers of power smoothly, others continue to face significant structural challenges to comprehensive inclusivity and stability. The long-term trajectory of democracy on the continent will remain closely linked to the capacity of states to strengthen their political institutions, defend the rule of law, expand civic participation, and manage pluralism within stable constitutional frameworks.



Final Bibliography

I. Transliterated Arabic References

- Al-Badri, Ahmed. "Namudhaj al-Ra's al-Akhdar: Qira'ah fi Istiqrar al-Nuzum al-Dusturiyyah bi-Gharb Afriqya 'Aqiba Intikhabat 2026" [The Cabo Verde Model: A Reading into the Stability of Constitutional Systems in West Africa Following the 2026 Elections]. *Majallat Dirasat Hawd al-Bahr al-Mutawassit wa-Afriqya* [Journal of Mediterranean and African Basin Studies] 11, no. 2 (June 2026): 44–51.
- Al-Baqash, Shaimaa. "Al-Intikhabat al-Ithyubiyah 2026 Bayna al-Tandheem al-Ijra'i wa-Mahdudiyat al-Shumul al-Siyasi" [The 2026 Ethiopian Elections Between Procedural Modernization and Limited Political Inclusivity]. *Markaz al-Dirasat al-Siyasiyyah* [Center for Political Studies], published June 13, 2026.
- Hijab, Mohamed. "Al-Intikhabat al-Ithyubiyah 2026: Bayna l'adat Intaj al-Haymanah al-Siyasiyyah wa-lkhtibar Tamasuk al-Dawlah al-Fidraliyyah" [The 2026 Ethiopian Elections: Between the Reproduction of Political Hegemony and Testing the Cohesion of the Federal State]. *Al-Majallah al-'Arabiyyah lil-Dirasat al-Afriqiyyah* [Arab Journal of African Studies], June 2026.
- Riyadh, Sarah. "Intikhabat Ithyubya 2026: Intikhabat Dawriyyah am Tafweeth Sha'bi?" [Ethiopia's 2026 Elections: Periodic Elections or a Popular Mandate?]. Analytical Report, reviewed by Mohamed Abdel Halim. *Markaz al-Manar lil-Dirasat al-Siyasiyyah* [Al-Manar Center for Political Studies], June 2026.

II. English References

- African Union Commission (African Union Election Observation Mission - AUEOM). *Arrival Statement and Preliminary Observer Report on the 17 May 2026 Legislative Elections in the Republic of Cabo Verde*. Addis Ababa: Peace and Security Council / African Union Commission, June 2026.
- African Union Election Observation Mission (AUEOM). *Preliminary Assessment and Observer Report on the 7th General Elections in Ethiopia*.

Addis Ababa: African Union Commission, June 3, 2026.

- Afrobarometer. *Summary of Results: Citizen Perceptions of Democratic Institutions and Electoral Trust in Cabo Verde*. Praia: Afrolabs, 2026.
- Coutinho, Angela. *Emigration and Citizenship: Diaspora Political Engagement and Legislative Representation in Cabo Verde*. Leiden: Brill, 2026.
- Elklit, Jørgen. "Electoral Integrity, Transparency, and the Prevention of Vote Buying in West Africa." *African Journal of Political Science* 14, no. 2 (2026): 112–118.
- Fitch Solutions / BMI. "Cape Verde Market and Sovereign Risk Analysis: The Post-Election Governance Outlook." *Fitch Solutions Regional Reports: Africa*, June 2026. <https://www.fitchsolutions.com/bmi/region/cape-verde>.
- International IDEA. *Direct Democracy and Institutional Frameworks in Small Island States: The Case of Cabo Verde*. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2026.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). "Cabo Verde (Assembleia Nacional): Electoral System and Constitutional Framework." IPU Parline Database. Accessed June 2026. <https://data.ipu.org/node/33>.
- Journal of Democracy. "Ethiopia Is About to Hold Another Sham Election." *Journal of Democracy* (Online Exclusive), May 2026. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/ethiopia-is-about-to-hold-another-sham-election/>.
- MIT Governance Lab. *Digital Transformation in African Electoral Systems: Evaluating NOSI's Reform of Cape Verdean Elections*. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2026.
- National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE). *Official Voter Registration and Technical Implementation Report for the 2026 General Elections*. Addis Ababa: NEBE Press, May 28, 2026.
- Xinhua News Agency. "Cabo Verde's Final Election Results Confirm PAICV Victory with Absolute Majority." *Xinhua News*, May 29, 2026. <http://english.news.cn/africa/20260530/60c29f52a2074e21a5d4252bf3184711/c.html>.