

The contemporary Ethiopian state is, without question, facing enormous challenges, including the militarization of state and non-state actors, high population density accompanied by youth unemployment, food insecurity, real and perceived inequality and discrimination among ethnic groups, ethnic and political polarization and widespread human rights abuses. At the core of the issues faced by Ethiopia lies the state-building process by which major constituencies and elite groups were either alienated from, or coopted into, ruling structures. Unable to derive political legitimacy from democratic participation, successive governments largely relied on coercion and neopatrimonialism, modulated by constitutional narratives and reform efforts including those of the imperial regime's attempts to regulate government functions by a written constitution, the Derg's land law reforms and the abolition of the gabar system, and the EPRDF's recognition and promotion of linguistic and cultural rights. Despite initially promising political, legal, and institutional reform initiatives undertaken by the incumbent regime, Ethiopians remain divided in their views about what kind of constitutional structure has the greatest potential to unify the country without compromising diversity.

Within this context, Northwestern University's Pritzker School of Law and Roberta Buffett Institute for Global Affairs, in collaboration with the Addis Ababa University College of Law and Governance Studies and the Harvard Law School's Human Rights Program, convened Ethiopian scholars from a wide variety of fields including constitutional law, federalism, history and political science to present papers and essays on the future of the Ethiopian social contract, which are included in this collection.

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