

**IDS Working Paper 220**

**The processes and dynamics of pastoralist representation in  
Ethiopia**

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March 2004

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## **Summary**

The functioning of democratic institutions has the potential to bring about substantial policy change in favour of poor and marginalised people. However, there is a limited understanding of how to strengthen the political representation of poor people within democratic structures. This paper looks at one example of how the political representation of a historically marginalised and excluded group – pastoralists in Ethiopia – is shifting and changing. Based on research at federal, regional and sub-regional levels in Ethiopia, it discusses the establishment of a body within parliament committed to representing this group. It identifies the critical factors which led to its formation as changes in the broader political environment as well as a specific moment of change, the role of key actors both internally and externally, and the cumulative effect of the mobilisation of a substantial group of MPs. The paper also discusses the limitations of both this body and other structures of political representation in the political context of Ethiopia. The key constraint to effective political representation is identified as the broader political environment, including a lack of political competition and an absence of institutionalised democratic processes.



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## **Acronyms**

DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EPRDF	Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
MOFA	Ministry of Federal Affairs
NRS	National Regional State
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogadenia National Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation
PCI	Pastoralist Communication Initiative
PDO	Peoples Democratic Organisation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSC	Parliamentary Standing Committee on Pastoralist Affairs
SNNPRS	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State
SPDP	Somali People’s Democratic Party
TPLF	Tigray Peoples Liberation Front

## 1 Introduction

Recent shifts in development thinking emphasise the importance of increasing the influence of poor and marginalised people in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. In the context of widespread disillusionment with formal political systems, researchers, policy-makers and activists have extolled the virtues of forms of direct participation. These are seen to provide opportunities for citizens to play a more active role in policy processes and to increase state responsiveness (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000; Gaventa and Valderrama 1999). There have undoubtedly been benefits from such “direct democracy” initiatives in many places. Nonetheless, there is a danger that the current popularity of such approaches has led to a neglect of the importance of the effective representation of poor and marginalised people *through* formal democratic structures. Such representation has the potential to transform public policy in favour of the disadvantaged on a scale which few “civil society” mobilisations could achieve. Yet, in practice, poor people and marginalised groups are usually ill-served by those who claim to “represent” them, and do not enjoy an influence commensurate with their numbers (Moore and Putzel 1999).

Despite the potential for significant change through the functioning of democratic structures, we have a limited understanding of how “representatives” of poor people can be encouraged to work more actively on behalf of poor people within such structures. We also have little knowledge of the conditions when their mobilisation becomes effective and creates policy change. This paper looks at one example of how the political representation of a historically marginalised and excluded group – pastoralists in Ethiopia – is shifting and changing. It considers how opportunities for collective action within formal political structures were created by changes in the broader political environment and seized on by key actors. It discusses the establishment of a body within Parliament committed to representing this group in society, and the limitations of both this body and other formal structures of political representation in the broader political context of Ethiopia.

Pastoralists, and the cultural and economic parameters of their existence have historically been misrepresented, misunderstood and marginalised by nation-states (Spencer 1998). Academic literature, primarily by anthropologists, has described the tensions in a number of countries between the ‘centrifugal ideology of nomads’ seeking autonomy and mobility, and the ‘centripetal ideology of the sedentary state that strives for dominance and encapsulation’ (Fratkin 1997: 239, drawing on Meir 1988). As states have attempted to impose institutions developed for a sedentary population, pastoral institutions have come under strain (Salih 2001), and pastoralist /state relations have often been conflictual.

Ethiopia has not been exempt from this conflict. From the colonial powers, to Emperor Haile Selassie to the Marxist Derg to the current government, successive regimes have swung between neglecting the country’s pastoralists, and trying to exploit them and the lands they inhabit wherever possible. Historically, the exclusion of pastoralists from Ethiopian life has been economic, political and social, and their interests have been ignored. However, many pastoralists and non-pastoralists suggest that there have recently been significant changes in the attitude of both the government and broader society

towards pastoralism, an acknowledgement of their needs, and the beginning of a recognition of pastoralism as a valid livelihood strategy.

This shift and the optimism it has created amongst various actors provides the background to this paper, which presents the findings of a study commissioned by the Pastoralist Communication Initiative (PCI), a DFID-funded project operating in Ethiopia, in collaboration with the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex. The PCI aims to promote communication between all the actors engaged in the process of making and implementing policy that affects pastoralists. It operates on the assumption that improved articulation of citizen voices and generation of effective institutional responsiveness can lead to beneficial impacts for citizens. It recognises that between the citizen and the institutional response lies a complex terrain of politics, power, leadership, culture and representation.

This study aimed to support learning among members of the Ethiopian parliament, pastoralist leaders and interlocutors in pastoralist policy in Ethiopia. In particular it sought to:

- document the process which has led to the current state of pastoralist parliamentary representation.
- consider how pastoralist peoples are represented by their federal representatives.
- attempt to assess the impact of this representation on policy processes.
- consider the interaction and relationship between federal/regional structures of political representation and traditional structures of representation.
- explore further how pastoralist peoples understand the concept of “political representation”.

Its focus was on the functioning of pastoralist representation within the broader political context in Ethiopia, and particularly on the role of pastoralist federal MPs. It did not, however, attempt to assess in depth the range of constraints to the functioning of democratic structures of government in specific pastoralist areas.

After a brief summary of the research method, the paper explores the concept of “representation”, defining how it will be used within this paper and setting out a framework for the analysis. The bulk of the paper analyses “representation” through three mediating processes identified in that framework. Section three provides the context within which those processes operate, looking at the dynamics of policy-making in Ethiopia, including the current political context, the shifts that are occurring and the ways in which both “representation” and “pastoralist” policy are understood. Section four analyses the functioning of the federal parliament, particularly the relationships of federal MPs with their constituents, and the activity of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Pastoralist Affairs (PSC). Section five examines the functioning of regional and sub-regional structures. After a brief discussion of the historical, political and cultural contexts to the fieldwork sites, this section analyses regional government and the *woreda/kebele*<sup>1</sup> structures. Section six considers the interaction between state and traditional structures of

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the levels of local government in Ethiopia see p23.



representation, before the final section provides concluding analysis of the processes and dynamics of pastoralist representation in Ethiopia.

### **1.1 Research method**

The research was carried out in three phases, with review of the method and the research questions between each phase. Relevant documentation was also reviewed.

Feedback sessions were held at each stage both with PCI staff members and also with members of the PSC.

The first phase, which took place in January 2003, was conducted in Addis Ababa and was focused on the federal context. MPs, Ministers, donors, civil society leaders, Ethiopian experts and opposition politicians were questioned in semi-structured interviews about the role of pastoralist parliamentarians broader concepts of representation, and changes in the political context in Ethiopia.

The second phase of the research was carried out in March and April 2003 and involved fieldwork in Borana region, Oromia State. The author, and a PCI facilitator and translator accompanied three federal MPs to their constituencies and observed the work of these MPs. They also conducted interviews and group discussions with zonal, woreda and kebele officials, traditional elders and women. Meetings were also held with representatives of international NGOs, and the regional state government in Addis.

The third phase of research took place in May 2003, when the researcher travelled to Somali region with a federal MP from the area, and a PCI facilitator and translator. Interviews were conducted with federal MPs, a Member of the House of Federation, Regional MPs, regional officials, traditional elders, woreda officials, leaders of women's groups and other citizens.

The Borana and Somali sites for fieldwork were chosen not only for logistical reasons, but also to present contrasting pictures of the mediating role of different institutions at the sub-federal level. Oromia is a big and very diverse state, with large areas that rely on peasant production. The fieldwork in Borana was carried out in primarily pastoral and agro-pastoral areas, far from the regional capital in Addis. The data from that fieldwork relates mostly to the role of sub-regional institutions. In contrast, the whole of Somali region relies on pastoralism or agro-pastoralism for its economy. Sub-regional institutions are barely functioning in most of Somali region, partly due to the difficulty of the terrain, and the emphasis in the fieldwork was on the role of regional government based in Jijiga, which was the primary site for the Somali fieldwork.

The research suffered several constraints, most particularly:

- the general political context in which several informants expressed unwillingness to speak openly to a researcher about sensitive political issues. It is likely that many informants felt this but did not express it.
- the necessity of working through translators in some interviews.
- heavy reliance on several key informants for interpretation of political issues. This was, however, mitigated to some extent by excellent recent analysis from other researchers. The work of Vaughan

and Tronvoll (2003), Aalen (2002) and Pausewang *et al.* (2002) have been cited heavily throughout this paper as their research is the most recent in-depth work on these issues. The findings of this study broadly concur with the conclusions of those authors.

- the difficult and inaccessible terrain in which most pastoralists live. For that reason, the research tended to focus on urban centres, and inevitably reflects the views of those with most contact with those areas.

Due to the relatively limited fieldwork involved in this study, the aim is to provide illustrative “snapshots” of how representation is shaped in the “mediating” processes identified in the framework. The paper makes no claim to be a comprehensive survey of representative structures and institutions in Ethiopia.

## 2 Concepts of representation

In Western political thought, the concept of representation is a difficult one and it is highly contested.<sup>2</sup> There is much debate but little agreement amongst political scientists and other theorists about what representation actually means (Manin *et al.* 1999). Ideas about representation are found in the theories of Burke, Bentham, Hobbes, John Stuart Mill, Toqueville, Schumpeter and Dahl (see Merrifield 1982, and Pitkin, 1967, for an analysis of key theorists). As Merrifield (1982) points out, the fact that there are such disputes about the concept of representation suggests that there is no one “correct” way to view it.

An initial area of confusion arises from the different meanings that can be attributed to the words “represent”, “representation” and “representative” in English. The first distinction that should be made is between those who may be described as “representatives” (a noun) because of the positions they hold (for example, MPs and other elected officials), and those who are in some sense “representative” (an adjective). In this study “representative” is used primarily as an adjective, to avoid confusion and alternative words are found to describe positions held. However, this use as an adjective also has several meanings. It could be taken to refer either to those who are somehow typical of a broader population, or those who act on behalf of others. In this study, the definition of Hannah Pitkin (1967: 209) is used, who defines political representation as ‘acting in the interests of the represented’. Pitkin also points out that there is nothing that necessarily associates ideas around representation with democracy, since a monarch or ambassador can represent a nation. However, here “representative government” is understood as a system in which those who serve in government are placed in their positions on the basis of citizen selection. Representative government thus enables an indirect citizen presence in the legislative process (CPA 2001).

There are, however a number of complexities around these definitions. The first relates to the idea of “interests”, and who decides what those interests are. In Western political thought the most common idea of representation focuses on the representative acting as the “agent” for the represented. Representatives

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<sup>2</sup> Conceptualisations of “representation” not based on Western liberal democratic theory which are present in Ethiopia are discussed in future sections where appropriate.

(such as MPs) can act as *trustees* who exercise their own judgement on behalf of those they represent, deciding what their interests are and acting accordingly. The role of the represented is restricted to determining whether to elect or re-elect their representative. An alternative view sees MPs as *delegates*, subordinating their own views to those of their constituents, who decide what their own interests are. MPs thus try to determine what their constituents want done and do it. Unlike trustees, delegates act according to the judgement of their constituents, not their own.

A second issue related to the “interests” of the represented is how these interests are aggregated and, when there are differences in interests between citizens, whose interests come to dominate. How does one “representative” choose between the differing interests of many citizens? Do all citizens have equal opportunities to express their interests, and on what basis do some come to dominate? These questions are important, as those interests which are compromised or unrepresented in the process of aggregation do not get translated into policies.

In democratic systems, political parties are one means through which interests are aggregated. Parties combine the articulated interests of interests and groups into an overall policy platform and seek election on that basis. However this adds a further complication to the issue of “representation”, as MPs are also *representatives of parties*. They follow the instruction of the party and its leadership and are thus limited in the extent to which they may take independent action either on the basis of their own opinions or the wishes of their constituents. This system of party representation is justified on the basis that elections are contested and organised around parties, and such an approach provides stability in Parliamentary systems.

There are therefore three potentially contradictory understandings of how “political representatives” should act and the basis on which they make their decisions: as trustees, delegates, or representatives of parties. In practice, in most political contexts, elected representatives take decisions on their actions according to all three forms of representation, making trade-offs in different contexts. In the UK, for example, in the March 2003 parliamentary vote on war with Iraq, 140 Labour MPs rejected their party’s stance (party representation) and supported an anti-war motion, effectively voting against the government. It is not clear how many were primarily voting according to their own views of what was right (exercising trustee representation) or those of their constituents (exercising delegate representation), although certainly many MPs were subject to intensive lobbying by their constituents.

A study of political representation in Ethiopia could address the extent to which elected representatives of government “act in the interests” of their constituents, and how they determine what those interests are. Indeed that is one element of this study. However, as the discussion above has suggested, there is no ‘right’ way to understand representation. It would be wrong to consider that there is an agreed standard or approach to representation by which it is possible to assess whether or not Ethiopian MPs and other representatives are “representative” or not. The concept is too contested, and there is no set of criteria against which individual performance can be measured.

Furthermore, such an exclusive focus on the role of those holding representative positions is not necessarily particularly helpful for policy-makers and those who wish to understand the means by which the interests of marginalised people are either ignored or advanced in political processes. It is therefore

important to concentrate on the extent to which the outcomes of the “representation activity” are favourable to those whose interests the representative is responsible for advancing. It is necessary to consider the broader constraints to a favourable policy outcome, even when “representatives” themselves are actively advancing the interests of those they represent. Such a shift in focus is also reflected in some recent theoretical work on representation, which has moved away from a focus on “agency” in representation, towards a view of representation as a process, a relationship between the interests of citizens and the policy outcomes of government (Manin *et al.* 1999).

A useful view is provided by Williams (1998: 23ff) who sees representation as a process, rather than the activities of individuals. Thus she writes of ‘representation as mediation’, in which the ‘different institutions and practices of any scheme of representation operate to shape and transform individual citizens’ political concerns and interests into governmental decisions and policies’. Such an approach focuses attention on the functioning of different institutions and practices which together mediate the relationships between citizen interests and policy outcomes. The activities of “representatives” are certainly one element of those institutions and practices. However, broader institutional factors and the functioning of political systems are also considered a critical part of the process of representation.

Drawing on Williams’ work but expanding her ideas to take account of the Ethiopian context, this study examines three critical processes that mediate between citizen interests and policy outcomes, and hence shape the process of representation:

- the functioning of the federal parliament
- the functioning of regional and sub-regional systems of government
- the interaction between formal and “traditional” or “customary” systems of government.

There are, of course, other processes which mediate between citizen interests and policy outcomes, and other practices through which citizen interests might be fed into policy processes (for example, specific consultation processes around particular policies). However this study has limited itself to three of the most significant processes related to formal political structures. It also limits itself to a specific consideration of the relationship between pastoralist interests and the policy that affects them.

The rest of this paper examines these three processes of representation that mediate between pastoralist interests and policy outcomes. However, these processes are embedded in and shaped by the broader political context and the dynamics of policy-making in Ethiopia. It is also affected by different perceptions of how “pastoralist policy” should be made. These are the subjects of the following section.

### **3 The dynamics of policy-making in Ethiopia**

This section provides a brief introduction to politics and government in Ethiopia, including a discussion of recent reforms. It then explores both how the ruling party conceptualises “representation” and its role, and how “pastoralist policy” is conceived.

### **3.1 Political systems in Ethiopia**

The current regime in Ethiopia emerged following the overthrow in 1991 of the Derg, which had pursued a centralised Marxist-Leninist system of government since 1974, including a prolonged period of state terror. After a period of transitional rule, the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) dominated by the TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front) took power. This ruling coalition justifies its control of power by claiming to represent the interests of peasants, who provided its support-base during the conflict, and especially suppressed peasants from different ethnic groups. It claims that it liberated these groups from the economic exploitation and ethnic suppression suffered under previous regimes (Pausewang *et al.* 2002).

A new constitution adopted in December 1994 created a federation of nine National Regional States (NRSs), delineated mostly according to the major language groups, with borders generally determined in a way designed to give particular ethnic groups control over areas they claimed as historic homelands (Joireman 1997). Regional states are divided into zones, woredas, kebeles and, in some cases, sub-kebeles, structures initially developed across Ethiopia under the Derg.

The constitution provides for a democratic structure of governance, following a modern Western model of democracy, including a division of powers and the protection of human rights. The Constitution follows a parliamentary model and vests both legislative and oversight functions in a House of Peoples' Representatives, elected by a "first-past-the-post" system. The House of Federation plays a constitutional role in safeguarding the interests of the nations and nationalities of Ethiopia, passing the legislation which defines the powers of government, as well as controlling important sources of revenue. Both the federal and regional governments have their own legislative, judicial and executive powers and the right to levy taxes and allocate budgets (Pausewang *et al.* 2002).

Political parties exist, and elections do take place. There are three types of political parties in Ethiopia. The first are those parties belonging to the EPRDF. The dominant party is the TPLF, followed by the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM). The Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF) for the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) are weaker members of the Front. The second type of party are EPRDF-affiliated parties which operate with somewhat looser ties in the more "peripheral" areas in Ethiopia: Afar, Somali, Harari, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Gambella. Thirdly, there are opposition parties. These are mostly very weak in organisational capacity, suffering from considerable resource constraints, and have shown little ability to coordinate amongst themselves to put pressure on the government. Many of them are also registered as regional parties and look to one ethnic group for their support, which further limits their ability to coordinate.

Moreover, both opposition parties and candidates face considerable hurdles, including in some areas repression and intimidation. Elections at all levels have been affected by government interference and manipulation. In the federal elections of 2000 there were numerous electoral irregularities. Candidates

were also often imposed on constituencies by the EPRDF. In some areas there is doubt as to whether elections were held at all. Many have concluded that both these elections and the local elections of 2001 were not “free and fair” (Pausewang *et al.* 2002).

This failure in electoral practice has profound implications for a discussion of representation. In democratic theory, there are often seen to be two ways in which elections can induce representation in governments. Firstly, elections can provide a mandate, a means by which citizens signal to governments what they want them to do. Secondly, they are a mechanism of accountability, through which citizens can judge whether governments have carried out what they were elected to do (Przeworski *et al.* 1999). To date, most observers would agree that elections in Ethiopia have not served to provide either a mandate or a mechanism of accountability. This failure also affects the position and perceived legitimacy of individual “elected representatives”, as will be discussed further below.

Thus, although the essentials for democratic development are in place in Ethiopia, there is a “two-track structure” at all administrative levels. While there is a formal structure of democratic institutions, below the surface there is a party structure that keeps tight control at all levels and ensures that these democratic institutions cannot be used effectively to challenge its power. The political structure is built on a party with exclusive access to state resources, and material interests keep individuals loyal to that party or the broader coalition. As Markakis commented:

Nearly all officials in the state administration from kebele to the federal government are EPRDF members, having joined the party before or soon after election to their post. Government business is discussed and decisions are made in party meetings that precede meetings of state bodies. In view of the party-state merger, it is understandable that Ethiopians have difficulty in distinguishing between them.

(Markakis 2001, quoted in Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003: 35)

Aside from the problems caused by the dual structure, there are groups which participate little in political life. Constitutionally, women have equality with men and are free to run for office at all levels. Certainly during the armed struggle the TPLF was enthusiastic about promoting the role of women. However, since 1991, gender representation has not been a focus of attention and both government and opposition parties are dominated by men. There are few powerful women either within the Party leadership or within the Federal executive (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). This pattern is repeated at regional and lower levels.

The marginalised and stigmatised groups, often called “occupational castes”, found in every ethnic grouping are also traditionally excluded from the political arena. In Somali region, for example, these people are called *Mijan*, *Yabir* and *Tumal*. They are partly assimilated by the dominant group in the area where they live, but in the past held serf status. They could be purchased and sold, and had few political rights (Lewis 1955). Today, they still have limited land rights and enjoy limited social interaction with others. They are supposed to be represented by the dominant group in the area in which they live, but in practice continuing discrimination excludes them from local politics and the administrative system.

### **3.2 Reform and renewal?**

As argued above, beneath democratic institutions, the TPLF has established an administration and structure that perpetuates its rule. However, following splits in the TPLF in Spring 2001, the EPRDF announced a “renewal” process (*tehadso*), including reforms intended to separate powers between different branches of government (Pausewang *et al.* 2002). Four new “superministries” – the Ministries of Capacity Building, Infrastructure, Rural Development and Federal Affairs – have been established which remove a number of coordinating functions previously carried out by political advisers or by the Prime Minister’s Office.

The establishment of these ministries could be understood as a move to institutionalise state structures and strengthen a civil service, removing a number of areas from personalised control. However, some note that a core of key ministries and agencies are still controlled by those loyal to the Prime Minister. It might thus be too early to comment on the actual impact of this reorganisation. Moreover, Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003) also raise the important point that the various measures proposed are in line with ‘a classic package of centralised bureaucratic reforms’. In a number of other African countries where these reforms have taken place, they have resulted in the retention of a clientelist system and the centralisation of power in an executive presidency which stands above factional politics and manipulates through control of financial and military resources (see Goetz and Lister 2001 for a discussion of this in the Ugandan context). Therefore although these changes might weaken the position of the ruling party in Ethiopia, they might not necessarily strengthen other representative institutions, and broaden political representation more widely.

Along with a number of observers and analysts, interviewees in this study expressed a wide range of opinions on the reform process. Some fear that the commitment to opening up is rhetoric, with little of substance, certainly no tangible signs of a deepening democratisation. On the other hand, others speak of a slow opening up, of reformist elements within the party guiding changes, and the need to be optimistic about an “incremental” process of change and a situation which is “relatively better” than previously.

### **3.3 The EPRDF and representation**

The ruling party’s conception of democracy has not historically been based on Western liberal ideals of individual participation, a diversity of views and plural representation. Instead it has been shaped both by Marxist-Leninist and Maoist ideologies and the EPRDF’s practical experience of mass political mobilisation during its struggle for power (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). EPRDF conceptions of democracy are therefore based on “democratic centralism”,<sup>3</sup> communal collective participation and representation based on consensus. Although the EPRDF changed its Marxist rhetoric in 1989/90 during the last phase of the struggle against the Derg regime, and opened up for multi-party democracy and

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<sup>3</sup> As Lenin described it, democratic centralism consists of ‘freedom of discussion and criticism, unity of action’. The *democratic* aspect of this methodology describes the freedom of members of the political party to discuss and debate matters of policy and direction; but once the decision by the party is made (by majority vote), all members are expected to follow that decision unquestioningly and dissent is ruled out.

market economy, ‘many Ethiopians from different walks of life still argue that the change was only in rhetoric and not in substance’ (Pausewang *et al.* 2002: 177). Whatever changes have taken place in recent years, there still remains a substantial legacy of Marxist thinking among powerful members of the EPRDF.

This historical legacy has three significant and related implications for EPRDF views about pastoralist representation. Firstly, the EPRDF focus has generally been on the peasantry, which was historically regarded as a homogeneous mass with common needs, interests and political outlook. The need for a government to be responsive to the interests and needs of different groups has not traditionally been acknowledged.

Secondly, this legacy affects how “the policy process” is understood. Agenda setting and policy formulation are seen to be the responsibility of the executive, and the dominant role of the ruling party in these activities is acknowledged. There is a view within government that policy should be hammered out behind closed doors, with the input of experts, after which it is seen as the “absolute truth” and not subject to questioning. There is little perceived role for broader public participation in policy formulation. There are, however, signs that this view is changing slightly. For example, some consultation occurred around the PRSP, although it is not clear how this was actually used in the formulation of the PRSP (Longo 2002).

There are two particular implications of this view of the policy process. Firstly, despite a stated commitment to decentralised government, the federal level is seen as responsible for policy formulation, with the role of the regions limited to implementation. Policy failure is frequently attributed to failure of implementation, which is the result of “technical” and “capacity” issues at regional level. The political nature of policy is thus often masked.<sup>4</sup> The second implication of this view of policy is the limited role ascribed to parliament or other actors. While there is an understanding that parliament has a constitutionally assigned role in the legislative process, it is widely acknowledged that parliamentarians rarely influence the formulation of legislation or other policy statements.<sup>5</sup>

Thirdly, the Marxist legacy has left what Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003: 10) describe as ‘an ideological unwillingness to engage with alternative political perspectives’, a sense that ‘if you are not with us, you are against us’. Within the EPRDF there is a dominant view that disagreements in policy and perspective should generate political competition from the outside, rather than dialogue. Indeed, such views of decision-making were put forward in interviews during the course of this research. Such views have significant implications for the way that representation is understood within government. Rather than

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<sup>4</sup> This approach has been widely written about by development anthropologists who argue that this masking of the political under a “cloak of neutrality” is a key feature of modern power (Shore and Wright 1997).

<sup>5</sup> The frequently quoted exception to this is the involvement of the Standing Committee on Women’s Affairs in the revision of the family and penal codes. However, the driving force for change in this process is widely acknowledged to have been a civil society organisation, the Ethiopian Women’s Lawyers Association.



seeing representation as a means of aggregating and mediating different interests – representation is seen as contributing towards the building of consensus amongst decision-makers, with an important role for “the representative” in then conveying decisions made to the population.

### **3.4 Pastoralist policy**

These views and approaches to policy-making feed into the government’s approach to “pastoralist policy”.

Before discussing this, however, it is worth noting that “pastoralism” itself is not a clearly defined concept. There is implicit disagreement in statements over the concept of “pastoralism” and the definition and substance of “pastoralist issues” in Ethiopia. These terms are used differently by different actors, often to legitimise their own agendas. During the course of this study, the concept of “pastoralism” was used in a number of ways, including:

- To signify identity, as an assertion of difference from or similarity with other groups. This appeared to cut across ethnic and class-based identities.
- As a mode of production in a Marxist interpretation of economic and political struggle.
- To denote a livelihoods issue, focused on the use of livestock.
- As a mobilising force in politics. This is perhaps more significant at a federal level than at a regional level, where regions are either predominantly agricultural or pastoralist.
- As a potential “sector” of policy. The disagreements around whether pastoralism should be a differentiated sector are discussed below.

The shift that occurred in Amharic from use of the word for “nomad” (which had a pejorative sense) to “pastoralist” (referring to one whose livelihood is gained through livestock) was important, and many pastoralists believe this is indicative of a change in approach, and one which conferred on them status and acceptability. However this vocabulary change has now been taken further by some members of the government who place increasing emphasis on pastoralism as “being about livestock”, but make little reference to the social relations or cultural aspects of pastoralist ways of life. By framing pastoralism in “technical terms”, then “technical solutions” can be sought with the implication that the “problem of pastoralism” can be “solved” in this way.

There is now an explicit commitment to the need for a holistic and pastoralist-specific policy and there is some evidence that, after years of neglect, the government is actually beginning to position itself as “champions” of pastoralists. Some, however, argue that any change in attitude is a result of the ruling party’s recognition of the need to exert greater control in pastoralist areas. Whereas military force was the chosen method in the past, “development projects” are a cost-effective way to extend control today into the so-called “emerging areas”, particularly when such initiatives will be largely funded from international sources. This paper argues that such different interpretations are not necessarily mutually exclusive but both can be held simultaneously, and the resulting position can be both realistic and productive. While different parts of the government may have different motivations and some parts may have a number of

potentially incompatible reasons for seeking change, there has been a notable change in both government rhetoric and action. It is clear that there are complex political processes occurring which are providing an opening of space for different interests to be articulated.

It is probably correct to attribute the recent changes in the government's attitude to a variety of internal and external factors including:

- a recognition of past policy failure with regard to pastoralists, particularly the problems of a piecemeal, sectoral approach
- international pressure, including from bi-lateral and multi-lateral organisations and international NGOs
- a recognised need for stronger linkages with the so-called “emerging areas”, including a fear of instability in these areas
- the split within TPLF which created a need for consolidation of the ruling party's position and new allies, as well as the renewal process discussed above.

The most contested aspect of “pastoralist policy” is whether its eventual goal should be to “settle” pastoralists. Until recently this was the explicit aim of government. However, there appears to have been a modification of this position somewhat, although some sources close to the government claim that this represents only a difference in the articulation of the policy, rather than a change of policy. The situation on this issue is currently shifting and is not entirely clear. Nor is it clear the extent to which pastoralist peoples should and can be involved in determining this and other critical issues.

There have been recent changes in the structures of government responsible for “pastoralist policy”. An inter-ministerial board, with a technical board reporting to it, have been established within the Ministry of Federal Affairs (MOFA). The Pastoralist Unit in MOFA serves as Secretariat to that Board. While the establishment of this structure was heralded as a sign that government was taking pastoralist issues seriously, its institutional location has been interpreted by some as a desire for continued control. Furthermore, there are concerns about the extent to which ministers with broad mandates will be able to give sufficient attention to pastoralist issues, as well as the extent to which the board will be able to coordinate the pastoralist units remaining in different ministries. It is thought that this will hinder the adoption of a holistic approach. Accordingly there is a call by some, including some members of the PSC, for a separate pastoralist ministry or commission. This is currently being resisted by the federal government, mainly on the grounds that it is the responsibility of regional governments to oversee pastoral issues and technical weakness at this level should be addressed.

## **4 The functioning of the federal parliament**

Section two laid out three processes which mediate between citizen interests and policy outcomes in Ethiopia and the section above provided the broader context within which these mediating processes operate. This provides the essential background to a discussion of the functioning of the federal parliament. As discussed, parliament is heavily dominated by EPRDF members and affiliates. It has been widely criticised for merely “rubber-stamping” the decisions of the executive and being a body with little authority or power. Although it initiated a number of relatively minor bills in the previous parliament, the House of People’s Representatives has not initiated any legislation in the current parliament. All legislation has originated from the executive, although the submission of draft legislation by means of a private members’ bill requires the signature of only 20 MPs. As there are 25 opposition and independent MPs, they could have worked together to introduce legislation (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). However, some point out in defence of the role of the Ethiopian parliament that it is usual within a parliamentary system for legislation to emanate from the executive branch.

Moreover, despite the overwhelming dominance of the EPRDF in parliament, a number of interviewees in this study suggested that parliament’s role in articulating citizen interests has been increasing. In order to understand how the interests of pastoralists are mediated in the policy process through parliament and any shifts that may be occurring, this section explores two particular aspects of the functioning of the federal parliament. Firstly, it looks at the relationship between pastoralist MPs and their constituents. Secondly, it discusses a relatively new initiative, the Pastoralist Standing Committee, and attempts to assess the extent to which this structure might affect the way the interests of pastoralists are incorporated into policy processes.

### **4.1 MP-constituent relationships**

There is considerable and widespread criticism of the limited extent of some MP’s knowledge of their constituents and their relatively infrequent visits to their constituencies. MPs themselves justify this in terms of the considerable difficulties they experience with logistics, transport and communication to very inaccessible areas. Indeed, these difficulties were observed in the course of this research. Moreover, it seems that contact with constituents is increasing in pastoralist areas. MPs for Afar, Somali, South Omo and Borana have recently spent an increased amount of time in their constituencies. There have also been occasions when pastoralist MPs have raised issues of concern to pastoralists in parliament. However, critics argue that those complaints raised within parliament usually in some way boost the EPRDF’s position on an issue, and certainly do not contradict it. The MPs raising these issues suffer little personal risk as they are not seriously challenging the government. Critics also question why the issue of recent famine, especially in Afar, has not been raised in parliament when it is of critical concern to so many of the residents of that region.

When MP visit their constituencies, people do present their problems to them, both in group meetings and seeking them out on an individual basis. The issues they discussed in the course of this research included problems with health service delivery, water and telecommunications infrastructure, and

education. Some take the opportunity to voice complaints about the general lack of development in their areas, and serious concerns around levels of hunger. The MPs in Borana region promised to take up the issues with the relevant authorities, and we observed that they did so with woreda and zonal officials and, where possible, provided feedback to the communities concerned on the responses of these officials. A Somali MP, however, explained how, after years of effort and numerous attempts to take up the issues of his constituents with regional government, he had given up doing so. He considered such activity to be a waste of time, as it never produced any action on the part of regional government. In both regions, some people said they assumed that their MPs were speaking on their behalf at higher levels but they really had no idea what they did as there was no mechanism for finding out.

It was also noticeable that the issues discussed between constituents and their MPs were all local. There was only discussion about the local manifestation of particular policies, but not about other national level policy or issues which were not perceived to have a particular impact locally. It was striking, for example, that although an important national-level issue – the decision of the Boundary Commission to assign Badme to Eritrea – was announced during the fieldwork in Borana none of the constituents discussed this issue with their MP. It was difficult to assess whether constituents limited their discussions to local issues because these were the areas where they felt the MPs had some influence, or they themselves were not interested or concerned about wider problems.

It was clear from the research that the role of an MP is largely dependent on his (in these cases all the MPs were male) personality and individual charisma, capability, contacts, conscience and background. Some seemed intimidated by the presence of MPs and afraid to speak openly in front of them. Meetings held by the researcher with groups of constituents were very different in content and style when the MPs were present, and when they were not. Many of the contacts and work appeared to be informal and somewhat *ad hoc*, which raises the question of the extent to which access to MPs is affected by status, ethnicity, gender and proximity to urban centres. In some contexts, the MPs' acceptability to their constituents in terms of ethnic background was also raised by constituents as an important factor in their relationship. This was perceived as a negative factor by some at the federal level, who argued that MPs from certain areas were strongly representative of their clans, rather than their broader constituencies.

Aside from, but exacerbated by, the logistical and practical issues which constrain the relationships, there are serious issues about the nature of constituent-legislator relationships, and their mediation of citizen interests. As discussed above, many observers consider that the federal elections of 2000 were not "free and fair". For most MPs, the real competition over their appointment occurred not at the ballot box, but at the time of their selection by the ruling party. Research for this study confirmed that in a number of areas people vote on the basis of party instructions. As one Borana elder explained

the people we elect, they go away and they do a lot, at least we assume that they do, but there is no chance to interact with them, so we don't know. We don't know what X [the Federal MP] is doing

. . . The party people decide and tell us [whether to elect and re-elect him]. We can only know what the party people tell us about this, if they are good or not. We don't know the day to day details of these people.

Many commentators and constituents are therefore dismissive of the role of parliamentarians on the grounds that they are appointed by the ruling party, and that their selection is on the basis of party loyalty, rather than skills or expertise.

This situation weakens the incentive for them to put forward their constituents' interests effectively, as their re-appointment as MPs is not perceived to be in the hands of their constituents. Many informants in this study stated that they would choose whether to re-elect a current MP in the next elections on the basis of the party's assessment of whether they should be re-elected, rather than whether they themselves judged that they had done a good job. Many expressed disillusionment with the voting system, saying that they would 'just vote for whoever' because they 'didn't care'. Furthermore, appointment to other political or parliamentary posts is also seen as dependent on political favour and there are thus strong incentives to remain loyal to the party. The pervasive nature of the party structure in the regions, the complex interlinking between the EPRDF and regional parties, as well as the democratic weakness of many regional parties, create a similar set of incentives for MPs from EPRDF-affiliated parties. There is a strong perception, therefore, that MPs prioritise their role as party representatives over that of constituent representatives.

An additional criticism is levelled against MPs by some who question the "real roots" of MPs to pastoralist communities, arguing that many of them are from elite groups and are not familiar with those they claim to represent. Ironically, some of those who are perceived to be closer to their constituents are criticised for being insufficiently educated to be able to contribute appropriately in parliament.

#### **4.2 The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Pastoralist Affairs (PSC)**

The view of representation adopted here, however, shifts the focus away from the agency of these individual "representatives", towards a broader analysis of the functioning and role of the Federal Parliament within policy processes. One of the recent changes within parliament, which affects how citizen interests are mediated through the parliament, is the establishment of a number of new standing committees, with mandates to oversee government bodies. One of these is the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Pastoralist Affairs (PSC) which was established in mid-2002.

The roots of the PSC can be traced back to a workshop held in Kenya in 1999. It brought together pastoralists from the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia, and also donors, traders, NGOs, activists and others interested in pastoralist issues, highlighting the exclusion of pastoralist voices from policy as a significant cause for concern. In particular, Ethiopian pastoralists learnt from the experience of Kenyan pastoralists in political organising.

The Pastoralist Communication Initiative (PCI) was subsequently formed in Ethiopia and began to meet with pastoralist Parliamentarians, initially individually and by region. In January 2002, it facilitated a workshop of 70 pastoralist Members of Parliament on representation of pastoralist communities in the affairs of federal government. International academics, Kenyan pastoralists leaders and others participated in further discussions with the pastoralist parliamentarians about the potential for an Ethiopian parliamentary group. The pastoralist MPs present proposed a small subcommittee of eight MPs tasked with setting up a standing committee. Membership of this interim committee was decided by region and area and was chaired by a Somali.

The interim committee embarked on the task of establishing a standing committee, with the support and facilitation of PCI and others. Members lobbied government and various authorities and vigorous debates were held in response to the significant opposition expressed. In particular, legal advisors within parliament argued that pastoralist issues could be addressed within structures that deal with rural development and that a separate committee should not be accepted. However, after a period of negotiation, the establishment of the PSC was allowed.

Five particular factors contributed to the successful establishment of the PSC. Firstly, the increased political attention to pastoralist issues, within the context of broader political changes and moves towards political pluralism, provided an opening of space for changes to occur. Secondly, a concurrent restructuring of parliament which reflected changes in the structure of government and the establishment of new ministries provided a specific political opportunity for structural change. Three new standing committees were created at this time. Thirdly, the support of the Speaker of the House was essential. He accepted from the outset that a critical constituency had been historically marginalised and that structures needed to be put in place to give greater voice to that constituency. Additionally he wanted a broader development of the capacity of parliament and an increased ability of its members to play a more engaged role in public life. Fourthly, the mobilisation of some 90 parliamentarians, including strong pressure and lobbying from some individuals was very important. A number of MPs spoke during this study of the personal encouragement and motivation they received by gathering with large numbers of other pastoralist MPs, and the resulting realisation of their numbers and potential for influence. Finally, PCI provided the catalyst for change in providing external information, including access to international experience and experts, facilitation for the mobilisation of the MPs and a variety of other resources and support for lobbying.

The legislative function of the PSC is laid out in the Constitution and resulting legislation, including proclamation no 271/2002, in provisions applicable to all twelve standing committees in the House of People's Representatives. Bills, which may be initiated by the House or drafted by the executive, are referred to the committees after preliminary readings. Having received a bill relevant to its mandate, a committee arranges a public hearing where relevant parties and individuals are invited to present their views and opinions. The dates and times of the public hearing and the agenda are announced in broadcast and print media, and contributions by letter or telephone are also invited. After the public hearing, when

all views have been collected, the committee submits its report and recommendations to the Speaker of the House so that it can be added to the agenda for the next regular meeting of the House.<sup>6</sup> Committees also exercise oversight over ministries and other government bodies relevant to their mandate.

The oversight function of the PSC is directly mandated for the Livestock Dairy Products and Marketing Development Authority (a responsibility shared with the Trade Committee), with the right to provide oversight of the pastoralist sectors established in other ministries. In practice, the exercising to date by the PSC of its oversight function has been limited. Interviewees in this study consistently stressed the fact that the Committee is very new and has needed time to establish itself and build its own capacity. It is beginning to engage with nine ministries, including MOFA, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Education. The Head of the Pastoralist Unit at MOFA has been called before the Committee several times to answer questions. The PSC has also participated in the questioning of ministers by other standing committees. Moreover, there is clearly vigorous debate within the Committee on a number of critical issues, including the need for a separate Ministry for Pastoral Affairs and the issue of settlement.

However, the constraints of the broader political context are likely seriously to limit the overall ability of the PSC to influence government policy and provide effective oversight. The influence of the EPRDF in the appointment of members undermines the claims to autonomy of all parliamentary standing committees in Ethiopia, with most of the prominent positions reserved for those who have been most active in the EPRDF. The PSC is no exception. Many will argue that the make-up of the PSC is carefully balanced to ensure representation of pastoralist regions, with non-pastoralist members included in order to integrate pastoralists further into national policy-making. However, several informants in this study considered that appointment to the PSC was carefully managed to ensure sufficient EPRDF input and control. They also suggested that, since MPs in the PSC tend to act as spokesmen for the broader group of pastoralist MPs, control of the PSC membership by the EPRDF limits the influence of the wider group of MPs. Nevertheless, there has been some negotiation around committee membership, and since its formation one member has been replaced by another with broader support from other pastoralist MPs. There are also questions about potential conflicts of interest between members of the committee and their business and humanitarian activities.

Additional constraints to the influence of the PSC include: the political nature and sensitivity of “pastoralist policy”; the lack of formal mechanisms for relationships with broader body of MPs; a relatively limited formal mandate; resistance from some ministries; resistance from some other standing committees; overall capacity levels; and the continued expression by some of a discriminatory attitude towards pastoralists.

Despite the many constraints it is experiencing and the limitations of the broader environment, the establishment of the PSC was an important achievement for pastoralist MPs, and both demonstrated and contributed to changing views about “representation”. In particular, it shows a recognition of the

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<sup>6</sup> Source: Background information: FDRE Office of the Government Spokesperson 30.12.98.

legitimacy of the demand for a separate consideration of pastoralist needs, embodying a move away from the view (discussed above) in which peasant approaches to development dominate. The establishment of a structure with the potential to influence policy and legislation on pastoralist issues also symbolises a move towards the increased influence of citizen interests in policy-making. It is also being used by some junior members of government and civil servants to raise issues where they do not wish to confront senior figures directly. Furthermore, the gaining of confidence, knowledge and energy by parliamentarians (not just those who are currently members of the PSC, but many others who participated in the process and fought for its establishment) will affect their ability to put forward their constituents' views effectively in a number of contexts.

The Committee could become a space in which genuine debate about pastoralist policy takes place, a forum in which the interests of different groups of pastoralists are aggregated and formed into a more coherent voice with greater potential for policy influence. Furthermore, the process of negotiation and contestation around initiatives such as the PSC may in itself contribute to an enlarging of political "space". While the PSC influence on policy processes is for the moment an unrealised potential, we should not overlook its existing contribution to broader processes of negotiation and contestation occurring within Parliament.

## **5 The functioning of regional and sub-regional structures**

This section analyses how the functioning of sub-federal layers of government affects the mediation between citizen interests and policy outcomes. In order to provide necessary context for the discussion, the first part provides an introduction to the fieldwork sites. Subsequent sections look at the functioning of the regional and sub-regional structures of government.

### **5.1 Borana region, Oromia NRS**

Borana region was formally incorporated into Ethiopia by Amharic-speaking Christian highlanders during the Abyssinian monarchy under Menelik II in the late nineteenth century, but suffered minimal interference from the state for many years. The Ethiopian Revolution of 1974, however, brought increased contact with central powers. Boranas were forced to use Amharic in administration and the schools and much of their land was taken from them (Gudina 2003). However, under the Derg, considerable support was given to the Borana. Indeed, in 1987, Borana became a separate administrative region and large numbers of educated young Borana were given positions in the local party and administrative structures. The increased employment opportunities solidified support for the Derg and this new layer of civil servants and functionaries mediated between the Borana and the state. However when the EPRDF came to power, these civil servants became politically "suspect", and wider suspicions affected the whole of the Borana as a group (Helland 1999).

Oromia regional state, with its administrative capital in Nazareth/Addis has a relatively strong capacity. However, there is a sense of divorce between the further regions of the state and the regional



capital. The regional state has been trying to encourage private investment in the region and this has resulted in local businessmen fencing off and claiming exclusive rights to large tracts of land, as a result of which the Borana people have recently lost land for purposes that do not seem to benefit them (Helland 1999).

The political context in Oromia is complicated by the existence and activities of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The OLF is an armed movement which claims that it is the only legitimate political representative for all the Oromo people (Joireman 1997). The OLF claims that it is currently at its historically strongest point in terms of military capacity (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). There has certainly been a recent upsurge of military activity in the last few years, particularly along the Sudanese border.

The “Gada” is the core traditional institution within Borana society and it serves political, judicial and ritual functions.<sup>7</sup> Borana rule is based on a system in which decisions are made by consensus (not majority vote) and in which different institutions balance the power of different groups. Power-sharing rests on the division of roles between different institutions, with power distributed across generations and age groups. Each age group has distinct tasks and responsibilities, and each age group chooses its leaders by election, although there is some hereditary principle. Leaders are accountable to the people through a variety of mechanisms and can be removed from office if they do not perform adequately. Thus the Gada system structurally limits the amount of power exercised by any individual both through its eight year cycles, and by balancing power and position with countervailing institutions. Power is seen to rest ultimately with the people, a right they exercise either by direct participation or by delegating that power to leaders of their choosing to participate in different assemblies and meetings (Legesse 2000).

The highest authority rests in the open national assembly (the Gumi) which takes place every eight years, in which all Gada councils and assemblies present and past participate and the Qallu (ritual leaders) participate as observers. Any individual is able to make his/her views known in the preliminary sessions, but the actual meetings consist of active and retired Gada leaders and members of Gada assemblies. There is no concept of a “majority” that can impose will on a “minority”, but, as in all assemblies, debate must be continued until the councillors reach an agreement.

Some, such as Legesse, argue that women are effectively disenfranchised from the formal traditional institutions. Almost all ritual leaders are men, and women are also excluded from judicial activities. However, others argue that in many groups within Ethiopia, women may be formally excluded but it would be a mistake to assume political exclusion on the basis of gender. Women often influence political, social, economic and cultural processes through alternative means, although their means and form of influence can be harder to detect by an outside observer (Hodgson 2000). This issue was largely beyond the scope of this study, although attempts were made to judge the extent to which women were present in both formal state and traditional structures.

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<sup>7</sup> This section draws on Legesse (2000).

## **5.2 Somali NRS**

Although the Somali people were officially incorporated into Ethiopia at around the same time as the Borana, the reach of the state has remained much less in Somali Region, due to its inaccessibility and harsh terrain. For centuries, Somalis lived under decentralised, clan-based political systems, practising what has been termed “pastoral democracy” (Lewis 1961), with few ties to any centralised state. The Somali people are divided into six clan-families, each divided into sub-clans, sub-sub clans and so on. The most stable level is the sub-sub clan which ‘consists of close kinsmen united by a specific contractual alliance whose terms stipulate that they should pay and receive blood compensation’ (Lewis 1988, quoted in Adam 1992: 12). The *Xeer* is the clan law and customary system of the Somali. It is based on tribe, and tribe is understood as both a territorial unit and a political unit (Lewis 1955). Authority is delegated from the smallest structural unit (the *rer*, a group of people united by a certain object or activity, such as a river area) up to the highest office, the tribal chief, through a series of councils.

Clanism has traditionally been blamed for much of the political turbulence experienced by Somalis over many decades, both by anthropologists (Lewis 1955) and by politicians and policy-makers. Markakis (1996: 570), for example, suggests that it remains an important factor in current political practice, ‘The new political order in Ethiopia does not seem to have affected the categorical imperative of Somali political practice which is clannishness.’ Some, however, question an over-emphasis on this which deflects attention away from injustice and inequality, suggesting that clanism should be understood as a ‘shield in the struggle against a lack of proportionality under a process of uneven development’ (Adam 1992: 15).

The Somalis suffered repression and human rights abuses under the regimes of both Haile Selassie and the Derg, including aerial bombardment of areas inhabited by pastoralists during the time of the Derg (Khalif and Doornbos 2002). This repression stimulated the formation of a number of opposition groups, including the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) and the Ogadenia National Liberation Front (ONLF). The ONLF’s initial policy statement defined the Ogaden (a dominant Somali clan) as an ‘oppressed nation colonised by Ethiopia’ and pledged to establish an ‘independent Ogaden state with full sovereignty in line with the aspirations of its people’ (Markakis 1994). It initially collaborated with EPRDF, participating in the transitional government, however trust broke down, and it moved towards a continuation of armed struggle (Khalif and Doornbos 2002).

Current literature on the Somali region suggests that both elite and the masses are divided between supporting a more accommodative political structure within greater Ethiopia and a demand for full autonomy/independence. Some have identified a recent change of heart among some Somali elite stemming from a recognition of some of the advantages the region is now getting as the result of security concerns at the centre.

Somali region remains perhaps the most problematic of the “peripheral” regions, in a ‘state of chronic insecurity’ (Khalif and Doornbos 2002: 81). There is widespread political, organisational and financial disorganisation within different branches of government. There have been endless rounds of political infighting, and sacking and imprisoning of politicians. The current Speaker is the third since the establishment of the position in Sept 2001. No woreda elections have been conducted since 1991. Nine

months into the financial year 2001/02 no budget had been agreed by the Regional government (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003), and a large proportion of the budget was eventually returned unspent. As one Somali elder explained during the research ‘Regional government spends most of its time witch-hunting each other – so nothing is done for the people.’

### **5.3 Regional governments**

On paper the constitution grants regions substantive autonomy, including allowing them to enact their own parallel constitutions and the right to secede. The legislative branches of the nine regional states were assigned important functions in the 1995 regional constitutions, which referred to them as the ‘highest political authority’ in the region. However, although states enjoy residual powers under the constitution, several articles provide the federal government with considerable powers over policy, which could be interpreted and used as a veto over NRS policy decisions or as justification to withhold a federal subsidy from a locality administered by an alternative party (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003).

Although there is a strong formal commitment to decentralised power through the regions, this has been questioned by many. A recent World Bank study (World Bank 2001) concluded that the system in place is characterised by administrative deconcentration, not the devolution of powers to elected bodies which is provided for in federal and regional constitutions. Others, including informants in this study, have questioned the underlying will of the federal government to devolve powers.<sup>8</sup>

All regional parliaments are overwhelmingly dominated by the EPRDF and its affiliates (Polhemus 2003), the Somali People’s Democratic Party (SPDP) and Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation (OPDO) in the regions in which research was carried out. Many of the criticisms levelled at both federal MPs and the federal parliament and rehearsed in some detail above are also made against regional MPs and parliaments. MPs are criticised for being chosen by the party, rather than the people, and many informants in this study therefore dismissed the regional parliaments totally.

Aside from numerical control of parliaments, the party exercises other means of control in the regions. The party used to post “advisers” to regional governments. Indeed, a recent study in Tigray and SNNPRS showed that those regional governments were in practice directed by representatives of the TPLF. These men held no formal position, but acted as advisers or coordinators and held the authority to intervene and make final decisions in political and policy matters (Aalen 2002). While the federal government officially no longer posts “advisers” at regional level, the party structure of “cadres”, officers and local cells remains strong throughout the country and additional mechanisms are also employed to

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<sup>8</sup> It is also worth noting that the relationship between decentralisation and citizen responsiveness is far from clear, even in more open political contexts. A recent review of decentralisation in a number of African countries argues that, since decentralisation is essentially about the distribution of power and resources, political variables (especially the politics of central-local relations) explain decentralisation outcomes in terms of greater responsiveness. In Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania central governments have used funding either to create a dependant local elite or to consolidate an alliance with local elites based on the availability of patronage opportunities. This contrasts with a more responsive decentralisation in West Bengal, India, and Brazil where decentralisation was designed by a central government intent on challenging conservative local elites, and with a strong ideological commitment to anti-poverty policies (Crook 2003).

ensure ruling party influence. These range from a wide array of seminars and courses for state and party officials and bureaucrats to ensure an EPRDF “way of thinking”, to the direct disciplining of members of affiliated parties and their removal from office.

The central control of regional and lower levels of governments through an opaque “dual structure” involving a variety of mechanisms was confirmed as widespread by informants in this study. In some particularly troubled areas, including the two where fieldwork was conducted for this study, federal armed forces have also intervened directly, including, some claimed, in political appointments. Nevertheless, representatives of federal government publicly deny “interfering” in regional government (except in cases where “security” issues demand it). They emphasise that the problems in the regions are due to the failures of regional governments. However, it is certainly true that regional autonomy is much less than that prescribed under the constitution. As Aalen commented (2002: 1),

The most prevalent political development [in the period 1991–2000] is the consolidation of a centralised party rule along with the formalisation of a federal system, a development which implies an apparent paradox. According to fundamental federal theory, centralised party rule and genuine federalism are incompatible because the presence of an all-powerful party inevitably centralises power and undermines regional autonomy.

### *5.3.1 Reform in the regions?*

The federal reform process discussed above has a number of provisions that affect regional administrations. One particularly significant area of recent reform has been an attempt to facilitate a separation of powers at the level of the regional state. The regional constitutions developed under the transitional government provided for the election of a Chief Executive on the recommendation of the party or parties in power. That person then became Chairman of the executive branch of government, President of the State, and also presided over the regional parliament. This blurring of executive and legislative functions has been recognised at the highest levels to be unsatisfactory, hindering the ability of the legislature to provide oversight (Polhemus 2003). By the end of 2002, all NRSs (with the exception of Harari) had amended their constitutions to ensure that a separate speaker and deputy speaker are elected. NRSs are in the process of establishing offices and staff of their regional parliaments separate from the executive branch and establishing new systems and procedures. Regional parliaments have now been charged with investigating the executive’s conduct and activities, thus establishing the principle of legislative oversight of the executive branch.

However, in Somali region, in many people’s perceptions there was a continued lack of clarity about the roles of the party, the administration and the parliament. This lack of clarity in perception reflected the actual overlap in personnel and functions between the different institutions. There had been some attempts to separate functions, but in many informants’ eyes, not much progress had yet been made.

The potential influence of regional parliaments has also been recently enhanced by a number of other measures. Provision has been made to allow regional parliaments to form standing and other committees. In Somali NRS, for example, a regional Pastoralist Development Standing Committee was formed in February 2003, although it had yet to start functioning properly at the time of this study. However, in broader terms, Polhemus suggests that, although the evidence is anecdotal, ‘the trend seems to be towards more open debate in the Regional Councils. Increasingly, regional Presidents and bureau heads are experiencing searching questions and comments on reports they present to each Council session from both government and, where they exist, non-government members’ (Polhemus 2003: 11).

However, despite recent changes, the research in Somali region revealed a widespread dismissal of the role and effectiveness of regional government. ‘Government has made no difference’ was a view commonly expressed during this research, and confirmed in the comments made in the recent PRSP consultation.<sup>9</sup> In Fik district, for example, it was said that ‘government exists only by name but does nothing’. Indeed some considered government only a hindrance and an obstacle to development. Problems cited included lack of justice, corruption, the failure of government institutions to coordinate, and a lack of accountability. Additionally, there was a widespread view expressed in this research that some government officials benefited from the increased flows of resources to their areas brought by conflict. They thus attempted to perpetuate conflict, making “a trade on the insecurity”.

It is not possible to extrapolate findings from Somali region to other regional governments, as that region is generally seen as an extreme case. Nevertheless, other studies reveal that all regional councils suffer severe human and other resource constraints which affect their abilities to carry out oversight functions effectively (Polhemus 2003). Furthermore, party control of regional governments restricts the extent to which these institutions are able to mediate between citizen interests and policy outcomes, since decisions are often made outside the formal structures of representation. Firstly, although regional officials are outspoken in their assertions that policy is made at regional level, in practice most over-arching policies are determined in the centre and citizen interests funnelled through regional structures do not influence it. Secondly, although policy implementation matters including budget allocations are decided at regional and sub-regional levels, regional parliaments appear to have little influence in these processes.

#### **5.4 Sub-regional levels**

The system of local government by zones, woreda, kebele and (in some places) sub-kebele, was established under the Derg and became widely feared as an instrument of both intelligence-gathering and repression. Under the EPRDF many of these structures continued to be subject to widespread abuse in places. Some officials wield considerable power and there are few mechanisms of accountability. The NRS elections of 2000 and the woreda and kebele elections of 2001 were extremely problematic in many regions, including areas of Oromia (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003).

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<sup>9</sup> Somali PRSP: Somali National Regional State: Districts and Regional Consultation Report on PRSP (2<sup>nd</sup> draft, 2002, Jijiga.

However, changes are also underway at these levels of government under the “renewal” process, and there have been considerable attempts to “clean-up” local administrations. In most regions, elected councils at woreda and kebele level are now run by a cabinet consisting of officials who are also elected locally. Zones usually have coordinating functions only and so zone officials are often appointed rather than elected. There has also been a recent significant increase in the educational levels of local administrative officials (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003).

In Borana region, the main site of research into the functioning of woreda and kebele structures, the articulation of local interests at these administrative levels seems to be working reasonably well. People do take issues of concern to the kebele council, or directly to the woreda or zone. Nonetheless, as at federal and regional levels, the party continues to play a strong and controlling role in the election of officials. Indeed, some argue that the grip of the party is strongest at local levels. Furthermore, women responded rather differently to men when asked about local level representation. They expressed a much greater level of disconnection from these state systems. Indeed, one organised group of women was extremely dismissive about the possibility of state channels providing anything of use, and argued that they were not going to waste their time on systems from which they expected to get nothing.

Although there is expression of local concerns to kebele and woreda officials and councils, the influence of this on policy outcomes appears to be limited. There is the perception by citizens of a serious lack of connection between the kebele/woreda structures and higher levels of government. Many informants stated that the woreda had passed on their issues to zonal or regional authorities, and yet they had received no response and did not know what had happened to their complaints. Despite the strong official rhetoric about decentralisation from the centre, policy formulation decisions are perceived to emanate from levels higher than the woreda. Even woreda officials stated that they were mostly implementing bodies.

In Borana, two particular issues which were seen to be crucial to local livelihoods were considered to be managed at federal level. The first related to the granting of land including wells along the border to Somali tribes,<sup>10</sup> and the second to issues around conflict and security in the region. These have become very deep-seated grievances which have generated considerable anger, and yet some elders perceived that there were not adequate systems through which they might influence the outcome of decisions.

It is also worth noting that relationships between communities and state authorities vary across and within regions. Different tribes relate differently to structures of government depending on a variety of local ethnic and political issues. For example, in Borana region, some argue that the Gabra tribe have generally been well-treated by the EPRDF in order to create a counter-force to the Borana. They have benefited with increased numbers of political positions. This tends to make Gabra relationships with state authorities more cooperative and collaborative, while further alienating the Borana, both from the state and from the Gabra.

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<sup>10</sup> See Helland (1999) and Shide (2003) for a discussion of this complex issue.

Somali region provided a contrast to Borana region, as the influence of woreda and kebele was seen to be very limited. No local level elections have taken place, although they have been planned and constantly postponed. Officials have been appointed to woredas and kebeles, but they are expected to implement decisions taken either at zonal or regional level.

Significant changes in regional/central relationships are likely to be brought about across Ethiopia in the near future by the move towards block grants to woredas and the devolution of budgeting, expenditure and accounting (World Bank 2001). The speed with which this long-standing policy is currently being implemented can be attributed both to donor pressure and a desire on the part of the federal government to restrict the influence of higher levels of government (including regional and zonal officials) on woreda levels (Vaughan and Tronvoll 2003). However this policy will have an uneven impact across the country. In Somali region, for example, block grants to woredas will be delayed until woreda elections have been held. There is, however, a move towards planning at a woreda level in this region.

## **6 Interaction between state and traditional structures of representations**

The third process which mediates between citizen interests and policy influence in the Ethiopian context is the interaction between state and traditional structures of representation. After a brief discussion of potential differences in conceptualisation between state and traditional views of representation, this section concentrates on one particular form of interaction, the function of the “amakari” in Somali region. It then assesses the extent to which such interaction is able to mediate effectively.

There are undoubtedly different conceptions of the role and practice of “representation” among different groups in Ethiopia. There are so many different peoples groups within Ethiopia with diverse ethnicities, histories and cultures that it would be unwise to make generalised statements about “traditional” or “customary” views of representation. It would be equally incorrect to assume that there is no diversity within ethnic groups, based on age, gender, status or other factors. Nonetheless, it is possible to consider how aspects of customary systems might affect the conceptualisation and practice of representation and how this might clash with the views of the majority “highlanders” in government.

Across many of the traditional systems in Ethiopia there are similarities with the Gada system of the Borana (described above) especially in principles and practices around decision-making. For example, age is often given a high value within “traditional” socio-political structures. Elders serve in both formal and informal structures, and councils of elders are frequently used to solve inter- and intra-community disputes, as well as domestic issues. Elder councils are usually male, and often also exclude the “occupational castes” (see section three above). Decisions are usually consensus based.

Some argue that a consensual, egalitarian-based approach contrasts with trends of the dominant “political culture” in Ethiopia. Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003) suggest that patterns of social interaction within Abyssinian traditions demonstrate a hierarchical stratification, with a system of social classification

in which people are not perceived to be equal and the world is not egalitarian. They suggest that these patterns of social interaction feed into a “political culture” which facilitates the continued dominance of central government as the source of the political agenda and decision-making.

Despite a difference in conceptual understanding of principles of representation, at all levels of political structure there is interaction between traditional structures of representation and state structures. In many instances, this takes place through different positions being held by the same person. For example, a number of federal MPs are also high-ranking elders. However, this filling of both traditional and state roles is particularly frequent at lower levels. In Borana, some estimated that about 20 per cent of the kebele council (about 100 people) were also elders, and the consensus in every meeting was that at kebele level the councillors are “one of us”.

There is a strong spoken commitment from those within political systems at all levels to respect traditional structures and not to interfere with matters which should be dealt with by traditional elders. They also sometimes provide financial and other support to customary celebrations. There is a widespread view that the situation is relatively better than under the Derg, when councils and other bodies had simply issued orders and expected them to be obeyed. Woreda and kebele officials do consult with elders about a wide range of issues including natural resource management and community mobilisation. On the surface there does not appear to be a big split or excessive levels of conflict between kebele/woreda officials and traditional elders.

In some cases, particular structures have been established to allow traditional “representatives” to engage with formal political systems. Based on a system established in Afar region, in Somali NRS there is a constitutional provision for an ‘Assembly of Elders and Ethnic Leaders’. This has not yet formally been established and the proclamation necessary for its establishment had not (as at May 2003) yet been drafted. However, the system is already operating and is intended to bring traditional conflict management mechanisms into government (Polhemus 2003). A number of elders, known as “amakari”, are appointed and receive a salary to advise government at regional, zonal and woreda levels on matters relating to customary and community issues, and also to be involved in conflict resolution.

A variety of views were heard in the course of this research about the extent to which this structure is an effective means of mediating interests. Some criticised the amakari strongly for being in the pay of the government and being divorced from the communities they claimed to represent. Others suggested they played a useful role, particularly in conflict resolution. However, there is certainly a question about the amakarists’ independence from the SPDP. The amakarists were first appointed just before the 2000 elections and many openly worked for the party at this time. During the course of this research, some amakari at different levels openly admitted bringing people into the party and persuading individuals who were planning to stand as independent or opposition candidates for the federal or regional parliaments to stand as SPDP candidates. They argued that it was important for the candidates representing their communities to have influence, and this could not be achieved outside the party. Furthermore they judged that the SPDP was the most likely party to bring benefits to their communities.



There was widespread agreement that the amakari exercise considerable control over the voting habits of the communities from which they come. It seems that the SPDP is anxious to retain the useful elements of the amakari, without allowing their power to grow too significantly. Some observers speculated that the failure to institutionalise their position and provide them with resources to mobilise themselves and work effectively (for example meeting space and offices) is a deliberate ploy to limit their influence.

Despite the often harmonious interaction between state and traditional structures, there are three particular issues that emerged on more than one occasion in several sites as sources of grievance between elders and the political authorities. Firstly, in Borana, there was widespread alarm at the granting to farmers by woreda officials of land traditionally reserved for vulnerable flocks. This was seen as a significant problem by pastoralists which would undermine their livelihoods as well as their traditional systems of flock management. Secondly, the distribution of power within the kebele and woreda was often a source of grievance. Some elders who were used to their decisions being final, find now that their opinions are not considered binding. In particular, the relative youth of the council chairs is often also a source of grievance. Finally, there is sometimes conflict between state and traditional systems of justice. State systems are seen to be slow and difficult to deal with. On occasions, individuals convicted by traditional courts have appealed to the police and had their convictions and penalties overturned by the state system. This was seen to be a source of frustration as those convicted of crimes were allowed to escape unpunished.

Undoubtedly the interaction between formal and traditional systems mediates between citizen interests and policy outcomes, and thus fulfils a “representation” function. However, three sets of questions about this mediation emerge from the research. Firstly, questions can be asked about the extent to which elders have been “co-opted” by their involvement with the government. It is not in doubt that elders who participate in political systems at all levels benefit financially from the government. Even those who hold no formal position but attend various “consultations” receive some financial compensation for their participation. What is in doubt is the extent to which their financial and other ties to the state or party affects their ability to put forward an independent articulation of interests within their community. It is difficult on the basis of this research to provide an assessment of this. Moreover, it is likely to vary from region to region, community to community and from individual to individual. Nonetheless, it is a question that should be asked.

Secondly, there are questions about the extent to which the views articulated by elders are influential in policy decisions. The research suggested that the elders’ views were incorporated into decisions at kebele and woreda level. Indeed, many of those making the decisions were themselves elders. Nonetheless, the discussion above has highlighted areas of grievance and disappointment felt by some elders about their participation in these structures. Moreover, the lack of connection between these levels of government and higher levels has been noted. Decisions on a number of matters are widely believed to be motivated by political issues. For example, access to food and water is perceived by some as related to allegiance to the central state in Addis, with clans and individuals suspected of disloyalty denied the right

to use wells and receive food aid.<sup>11</sup> There is a widespread perception that policy on certain important issues, such as land and security, is made at a federal level and that the views of elders are not significant in these decisions. Even when “consultations” have been held by the government on certain issues, some elders have suggested that this has only been for the sake of appearance.

A third set of questions can be raised about the process of “interest aggregation” by elders. As discussed above, their traditional systems are based on consensus reached by adult males, and both women and outcast groups are usually excluded from these processes. The extent to which elders are therefore able to put forward a position which reflects the diversity of views from within their communities can be questioned.

## **7 Conclusions: pastoralist representation in Ethiopia**

It was never the aim of this paper to form a judgement about whether representation “does” or “does not” occur in Ethiopia, or whether, for example, pastoralist parliamentarians are or are not “representative”. The concept of representation is too contested, both within Western political thought and within Ethiopia, and such an approach implies a view of political systems which is overly simplistic and unhelpfully functionalist. Just as there is more to “democracy” than the formalities of elections (Ottaway 1995; Carothers 2002), so there is more to “representation” than having “representatives” in parliament and other structures of government.

Instead, this paper has conceptualised representation as the processes mediating between citizen interests and policy outcomes, identifying these in the Ethiopian context as: the functioning of the federal parliament; the functioning of regional and sub-regional systems of government; and the interaction between formal and “traditional” or “customary” systems. The analysis of these areas has been wide-ranging, covering a number of levels, concepts and processes and it is not proposed to summarise all the points made and questions raised again here. Instead there are three related sets of conclusions relating to the case presented. These focus on: the role of individuals, the location of policy-decisions, and the factors influencing pastoralist policy.

Firstly, although the focus of the paper has been on mediating processes, these do involve individuals who have a representative function. As discussed in section two, elected officials in many different contexts can be required to make trade-offs between the roles of a delegate, a trustee and party representative. In the Ethiopian context, officials at all levels were strongly perceived to act primarily as party representatives. The lack of free and fair elections and the system of party nominations for candidates strengthen the incentives for “representatives” to prioritise representing their parties when there is a potential conflict of interest. As discussed, individuals can represent the interests of others whether or not they have been transparently elected by those for whom they are supposed to speak.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, in April 1999 government troops denied pastoralists access to a portion of the Webi Shabelle River near Godey. Many people believe the reason is because the former chief of the ONLF belongs to the sub-clan that inhabits that area (Khalif and Doornbos 2002).

Undoubtedly there are occasions when individual MPs and other elected officials at different levels act in the interests of their constituents, even when this may be in conflict with their role as party representatives. Nonetheless, notwithstanding individual decisions and behaviours, the structures of political competition in Ethiopia operate in a way that provide incentives for individuals to represent parties, and not constituents.

The second set of conclusions is around the broader processes which mediate between citizen interests and policy outcomes. There are many factors which affect how pastoralist interests are articulated within these processes, and many of these have not been explored in detail here. Factors which hinder an effective articulation include the poverty, inaccessibility and lack of education of much of the population; gender, age and minority discrimination; and clan rivalries. Historically, prejudice against pastoralists and their way of life has certainly been a significant factor. However, the analysis presented here has shown how the three processes identified are all critically affected by the dynamics of the policy-making arena in Ethiopia, and the politics within which it is embedded. A central argument of this paper therefore is that, although there are structures in which those who hold representative positions participate, the most significant policy decisions are taken outside those structures. The scope for the effective linking of citizen interests to policy outcomes through these political structures is therefore limited.

A third set of conclusions is an implication of the other two. It has been argued that many policy decisions are somewhat unconnected to the articulation of pastoralist interests and the actions of pastoralist “representatives”. Instead, they are the result of a strong and still relatively centralised decision-making structure dominated by the EPRDF. Policy-making around pastoralism cannot therefore be understood by focusing only on “pastoralist issues”. Pastoralist issues and policy are affected by processes and changes at different levels – international, federal, regional and sub-regional – as well as by shifting relationships between different actors at different levels. They are also affected by a range of other issues and dynamics in Ethiopia, and link directly to broader concerns and processes. These issues include:

- the relationship between federal and regional governments.
- land issues, including debates about private ownership.
- broader economic performance and development and a concern to “modernise” Ethiopia, bringing the country into global markets.
- the stability of the Federation and concern about secessionist tendencies in some regions where pastoralists live, particularly Somali.
- inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts which frequently break out in pastoralist areas, and act as a considerable drain on state resources.
- conflict with neighbouring states. The terms of the settlement of the Ethiopian-Eritrean War are considered very unsatisfactory by many Ethiopians and concerns about border security in pastoralist areas are strong.

- donor concerns (especially about poverty levels and the Millennium Development Targets). Ethiopia is a strongly aid-dependent state, and while the government frequently rejects donor demands, its room for manoeuvre is limited.
- The tension between the EPRDF/TPLF desire to retain control, and internal and external demands for democratisation and political pluralism.
- The role and legitimacy of traditional structures and their links to structures of the state.
- Regional and sub-regional political issues, which vary by region.
- Concerns about pastoralist cross-border trade and contraband.

These three sets of conclusions might appear somewhat negative about the state of representative government in Ethiopia and the extent to which pastoralists can influence policy in their favour through those whom they elect. However, the political context in Ethiopia is changing. As this paper has suggested there are different interpretations of those changes. Some see them as a sign of a cautious and incremental “opening-up”, others interpret the changes as cynical manipulation by those in power to reinforce a control that might be weakening. As Vaughan and Tronvoll (2003: vi) put it, ‘Ethiopia’s leaders seem poised either for a renewal of progress towards devolution and “power-sharing”, or for a dive into increased authoritarianism, and repression of competitors.’

Whatever the motivation for and extent of changes (and there is probably some truth in a number of views), it is argued here that there are spaces opening up which can allow for a more effective articulation of citizen interests to influence policy. These spaces appear to be constantly shifting – opening, then closing, and opening again somewhere else. However, it does appear that the type and use of these spaces is open to negotiation, contestation, re-interpretation, and challenge in various arenas and by different actors. Furthermore, these processes are occurring not only in relation to broad political issues and democratic opening, but simultaneously around a number of policy issues. Government is indisputably engaging with issues around pastoralism in ways that it has not done in the past. Understanding how engagement in this issue is linked to and affected by broader political shifts and developments in different policy arenas will help those concerned with enhancing pastoralist “representation” in Ethiopia.

It is, perhaps, unwise to draw broader conclusions from research into one case. Nonetheless, the mobilisation of pastoralist MPs, and especially the formation of the PSC has provided an example of how “representatives” of poor and marginalised groups have come together to work through formal political structures in favour of those they “represent”. Critical factors in their mobilisation included changes in the broader political environment as well as a specific moment of organisational change, the influence of key actors both internally and externally, and the cumulative effect of the actions of a substantial group of MPs. However, the key constraint to the influence of both this group and other structures of political representation remains the broader political environment, with a lack of political competition and an absence of institutionalised democratic processes.

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