

# Ethiopian Protesters Killed as East African Clashes Spread

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NAIROBI, [Kenya](#), Nov. 2 - Ethiopian security forces clashed with protesters on the streets of Addis Ababa on Wednesday, killing at least two dozen people and wounding 150 in an escalation of the discord over the results of the May parliamentary elections.

Witnesses described hundreds of police officers and soldiers sweeping through the streets, rounding up young men believed to be tied to the opposition that is challenging the governing party's victory.

Earlier in the week, the police killed six opposition protesters in clashes. Two police officers were also killed in the protests. In June, an earlier round of antigovernment protests led to the shooting of 36 people by the police.

Information Minister Berhanu Hailu said he was "sorry and sad" for the violence, The Associated Press reported, but he disputed the notion that the police were quick to resort to force and called opposition politicians the instigators of the violence.

The police have begun rounding up many of those leaders, arresting them in a campaign to stop protests that runs the risk of angering the opposition further.

The clashes in [Ethiopia](#) were the worst in a string of police crackdowns on protesters in East Africa in recent days. Kenya and [Tanzania](#) have also been shaken by deadly campaign violence in the last week.

When Kenyan police officers planned security arrangements for a political rally last week, they agreed that tear gas, rubber bullets and clubs would be used to control the crowd, not live ammunition.

But something went awry after protesters began filling the streets of Kisumu last Saturday, throwing stones at officers and setting bonfires to show their displeasure with a proposed constitution. Despite their plans, riot police officers shot live bullets into the crowd, killing 4 people and wounding as many as 30.

It was an all-too-common occurrence, one that would probably have ended right there had one of the victims not turned out to be the son of one of the police officials in the planning meeting. The grieving father is now demanding answers about how his son, a 13-year-old wearing a school uniform and carrying books, ended up with bullet fragments in the back of the head.

"If the instruction was not to use live ammunition, why did it happen?" Police Inspector Kennedy Limera Omutere, a 16-year veteran of the Kenyan police, asked in an interview, in the midst of making funeral arrangements for his son. "They shot an innocent boy who was unarmed. They shot other people who were not involved in the riots."

The State Department recently urged visiting Americans to steer well clear of even the most tame-looking demonstrations as Kenya's Nov. 21 referendum approaches, because the rallies can erupt quickly into violent free-for-alls.

Similar warnings have gone out for Ethiopia and Stone Town in Zanzibar, where opposition supporters protesting election results have confronted stern-faced security forces intent on clearing the streets.

In Zanzibar, the atmosphere was tense in the period before last Sunday's presidential elections because the last round of balloting on the semiautonomous islands in 2000 had resulted in dozens of deaths. Despite the presence of international observers, violence broke out again this time, with security forces firing live ammunition, beating opposition supporters in the streets and using a water cannon to disperse crowds.

Nine people died in the clashes, five civilians and four government security officers, according to news agency reports.

The National Democratic Institute, an American election organization, called the voting in Zanzibar an improvement compared with the voting five years ago but noted a variety of irregularities as well as the use of excessive force.

Demonstrators sometimes fuel the violent confrontations, overstepping the bounds of peaceful protest. In the Kisumu rally, for instance, protesters used slingshots to propel rocks at police officers. Kenyan police officers said some rioters were moving in on the police station in an attempt to free some of their compatriots.

But as the Kisumu rally showed, even the best of plans can fall apart once the commotion begins. The police have declined to say whether anyone gave an order for police officers to use force or whether the shooting just began spontaneously, despite the discussions beforehand on the use of nonlethal methods.

"I wouldn't say they had malice against my son," Inspector Omutere said of the police officers who opened fire in Kisumu. "I would say they weren't prepared. They did not act professionally, and you have to act professionally - even if provoked to the extreme."

Inspector Omutere intends to ask his bosses to conduct an investigation of the shooting so that those who opened fire without authorization are brought to justice.

Other critics, however, have already asked for the resignation of Maj. Gen. Mohamed Hussein Ali, an army officer who became Kenya's police chief last year with a mandate to crack down on violent crime.

Excessive force has been a recurrent issue in Kenya and throughout the region. One of General Ali's predecessors, Shedrach Kiruki, was fired as Kenya's police chief in 1996 after officers killed a university student involved in a protest against high tuition fees and then killed two other students who gathered to protest the police's use of force.

But General Ali, who has defended the police response in Kisumu, has earned the support of top government officials. He insists that by acting sternly in Kisumu and at other political rallies the police have kept violence from increasing.

In Ethiopia, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has defended his security force's tactics, saying that opposition supporters are trying to overturn the election results from the May parliamentary elections through protest, a tactic he declared undemocratic.

In Zanzibar, officials with the governing party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi, have made similar claims against the opposition Civic United Front. Official results gave incumbent President Amani Abeid Karume 53.2 percent of the vote, compared with 46.1 percent for the main opposition candidate, Seif Shariff Hamad. But opposition backers are claiming fraud and refusing to recognize the result.

In Kenya, two ministers in President Mwai Kibaki's administration who are opposed to the government's draft constitution were condemned when they suggested that approving what they called a flawed document could prompt people, in the words of Roads Minister Raila Odinga, "to rise up against the undemocratic constitutional order."

Mr. Odinga, who explained later that he was not advocating a coup, said of the police shootings that he was "ashamed to be serving a government that does this to its people."