A major argument of this book is that the analysis and understanding of ethnic political mobilisation must have a wide scope, transcending the traditional political science focus on institutions and formal structures of political power. I have argued in chapter 1 that the main assumption of the institutional approach, that the introduction of a certain institutional framework is the key determinant of political behaviour, is too simplistic and cannot explain the complexity of multiethnic societies and ethnicity as a political phenomenon. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how my findings in the multiethnic region of southern Ethiopia support this argument. The case studies of Sidama and Wolayta show that the two communities have produced two different patterns of ethnic political mobilisation under the same order of ethnic federalism, underlining the need to find additional explanations of political behaviour to supplement the institutional one. Drawing on the historical outlines in chapter 3 as well as on discussions of the national and regional political systems in chapters 2 and 4 respectively, I explore the political trajectories of Sidama and Wolayta after the fall of the Derg. I look at how the EPRDF’s strategy of forming ethnic-based parties either related to or disregarded the cultural, social, and historical context of the two communities, and I attempt to explain why political mobilisation has turned divisive in Sidama and cohesive in Wolayta.

Creating a new elite: Establishment of the Sidama
People’s Democratic Organisation

The EPRDF was received with a mixture of appreciation and scepticism when it first arrived in the south. People welcomed liberation from the repressive rule of the Derg and noted that people of their own ethnic group had followed the forces as they moved southward. But they were also sceptical because the new Tigrayan-led rulers represented yet another invasion from the north.
The EPRDF itself also faced a dilemma: how to consolidate its control of the south in a way that both ensured its legitimacy among the local populations and provided a cadre of loyal and submissive agents. Two different strategies were possible. On the one hand, the party could enhance its legitimacy by seeking a closer alliance with already established local elites not attached to the Derg. All over the country, the EPRDF avoided the so-called *nekiki*, those who had ‘touched’ power or who had relatives who had ‘touched’ power during the Derg (Poluha and Rosendahl 2002). On the other hand, if the party were to prioritise the search for submissive agents, they would have to create their own leaders who gained their standing in the community solely from being cadres. The elite in many communities had already been absorbed by established opposition parties and movements or had a traditional power base of their own, and they were therefore antagonistic towards membership in the EPRDF. However, the younger generations and the groups which traditionally had been excluded from political participation were eager to join. This led the EPRDF to follow the second strategy of party building: recruiting the young and the marginalised and creating an entirely new elite of loyal party agents—but at the cost of legitimacy. This was the backdrop to the process of EPRDF party building in Sidama and Wolayta from 1991 on.

**Hostility between the EPRDF and the SLM**

In Sidama, there was no party active on the ground when the EPRDF arrived from the north. But the Sidama Liberation Movement, in exile in Somalia, had already co-opted some of the traditional and educated elites since its founding in 1975. Considering the ideological similarities between the SLM and the TPLF, the two should have been natural allies in post-Derg Sidama. Both were nationalist movements that had fought for self-determination for their respective ethnic groups against the Derg, and both had links to the Ethiopian radical student movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In the last days of the Derg, they met for negotiations in Mogadishu. No cooperation or alliance was agreed upon, but the negotiations facilitated the return of the SLM leader Wolde Emmanuel Dubale from Somalia after Mengistu Haile Mariam was out of office in Addis Ababa.

The SLM took part in the transitional government, providing two of the 19 representatives from Sidama in the parliament. But the transitional government broke up in March 1992 after many of the non-EPRDF parties attended a conference in Paris organised by