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ETHIOPIA CONFLICT INSIGHT

ABOUT THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide analysis and policy implications to assist the African Union (AU), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Member States and Development Partners in decision-making and in the implementation of peace and security related instruments. The opinions expressed in this report are the contributors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Institute for Peace and Security Studies.

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SITUATION ANALYSIS

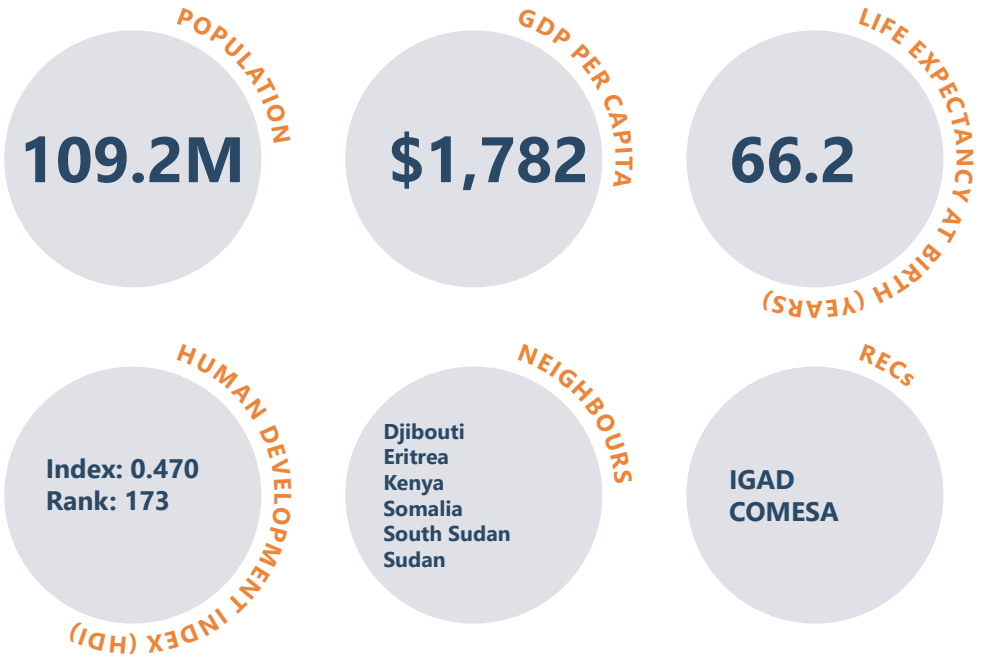


Figure 1: Country profile and demographics

Source: UNDP Human development index, (2019). (Retrieved from: http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/ETH)

Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, is one of the continent's oldest independent countries that served as a symbol of African independence during the colonial period. As a founding member of the United Nations and the Organization of African Union (later transformed into African Union), Ethiopia played an essential role in laying the foundation for Africa's anti-colonial struggles. A modern state incorporating different ethnic groups and regions into one state entity and characterized by political and economic coercion and cultural assimilation, Ethiopia was formed at the end of the 19th century by Emperor Menelik II. The period that followed, the reigns of Emperor Haile Selassie and the Military regime, sustained the centralist unitary-state model under which both individual and group rights were largely repressed.[1]

After toppling the Derg Military regime in 1991 and masterminding the transitional period that followed, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) drew up the current Ethiopian Constitution in 1995, introducing a decentralized federal system of government premised on ethno-linguistic considerations and devolution of power into regional states. Since taking power, the incumbent regime has promoted a development agenda marked by notable economic growth and poverty reduction, particularly, after 2001, as well as rolled out several mega projects aimed to accelerate economic transformation.

Despite the steady socio-economic progress, in November 2015, anti-government protests - commonly referred to as the "Oromo protests"- engulfed the country. Although the protests initially unfolded in the Oromia region against the controversial "Addis Ababa Integrated Regional Development Plan" (hereinafter the "Master Plan"), they quickly spread to several parts of the country, including Amhara and some parts of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) Regional State with demands for broader economic and political reforms. Acknowledging grievances of its citizens, the government underwent a "deep reform" process, which included the parliamentary election of Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the current Prime Minister (PM) in April 2018.

Since his appointment, the new PM has spearheaded several reforms to open-up political and economic spaces - released political detainees, allowed exiled opposition leaders to come home and mended Ethiopia's relations with its long-term enemy – Eritrea, a move that accorded him international acclamation and a Nobel Peace Prize. However, the post-April period has been accompanied by soaring ethnic tensions, violence and breakdown of law and order that resulted in the death of thousands and displacement of millions of people.[2] Despite efforts to bring about reform, enormous challenges remain. The country still has a long way to go

1 *The military regime, however, had later on recognised ethnic and religious rights to a certain extent.*

2 *AP News, (September 25, 2019). Ethiopia says 1,200-plus killed in unrest over past year. Retrieved from: https://apnews.com/6328b8f396f84cd3b852ec20cd0ac4aa*

to see its wounded unity heal, restore the rule of law and breathe life into its depleted reserves so as to eventually realize sustainable peace and stability. As the country is preparing to organize election in 2020, it is imperative that the government ensure rule of law; stem the tide of violence across the country; and keep in check divisive forces that can derail the country's transition.

CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

Economic Inequality and Youth Unemployment

Notwithstanding its rapid economic growth and relative success in reducing absolute poverty over the past two decades, a significant segment of the Ethiopian population (29.6%) still lingers in absolute poverty.[3] Indications of food insecurity are shown in the WFP report, which estimated 8.3 million people requiring emergency food assistance in 2019.[4] The registered growth also came with soaring inequalities – both vertical and horizontal. The imbalance between economic growth and the actual living standards of the people, in tandem with the apparent inequality,[5] created dissatisfaction among the public, particularly, the youth who are largely unemployed.

While unemployment is a national challenge, the problem is more prevalent among the urban youth (estimated at 17%).[6] This is largely due to rural-urban migration caused by large-scale infrastructure investments and the commercial pressure for land from both domestic and foreign investors, growing urbanisation as well as the failure of the economy to absorb the growing workforce.[7] Moreover, over the past two decades, with the aim of modernizing the agricultural sector, the country introduced capital intensive farming projects (involving both local and foreign investors), mainly in Oromia, Gambella and SNNP regions. However, many of the decisions surrounding the allocation of land to developers followed a top-down approach that created resentment from local community and regional states and also came with little or no compensation to the displaced. This move naturally aggravated poverty and inequality by increasingly exposing them to food insecurity. The frustration caused by joblessness and persistent dependency forced the disaffected youth to resort to informal migration and violence.

The situation was further exacerbated by poor governance and corruption. The absence of efficient and responsive state institutions, particularly, lack of transparency and accountability in managing public affairs created a situation replete with corruption. A case in point is that the 2018 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index placed Ethiopia at 114th out of the 180 countries measured.[8] The combination of these factors - economic exclusion, soaring inequality, high rate of youth unemployment, corruption and failure on the part of the state to adequately respond to these problems - contributed to the shaping of the 2015 protests in the Oromia and Amhara regions and the subsequent nationwide escalation that rocked the fabric of socio-economic and political life in the country.

Contested Federal Structure

In Ethiopia, there is distressing lack of elite consensus on several key issues ranging from national flag, language (one vs. multiple languages at national level), ownership of the capital city and most importantly the federal structure itself. As a stark departure from the past, in 1995, the EPRDF government established a federal system with regional and local administrations drawn along ethno-linguistic lines. However, this governing structure is contested by two dominant forces: ethno nationalist/centrifugal forces that strongly support the (ethnic) federal structure and call for its effective implementation including genuine self-rule and fair representation at federal level; and centripetal forces that criticize the federal system for undermining the country's unity.

For the latter group, the federal system has intensified ethnic hostilities by eroding national unity, further augmenting lack of trust among ethnic groups and unleashing minority-majority tensions. According to this group, several inter and intra-ethnic conflicts have unfolded across and within regions since the adoption of the federal structure. There are contested boundaries among the regional states and minorities within the regional states feel insecure as the federal government has failed to uniformly ensure citizenship rights throughout the country.[9]

The ethno-nationalist forces, however, attribute much of these challenges to the failure of the ruling party to effectively implement the federal system. According to

3 World Bank 4th Ethiopia Economic Update. (2015). Overcoming Constraints in the Manufacturing Sector. Retrieved from http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/827261468190142554/pdf/97916-REVISED-Box393200B-PUBLIC-Ethiopia-.Economic-Update-4th-Edition-v-web.pdf. See also IMF Country Report. (2015). No. 15/326. Retrieved from: https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2015/cr15326.pdf.

4 WFP Ethiopia Country Brief. (July 2019). Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WFP-0000107859.pdf

5 IMF Report. (2015). IMF Country Report No. 15/326. Retrieved from http://www.imf.org.

6 World Bank Economic Update. (2016). 5th Ethiopia Economic Update: Why So Ideal? Wages and Employment in a Crowded Labor Market. Retrieved from: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/463121480932724605/pdf/110730-REPLACEMENT-WP-thEthiopiaEconomicUpdatevweb-PUBLIC.pdf.

7 According to recent studies, landlessness is a growing problem in rural areas, including Oromia, Amhara and SNNP regions. As much as 38.3 percent of households in Oromia and 25 percent in SNNPR are landless, and the problem is more prevalent among the youth. See Rahmato, D. (2018). Land, Landlessness and Poverty Introduction and context. In Rahmato, D. (Ed). Land, Landlessness and Poverty in Ethiopia. Research findings from four National Regional States. Pp 1 – 8. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Forum for Social Studies.

8 Corruption Perception Index, (2018). Retrieved from: https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018

9 Accord Report. (2017). Ethnic federalism and conflict in Ethiopia. Retrieved from:http://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/ethnic-federalism-conflict-ethiopia/.

this group, although the EPRDF adopted, on paper, a federal governance structure, in practice power is highly concentrated at the centre, with very little authority devolved to the regions. The resulting discontent fuelled ethnic polarisation and strong ethno-nationalist sentiments which facilitated inter-ethnic competition and violence.

The federal structure continues to be contested by both forces and it will likely be the topmost issue in the upcoming election as evidenced by the ongoing elite/political polarisation and alliance formation across parties. Achieving a consensus on the country's future requires the Ethiopian government and people to undertake a genuine national dialogue that will allow them to craft an acceptable constitutional design, including the re-defining of power relations between the centre and regions. Who wins the election and what trajectory it chooses to take will significantly determine the future of the country.

Lack of Rule of Law and Breakdown of Law and Order

Although the EPRDF government embraced a multi-party system in 1991, the political landscape was dominated by one party and characterized by authoritarianism and repression. This was reinforced by the government's introduction of a series of restrictive laws that enabled the state to silence political activists and journalists, decimate political opposition, and restrain freedom of expression and association.[10] Since 2005, the government used these laws to harass and arrest several journalists, bloggers and opposition members; systematically push out CSOs and constrain the operations of the independent media.[11]

Moreover, institutions such as the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), the Human Rights Commission, and the judicial system that is supposed to be accountable to the parliament were ineffective and perceived by the public as highly partisan. The unwarranted influence of the government on the work of such institutions has undermined the institutions' credibility and rendered them weak and incapable of ensuring check and balance in the country.[12] This has led to a substantial absence of impartial platforms that rectify public grievances and eventually resulted in sustained protests (often violent), the only means of communication with the government.

Subsequent to the coming to power of the incumbent Prime Minister, which ensued the four–year-long persistent protest, civic and political landscapes began to broaden. Political prisoners were released, media spaces liberalized, and some restrictive laws amended. However, the reforms introduced in the post-April 2018 period have been accompanied by breakdown of law and order amidst escalating ethnic tensions resulting in death and displacement of thousands of people across the country. Two issues are worth mentioning here. The first is the public admission by the PM of the security institution's actions as 'terrorist acts' shocked and intimidated the institutions.[13] The second is the emergence of informal forces and youth groups, particularly in the Oromia and Amhara regions, and their competition for power and space and replacement of formal institutions.

The emergence of these forces and the inability of the federal government to ensure law and order trammelled the initiated reform from reaching grassroots structures; and also put the capacity and legitimacy of the security institutions in question.[14] It has also intensified the privatization of the monopoly of violence at groups and regional levels creating fear of an eventual security vacuum that can be exploited by some political actors. The manifestations have already started to surface and are evidenced, among others, by the "unprecedented" levels of proliferation of arms and regions' competition to strengthen their security forces.[15] This, at times, has led to violent confrontations between radical groups (mostly youth) and federal security forces as well as between regional and federal forces themselves.[16] With the sharply deteriorating security and apparent weakness in the security apparatus, risks of violence around national elections loom high.

10 This includes the Anti-Terrorism Law (2009), the Charities and Societies Law (2009) and the Media Proclamation (2008)

11 Freedom House. (2016). Ethiopia: Attack on Civil Society Escalates as Dissent Spreads. Retrieved from:https://freedomhouse.org/blog/ethiopia-attack-civilsociety-escalates-dissent-spreads;

12 Home Office, UK Border Agency, Operational Guidance Note – Ethiopia (July 3, 2012). Retrieved from: http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5012a8072.pdf.

13 Aljazeera News. (June 19, 2018). Ethiopia PM: Security agencies committed 'terrorist acts'. Retrieved from: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/ethiopia-pm-security-agencies-committed-terrorist-acts-180619051321984.html

14 Interview with Senior Political Expert, 25 November 2019. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

15 Interview with Senior Security Expert, December 12, 2019. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

16 A case in point is the clash between Amhara regional security forces and Oromia militias in April 2019, in the Oromia special zone of Amhara region., See Crisis Group Report. (2019). Preventing Further Conflict and Fragmentation in Ethiopia. Retrieved from: https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/preventing-further-conflict-and-fragmentation-ethiopia; See also Human Rights Watch Report. (2019). Ethiopia: Abiy's First Year as Prime Minister, Review of Conflict and Internally Displaced Persons. Retrieved from: https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/09/ethiopia-abiys-first-year-prime-minister-review-conflict-and-internally-displaced

Trans-boundary Security Factors and Geopolitical Dynamics

Ethiopia's external security challenges emanate partly from the rapidly changing trans-boundary geopolitical dynamics. The trans-boundary security threats are associated mainly with border and resource-related issues. In this regard, the country has had a history of conflict with Somalia (over the Ogaden region in 1963/4 and 1977/8) and with Eritrea (the war fought for independence from 1962 to 1991, over divergent political and economic interests and contested territories between 1998 and 2000). Although Ethiopia-Eritrea relations initially showed improvement following the signing of agreement between the two governments in June 2019, the rapprochement seems to have stalled as the necessary steps stipulated in the Algiers agreement, including the demilitarisation of the border areas, are yet to be implemented.[17] The border which was initially opened following the accord has also been closed once again.

Ethiopia's relation with Egypt has, in general, also been at odds over the use of the Nile River and, in particular, the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).[18] As a result of these strained relations, some of these countries are alleged to have supported armed opposition groups, particularly, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and Ginbot 7 which were fighting against the incumbent government[19]. Furthermore, the presence of extremists and rebel groups in the region such as Al Shabaab in Somalia, the mounting refugee influx (mainly from South Sudan and Eritrea) and the ensuing proliferation of arms also exert threats to the country's stability.

The growing Gulf and other Arab States' interest and presence in the Horn of Africa (HoA) which is manifested by the setting up of military bases (in Djibouti, Eritrea and Somaliland) and increased investment in port deals (Berbera and Djibouti) are also emerging dynamics that can bring adverse political and security backlash on Ethiopia's national and regional security interests. This may entail the financing of rivals and trigger conflicts in the HoA region, the Red Sea area and the Strait of Bab-el-Mendab due to diverging stakeholders' power interests. Such developments will affect not only Ethiopia's security but also its economic interests of trade and other transactions.[20]

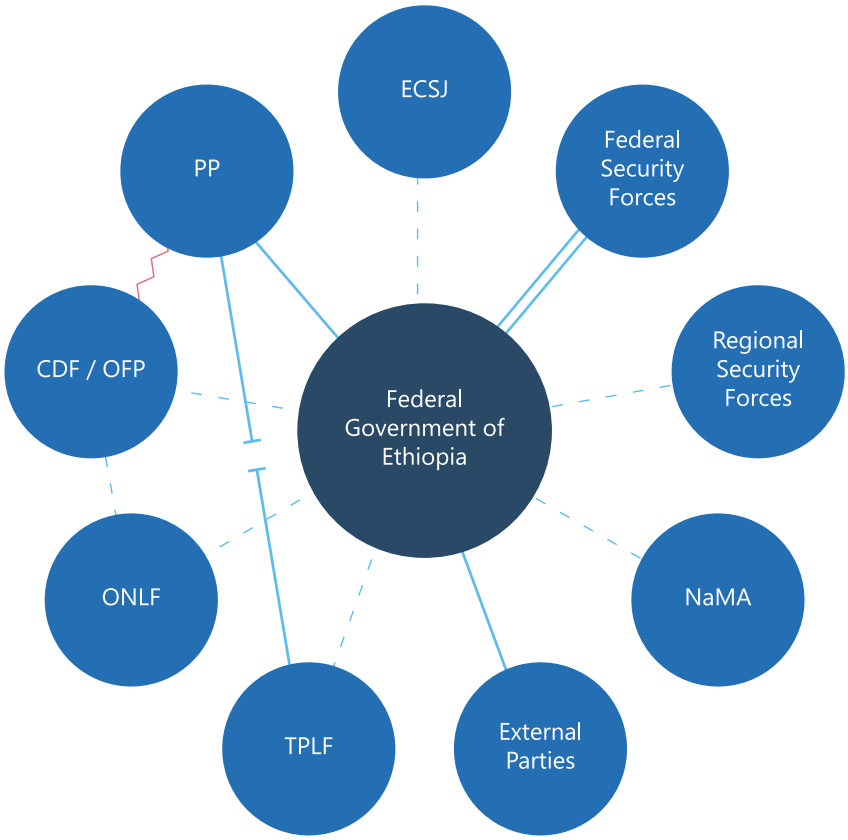
17 Plaut, M. (2019). How glow of the historic accord between Ethiopia and Eritrea has faded. The Conversation. Retrieved from: https://theconversation.com/how-glow-of-the-historic-accord-between-ethiopia-and-eritrea-has-faded-119931

18 The construction of the GERD, which was initiated by Ethiopia in 2011, has been a source of tension between Ethiopia and Egypt mainly with regard to the potential impact on water share of downstream countries, especially around the time of filling the reservoir. Egypt which relies heavily on the Nile River as a main source of water sees the project as a potential threat to its water security despite the signing of a water management agreement between Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan in 2015. Yihdego, Z. (2013). The Blue Nile Dam Controversy in the Eyes of international law. In C. White (Ed.), Global Water Forum: Discussion Paper (Vol. 1326, pp. 1-14). (Discussion Paper). Canberra: Global Water Forum. & Ejigu, N. A. (2016). Construction of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile: Cause for Cooperation or Conflict among Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan. (Unpublished) Master's Thesis. University of Tampere School of Social Sciences and Humanities. Retrieved from: https://tampub.uta.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/99271/GRADU-1465551192.pdf?sequence=1

19 Report of the United Nations' Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea. (2014). UNSC Report - S/2014/727. Retrieved from: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2014_727.pdf. See also Bloomberg News. October 10, 2016. Ethiopia Alleges Oromo Protesters Receiving Support from Egypt. Retrieved from: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-10/ethiopia-alleges-oromo-protesters-receiving-support-from-egypt.

20 Kahsay, B. (2016). Arab Invasion of the Horn of Africa Region. Tigrai Online. Retrieved from: http://www.tigraionline.com/articles/arabs-invading-hoa-africa.html.

ACTORS



KEY

- *Discord/ Conflict*
- *Links/ Close Relationships*
- *Alliance*
- *Informal/ Intermittent*
- *Broken Link*

Dominant Political Parties/Forces

The country is bracing itself to organize elections in 2020, which is anticipated to be one of the most contested in its history. In the meantime, several forces, including the parties that have recently returned from exile, are preparing themselves: working to fulfil the procedural requirements for registration and forging alliances with other like-minded parties. Although most of the parties are weak, disjointed and the alliances formed are still at their formative stages, essentially the upcoming election will largely be a competition between centripetal and ethno-national based centrifugal forces.

While the centripetal forces are composed of individuals/ groups of different ethnicities who place less emphasis on the issue of identity and call for a federal structure that looks beyond ethno-linguistic lines and advocate for a strong central government, the centrifugal forces represent a single ethno-national group centring their argument around identity and contending for greater autonomy/self-rule and power devolution to the regions. This section, therefore, will attempt to discuss the most influential parties that are expected to exert some level of influence on the upcoming election under the two broad categories.

1. Centripetal Forces

a. Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) - now Prosperity Party (PP)

EPRDF/PP, Ethiopia's ruling party, was originally a coalition of four regional parties.[21]The Front came to power in 1991 with the objective of creating a multi-party democratic system, ensuring ethnic equality through the introduction of an ethnic federal system, attaining economic growth and reducingpoverty.[22]During the transitional period (1991-1995), the EPRDF consolidated power by expanding its apparatus in the country through its coalition members and other affiliated regional political organizations.[23] However, its failure to achieve real democracy through credible elections, and the exclusion of large segment of the society from the country's political and economic development undermined its popular support. Furthermore, following the death of its long-time

21 Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) – formerly Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM); Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) and Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) - formerly Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO).

22 See EPRDF Website.

23 The affiliated parties are Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP), Harari National League (HNL), Gambella People's Democratic Movement (GPDM), Ethiopian Somali People's Democratic Party (ESPDP), and Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front (BGPDUF).

leader Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in 2012, the Front began to weaken as a result of inter-party infightings. This led to the waning of the Front's ideological cohesion, unity and legitimacy.

In a bid to revive the flagging coalition and transform it into an all-inclusive national party in the face of the upcoming 2020 election, the regional parties, with the exception of Tigray Liberation Front (TPLF), merged with the aim of ensuring prosperity and maintaining the dignity of the multi-cultural federal state of Ethiopia[24] The unified party – dubbed Prosperity Party (PP) – consists of three of the coalition members – except TPLF [25]– and five affiliated parties that altogether govern eight of the 10 regional states in the country.[26] With the merger, PP is expected to ensure inclusive and fair representation by bringing affiliated parties - that are largely minority representatives - to an equal footing with the core EPRDF members.

Despite the on-going merger and repeated claim by the leadership for the party's unity, there are criticisms, both from within and outside, on the relevance and timing of the merger.[27] While the TPLF has so far opposed the merger and decided to withdraw and retain its political identity, some political elites also questioned PP's move as they reckon it would concentrate decision-making power at the center, unlike its predecessor that, at least in theory, gave some level of power to the regions.[28] This view is particularly dominant among nationalist forces that fear that the new arrangement will break with the very essence of ethnic federalism and power sharing. Regardless, considering its wide social base and organizational reach, PP is expected to appear as one of the visible parties in the upcoming election. Attributable to the reform initiatives implemented by the PM over the past months and also its proclaimed commitment to organize free and fair election, PP has also garnered strong support from the international community.

b. Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (ECSJ)

ECSJ was formed in 2019 with the coming together of seven parties.[29] Led by Dr. Birhanu Nega, former leader of Qinijit (Coalition for Unity and Democracy-CUD) – a party that won overwhelming votes in Addis Ababa and other major constituencies in the controversial 2005 election, ECSJ is a social democrat party that advocates for the respect of individuals' rights and promotion of federal system that does not solely centre on ethnicity/language.[30] The party has a strong support-base in Addis Ababa and other urban areas in the South and parts of Amhara regional state as well as among the diaspora. It is expected to secure some seats from these areas in the upcoming elections.[31]

2. Ethno-national-Based Centrifugal Forces

a. Oromo Federalist Parties

Although there are several parties operating in the region, presently the most dominant/influential ones are Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and Oromo National Party (ONP). OFC is a coalition formed in 2009 by the Oromo People's Congress (OPC) and the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM)[32]. The party aims to peacefully struggle for the rights of the Oromo people through the full realization of ethnic federalism.[33] OFC has a sizeable support-base in the Oromia region, particularly Shoa and West Arisi[34] and is currently one of the largest legally registered

24 See Prosperity Party Program. Retrieved from: http://www.lawethiopia.com/images/tools%20for%20political%20parties/Ethiopia%20prosperity%20party%20political%20program.pdf

25 Addis Standard News, November 21, 2019. TPLF cites legal, procedural shortfalls to decline merger. Retrieved from: https://addisstandard.com/news-tplf-cites-legal-procedural-shortfalls-to-decline-merger/

26 The five affiliated parties are the Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP), Benishangul-Gumuz Democratic Party (BDP), Somali Democratic Party (SDP), Gambella Peoples Democratic Movement (GPDM), and Harari National League (HNL). They all signed an agreement to join the PP as of December 1, 2019. Ezega News, (December 1. 2019). Eight Ethiopian Political Parties Sign to Join Prosperity Party. Retrieved from: https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/7501/Eight-Ethiopian-Political-Parties-Sign-to-Join-Prosperity-Party

27 Lemma Megersa, Key Ally of PM Abiy Ahmed, Opposes Party Merger and Medemer. Retrieved from: https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/7498/Lemma-Megersa-Key-Ally-of-PM-Abiy-Ahmed-Opposes-Party-Merger-and-Medemer. See also B. Mekuria. (November 15, 2019). EPRDF'seminent merger: the right priority? Addis Standard. Retrieved from: https://addisstandard.com/op-ed-eprdfs-eminent-merger-the-right-priority%EF%BB%BF/

28 Under EPRDF arrangement, regional parties have the power to elect their leaders and central committee representatives. However, according to PP's bylaws, the National Congress will be responsible for directly electing Central Committee representatives. Interview with senior political expert. December 5, 2019. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. See also Allo, K.A. (2019). Why Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party could be bad news for Ethiopia. Aljazeera Opinion. Retrieved from: https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/abiy-ahmed-prosperity-party-bad-news-ethiopia-191204130133790.html

29 Patriotic Genbot 7, Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP), All Ethiopian Democratic Party (AEDP), Semayawi Party, New Generation Party (NGP), Gambella Regional Movement (GRM) and Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) party

30 Borkena, Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party elected leaders, 13 May 2019,

31 Interview with Independent Political analyst. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. September 5, 2018. See also Borkena News. (September 23, 2018). ArbegnochGinbar splits from Ginbot 7 soon after returning home. Retrieved from: https://www.borkena.com/2018/09/23/arbegnoch-ginbar-splits-from-ginbot-7-soon-after-returning-home/.

32 Both parties actively participated in the 2005 Ethiopian election in the State of Oromia region.

33 See OFC Preamble.

34 Interview with Independent Political analyst. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. 5 September 2018.

opposition political parties in the region. Its leaders – Merera Gudina and Bekele Gerba – who are strong nationalist figures in the region, were arrested during the protest period for their alleged participation in the unrest.[35] However, after the coming to power of the new PM, OFC resumed its activities and is presently preparing to participate in the upcoming elections in collaboration with other Oromo and non-Oromo nationalist forces.[36] The party has recently been joined by a prominent activist and influential figure, Jawar Mohammed.

Jawar is a formerly exiled journalist and human rights activist who played a prominent role in mobilising the popular protests in the Oromia region throughout 2014-2018. His contribution to the movement has earned him a wide support in the region and beyond, particularly among the youth (Qeerroo). Jawar's relations with the new leadership have waned over the past few months as manifested by his strong criticisms of the policies pursued by the PM on several occasions, including the EPRDF merger.[37] The October 23 incident that followed the alleged attempt by government authorities to withdraw his security details was also another incident that exposed the fissure between the two parties.[38] The growing rift reached its height as Jawar announced his plan to run against the ruling party in the upcoming elections. Jawar brings a large part of Oromia (East and the South as well as the youth) into OFC, uplifting the party's social base. Considering his wide support-base, his alignment with OFC may adversely affect PP's chance for election victory in the Oromia region.[39]

The OLF, on the other hand, is a former rebel front established in 1973 to lead the Oromo people's struggle for self-determination. The Front took part in the struggle against the Derg military regime and later joined the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). The OLF turned to armed struggle following the subsequent fall-out with EPRDF in 1992. After signing a peace agreement with the Ethiopian government, the front returned to the country to continue its demands peacefully.[40] However, while several OLF soldiers have joined government camps as per the initial agreement for rehabilitation and integration into the regional security forces[41], certain factions of the OLF such as OLA (Oromo Liberation Army, the former army wing of the OLF which has recently parted itself from OLF), is mainly operating in Kelem Wollega (West), East Guji and West Guji Zone of Oromia region[42] and, has refused to renounce arm. They have also been accused of carrying out attacks on civilians including rape and bank robberies.[43] As a result, the government has been fighting with the group/faction since October 2018.[44]

Despite its internal divisions, the OLF continues to garner wide support from Oromo community, particularly in the Western Oromia, Borana, Guji, and Eastern part of Ethiopia. The party has also officially re-registered as a legal party and established collaboration with other compatible regional and national forces, working its way towards the upcoming regional and parliamentary elections.

ONP on its part is a party established on 4 November 2018 by Kemal Gelchu, a former senior OLF figure.[45] After returning to the country on 5 July 2018, Kemal was appointed as Oromia Regional Security Chief in October 2018. However, he was discharged from his responsibilities by the regional government in April 2019. Kemal's relation with the regional governing party degenerated as he strongly criticized them "for mishandling the group's return."

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35 OFC – which is one of the largest registered political parties in Oromia region – was one of the most visible opposition parties that played a vanguard role in the protests by initiating and mobilizing the Ginchi protest which marked the beginning of the relentless nationwide protest. Interview with independent political analyst. August 18, 2018. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

36 The Reporter. (October 5, 2019). Political Parties in Oromia region agreed to work together. Neamin Ashenafi. Retrieved from: https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/political-parties-oromia-region-agreed-work-together

37 Jawar Mohammed's Interview with LTV. (October 22, 2019). Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXxBIOQJhXw&fbclid=IwAR27qFsgJPI5NPquizbNW8atGVa5Ad9jb5QBda9NcsyAMxHS3C6Y2R6oINs

38 Plaut, M. (October23, 2019). Ethiopia: Protests, security standoff across Oromia, in Addis Abeba. What happened. Retrieved from:http://www.harnnet.org/index.php/articles-corner/english-articles/item/5969-ethiopia-protests-security-standoff-across-oromia-in-addis-abeba-what-happened

39 See Jawar's interview with Addis Standard (December 31, 2019). Retrieved from: https://addisstandard.com/interview-i-have-always-said-that-there-is-really-no-ideological-difference-between-oromo-political-parties-jawar-mohammed/

40 Ethiopian News Agency News. August 7, 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.ena.et/en/2018/08/07/govt-oromo-liberation-front-sign-reconciliation-agreement/.

41 A New Business Ethiopia report, 2019. 'Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 Oromo Liberation Front Soldiers', 13 February 2019,Over the past few years, the OLF has splintered into five main factions, although they continue to use the name and flag.

42 Over the past few years, the OLF has splintered into five main factions, although they continue to use the name and flag.

43 Tasfaye, E. (2018). Several killed by police in Nekemte after protest over attacks on Oromo. Ethiopia Insight. Retrieved from: https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2018/11/10/several-killed-by-police-in-nekemte-after-protest-over-attacks-on-oromo/

44 Tasfaye, E. (2019). Team Lemma's choice: power or peace? Ethiopia Insight. Retrieved from: https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2019/01/01/team-lemmas-choice-power-or-peace/; see also Reuters News. (JANUARY 16,2019). Ethiopia says launches offensive against Oromo rebels. Aaron Maasho. Retrieved from: https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-ethiopia-politics/ethiopia-says-launches-offensive-against-oromo-rebels-idUKKCN1PA2LB

45 Kemal, initially defected the Ethiopian National Defense Force in 2006 to join the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). He was later on expelled from OLF in 2014 due to inter-party fighting. See The Reporter, (April 3, 2019). Lemma removes Oromia security chief. Retrieved from; https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/lemma-removes-oromia-security-chief

To increase their political and operational leverage, OFC, OLF and ONP formed a coalition called "Coalition for Democratic Federalism" on 4 January 2020. They formed CDF with the aim of forging a regional coalition government if they succeed in the upcoming elections. For this purpose, the parties will jointly put candidates forward and also mobilize material and financial resources for the election campaign.[46] With the convergence of their sizeable constituents, OLF, OFC and OPN will be a strong opposition force to reckon with for the ruling party in the 2020 election. Their alliance also opens doors for the creation of larger groupings with other ethno-nationalist forces operating outside of the Oromia region, strengthening their prospects on the federal level.

b. National Movement of Amhara (NaMA)

NaMA, on the other hand, is an Amhara-centred ethno-nationalist party established in June 2018.[47] Its primary objective is defending the socio-economic and political rights of the Amhara people, which according to many of the movement's proponents, has been undermined under the previous regime. In a region where the ruling ADP party[48] is widely discredited for serving as a subordinate of the former TPLF-led regime, alternative movements such as NaMA that vow to represent the interests and aspirations of the Amhara people have managed to garner wide support-base, particularly among the youth.[49] However, some view it as a radical movement morphed out of the growing Amhara nationalism sentiment in the region. Its top members have been arrested for implication in the June 2019 attempted coup d'état in the Amhara region.[50] Considering its growing support-base, NaMA is expected to be one of the main contesting parties in the upcoming election in the region.

c. Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)

Founded in 1984, the ONLF is a former separatist rebel movement struggling for the right to self-determination of the Somali people in Ethiopia. The group has considerable support in Somali region, particularly among the Ogaden clan. Following the lift of its "terrorist" tag, the Front signed a peace deal with the Ethiopian government on 22 October 2018 ending its over three-decade-long hostility[51]. Subsequently, the front officially disarmed itself on 8 February 2019, signing an agreement with the regional government to reintegrate its members into the regional security forces.[52] ONLF have officially registered as a party to participate in the upcoming election. Considering its wide support-base, it will likely be a strong contender to compete with the governing Somali Democratic Party, which is now part of the Prosperity Party, and secure seats in the Somali regional state council and the parliament.

d. Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)

TPLF is a Marxist oriented movement established in 1974.[53] As a political party that was instrumental in the formation of the other EPRDF coalition members, TPLF had largely dominated the front since its establishment, providing ideological and leadership direction.[54] However, its influence began to weaken as a result of the post 2015 nation-wide resistance. Subsequently, the relations between the coalition parties deteriorated. In this regard, the open rivalry between the TPLF and the Amhara Democratic party (ADP) was the most notable and a clear manifestation of the deeply entrenched fracture within the front.[55] The controversy reached its height following TPLF's open criticism of EPRDF's merger and its decline to join the newly formed Prosperity Party citing procedural and legal mishaps.[56] The

46 Addis Standard, (January 4, 2020). OFC, OLF and ONP Agree to Form "Coalition for Democratic Federalism". Retrieved from: https://addisstandard.com/news-ofc-olf-and-onp-agree-to-form-coalition-for-democratic-federalism/

47 Borkena News. (June 10, 2018). National Movement of Amhara party officially founded in Bahir Dar. Retrieved from: https://borkena.com/2018/06/10/national-movement-of-amhara-party-in-bahir-dar/

48 Amhara Democratic Front was one of the four coalition members of EPRDF, it has now dissolved itself and joined Prosperity Party.

49 Interview with an Amhara youth activist. November 7. 2019. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

50 Aljazeera News. (June 28, 2019). Ethiopia steps up arrests as shockwaves from coup bid continue. Elias Gebreselassie. Retrieved from:https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/ethiopia-steps-arrests-shockwaves-coup-bid-continue-190627134337270.html

51 Fana Broadcasting News. (22 October, 2018). Retrieved from: https://fanabc.com/english/2018/10/ethiopian-govt-onlf-sign-peace-deal/.

52 Africa News. (February 09, 2019). Ethiopia: ONLF rebels disarm, sign agreement with Somali state. Retrieved from: https://www.africanews.com/2019/02/09/ethiopia-onlf-rebels-disarm-sign-agreement-with-somali-state//

53 Milkias, P. (2001). "Ethiopia, The TPLF and Roots of the 2001 Political Tremor". International Conference on African Development Archives. Paper 4. Retrieved from: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1051&context=africancenter_icad_archive

54 Sande Lie. J.H & Mesfin. B. (2018). Ethiopia: A Political Economy Analysis. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. Retrieved from: https://brage.bibsys.no/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2496505/NUPI_rapport_%2BEthiopia_%2BSandeLie_Mesfin.pdf

55 Capital News. (July 15, 2019). ADP, TPLF fight will create chaos: Politicians. Retrieved from:https://www.capitalethiopia.com/featured/adp-tplf-fight-will-create-chaos-politicians/

56 Addis Standard News, November 21, 2019. TPLF cites legal, procedural shortfalls to decline merger. Retrieved from: https://addisstandard.com/news-tplf-cites-legal-

front officially broke away from the ruling party (PP) in January 2020, indicting its resolve to work along with other like-minded federalist parties to contest in the upcoming elections.[57] As a governing party, TPLF garners wide support in the Tigray region and is expected to collect substantial votes in the coming election.

Given the relations between PP and TPLF are rocky, those between the federal and Tigray regional government also remain tense. Recently the relationship has been put to test when the federal government dismissed TPLF officials, including senior ministers, from the federal government. That was contrary to previous practices where regional governments used to determine their representatives in the federal government.[58]With such growing tension and animosity between the political elite, Tigray nationalism is also on the rise and if not handled carefully, any minor incident can trigger dispute and conflict between the centre and the regional government.

The Federal Government

Led by the Prime Minister, the Federal Government of Ethiopia is a federal parliamentary republic with three branches of government – executive, legislative, and judicial. The legislative organ is bi-cameral: the House of Federation (HoF) and the House of People's Representatives (HoPR). The HoPR - whose members are elected by general elections every five years – is the highest legislative authority. The highest federal executive power on the hand rests with the Prime Minister, who is elected by the party with majority seats in the HoPR. The Prime Minister, who is also the chair of the Council and the Commander-in-Chief of the National Armed Forces, in turn, selects the Council of Ministers upon approval by the HoPR.[59] Under the Ethiopian Constitution, the Council is vested with the responsibility of ensuring implementation of laws enacted by the Council of Peoples' Representatives, and the respect for law and order, among others.[60] In this regard, the newly formed Ministry of Peace, in collaboration with relevant law enforcement agencies, has an instrumental role to play in the maintenance of peace and security in the country, particularly during the upcoming election.

1. The Ethiopian Ministry of Peace

Established on 16 October 2018, the Ethiopian Ministry of Peace is one of the critical structures built by the new leadership to sustain the on-going reforms through undertaking peace-building measures. This involves the development and strengthening of peace and security structures/institutions to ensure the rule of law and lasting peace.[61] The Ministry oversees key peace and security offices, including the National Intelligence & Security Service (NISS), Information Network Security Agency (INSA); Federal Police Commission; and the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs.

One of the principal mandates of the Ministry is ensuring the maintenance of public order; through among others identifying factors that trigger conflicts among communities. As part of its efforts to deliver on its mandate, the Ministry has so far undertaken several initiatives. This includes the conducting of a national Conflict Mapping study and introduction of a Conflict Early Warning and Rapid Response System (CEWRR) which aims to detect and promptly respond to potential conflicts.[62] If accorded the political backing and resources it requires, the Ministry - through the strategies and instruments being introduced - has the potential to efficiently respond to emerging conflicts that can threaten the peace and security of the country and its people – particularly around the much-anticipated election.

2. The Law Enforcement Agencies: Federal and Regional Security Forces

The military is one of the most powerful institutions with a mandate of safeguarding national sovereignty and security. With the premier as its commander-in-chief, the defence force is one of the largest and strongest militaries in Africa, ranked 6th in 2018, with 162,000 well-trained and equipped military personnel.[63] Regardless of the multi-ethnic composition of the rank and file members and the middle-level military officers, the military establishment was perceived as partisan to the ruling Front. This was mainly due to its affiliation with ruling EPRDF, the Tigrayan domination of its top brass as well as its unrestrained involvement in the country's economy through the Mega Corporation METEC.[64]

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57 Stratfor Situation Report. (January 6, 2020). Ethiopia: Tigray Party Officially Breaks with Ruling Coalition. Retrieved from:https://worldview.stratfor.com/situation-report/ethiopia-tigray-party-officially-breaks-ruling-coalition

58 Ezega News. (January 22, 2020). TPLF Issues Warning on Dismissal of TPLF Officials from Federal Posts. Retrieved from: https://www.ezega.com/News/NewsDetails/7679/TPLF-Issues-Warning-on-Dismissal-of-TPLF-Officials-from-Federal-Posts

59 See FDRE Office of the Prime Minister Website

60 See the Ethiopian Constitution, (1995) Article 77

61 See Ministry of Peace website. Retrieved from: https://www.mop.gov.et/web/en/about

62 ENA News. (September 23, 2019). Pilot Conflict Early Warning, Rapid Response System. Retrieve from: https://www.ena.et/en/?p=9825

63 Global Fire Power. (2018). Ethiopia Military Strength. Retrieved from: https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=Ethiopia.

64 Erwin van Veen, E.V. (2016). Perpetuating power: Ethiopia's political settlement and the organization of security. CRU Report. Retrieved from: https://www.clingendael.org/

For the past five years since the start of the nationwide protest, the army has been involved in domestic affairs, delegated to control violence and protests in different parts of the country. During this period, the force has been accused of abuse and use of disproportionate measures. According to reports by human rights organizations, an estimated 1,000 people have been killed and tens of thousands detained during the two state of emergencies (SoEs).[65] The force continues its engagement in domestic matters being deployed in several parts of the country, including the SNNPR, Oromia and Tigray-Amhara regional border areas.

Since April 2018, however, several initiatives have been introduced to reform the security sector, including leadership reshuffle, professionalisation of the personnel/institutions as well as ensuring civilian oversight. These efforts seem to have brought some changes in the modus operandi of these forces.[66] Tellingly, security forces have largely refrained from using force in handling the violent conflicts in several parts of the country.[67] This (in) action, in some instances, has arguably created a favourable ground for some "anti-peace" elements that choose to take advantage of the situation, raising questions on the capacity and commitment of the security institutions.

The other two important law enforcement institutions are the federal and regional police both of which are responsible for ensuring internal security. While the Ethiopian Federal Police (EFP) is responsible for maintaining the security of the public at the federal level, including riot and violence control, the regional police forces, on the other hand, are primarily responsible for maintaining law and order in the regional states and are accountable to their respective regional governments. The regional forces include police and special forces (Liyu Hail).[68] Although there is not much information as to the exact size, structure or command and control procedures of the regional forces, there is variation in their capacity and resources. In this regard, the Somali regional special force (commonly known as the Liyu Police), initially established to fight ONLF and Al-Shabaab, was one of the strongest and well-resourced regional force with an estimated 42,000 personnel equipped with heavy weapons like machine guns.[69]

Nevertheless, owing to the rising ethno-nationalism and on-going inter-regional power struggle that transpired in the post April 2018 period, regional governments have been engrossed in strengthening their security forces in terms of number/recruitment, training and sophistication.[70] This, in certain instances, has led to violent confrontations between regional security forces as seen in the case of Oromia-Somali, Amhara-Tigray and Benishangul–Oromia regional border tensions.[71] Considering the apparent lack of elite consensus at the central and regional levels, the propagation of such ethnic forces could pose a threat to the country's unity. As the election is approaching, how much these forces will be able to put their conflicting interests aside and execute their respective mandates in a non-partisan manner will be the key to conducting peaceful elections.

pub/2016/power_politics_and_security_in_ethiopia/2_state_security_in_ethiopia/

65 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Report. (2016). See also Human Rights Watch Report. (2018). Ethiopia Events of 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/ethiopia.

66 Interview with top EPRDF official, 24 Aug, 2018. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. See also The Ethiopian Reporter. (December 15, 2109). Military under reform. Retrieved from: https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/military-under-reform

67 Interview with prominent Journalist and activist, 12 August, 2018. See also Reuters News. (August 24, 2018). Ethnic Unrest Tarnishes New Ethiopian Leader's Reforms. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2018/08/24/world/africa/24reuters-ethiopia-violence.html.

68 Article 52 (7) of the Ethiopian Constitution gives regional states the right to establish and administer a state police force, and to maintain public order and peace within the state'. See Ethiopian Constitution. (1995).

69 Landinfo Country report. (2016). Ethiopia: The special police (Liyu Police) in the Somali Regional State. Retrieved from: https://www.landinfo.no/asset/3404/1/3404_1.pdf.

70 Metta-Alem, S. (2019). Will Ethiopia withstand the setback or return to dictatorship? Retrieved from: https://borkena.com/2019/06/28/will-ethiopia-withstand-the-setback-or-return-to-dictatorshipmetta-alem-sinishaw/. See also Fitz-Gerald, M.A (2019). Ethiopia's Security Dilemmas. Retrieved from: https://rusi.org/commentary/ethiopias-security-dilemmas

71 Borkena News. (March 7,2019). Amhara regional state says Tigray military buildup unacceptable. Retrieved from:https://borkena.com/2019/03/06/amhara-regional-state-says-tigray-military-build-up-unacceptable/

CONFLICT DYNAMICS

Although the EPRDF government faced dissent throughout its 27-year rule,[72] the first serious incident occurred around the fiercely contested 2005 elections that resulted in the death of more than 193 people and the detention of tens of thousands.[73] The post-election violence revealed the regime's intolerance to the opposition as well as the existence of simmering socio-economic and political questions among the people. The increasingly narrowing political space that followed, coupled with growing unemployment and soaring inequality, created public dissatisfaction that was eventually manifested through the nation-wide anti-government protests that brought PM Abiy Ahmed to power on 2 April 2018. Although the new PM ascended from the highly criticized ruling EPRDF, the reform process he embarked on convinced many to view him as distinct from his predecessors. Under his premiership, the country witnessed reforms on several fronts. On the political front, deliberate efforts were made to restore trust in public authority, enhance social cohesion and tackle the growing ethnic tensions by promoting Ethiopian nationalism (Ethiopiawinet, meaning Ethiopianness) as a unifying factor. In a bid to broaden the political landscape, he reshuffled his cabinet, released political prisoners, amended some of the country's restrictive laws, and legalized prominent opposition groups formerly labelled as "terrorists", thereby convincing several rebel movements to renounce their armed struggle. New structures such as Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation Commission were introduced and institutions such as the National Electoral Board (NEBE), Human Rights Commission and the security sector were reformed.

The PM's positive influence was also felt beyond the Ethiopian borders. On 5 June 2018, the new administration decided to implement the Algiers Agreement after 20 years of deadlock.[74] As a result, Ethiopia and Eritrea restored friendly ties signing consecutive bilateral agreements. Their reconciliation also influenced other inter-regional affairs as was seen by the restoration of diplomatic relations between Eritrea-Somalia and Eritrea-Djibouti as well as the signing of a tripartite agreement among Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. Although the rapprochement was seen as being stalled, as many of the necessary steps stipulated in the agreement were not implemented, the recent visit by President Afwerki is expected to reinvigorate the process and boost cooperation between the two.[75]

On the economic front, the new administration introduced economic reforms including the full/partial privatization of key state-owned enterprises with a view to overcoming the challenges of rising inflation, high public debt and a shortage of foreign currency. These moves, coupled with the relative stability that prevailed in the country, boosted the confidence of the international community to lend its support. The decision by the World Bank to provide $1.2 billion in budget support,[76] the first after previously being suspended by the same bank and other donors following the disputed 2005 election, is a good example in this regard.

Despite these reform measures, however, the post April period saw an upsurge in violence and breakdown of rule of law and order. Since April 2018, ethnic and religious-based conflicts have alarmingly escalated in several parts of the country including Somali, Oromia, Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, and SNNP regional states as well as Tigray and Amhara border areas, leading to the death and displacement of unprecedented number of people.[77] Taking different forms and affecting establishments ranging from universities to religious institutions, the spiralling violence has had a devastating impact on Ethiopia's social fabric.[78] The ongoing violence in the Central and West Gonder (between Amhara and Qemant communities), Benshangul-Oromia border and Western Oromia areas is a live depiction of the enduring challenge facing the country.[79]

72 "This was mainly due to absence of democracy, narrowed political space and increased government repression which created public discontent". See International Crisis Group (2009). Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents. Africa Report N°153. Retrieved from: https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/153-ethiopia-ethnic-federalism-and-its-discontents.pdf& Smith, L. (2007). Political Violence and Democratic Uncertainty in Ethiopia. United States Institute of Peace. Special Report 192. Retrieved from: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/sr192.pdf.

73 According to an independent commission appointed to investigate the postelection violence, the government response resulted in the deaths of 193 people. See Carter Center Final Report. (2009). Observing the 2005 Ethiopia National Election. Retrieved from https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/ethiopia-2005-finalrpt.pdf.

74 Algiers Agreement was a peace agreement signed in December, 2000 between Ethiopia and Eritrea, ending a border war between the two countries.

75 Xinhua News, (December 26, 2019). Ethiopia, Eritrea eye socioeconomic integration amid rapprochement of ties. Retrieved from:http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/27/c_138659927.htm

76 World Bank Scales Press Release. (October 30, 2018). World Bank Scales up Support to Accelerate Ethiopia's Economic Development. Retrieved from: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/10/30/world-bank-scales-up-support-to-accelerate-ethiopias-economic-development

77 As of August, 2018, there are 2.6 million IDPs in Ethiopia and 2.1 million of these are conflict-affected IDPs. OCHA Report. (2018). Ethiopia: West Guji – Gedeo Conflict Displacement. Retrieved from : (https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ethiopia_somali_region_inter-communal_conflict_update_1.pdf). See also Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) Report. (2018). Retrieved from: http://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/201809-mid-year-figures.pdf

78 Several people were killed across the country in religious and ethnically-charged mob justice and rioting in 2018 and 2019, including – Harerege, DireDawa city, Shashemene,and Adama city, Burayu, Jigjiga, Dire Dawa . Prisons and religious institutions were set on fire. Human Rights Watch. (2018). Ethiopia Violence A Concern Despite Reform Promises. Retrieved from:https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/15/ethiopia-violence-concern-despite-reform-promises.

79 OCHA Report. (March 1, 2019). Amhara Flash Update. Retrieved from: https://

To curb the situation, government security forces have intervened in some of the conflict affected areas. Accordingly, areas including SNNP (Hawassa), Oromia (western Oromia including Wollega, Borana and Guji) and Amhara (central and western Gondar zones) are currently under command post control.[80] Nonetheless, the insecurity has sustained and some areas, particularly in the West Oromia region, are said to be outside of effective control of the government.

The growing deterioration of security has been fuelled/facilitated by the apparent weakness of the ruling party and rising ethno-nationalist sentiments that are weakening state and party structures. Despite the merger, the ruling party is highly fractured and divided as manifested by the bickering over state power (competition to control the central government), administrative border disputes, as well as controversy over the merger itself. [81] Given the party's deep entrenchment in all tiers of state structures, its volatility fuels ongoing ethnic violence by emboldening radical elements and further dividing the already polarized elite/ethnic communities.

As the ruling party weakened and the state's capacity to provide security waned, several underlying disputes over issues of identity, resource and territory have transpired.[82] This, coupled with the growing nationalist sentiment, facilitated the intensification of inter-regional power struggles among the regions and also between the regional and federal governments. This was, among others, manifested by the alarming race between regions to reinforce the number and capacity of their security forces, which resulted in the proliferation of ethnic militias.[83] In some instances, these trends have led to violent inter and intra-regional confrontations as seen in the 22 June coup attempt in the Amhara region, which claimed the lives of the Regional President and other top officials.[84]Moreover, as regions became more assertive and began to flex their muscles, aspirations for more substantial self-rule acquired momentum and forces seeking greater autonomy thrived, leading to violent clashes as seen in the case of Sidama.[85] So far, including Sidama which has already secured statehood after referendum, 13 zones in the SNNPR, one of the 9 Regional States in Ethiopia and home to 56 nations and nationalities, have requested to become regional states.[86]

The deep division and mistrust between political forces including within the ruling party itself and the regional governments, underscores the complexity of the challenges facing the new leadership. The condition poses a formidable threat to the integrity of the state, hence necessitates a deeper reflection on the modes operandi including a re-negotiation between the two layers of the government. If not managed well, this trend threatens the country's capacity to sustain the initiated reforms and organize fair and free elections in 2020, which will eventually hinder its transition to democracy.

Economically, notwithstanding the measures taken by the new leadership to reform the economic sector, including the introduction of the 'Homegrown Economic Reform program', the economy would continue to struggle with high macro-economic imbalance, currency shortage, and growing unemployment. Inflation also remained double digit, reaching 19.5 percent in the month of December 2019.[87] The situation was further compounded by the considerable reduction in government public spending and on-going insecurities across the country.[88] Although the recent pledge from international institutions such as World Bank and IMF[89] to support the country's ongoing economic reform program is something to be hoped, its impact on the macro and micro-economic level is yet to be felt.

reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Amhara-Flash-update_March-1-2019_FINAL_0.pdf; The Reporter. (May 11, 2019). Violence in Benishangul-Amhara Border towns. Retrieved from:https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/violence-benishangul-amhara-boarder-towns

80 Reuters News, (July 23, 2019). Ethiopia federal forces take over security in protest-hit region. Retrieved from: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-politics/ethiopia-federal-forces-take-over-security-in-protest-hit-region-fana-idUSKCN1UI29Z

81 Defence Minister Lemma Megersa criticises planned merger of ruling coalition, (November 30, 2019). Retrieved from: https://www.ethioreference.com/archives/19988; See also Faleg. G. (2019). Resetting Ethiopia: Will the state heal or fail? European Union Institute for Security Studies. Retrieved from:https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/resetting-ethiopia. See also TPLF Manifesto on Merging Ethiopia's ruling coalition. Retrieved from: https://www.ipromotenews.com/articles/eprdf-to-merge-ethiopia%e2%80%99s-ruling-coalition_105.html

82 David Pilling. D. (2019). Fractures appear in Ethiopia's ethno-political mosaic. Financial Times. Retrieved from:https://www.ft.com/content/41ebf5a0-fb05-11e9-a354-36acbbb0d9b6

83 Manek. N. (2019). Abiy Ahmed's Reforms Have Unleashed Forces He Can No Longer Control. Financial Times. Retrieved from:https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/07/04/abiy-ahmeds-reforms-have-unleashed-forces-he-can-no-longer-control-ethiopia-amhara-asaminew-adp-adfm/.

84 The New Humanitarian. (October 16, 2019). Briefing: Five challenges facing Ethiopia's Abiy. Retrieved from:https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2019/10/16/Abiy-Ethiopia-Eritrea-Nobel-peace-Tigray

85 Civil unrest in Sidama zone of SNNP region killed dozens and displaced more than 900 people, mostly women and children. See OCHA Report. (2019). Humanitarian Bulletin Ethiopia. Issue #12| 15 – 28 July 2019. Retrieved from:https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/humanitarian_bulletin_15_-_28_july_2019_final_002.pdf

86 See Addis Standard. Official Twitter page https://twitter.com/addisstandard/status/1230172517542879232

87 Trading Economics. Ethiopia Inflation Rate 2006-2020 Data. Retrieved from: https://tradingeconomics.com/ethiopia/inflation-cpi

88 Bloomberg News. (February 1, 2019). Ethiopia Says Economy Imbalanced, Needs Corrective Actions. Nizar Manek. Retrieved from: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-01/ethiopia-economy-imbalanced-needs-corrective-actions-abiy-says

89 Xinhua news. (December 13, 2019). World Bank, IMF pledge over 5 bn USD financial support to Ethiopia's economic reform. Retrieved from: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/13/c_138629247.htm

Another challenge facing the new administration has to do with an increasing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) which reached a world record high of 2.3 million in 2018. Although other factors such as environmental challenges also contributed to the country's displacement crisis, the significant portion was conflict-induced. To deal with the situation, the government, with the leadership of the newly established Ministry of Peace, has undertaken extensive work since April 2019 to return IDPs to their original homes. As a result, the number has now significantly reduced to 140,000, according to government reports.[90] Humanitarian agencies have, however, accused the government of breaching international humanitarian principles by returning IDPs to their areas of origin with minimal or no assistance, including by force.[91] This, in some instances, has led to secondary displacement of returnees as seen in the case of East and West Wollega zones.[92] To address the challenges faced by returnees and displaced people who are still residing in shelters, the government has recently launched Durable Solution Initiative (DSI). The extent to which the DSI will succeed in resolving the issues of IDPs in a systematic manner will be key to ensuring peace and durable solution to Ethiopia's internal displacement challenges.

Despite these challenges, the government announced its determination to go ahead with the planned national election of 2020. Accordingly, the NEBE has announced 23 August as the general polling day. While the ruling party, PP, has supported the decision indicating the government's preparedness and its capacity to ensure security across the country, several others, including OLF, OFC and ECSJ have objected to the proposal citing seasonal and security concerns.[93] Some opposition leaders are also adamant that organising an election in such tense environment might aggravate existing tensions and lead to a total breakdown of order.[94] This is mainly due to problems such as increasing lack of security across the country, apparent disagreement on legal frameworks among political actors, and lack of preparation on the part of the NEBE itself. While the National Electoral Board (NEBE) is still in the process of overhauling itself and a registration law for new electoral and political parties has been adopted in August 2019 (albeit contested by some opposition groups)[95], other essential electoral preparations including voter registration, voter education and logistical preparations are lagging far behind.

The current political landscape in Ethiopia is highly polarized and unstable and the security is fragile. Considering the prerequisite of security as an essential element for organising a peaceful and credible election, many agree that stemming the tide of violence effectively should be the government's key priority. This entails, among others, guaranteeing security for NEBE to effectively administer the election process; for political parties to freely campaign across the county; for CSOs to play their roles and also for citizens to freely cast their votes. Ensuring the independence of democratic institutions such as the NEBE, security forces and judiciary, as well as the media will also be crucial to ensuring credible election processes and stability in the aftermath of the election.

90 Ethiopia Press Agency. (August 8, 2019). Nearly 2.2 mn. IDP return home. Retrieved from: https://www.press.et/english/?p=9402#

91 OCHA. (May 2019). ETHIOPIA IDP Situation Report. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/idp_situation_report_june_13_2019_final.pdf. See also Africa News. (May 31, 2019). Ethiopia cautioned over 'forced return' of displaced persons. Retrieved from:https://www.africanews.com/2019/05/31/ethiopia-cautioned-over-forced-return-of-displaced-persons//

92 OCHA. (May 2019). ETHIOPIA IDP Situation Report. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/idp_situation_report_june_13_2019_final.pdf.

93 Africa News. (January 15, 2020). Ethiopia's activist turned politician raises 'red flag' over proposed poll date. Retrieved from:https://www.africanews.com/2020/01/15/ethiopia-s-activist-turned-politician-raises-red-flag-over-proposed-poll-date//

94 Interview with Senior Political Ethiopian Expert. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. November 27, 2019

95 "33 parties demanded the revocation of 20 articles and the amendment of 13 others from the newly drafted electoral law". See The Reporter. (August 3, 2019). Determined against all odds. Retrieved from: https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/determined-against-all-odds.

CURRENT RESPONSE ASSESSMENT

Since the coming to power of PM Ahmed, many international actors have extended their support to the initiated reform process. Most of the funding was geared towards supporting the newly launched Economic Reform agenda which is estimated to require up to $10 billion. So far, international partners, including IMF and WB[96], have committed close to $9 billion to assist the economic reform.[97] Saudi Arabia and UAE have also been close allies to the new administration, both in financial (through provision of grants and loans) and diplomatic terms.[98] Others, such as UNDP, US and EU have committed themselves to supporting the country's democratic transition by providing assistance to the peace building and electoral processes, i.e. technically and financially assisting the Ministry of Peace and NEBE, among others. On the humanitarian front, considerable support has been directed to supporting the government's IDP's return initiative that began in April 2019. International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other international organizations have also played a crucial role in the development and implementation of the Durable Solution Initiative (DSI) launched by the Ethiopian government.[99]

Despite the devastating scale of internal displacement, which reached a world record high in 2018[100], and dedication of the year 2019 to the issues of refugees, returnees, and internally displaced persons, the AU has chosen to remain surprisingly silent about the situation in Ethiopia. This may be, to a certain extent, due to Ethiopia's strategic position as host of the African Union Commission and valuable partner in regional security (prominent contributor to AU and UN-led peacekeeping operations, a staunch ally in the fight against terrorism and migration, and host to close to 900,000 refugees).[101] Although the country is yet to ratify the Kampala Convention, and as a sovereign state, the responsibility of protecting its internally displaced falls within its jurisdiction, the AU, as a continental organisation to which Ethiopia is a member, should have made efforts to strategically support the protection of IDPs in the country.

96 Xinhua News. (December 13, 2019). World Bank, IMF pledge over 5 bn USD financial support to Ethiopia's economic reform. Retrieved from: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/13/c_138629247.htm

97 Asharq Al-Awsat News. (December 14, 2019). Ethiopia: Donor Support for Economic Reforms Reached $9bn. Retrieved from:https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2035251/ethiopia-donor-support-economic-reforms-reached-9bn

98 Modern Diplomacy. (July 13, 2018). Saudi Arabia, UAE footprint in Eritrea-Ethiopia rapprochement. Retrieved from:https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2018/07/13/saudi-arabia-uae-footprint-in-eritrea-ethiopia-rapprochement/; See also Ethiopia News Agency. (July 15, 2019).Ethiopia, UAE Sign 100mil USD Grant Agreement. Retrieved from: https://www.ena.et/en/?p=8666

99 Xinhua News. (December 8, 2019). Ethiopia, UN join hands to find durable solutions to displacement crisis. Retrieved from: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/08/c_138613993.htm

100 Ethiopian Monitor. (December 8, 2019). Ethiopia Moves to Ease Burden of Internally Displaced People. Retrieved from: https://ethiopianmonitor.com/2019/12/08/ethiopia-moves-to-ease-burden-of-internally-displaced-people/

101 ISS Today, 2018. Why the African Union needs a stable Ethiopia? Retrieved from: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/why-the-african-union-needs-a-stable-ethiopia.

SCENARIOS

Best Case Scenario

The best case scenario for Ethiopia will be the holding of an inclusive, fair and credible elections with a revitalized ruling party - PP and strong and united opposition parties - where the voter is provided with real alternatives. For this to happen, the government should reinforce implementation of tangible reforms on various fronts, particularly in the electoral and security sector. The opposition ought to prepare for peaceful struggle by forging alliances – at regional and national levels - and devising progressive policy alternatives that will make them real competitors in the election. This scenario is likely to happen if PP's presumed commitment to democratic elections is ensured in practice; public confidence in the reformed National Election Board is enhanced; and the recent alliance formation observed among various opposition groups across the country is seen in practical operation. Although the election might be followed by some incidents of violence, it will largely be peaceful and the violence will be easily manageable. Under this scenario, the government needs to effectively stem the violence in different parts of the country and guarantee the rule of law and order by monopolizing the means of violence. It will also need to devise feasible policies that could further stimulate the economy and incentivize the private sector to create new jobs for the unemployed youth. This will enable the country's transition to a more democratic system.

Most Likely Scenario

The most likely scenario for Ethiopia would be the holding of fair and credible elections involving a relatively weaker ruling party and fragmented opposition. This is most likely the case considering the current weakening status of PP and fragmentation of the opposition operating in various parts of the country. Under this scenario, no single party will win a majority that will enable it to establish a government at the federal level and thus, the incumbent party could be forced to form a coalition government. This could change the dominant party culture of the country and, if handled well, create a representative government with a higher degree of political legitimacy. Conversely, it could also lead to an unstable government by intensifying internal political friction, which would eventually impact the performance of the governing power. This is most likely considering the mounting challenges the new leadership faces in effectively addressing the various ethnic grievances and conflicts unfolding in the country.

Worst Case Scenario

The worst-case scenario would be the failure of the government to maintain the broadened political space and hold fair and credible elections which will eventually lead to electoral contestation at various levels and post-election violence. This would result in an escalation of unrest and lawlessness, intensify ethnic divisions, and further the prevailing economic crisis and deterioration of humanitarian situation in the country. Under this scenario, the ruling party is likely to resort to strict security measures to stem the unrest and continue to monopolize the political landscape. This can result in relapse to authoritarian rule, preparing the ground for eventual civil war. Furthermore, the already fragmented opposition parties could lose their chance to play a constructive role in the reform and election process by failing to forge broad-based alliances or formulate viable policy alternatives. This is particularly probable considering the growing polarisation among various ethnic and opposition groups which will lead to vote fragmentation and ever deteriorating security conditions across the country. Also under this scenario, considering the post-election violence and breakdown of law and order, the ruling party may push for a transitional arrangement that can pave the way for crafting a new constitutional system. Although this proposal might come as sound to some centripetal forces, other ethno-nationalist forces might likely react negatively creating favourable condition for the breaking out of conflict.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS

To the National Government

The establishment of the Ministry of Peace and the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission by the government is a commendable step towards addressing entrenched grievances among the people and the prevailing deep divisions in the society. Nevertheless, the government must effectively use these structures to strengthen its national peace infrastructures and strive towards creating national cohesion and strengthening tolerance. But most importantly, given the increasingly polarized and already tense political landscape, the government should create a genuine platform that would pave the way for a negotiated political solution as a way out from the current stalemate and for peace and development in the long run. For this purpose, an inclusive national dialogue forum must be convened involving political leaders, traditional and religious leaders, youth representatives and other relevant stakeholders. The Reconciliation Commission must also expeditiously develop a clear activity plan and engage in implementation.

To hold free and fair elections, the government should expedite preparations for the upcoming election - speed up logistical and other preparations and introduce other mechanisms governing the conduct of the election including use of automated voter registration. As a state party to the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), Ethiopia should request the Democracy and Elections Assistance Unit (DEAU) of the AUC to provide advisory and technical assistance to help strengthen the NEBE.

The government should also continue its efforts of reforming and professionalizing its security sector with a view of creating a non-partisan and legitimate national security force that upholds the interest of the state. This will be key to enhancing the operational effectiveness and legitimacy of the forces, thereby ensuring the conducting of a peaceful election process.

To prevent the eruption of violent conflicts, the government must use its existing national early warning structures and also newly developed conflict mapping effectively. This will particularly be vital now as the election is approaching. It should also strengthen its collaboration with regional (IGAD) and continental (AU) early warning structures and use information in a timely and efficient manner.

The government should create a favourable economic environment that encourages domestic private sector operators as well as foreign investors with a view to stimulating the economy in a manner that could address some bottlenecks such as foreign currency shortage and inflation in the short run, and also create new employment opportunities for the ever-increasing labour force in the long run. This will help to transform the youth bulge into an asset and induce young people to be vigilant citizens who play a constructive role in building a democratic country. In the meantime, the government should devise a strategy to manage the soaring inflation and rising cost of living to prevent any adverse outcomes.

To present themselves as a viable alternative and increase their chance of winning, political parties should strategically forge alliances with like-minded forces and focus their campaigns on concrete political and socio-economic policies that can respond to the people's questions.

To the AU and IGAD

In line with the principles embedded in the Constitutive Act and ACDEG, the AU should encourage the government to promote democratic governance, respect human rights, and uphold the rule of law by, among others, holding a free and fair election and creating space for public participation (including youth and women engagement). As the country is preparing for election in 2020, the AU should undertake pre-election assessment mission to assess the political and security atmosphere and gauge the administration's preparedness and ability to organize a credible and democratic election that meets international standards/ norms.

In conformity with Article 18 of the ACDEG, the AUC should provide advisory and technical assistance to the NEBE through its DEAU.

In line with Article 12 of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the AU (PSC Protocol), the AU PSC, through its Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) and IGAD, through its Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) should closely monitor early warning signs of political and security tensions and take the necessary action to prevent violent conflicts and facilitate timely responses by the Panel of the Wise. They should also technically support national early warning structures to enhance their capacity to predict and prevent conflicts.

The AU should encourage Ethiopia to ratify and implement the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention) to ensure the provision of effective and efficient humanitarian and emergency assistance to internally displaced persons. In line with the Kampala Convention, the AU should also provide technical assistance to Ethiopia to strengthen its disaster response mechanism.

In line with its Regional Framework for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, IGAD should support the recent peace initiatives in the Horn of Africa region (peace agreements between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Eritrea and Djibouti), with the view to creating a conducive environment for regional economic integration as a lasting solution for conflicts in the region.

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CONFLICT TIMELINE: 1974-2020

1974 September	The Marxist-Leninist Derg dethrones Emperor Haile Selassie in a military coup.
1977 July	Ethiopia fights with Somalia over the Ogaden region.
1989 May	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) established with the coming together of TPLF and the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM).
1991 May	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) overthrows the Derg regime.
1991 July	EPRDF establishes Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) adopting a National Charter.
1995 May	Ethiopia holds the First general elections.
1995 August	The current Constitution of Ethiopia comes into force.
1998 May	Ethiopia and Eritrea go to war over delineation of border.
2000 December	The Algiers Peace Agreement is signed between the governments of Eritrea and Ethiopia.
2005 May	Ethiopia holds third general elections which led to violent protests.
2008 July	Government passes the Mass Media and Freedom of Information Proclamation (Media Law).
2009 February	Government introduces the Charities' and Societies' Law.
2009 August	Government introduces the Anti-Terrorism Law.
2016 July	Anti-government protest expands to other parts of the country, mainly Amhara and SNNPR regions.
2016 October	Government declares a six-month state of emergency following months of violent anti-government protests.
2017 March	Government extends state of emergency for four months.
2017 April	The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission reports that 669 people have been killed since anti-government protests erupted in 2015.
2017 August	Government lifts the state of emergency.
2017 September	Cross-border clashes erupt along Oromia and Somali borders claiming several lives and displacing over a million people.
2018 February	Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigns from office.
2018 April	Dr. Abiy Ahmed sworn in as a Prime Minister of Ethiopia.
2018 April	The new Prime Minister reshuffles his cabinet.
2018 April	Ethnic violence in Guji-Gedeo erupts, killing an estimated 200 people and displacing more than 800,000 people.
2018 June	As part of the reform process, government reshuffles top military, security and intelligence leadership figures.

2018 June	Government lifts the state of emergency following the resignation of the former Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn.
2018 June	Government decides to implement the Algiers agreement and fully/partially privatizes key state-owned enterprises.
2018 June	A grenade attack occurs at a rally organized to show support for the new leadership and its reforms.
2018 July	Government legalizes three prominent opposition groups formerly classified as "terrorists".
2018 July	Government establishes an Advisory Council to reform the country's restrictive laws, including the anti-terrorism law.
2018 July	Ethiopia and Eritrea sign a peace agreement (Asmara declaration).
2018 July	The Ethiopian Prime Minister orders the National Defense Force and Federal Police to intervene in the areas where armed conflict intensified.
2018 October	The federal Command Post takes over security responsibility of western Oromia region.
2019 May	Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (ECSJ) officially formed.
2019 June	Factions of the security forces of Amhara Region attempt a coup d'état against the regional government.
2019 July	Sidama zone civil unrest kills dozens and displaces several others.
2019 August	New electoral and political parties' registration law adopted.
2019 December	Prosperity Party officially formed following EPRDF merger.
2019 December	Jawar Mohammed joins OFC.
2020 January	TPLF officially declines joining Prosperity party.
2020 January	OFC, OLF and ONP form Coalition for Democratic Federalism.
2020 February	NEBE announces election calendar for the 2020 general elections.

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