

## Post 2018 political reforms in Ethiopia: Its achievements and challenges

Worku Dibu and Ephrem Ahadu \*

**Abstract:** This desk study was employed secondary data which are gathered from various literatures to assess the achievements and challenges of post 2018 political reforms in Ethiopia. The development of Ethiopia political trajectory is entangled with numerous paradoxes that raising both challenging and interesting questions. After the down fall of the military junta ,the current ruling party i.e. EPRDF take the power and come up with different legal and political reform such as adoption of progressive constitution, recognition of multi-party system and federal state structures to end the long lasting civil war in Ethiopia. However, through time the EPRDF party also become dictator like its predecessors, the ruling party also extensively engage in high political stifling, blocking of internet and website, arbitrarily detention of the country calibers such as figure of political leaders, bloggers, journalists and activists that works on human and democratic rights and dumping of Diaspora media which are an artery of voiceless peoples of Ethiopia and uneven factor mobility. These measures triggered the public to stand against it. The massive public protest coupled with bloodshed of civilians shocked the party and forced to look inside so as to rescue the country from disintegration. As the result of deep reform held within the party, Abiy Ahimed becomes the chairman of the party and by default the prime minster of the country. After he come into power, unexpected remarkable achievements have been recorded in fostering regional peace, widen political landscape and liberalize the key economic sectors. However, the reform of Abiy is not unchallenged rather there are various challenges that impede the speed of reform. Hence, the authors are intended to as the achievements and challenges of post 2018 political reform in Ethiopian and forward the possibly solution to overcome the challenges.

**Keywords:** political reforms, achievements, challenges

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\* Worku Dibu; Ephrem Ahadu (✉)

Department of Civic and Ethical Studies, Wachemo University, Ethiopia  
e-mail: Workud123@gmail.com (corresponding author)

## INTRODUCTION

The development of Ethiopia is characterized by a number of paradoxes that raise both challenging and interesting questions in respect of the country's future trajectory. For many decades, Ethiopia was suffered by lack of democracy in which the political power is monopolized by the central government and the grass root people excluded from political decision process. The countless undemocratic measures had been taken by Ethiopian rulers before the current ruling party come to power. Due to this reason, the current ruling part predominantly TPLF made bloodshed struggle to overthrow the dictatorial regime i.e. Derg or military junta and they become successful with the help of other Ethiopian people.

After the EPRDF party took the power different remarkable achievements like introduction of federal state structure, self-determination, and equality of nation nationality and peoples are promulgated. However, gradually the EPDRF party also becomes most dictators like its predecessor under the progressive constitution. Beyond this, a total political dominance of EPRDF party for more than 25 years by paralyzing the emerging mushroom of political parties are the paradoxical historical events that has been taken place in Ethiopia. Though the 1995 FDRE constitution recognized multi-party system, practically there is only one dominating party in which all the resources are absolutely monopolized by the EPRDF (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009). To stay with their power, the party made more repressive laws on antiterrorism, civil society, and the media that enables them to cemented the EPRDF's authoritarian rule, effectively eliminating opposition parties and independent news outlets and stifling all forms of opposition. The caliber or icon of the country that work on advocacy of human rights and democracy are sent to prison in the name of the repressive law so as to conceal its tarnish image from the international communities. The cumulative effect of the repressive laws, gross human rights violation, and unbalanced power sharing and factor mobility triggered different section of Ethiopian to oppose the spoiled political system. Because of this fact, high political opposition had been taken place in different parts of the country especially within the two dominate ethnic group of Ethiopia i.e. Oromo and Amhara to over throw the yoke of repression from their shoulder. Yet, the party became reluctant to take lesson from its past wrong doing and widen the political ecology and equal resource utilization rather the ruling

party attempt to abort the opposition by gun shoot via declaring state of emergency. As a result of this, many innocents who oppose the ruling party life was taken away by the order of commander of the defense force. The cruel and inhuman measure taken by the ruling party exacerbate the magnitude of the protest and pave the way to different youngsters from different corner of the country involved in the protest. The massive opposition held within the country makes the ruling government shocked and began to understand the problem is not solved by force rather they preferred to come up with the political propaganda what is the so called conducting deep reform. However, the deep reform cannot bring what they have expected rather the resistance is expanded and resulted the death of many innocent people.

As a result of this, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn has been determined to resign his power willingly to save the country from the scourge of further destruction (*Addis standard* 2018). His party also welcomed the question and determined to elect the chairman of the EPRDF party by the place of Haile Mariam Desalegn. On April 25, 2018 Dr. Abiy Aimeed was elected as the chairman of the EPDRF party and the Prime Minister of Ethiopia since by default the chairman of the party becomes the prime minister of the country as per the trend of the party.

Abiy quickly embark on different parts of the country that are previously disregarded and become the victims of the system and arranged hall meeting with various section of the society and try to hear their voice. With great commitment and dedication, he can bring unbelievable reform in the country. Among others, releasing several high-profile political prisoners and lifting a draconian state of emergency, encouraged exiled opposition politicians to return home and participate in politics, and proposed liberalization of key economic sectors, including telecommunications, energy, and air transport, ending the two decades No war No peace situation of Eritrea. Though the prime minister can achieved such kinds of remarkable change, it doesn't mean everything is done without any obstacles rather there are remnants who's lost their interest barking day up to night and highly engage in conspiracy how can they destabilize the country, create management crisis towards team Lemma and restored their lost political dominance. That is why the authors are triggered to conduct the challenges and achievements of political reform post 2018 in Ethiopia.

## FACTORS OF POLITICAL REFORMS IN ETHIOPIA

It is clear that political reform is not something that comes without unreserved efforts of various sections of the societies who live in a given political system. Yet, it doesn't mean that the society is arbitrary struggle to bring political reform without different triggering factors that obliged them political reform in given country is necessitates. Some of the major factors for post 2018 political reform in Ethiopia are depict as follow:

### *Narrowing Down Political Landscape*

Though the ruling party recognized multi part system, it wins election without competition. However in 2005 election, what is happened in Ethiopia history is against what the EPRDF party expected. The ruling party encountered high challenges from opposing party. The electorates gave their voice for opposing party named '*kingit*' party. At this time, the ruling party rushed to crush down the opposite parties via repressive law made by the legislator. The 2005 election was followed by harassment, prosecution, and punishment of the major critical voice including predominantly the members of opposition party, human rights activists and journalists. As a result of this journey the democratic reform is undermined and the political space has been shrinking. Starting from 2005 election, the human rights situation in Ethiopia was deteriorated as a result of illegal and clandestine harassment and adopting restrictive law like election, anti-terrorism, media and civil society. The enactments of the above listed laws make the ruling party an authoritarian government. The overlap repressive measures taken by the government create political conscious in the mind of Ethiopians .Thus; different Ethiopian who lives in different parts of the world campaigned on the EPRDF party and exposed the serious human right violation done in the country. The influential educated Ethiopians who live outside the country galvanized the young Ethiopians stand to end the repressive regime. As a result of this, high public protest has been occurred in different party of the country and shocked the party to look inside. The EPRDF party feeling intimidated, the ruling party resorted to extreme measures: it declared a state of emergency and went on to arrest tens of thousands of civilians and the caliber of the country such as activists, journalists, bloggers and politicians in the hope of containing the unrest. It also blocked the internet. But in spite of the draconian measures, the unrest continued: the young people increasingly targeted economic and industrial

institutions supposedly owned by the ruling coalition, and particularly the TPLF. The cumulative effect of political stifling leads the party to make real political reform and elect Dr. Abiy Ahimed to cooling down the massive public resistance and save the country from disintegration.

#### *Institutional Related Factors*

In Ethiopia, there is no well-established democratic institution rather everything is highly rely and determined by few political elites. The absence of independent judges, human right institutional, civil society that works on advocacy of human rights and democracy led the party to the high tendency of dictatorship. At the first place, the executive and legislative organ is fused together. This implies even if the legislative organ vested the highest power by the FDRE constitution and has the mandate of investigating the wrong doing done by the executive organs, they don't properly discharge their responsibility. Because ,first and foremost ,the party wins parliament seats solely without opposing parties and also the head of the government is elected from the house of people representatives .Thus ,since they come from the same party and the representatives elect the chairman or prime minister of the country by trust ,they don't expose the wrong doing rather the considered the success and failure of the head of government is their own party, they prefer to remain silent though they have mandate up to remove the prime minister form his power. In addition, due to the absence of neutral institutions that check and balance the activities of each organ, it paves the way for the political elites resort in rent seeking and corruption. When the few political elites builds sky rocketed building, led luxuries life, send their child to study in famous European universities, the vast majority Ethiopian are suffered by lack of basic needs. Hence, the absence of impartial institution that renders justice obliged the people to opt force as option to bring justice.

#### *Economic Related Factors*

Other things remain constant; one of the main responsible factors that make political change inevitable in Ethiopia is the issue of unemployment and high living condition that has been occurred in the country. Many university and college graduate become unemployed. Even feeding empty belly become difficult in the country .But the government reported Ethiopia has been recorded double digit and we make poverty history instead of search a solution for the

unemployment and reducing the high living standard gap by devising various strategies and policy's in consultation with economics professionals.

### *Addis Ababa Master Plan*

The uprising was initially triggered by a plan to expand the city of Addis Ababa, infringing the land rights of the Oromo people around the capital. Resistance to the plan quickly developed into political opposition to the ruling party, and in particular the TPLF. The popular uprising constituted a serious threat to the rule of the EPRDF. In summer 2016, the uprising was joined by young people in the Amhara region (Dinberu 2018). This demonstration of unity by the country's two major – and hitherto antagonistic – ethnic groups constituted a real threat to the survival of the EPRDF, and particularly to TPLF.

## ACHIEVEMENTS HELD POST 2018 IN ETHIOPIA

### *Enhancing Diplomatic Ties*

The prime minister ended the long lasting instability occurred between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The rapprochement with Eritrea on the intractable border dispute and worked toward normalization of relations with Somalia and Djibouti are the unbelievable dramatic achievements of Dr Abiy Ahimed (Bereketeab 2019). The UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, portrayed the new development in the region as powerful wind of hope blowing across the Horn of Africa (Bereketeab 2019). This wind of hope was unique, in that no one could predict its dynamics, scope or momentum (Ibid.). From a light breeze, it gusted to unprecedented speeds. The vectors of change also multiplied dramatically (Ibid.). The work towards the normalization of Ethiopia and Eritrea also has a spillover effect to alleviate the destabilization of horn Africa. Following sudden and dramatic change came as a surprise to all, Somalia also come on in good contact and agreed to work each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The resumption of relations between Somalia and Eritrea just few days after the restoration of those between Ethiopia and Eritrea is a strong indication that the Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict was the primary source of dysfunctional inter-state relations in the region. On 5-6 September, the leaders of Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea held a summit and issued a Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Cooperation between Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea that enhanced their respective territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence (Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea Joint

Declaration 2018). Furthermore, the prime minister also can reconcile the long year's split Ethiopian Orthodox Church two and make one.

### *Enlarging Political Landscape*

After Abiy Ahimed came into power, issue of the human rights and democracy also give high concern. As part of widen political landscape, the government show different progress. Among others, the draconian state of emergency was lifting, decided to unblock a number of websites, blogs and radio and TV-stations, which were previously unavailable to the population, at least through legal channels. The Diaspora media like ESAT which is the voice of voiceless Ethiopian that is dumping from air by the TPLF for a long period of time and OMN TV allowed to express their view by set up their basis in Ethiopia, different bloggers, journalists, political leaders and activists were released from prison and the 'Maekelawi' or federal central prison in Addis Ababa in which many civilians were tortured changed into museum. Moreover, general forgiveness was declared and all the rebel groups that had been grouped terrorists by the previous administration were invited to return to the country and pursue a peaceful political struggle. Accepting the invitation, many armed groups have indeed laid down their weapons and returned, including Patriotic Ginbot 7 (G7), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the Tigray People's Democratic Movement (TPDM).

### CHALLENGES FACING THE REFORMS

Abiy's reforms will not go unchallenged. The reform process has encountered a number of setbacks. Some of the challenges are as follow:

#### *The Prevalence Media Extremists*

Among others, one of the major challenges that hamper the journey of the political reform is the presence of extremist group who disseminate their pseudo propaganda to escalate the difference than preaching peaceful existence via electronic and non-electronic media. The hate speech repeatedly written via social media initiated one ethnic group to stand over the other. Hence, enacting media law regarding hate speech and make the extremists calm down and refrain from hat speech is a challenge for the reform.

### *Ethnic and Communal Conflict*

Another major gravest challenge is insecurity driven by rising animosity among Ethiopia's ethnic groups. Longstanding grievances among Ethiopia's ethnic groups are becoming more acute. The forces that kept them at least partly in check are loosening, and all around the country groups that see each other as competitors are jostling for power (Nairobi/Brussels 2019). Though anti-government protests have largely subsided since Abiy became prime minister, communal violence that rose in parallel with them over the past few years has spread and worsened and ethnic militias are growing in size and reach. The number of persons displaced due to conflict in Ethiopia has reached 2.2 million; more than half of them have been displaced since January 2018 (Ibid.). At the same time, ethno-nationalist sentiment around the country is on the rise, with ethnic movements using increasingly incendiary rhetoric about other groups and pressuring parties within the ruling coalition toward more confrontational policies. Therefore, calming ethnic and communal conflict erupt by waiting time also need perpetual solution.

### *Political Uncertainty*

Political uncertainty generated has been one of the challenges that exacerbated by increasing polarization among political elites, brought to a climax in June 23 assassination of vocal Amhara regional states leaders and the highest military commanders as well as the mass detention and accusation of Tigriyan political officials. Following the assignation of Amhara regional states high officials, the mass imprisonment of many Amhara icon or caliber measures has been taken such as the commander of police and the members of Amhara Nationalist part movement in the name of the June 23 even without solid investigation. However, the members of 'OLF' who robber more than 18 banks were not imprisoned. Not only this but also the political parties and elites of Oromia disseminate hate speech but the federal government cannot take any measure. In addition to this, though the reform is considered as the chapter for change and negotiation, the prime minister himself publicly declared that we don't amend the constitution for one ethnic group and bargaining by the federal system and Oromo high official who propagate about disunity, the federal government remain silent. This result especially the Amhara and Tigriyan elites to develop suspect regarding the change and obliged to search their own way. So, articulating political stand of Oromo and fair



treatment of all ethnic groups are also another challenge that need to do much.

#### *Tactical Honey Moon between Amhara and Oromo Elites*

It is undeniable fact, the present political change has brought by the joint effort of Amhara and Oromo peoples and their political elites. However, their relation is tactical not strategic that means they simply work together so as to overthrow the TPLF regime from his power. After the removal of TPLF from his power, the relationships between the two people as well as the elites are not in the same fashion. The gap created between two people pave the way for the political remnants who oppose the changes to create management crisis and destabilize the country. And also, it makes the federal government to spent time on silly and simple issues instead of emphasizing on the grand and structural issues. Thus, compromise the interest the two dominate ethic group i.e. Oromo and Amhara elites that develop historical hostilities each other and have polarized interest is also the challenge for the reforms.

#### *The Prevalence of Mob Justice*

The federal and regional government cannot ensure rule of law. Even the, federal and regional governments themselves are parts of the problems because of this reason mob justice is prevailed in the country. Many innocent were killed, displaced and their right to movement is mitigated. This in turn led the people even to nostalgia the old ruling system at least there is a relative peace. So, ensuring the prevalence of the rule of law is a challenge of the reform that requires doing much.

#### *High Living Conditions and Money Laundering*

Fostering economic benefit of the people is also an acute challenge that Abiy will need to prioritize. Abiy inherited an economy that was already in a perilous state (Ibid.). The country's economic growth over the last decade was fuelled by massive borrowing that has created a debt burden of more than \$24 billion, which Addis struggles to service (Ibid.). Moreover, in recent years, prices have sky-rocketed even as unemployment has increased. Compounding the problem are the public's rising expectations, notably in the urban population that is more aware of the economy's weaknesses. Disappointment and frustration are especially acute among job-seeking youths joining the country's expanding labor pool only to find that there are few

meaningful prospects. Even if many Ethiopian seen the change can brought economic benefit, the living condition become high and high. Hence, money youngsters are involved in various criminal activates like becoming illegal brokers of goods and services, robbers and so on. Furthermore, an extensive engagement of the old system in money laundering outside of the country that has potential to cover all loan of Ethiopia need much bargaining from depositor countries to return the money.

### *Lack of Impartial Institutions*

Like the old system, the new change leaders also go with the same path. Instead of establishing the well-established and persistent impartial democratic institution, many innocent are arbitrary detained by political decision and sent to prison. Just like the former, they attempted to rule the people by force and repeat what the TPLF did. These draconian measures again darken the hope of solid democracy seekers in Ethiopia and triggered to stand against the regime like the former one. Hence, establishing impartial democratic institution in which the public trust them is also another challenge that badly need much work.

### *SECURITY CRISIS*

It is known that the security sector is under the total control of TPLF party for a long period of times. Hence, remnants of the previous regime are hampering progress. Bringing these forces under the political control of the new prime minister has proved a real problem. Abiy inherited a parlous security situation. Inter-ethnic violence has resulted in many internally displaced people in Ethiopia, the highest of any country in 2018. The security situation has worsened partly because Abiy has targeted Ethiopia's authoritarian security agencies to gain popular support and remove threats to his leadership. Senior officials have been relieved from their positions or arrested under corruption charges. This has resulted in the TPLF and Tigriyan feeling targeted by the government and has caused a damaging power vacuum. Thus, TPLF use this opportunities to destabilize various part of the region and to restore its power via create management crisis. Though many icon of the country are assassinated, still now the real criminals were not announced for the public.

### *Taking Over Turn*

The political and academic elites of Oromo claimed that it is our turn and publicly declared that Semitic never get government position, the Cushitic also rule Ethiopian for the coming 3000 years. The illusion and arrogant thought inculcated in the mind of the Oromo elites irritate the rest Semitic people to look the change through suspect. Hence, compromising the incompatible interest of various ethnic groups is also challenge that must be overcome.

### *Disharmony within the Four Coalition Ruling Parties*

Before Abiy Ahimed come into power, the four sisterly parties jointly perform their functions. But after he comes into power, the thing is changed mainly TPLF become against the change. There are reasons forward by the TPLF that makes to become against the change: the first one is arbitrary detention mainly targeted Tigriyan is seen as to weaken Tigray and also violation of constitution. Other scholar argued that TPLF oppose the change simply too far from accountability for their previous mal-did. Power struggles within the EPRDF leadership and its affiliated ethnic-based parties continue to simmer. In particular, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, representing a minority ethnic group that has exercised outsized control over the government for decades, stands to lose influence and could be a spoiler. The government blames disgruntled elements in the party and government structures for recent instances of violence, including a grenade attack at a pro-Abiy rally in Addis Ababa in June. TPLF extensively engage in provoking and exploiting inter-ethnic cleavages.

### CONCLUSION

The post 2018 political change has been entangled with numerous hope, dramatic sudden surprising changes like rapprochement of Eretria and Ethiopia as well as normalization of the horn Africa, widen political landscape in which the caliber of the country arbitrary detained by the pervious system were released and welcoming of different Ethiopian political parties as well as Diaspora media grouped under terrorist. Though various remarkable dramatic changes were recorded in Ethiopian after the reform, there are various backlogs and challenges that should hamper the speed of reform. among others, some sort of inclination to the pervious system or yearning to repeat what the former did or not learn from the failure of the old system, security crisis, prevalence of media extremists, take over turn, political

uncertainty are some of the challenges that impedes the reform process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The authors of this appear forward the following possible solution to overcome the changes that hampers the speed of political reform:

- The mass media should work towards the creation of awareness on commonalities of Ethiopian people's than preaching about their difference that lead to tension by disseminating fake news.

- Establishing persistent democratic institution and civil society or human rights and democracy advocacy groups in which the people trust them.

- Revising the draconian law and widen the political landscape. The government of Ethiopia should revising laws such as the Charities and Societies, Antiterrorism, and Mass Media Proclamations that prohibit civil society work on human rights and democracy issues and restrict the ability of independent media to operate in transparent way via includes all stakeholders, and occurs in a timely fashion.

- Accelerate reform of the criminal justice system and the security sector to make them independent of political control and influence. The police and courts have routinely been used to level spurious and politically motivated charges against critics of the ruling party.

- Address recurring ethnic-based clashes that are causing humanitarian crises in many parts of the country without negligence. The government should establish effective early-warning, prevention, and mitigation mechanisms for such conflicts, and show a commitment to investigate and punish the perpetrators of related human rights abuses, including members of regional paramilitary forces.

- Resolving the political disputes occurred among for the sisterly collation EPRDF party harmoniously and works tighter with mutual benefit.

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