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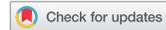
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## EPRDF's 'menu of institutional manipulations' and the 2015 regional elections

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### ABSTRACT

Ethiopia is generally considered to have 'a dominant party authoritarian' system in which the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), along with its affiliates, enjoy electoral dominance. This contribution argues that EPRDF's electoral dominance in the 2015 regional elections, indeed in all the elections held in the past two decades, is partly the result of the party's use of what Schedler refers to 'menu of institutional manipulations' including electoral rules, government agencies, local authorities and even civil society organizations, to maintain its dominance. The semi-consociational system that guides the relationships of the constituent parties of EPRDF also provides the latter an electoral edge over the opposition parties which are often fragmented. The paper further argues that EPRDF's vanguardist self-view, which is an offshoot of its 'revolutionary democracy' ideology, underpins its drive to be a dominant party and to use all of the institutional manipulations under its disposal.

**KEYWORDS** Regional election; Ethiopia; regional states; 2015; federalism

### Introduction

Ethiopia, once a unitary state, became a federation in 1995. The country began its journey towards federalism in 1991 after the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of ethnic rebel groups, ousted the *Derg*, the former military junta, after 17 years of gruesome civil war. Following four years of interim period, the 1995 Constitution was adopted which entrenched the federal system which is made up of a federal government, nine regions and a federal city, Addis Ababa.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1991 five national and local and six regional elections were held in the country. EPRDF and its affiliates were declared winners in all of the elections hitherto held. Opposition parties had certain, indeed growing, representation in Parliament and regional councils in the first three elections. Their representation, however, dropped sharply in the 2010 election and became

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zero in the 2015 general election. The 2015 election, which is the focus of this contribution, resulted in EPRDF's complete dominance of all federal and regional councils giving a rise to a *de facto* one-party system. This begs the question: what explains EPRDF's exclusive dominance of all levels of government?

EPRDF attributes its electoral dominance to the popularity it gained owing to its role in ousting the *Derg* and the economic growth and improved social service provisions that are achieved under its leadership. This is not totally incorrect. However, EPRDF's popularity, on its own, does not explain the electoral results of the past two decades. This contribution argues the regime in Ethiopia is in the category of 'electoral authoritarians', more specifically, 'dominant party authoritarians' in which EPRDF and its affiliates, exercise exclusive political control in the country (Aalen and Tronvoll, 2009; Arriola and Lyons, 2016). As an electoral authoritarian, EPRDF uses what Schedler (2010) calls 'menus of institutional manipulations' in order to maintain its dominance. The semi-consociational system that guides the relationship of the constituent parties of EPRDF also provides the latter an electoral edge over the opposition parties which are often fragmented. The paper then takes a step back and attempts to explain what underlies EPRDF's electoral authoritarianism and argues EPRDF's vanguardist self-view, which is an offshoot of its 'revolutionary democracy' ideology, underpins its drive to be a dominant party and to use all of the institutional manipulations under its disposal.

The paper begins with a discussion of what electoral authoritarians are, why they hold elections and the 'menu of institutional manipulations' they employ to retain their incumbency. It then deals with the political and institutional context within which the 2015 regional election was held. It introduces the political structures of the nine regions followed by a brief discussion of the political parties and the electoral system in use in the country. After outlining the results of the 2015 regional election, the paper turns to EPRDF's 'menus of institutional manipulations' that help it sustain its dominance. Finally, it discusses the party's notion of vanguardism that drives its electoral authoritarianism.

### **Electoral authoritarians and their 'menu of institutional manipulations'**

Totalitarian dictatorships – those that assume, and cling to, power without elections – seem to be out of fashion and very small number of them are in existence today. Most states now organize elections at national and/or sub-national levels. This has specially been the case since the end of the Cold War. Yet only a handful of states, mostly western countries, are considered as genuinely democratic. The rest are in the 'foggy zone between liberal democracy and closed authoritarianism' which is known as 'electoral authoritarianism'

(Schedler, 2002a).<sup>2</sup> Electoral authoritarians come in different shapes and forms including hegemonic authoritarian, competitive authoritarian, and dominant party authoritarian (Donno, 2013). Unlike totalitarian regimes, electoral authoritarians organize, often multiparty and regular, elections. However, they do not envision elections to be a mechanism of gaining political powers but of legitimising their hold on power (Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009: 405). They also use elections as a 'safety valve' to allow the public let off steam and express its displeasures and frustrations so that it does not resort to uprisings. Moreover, they use elections to measure their level of support so that they can co-opt or coerce groups and individuals opposing them (Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009). Elections also help electoral authoritarians keep opposition parties in the political game since the latter are in general presumed to have a chance, though slim, of gaining power through elections. This, in turn, allows the former to maintain some level of democratic facade which would be completely lost in the absence of the latter (Bhasin and Gandhi, 2013: 621).

Almost all electoral authoritarian regimes thus organize elections though without the intention to lose them. Schedler (2002a: 47) maintains '[w]hile democracy is "a system in which parties lose elections", electoral authoritarianism is a system in which *opposition* parties lose elections' (emphasis in the original). Electoral authoritarians have a 'menu of institutional manipulations' under their disposal that help them tilt electoral odds in their favour so that they can retain their incumbency (Schedler, 2010). In the menu are favourable electoral laws, disempowered or reliable judiciary, organs of elections administration, controlled media, local government, civil society organizations (CSO), and the like (Schedler, 2010).

Having direct and indirect control over national legislative organs, authoritarian regimes ensure that 'the basic rules of electoral games', including the electoral systems, are designed in their favour. Democratic elections presuppose the existence of 'alternative sources of information' for voters. However authoritarian regimes retain direct and indirect control over the media and restrict voters' access to information about alternative policies and parties (Schedler, 2010: 72). They even actively engage in acts of misinformation. In addition, they undermine the role of judicial organs as guardians of democracy either by disempowering them, for instance, by denying ordinary courts of the power to adjudicate electoral disputes, or by ensuring that judicial positions are filled with 'politically reliable' judges (Schedler, 2010). Moreover, authoritarian regimes either restrict or co-opt civil society organizations thereby keeping citizens from forming independent associations. They also contrive ways of fragmenting opposition political parties (Schedler, 2002b: 107). Organs which are in charge of administering elections are expected to have 'administrative efficiency, political neutrality and public accountability' (Mozaffar and Schedler, 2002: 8). However, such organs in authoritarian

systems lack specially the last two elements. The rulers manipulate these institutions to commit 'electoral fraud' at the various stages of electoral administration ranging from voters' registration to 'the tally of the votes' (Schedler, 2002b: 105). Furthermore, authoritarian regimes deem critical having a direct or indirect control over local authorities for retaining their incumbency. They hence use various institutional mechanisms to put local authorities under their thumbs including establishing parallel bureaucracy that competes with local authorities, by insisting on retaining the power to appoint local authorities or by requiring the latter to be accountable to them. In addition to the above, authoritarian regimes use other overtly illegal measures such as physically eliminating dissenters, violent campaign, and the like (Schedler, 2002b: 105).

It will be shown below that EPRDF uses the above and other institutional manipulations to retain its incumbency.

## **The political and institutional context for the 2015 regional elections**

### ***The political institutions of the states***

Ethiopia has what is often referred to as a dual federal system in which political, judicial and administrative powers are, in principle, neatly divided between the federal and state governments (Assefa, 2007). The federal government has a bicameral legislative house, a parliamentary executive, and a judiciary.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, each of the nine states has a legislative council (a state council) a parliamentary executive (state administration), and a state judiciary (FDRE Constitution art 50(3) & (6) & 45).

### ***Political parties***

There are 63 political parties that are currently registered by National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) of which 23 are national political parties while the rest are regional parties.<sup>4</sup> The political parties existing in Ethiopia are often classified into three categories based on their political programme and standing; EPRDF, EPRDF's affiliate parties, and opposition parties (Wondwosen, 2009). EPRDF is a coalition of four ethnic-based regional political parties; Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM). Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO), and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (SEPDM). These regional parties, in theory, have equal weight and are represented by an equal number of people in EPRDF's central and executive committees despite the difference in the number and population size of the ethnic communities each party claims to represent. However, many consider the TPLF as the most influential

member of EPRDF since it played a major role in the civil war that saw the *Derg* ousted. EPRDF has been the ruling party at the federal level since the transitional period. ANDM, OPDO, TPLF, and the SEPDP each controls the Amhara, Oromia, Tigray and SNNP regions, respectively, where over 70 percent of the Ethiopian people live.

EPRDF's affiliates are Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP), Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP), Benishangul-Gumuz Peoples Democratic Party (BGPDP), Gambela people's Unity Democratic Movement (GPUDM), and Harari National League (HNL) (Wondwosen, 2008). These are also regional and ethnic-based parties and in charge of the Afar, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Gambella regions, respectively. The affiliate parties are not opposition parties per se. In fact, they have identical ideological orientation and political programmes with EPRDF's constituent parties. It is also often alleged that these are the creation of EPRDF itself.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the opposition parties are regional or local ethnic-based political parties, which operate either alone or by forming a regional or national coalition. Among the major national collations of ethnic-based parties in the opposition camp are the Ethiopia Federal Democratic Unity Forum (in its Amharic acronym known as Medrek) and the Ethiopian Justice and Democratic Forces Front (EJDF).<sup>6</sup> Not only do the ethnic opposition parties support the ethnic federal system but also promote its implementation to the letter.<sup>7</sup> There are also a few political parties that claim to have a supra-ethnic political outlook and multi-ethnic memberships which seek either to scrap or reform the ethnic federal system. The Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) and Blue Party (BP) are among the major opposition parties in this category.

Dozens of opposition parties had emerged into the Ethiopian political scene since the establishment of the Ethiopian federation. Most have however disappeared having little or no impacts on the country's politics. The two opposition political parties, which had a noteworthy electoral success, were the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), a coalition of four national opposition parties, and the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), a collation of several ethnic-based parties. These, between themselves, secured over 174 parliamentary seats in the highly contested 2005 general elections. The CUD even won every seat of the Addis Ababa City Council in the same election, even though it failed to administer the city since its leaders were imprisoned in connection with the political turmoil that followed the elections.

### ***Electoral system***

The federal Constitution (art 54(2)) provides that the first-pass-the-post (FPTP), a version of the plurality electoral system, would be used in federal elections. Under this system, members of the House of Peoples Representatives (HoPR),

the lower house of parliament, are elected from a single member constituency, by a plurality of votes cast. The Constitution does not prescribe a specific electoral system for subnational elections and leaves that to HoPR to legislatively determine. As per Article 25 of Proclamation 532(2007), which HoPR enacted to regulate federal and subnational elections, a version of the plurality system that uses multimember constituencies is employed in state and local elections.

### ***Elections in Ethiopia***

There are two main categories of elections in Ethiopia, general and local elections. The general election includes the election to the HoPR (national elections) and state (regional) councils (regional election) (Proclamation 532 (2007), art 28). All sub-regional elections (zonal, *woreda* and *kebele*) are in the category of local election. The election to Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa Councils are also held as a part of local elections.<sup>8</sup> The general elections are held on the same day, in the month of May, every five years.<sup>9</sup> The elections to all of the nine state councils are conducted simultaneously even though, twice or so, the election to the Somali state council was held separately due to the poor security situation in the region.<sup>10</sup>

The Constitution, while clearly stating HoPR would have a maximum of 550 seats, is however silent on the size of regional councils. The election proclamation, on the other hand, authorizes the states to determine the size of their councils in their state constitutions. As Table 1 shows, there are a total of 1989 electoral positions at the state level. The sizes of state councils differ from one region to the other depending on the territorial and population size and the ethnic diversity of the people in each region.

Oromia, which is, both territorially and in terms of population size, the largest region in the country, has the biggest state council which is nearly equal to the HoPR. The SNNP, third in terms population size, has the second largest states council. This is perhaps because the region, with over 56 ethnic communities in it, is the most ethnically diverse state. Many of

**Table 1.** The number of seats in state councils.

Region/Federal city	Council size
Tigray	152
Afar	96
Amhara	294
Oromia	537
Somali	273
Benishangul-Gumuz	99
SNNP	348
Gambella	155
Hareri	36
Total	1989

Source: NEBE, 2015.

the ethnic communities in this region have a few thousand population. They could thus be represented only in the special scheme that the Constitution envisages, not in the regular electoral process.

This seems to have required the state council to have a relatively large size.

For the purpose of general elections (national and state elections) the NEBE has created constituencies by taking as the basis a *woreda* (district), which presumably has approximately 100,000 population (Proclamation 532(2007), art 20(1)). Every elector in each constituency casts his/her vote for a party or an independent candidate (IC), if any, to the HoPR and another (single) vote for a party to a regional council. The Constitution (art 54(3)) provides that minority ethnic communities, which cannot be represented in the HoPR and state councils through the normal electoral process, would be represented through a special procedure, without, however, defining the procedure.

## The May 2015 regional elections

### *Candidates and voters*

The NEBE official report shows 36,851,461 voters registered for the 2015 general elections. And on the day of election, 34,332,298 people came out to cast their votes which puts the voter turnout at approximately 93 percent; an exceedingly high voter turnout. Of the total votes cast, 33,201,969 (96.7%) were counted to be valid.<sup>11</sup>

Some 3991 candidates (3022 men and 969 women) contested in the regional elections; an average of two candidates to every seat in every regional council. These candidates contested in the regional elections representing 47 political parties (coalitions, fronts, and single parties). Three ICs also took part in the elections. Indeed, not every political party, not even EPRDF, had candidates in every region or constituency for the election. Yet in eight of the nine regions a minimum of five political parties took part in the elections. Some 21, mostly local and ethnic-based, political parties contested in the SNNP. In Amhara and Oromia regions 13 and 16 political parties, respectively, took part in the election. The Gambella Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Movement (GPRDM) was the sole contestant in the Gambella region.

As can be seen from [Table 2](#), EPRDF, through its constituent parties, deployed 1350 candidates in the four highland regions that are considered to be its strong support base, thereby, contesting for every seat in the councils of these regions. The party did not, however, contest in the other five regions leaving those for its affiliates except, for reasons that are explained below, the OPDO, a member of EPRDF, fielded 20 candidates in some parts of Hareri and Afar regions.

The opposition parties also put candidates to regional councils in selected regions. For instance, Medrek had 639 candidates who ran for regional councils

**Table 2.** Political parties and their candidates for regional elections.

Political parties	Abbreviation	No candidates
Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front	EPRDF	1350
Ethiopia Federal Democratic Unity Forum	Medrek	639
Blue Party	BP	204
Ethiopian Democratic Party	EDP	172
Somali people Democratic party	SPDP	273
Coalition for Unity and Democratic Party	CUDP	119
All Ethiopian Democratic Organization	AEDO	109
Unity for Democracy and Justice Party	UDJP	95
Gambella Peoples Unity Democratic Movement	GPUDM	156
All Oromo People Democratic Party	AOPDP	70
New Generation Party	NGP	58
Benishangul-Gumuz Peoples Democratic Party	BGPDP	99
Ethiopian Raie Party	ERP	62
Afar Nation Democratic Party	ANDP	93
Gumz People's Democratic Movement	GPDM	85
Ethiopian Democratic Unity Movement	EDUM	38
Ethiopian Democratic U		43
Ethiopian Justice and Democratic Forces Front	EJDF	36
SidamaHadicho People Democratic Organization	SHPDO	43
Oromo National Congress	ONC	31
Geda System Advancement Party	GSAP	33
All Ethiopian National Movement	AENM	22
Agew Democratic Party	ADP	28
Ethiopian Peace and Democratic Party	EPDP	20
Gedeo People Democratic Organization	GPDO	21
Harari National League	HNL	18
Oromo Liberation Unity Front	OLUF	9
Bench People Democratic Organization	BPDO	9
Wolayta People Democratic Front	WPDF	8
Independent Candidate	IC	3
Welene People Democratic Party	WPDP	3
Dilwabi Peoples' Democratic Movement	DPDM	7
Donga People Democratic Organization		6
DentaDubamoKinchinčila People's Democratic Organization	DDKPDO	5
Kembata People's Congress	KPC	5
All Amhara People's Organization		3
Ethiopian's Unity Democratic Organisation	EUDO	0
Somali Democratic Alliance Forces	SDAF	5
Dube and Degeni Nationality Democratic Party		3
Argoba People Democratic Organization	APDO	3
Argoba Nationality Democratic Movement	ANDM	3
TigriWorgi Nationality Democratic Organization	TWNO	
Western Somali Democratic Party	WSDP	2
All EDP	AEDP	–
SodoGordona Peoples' Democratic Organization	SGPDO	
Ethiopian National Unity Party	ENUP	–
		3991

Source: NEBE, 2015.

in Oromia, Tigray and SNNP regions. Some regional opposition parties also fielded candidates in their respective regions. For instance, Western Somali Democratic Party (WSDP) and Somali Democratic Alliance Forces (SDAF) contested in Somali region while OFC, Oromo Liberation Unity Front (OLUF), Geda System Advancement Party (GSAP), and All Oromo People Democratic Party (AOPDP) contested in Oromia. Several small local parties also contested in the SNNP.

### **The 2015 regional election results**

As was briefly mentioned above, EPRDF (its constituent parties) and affiliates declared a total victory in the May 2015 regional elections. Every single candidate that these parties fielded for the election became a winner. Therefore, now an EPRDF member party or an affiliate party controls every seat in every regional council. As can be seen from [Table 3](#), the TPLF controls all of the 152 seats in the Tigray state council and the ANDM occupies all of the 294 seats of the Amhara state council. Likewise, the OPDO and SEPDM hold every seat in the SNNP and Oromia regional councils.

Likewise, the affiliate parties have full control of their respective regional councils. According to the official elections result, GPRDM received 100 percent of the votes cast in Gambella. The HNL (an EPRDF affiliate party) and OPDO (members of EPRDF) equally share the 36 seats in the Hareri Regional Council.<sup>12</sup> The national election results also mirror the results of the regional elections. EPRDF won 501 of the 547 seats in the HoPR which amounts to 91 percent of the seats in the HoPR. Its affiliate parties claimed the rest.

EPRDF's dominance in national, regional, and local elections is neither unprecedented nor unexpected even though the 2015 elections result was unparalleled<sup>13</sup> in that it brought about the complete exclusion of opposition parties from all federal and regional councils. This begs the question; what helps the EPRDF maintain its electoral dominance?

### **EPRDF's 'menu of institutional manipulation'**

As was briefly stated in the introduction, the EPRDF has 'menus of institutional manipulations' that it uses to retain its incumbency. These include a favourable electoral system, an organ of elections administration which is under its control, local authorities. The semi-consociational arrangement that guides the relationships of members and affiliates of the EPRDF, along with

**Table 3.** May 2015 regional elections results.

State	No parties	Winner	Vote received	Percentage	Seats won	Total no. seats in the state council
Tigray	6	TPLF	2,374,574	99.39	152	152
Afar	9	ANDP	817,107	99	93	96
		OPDO	8253	1	3	
Amhara	13	ANDM	7,314,564	93	294	294
Oromia	16	OPDO	10,877,190	93	537	537
Somali	6	SPDP	2,621,088	99.97	273	273
BG	5	BGPDP	222,790	81	99	99
Gambella	1	GPRDM	195,335	100	155	155
SNNP	21	SEPDM	5,836,849	93.74	345	345
		HNL	19,791	19.1	18	
Hareri	5	OPDO	84,097	80.9	18	36
Total			30,371,638			1989

Source: NEBE, 2015.

the 'ineptitude' of the opposition parties, also helps the former maintain its dominance.

### ***Electoral system***

The first is in EPRDF's menus of institutional manipulation is the electoral system. As was stated above the plurality electoral system is the working system for all elections in Ethiopia. This electoral system has been a contentious matter among the country's political parties since the 1990s. Opposition parties allege that the plurality electoral system arose from the ruling party's 'constitutional engineering' to ensure its continued dominance (Merera, 2002). Having blamed, among others, the current electoral system for their poor electoral performances, the opposition parties had demanded the implementation of the proportional representation (PR) system for all elections. The ruling party, on the other hand, was adamant on maintaining the current electoral system claiming that the PR system would result in party fragmentation rendering decision making prolonged and difficult.

There is a disagreement among scholars on the actual impacts of the electoral system on the elections results in Ethiopia. For instance, John Ishiyama (2009), based on the 2005 election, maintains that the past electoral results would not have shown significant changes even if a PR system was in use. Moreover, as Table 3 shows, each of EPRDF's constituent units received a minimum of 93 percent of the total votes validly counted in their respective regions. The picture is the same in the lowland regions; the domains of the affiliate parties. If one accepts the official result as reflective of the true will of the voters, it becomes clear that the electoral system had little or no impact on the electoral outcome of the 2015 regional elections. In any case, following the ten-month public protests that engulfed the country in 2016,<sup>14</sup> the underlying cause of which was believed to be the complete exclusion of all dissenting views from all regional and federal institutions, the ruling party has agreed to introduce a reform on the country's electoral system. Mulatu Teshome, the FDRE President, in his annual state of the nation address thus stated:

In the last two elections, the ruling party, and its allies, won 99.9% and 100% of the seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives. Although, all those seats were won through free and fair, periodic elections, the result left the substantial number of votes given to opposition parties unrepresented in the HoPR. The electoral system in effect left out demands that might have been represented by parties other than the ruling party. (Solomon, 2016)

The president further stated that the electoral system would be reviewed and, to this effect, the Constitution might even be amended (Solomon, 2016). Prime Minister Haile Mariam Desalegn also stated the reform was necessary to ensure different political opinions are represented in the country's representative councils (Adem, 2015). It is, however, unclear what

electoral system would be adopted. Nor is it clear whether the electoral system reform relates to only national elections or also to both national and subnational elections. From his speech in Parliament, a mixture of the plurality and PR systems seems to be what the prime minister has in mind. This is however yet to be determined through negotiations between EPRDF, opposition political parties, and other stakeholders, which is already underway.

### ***The NEBE: a non-neutral umpire***

The other institution in EPRDF's menu of institutional manipulations is the NEBE. The Constitution allows the party controlling the federal government to exclusively determine the composition of the NEBE. Under the Constitution (art 102(2)) the Prime Minister is authorized to nominate nine members the NEBE who would then be confirmed by the HoPR. The NEBE has also deconcentrated regional and local structure which the Board itself establishes. The political neutrality the head, and other members, of the NEBE has therefore been suspect. The opposition have been demanding to have a say in the selection of members of the NEBE, a demand that EPRDF rebuffed.

Several reports show that the NEBE is far from independent or politically neutral. Opposition parties allege that EPRDF makes sure that, the NEBE at all level, is filled with its own members who obviously lack a modicum of independence. For instance, Beyene Petros, the former chairperson of Mederk, maintained: '[since the 2005 elections] the competence of the Board has gone down ... I don't see people of integrity from top to bottom. It is not serving the nation and the democratic transition in this country'.<sup>15</sup> The European Union Election Observation Mission (EUEOM) (2010), in its report on the 2010 general elections, confirmed that the NEBE staff, at federal, state and local level, were government employees and civil servant who were often members of the ruling party. The EU Mission further observed that local authorities, who were evidently members of the ruling party, served as electoral authorities in certain areas (EUEOM, 2010). The fact, and indeed the perception, that the NEBE is controlled by those who are members of EPRDF are among the main causes for the lack of trust among the opposition parties in the independence of the NEBE.

Furthermore, it is often alleged that members and employees of the NEBE create all sorts of difficulties on the opposition parties. They come up with various excuses to refuse registering the opposition parties' candidates. Beyene complained that officials of the NEBE refused to register some of his party's candidates for the 2015 elections.

We have a standard format where we introduce a candidate. I signed on the paper and we photocopied that paper and put original seal on each and

every page of the paper. I cannot sign on the form of every candidate. This is how we operated all over the country. But now at the eleventh hour they refused to register. They use such tactics and pretexts to frustrate our participation in the electoral process. The NEBE does not seem to be informed on the basics of the election process.<sup>16</sup>

The opposition also allege that the NEBE readily takes the side of EPRDF whenever there is an electoral dispute between the two sides. They even accuse the NEBE of serving as EPRDF's right hand in terms of causing division within them. The claim in this respect is that EPRDF uses infiltrators to sow division within the leadership of the opposition parties. When such division occurs and the dispute is brought to it, the NEBE allegedly chooses one faction, often the one which is amenable to EPRDF, over another, and recognizes the former as the legitimate leadership of the party. This was supposedly what happened when internal disputes arose within the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) and the All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP). In both cases, the NEBE recognized 'minority splinter groups ... at the expense of the majority hence weakening the parties' and putting its impartiality and independence into question (Neamin, 2015).

### ***Media and CSOs***

The Ethiopian print media enjoyed a relative freedom in the early 1990s and early 2000s. As a result, newspapers and magazines mushroomed in the first ten or so years after EPRDF assumed power. The government however retained exclusive control over radio and television stations. Moreover, freedom of the press was slowly eroded in the successive years. The 2005 elections changed everything in this regard. The private media reported favourably about opposition parties before and after the elections while being critical of the ruling party. This did not settle well with the latter and, therefore, it began taking various measures to restrict free press (Aalen and Tronvoll, 2009: 193).

The government thus passed several pieces of legislation that had the impact of, if not intended to, restricting freedom of the press, the most important ones being Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation 590/2008 and Anti-Terrorism Proclamation 652/2009. The first one contains several restrictions that eat into the freedom of the press including a 'defamation clause' which imposes criminal liability for 'accusations and defamation against the constitutionally established legislative, executive or judicial authorities'. One's criminal liability in this respect does not depend on whether or not an individual member of these institutions has sustained material or psychological damage as a result of a certain media report. This means 'journalists and other members of the media can be criminally prosecuted, fined, or jailed for defamation when there is no victim' (Ross, 2010:

1060). The Anti-terrorism proclamation (art 6) renders a crime publishing or causing the publication of

a statement that is likely to be understood by some or all of the members of the public to whom it is published as a direct or indirect encouragement or other inducement to them to the commission or preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism.

The crime is punishable with 10–20 years of imprisonment.

The above laws resulted in the closure of several private newspapers. Moreover, until recently there was no a single private radio or television station. Only government-owned TV and radio stations existed to which EPRDF had unlimited access. This obviously helped the party maintain its incumbency.

The federal government also issued a proclamation (621/2009) that sought to regulate the activities of CSOs. The government reportedly decided to adopt this proclamation because some CSOs showed an interest to act as independent observers in the 2005 election and they dared to take the matter to court when the NEBE initially tried to curtail their involvement in this regard (Aalen and Tronvoll, 2009: 111). The CSO proclamation contains several provisions that aim to restrict the operations of CSOs including strict registration and licencing requirements and intrusive government inspection regime.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the proclamation categorizes CSOs into Ethiopian, Ethiopian residents, and foreign CSOs depending on their membership and origin of funds.<sup>18</sup> It further provides that only Ethiopian CSOs could raise political issues, engage in advocacy of human rights, democratic participation, and promotion of efficiency in justice administration and law enforcement and the like. Other CSOs, as per this law, are restricted to providing relief in case of emergency, undertaking charity works, or engaging in activities that are less politically sensitive, such as, sport and culture (art. 14(5)). So only Ethiopian CSOs can engage in acts of promoting democracy.

This has two inter-related problems. First, most of the Ethiopian CSOs, including youth associations, women associations, teachers' associations and the like, are affiliates of the ruling party.<sup>19</sup> Second, the few Ethiopian CSOs that are indeed independent operate under severe financial constraints (since they have to raise over 90 percent of their revenue from domestic sources) and fear of being accused of having affiliation with opposition parties and losing their licences. Even worse some of the leaders of such CSOs are criminally charged and sent to jail (Awol and Beza, 2015: 290).

The CSO and anti-terrorism laws allowed the ruling party to decimate autonomous CSOs and private newspapers and prevent them from serving as 'voices of dissent and criticism' (Awol and Beza, 2015). This, in turn, seems gave the government a freehand to restrict 'normal democratic initiatives' and to label 'unlawful' and crackdown on 'peaceful opposition political activit[ies]' (Awol and Beza, 2015). In the absence of strong CSOs in the country, the government

refused to invite, even rejected the offer from, the EU and American election observers under the pretext of 'relying on domestic resources than foreign judgment on the credibility of the [electoral] processes'.<sup>20</sup> The 2015 regional election was hence held in the absence of international elections observers; the first election since 1991 to be conducted without international observers.

### **Local authorities**

As stated at the beginning, local authorities are indispensable for authoritarian regimes for maintaining their incumbency. The same seems to be the case in Ethiopia. Since it assumed power in 1991, EPRDF has been careful not to lose control of local government.<sup>21</sup> And it has effectively used local authorities to control electoral outcomes. Even more, the party had introduced several measures that aimed at ensuring that local government is within its exclusive domain. The most notable measure in this respect was increasing local councils' seats (from 600,000 to 3.6 million) under the pretext of creating 'an expanded forum for public participations' (Aalen and Tronvoll, 2008: 116). The ulterior motive for the expansion of local councils, however, was preventing 'any opposition party from gaining influence in the local government elections' since none of the parties, other than EPRDF, could put such number of candidates in the local election (Bertelsmann Transformation, 2009). Local government and local authorities, in turn, worked towards maintaining EPRDF's dominance.

[Local authorities] control the local police forces and other security apparatuses which they often use to the detriment of opposition parties. For instance, a *woreda* administrator is in charge of a *woreda* police force. In order to hold public rallies, demonstrations, or public meetings, local authorities need to be 'informed' of the arrangements so that they can provide security. If local officials 'cannot' provide security – and often they 'could not' – such rallies, meetings and demonstrations cannot take place. (Zemelak 2011, 149)

As it is often alleged, local authorities harass and intimidate members and candidates of the opposition often forcing the latter to withdraw from the electoral process. In the 2010 general elections, for instance, 72 opposition candidates withdrew from the elections due to alleged intimidation and harassment from local authorities (Tronvoll, 2010: 8).

### **The semi-consociational arrangement within EPRDF**

The other institutional mechanism that allows EPRDF to maintain its electoral dominance is the semi-consociational principle based on which the party is established and that requires cooperation among the constituent units of the party.<sup>22</sup> As was stated elsewhere, the Ethiopian federal system provides territorial autonomy to the major ethnic groups by establishing nine states and several more sub-state territorial units that are organized along ethnic lines. The four

ethnic-based regional parties that form the EPRDF each governs one of the four largest regions (Amhara, Oromia, SNNP, and Tigray). Those regional parties that are affiliates of EPRDF control the remainders of the states. The EPRDF and its members operate in a semi-consociational arrangement that allows them to control the states and the federal government. Each member of the EPRDF enjoys some degree of autonomy in the manner it runs the state under its control; notwithstanding the principle of democratic centralism based on which the EPRDF operates (EPRDF Statute, art 7). The regional parties are also represented in the different structures of the EPRDF on an equal basis (EPRDF Statute, Chapter 3). Hence TPLF which claims to be a representative of 6 million Tigrayans has equal representation in EPRDF's various structures with OPDO, a party that claims to represent about 35 million Oromos. Decisions in EPRDF are principally made based on consensus.

These regional parties, which are members or affiliates of the EPRDF, cooperate with each other for the purpose of controlling their respective regions and the federal government. They coordinate their campaign against the opposition parties during election periods and avoid competing against each other. An EPRDF member or affiliate party seldom deploys a candidate into a region that is considered to be the political domain of one of the other sister parties even if members of the ethnic community that the former claims to represent are found in the region. This seems why that OPDO did not deploy candidates in the Amhara region in the 2015 national and regional elections even though there are about half a million Oromos in Amhara region having their own ethnic local government in Kemisse area. Nor did TPLF had its candidates run for election in the Metema area of the Amhara region where there are a substantial number of Tigrayans. Indeed, as stated earlier, OPDO had candidates who ran for elections in the Hareri region. This is also undertaken based on the semi-consociational system under consideration.

In addition, EPRDF deploys candidates that are drawn from its member parties for elections in the two federal cities (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa) since these are multi-ethnic cities that no specific ethnic community can claim as its exclusive domain. The candidates so drawn run for elections in the two cities representing EPRDF, as opposed to OPDO, ANDM, or TPLF (EPRDF Statute, Art 25).<sup>23</sup> Member parties of the EPRDF run the governments of the two federal cities on consociational basis. For instance, the previous and current mayors of Addis Ababa were from the Oromo community (from OPDO) while the deputy mayors were from the Amhara community (from ANDM).

### **'Ineptitude' opposition**

Schedler (2002a: 42) maintains that the electoral victory of authoritarian regimes is not solely due to the strength of the regimes. It is also because

of the 'ineptitude' of the opposition. This is also true in Ethiopia where EPRDF's electoral dominance is in part due to the weaknesses of the opposition parties. The Ethiopian opposition parties are extremely fragmented. Indeed, as stated above, many of them have similar ideological orientation and political programme. For instance, the BP and the EDP both claim to be 'liberal' in their ideological orientation and often declare their disapproval of the ethnic federal system.<sup>24</sup> The majority of the opposition parties are ethnic-based which agree with EPRDF on almost on everything. Their main reservation is that EPRDF has not sufficiently implemented the ethnic federal system. Yet those opposition parties that have similar ideological outlook are seldom seen bringing their members and resources together to create a formidable opposition against the ruling party (Arriola and Lyons, 2016: 78). Indeed, around election time various coalitions are created which however barely last a single electoral cycle before crumbling. The disintegration of the CUD into its constituent units following the 2005 election is just a case in point.

Furthermore, as was shown above, members and affiliates of EPRDF cooperate with each other and avoid competitions among themselves. On the other hand, opposition parties contest against each other in every electoral district, enabling EPRDF to easily defeat them. They eliminate each other before even voting begins. For instance, an NEBE directive on the registration of candidates (1/2009) provides that no more than 12 candidates (parties) could contest in a single electoral district. When there are more than 12 candidates in a single electoral district, first those who run as ICs would be eliminated. If the number of candidates still exceeds 12, then six parties which participated in previous elections and received the highest votes would be retained while the fate of the rest of the parties (candidates) would be determined by lots drawn by the NEBE. Three candidates of the BP, including Yilikal Getnet, the then chairman of the party, were eliminated from the 2015 national elections due to this rule (Neamin, 2015).<sup>25</sup>

The opposition parties also suffer from acute financial constraints. They raise little revenue from member contributions and other internal sources. They are by law prohibited from engaging in businesses and receiving donation from foreign sources (Proclamation 573(2008), art 52(1)). Members of the Ethiopian diaspora, especially those in Western countries, are the oppositions' main source of revenue. And these often attach different conditions for their grants including requiring the opposition parties to focus on national election, as opposed to regional or local elections (Wondwosen, 2009). EPRDF, on the other hand, has an immense financial capacity. Moreover, government properties such as *kebele* halls, government vehicles, state radio, and television are at its disposal.

Various donors provide the NEBE with considerable revenue with a view to encouraging electoral democracy in the country which the latter disburses for the political parties. Firstly, the fund is simply a grant, not an entitlement that a

party can rightfully demand. Hence the revenue may be available in one electoral period and absent in the next. Second, the criteria for the division of the revenue are skewed in favour of EPRDF. The most important criterion in dividing the money among political parties is the number of seats that each party occupies in parliament and state councils (Proclamation 573(2008), 45(1)). This clearly allows EPRDF to take almost the entire portion of the grant that is dispersed based on the seats each party has in parliament. For instance, as was indicated earlier, the 2010–2015 parliament was almost fully controlled by EPRDF with the exception a single seat that was occupied by an opposition party member. The NEBE made available 29,793,102.41 Ethiopian Birr (\$1,316,907) as a grant to be divided among all political parties and to be used for the 2015 elections. Half of this money (ETB 14,879,734.62 or \$657,710) went to EPRDF. EPRDF received approximately ETB 8 million (\$353,614) simply for controlling all the seats in parliament.<sup>26</sup>

### **Vanguardism: the driver of EPRDF's 'electoral authoritarianism'**

As was stated at the beginning, EPRDF's electoral authoritarianism is underpinned by its vanguardist self-view. Vanguardism is a Marxist Leninist notion which is often linked to the establishment of a party or a similar organization by the most 'class conscious' members of the working class to lead the latter in its 'revolutionary struggle'. Vanguardism, as initially conceptualized by Marx, seems to envisage a democratic organization of the working class (Jones, 1990). However, Lenin and, later on, Mao reconceptualized vanguardism as a process of creating a party 'which is sovereign above all other workers' organizations' (Socialist Labor Party of America, 2007).

Vanguardism is elitist in a sense that it envisages a centralized party with a hierarchical structure. This is based on the premise that the consciousness of the majority of the working class is at 'trade union consciousness' level and, therefore, ordinary members of this class are incapable of 'emancipating' themselves (Topper, 1982). Workers thus need to be directed by a party that is under the leadership of 'professional revolutionaries [and] the unquestioned discipline of a central committee' (Topper, 1982). Hence those in the leadership positions of the vanguard party – in particular members of the central committee – are expected to control everything and they are controlled by no one. Other organizations of the working class, or any organization for that matter, are not allowed to exist. If they ever exist, they are expected to play a subordinate role to the vanguard party (Topper, 1982). EPRDF has espoused the Marxist Leninist notion of vanguardism to fit its own purpose.

Political contestations based on the notion of vanguardism is not a new phenomenon in the Ethiopian political history. It can be traced back to the 1960s when Marxism Leninism was the most dominant ideology of the

Ethiopian Student Movement (Bahru, 2014). Some of the multi-ethnic parties that sprang from this movement, including Ethiopian People Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and All Ethiopian Workers Movement (also known in its Amharic acronym as *Meison*), saw the social problems in the country as primarily emanating from 'class contradictions' (Asnake, 2012). The ethnic ones, such as TPLF and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), on the other hand, saw the problems in the country as principally originating from a century of ethnic-based marginalization. In any case, the parties in both camps, by espousing Marxist Leninists political theories to fit their own purpose, declared themselves vanguard parties of the groups they supposed to represent. Hence EPRP and *Meison* each saw itself as a national vanguard party and was determined to eliminate (often through violence) any possible contender. This conviction of the two parties led to the Red Terror in which members of these parties massacred each other (Bahru, 2008).

The ethnic-based parties took as a strategy to conduct guerrilla warfare against the *Derg* in the areas where the ethnic community that they claim to represent is situated (Vaughan, 2011; Asnake, 2012: 63). Hence TPLF began military operation in Tigray area while OLF began operating in different parts of what is now known as the Oromia region. Having the view that they were vanguards of the ethnic communities in which they were imbedded, the ethnic parties were unwilling to allow any other party, ethnic or multi-ethnic, to operate in the areas they considered as belonging to the relevant ethnic communities. Hence in the 1970s, TPLF demanded EPRP to leave Assimba, a mountainous area in Tigray, wherefrom the latter was conducting military operation against the *Derg*. TPLF asserted that only it could operate in Tigray as the vanguard of the Tigray people (Gebru, 2008, Ethiopian Calendar). The refusal of the EPRP to accede to the demands of the TPLF, among others, led to a war between the two groups and TPLF drove EPRP out of the region (Gebru, 2008). Likewise, in the early 1990s OPDO emerged (allegedly created by TPLF) claiming to be the vanguard party of the Oromo (International Crisis Group, 2009). Yet, OLF, which also saw itself as the vanguard party of the Oromo, opposed OPDO's operating in the Oromia region. This, among others, led to some military skirmishes between EPRDF's fighters and OLF's fighters in 1992 and the latter were defeated and driven out of Oromia.

EPRDF's notion of vanguardism is thus simply an extension of TPLF's vanguardist style that found continuity in the current dispensation. It is also an offshoot of EPRDF's 'revolutionary democracy' ideology, an ideology that is underpinned by the theory of Marxism Leninism. Revolutionary democracy, as Gebru (2008), a veteran of TPLF, argues, categorizes the political groups in the country into those that are committed to promoting the peoples' interest and those that are enemies of the people. The ideology sanctions the exclusion from the country's political life of those that are considered to be

in the latter category. Gebru further states that revolutionary democracy is based on the view that there must be a vanguard party that exercises exclusive control over the country's political, economic, and social movements.

Revolutionary democracy ... teaches the preeminence of the party [EPRDF] and its vanguard status. It links democracy with class division and teaches that democracy is for the oppressed and not for those who are considered to be oppressors. Moreover, [it requires] that the ruling party to be in control of all government institutions including parliament, state councils, executive organs, security apparatuses and judicial bodies. It also requires civil associations and, indeed, the society at large, to be under the control and influence of the ruling party. The existence of a free press and media is thus viewed as contrary to this objective. In general, [revolutionary democracy is based on the belief that] activities that are outside the control of the party had to be limited. (Gebru 2016: 181)

The Statute of the party also shows that EPRDF views itself as a vanguard party of the country and its role at the national level as the role of a vanguard party.

For the realization of the programmes of EPRDF, the people should internalize and struggle for their achievement. In order to enable people to rally behind the objectives of revolutionary democracy and to struggle for their accomplishment, *EPRDF is expected to play the role of a vanguard by bracing up its organizational capacity to lead the people in their efforts to raise their consciousness and organize themselves.* (EPRDF program, 2006)<sup>27</sup>

As a vanguard party, EPRDF asserts to itself the role of providing 'political leadership to all of the ethnic regions either through its member organizations or affiliates' (Asnake, 2012). Within the context of the country's ethnic federal system, EPRDF's vanguardist view is that every ethnic community should have one vanguard party and that the ethnic community needs no other party to champion its cause. At the regional level, therefore, each of EPRDF's constituent parties is expected to play the role of a vanguard party with respect to the relevant ethnic community and region. Hence TPLF deems itself (and is viewed by the sister parties) as the vanguard party of the Tigray ethnic community and region (ICG, 2009). Likewise, OPDO, ANDM, SPDM deem themselves as vanguard parties of the Oromia, Amhara, and SNNP, respectively. Each of the affiliate parties which governs each of the remaining five regions is created, allegedly by the EPRDF, to play a similar role (Vaughan, 2006: 186). Any party that seeks to champion the causes of any of the ethnic communities of which a member or an affiliate of the EPRDF views itself as vanguard party can thus be prevented from gaining any foothold. This vanguardist view of EPRDF, its constituent units and affiliates and the tendency to exclude, it is maintained, underpins the electoral outcome of the 2015 regional elections.

The 1995 Constitution indeed entrenches multiparty democracy in which parties that are organized regionally or nationally, along ethnic lines or otherwise, can participate in democratic elections, at all levels of government. Hence EPRDF, its constituent parties or affiliates have no choice but to allow opposition parties to exist. Yet, the notion of vanguardism that shapes EPRDF's outlook makes it view with disdain the very existence of other parties, in particular those that seek to champion the causes of the ethnic communities whose interest the vanguard parties claim to promote. Hence the vanguard parties take all sorts of measures to hinder the operation of opposition parties. Moreover, opposition parties, to the extent they are allowed to exist, as EPRDF's officials are often heard saying, are expected to merely serve as a mirror through which EPRDF could see its own weaknesses and defects so that it can self-correct.<sup>28</sup> They are not supposed to be serious political opponents which possibly can unseat the vanguard parties through competitive elections.

EPRDF's self-view as national vanguard party is therefore what drives it to maintain electoral dominance. The drive to maintain its dominance, in turn, leads it to employ 'menus of institutional manipulations' including the electoral board, courts, the police, and CSOS and the like (Bassi, 2014).

## Conclusion

The May 2015 regional elections brought about an unprecedented outcome in the post-1991 political history of Ethiopia in the sense that it led to 100 percent control of every seat in every regional council by EPRDF's constituent parties and the affiliates. ICs and opposition parties were completely excluded from all regional councils. The electoral results of the 2015 regional elections were so because, as in the elections previously held, EPRDF made use of a 'menu of institutional manipulations' that was at its disposal to retain its incumbency. In the menu were favourable electoral systems, an election administering organ which is under EPRDF's control, several pieces of legislation that are designed to stifle free press and restrict autonomous CSOs.

EPRDF is driven to use the aforementioned institutional manipulations by its vanguardist self-view. The semi-consociational system that guides the relationship of the constituent parties of EPRDF, over and above the fragmentation of the opposition parties, came in handy for EPRDF's vanguardist aspiration of controlling all political institutions of the country.

So, what is the significance of the 2015 regional elections for democracy/democratization in Ethiopia? Should regional elections under EPRDF, all elections for that matter, be dismissed as meaningless periodical exercise without any consequence for democratization in the country? This author maintains otherwise. Elections under authoritarian regimes, by definition, have no

certain outcome even though, given all sorts of institutional advantages they have, authoritarian regimes are likely to retain their incumbency. This is because electoral authoritarians only 'reduce', not completely remove, the risk of losing power through elections, lest they should lose their democratic facade (Schedler, 2010). There is, therefore, always a chance that even an authoritarian regime may be unseated through elections. It is important to recall that EPRDF itself came very close to losing power in the 2005 national and regional elections. What is crucial is that the 1995 Constitution establishes multiple representative councils at multiple levels of government, entrenches multiparty elections, and that elections are indeed organized without interruptions. Elections will not be entirely pointless in Ethiopia so long this remains to be the case.

#### *Constitutions and laws*

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution 1995.

Anti-Terrorism Proclamation 652/2009.

Charities and Societies Proclamation 621/2009.

The Revised Political Parties Registration Proclamation 573/2008.

The Amended Electoral Law of Ethiopia Proclamation 532/2007.

The Amended Electoral Law of Ethiopia Proclamation 532/2007.

Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation 590/2008.

## Notes

1. The nine subnational units of the Ethiopian federation are Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Tigray, Somali, Hareri, Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz, and the SNNP. Each of the first five regions has a dominant ethnic community and bears the name of the ethnic community. Hareri, a small city-state, has also taken the name of the ethnic community to which it is established, despite the community being numerically in the minority in the region. The rest of the regions, in particular the SNNP, are multi-ethnic with no ethnic community in the majority.
2. These are also referred to as "semi-democracy," "virtual democracy," "electoral democracy," "pseudo-democracy," "illiberal democracy" "semi-authoritarianism," "soft authoritarianism" (Levitsky and Way, 2002).
3. The lower house is the House of Peoples Representatives (HoPR) while the upper house is the House of Federation (HoF). The HoF does not, however, play any legislative role. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution 1995, Arts 53–63.
4. A national party is a party over 60 percent of whose founders are from at least four regions while regional party is a party about 60 percent of whose founding members are from a single region. The Revised Political Parties Registration Proclamation 573(2008) Arts 5 & 6.
5. After the fall of the *Derg* and during the transitional period EPRDF fighters 'marched' to the present-day SNNP. In the area, they mobilized the various ethnic groups into small ethnic-based political parties. The teachers in the area were particular targets of recruitment. Each of these parties now bears

the name of the ethnic group they claim to represent followed by ‘people democratic organization’ (PDO). Hence these parties are commonly called as PDOs (Vaughan, 2006).

6. Members of this coalition are Ethiopian Social Democracy-Southern Coalition Unity Party (ESD-SCUP), Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), Union of Tigrayans for Democracy & Sovereignty (UTDS), and Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM). The EJDFF is composed of Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), Unity of Southern Ethiopian Democratic Forces (USEDFF) and Oromia Liberation National Party (OLNP). The USEDFF, in turn, is a regional coalition made up Wolayta People’s Democratic Front, Gamo Democratic Union, and Gomogofa Peoples Democratic Union, which are local ethnic-based political parties operating in the SNNP.
7. Almost every ethnic-based party, which is a member of, or an affiliate to, EPRDF, seems to have a corresponding party in the opposition camp. For example, Medrek is composed of four ethnic political parties claiming to be the voices of the Oromo, Tigray, and several ethnic communities of the SNNP, more or less mirroring EPRDF. The Ethiopian Social Democracy-Southern Coalition Unity Party (ESD-SCUP), which is one of the members of the Medrek, is a coalition of a number of ethnic-based parties, which claim to represent certain ethnic communities in SNNP. The ESD-SCUP can thus be considered as the counterpart of the SEPDM in the opposition camp Wondwosen, 2009)
8. The election to the Addis Ababa City Council was previously held with the general elections. This has changed since the 2005 general election and now the elections to the two federal cities are held as a part of local elections. The last elections for the city councils of the two cities were held as part of the 2013 local election. Ashenafi Endale ‘Local elections get underway’ (Addis Fortune, 14 April 2013).
9. The Electoral Proclamation authorises the NEBE, with the approval of the HoPR, to conduct national and regional elections at different times, if the former deems necessary. This has not happened thus far. Art 28(2)
10. For instance, in 2005, the general election in the Somali region was held on 21 August 2015, three months after it was held in the rest of the country.
11. ኢትዮጵያ ብሔራዊ ምርጫ ቦርድ: 2007 ዓ/ም ጠቅላላ ምርጫ አጠቃላይ ውጤት (National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) *Official Results of the 2015 general elections*).
12. Hareri is viewed and established as the regional homeland of the Hareri ethnic community. Yet the community constitutes only 13 percent of the total population in the region. The regional constitution provides for the establishment of two regional houses; the People’s Representative Assembly (PRA) which has 22 seats and the Harari National Assembly (HNA) which has 14 seats. The two together form the 36 seats of the Hareri state council. The PRA is composed based on a consociational arrangement in which party/parties representing the Hareri community control a portion of the seats in the council while another representing the Oromo community controls the rest. The HNA is entirely controlled by a party representing the Hareri community. This arrangement excludes members of ethnic communities residing in the region other than the Oromo and Hareri from any representation (Van der Baken, 2014).
13. Opposition parties and/or independent candidates had some, in fact growing, representation, in the state councils. EPRDF and its affiliates were in control of 96 percent of the regional councils of the transitional period after the June 1992 local and regional elections (Keller, 1995). Many of the opposition parties boycotted the 1995 general election including, therefore, the regional election.

Yet some individual who runs as independent candidates won a number of seats in some of the state councils. In the 2000 general election opposition parties, such as All Amhara People Organization (AAPO) and EDP, managed to win 53 seats in the Addis Ababa city the Amhara, Somali, and Benishangul-Gumuz state councils. In the 2005 general election, the opposition parties had an unparalleled success. CUD and UEDF in particular performed rather well in all the regions except in Tigray where TPLF (supposedly the core of EPRDF) is assumed to have unwavering support. CUD won 137 of the 138 seats of the Addis Ababa City Council along with 196 seats in Amhara, Oromia, SNNP, and Benishangul-Gumuz regions. UEDF in turn, won 143 seats in Oromia, Hareri, and SNNP regions. African Elections Database *14 May & 31 August 2000 regional state council elections in Ethiopia* [http://africanelections.tripod.com/et\\_2000state.html](http://africanelections.tripod.com/et_2000state.html) (Last accessed on 25 January 2017); African Elections Database *15 May & 21 August 2005 regional state council elections in Ethiopia* [http://africanelections.tripod.com/et\\_2005state.html](http://africanelections.tripod.com/et_2005state.html) (Last accessed on 25 January 2017).

14. The public protests began in Oromia as demonstrations against the master plan of the Addis Ababa city which sought to integrate the city with neighbouring towns that are found in Oromia. These were followed by other protests in Amhara region where protesters demanded that Wolqait, a district in Tigray, should be part of the Amhara region. The protest grew in size and increasingly became violent culminating in the death of dozens of people in the town of Bishoftu, at the Irecca festival, an Oromo traditional thanks giving day festival.
15. The Reporter 'A veteran politician speaks out' (February 2015) <http://archiveenglish.thereporterethiopia.com/content/veteran-politician-speaks-out> (Last accessed on 1 February 2017).
16. The Reporter 'A veteran politician'.
17. The Proclamation creates a government agency called 'Charities and Societies Agency' which under the proclamation has the power to or not give licence to a CSO and a wide supervisory power over CSOs which allow it to interfere in the internal affairs CSOs.
18. A CSO is deemed Ethiopian if it is established by Ethiopian nationals, under Ethiopian law. A CSO that raises over 90 percent of its funds from within the country is also considered as Ethiopian CSO. A CSO formed by residents of Ethiopia and that receives over 10 percent of its revenue from foreign sources are considered 'Ethiopian residents' CSO. A foreign CSO is one established by foreigners, under a foreign law. Societies proclamation, art 2(2-4).
19. Strategic Thinking on East Africa 'The Role of Civil Society in Ethiopia's Current Crisis: Who will make the first move?' <<http://www.strathink.net/ethiopia/the-role-of-civil-society-in-ethiopias-current-crisis-who-will-make-the-first-move/>> accessed on 26 May 2017.
20. The Reporter 'A veteran politician speaks outs'.
21. For more on how critical local authorities are for EPRDF's incumbency see Zemelak, 2011.
22. Consociationalism is an institutional arrangement that aims at ensuring that political powers are shared among major ethnic, religious, racial, or other social groups of a country, depending on the social divide in it, with a view to preventing conflicts. A consociational political system works on the basis of negotiation and compromise among the elites of the relevant identity groups. A government that comes about as a result of a consociational arrangement is thus

often referred to as ‘government by elite cartel’. Consociationalism has three institutional features ‘segmented’ or ‘group’ autonomy, PR and ‘mutual veto’. Consociational arrangement may work at a party level in a sense a party may be formed based on consociational principles (Bogaards, 2006; Andeweg, 2000; Lijphart, 2006).

23. See National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) *Official Results of the 2015 general elections*.
24. Yilikal Getinet (the former chairperson of Blue Party) and Lidetu Ayalew (the former chairman of EDP) have made this clear in various interviews. Recently EDP seems to have adopted a moderate view on the country’s ethnic federalism. For an Amahric interview Yilikal gave to an Amharic magazine called Life visit <http://hornaffairs.com/am/2013/05/22/ethiopia-semayawi-party-amhara-omro/> (Last accessed 1 February 2017).
25. Neamin (2017).
26. National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (2017).
27. EPRDF *Program: Introduction* available at <<https://www.slideshare.net/Bereh11/eprdf-program>> (accessed on 18 April 2017). Emphasis added.
28. At a conference titled ‘የኢትዮጵያ የዴሞክራሲና የፌዴራል ስርዓት ግንባታ ከየት ወደ የት?’ (Ethiopia’s democracy and federal system: Where are they and where are they heading?) that Fana Broadcasting Corporate (FBC) hosted in October 2016, Lidetu Ayalew, a prominent opposition party leader, reacting to Bereket Simon’s reference to the role of the opposition parties as EPRDF’s ‘mirror’, stated that such references show that EPRDF does not take opposition parties seriously. The full video of the conference is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkHjaWlmbpc&t=47s>.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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