

## ***Full Length Research***

# **Election and democratization in Ethiopia during EPRDF**

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**Ethiopia, like other African countries constitutionally introduced electoral system in 1995. And since then five consecutive elections (1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 & 2015) were held. It is assumed that repetitive elections (even though in some cases they are impaired by flawed practices) will lead to democratization. Unlike this assumption, the practice of election in Ethiopia as force of democratization is fluctuating and regressing instead of progressing. Therefore, this thesis tried to analyze why repetitive elections failed to enhance the democratic system in Ethiopia. To address the issue, electoral institutions have been evaluated qualitatively in line with democratic consolidation. Primary and secondary data were collected from institutions and published and unpublished literatures. Data from both sources were analyzed and interpreted thematically. The basic finding of this thesis shows that the weakness of elections to enhance democracy in Ethiopia is attributed to fragile institutional foundations coupled with Prebendal political practices.**

**Key words:** democracy, election, institution and democratization

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The process of consolidating democracy entails strengthening democratic institutions, extending democratic process and preventing authoritarian reversals (Smith, 2003:255). And democratization associated with transition from less democratic to more democracies. In a nutshell, democratization is a process through which institutional installation such as the parliament, an independent judiciary, electoral institutions and police, and independent media useful to the construction of democratic polity is established (ibid). It is not a one start event but a continuous process through which democracy is involved.

Post-cold war Ethiopia as any other African state strives to introduce democracy. In 1991 the Ethiopia Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), controlled the state power and promised to introduce democratic regime in Ethiopia. On July 1991 peace and democracy conference was held in order to establish a legitimate broad based transitional government that can prepare the country for democratic transformation as agreed at the America brokered London peace conference (Merera, 2004). The new charter provides some legal grounds for democratization in Ethiopia. It contained beneficial provisions for the country's quest for democracy. Freedoms of expression, assembly free press and association have been allowed legally (Shimelis, 2018: 30).

The post 1991 Ethiopia government introduces some ingredients that help for the consolidation of democracy. After many years of centralized rule, the country has started to legalize multiparty political system by attempting to modernize Ethiopia multi ethnic society within the ethnic based government system and multiparty democracy (Merera, 2011). As a result, the introduction of multiparty politics after 1991 was a good opportunity that paves the way for many groups to

form political parties and run for elections. Some scholars, however, argue that some political parties are systematically excluded from attending the conference (Vaughan, 1994).

Decentralization is another democratic element that the EPRDF government comes up with. Since the incumbent government took power in 1991, it has taken significant steps to introduce elements of democratic accountability. "It has also embarked on a process of decentralization that seeks to recognize the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of Ethiopia" (Shimellis, 2018: 30). Building of democratic and human rights institutions is another significant measure, institutions such as human rights institutions, election board and the introduction of democratic reform. The immediate democratic institution established by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia was National Electoral Commission in 1992 (Ibid: 31). Another fundamental measure of post 1991 in Ethiopia government is an explicit commitment to ensure protection of human rights within the new federal political structures. In similar vein, Ethiopia has expanded the human right regime by providing ground for the establishment of the institution of Ombudsman too. Speaking in sum, though opposition and other scholars are pessimist viewing the democratization process as aborted attempt (Gudeta, 2013 and Sileshi, 2011), the government and pro-government scholars are optimistic.

Democratization requires the construction of participatory and competitive political institutions. Bratton and Vande Walle, (1997:159) argue that the process of democratization begins with political challenges to authoritarian regime, advance through the political struggle over liberalization and requires the installation of freely elected government. Accordingly election is an important element for the consolidation of democracy in a given state. Among variety of factors that help to improve democratic system, this study aims at describing the role of election and the electoral system in consolidating democracy.

Democratic system is the result of a thorough struggle of the people against authoritarian regime and election is an important instrument among other things. In fact the election system is a manifestation of a political system which is based on the will of the people and is an instrument for delivering the public demands to the governmental institutions and authorities (Kiani and Sartipi, 2016:20). Election, therefore, is a means by which citizens can participate in the formation of political institutions and a check on the exercise of political authority. In a common parlance, democracy is conceptualized as a political system designed to widen the participation of ordinary citizens in government, the power of which are clearly defined and limited.

Elections are like double- edged blade, on the one hand, groups or a power holder is ousted from government and on the other hand a new power holder is replaced. Therefore, election is flesh and blood of democracy, which can simply be taken as the most critical and visible means through which all citizens can peacefully choose or remove their leaders. In other words, elections are the principal instruments that 'compel or encourage the policy-makers to pay attention to citizens' (Powell, 2000:4).

In any political process, election can be considered as the minimum criteria to embark on democratic regime. The democratic litmus test in any political system normatively is the peaceful power transition with the opposition winning elections and the ruling party quietly accepting the results without responding through violence and intimidation. Elections are the founding pillars of any democratic political system, whether the system is considered fragile or well established (Berouk, 2008:1). It is quite difficult to think of democracy in the absence of election. A transition to democracy can be said to have occurred only when competitive election is installed freely and fairly, a matrix of civil liberty are respected and the results of the election are accepted by all contesting parties (Bratton and Vande Walle, 1997:159). Therefore, election is among the pillars, but not the only instrument to consolidate democracy.

Ethiopia has held a series of elections since the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF) ousted the socialist oriented totalitarian regime in 1991. Though democratic election is endorsed in the 1995 constitution, the hitherto elections are susceptible to corrupt practices. A combination of ruling party repression and opposition party strategies to boycott left the overwhelming majority of Ethiopian voters without a meaningful choice in 1995, 2000, and 2005 (Lyons, 2010) and the 2010 and 2015 election too. The incumbent regime has used the series of elections to build a powerful, dominant party that penetrates the most rural corners of the country. Indeed elections have been held in authoritarian settings to provide some façade of democracy while retaining control within a single party, military regime or traditional monarchy. Therefore, elections in Ethiopia were not free and fair to contribute for the building of political democracy. The reasons why consecutive elections failed to contribute for democratic consolidation in Ethiopia is the focus of this study.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a qualitative tradition, because qualitative tradition is significant among other things to study about issues involving public responsibility, the role of institutions and episodes that takes place in specific time and geographic area (Perakyl and Ruusuvor, 2011). In studying democratization, elections, democratic institutions such as Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), political parties and election observers are the focus of the study.

An in-depth study of the role of election for the consolidation of democracy and the grey parts of elections that negatively affect the consolidation of electoral democracy, considering the phenomena in the Ethiopian context is the central theme of the study. A major feature of qualitative tradition is their facility to describe and display phenomena as experienced by the study population, in fine-tuned detail and in the study participants' own term (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:27). Therefore, descriptive-case study design is preferable to examine elections role for democratization in Ethiopian context.

Documentary sources such as books, journals, articles, working papers, professional commentaries, unpublished materials and media outlets was also consulted. The data were analyzed using interpretative approach. Consecutive elections results, legal documents, media outlets reports of observers and election board, code of conduct and informants' response was interpreted thematically to find answers for the raised questions.

## **Democratization by Election**

The repeated sanctioning of competitively flawed elections has the intrinsic capacity to pull authoritarian regimes towards democracy (Lindbergh, 2006). This is premised on that elections raise the cost repression and lower the cost of toleration in ways that eventually bring about democracy. Bratton (1998:52) argues that, While it is possible to conduct elections without democracy, it is impossible to have democracy without election. Election as an independent causal factor for democracy- as coined by Lindbergh, (2006), however, is not a reality in Ethiopia, though elections are important constituting elements of democracy. Even though existing scholarship has so far found a robust causal relationship between democracy and election (Morgenbesser, 2017), the concept democratization by elections has not accounted other countervailing factors that inhibit the transformative power of elections. Thus beyond competitive multiparty and multicandidate elections (a reality under authoritarian rule too), other factors that have shielded elections from democratic consolidation should be taken into account. Ethiopia has held five national elections regularly (1995 – 2015) and working for the upcoming election, but there is no meaningful democratic consolidation for the last three decades. This is due to primarily the weak institutionalization of primary agencies of electoral administration, particularly National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) and neopatrimonialism that creates dominant power politics. Countries with such syndrome have limited but still real political space, some political contestation by opposition groups and at least most of the basic institutional forms of democracy, yet one political grouping dominates the system in such a way that there appear to be little prospect of alteration of power in the foreseeable future (Carothers, 2002). And it is a solid reality in the context of contemporary Ethiopia.

It is sound to argue that reiterated elections have role for democratic transition via creating popular protest following elections, opposition party coalition, social learning, liberalization and others. However, mere flawed reiterated elections may not cause democracy; the case in Ethiopia comes here. In conceptual reading, the researcher is in agreement with Omotola (2010), that the form and character of elections, either as a reinforcement of democratic consolidation or as regression, are largely contingent up on a series of factors. The most important of these are related to Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), neopatrimonialism, prebendalism and other institutional and political frameworks that surround it, including parties, mass media, the judiciary and their degree of institutionalization.

## **Election-Democracy Nexus in Ethiopia**

The practice of election to staff law makers was started during Haile Selassie's regime. Despite its questionable substance, this electoral process helped to raise the awareness of citizens' involvement in the selection of their representatives. Nevertheless, the overthrow of the emperor by the military committee (Derg) disrupted the practice of election and the country fell under the control of the military provisional government which debilitated the life and economy of many Ethiopians. After 15 years of rule, the provisional military transformed itself to civilian a government under the guidance of the Workers party of Ethiopia and endorsed elections in a new form. In this case the leader of the country was selected through formal election. But this regime has also overthrown by a rebel groups. The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary democratic Front (EPRDF) commenced a quasi-democratic election in 1995 after the rule of transitional government for three years (Aaron, 2006).

Even though the function of electoral practice differs significantly, the three regimes have institutionalized election by organizing commissions to execute the process and result of the election. Surprisingly, after each one has controlled the political power and secure its dominance, it set up national electoral office under its own auspices (Eyobe, 2011), which were a simple establishments to appease the international donors and the citizenry too.

Elections under the Imperial regime were prescribed by 1931 and the 1955 revised constitution. According to the electoral regulation, senators were appointed by the emperor for six years term (Article 101, Constitution, 1955) and

qualified subjects at the age of 21 elect deputies (Article 95, constitution, 1955) which were highly exclusive, only those economically in a better position were eligible to join the house of deputy. Although direct elections were introduced all the consecutive five elections conducted from 1957 – 1973, were never actually meant to establish a people's rule, the last say was vested in the emperor and the representatives in both houses had served as a mere bridge between the emperor and the people (Yacob, 2007). The elected members were puppet that cannot question the legitimacy of the system and the king.

Three times within a generation Ethiopian has attempted a transition from autocratic rule. The first was the 1974 revolution that ended the reign of emperor, Haile Selassie I. After centuries of monarchical and autocratic rule, the military junta (Derg) controlled state power. The absence of an organized civilian opposition movement by this time helped the military junta to hijacking the revolution. The Derg proclaimed itself as a provisional military government. After 15 years of provisional government the military transformed itself to a civilian one by adopting socialism as a state ideology and organizing an official party. Election in the era of Socialist regime was simply endorsing pre-determined single party rule. The Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) - guided by Marxist-Leninist - is a vanguard party dedicated to serving the working people and protects their interests (PDRE constitution, 1987). Accordingly a de-jure one party system with the absence of opposition party, elections were held, which violate the basic principle of democratic elections. At the expense of the metastasized in to 17 years of military dictatorship under Mengistu Haile Mariam (Haberson, 1996).

The second attempt was the Overthrowing of the Derg, military dictatorship. Ethnically established rebels had deposed the regime from power by a military means. EPRDF, which is a coalition of four groups, took power in 1991. In the EPRDF regime, though the multiparty system was introduced for the first time in the country's political history, all the transitional power as well as the post transition period elections was insignificant. At end of every election, opposition party reject the outcomes accusing election process have not been in line with national as well as international standards (Eyobe, 2011). Thus, the twenty seven years old EPRDF were unable to introduce meaningful elections.

The third and the near past democratic attempt was the nationwide popular resistance against the EPRDF government, especially since 2018, which result the so-called '*reform*', yet unexamined.

### **The Nature of Elections: Post 1991 Ethiopia**

After the overthrowing of Marxist-Leninist dictatorial regime, the country entered a new era with full of democratic promise. One of the major political developments in Ethiopia since 1991 was the introduction of multi-party political dispensations, which was generally new to Ethiopia at that time (Solomon, 2018). The regime change allows the existence of multiple and diverse interest aggregation that reflect the true color of Ethiopia. Thus the coming to power of EPRDF regime, in May 1991 ostensibly heralded a new paradigm of multi-party democracy, constitutionalism and human rights protection in the country (Abbink, 1995). However, the EPRDF has remained the pre-eminent political force in Ethiopia and its true color boldly uncover during the 2005 general election of Ethiopia. The already held five consecutive elections were not as such significant to endorse democracy, but remained only for window dressing rituals to imitate democratic façade.

It is obvious that elections are conducted in both democratic and autocratic regimes for different purpose. The mere presence of political parties may provide a system with a nominal existence of party system. The genuine multiparty election, however, requires a democratic order in which political parties compete for the votes of citizens exist in practice when people are at liberty to express their idea without fear (Solomon, 2018). For an election to be meaningful, it has to fulfill the standards of democratic election.

Internationally recognized election indicators as coined by Tronvoll, (2009) are political participation, competition and legitimacy, which have respective details. Accordingly, here after is the discussion of the five consecutive election of Ethiopia.

### **The 1995 General Election**

The May 1995 regional and national elections were the first held under the new constitution that signals the end of the transitional period and the beginning of Federal Republic Ethiopia. However, in many regions the election process was far from competitive and democratic. Opposition parties boycotted the elections, claiming they would be neither free nor fair because no impartial democratic institution conducted them (Aaron, 2006). As the EPRDF basically dominated the election process, it was the sole player and the rule maker at a time. The then prime minister, Meles Zenawi in reaction to the opposition parties' stand speaks: "One can take the horse to the river, but one cannot force the horse to drink water".

It was a kind of diplomatic speech to the international and national community. The boycott of opposition party has allowed the ruling party to control Ethiopian politics without opposition. Participation is the fundamental principle in any kind of democracy and the overall participation are measured primarily by the number of parties and their unrestricted participation (Tronvoll, 2009). Accordingly the 1995 elections lack fundamental requirements.

According to the result of the 1995 parliamentary elections, EPRDF won 90.1%, others (parties sympathetic to the incumbent) won 7.3% and independent 2.6% (Aaron, 2006). The EPRDF, backed up by a powerful militia skillfully employed a variety of political manipulation to assure its dominance.

Tronvoll and Adadland (1995:5) observed that:

*The 1995 elections were not based on inclusive discussion. They did not allow free competition between all legal political alternatives. People in rural areas had good reasons to fear negative consequences if they did not vote for the EPRDF or its member parties. Thus we cannot conclude the elections were free and fair.*

What is funny then were many western governments and OAU concluded that the federal and regional elections were on the whole conducted in a free and fair atmosphere (Lyons, 1996). Yet the hard fact of the 1995 elections is that it fell short of being a midwife to a democratic order in Ethiopia.

### **The 2000 General Election**

Ethiopia held the second general elections on 14 May 2000 for seats both national House of People Representatives and regional councils. Two days before the Ethiopians cast their votes, the country resumed its two years' war with Eritrea. And opposition parties were better organized and their campaign strategies were somewhat impressive as compared to the previous one. Although several opposition parties boycotted the election, 17 parties including the All-Amhara People's Organization (AAPO), the Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Coalition (SEPDC) and the Oromo National Congress (ONC) did participate (Greenidge, 2010).

Unlike the 1995, no international observers were present at the 2000 elections. The opposition parties call for the existence of international observers, however, defended by the government in the name of keeping state sovereignty. The obvious threat, intimidation and harassment hinder the existence of fair playing field. Prior to the elections of 2000, there were reports of intimidation and harassment, especially in Southern Ethiopia's Hadiya, Sidama, and North Omo Zones (Aaron, 2010). Results announced in mid-June by NEBE showed that the incumbent, led by prime minister Meles Zenawi had won a mandate to remain in power for the next five years as it won 87.9 percent of the seat and once again the election was unable to consolidate democracy.

### **The 2005 Election (the peak)**

The May 2005 national and regional election of Ethiopia was an exception to the history of Ethiopian election. Opposition parties improved their competence and compete effectively with the ruling party. Different opposition parties harmonized their policies and formed unity (coalition) party. Their unity also motivated the voters to participate in the election. Besides, it attracted the attention of domestic and international scholars for discussion. Indeed it was most contested in electoral history of Ethiopia. Even some call it as a watershed in the growth of organized political opposition parties (Greenidge, 2010). John Abbink (2006) in his observation of the 2005 Election notes that:

*The May 2005 national election was the most competitive ever. Preceded by a relatively free and open public debate between the dominant party and the opposition parties, as well as by more wide- spread campaigning in the countryside than hitherto, they generated an atmosphere of hope and dynamism. But they ended in sharp disagreement, controversy, and massive repression of popular protest in the post-election phase. The end therefore is not sane at all.*

It was an election with an encouraging start, but ends up with a black spot. In the pre-election process, important debate and discussions were held on state owned media and there was better election climate than the preceding and even the next two elections too. On September 6, 2005, the Ethiopian National Election Board announced the final results of the disputed May 2005 elections. The ruling EPRDF had won 327 seats while the CUD and UEDF won 109 and 52 seats, respectively.

**Table 1.** The Official Result of the May 2005 National Election of Ethiopia

Party	Seats
EPRDF	296
CUD	109
UEDF	52
Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement	11
Others	24
Independent	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>492</b>

Source: *National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, 2005.*

As shown above, the opposition parties were capable to win one-third of the seat of the parliament. The pre-election process, relatively better playing field was an important factor for such a result. One then can understand the fundamental reasons behind such openings. There was some doubt whether the new space for campaigning was a policy to which the regime was genuinely committed, or whether it was primarily a façade to answer donor country pressure. The researcher strongly argues that it was not because of genuine institutional reform of the incumbent that brings such democratic winds. Instead the EPRDF party rupture following Ethiopia-Eretria war (Tronvoll, 2000), pressure from donor-community (Abbink, 2006) and coalition of opposition parties (Aaron, 2010) such as Coalition for Unity and Democracy CUD and UEDF leads to such an enabling environment. In addition the EPRDE government allowed a more open process than in 2000 not for genuine purpose, but a gamble on their part based on the belief that more competitive election would showcase democratic credentials for donor community (Greenidge, 2010).

In sum the post-2005 election process uncover the true color (autocratic) of the EPRDF regime. 'The regime openly restore to favoritism to achieve total control of the institutions and the use of public resources for the purpose of self-aggrandizement of the officials and network of beneficiaries' (Solomon, 2018). The promising 2005 election process as experienced prior to the election day in May turned into a bloody and failed issue by the end of the year and it did left its scar on the processes and the outcomes of the 2010, 2015 and even the upcoming national election of Ethiopia too.

## The 2010 Election

This election signals the reemergence of autocratic regime in Ethiopia. In this period those democratic seeds are rooted out and the system apparently becomes oppressive. And a culture of fear has been reemerging in Ethiopia politics following the unexpected liberal spring of the 2005 campaign.

What happened in the 2010 election of Ethiopia was the emergence of prebendalism. In this regard Alemayehu (2010) suggests that;

*Conventional political science explains the 2010 election of Ethiopia was happened in terms of personal rule or prebendalism in which state offices are regarded as prebends that can be appropriated by office holder, who use them to generate material benefits for them and their supporters.*

In this era the incumbent become omnipresent and control every aspect of the state asset. And only those who are loyal to the system are beneficiaries. Threat, harassment, intimidation, discrimination were obvious in the second phase elections. The EPRDF, led government deploys multiple controlling mechanisms. The one is that the institutions and economic resources by the EPRDF and the so-called partner organizations had been blurring the distinction between this political organization in state power and government institutions (Solomon, 2018). The incumbent therefore, uses state resource to strength the party at the expense of public and opposition party interest.

The incumbent introduce different legislations such as Charities and societies Proclamation and anti-terrorism law to weaken opposition party competition. The regime also established networks of informants' agents and secret police type rely on heavily handed methods to harass, intimidate, gather intelligence and penetrate opposition elements with aim of neutralizing them (Alemayehu, 2011). With such multiple obstacles the opposition parties were not capable to compete well. At the end of the day the EPRDF secure one-party dominance, winning 545 seats, 99.6% otherwise while the opposition is one. In his briefing explaining 2010 Ethiopia election Tronvoll (2010) suggests that:

*Important political institutions are building and growth of public ethos of democracy in Ethiopia is increasing since the rise of the Meles dictatorship, yet the process is still closely controlled by the ruling TPLF and had high ingredient of rhetoric not backed by practice.*

The European Union Election Observation Mission to Ethiopia (EU-UEOM), (2010) conclude that, ‘the electoral process fall short of international commitment for elections notably regarding the transparency of the process and the lack of level playing field for all contesting parties. In contrast, Africa Union Observation Mission (AUOM) (2010) concluded that “the Ethiopia legislative election were organized and conducted in accordance with the constitutional and legal provisions and the rules and regulations governing the conduct of democratic elections”. However, the report of AUOM was accused for failing to undertake careful observation; it was instead a cursory kind (Alemayehu, 2011).

## The 2015 Election

The near past election of Ethiopia was the 2015, 100 percent election. Following the shocking result of 2005 national election, the incumbent party worked industriously to harass opposition parties using both legal and extra-legal mechanisms. It was took place in a condition where all states institutions were mobilized to ensure a total victory for the EPRDF and its affiliates, organized by the electoral commission that has been simply enforcing the incumbent’s position without any remorse (Solomon, 2018). The omnipresent incumbent worked shamelessly. Thus for the first time since EPRDF’s rise to power in 1991 not one opposition or independent parliament will sit in the 547 seat HPR, that represents a hardening of authoritarian rule in Ethiopia (Arriola & Lyons, 2016).

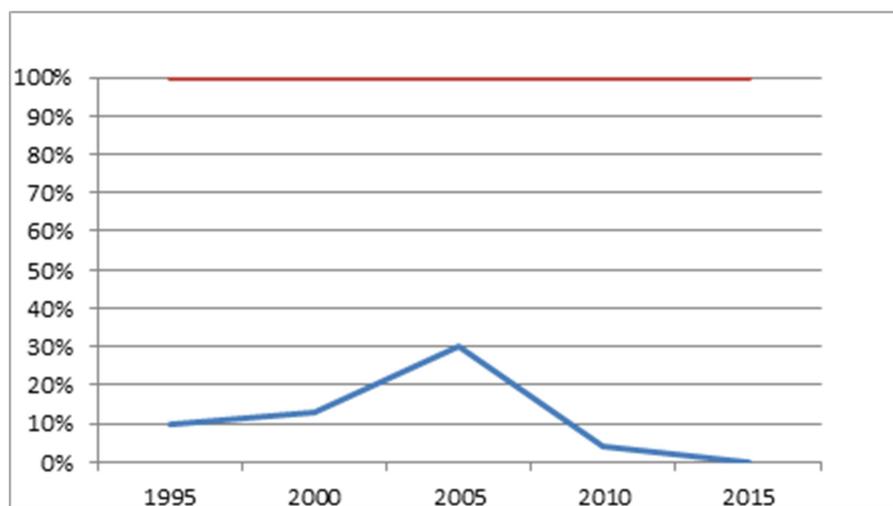
Multi-party system becomes a façade while dominant party is a reality. The regime is also condemn for its divide and rule strategies. Rather than emphasizing national unity, Lyons and Arriola (2016) argue that EPRDF boldly- some say recklessly-choose to construct a political system on the basis of static and ascriptive categories.

In his description of the 2015 election process, Solomon Mebrie (2018) notes that:

*The 2015 electoral process that leads EPRDF to won 100% was the logical outcome of the antagonism, the degradation of basic norms of human dignity, human right and freedom beyond the conduct of periodic election. It characterized by the near absolute loss of integrity of not only of the election but also of the whole institutional as well as the political process of the country.*

The post 1991 political development witnessed the fusion of EPRDF as a political organization and the state in Ethiopia. Speaking in sum the 2015 election was the most deteriorating ever; fall in the bottom point of the imaginary downward election curve of Ethiopia.

In a nutshell, elections conducted in the first and second phase lacks fundamental criteria of election; participation, competition and legitimacy (Dahl, 1971). And Competition for example, is measured by government share of seat in the parliament and largest opposition party share of seat in the parliament (Tronvoll, 2009); if we consider the seat of opposition party in the parliament, we can have the following simple summary graph.

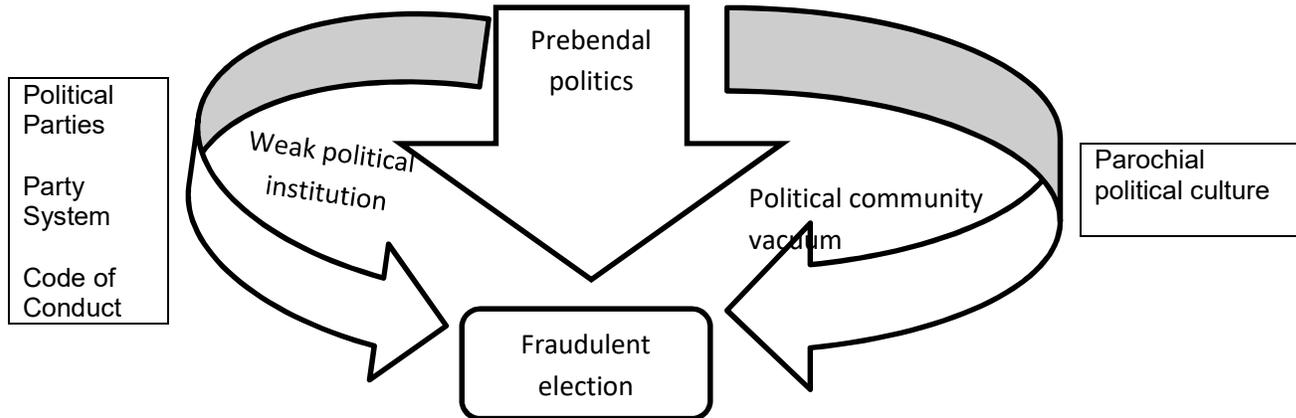


**Figure 1.** Opposition party shares of seat in the five consecutive elections.

**Source:** “developed by the Author, 2022”

## The Bottlenecks

The post-cold war states in Africa are engaged to hold some kind of election in order to show a democratic façade primarily to attract the attention of donor community. One of the major political developments in Ethiopia since 1991 was the introduction of multiparty political system which was new practice to Ethiopia. Since then Ethiopia under EPRDF rule has held five consecutive national elections, yet no significant democratic improvement. This section focuses on the three major obstacles that impede the exercise of genuine election in Ethiopia.



Source: “developed by the author, 2022”

### **Weak Institutional Base**

Institutions in political science to mean everything from a formal structure like, the parliament to very amorphous entities like, social class, with other components of the socio-political universe such as, law and market are also being described as being institutions (Peters, 1999). The reason behind nascent and fragile democracies in Africa in general and in Ethiopia in particular is conferred to an institution which is not properly insulated from the political pressure and control of political force, especially the ruling party (Berouk, 2008). This section assesses the gray part of those primary electoral institutions that hinder genuine election in Ethiopia.

*Election Management Bodies (EMBs)*: Consolidating democracy through elections depends largely on the institutional foundations of the electoral process, particularly the election management bodies; in this case NEBE. The appointment of high ranking EMBs officials should be insulated from politics and should receive its statutory allocation in the annual budget (Omotola, 2010).

*Elections have multiple process, however, citizens give due consideration to the Election Day alone. We strive to have clear frameworks and procedures. Our institution will be free from any interference particularly from the incumbent party. We work genuinely so that significant numbers of actors accept the election result Birtukan Medeqssa, Head of NEBE, aired on Walta TV, May, 2020).*

It is not debatable that for an effective election political institutions played a paramount role. Thus, democratic consolidation or regression will highly depend on the independence and professionalism of electoral institutions, particularly Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) (Morgenbesser, 2017).

The NEBE is accused for failure to lead election process impartially. In the 2015 national election for example, EPRDF and its affiliate parties were organized by the electoral commission that has been simply enforcing the incumbent position, at the expense of opposition parties and the electorates (Solomon, 2018). The appointments of leaders of NEBE are not yet free from the hands of the ruling party. The member of National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) shall be appointed by House of Peoples Representative (HPR) upon the recommendation of the prime minister (FDRE constitution, article 102/2).

Therefore, an appointment of high ranking NEBE’s officials requires the blessing of the ruling party. In the past elections, leaders of NEBE were not come to power unless from EPRDF circle. NEBE was an instrument of the ruling authoritarian government.

Other democratic institutions such as the parliament and the judiciary are also weak enough that cannot challenge the incumbent. In line to this Alemayehu (2011) condemn political institutions in Ethiopia arguing:

*In Ethiopia though there is a constitution that is manifestly democratic, both in terms of the protection of civil liberties and rights and structure, it is useless for all intents and purposes because of the absence of an independent judiciary to uphold against executive abuse and encroachment. Moreover, there is a non-functional parliament that rubberstamps the desire and wishes of the ruling dictatorship. Judges will remain in the back pocket of the ruling regime.*

Therefore, such an omnipotence nature of the EPRDF regime impedes elections to be an instrument of democratic consolidation, instead manipulated for pseudo democracy. Moreover, the use of state institutions especially the court as an instrument to legitimize state repression against the political opponents of the EPRDF strikes is at the heart of institutional crisis in contemporary Ethiopia (Ibid). The system blurred the distinction between political organization in state power and government institutions; this is the key feature of dominant power politics (Carothers, 2000). Beyond the incumbent party and democratic institutions, lack of coordination and coalition among political parties is also another institutional obstacle to make election an instrument for democratic consolidation in Ethiopia.

**Political parties:** Democratic election requires the existence of competitive political parties. Since the introduction of multi-party politics, political organization including the incumbent inclined to identity based political formation, which systematically affects the formulation of nation-wide and strong political parties. As Solomon (2018) explained, fragmentation of political organization extends to the lack of consensus on the meaning of citizenship, collective and individual rights, the status of some of the most controversial provisions in the constitution, the nature of borders and solutions. Backed up by language based identity formulation, it makes harsh to build up pan-Ethiopia party kind that can promote national solidarity.

What is disappointing is that political organizations in Ethiopia are still competes each other antagonistically and as bloody enemies rather than as responsible political actor and worthy partner in nation building. De-ethnicity political parties which are diligently involved in mobilizing popular support in linking the demand of all citizens and different groups are essential (Bourok, 2008) It was because of coalition that brings meaningful competition and challenge during the 2005 national election.

**Party System:** The design of the electoral system matters a lot to accommodate diversity. The main choice of electoral system is often between plurality- majority system and proportional representation system (Yonatan, 2009). In the plurality system, the winner is the candidate with most votes in the constituencies, while in proportional representation seats are allocate to all candidates based on the votes they received nation-wide. Some scholars argue the appropriateness of the proportional representation for diversified society like Ethiopia (Ibid). As clearly stipulated on Article 54/2 of the 1995 FDRE constitution the electoral system of Ethiopia is plurality. And some accused the electoral system for the creation of de facto one party system in Ethiopia.

As Eyob (2011) explained plurality electoral system favors the incumbent government to win every election. In conventional set up proportional representational voting is recommended for multiethnic countries like Ethiopia. However, in Ethiopia, where the territorial units are delimited on the basis of linguistic lines and the ethnic groups are generally geographically concentrated (Yonatan, 2009), the plurality system has not led to disproportionate result along ethnic lines. In addition, the proportional representation system tends to reproduce ethnic cleavages in the legislatures, which challenge the creation of strong parliament. Comparative studies show that plurality election system tends towards party dualism while proportional representation is associated with multiparty system (Hague and Harrop, 2004). However, it is a paradox in Ethiopia contemporary reality. Thus deploying proportional system in Ethiopia where dozens of ethnic based party run for an election, may create acute ethnic cleavage that challenge national solidarity.

**Code of Conduct:** Codes of conduct are related to a number of aspects of elections such as for the rule of behavior for political parties and candidates during the electoral campaign, the conduct of the ruling government party to prevent from having undue advantage over other parties (IDEA, 2002). In principle codes of conduct are useful and facilitate elections that are clean and free from violence and vote rigging.

In Ethiopia it was a manifestly appealing idea because it pointed to the presence of a level playing field and an electoral process with a monitoring system. As Alemayehu (2011) explained codes of conducts are not implemented as intended.

*In Ethiopia code of conducts were the foil used to cloak and shroud the dirty political and electoral tricks the ruling regime had always practiced in the past. But when the fox is guarding the election hen house, it rather meaningless to talk about election housekeeping rules which is what a code of conduct is. This is evident especially since 2010 election on ward.*

Opposition parties accused ruling party for monopolizing the formulation of code of conduct without consensus and reach participation of political parties. Ato Lidetu Ayalew tersely criticized the Ethiopian election code of conduct on Walta television aired on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2020 in the following way: “The code of conduct is endorsed with an active manipulation of the incumbent party. We are not reaching on consensus. It is imposed from above. Therefore unless consensus among main actors, it is impossible to conduct democratic election”.

**Prebendal Politics:** Prebendalism as Ugwuani and kwokedi (2015) explain can be perceived in two ways:

*Firstly, as a situation where political offices are regarded as prebends that can be appropriated by their holders and actually used as such to generate material benefit for themselves. Secondly, as a form of political clientele in which people ascend to political offices through the active support of power brokers (political God Fathers), ethnic or kin groups who must be rewarded in sundry ways including using the trappings of such office.*

Thus, prebendalism could be taken to mean the use of political offices for direct selfish personal gains or to indirectly benefit political masters, cultural groups or other tribal groups. Democratic development involves the practice and sustainability of regular credible electoral conducts and processes. Elections in Ethiopia, over the years, have lacked the basic elements of democratic election as they all have been characterized by rampant and intense electoral fraud and violence. This is partly because political offices are seen primarily as a means to some form of economic empowerment, secured material life, influence and affluence and not as an opportunity to serve the people; this is what we call prebendalism.

The post 2005 election of Ethiopia is manifested by prebendalism and personal rule. Government offices are considered as prebends that can be appropriated by office holders, who use them to generate martial benefits for themselves and their supporters. It is evident that people in position of power from the federal level to local community are appointed because of loyalty to the party.

A state controlled and run for the benefit of an individual or a small group, who uses their power to transfer a large fraction of society's resource to themselves and create patronage based alliance of ethnic factions (Arriola and Lyons, 2016). Party membership was an important requirement to receive service from the state. Job opportunities, socio-economic benefits are distributed based on party membership identification card. In a more tragic way, the Meles's regime use safety Net program payment, emergency food assistance and other aid to reward its supporters while marginalizing those it considered disloyal or supportive of opposition elements (Alemayehu, 2011). The system cause structural challenge to those stand against the ruling party. Irrespective of their qualification loyal members are haired and appointed for different public positions. This creates a disadvantaged and excluded group from the state resources.

Meles's personal dictatorship was evident for around quarter of a century. He has served as a prime minister and EPRDF's head till his death and overtime his power was become largely uncontested (Arriola and Lyons, 2016). He has been successful in preventing opposition parties from challenging his rule by providing selective incentives and punishment. Surprisingly, as Alemayehu (2011) explained, the prime minister was set up a kitchen cabinet for the nice opposition leaders to come in through the back door and chit chat with him, but they will never be allowed to get out of the kitchen and sit at the dining table.

**The Political Community vacuum:** Meaningful elections do not exist in a vacuum. It takes place in an environment where the political rule of the game allows the exercise of the free will of the citizen, member of political community otherwise. The prevalence of well informed and organized political community is an essential element of democratic transition.

*Political community is a union of free people that have chosen to live under a political order for the purpose of their common economic, political and social wellbeing. Its members are endowed with human dignity freedom and solidarity, and sense of meaningful citizenship serve as the foundation of well-functioning state, legitimate government and ultimately a political order in which the business of politics, including genuine elections can be conducted in orderly and predictable manner (Solomon, 2018).*

The capacity of the people to stand together under the rule of law is crucial while talking about political community. Urban middle class, primary actors of democracy are the principal force pushing for democratic transition (Huntington, 1991). However, post 1991 Ethiopia political environment does not allow such a viable political community. Through fabricated rhetoric the system causes fear, fragmentation, and distrust within different ethnic groups, which is also practical in today's Ethiopia political practice. Thus hierarchical political culture coupled with the regime manipulation resulted wide political community vacuum where by the system remain unchallenged for many years.

Speaking in sum, the electoral history of Ethiopia is not remarkable. Leaders in different level of position are working for personal enrichment and their client. It is full of conspiracy. The TPLF – led government put negative statecraft legacies which are a timely bomb. And all elections are not conducted in a way to bring democratic consolidation, the fundamental reason thus are lack of well-established democratic institutions, rampant patronage and absence of well united political community, middle class otherwise.

## CONCLUSION

Empirical studies show a robust causal relationship between reiterated election and democratic consolidation. As elections and electoral campaigns practiced regularly a culture of tolerance and competition will develop. Consequently democracy will be consolidated. Indeed elections do have cumulative effects, it promote civil liberties, serve as meta-game and has social learning effects.

Although the progress to democracy is creeping, Ethiopia introduced plurality electoral system in 1995. Since then, five regular elections were conducted in Ethiopia, and the sixth national election presumed to be held in 2021. Those already held elections were insignificant for democratic consolidation. In the first phase elections (1995, 2000 and 2005), there were an encouraging progress. However, after 2005, elections were dominated by the ruling party and other parties were harassed and marginalized from the political field resorting to different repressive mechanisms. For instance the EPRDF regime explicitly and implicitly engaged to demolish anti-incumbent political actors during the 2010 and 2015 national elections. The regime announced anti-terrorism and civil society and charity proclamations to curb freedom of expression and association. Finally it was possible for EPRDF and its affiliate parties to won 100% in the 2015 national elections. Speaking in sum, the failure of the last five consecutive elections to bring democratic progress in Ethiopia mainly attributed to weak institutional installations.

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