



## ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ МИРЕ

DOI: 10.22363/2313-1438-2018-20-4-506-515

### SINGLE-PARTY DOMINANCE IN ETHIOPIA: FPTP ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT SYSTEM AS CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

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**Abstract.** The primary objective of this paper is to reveal the role of the FPTP electoral system and the parliamentary government system in reinforcing single-party dominance in Ethiopia. For this purpose, the author uses secondary sources of data in his research. The data analysis showed that both the FPTP electoral system and the parliamentary government system have contributed substantially to the existing single-party dominance in Ethiopia. The FPTP electoral system encouraged a single-party rule by awarding seat advantage in parliament to the stronger party, EPRDF. The parliamentary government system has also promoted single-party dominance across all branches of the government by vesting parliament sovereignty with the EPRDF. The researcher comes to the conclusion that due to the inequality of perspectives and opportunities for all political parties (or no genuine multi-party system), the FPTP electoral system and the parliamentary government system inevitably contribute to the development of single-party dominance, which may further lead to authoritarianism.

**Key words:** Single-party dominance, Parliamentary government system, FPTP electoral system, EPRDF, Ethiopia

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on Ethiopian politics reveal that Ethiopia has no genuine democracy due to several factors. One of the main circumstances associated with the existing weak democracy is the existence of single-party dominance in the country [7]. Following the end of the military rule, a coalition party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), seized the governmental control. EPRDF consists of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM), with TPLF being the dominant faction. Since EPRDF came to power in 1991, it has been a single ruling political party, with no opportunity for opposition to win the office. The ruling party monopolized the political space, kept its opponents out of any sort of meaningful political participation, and perpetuated an authoritarian rule. The successive election results

corroborate this assertion: EPRDF won 96.6% (1992)<sup>1</sup>, 90.1% (1995), 87.9% (2000), 66% (2005), 99.6% (2010), and 100% (2015) (See: [1; 2; 3; 12; 21; 28]).

The incumbent party adamantly resisted the emergence of any strong opposition. Ever since the 2005 parliamentary election and the resultant political turmoil, opposing political parties have been severely repressed. The fact that the opposition received substantial popular support in the election came as a shock to the government and forced it to take all necessary steps to suppress and debilitate all opposition parties, media, and civil society organizations [1; 3]. For instance, in 2009, it enacted proclamations on Anti-Terrorism and the Charities and Societies, the true underlying motive of which was to harass and silence journalists, opposition leaders, and *activists*, as well as eliminate several civil society organizations promoting democratization and human rights protection [1]. The 2008 Media proclamation, the 2007 Electoral proclamation, and the 2008 Revised Political Parties Registration proclamation are all restrictive laws enacted subsequent to the shocking 2005 election [1]. EPRDF's suppressing policy drastically narrowed the political space, perpetuated an authoritarian single-party dominance, and erased the border between the ruling party and government in the country.

There has been an ongoing active discussion on the single-party system in Ethiopia among various scholars in the field of politics. Nevertheless, while assessing the factors that contributed to single-party dominance, many authors ignore the role of Ethiopia's First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system, as well as the parliamentary government system, which became the underlying motive for conducting this research. The current research attempts to shed light on how the FPTP electoral system and the parliamentary government system have reinforced single-party dominance and thus undermined the formation of democracy in the country. In his analysis, the author uses a qualitative research method and relies on secondary sources of data: publications, scientific journals, reports, and legal documents.

## 2. PARTY SYSTEM: GENERAL INFORMATION

Political parties are organizations of politically like-minded people who seek political power and public office to realize their policy goals [16]. There are different types of party systems. In this article, the author used the classification offered by Newton and Deth [16]: 1) Dominant one-party systems: party systems in which one party dominates all the others; 2) Two-party systems: party systems in which two large parties dominate all the others; 3) Multi-party systems: party systems where several or many leading parties compete; oftentimes, as a result of this competition no single party has an overall majority.

One-party-dominant systems, which are the focus of this paper, are also defined by Sartori as “party systems in which the same party wins an absolute majority in at least three consecutive elections” [8]. Many scholars consider this structure antithetical to the very essence and nature of democracy, as in such systems there is no genuine party competition, because “a single party has managed to govern alone or as the primary and on-going partner in coalitions, without interruption, for substantial periods of

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<sup>1</sup> This result shows the EPRDF's winning margin in the 1992 regional and local elections.

time” [8]. According to Sartori’s typology, one-party dominance has two varieties, namely *dominant party systems* and *dominant-authoritarian party systems* [8]. Thus, single-party dominance can exist both in democratic and undemocratic regimes. In Ethiopia’s case, there is little room for doubt as to the undemocratic nature of the political regime, as was demonstrated above and will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

### 2.1. Party System in Ethiopia

The appearance of a political party in Ethiopian politics is a fairly recent phenomenon. There was no legitimate political party up until the end of the monarchical rule [5; 27]. During the imperial regime (the Haile Selassie’s rule), there was no party politics, no right to question the authority of the king, and no right to claim power on the basis of popular election. Establishing political parties was illegal during this era; therefore, opposition forces were forced to operate in the form of rebel fronts from outside the country [27]. Among the opposition groups that fought the imperial regime were the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), the Ethiopian National Liberation Front (ENLF), and the Somali Abo Liberation Front (SALF).

Following the collapse of Emperor Haile Selassie’s regime in 1974, a military junta (the Derg) took political power and embraced socialism as their ideology. After a decade of party-less rule, the Derg regime created a single vanguard political party called Workers’ Party of Ethiopia (WPE) [5] and outlawed all other political parties and rebel fronts [27]. Thus, the repression of opposing political parties and rebel groups in the country continued: the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP), the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM), the Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization (MLRO), the Workers’ League (WL), *Echat*, and *Abyotawi Seded* were severely repressed [27]. Despite the persecution of opposing political parties, other ethnic insurgent groups continued their struggle until the collapse of the regime in 1991.

After the current government took power in 1991, the country has become an ethnically-diverse federal state, and a multi-party system has been legally and officially recognized [14]. As a result, currently there are several formally acknowledged, mainly ethnic-based political parties participating in the national elections.

Multi-party elections do not necessarily bring a genuine multi-party system [4]. The majority of African states have experienced multi-party elections, but no change in government [4], as was the case with Ethiopia, where several political parties participated in national elections a few times in succession, however, a single party still holds the power. The existing opposition in Ethiopia is still not strong enough to compete with EPRDF. They lack financing and are unable to keep pace with the ruling party’s ability to campaign throughout the entire territory of the country. The government has failed to propose adequate funding for the opposing parties while making every effort to marginalize them by arresting their members and leaders and labeling them as terrorists [27; 10]. As is stated by M. Chege, “the government’s repressive stance has, in turn, made it difficult for opposition parties and alliances to mobilize their membership effectively through public meetings and the press” [5].

The lack of support for the opposition caused authors engaged in the research of Ethiopian politics to actively debate the existence of a genuine multi-party system in modern Ethiopia. The questionable nature of the Ethiopian multi-party system has injurious effect of the development of democracy in the country. Consequently, studies describe Ethiopia as a one-party dominated state [5; 27]. The author of the current research, however, would like to highlight the role of the FPTP electoral system and the parliamentary government system in the development of single-party dominance and the downfall of democracy. Therefore, in the following sections, the researcher will review a variety of existing electoral and government systems and reflect on the benefits of adopting one to help truly democratize Ethiopia.

### 3. ELECTORAL SYSTEM: GENERAL INFORMATION

One of the mechanisms of public participation in the political decision-making of a country is through election, by means of which citizens choose their representatives and vest in them the authority to defend their interests. Different states adopt different types of electoral systems, but for this study, the author selected the following most popular types.

**Simple Plurality/First-Past-The-Post:** In this system, the winning candidate gets more votes than any other (a simple plurality), no matter how many candidates and how small the winning margin [16]. The candidate who receives the most votes will be declared a winner.

**Proportional Representation:** This system requires the use of multi-member voting districts, and the electoral support is reflected proportionately into the elected body [24]. The competing political parties gain seats in proportion to the number of votes cast for them [15].

#### 3.1. Simple Plurality / FPTP Electoral System and Single-Party Dominance in Ethiopia

As was mentioned above, there are different types of electoral systems, and it is incorrect to say one is better and more democratic than the rest [16]. Each has its benefits and flaws, and the preference depends on what one wants from a voting system [16]. Though no electoral system is perfect, a considerable majority of researchers in the field tend to favor the proportional representation (PR) system over the FPTP (plurality) system [17]. Adopting the FPTP system in a plural society is against the very idea of democracy (*ibid*). Conversely, although subject to political instability and break-up resulting from government coalitions, the PR system gives better representation to the minority [5; 15]. Most importantly, the PR system is preferable in a state which has a parliamentary system of government [17]. I. Szilágyi [20], concurrent with this idea, mentions that “many parliamentary countries, especially those that use “first-past-the-post” voting, have governments composed of one-party”. This statement leads to the conclusion that FPTP system sets perfect conditions for one-party dominance as it rewards the winner a majority of seats [11; 15; 20; 24; 25]. Eventually, states with a dominant one-party system have a high tendency of becoming authoritarian states [5].

Despite all these facts, Ethiopia, a multi-national state with a parliamentary system of government, adopted the FPTP electoral system. Conforming to the mentioned above ideas, the author insists that the FPTP electoral system contributed to further consolidation of single-party dominance in Ethiopia. Because opposition parties have not been able to get better support than the ruling party, the latter has remained the winner enjoying a majority of seats in the parliament. Differently put, given its relative strength and having the FPTP electoral system as an aid, EPRDF has managed to successively steal victory in all national elections.

The weakness of opposition parties is associated, among other factors, with their sheer numbers. Ethiopia has a multi-ethnic, diverse society. Accordingly, a myriad of opposition groups have emerged, each one of them serving to represent their respective social/ethnic segments. The appearance of these multi-ethnic political parties is greatly discouraged by the incumbent party for the sole reason that they jeopardize its hegemonic aspirations. Internal disagreements have further fractured many of the existing parties into numerous smaller political units; although there is hardly any substantial difference in their policy goals. The opposition groups' internal discord and separation has also been partly fueled by systematic interventions of the ruling government in their affairs [10]. The author believes that this uncontrolled proliferation of smaller opposition political parties in the country dwindles down their financial and operational capacity and decreases the chances of receiving substantial electoral support. Contrarily, it enables the ruling-party to further consolidate its ascendancy in Ethiopia's political system while taking advantage of the *winner-takes-all* electoral system. Since, according to the FPTP electoral system requirements, EPRDF only needs marginally better support than the rest of its enfeebled competitors, it has managed to win a number of consecutive parliamentary elections by a landslide. Thus, with a multitude of fragmented and weakened opponents facing a giant, the FPTP system serves the incumbent party as a legal instrument to sustain its dominance.

Moreover, in a state where the FPTP system is applicable, only a single individual is elected in each electoral district, and thus minority candidates are less likely to get seats. This discourages various smaller parties and holds them back from active participation in national politics. The PR system, on the contrary, allows them to build confidence, as the likelihood of their share in the parliament increases [29]. The party history of Ethiopia is a good illustration of this tendency. Narrow chances of winning, coupled with the deliberate repression by the state has compelled several opposition groups to back-out from the electoral competition. The elections for Ethiopia's first popularly chosen national parliament, which were boycotted by minority parties and left the ruling-party without competitors, can serve as a textbook example of the FPTP system and single-party dominance correlation [3; 28]. This state of affairs does not only discourage the parties, but also the voters, who see no sense in providing their support for a self-defeating enterprise. Such a discouraging impact of the FPTP system on both parties and voters is another reason why the incumbent party has been enjoying its continued dominance, while nipping all the contenders' efforts to resist in the bud. Thus, the FPTP system enables the ruling party to monopolize the state power and use the government apparatus and national resources to circumvent any possible challenge from competitors in upcoming elections.

To sum up, the FPTP system, combined with a dominant one-party system, provides a stable, more centralized and less accountable rule [11]. A perfect example of such rule is Ethiopia, where, with the help of the FPTP system, EPRDF has been winning the office for the last 27 years on loop, while decimating opposition groups.

#### **4. SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT: GENERAL INFORMATION**

According to the relationship between the legislative and executive branches, government systems can be classified into three main types: parliamentary, presidential, and hybrid. The first two are the most commonly practiced systems of government in the world, while only a few countries adopted the third type [16].

**Parliamentary System:** The core characteristic of this government system is integration of power between the legislative and executive branches [13; 16; 19]. In the parliamentary system, the executive branch is an integral part of the legislature; thus overlapping of membership can occur: the parliament appoints executive officials, mostly from its own members, and they are accountable to the parliament [9]. In case they fail to get majority support from the parliament, executive officials can lose their power through the process called ‘vote of no confidence’ [13; 16; 19]. Moreover, the parliament also appoints judges of the Supreme Court, relying on the recommendation of the prime minister. Parliamentary system is characterized by the sovereign power of the parliament and strong interrelation among the three branches of government.

**Presidential System:** A presidential system is a system of government where the executive branch is separate from the legislative branch [13; 19]. There is no overlapping of membership as an individual cannot serve as a member of the legislature and an executive official at the same time. In the presidential system, the president (chief executive) is directly elected by people and is accountable to people. The formation and operation of executive and legislative authorities occur independently of each other [19]. The president appoints other cabinet members, and they are accountable to him/her. The president also has the power to assign judges to the Supreme Court. Generally, one can observe relatively less integration among the three branches of government.

**Hybrid System:** This system is a combination of the features of the first two systems of government. In the hybrid system, there is no clear separation of power among the two branches of government (executive and legislative). While the president is directly elected by people and is accountable to people [6], the prime minister is appointed by the president but reports to the parliament [16]. The cabinet, as well, is answerable to the parliament [19]. Again, we can observe a relatively more significant integration between the two branches than in the presidential system.

##### **4.1. Parliamentary System of Government and Single-Party Dominance in All Government Bodies in Ethiopia**

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) has adopted a parliamentary system of government. Article 45 of the 1995 FDRE constitution states that “the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia shall have a parliamentarian form of government”. Further discussion will demonstrate the characteristics of the parliament system in Ethiopia.

The author strongly argues that this type of a government system is one of the major factors influencing the formation of party dominance in a given country. It is the author's conviction that the parliamentary system adopted by Ethiopian government has significantly helped EPRDF to secure its dominance as a single political party in the country and assume strong control over all government bodies. Thus, the parliament, a sovereign body, has consisted solely of the EPRDF members. The analysis below shows how the parliamentary system has fortified the ruling party's monopoly of power across all branches of the government.

**Law-Making Power:** Members of the parliament (HPR) are elected in accordance with provisions of Article 54 of the 1995 FDRE constitution. This government body is mandated to make laws as per Article 55 (1) of the constitution. Due to the frailty of opposing political parties and the adoption of FPTP electoral system, a single political party (EPRDF) has controlled the seats in the parliament and, as a result, the legislative power in Ethiopia. Consequently, the dominant single party has been making laws regulating the diverse society of Ethiopia, neglecting to meet various interests of different ethnic and social groups, which compromises the quality of the laws.

Most importantly, this unrepresentative (single-party dominated) parliament has been using its power to make oppressive laws that narrow the political space and restrict free participation of various political actors. The most important examples of these restrictive laws were referenced in the introduction; for example, the 2009 Anti-Terrorism, and the Charities and Societies proclamations, which kept democracy supporters and political competitors out of the political arena and made EPRDF the only game in town. These proclamations are examples of EPRDF's attempts to hold on to power through abusing authority and overreaching the limits of the parliament's law-making capacity (Adem, 2012).

**Law-Enforcing Power:** Like in other parliamentary systems, in Ethiopia, the chief executive is the Prime Minister (Art.74 (1)). "The Prime Minister is elected from among members of the House of Peoples' Representatives" (Art.73 (1)). He/she has the mandate to execute the functions listed under Art.74. The prime minister is accountable to the parliament (HPR). The council of ministers, drawn mainly from the parliament and mandated to exercise the powers and functions stated under Art.77, is also accountable to the HPR for all of its decisions (Art.76 (3)). Therefore, it is obvious that executive officials depend upon the support of the EPRDF, which solely constitutes the parliament. Hence, a single party in the parliament appoints its members to the executive departments and removes them whenever it sees fit.

It is evident that institutions within the executive branch are duty bound to implement whatever oppressive, exclusionary and unaccountable laws that have been enacted by parliament, such as intimidating and harassing opposition leaders and members, independent journalists and activists [10]. In concordance with this opinion, E. Veen unequivocally labelled Ethiopia's security institutions "guardians of TPLF/EPRDF political dominance" [23]. The police, the military, the intelligence and security service are all commanded mainly by individuals who carry authority in the ruling party and do everything in their power to maintain the party's political control. Hence, one can conclude that the *de jure* national security forces are serving as *de facto* TPLF/EPRDF security forces. In addition, the public prosecutor, the prison administration, and all

other administrative bodies serve as partisan executive agencies and actively participate in persecuting and silencing any form of political opposition [23]. In light of this, it is logical to conclude that the incumbent party makes and implements laws in the country, thereby perpetuating its monopoly of government power.

**Law-Interpreting Power:** The constitution (Art.78 (1) & 79 (2, 3, 4)) stipulates independence of the judiciary branch. In respect to its formation, the constitution states that “The President and Vice-President of the Federal Supreme Court shall, upon recommendation by the Prime Minister, be appointed by the House of Peoples’ Representatives” (81 (1)). “Regarding other Federal judges, the Prime Minister shall submit to the House of Peoples’ Representatives for appointment candidates selected by the Federal Judicial Administration Council” (81(2)). The same procedure is followed at the state levels (see sub art.3&4). This appointment procedure undoubtedly compromises the cardinal principle of judicial independence as judges are subject to appointment by EPRDF and the EPRDF-appointed presidents and vice-presidents. EPRDF’s upper hand in the operation of the judiciary branch, as in all other branches, is undeniable.

In relation to this, courts, just as all other government institutions, have been criticized for reinforcing the single-party dominance through implementing laws in a way that serve the interest of the ruling-party. There have also been accusations that courts were staffed with ‘puppet’ judges who ‘graduated from the EPRDF-controlled Civil Service College’ to criminalize and suppress anybody challenging the ruling party [26]. Moreover, courts have been accused of an unfair attitude toward persons charged with political crimes and depriving them of constitutionally guaranteed rights, such as a right to a favorable legal presumption [23]. Therefore, the judiciary system is another partisan institution that renders decisions commanded by the ruling party.

The conclusion is that the strong integration among the three branches of government, as is presupposed by a parliamentary system, has helped EPRDF to dominate the law-making, law-interpreting and law-enforcing bodies of the government. The government and the ruling party, inextricably fused together, devote all state resources and use all government institutions to guarantee the survival of the ruling-party.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Even though Ethiopia officially recognized a multi-party system, the analysis of its field practices revealed that, in fact, the current Ethiopian government is comprised of a dominant one-party system. On top of different factors pointed out by other authors, whose works were analyzed in this research, this study confirmed the fact that the adoption of FPTP and the parliamentary system of government in Ethiopia considerably contributed to securing single-party dominance across all governmental spheres. Therefore, unless substantial efforts are made to increase the power and voice of opposition parties and institute a genuine multi-party system through abolishing the current election and governmental systems, it is highly unlikely that single-party dominance will ever cede ground to any other rule.

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DOI: 10.22363/2313-1438-2018-20-4-506-515

## **ИЗБИРАТЕЛЬНАЯ СИСТЕМА ПРОСТОГО БОЛЬШИНСТВА И СИСТЕМА ПАРЛАМЕНТСКОГО ПРАВЛЕНИЯ КАК ФАКТОРЫ, СПОСОБСТВУЮЩИЕ ДОМИНИРОВАНИЮ ОДНОЙ ПАРТИИ В ЭФИОПИИ**

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Основная цель настоящей статьи заключается в выявлении роли избирательной системы простого большинства и системы парламентского правления в укреплении господства одной партии в Эфиопии. Проведенный автором анализ данных показал, что и избирательная система простого большинства, и система парламентского правления в значительной степени способствовали сложившейся системе однопартийного доминирования в Эфиопии. Избирательная система простого большинства поощряла однопартийное правление, предоставляя преимущество при получении мест в парламенте более сильной партии — Революционно-демократического фронта эфиопских народов. Парламентская система правления также способствовала однопартийному доминированию во всех ветвях власти. Автор приходит к выводу, что из-за неравенства перспектив и возможностей для всех политических партий (и отсутствия подлинной многопартийной системы) избирательная система простого большинства и система парламентского правления Эфиопии неизбежно способствуют доминированию одной партии, что может в дальнейшем привести к авторитаризму.

**Ключевые слова:** доминирование одной партии, парламентская система правления, избирательная система простого большинства, Революционно-демократический фронт эфиопских народов, Эфиопия

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Статья поступила в редакцию 09.09.2018.

Received 09.09.2018.