

An Exploratory Study on the Restructuring of the System of Government in Ethiopia, and the Search for an Electoral System best suited for Democratic Governance

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Abstract

This paper seeks after some options for restructuring the system of government in Ethiopia while surveying models of government that could be compatible with the country's democratic transition. Based on the presumption that the current regime is undemocratic, the study attempts to demonstrate that an urgent transformation of the country into a real democracy is critically needed. As such, relying primarily on a qualitative data analysis, the research assesses the advantages and disadvantages of the three widely-accepted models of democratic government---presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential---based on the comparative experiences of established democracies. In particular, it deciphers the pros and cons of the model that is best suited for the country while suggesting areas of reform in the system that is currently in place. The study concludes that the semi-presidential form of government matches up well with Ethiopia's future transition to a stable democratic state.

Key Words: Federalism, Presidentialism, Parliamentarianism, Semi-Presidentialism, Hybrid System, Ethnic Oligarchy, Unitarism, and Consociationalism

Introduction and an Overview of the Problem

Ethiopia, considered by some political observers as a hegemonic power in the Horn of Africa (Iyob 2000, 659-682), has undergone an unprecedented political transformation since the armed-seizure of state power in 1991 by the current regime---the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The EPRDF, a coalition of four ethnic-based rebel movements, including the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM), and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), was formed in 1989 prior to the takeover of government in Addis Ababa by the group. The TPLF singlehandedly created the EPRDF and has dominated the coalition since then (Engedayehu 1993, 29-52).

However, the TPLF rulers, headed by a former Marxist Melese Zenawi, who died in 2012 after almost 17 years of absolute power, came to be regarded by many in Ethiopia immediately after their ascension to power as too authoritarian, repressive of human rights, and anti-democratic, as the minority rulers from the north imposed their vision of a new Ethiopia by virtue of controlling every aspect of the social, political and economic lifelines of society and reconfiguring the Horn of Africa country into nine ethnic-based regional states (*killes*--- similar to girded/fenced/corralled enclaves in Amharic, the official language of the country). Taking everything into account, the ruling party (the EPRDF) has virtually created a de facto one-party state since then. Five national elections during the last 25 years have gone in favor of the ruling party, which controls nearly every facet of the electoral process, thereby making the opposing parties irrelevant in a political culture that gives no room for transparency. Among the regime's controlling means to curb opposition to its rule include political repression; rigging of elections; jailing of political opponents; clamping down on the free press; and arresting journalists for critical reporting of human rights violations in the country. Other measures put into effect to curb reports that are critical of the government include the jamming of Amharic radio broadcasts originating from foreign sites--- Voice of America, Deutsche Welle (German Radio Amharic Programming), and Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT) Radio Programming from Amsterdam and its branch studios in Washington, D.C. and London (U.S. State Department 2015).

In essence, Ethiopia has become the most notorious among countries that have put more journalists in jail, or forced them to live in exile for fear of persecution under trumped up charges. All major internet news sites and blogs that report on Ethiopia exclusively are blocked from time to time, including voice-over-Internet Protocol (VOIP) and Skype-like services. The country's anti-terrorism law, primarily aimed at squashing dissent, has put thousands of people, including journalists, opposition politicians, academics, students and other critics, in jail, according to multiple reports made public by human rights organizations and media groups, as well as foreign-based organized opposition groups of the regime. The one-party controlled Ethiopian parliament passed the new anti-terror legislation in 2009, allowing a clampdown on political demonstrations and public criticisms of government policy as well as criminalizing any reporting that authorities deem to "encourage" or "provide moral support" to groups the government has labeled 'terrorists' (International Crisis Group 2009).

Needless to say, the U.S. and its Western partners have looked the other way over the years, even though reports of human rights violations, suppression of dissent, political corruption, illegal detention and torture, rigging of elections, and even extrajudicial killings of political opponents have emerged and the prospects of democratization have remained grimmer in the second most populous African county. Investigations conducted by groups, such as *Human Rights Watch*, *Amnesty International*, the *Task Force on Financial Integrity and Development*, the *Committee for the Protection of Journalists*, *Reporters without Borders*, *Survival International*, the *Oakland Institute* and others, all have revealed that the current TPLF-led regime is far from democratizing the political system in Ethiopia. Contrary to the general belief in the West, the political space in Ethiopia has narrowed rather than broadened, as a one-party authoritarian political system has been in the making for more than two decades.

In effect, Ethiopia has also become a de facto ethnic oligarchy, as these few examples, among many, point to the fact: 90% of the command posts in the Ethiopian army, the air force, and national security and military intelligence are held by a single ethnic group (Tigreans); among the latest 37 promotions awarded to high ranking military personnel, 26 involved Tigreans; 20 of the richest Ethiopians, excepting Mohammed Al Almoudi, the billionaire investor from Saudi Arabia, who was born into an Ethiopian mother and a father from the Saudi kingdom, are Tigreans; 66 parasitic companies with millions of dollars in both cash and assets belong to the Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), the largest business conglomerate that rivals Al Almoudi's MIDROC (Mohamed International Development Research Organization Companies); even within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, minority ethnic overrepresentation is clearly reflected in the composition of the Holy Synod in Ethiopia itself, as 16 of the 47 members of Synod are of Tigrean descent; and all elections that have taken place in Ethiopia since the early 1990s have been rigged in favor of the ruling party (Engedayehu 2013).

This is further exacerbated by the regime's experiment with ethnic-based federalism that has ushered in a seemingly never-ending debate over its practicability, contrasted with Ethiopia's political realities and democratic aspirations. Critics assail it for making the county the epicenter of ethnic conflict at its extremes, while proponents hail it for steering the multi-ethnic Horn of Africa state away from the domination of one ethnic group by another--a practice alleged to have been all-pervading throughout much of Ethiopia's long history. Thus, given this purported political tradition in Ethiopia, the latter passionately argue that only federalism based on ethnic particularities can offer historically-suppressed ethnic groups the right to self-rule as well as the freedom from the confines of marginalized existence (Habisso 2012). However, those opposing it advance a counter-argument that a political system, ideologically fixated on the advancement of ethnic exclusivity as opposed to national unity, would lead only to a disastrous outcome, conceivably destabilizing the country's territorial integrity, at best, and jeopardizing its survival as a viable state, at worst (Mariam 2016).

Pit against this implacable debate is also the question of which of the constitutional forms of democratic governance could be compatible with Ethiopian democratic aspirations, especially after more than 25 years of experimenting with ethnic federalism, almost with little or no social harmony. After all, ethnic distinctiveness and the rights of ethnic groups to self-determination and even up to secession are prominently enshrined in the national constitution. Given this reality, opponents argue that the constitution was superimposed on Ethiopia by the EPRDF within four years after its toppling of the Marxist-oriented regime that had preceded it, adding that no evidence exists that the document was ever validated through a popular referendum, which is a common practice in a democratic system of government where, among other things, individual rights and civil liberties are fully guaranteed (International Crisis Group 2009).

And so, the overarching purpose of this paper is to examine the practicalities of parliamentarianism, presidentialism or semi-presidentialism for Ethiopia within the framework of a reformed federal political arrangement. Stated differently, this study aims to shed some light on the main features of the three systems of democratic governance and find out if any of them can be suitable to Ethiopia's transition to a genuine, prototype democracy. In so doing, the paper attempts to identify the one among them that has the best prospects of addressing the issues of governance in that country. The ultimate goal of the paper is to suggest some reforms that would be needed to make the country more democratic and stable.

The study pivots on the premise that the parliamentarian system of government that has been in place since 1995 in Ethiopia, purportedly based on the distribution of powers among the various ethnic parties that make up the ruling EPRDF government, does not embody a true democracy---especially the type acceptable in countries that practice it dependably, devoid of any political turbulence. Rather, the regime in Ethiopia has been, since its inception, a dictatorship, devoid of any opposition party to speak of, and that the "parliament" that the country boasts to have can hardly epitomize the basic tenets of democratic governance. On the contrary, what has been observed in Ethiopia, for the most part, is a one-party authoritarian state under the guise of a federal republic, mimicking the fancies of democracy but in reality embodying the fundamental indicators of an ethnic oligarchy.

The paper is organized into several sections. The first segment is a brief statement justifying the rationale for reforming the current system of government in Ethiopia, followed by a brief examination of the practical applications of parliamentarianism, presidentialism and semi-presidentialism, navigating through the particularities that separate them. This will be followed by assessing critically the workings of Ethiopia's current parliamentary system of government, based on exclusively on the interpretation of the constitution. The ensuing section looks at the potential risks of staying with the system of government that is currently in place, proposing instead changes that would be needed along the way. It is in this final section of the paper that the democratic model of government best suited for the country is also suggested as a way of reforming the current political system. In the end, as is customary, the study will offer summations.

The Need for Political Reform

In light of the debate unraveling with regard to issues of governance in Ethiopia today, as clearly described earlier in the overview, what should be the nature of the political reform to change things around? A democracy centered on a presidential or a parliamentary or semi-presidential form of government under a reformed federal system could provide the options that would be necessary to effect a genuine political reform. This, of course, is based on this author's contention that Ethiopia's current system of governance has been a dismal failure and that a new beginning would warrant a political transformation into a genuine democracy. As often as not, when one thinks of democracy, either presidentialism or parliamentarianism, or a fusion of the two, typically comes to mind. As such, the discussion now turns to an examination of the practical bases of democratic governance with a special focus on presidentialism, parliamentarianism, and semi-presidentialism, also known as a hybrid system, with the ultimate goal of setting apart the one that most likely will serve Ethiopia's national interest at best, especially given the view that the current crisis of governance under ethnic oligarchy demands an urgent political change.

Characteristics and Functions of Presidentialism

Relatively speaking, the origins of presidentialism can be traced to the U.S. Constitution---adopted at the constitutional convention of 1787 in Philadelphia--- in which the conceptual foundations of democracy were fully established. In essence, it was in *The Federalist Papers*---a series of 85 essays written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay urging the citizens of New York to ratify the U.S. Constitution---that the key theoretical formulations, ideals, and aspirations of the Constitution were firmly grounded, drawing from the works of earlier political theorists, such as John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, Thomas Hobbes, and others. In his acclaimed study of presidential regimes, Miguel De Luca observes that the central elements of democracy, envisaged by the framers of the U.S. Constitution, were rooted in: "...a written constitution that aimed at defining and limiting political authority, a government based on popular sovereignty, a chief of state named 'president' instead of a hereditary king, and a system of checks and balances between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches designed to guarantee order and security and avoid tyranny" (2011, 2).

At the same time, some presidential scholars have also made an attempt to differentiate between democratic regimes, regarded as full presidential systems, and those dubbed semi-presidential, or alternatively known as hybrid, in the way they are designed.

Both models have emerged across the world since the ratification of the U.S. constitution in 1789, which made the United States not only a democracy recognized by many as having a long history of constitutional continuity, but also a presidential system that has become the world's best known. In this connection, the U.S. State Department official figure reveals that there are 196 sovereign countries in the world today, of which 80 are reported as having some form of the presidential system of government, although not every one of the countries is necessarily democratic in practice.

In realistic terms, the executive authority of a full-fledged presidential system of government, such as the U.S.'s, is vested in the office of the president, who holds the twin titles of head of state and head of government while exercising considerable powers that are duly expressed in the constitution. Benjamin Reilly (2003) comments that the American presidential democracy has had a considerable impact on countries where authoritarian rule was once the norm but was cast off in favor of a democracy, adding that presidentialism became a favored system of government in several new democracies that emerged in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America, especially in the decades after the end of the Cold War. But the U.S. presidential system was by no means adopted in exact replica, as many of the countries created their systems based on their specific needs and local political and social conditions. Still, Reilly gives credit to the U.S. model, which he believes was responsible, to some degree, for such countries to transition into democracy.

Reilly describes some key advantages of governance under presidentialism while noting some disadvantages, as well. This is especially true in contrast with the parliamentary system or the hybrid model. For example, under a pure presidential democracy, these features are recognizable: the executive (president) is not accountable to the legislature (congress) but is to voters who elect him/her directly through a popular vote (indirectly through the Electoral College as in the U.S.); the president is the most powerful political figure, or "a unifying national figure," to borrow Reilly's characterization, although in some cases one's tenure can also become out of favor depending on some aspects of his/her leadership characteristics or policy initiatives; the presidential system on the whole offers continuity, stability and predictability in policy-making or legislative priorities throughout the presidential term(s), thus leading to efficiency in governance; the president enjoys a lawmaking authority, although this could vary from one country to another in both scope and degree; the executive has a fixed tenure in almost all cases and thus stays in power for the whole term unless removed through an impeachment process; and the president appoints ministers (or secretaries as in the U.S.) from outside the legislature (congress) for the most part, although in some instances he or she can also tap someone from the legislative body for appointment (2003). However, presidentialism has also some drawbacks, according to Reilly. In some presidential systems, he argues, checks on the powers of the executive may be non-existent, especially "...when there is a concordance between the president's party and the majority party in parliament," (2003, 1), thereby effectively making the legislature a "toothless body" rather than being a counter force to executive dominance. Furthermore, the executive is seen as lacking flexibility because, despite a constitutionally-built-in safety net to impeach an unruly president, some presidential systems are not flexible enough to thwart the continuance of an "...unpopular president in a position of considerable long-term power," states Reilly (2003, 2). To underscore this very point, he cites the case of Salvador Allende's election as president of Chile in 1970, when the lack of flexibility in the Chilean presidential system "...gave {Allende} control of the executive," even though he came to power with only 36 per cent of the popular vote (2003, 2-3).

Along the same line, Jose Chelbub (1976) cites four significant pitfalls of presidentialism, contending that a lasting democratic system can be better realized under parliamentarianism than under presidentialism. As such, he identifies these drawbacks: majority support from the legislature for the policies of the executive is not fail-safe "... since there is nothing in the system that guarantees that such a majority will exist" (1976, 3); legislative gridlock could occur, leading to high profile fights between the executive branch and the legislature; presidential regimes rarely lend themselves to party coalitions because there is no incentive to do so, as is often the case in a parliamentary system; and, finally, the decentralized nature of decision-making under presidentialism, wherein proposed legislation originates in the legislature, even under a strong presidential model, can make the executive appear only as an approver of such proposed legislation rather than being as an initiator of the same, although this could vary from one country to another to a large extent and also could depend on the formal powers granted to each branch under the constitution (1976).

Characteristics and Functions of Semi-Presidentialism

As a concept used in the comparative study of democratic states, semi-presidentialism can be problematic at times because there is no consensus among scholars to classify countries using such a designation. Still, many scholars have made it a practice over the years identifying democratic countries under the three-way classificatory scheme--presidential, parliamentary and semi-presidential regimes---and have been content with knowledge gained through the comparative study of states, using the rubrics central to each of the three systems.

Albeit the conceptual issues associated with it, however, “many countries swept within a recent wave of democratization have chosen semi-presidentialism,” observes Kimberly McQuire (2012, 430). As a general consensus, therefore, semi-presidentialism “refers to a democratic regime in which there is both a directly elected president and a prime minister, who is responsible to the legislature” (2012, 429). More specifically, three general characteristics are prevalent in this system, according to Maurice Duverger: “popular election of the president, presidential constitutional powers, and the separate office of a prime minister” (in McQuire, 430).

Furthermore, semi-presidentialism is a system of democratic practice with a popularly elected, fixed-term president who shares executive powers with a prime minister, who is appointed by the executive but is accountable to the legislature, along with the cabinet. Featuring some aspects of presidentialism and parliamentarianism, this hybrid model not only allows the president to select the prime minister, as may be required by the constitution, but also in some cases provides for the post of prime minister to be offered to a member of a party in the ruling coalition that may not necessarily be from the president’s own party, sometimes for reasons of political expediency, although such selection may not be constitutionally required. This means that the “prime minister may or may not be a member of the president’s political party, depending upon what party or coalition of parties maintains the majority in the legislature” (430). The dual nature of the executive branch in this system, however, makes it critical to understand thoroughly about the constitutional powers vested in it; and such powers can be delineated in both legislative and non-legislative terms. For instance, legislative powers may include the ability of the executive to veto legislation or resolutions, to issue decrees, and to initiate legislative proposals. In the same vein, the non-legislative powers of the executive may contain the ability to appoint and dismiss cabinet members, to design the structure of the cabinet, and even to dissolve parliament in cases of a stalemate between the executive and the parliament over legislation or policy implementation (UK Essays 2015).

So, under the hybrid system, it is essentially possible that the executive branch of government can be dominated by either the president or even the prime minister when two opposing parties have strong-willed, rival leaders in what is sometimes known as a “dual executive.” In the French system, for example, this was observed in 1988, when Francois Mitterrand, a leftist, was elected president and Jacques Chirac, a right wing politician, was appointed prime minister. Some scholars expediently refer such a period of a French government to “cohabitation,” heralding a time in which the president had to coexist with the prime minister from an opposing party, or ideologically far-off from him/her, as “co-equals,” and govern accordingly (2015, 1).

Yet, there are variations within semi-presidentialism that must also be understood to have a better grasp of the type with which a country can be identified. In their highly- praised study, Matthew Shugart and John Carey classified semi-presidentialism into two types--premier-presidentialism and president-parliamentarianism--- to account for such variations (in McQuire, 430). Under the former, the prime minister and the government that he/she heads are exclusively responsible to the parliamentary majority. This is so because the president’s constitutional power does not provide for dismissal of the prime minister by the executive. Under the latter, however, the prime minister and the government are equally accountable to the president as well as to the parliamentary majority; hence, dismissal of the prime minister is a function of both. Among more than 23 countries around the world that use some form of the semi-presidential system today, the French premier-presidentialism model is the most typical, with which other similar systems possibly may be contrasted. Russia, whose constitution gives the president the power to appoint and dismiss the prime minister and members of the government, as well as the power to dissolve the parliament (Duma) while having to seek consent from the legislature for presidential appointment and dismissal, represents the president-parliamentary model of government (2015).

Ordinarily, semi-presidentialism has these features: president is head of state while prime minister (premier) is head of government; president possesses significant constitutional powers, such as legislative veto and appointment power, although lacking dismissal power of prime minister; prime minister is subject to a vote of no confidence from parliament; and prime minister and his/her government (cabinet ministers) are exclusively accountable to the parliamentary majority.

Governance under this system may include these advantages: oblige mutual dependence and cooperation upon the executive and the prime minister and help bring about efficiency in government, while minimizing conflict and authoritarian tendencies; allow the president to appoint government ministers to the cabinet, who are recommended to the president (head of state) by the prime minister (head of government), while subjecting both the cabinet and the prime minister to being accountable to the legislature, and thus providing a mutually-beneficial working relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government; afford a system of checks and balances so that neither the executive office nor the legislature exerts dominance, and this is done through a power balancing principle of effective governance through mutual support and interdependence between the prime minister and the president; mandate the popular election of the president for a fixed term, as well as the election of the members of the legislature for a limited term, in order to mitigate the chances of authoritarian leanings; provide for a robust democratic competition through multi-partyism, which often induces the formation of alliances between or among parties to form a coalition government; and, finally, afford the president to have an international stature almost similar to that of the U.S. executive by virtue of his serving as head of state, exerting presidential leadership, and overseeing the day-to-day functioning of the government, among others.

However, just as in presidentialism, semi-presidential regimes have their own shortcomings, which may include the following: ambiguity in the constitutional roles that the president and the prime minister play in the area of foreign affairs, for example, as in France, where the president serves as a commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and the prime minister is constitutionally responsible for national defense and makes appointments to military posts; vulnerability to executive dominance especially in the absence of constitutional checks on the executive, as was the case in France, until the law providing for presidential impeachment was passed in 2014, which in effect may have thwarted the potential of a “cult-like” executive emerging within the system from time to time and thus becoming authoritarian, since the constitutional checks on the executive were not as stringent as that of the U.S. president; and there is always the potential for gridlock in that, during periods of cohabitation, a stalemate or lack of compromise between the prime minister and the majority in parliament on one side, and the president, on the other, could exist, especially when the president and the prime minister become at loggerheads on policy priorities. Despite these shortcomings, however, the hybrid system has its staunchest supporters who see it as having more advantages than disadvantages in the overall framework of democratic governance (2015).

Characteristics and Functions of Parliamentarianism

Parliamentarianism is a system of democratic government in which representatives are elected to a legislative body (parliament) to make the necessary laws and decisions on behalf of the people who have elected them. Because the executive branch is not separated from the legislative branch under this model, as is normally the case in presidentialism, the members of the council of ministers (cabinet) who run the government are also the members of the legislature. In other words, those elected into parliament run the executive and legislative functions of the government. Typically, in a parliamentary democracy, a prime minister, who is first elected as a member of parliament, then elected prime minister by the other members of the legislature, becomes the head of government. However, the prime minister remains a part of the legislative body and engages in the law-making process as his/her counterparts in the parliament. Often referred to the Westminster model of democratic governance (taken after the British model), parliamentarian regimes today outnumber presidential systems, taking into account all the sovereign states across the globe. “In general, the majority of the world’s ‘established’ democracies use parliamentary systems,” according to Reilly (2003, 1).

In essence, the parliamentary theory of government implies that the assembly (legislative body) and government (executive branch) are fused into one. “A parliamentary constitution is characterized by the fusion of the executive and legislative powers achieved by the fact that the government needs the confidence of the majority in the legislative assembly in order to come to and remain in power,” notes Cheibub (1976, 1).

The defining characteristics of parliamentarianism, however, include, but not limited to, the following: the roles of head of government (premier) and head of state (often a ceremonial position reserved for president, or in the case of the British constitutional monarchy for the Queen) are separate; a government is formed on the basis of legislative seats won by competing parties; the majority party organizes both executive and legislative branches after elections, except in the absence of such a majority, the party with the most seats in parliament can establish a coalition government; coalition parties then jointly determine who will serve as head of government (PM), fill the various cabinet positions, and appoint heads of legislative committees; the prime minister can appoint only the members of parliament as minister, his/her tenure is not fixed, ministers can be dismissed any time before their tenure ends, and new elections can be held upon a vote of no confidence against the cabinet by the legislature; in some rare cases, as in Canada, for example, when a coalition is impossible to forge, a minority party with the most members can become a *de facto* governing party; separation of powers or checks and balances do not exist under this system, as is the case with presidentialism; the use of the proportional electoral system is most common to fill legislative seats, although the United Kingdom and India use the single-member plurality electoral system, which often favors a two-party dominance; the system is amenable to a robust multiparty competition because legislative seats are allocated based on the percentage of votes won by parties; and, finally, the absence of a fixed term to serve in parliament makes cooperation among politicians critical because the threat of holding new elections upon a no-confidence vote against the governing party, which often leads to the collapse of the coalition, makes it indispensable for career politicians to work compliantly (Preserve Article.com 2016, 1).

So, taken together, the parliamentarian system of government embodies these positive elements: inclusion of all groups in the executive cabinet appointments, drawing from members of the legislature including those from minority parties; flexibility and dynamism of the system to adapt to changes caused by emerging circumstances, the best illustration of which is its ability to dismiss “a discredited government from office by the parliament itself” without resorting to a general election; accountability is known to be greatest under this system because of the ease with which public officials can be removed from power for failure to do their job, which is in keeping with the principle of “checks and balances” (Reilly 2003, 1-2); frequent elections that could come from conflicts within the parliament can easily be minimized with the success and stability of a governing party coalition; the system is more conducive to party formations, fosters party loyalty with its reward and punishment mechanism for members, and ensures that party discipline is maintained with little or no misstep; and, finally, under this model, political parties can become vehicles for tackling problems that require a collective action through the mobilization of their members.

However, this system is not without its own shortcomings, although minimal compared to the other two models (presidentialism and semi-presidentialism). For example, the constant threat of dissolving the parliament at a time of crisis and thus subjecting members to removal from office could be a major hurdle for the stability of party governance. Secondly, to a degree, the system could also foster legislative gridlock if and when coalition partners become embroiled in disagreements over key policy issues even to the extent of leading them to a crisis of unknown consequences. Such a crisis, for instance, “affected the Fourth Republic France and that was partly responsible for General de Gaulle’s assumption of presidential power” via a decree in 1962 (Reilly 2003, 2). Two other flaws are cited by Reilly in this type of system, namely, the “lack of accountability and discipline,” and the “propensity towards weak or fragmented government” (2003, 3). The former alludes to the fact that “responsibility for decisions is taken by the collective cabinet rather than a single figure,” (2003, 2), thus implying that it can be difficult to pinpoint which members of the coalition are held responsible for what decision. While this may be true, however, the fact that the legislature as a whole still remains in control of the no confidence vote against a governing coalition proves that any lack of accountability and the discipline there of does not seem such a valid source of weakness as Reilly portrays it to be. On the other hand, the prevalence of a weak or fragmented government in such a system is a real issue and consequently could occur within a parliamentarian government organized around a weak party coalition. Reilly correctly makes the argument that the unpredictability of coalition partners in some parliamentarian systems, whose policy priorities may be shifting from time to time, may create an executive branch of government that is “often weak and unstable, leading to a lack of continuity and direction in public policy” (2003,1-2).

After having deciphered the three types of democratic governmental systems and their advantages and disadvantages, respectively, the discussion now turns to a succinct but critical examination of the so-called parliamentary democracy in Ethiopia that has been in place since the adoption of a new constitution in 1994 under the ethnic federalist framework. This is done to underscore two interrelated imperatives for that country: a reformed federal government, and a system of rule based on the values and principles of a true democracy.

Ethiopia's "Symbolic" Parliamentary Democracy at a Glance

The reference above to the Ethiopian parliament as "symbolic" is meant merely to draw attention to the fact that the country's legislature has served for more than 25 years more like a rubberstamp parliament for the decisions and decrees desired by the dominant TPLF rulers than serving as a true legislative body representing the Ethiopian people. A presumably majority party coalition of ethnic-based groups, known as the EPRDF, claims to govern the Horn of Africa country without opposition from any other legitimate parties. This has been so because the suppression of opposing parties by the regime literally has thwarted emerging parties over the years from successfully competing against the EPRDF, as the results of the five national elections that have taken place so far have unambiguously made it clear. What this means is that, while the constitution establishes a fairly democratic parliamentary system, it only exists on paper since all the fundamental principles of the constitution, rights and freedoms, human rights, and democratic rights---all articulated in plain language within the document and are certainly a requisite for a true democracy--- have not been fully practiced due to the regime's dictatorial tendencies.

Besides, the current constitution of Ethiopia, as pointed out earlier in the paper, is a result of a forced imposition on the country by the Tigrean ruling elites and their ideological partners from the EPRDF coalition, who led the way, upon their ascension to power in 1991, to an ethnic-based reconfiguration of Ethiopia for the first time in the country's long history. However, this was mainly done without any prior popular referendum for approval of the constitution that, despite its shortcomings, still contains the basic principles and ideals of democracy. Yet, the absence of practical use of and respect for the freedoms and liberties granted in the document is why critics of the regime often dub the system in place "a mockery of democracy," which apparently is their rhetorical dismissal of the rulers' claim that they are running a democratic government in Ethiopia. Defiantly, these critics argue that the democracy that the regime claims to embrace has not been seen in reality (Mariam 2015).

Organized under 11 Chapters and 106 Articles, the noticeably-long Ethiopian constitution enumerates provisions that can be regarded as genuinely democratic by any measure of standards that may be used to compare democratic constitutions anywhere in the world. With the exception of Article 39, to which critics vehemently object for the emphasis placed on ethnicity as a basis of nation-building, and of Article 40, which makes ownership of rural and urban land, as well as of all natural resources, to be exclusively vested in the state, the entire document is anchored in the fundamental principles of democracy in which the rights and privileges of citizens are protected and guaranteed. Both Articles, according to critics, are a reminder of the ideological bent of the former Marxist rebel-turned-politicians of the TPLF, noting that the provisions in both Articles are manifestations of the Marxist ideology, to which all members of the TPLF ethnic oligarchs subscribed resolutely in the past.

However, because of Articles 39 and 40, the constitution still remains a controversial one. At the core of the debate for critics are particularly the terms defining the "Rights of Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples," which Article 39 explicitly states as follows:

Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession....The right to self-determination, including secession, of every Nation, Nationality and People shall come into effect: (a) When a demand for secession has been approved by a two-thirds majority of the members of the Legislative Council of the Nation, Nationality or People concerned; (b) When the Federal Government has organized a referendum which must take place within three years from the time it received the concerned council's decision for secession; (c) When the demand for secession is supported by majority vote in the referendum; (d) When the Federal Government will have transferred its powers to the council of the Nation, Nationality or People who has voted to secede; and (e) When the division of assets is effected in a manner prescribed by law...A "Nation, Nationality or People" for the purpose of this Constitution, is a group of people who have or share large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory (Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia).

By all accounts, therefore, Article 39 precisely validates the constitutional founding of Ethiopia's ethnic federalism, whose negative consequences for the country, following its implementation, have made Ethiopia the epicenter of ethnic clashes that still go unabated to this day.

At the same time, the constitution provides provisions defining the structure of state in Article 45, starting with this statement: "The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia shall have a parliamentary form of government" (Constitution of Ethiopia). Under this Article is also a list of the current ethnic-based regional states that make up the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, including the procedures to be used by "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples within the States to form their own states." However, the most direct reference to the country's parliamentary form of government, including the structure and division of powers among the three branches, are enumerated under Articles 50 through 84. Accordingly, Ethiopia appears to follow on paper the common form of a parliamentary democratic government. In line with the basic tenets of a parliamentary democracy, the constitution so creates a model similar to that of the United Kingdom, not replicating of course the constitutionally-sanctioned overseer of the state--- the British Monarchy.

By creating a federal republic based on ethnic exceptionality, the constitution identifies the organs of the state, describing them in these terms: "The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia comprises the Federal Government and the State members. The Federal Government and the States shall have legislative, executive and judicial powers" (Article 50). Articles 50 through 84, therefore, are exclusively devoted to delineating the structure, powers and functions of both houses of parliament; appointment and powers of the President; appointment, powers and functions of the prime minister; and powers and functions of the Council of Ministers (cabinet). From this, one can see clearly many similarities with the parliamentary constitutions of those countries that use the British model, certainly with some variations reflective of their own respective social and political dynamics. More specifically, one can also find all the vital features of the parliamentary system in the Ethiopian constitution. For example, two federal houses---the House of Peoples' Representatives and the House of the Federation---make up the legislative body, practically the same as any other parliamentary system. Secondly, much of the power of legislation is given to the House of Peoples' Representatives, with jurisdiction over a specific list of legislative areas, and members of this House are directly elected for a 5-year term by the people from each electoral district by a plurality of the votes received. "A political party, or a coalition of political parties that has the greatest number of seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives shall form the Executive and lead it," states Article 56 of the constitution.

The highest executive powers of the Federal Government are vested in the prime minister and in the Council of Ministers, the constitution mandates. Elected from among members of the House of Peoples' Representatives, the prime minister has the power to appoint ministers as well as dissolve the legislature, both with the consent of the House of Peoples' Representatives. The dissolution can occur when and if the majority party coalition falls apart over policy differences or other related conflicts that give rise to disharmony between or among coalition partners. In sum, the bicameral parliament of Ethiopia consists of the 110-member House of the Federation, representing the ethnic aspirations or interests of the 9 *Kililoch* (regional states), and the 547-member House of Peoples' Representatives, who are popularly elected and who in turn elect the president.

At the same time, it is apparent from the constitution that the role of the House of Federation is limited only to specific functions, such as the interpretation of the constitution; deciding on issues relating to the rights of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples to self-determination, including the right to secession; and organizing the Council of Constitutional Inquiry, among others. Styled more like the House of Lords in the British parliamentary system, the House of the Federation is composed of representatives of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, with all the members being appointed by their respective state for a term of 5 years. In the same vein, the role of the president is limited, as well. As the head of state, the president occupies more or less a ceremonial position, as is the case in almost all other parliamentary democracies. Nominated by the House of Peoples' Representatives but elected by a two-thirds majority of the members of both the House of the Federation and the House of Peoples' Representatives, the president is constitutionally entrusted with performing these and other ceremonial functions: officially sanction the opening of the joint session of the House of Peoples' Representatives and the House of the Federation at the commencement of their annual sessions; appoint ambassadors and other envoys to represent the country abroad upon the recommendation of the prime minister; accept the credentials of foreign ambassadors and special envoys; award medals, prizes and gifts as well as grant high military titles upon the recommendation of the prime minister; and grant pardon and reprieve to offenders of crime, in accordance with conditions and procedures established by law.

As the foregoing cursory review of the Ethiopian constitution so explicitly suggests, parliamentary principles are rooted in at all levels of the government structure, although much of what appears in the document has not deterred authoritarianism from taking roots in the country. At least, this has been proven to be the case by empirical data that has come to define the current government based on the dismal reports that is made public periodically from numerous sources on the regime's suppression of civil liberties and basic human rights, including the constant jailing of journalists and the elimination of the free press altogether from the country (Human Rights Watch: Ethiopia 2016). By all indications, such reports have not only come from victims and opponents of the regime within the country and the Diaspora, but also from international human rights organizations, the foreign media, and, more importantly, from foreign government agencies, such as the U.S. State Department, and some member countries of the European Union, just to name a few.

Given the backdrop above, the need for a political reform aimed at the restructuring of the government and the concomitant development of a democratic culture in Ethiopia has never been more compelling today than any time before. It is with this in mind that the next section of the paper looks into some of the reforms needed to deepen the culture of democracy in Ethiopia.

Areas of Reform toward a Functional Democracy

The discussion that is to follow outlines some specific areas of reform that could jumpstart the process of Ethiopia's transition from the political predicament in which it finds itself today into an all-inclusive participatory democracy that offers every segment of the population the opportunity to realize the hopes and aspirations of living in harmony and of enjoying the freedoms that such a system of government guarantees. As such, the emphasis in this final section of the paper is placed upon three significant areas of reform: incorporation of consociational democratic principles into the political system as a transformative means of expression; revision of the constitution with the aim of approval by a popular referendum; and adoption of the semi-presidential democratic form of government, particularly the type similar to that of France but refined to go with Ethiopian particularities. These suggested changes, however, require, at the most, a serious negotiation in good faith among political actors representing all stakeholders. One point must be clear here, though---the suggested areas of reform and the extent to which they are put into effect still remain a future project for those who must work within the framework of a negotiated settlement of all the outstanding issues affecting adversely the democratization process in Ethiopia. Thus, the paper merely suggests the areas of reform here so that they may serve as elements of a working modality that the framers of Ethiopia's transformation can use, as they craft the details of the governmental structuring needed to transition the country into the next political phase, starting with the revision of the constitution. However, the discussion of consociationalism precedes that of the changes to be considered in the constitution.

1. Adoption of Consociationalism

The idea of ethnic-based self-rule may have been prompted by misgivings that proponents had about the ability of the unitary Ethiopian state of the past (both under the monarchy and the military regime that succeeded it) to move the country on the path of "economic development and changing the material conditions of the Ethiopian people" (Tegenu, 2016). In Tegenu's view, the Ethiopian unitary state's inability to foster economic development as well as advance the culture of democratic rule in Ethiopia may have justified the move from unitarism to ethnic federalism in post-1991 Ethiopia. Yet, the institutionalization of ethnic federalism has only shown consequences that are detrimental to the stability and wellbeing of the country, as has been uncovered throughout this paper. And Tegenu confirms this same point, as he acknowledges that the current government has "slipped back into the same tradition of unitarist or centralist," adding that "the central Ethiopian state is true to its tradition: very much elitist and extractive" (2016).

In light of the multitude of issues facing the Horn of Africa country today, what then are the changes needed to turn things around? Tegenu advances primarily the scheme of consociationalism. Expounding further on the value of consociationalism as a corrective measure for Ethiopia's ethnic federalism, he states that "Ethnic federation is apparently dependent on democratic rules and it requires democracy for its successful accomplishment.....consociationalism is the type of democracy (decision making process and mechanism) which fits the kind of constitutional structure of ethnic federation" (2016).

According to some scholars, who have done extensive research on it, consociationalism is a democratic theory developed on the basis of reconciling societal fragmentation.

If a state, for instance, has found a consociational political solution, it means that such a state is one that has major internal divisions along racial, ethnic, ideological, religious, or linguistic lines, yet manages to remain stable due to the collaborative working modalities forged among the elites of each of its major social groups. Stated differently, consociationalism refers to a system of “government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy” (Lijphart 1969, 216). In this regard, “consociationalism is based upon the idea that conflict resolution in divided societies is best achieved through the accommodation of the political élites representing the salient segments of society and institutionally anchored by inclusive coalitions and proportionality in public appointments” (Andeweg 2000, 512).

Furthermore, Lijphart (1977, 25-52) identified four features shared by consociational systems: a grand coalition government consisting of societal elites of the various subcultures, who are willing to bargain, compromise and negotiate in good faith regardless of ideological, religious, linguistic, and ethnic/racial divides and govern in the interests of their constituencies, as they recognize that, not to do so, would peril national coexistence; segmental autonomy giving ethnic groups cultural freedom; proportionality that offers a substantial presence of members of all subdivisions of society based on the percentage of their total population in employment within the public sector; and mutual veto, that is, having consensus among the elites as a prerequisite for acceptance of the majority rule. Mutuality, in this case, suggests that the interests of the majority cannot be blocked by the minority, or vice versa. These characteristics were, more or less, present in all the classic examples of consociationalism: Lebanon before the civil war, Cyprus, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Fiji, and Malaysia. Some consociations have succeeded, such as the ones in Northern Ireland, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, and Belgium, while others have failed, as it was the case in Lebanon, Cyprus, Fiji, and Malaysia. “The key feature of consociationalism is that it is a power sharing arrangement encompassing a set of institutional devices (proportionality, grand coalition, mutual veto etc.) as well as related cooperative attitudes of political elites in segmented societies, leading them to transcend the borders of their own groups, to be receptive to the claims of others and to accommodate the divergent interests and claims of the segments,” according to Darko Angelov (2000, 23).

While consociationalism thus appears to have some very promising elements that can address the issues of power-sharing in deeply divided societies, such as Ethiopia, critics argue that power-sharing arrangements through elites could ostensibly solidify the underlying conflict across political, racial, ethnic, religious and ideological cleavages to the detriment of a permanent stability. Theoretically, it is built on an uncertain and changing conceptual basis, some say. This is to say that the unpredictable nature of sub-cultural elites to remain committed to conflict resolution through accommodation and compromise makes consociationalism untenable. For instance, “The increasing complexity of conflict settlements in which consociational arrangements form an important element but require complementary mechanisms to deal with, for instance, “the design of the police, demilitarization, the return of exiles to their homes, the management of prisoners, education reform, economic policy, and the promotion of language and other group rights”” can be at the core of this doubt among some analysts (Wolff 2009). Besides, the very nature of elite-based accommodative power-sharing arrangements makes the theory of consociationalism undemocratic, they add. Finally, some even go as far as declaring that it does not lead to stable conflict settlements. At the heart of their criticism is the belief that consociationalism will not support political moderation, but rather, destroy it. For some, consociationalism fails to move the state forward towards peace. “Instead, it re-entrenches divisions and leads moderates, fearful of losing out in negotiations, to more extreme parties” (Noble 2013, 3)

Some known additional characteristics of consociationalism are: coalition-based cabinet, where executive power is shared between parties, not concentrated in one; reasonable balance of power between the executive and legislative branches; decentralized, federal government, where (regional) minorities have considerable independence; distinct bicameralism, where it is very difficult for one party to gain a majority in both houses, and where one chamber normally represents regional interests and the other national interests; proportional representation making sure that minorities gain representation in both chambers; inclusion of organized interest groups representing minorities; a strict constitution preventing government from changing the provisions without the consent of minorities; judicial review allowing minorities to go to the courts to seek redress against laws that they see as unjust; and elements of direct democracy enabling minorities to enact or prevent legislation.

However, given the overall value of consociationalism in resolving deep-seated societal conflicts through accommodation, negotiation and compromise in highly fragmented societies, the quest for a political solution using democratic principles as the vehicle to bring peace and stability to Ethiopia simply outweighs the shortcomings cited by critics of the theory. While it may not be a perfect system, consociationalism has a meaningful practical application to the Ethiopian case; hence its inclusion as part of the solution.

All things considered, the suggested use of consociationalism, as noted in the foregoing discussion, still would have no real meaning in the practical scheme of things unless fronted by a commitment toward fixing the constitution itself in a way acceptable to all concerned. So, as a point of departure toward a negotiated political reform in Ethiopia, the constitution that was put into effect more than two decades ago unilaterally by the EPRDF must be modified so as to make it a national constitution embraced by all sections of the Ethiopian people. A constitution superimposed following an armed seizure of state power without a popular referendum cannot have any legitimacy, nor the force of law in a country of 96 million people, who never had a say so in the first place in the formulation of the document.

2. Arguments for Revising the Constitution

At the center of Ethiopia's controversial federal system is the constitution that sanctions power-sharing between the federal government and the nine ethnically-divided regional states, although many of the provisions are not strictly put into practice by the regime. Moreover, the constitution, which makes ethnic identity as the cornerstone of political decision-making or governance, has given a legal cover for ethno-nationalists---especially officials at the regional levels of government and their ideological partners at the federal level-- to discriminate against, uproot, kill, and, in some cases, engage in ethnic cleansing of members of minorities in a majority ethnic enclave. This was done by forcing them to abandon their places of residence and personal properties from areas where their forefathers had once lived for generations but, with the new ethnic demarcations of boundaries, have become "aliens" in their own country and thus unfit to live in peace because of their ethnic and linguistic affinities to people of other states or provinces. Oftentimes, disputes over demarcations of borders of adjacent administrative districts, control of commercial and economic zones, property ownership, and the like have provided the impetus for the conflicts, pitting one group against another. The numerous ethnic conflicts that have been recorded throughout the last 25 years in Ethiopia are the direct results of this constitutional order.

While much of what the constitution contains conceivably could be retained because many of the rights and privileges granted to citizens under a democracy are found in it, however, the entire document must be subject to revisions in order to incorporate the principles of consociational democracy into it, as suggested earlier. But more so than anything else, the provisions that give legitimacy by dividing up the country strictly on ethnic grounds must be the subject of scrutiny among the political élites representing the salient segments of the Ethiopian society as a whole, as they refine the constitution based on the principles and practices of consociationalism. More specifically, though, three elements of the constitution must be seriously considered for modification, first and foremost: the section of the Preamble that makes reference to "We, the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia: Strongly committed, in full and free exercise of our right to self-determination...;" Article 39, which lists provisions sanctioning self-determination up to secession; and article 40, which contains a stipulation affirming that "The right to ownership of rural and urban land, as well as of all natural resources, is exclusively vested in the State and in the peoples of Ethiopia. Land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange." Article 39 of the constitution, in particular, provides the basis of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, and thus any reform to address the interethnic conflicts that have become the mainstay of Ethiopian politics these days must be carried out with vigor.

Asking the questions of "whose Constitution is it exactly?, and which groups does it benefit?," Borango contends that the TPLF and other "tribal opposition political organizations," including the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Oromo Federalist Congress (OFD), Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), and some parties within the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), all had a monopoly on the creation of the constitution from the beginning, while those advocating a stance of national unity through democratic reforms were left out in the process (2016). He further maintains that ethnic-based organizations, whether armed or peaceful, that oppose the TPLF have no issue with the contents of the constitution per se, but with the lack of its implementation.

Alluding to the May 2016 Oromo uprisings over opposition to the Addis Ababa Master Plan, which was more or less exclusively-led by Oromo ethno-nationalist elements, Borango insists that the primary motivation of the protest leaders was to raise issues against the regime for violations of the constitution, which they adamantly support, adding that the protesters were fighting for the interests of the Oromo entirely and, by extension, for the “Oromo state” that they have come to internalize since the adoption of the constitution (2016). In essence, this is another unpleasant outcome of a constitution, which not only gives preeminence to ethnic federalism but also arguably has helped sharpen the desire of those clinging to the ideology of ethnic exclusivity at the expense of a wider, national Ethiopian identity. This sharpened identity crisis of ethno-nationalists no doubt has led to many disastrous interethnic clashes over the last two decades across the country. Even more alarming is that the consequences of such clashes seem to have paved the way for further fragmentation among the many ethnic groups that make up Ethiopia today, even to the extent of threatening the continued existence of that country as a viable state. “The Oromo protests opposed the Addis Ababa Master Plan because they view ‘Oromo state’ as a tribal enclave to be settled exclusively by ethnic Oromos,” contends Borango, accentuating this same viewpoint (2016).

Making a compelling argument against the constitution, Borango also observes that “the current constitution exists to benefit the TPLF and to satisfy tribal and ethnocentric opposition groups,” adding that “the TPLF constitution and its ethnic-federalism system reject the fundamental human rights of at least two large populations in Ethiopia: the millions of mixed Ethiopians whose parents or great-grandparents are each the byproduct of more than one ethnic group and the millions of non-mixed Ethiopians who are tagged ethnic labels by TPLF without their will. Both these two groups identify themselves as Ethiopians and Ethiopians ONLY. Both these two population groups have rejected the TPLF constitution since the first day. We rejected ethnic-federalism” (2016).

However, in the view of Tesfaye Habisso, a former Ethiopian ambassador to South Africa, ethnic federalism and the constitutional grounds upon which it was created in Ethiopia has more benefits than detriments for the multi-ethnic country. Citing success stories of similar systems in Switzerland, Belgium, Canada, and a number of other countries, Habisso claims that “By allowing each ethnic/cultural-linguistic community to have control of those regions of the country where it is in the majority, while respecting basic minority rights, it prevents the kind of zero-sum power struggle between groups that is likely to occur in an ethnically divided society where all the power is in the hands of the central government” (2016). But the comparison between those countries and Ethiopia is empirically indefensible because none of the states he cited has the 80 or more ethnic groups that Ethiopia has today. Besides, the historical development of each country is different, thus making the comparison even more complicated than Habisso tries to make us believe. In Canada, for example, it is a well-known fact that Quebec has had a special status in the Canadian system historically to deal with its distinct French culture in a formula adopted in the 1960s by which Quebec would be given special considerations, so that its distinct culture could be protected and developed while continuing to be part of the Canadian federal system. But, when compared to the 80 ethnic groups that Ethiopia is comprised of, the comparison about Canada just does not offer a realistic connection to the realities of Ethiopia’s ethnic federal system. Besides, Ethiopia’s ethnic makeup is marked with a history of inter-ethnic fusion, as manifested throughout the centuries involving both marriages and settlements of people conditioned by unfettered movements from one part of the country to another without regard to cultural and linguistic differences, thus making once again the comparison with Canada empirically untenable.

To further bolster his argument, Habisso asserts that the major ethnic federal systems of the past, “including {those of} the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia” failed because “they were, in practice, sham or pseudo federation” (2). He states that federalism in each of these states was imposed on the people by force and that these states simply lacked a genuine democracy to make it work. By this, he is implying that Ethiopia, in comparison with these failed states, is a democracy and that the country’s ethnic federalism stems from the will of the people when in fact it was forced upon them immediately after EPRDF’s taking of state power.

However, regardless of the extreme divide between supporters and detractors of the system and the constitution that legitimizes it, the need for revising the constitution to accommodate all stakeholders and find the right formula that would bring a permanent peace and stability to the country is more heightened than ever.

3. Merits of Semi-Presidentialism for Ethiopia

Among the three types of democratic government that were critically examined earlier, the semi-presidential model appears to be the most practical for Ethiopia.

For instance, France is known to be a unitary state with a strong semi-presidential form of government--- more precisely the premier-presidential type--- and thus can be a model for Ethiopia under a restructured federal system, with ethnicity deemphasized as a form of constitutional power sharing between the federal government and its regional governing units. In what ways then can the French hybrid model help Ethiopia achieve a functional democracy? While this will be the focus of discussion next, the narrative that is to follow is framed on the premise that the current parliamentary system of government in Ethiopia does not promote democracy nor has the potential to transition itself from a one-party rule to a true and strong multiparty competitive electoral system based on proportional representation. As such, the discussion presumes that the Ethiopian parliament is one requiring a complete make-up and that the one-party rule is in need of a radical transformation into a genuine, multi-party system.

The premier-presidential type of democratic regime that the French enjoy currently could have these major advantages for Ethiopia:

a. Mutual Dependence

The hybrid system, with a directly-elected head of state (president) and a head of government (prime minister) and his cabinet appointed by the president from among those nominated by the prime minister, mandates the prime minister and his cabinet to be directly accountable to the parliament. This requirement compels the president to seek the cooperation of the prime minister, and the prime minister the cooperation of the president in order to govern effectively and with mutual support for each other's political agenda. This system thus features in a way the kind of checks and balances that the U.S. presidential system provides for, and that by creating mutual dependence between the president and the prime minister and his cabinet and making the latter accountable to the majority party in the general assembly very likely fosters political stability and efficiency in government. On one hand, it discourages authoritarianism of any kind, and, on the other, it engenders compromises, concessions and negotiated settlements on issues of national implication among the various political actors.

In an ethnically-fragmented society, such as Ethiopia's, the mutual dependence engendered under the hybrid system between the head of state and head of government would not only advance the interests of the many sub-cultural groups that make up the entire country, but also would conform to the theoretical principles of consociationalism, which was discussed earlier as one of the suggested reform measures. When this is applied particularly to Ethiopia, the needs and interests of sub-cultural groups could be represented by any of the parties competing for office, as the system is conducive to multi-party elections in an electoral system of proportional representation in which each party receives legislative seats based on the proportion of its winnings in a national election. The hybrid system thus allows both the head of the government and the head of state to act as "dual executive" or a "twin-headed executive," as some prefer to say, and engage in selecting the cabinet ministers who run the government. This also offers opportunities for members of the parliament, and, by extension the sub-cultural groups they represent, to influence the make-up of the government itself. Moreover, the legislative body's ability to use the threat of the "no confidence" vote as leverage against the prime minister and his/her cabinet often impels the spirit of accommodation and compromises between the government and the parliament.

More importantly, in a hypothetical case scenario, let us say a candidate was nominated by a party that is exclusively ethnic-based in Ethiopia to run as president and won a national election. However, no party won a majority in the parliament, and a coalition of parties eventually agreed to make up one. Given this reality, the president then could possibly nominate a prime minister acceptable to the majority party coalition, and he or she could come from a party that is non-ethnic-based, or a party that is organized with no attachment to ethnic identity. What this would do prospectively is forcing the president to nominate a prime minister of national stature with whom he could work effectively and thereby increase the likelihood of shared governance in the "cohabitation" mode of the premier-president type regime that was once observed during the Mitterrand-Chirac reign in France. In essence, what this also does is allowing minor parties to have some influence in the selection of the head of the government in ways that deter the "tyranny of the majority." Above all, the advantage of having a system that is based on mutual dependence between the head of state and the government headed by a prime minister, who is also accountable to parliament, cannot be underscored enough when considering the multitude of issues that have to be resolved through the legislative process and the societal fragmentation that has to be overcome to govern optimally. This is even more enviable for a country of more than 80 ethnic groups that Ethiopia is today.

b. A Two-Ballot Electoral System

Under semi-presidentialism, both the president and members of the legislature are elected through a two-ballot system. Unlike the U.S. electoral system, where the president and the members of the legislative body are elected at the same time (all members of the House, and 1/3 of the Senate), the French constitution requires two separate electoral systems for the president and the legislature, respectively, while affording the president a national acclamation of winning a direct popular vote and strengthening presidential legitimacy at the same time; the 1962 constitutional change made the president of France to be elected by a direct, nation-wide popular vote.

In the same vein, having a two-ballot electoral system in Ethiopia in which the president is elected by direct popular vote separately from the members of the parliament provides for the election of a national political figure in which politics transcends ethnic and regional identities and where an ethnic oligarchy of the same kind that is currently found in Ethiopia would be avertable.

c. Prevention of Authoritarianism

Having a fixed-term for the president and members of the legislature has great advantage especially in a country like Ethiopia, which has had a long history of authoritarian rule and a deep ethnic segmentation. In France, the direct elections of the president to a term of 5 years and the same term for members of the legislature, who are elected through a system of proportional representation, both are intended to prevent any form of tyranny that could develop over time if the term of office was not set. A popularly-elected, fixed-term president accountable to the entire population would not only demonstrate a commitment to a genuine democracy but also a constitutional safety net that would prevent the emergence of a cult-like political figure, who may become prone to authoritarian tendencies. So, as the head of state is accountable to the national electorate and subject to a fixed term of office, the same is true with the members of the legislature who are accountable to their respective constituency and subject to a fixed-term, as well. Likewise, Ethiopia would be served well with a constitutionally fixed-term president and the same for members of parliament so as to preclude a resurgence of authoritarianism once again.

d. Strong Multi-party Competition

Arguably, the most identifiable trait of the semi-presidential democratic system lies in its ability to generate a multi-party competition, while fueling the forging of alliances among parties, when and if the need for a coalition government obligates the merger of two or more such parties. This normally occurs when no one party has a majority in parliament to form a government singlehandedly. The forging of party alliances becomes even more crucial in a country where there are dozens of parties and where a single party may not be able to form a government but only in partnership with other parties. Such a case would be very likely to happen in Ethiopia under a true semi-presidential democracy, as multiple parties of both ethnic- and non-ethnic types plausibly vie for electoral competition. At the same time, the spirit of consociationalism would prevail in Ethiopia, and the stability that could be gained from accommodative political discourse among elite-led parties, which consociationalism calls for in both theory and practice, would make this practice transformative as well as acquiescent to a functional democracy.

e. Symbol of National Unity

The semi-presidential model of democracy, as in France, provides the head of state with the symbolism of a national figure, personifying both the unity of the people and the stability of the kind of democracy that the country has come to embrace in the post-French Fifth Republic era. The image of the French president in the international arena is also one of high prestige for the French people, making him a unifying national figure, and viewed by many as the protector of French sovereignty as well as the international spokesperson for his country. This impression, in turn, translates for the French electorate into a sustainable support for and confidence in government and politics in France.

Similarly, Ethiopia could nurture such a national political figure starting with the constitutional reforms and having a head of state electable by direct popular vote for a fixed term, coupled with a cabinet headed by a prime minister who reports to the parliament and shares executive powers with the president. The advantage of having a nationally elected president under a separate electoral system from that of the members of the legislature would enable the divided Ethiopian people as a whole to become an “official elector” of a president based on national appeal rather than ethnic and/or regional consideration.

Having a “national president” would also mean that the unity of the country, irrespective of ethnic, religious, ideological, racial, and linguistic differences, would be elevated and disharmony among sub-cultural units would have the potential of lessening over time rather than escalating. Ultimately, peace and stability would be the desired outcome for a county that has undergone unprecedented turmoil for a quarter of a century under the current minority regime.

Conclusion

The overriding goal of this study was to understand expansively the structural reform that the Ethiopian political system needed against the backdrop of persistent ethnic conflicts and government repressions that have threatened the country’s long-term stability. Addressing the salient issues that inhibit good governance in Ethiopia, the study postulated that the Horn of Africa country has been more or less a one-party authoritarian state for the last 25 years and that the regime uses the existing constitution as a camouflage for democracy as well as the legal basis for its ethnic-based policies, which have become the source of disharmony for the more than 80 ethnic groups that make-up the country. The fact that Ethiopia has been beset frequently by both ethnic-based clashes and regime brutalities, which have literally become the mainstay of Ethiopian political experience since the current regime’s armed-seizure of state power in 1991, is no longer in dispute.

Given this reality, a political reform aimed at transforming the Horn of Africa state into a viable democracy is essential so that the myriad of issues facing the country today can be tackled through a democratic process. To that end, the study attempted to critically examine the three broadly-accepted democratic systems of government, including presidentialism, parliamentarianism, and semi-presidentialism, with the ultimate goal of finding the one among them that has the potential of furthering the culture of good governance in Ethiopia. Corollary to this endeavor was identifying some specific areas of reform that are essential to transform the country into a viable democratic state.

In order to uncover the best ways to reform the political system and call to mind a government model that foremost serves the national interest of Ethiopia, the paper identified three areas in which the prospective reform can be targeted, namely, revising the current constitution; incorporating consociational democratic principles into the structuring of the government; and, more importantly, adopting the semi-presidential system of government to transform the country into a real constitutional democracy. France’s model of semi-presidentialism, especially the premier-presidentialism brand, appears to be the best model for Ethiopia.

The premier-presidential type of government requires the prime minister be exclusively accountable to the parliament in order to guarantee his/her independence from any pressure that the president might exert on his/her government (premier and the cabinet), as well as to ensure consistency with the governing structure of “dual executive,” for which the French premier-presidential model is known. Furthermore, the advantage of having this type of semi-presidential democracy is that only the legislative branch of government can formally and constitutionally force the resignation of the government; and when this is paired with a strong multi-party system and a president who is constitutionally barred from pressuring the prime minister to resign even during the period of cohabitation, the hybrid model is likely to spur a collaborative and accommodative political environment in which issues are resolved through negotiations, concessions and compromises among political elites representing their respective constituency. For this reason, it is better suited for the sustainment of democratic stability in a country where democracy has not yet taken roots. So, both realistically and prospectively, Ethiopia would be better off with the semi-presidential type of government, should it embark on a transition to a genuine democratic society, than with the other democratic models examined earlier in the paper.

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