

Forum For Social Studies

Report on the Media in the 2000 Elections in Ethiopia



**Prepared by:
Berhanu Nega
and
Meleskachew Ameha**

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Acronyms

1	AAPO	All Amhara Peoples Organization
2	ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
3	CETU	Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions
4	COADF	The Coalition of Alternative Democratic Forces
5	EDP	Ethiopian Democratic Party
6	EDUP	Ethiopian Democratic Union Party
7	EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front
8	EEA	Ethiopian Economic Association
9	ETV	Ethiopian Television
10	EWLA	Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association
11	IAG	Inter African Groups
12	GPM	Gambela Peoples Movement
13	HPR	House of Peoples Representatives
14	NEB	National Electoral Board
15	NGO	Non Governmental Organization
16	NDU	National Democratic Union
17	ONC	Oromo National Congress
18	OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organization
19	OULF	Oromo Unity Liberation Front
20	SNNDM	Southern Nations Nationalities Democratic Movement
21	TPLF	Tigray Peoples Liberation Front
22	WIC	Walta Information Center

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Part I: Democracy the Media and Elections

1.1 Introduction

Ethiopia held its parliamentary elections under the current constitution in May 2000 amid conflicting opinions about the way the election was conducted. The government and its supporters generally hold the opinion that it was a free and fair election. The supposedly independent National Election Board of Ethiopia certified the election free and fair in most places and ordered a re-election in some localities where it deemed the process was too much tampered with. On the other hand, opposition groups bitterly complained about the unfairness of the election process and the undue advantage the ruling coalition was getting by illegally using government resources and institutions, including local administrative units and law enforcement agencies, for the sole purpose of pushing the coalition's candidates to win. The accusations range from problems in the electoral law and procedures to illegally using government vehicles and other resources for campaign purposes to down right intimidation of opposition candidates and voters. The actions complained of took place before and during the campaign process, at polling stations and at the time of vote count. The acrimony has reached such a point that opposition candidates threatened to withdraw from participating in the election during the campaign and declared the election un-free and unfair following the announcement of the results by the electoral board.¹ The truth, as is frequently the case in such debates, may probably be somewhere in the middle. What is needed to determine the truth is an issue-by- issue independent analysis of the electoral process. This report contributes towards this effort by looking at the media during the 2000 elections.

¹ Press conference given by the opposition coalition right after the election. See also the report by the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, which concluded, based on its own election monitoring activities, that the election was neither free nor fair. Ethiopian Human Rights Council, The May 2000 General Election: A Report, 2000.

One of the main areas of contention at the time of the campaign was media use. Every body agrees that the electronic media in developing countries such as Ethiopia, where the population is predominantly illiterate, is extremely crucial in influencing the electoral process. Fair allocation of airtime to contending parties and candidates to enable them to pass their message to voters significantly adds to the credibility of the election. Accordingly, the Ethiopian constitution in article 30(5) requires state financed media to entertain diversity in the expression of opinion. The electoral law in Article 50 (1-2) has clearly stipulated that the responsible authorities provide equal and free access to the media for the contending political groups during elections. The electoral board also promised to work with the government media (radio and television) to prepare the mechanisms for fair allocation of airtime. On the other hand opposition groups complain that the government is using its monopoly over the electronic media to its own advantage.

This report summarizes the findings of the "Media Monitoring Project in the 2000 elections." The project was designed to monitor the electronic media from the beginning of the electoral campaign to the end to determine the degree to which access to publicly owned airtime was fairly distributed to all political groups and candidates running for office. Although the findings of this report by itself are not sufficient to reach a definitive conclusion about the fairness of the election and its credibility in general, we hope it will shed some light about the role of the media during the election, the degree to which the media has influenced the election and whether or not contending political groups had equitable access to the media. All this, it is hoped, will provide some lessons towards the use of the media in future elections.

The report has two parts. The first part will present a brief discussion about the need for democratization in a country such as Ethiopia and the role of the media in the democratization process. The first part will also present a discussion of the overall political and electoral process in the country in order to evaluate the role of the media in the context in which it is operating.

Part two presents the results of the media monitoring done during the election. The first section of part two will present a summary of the weekly assessment of the media done during the campaign. The second section will provide an overall analysis of the role of the media during the elections.

1.2 What recommends democracy?

World history is full of examples of various forms of governmental organizations and forms of legitimacy both in different countries at the same period and within the same country over a period of time. Until the complete collapse of the Soviet system in the late 80s, and partly due to the prominence of geo-political thinking in international politics, democracy was not considered as an important variable in inter-country relationships. Nor was it a desirable instrument in the development process. Multilateral financial institutions that have dominated official development policy debates in the past few decades have simply ignored the issue of democratization as if it had nothing to do with the economic development of developing countries. Some have even argued that authoritarian regimes were better placed to engender rapid economic growth and development than democratic regimes (the so called Lee thesis).

A number of factors have coalesced to bring about a change in the attitude of development thinkers and practitioners regarding the value of democracy in development. First, the end of the cold war, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, brought to focus the need for democratization and the protection of human rights as an important item in international relations in general and the relationship between donor countries and developing countries in particular. Equally importantly, the dismal performance of many developing countries, particularly in Africa, even after implementing

various economic liberalization measures, has forced many development thinkers to look at non-economic variables such as good governance and accountability as important determinants of economic growth. Prominent economists such as Amartya Sen² have argued that democracy is not only a constitutive part of development but also an important instrument to achieve development. Joseph Stiglitz, until recently the chief economist for the World Bank, has vehemently argued the need for democratization and good governance as central requirements for economic growth and development in developing countries.³ There are also a number of empirical studies that have showed the strong correlation between democratization, political stability and economic growth.⁴ It is no more a contestable issue, therefore, that the existence of an accountable government with strong democratic institutions is desirable both as a requirement to protect people's basic rights and freedoms but also as an indispensable instrument for achieving economic progress.

1.3 Requirements for a Genuine Democracy

If the argument for democratization is plausible, the important question that follows is to clearly identify the requirements for achieving true democratization. It is generally agreed that a functioning democracy, at a minimum, requires a representative government elected by the public, a clear separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of government, an independent judiciary, a constitutionally guaranteed

² See, Amartya Sen, "Development as Freedom" Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.

³ See Joseph Stiglitz, "More Instruments and Broader Goals: Moving Towards the Post-Washington Consensus", The 1998 WIDER Annual Lecture, Helsinki, 1998.

⁴ Collier, Paul, Ibrahim Elbadawi, and Nicholas Sambanis "Why are There So Many Civil Wars in Africa? Prevention of Future Conflicts and Promotion of Inter-Group Cooperation." Paper Prepared for the Ad-hoc Experts Group Meeting on the Economics of civil Conflicts in Africa, UNECA, Addis Ababa 7-8 April, 2000.

and practically implemented respect for human and democratic rights of citizens and a free and vibrant press. The existence of these institutions and freedoms on paper, of course, does not guarantee the presence of a genuinely democratic system. The litmus test for the presence of a democratic system is the implementation in practice of these principles or at least a positive movement in that direction. But, as is seen in many developing countries and other transitional societies, most of the problems of democratization emanate from the failure to implement these otherwise generally accepted principles even when they are written in the law books of these countries.

There are generally two reasons that contribute to the failure to implement these fundamental principles. The first is related to capacity constraints. Developing countries that had little experience in democratic governance and a very weak economic base usually face serious capacity constraints (material, human resource, cultural...etc.) to satisfy public expectations in their attempt to establish democracy and build strong democratic institutions. Until these institutions are well established, all kinds of problems are bound to appear that threaten the consolidation of a democratic system. These threats are there even when there is willingness on the part of governments to abide by democratic principles of governance. The second, and more difficult to address, is government's (whether central or local) unwillingness to be ruled by these principles in practice while giving lip service to the lofty ideals of democracy. The instinctive reaction of many governments in transitional societies when faced with potential threats to state power is to take desperate measures that clearly circumvent the democratic process in order to maintain state power. The weakness of democratic institutions and the absence of a strong constituency in civil society to fight for these principles including the serious weakness or even absence of an independent and vibrant media, enables such governments to (at least temporarily) get away with their undemocratic measures further weakening society's confidence in the viability of a democratic political system.

1.4 Elections and Democracy

The legitimacy of governments in democratic societies emanates from the mandate they receive from the public. Such mandate is given through the process of periodic elections whereby free individuals make free choices from among competing political parties or individual candidates in a fair electoral process. For the government to be legitimate and thus effectively govern, it is crucial that the public believe this process to be free and fair. In the absence of such a legitimizing process, political stability and with it economic development is unthinkable.

For an electoral process to be free, voters should be in a position to cast their vote without any fear or intimidation. Competing political parties or individual candidates should be able to campaign freely to reach voters, and a clear and fair electoral process should be established that is equally applicable to all political contenders backed by a strong and independent judiciary to arbitrate possible conflicts that arise in the electoral process. Fairness in the electoral process also implies equal access to the electorate by contending political groups. That is what makes the role of the media crucial in democratic societies. In this age of information, most of the electorate gets its information about candidates from the media. Especially in societies where a large segment of the population is illiterate, fair and equitable reporting on candidates and the education of the public on basic principles of democracy and a clear presentation of the electoral process in the electronic media is indispensable for strengthening the democratic process in general and legitimizing its outcome in particular. It is in line with this overall thinking that we evaluate the role of the electronic media in the 2000 elections in Ethiopia.

2. The Electoral Process and the Media in Ethiopia

A fair discussion and evaluation of the role of the media in the 2000 elections in Ethiopia is not an easy task. In order to understand the role of the media, it is important to first understand the context in which the media covers the electoral process. This requires an understanding of the electoral process itself and the nature of the media industry in the country.

2.1 The Electoral Process in Ethiopia

According to the laws that govern elections in the country, there are no national candidates running for office. All elections are conducted at the Woreda level (the lowest administrative level roughly incorporating 100,000 people) both for the national parliament and the local and regional councils. The national parliament (the House of Peoples Representatives) then elects the president and the prime minister to head the executive branch of government. The regional councils follow the same process to elect the heads of the regional administrations. Contending parties do not and legally cannot field candidates for high offices at both regional and national levels. Therefore, so far as the electorate is concerned, the individuals who would effectively govern the country will not be known until after the elections are held and the new parliament is convened. One can, however, speculate that the leader of the party winning the largest seat in parliament will be the most likely choice for the position of the prime minister. This process has an important implication in the media's coverage of the elections, as we will see later.

Another related feature of the electoral process in Ethiopia is the sheer number of candidates and political parties contending for seats for the national and regional councils at the same time. As can be seen from table 1 below, if we only look at the elections for the national parliament,⁵ for the 547 parliamentary seats contested, there were

⁵ Since there is no significant regional media and not much coverage for the regional elections, we are concentrating on the electoral process for the national parliament for this report.

1,156 candidates competing of which 412 were individual candidates while the remaining 744 candidates represent 50 national and regional political parties. Given the virtual absence of regional media and the limited amount of operational airtime that the national media has at its disposal, it is not difficult to see the logistical problems associated with any attempt to provide adequate air-time for all the contending candidates. On the other hand, the absence of candidates running for national office makes it difficult to provide a focused coverage to generate interest and excitement on the elections at the national level.

Table I: Profile of the 2000 elections

Number of Candidates	1,156
Number of Parliamentary Seats	547
Number of Participating Political Parties	50
Number of Independent Candidates	412
Number of Uncontested Seats	263

Source: Compiled from National Electoral Board publications.

Another noted feature of the 2000 elections (although significantly better than the previous elections where there was no contest as such) is the large number of uncontested seats, which makes the election rather predictable and unexciting.⁶ Of the 547 open seats for the national parliament, the ruling coalition with out any opposition from contending parties or independent candidates won 263 seats or about 48.1% of the total. As can be seen from table 2 below, most of the real

⁶ These are seats where only one candidate (almost always from the ruling party) ran unopposed.

competition took place in urban areas and regions where the domination of the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), is not complete.⁷ All the seats in Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, Harar, Somali and Gambella regions were contested. On the other hand, almost 90% of the seats in Tigray, 86% of the seats in Afar, 75% of the seats in Amhara, 44% of the seats in the South, 34% and 33% of the seats in Oromia and Benishangul/Gumuz, respectively, were uncontested.

Table 2: Profile of the 2000 elections by region

Region	Number of seats contested	Number of seats, uncontested	Total number of registered candidates	% of uncontested seats
Addis Ababa	23	0	160	--
Harar	2	0	7	--
Dire Dawa	2	0	21	--
Gambella	3	0	6	--
SNNPR	123	54	217	43.9
Benishangul/Gumuz	9	3	18	33.3
Somali	23	0	74	--
Oromia	178	61	405	34.2
Amhara	138	104	196	75.3
Afar	8	7	10	87.5
Tigray	38	34	42	89.4
Total	547	263	1156	48.1

Source: Compiled from National Electoral Board publications.

⁷ The Ethiopian peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is composed of four regional parties: The TPLF of Tigray, OPDO of Oromia, ANDM of Amhara, SNNDM of the southern Region. There are also non member parties affiliated with the EPRDF in all the regions of the country.

2.2 The Media in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has one of the least developed media institutions in the world. Until the overthrow of the Derge regime in 1991, the government solely owned all media outlets, whether print or broadcast. The media was presumed to serve the interest of the "socialist state" without any pretensions of balance or entertaining competing views about matters of public concern.

The new government, with its formal commitment to democratization enacted a press law soon after it took power (Proclamation No.34, 1992), and the print media was deregulated following this proclamation in 1992. The immediate effect of this deregulation was the proliferation of private tabloid weekly papers in various languages and an assortment of monthly magazines mainly in the dominant Amharic language, providing mostly alternative news, news analysis, political commentaries and entertainment. Although harassed here and there by the government, and some being closed for financial reasons, a multiplicity of newspapers and magazines, most of which were vehemently critical of government policies, are still operational in the country. The main draw back of these news papers, at least as far as their reach of the electorate is concerned, is that almost all of them are located in the capital with little circulation in the regions. Because of the relatively small number of literate citizens, the circulation even in the capital (with over 2.6 million residents) is minimal, the largest circulation not exceeding 8000 per week.

The press law of 1992 left the broadcast aspect of press freedom for later and a broadcast law allowing the operation of private radio and television was not promulgated until June 1999.⁸ Although the proclamation made the law effective from the time of its publication in *Negarit Gazeta* in 1999, because of the delay in the formation of the broadcast agency that regulates and issues licenses to private operators, no private broadcasting establishment exists up to now. So,

⁸ See Proclamation No. 178/1999, A proclamation to Provide for the Systematic Management of Broadcasting Service., *Negarit Gazetta*, 5th Year, No. 62, Addis Ababa -29th June, 1999

the broadcast media, at the time of the elections, consisted of government owned radio and television transmitting from Addis Ababa for all the country (using Amharic, Oromifa and Tigrigna languages mostly) and a couple of local radio stations also owned by the government. The only exception to this general rule is Radio Fana and Dimtse Woyane, both radio stations owned and operated by the ruling coalition EPRDF, the later operating in Tigrigna language in Tigray region and owned and operated by the regional party TPLF.

This obviously gave the ruling party a tremendous propaganda and public relations advantage over its opponents. In the case of the government owned media, even if we assume the government is committed to play the game fairly and allow the opposition access to the electronic media as the electoral law stipulates, EPRDF candidates, who are also government officials, have a much higher chance in making it to the media as they make the news because of their governmental responsibilities. Because, the party's policies are also government policies, the party's positions on various issues are bound to get a lot of coverage in the government media. On the other hand, opposition candidates can only use the allotted time given by the electoral board. The other advantage that the ruling party has in relation to access to the media is that it is the only one that owns its own electronic media and there is nothing in the then existing media law that either prohibits it from using this medium for electoral purposes or requires it to share it with opposition candidates. We are indicating this in this report to show the inbuilt advantage that the incumbent party will have under the existing arrangement even without considering any deliberate abuse on the part of the government to give undue advantage to its own candidates in the use of publicly owned media.

With this broad background, we now turn to the specific result of the media monitoring project in the 2000 elections.

Part II. Media Monitoring Results

1.1 Monitoring Methodology

Given the available time and resources, the first issue to decide was which electronic media to monitor. In this context, it was decided that the few regional radio stations could not be monitored simply because the resources were not available to send monitors to these regions. Accordingly, it was decided that only the stations broadcasting from the capital can be monitored. As suggested earlier, two radio stations (Radio Ethiopia and Radio Fana) and one television station (Ethiopian Television or ETV) were chosen for the purpose. To cover these three media outlets, 'x monitors were assigned. Among these, one was assigned to monitor the Amharic programs and news casts of Ethiopian Television. The remaining five monitors were assigned to do the monitoring on Radio Ethiopia and Radio Fana.

As it was clearly stated on the project proposal the two Radio stations transmit programs in more than two languages. The program coordinators, deemed it necessary that programs and newscasts in Amharic, Oromifa, and Tigrigna be monitored. Thus two monitors were assigned to the task of monitoring transmissions in Oromigna and Tigrigna on Radio Ethiopia and Ethiopian Television. One person was assigned to monitor Amharic transmissions on Radio Fana while the remaining two persons were to monitor the news and program casts on Radio Ethiopia.

The monitoring was done by cassette recording the news and programs related to the election. The monitors reported their findings in a standard format given to them. These reports were analyzed and prepared for media consumption every two weeks.

The monitors and the management met every Monday to discuss problems and issues on monitoring and reporting. The monitoring started on March 19, 2000 and ended on May 8, 2000.

Table 3: The available broadcast time in the three stations and the airtime allotted to the election campaigns.

	Broadcast time (hrs/week)	Campaign air time (Hrs/week)	Campaign airtime (%)
Radio Ethiopia	84:00	21:10	25%
Radio Fana	30:00	9:58	30%
ETV	59:00	7:17	11.8%

As can be seen from the above table, the total amount of airtime in the three stations is very small in comparison with other countries and because of all other programs that have to be accommodated (entertainment, international news...etc.) the amount of time that can be allotted to purely political programs is rather limited even during elections. Accordingly, about 28 hours out of a total of 173 hours of programming or roughly 16% of all the airtime was used for election related purposes.

The allotted time for election campaigns was distributed to the various candidates according to rules established by the electoral board using only the two government media institutions. The established rule broadly stipulates that political parties will have 15 minutes airtime to introduce their platforms to the public while independent candidates will have only five minutes. Obviously, given the sheer number of the competing candidates, all the candidates cannot be accommodated within the limited airtime available to the two media institutions. Accordingly, based on criteria that we are not fully certain about (mostly because most of the party candidates opted not to use the time) only 224 of the 412 independent candidates (about 55%) running for the national parliament used either one of the media while only 41 out of the 744 party candidates (about 5%) used their officially allotted time.

Table 4: Parties and Independent candidates who presented their platforms

Media	Ind. Candidate	Party candidate
Radio Ethiopia	119	27
ETV	105	14

The above media usage reflects the amount of officially allotted time established by the electoral board for all the candidates in order to provide equal access to the media. These, of course, are not the only times the media covered the elections. Election coverage by the electronic media also includes news items or special programs (usually related to coverage of public debates held by contending parties and organized by various civic institutions). The amount of this coverage both in terms of the quantity of time and the fairness of its coverage is very difficult to summarize. In stead, for the purpose of this report, we have opted for an as is reporting of the weekly media coverage as was taped by the monitors on a daily basis on each of the media institutions. Such a presentation, as the reader can surely detect, can be rather boring and tedious. However, it has also the distinct advantage of giving the reader a sense of the kind of reporting that was taking place in the thick of the campaign and judge the media's role not only in terms of time allocation to candidates but also in terms of the degree of excitement it generated about the election in general.

1.2 The Election Campaign on Ethiopia's Electronic Media

To provide a good picture of how the media was used during the election process especially for those who did not have a chance to follow the process while it was taking place, we have decided to provide a more or less blow by blow account of the media coverage of the elections on a weekly basis first and then put the whole period together to provide a general assessment. As was said earlier, the monitoring was conducted for five weeks beginning Monday March 19, till the end of the election. This period more or less covers the effective campaign period.

With this purpose in mind we now proceed to look at what has taken place in terms of news and other relevant program coverage of Ethiopian radio and Ethiopian television in their Amharic, Afan Oromo, and Tigrigna as well as Radio Fana's Amharic program from Megabit 10 -15/92 (March 19- 24/2000).

Week 1: Megabit 10-151992 E.C (March 19-242000)

Radio Ethiopia

In the aforementioned dates, Radio Ethiopia in its Amharic program presented election- related news on two days only. Radio Ethiopia transmits in the Amharic language for six hours per day. On II/8/92 (March 20/ 2000) on its morning news, Radio Ethiopia announced that in Baneshangul and Gambela regions, four women running as party and independent candidates promised that if elected they would bring about economic and social development. The party or political affiliation of these candidates was not identified in the report.

On 15/7/92 (24/03/2000), it announced that an individual who stole campaign equipment was caught. On the same day, the Electoral Board had announced the candidates for the upcoming election. Excluding the Somali region, there were 3231 candidates. Out of the independent candidates, 368 were running for seats in the House of Peoples Representatives while the rest were running for seats in the regional councils. Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) took the lead in the number of women candidates with 89 candidates while the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) came in second with 59 women candidates. Both OPDO and ANDM are members of the ruling party EPRDF.

In the above-mentioned dates, no news or program relating to the election was covered in Ethiopian Radio's Oromiffa language programs. In its Tigrigna language program it was noted that four opposition parties had come up with economic agendas that were believed to be a better development alternative for the country. There was no other election related news item or program. It was interesting

to note that the bridge music between shows in the Tigrigna programs was Tigray Peoples Liberation Front's (TPLF) 'patriotic hymn' that the front used during its guerrilla days.

Radio Fana

Radio Fana had election-related news on all the days cited above along with additional programs dedicated to the election. Out of the news items presented was that in the southern Tigrai region women and religious leaders asserted that they were prepared to elect candidates that would uphold women's rights and religious freedom.

On 13/7/92 (22/3/2000) Radio Fana covered the debate held in Bahir Dar and organized by the Inter Africa Group (IAG) between the All Amhara Peoples Organization (AAPO), the Ethiopian Democratic Union Party (EDUP), and ANDM. The former two are opposition organizations running candidates in the region while the later is the ruling party in the region and a member of the EPRDF coalition, the ruling party.

On 14/7/92 (23/3/2000), Radio Fana transmitted that some independent candidates promised to complete the development projects already underway. The candidates' identity was not revealed in detail.

On 15/7/92 (24/3/2000), Radio Fana revealed that political parties have begun receiving the allotted campaign funds from the National Electoral Board. Political parties can obtain Birr 5000 per candidate running for the House of Representatives and Birr 2500 per Regional Council. It was emphasized that EPRDF, the ruling party, was not participating in this disbursement voluntarily.

Ethiopian Television (ETV)

E TV reported election related material in the above-mentioned dates every night. Additionally it covered the debate held in Bahir Dar between the three competing parties mentioned above, in a program entitled "whom shall we choose". Prior to the beginning of the debate,

a short cinematic portrayal of the previous (Derge) Ethiopian government was shown. The gist of this portrayal was that true democracy was practiced since EPRDF came into power.

It was also announced that ETV would allocate 5 minutes of free airtime to each independent candidate and 15 minutes of free airtime for each party candidate starting from March 21, 2000. On the same day, it was announced that the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association was giving four days training seminar for candidates.

Looking at the reports for the week, it would be difficult to conclude that sufficient and precise news relating to the election was transmitted in the two media sectors in the aforementioned dates. It is evident that some stations have by passed some of the election-related news in silence. It is expressed that as the election draws nearer the coverage will improve.

Week 2. 16/7/92 -22/7/92 (March 2Sth -March 31st .2000)

Radio Ethiopia

Three days in the week, the Amharic Service did not have news relating to the elections. In the rest of the days during this week there was more than one item of news relating to the election. The service also presented the debate that took place in Bahir Dar among the contesting parties- (AAPO), EDUP) and (ANDM), the later a member of the ruling coalition EPRDF. The debate was transmitted on a daily radio program called "Woktawi Report" in four series. On 21/92 (March 30, 2000) the National Election Board announced that 20,253,417 voters have registered for the upcoming election. Radio Ethiopia also made an announcement to the effect that it would provide candidates with airtime to help them present their platforms to the public.

The Tigrigna service the debate held in Mekele between TPLF and EDUP. Similar announcements were also made in Tigrigna programs during this week. The program in Afan Oromo focused on the 10th anniversary of OPDO with indirect hints to the upcoming elections.

Radio Fana

With the exception of two days, Radio Fana had election related items during the week. In one of its reports the radio stated that individuals from Borena have declared that they were ready to elect candidates who are willing to uphold the constitution. It also announced that the public from various Oromia zones have donated up to 450 thousand birr for OPDO indicating that the party has a strong support among the Oromo people. This announcement was made on more than one program.

Ethiopian Television (ETV)

ETV reported some news stories related to the upcoming elections. On 16/7 /92 (25/3/2000) in its program especially tailored for the election period "Whom shall we choose?" -presented a report on OPDO's 10th year anniversary. On this report, the ruling party gave not only its opinions about the upcoming elections, but also used the program as a campaign forum for the party. On the following two nights it presented the debate that was held in Bahir Dar among three parties running for the election AAPO, ANDM and EDUP.

It also reported that EDUP and TPLF had debates in Mekele on 18/7 /92 (27/3/2000). E TV reported that participants of a conference termed "Peace, Democracy and Development" warned some opposition elements to desist from deterring the payment of loans taken for agricultural inputs. On 30/3/2000 E TV announced that 20,253,417 voters have registered for the upcoming elections. On the same date it presented the debate held in Mekele between TPLF and EDUP. The two parties presented their policies on education and health.

Radio Ethiopia

Amharic

During the week the Amharic service of Radio Ethiopia had a wide coverage on the election. The daily program 'Wektawi report' continued to present the debates held in Mekele between TPLF and EDUP and in Nazareth between OPDO, Oromo National Congress and the Oromo Unity Liberation Front (OULF). There was also an extensive coverage of the Hadia zone "Peace, Democracy and Development Conference" held by the local affiliate of the ruling party. The report finally read a statement as part of the resolution of the conference accusing the opposition parties operating in the region of instigating people not to pay taxes and loans they owed to the local government. The statement strongly advised the opposition to restrain from such "unlawful" actions. The news coverage of the whole of this week had election related reports. The topic of election was also raised in other programs like women's forum and other entertainment programs.

It is also during this week that the media campaign of candidates officially started. As intimated earlier, each independent candidate was given five minutes to present his/her case to the electorate while party based candidates were given fifteen minutes. Although all candidates are running locally within their Woredas, the media campaign is national because there are no local stations as such in the country. What this means is that voters are obliged to watch the campaign presentations of all the candidates running for all the localities. This raises a serious issue not only about the effectiveness of these one shot 5- 15 minutes presentations in transmitting the message of the candidate but also the ability of voters to retain the message delivered by candidates two to three weeks before polling. In any case, during the course of this week some 46 candidates introduced themselves in the allotted free airtime.

Oromiffa

Except on the 28th the whole of this week, election activities have been covered in news programs. Besides, the media campaign also started in Oromiffa service and about 5 candidates were introduced. One of the news items reported during this week indicated that in Woreda 21, all the candidates were EPRDF members. As was discussed earlier, the non-existence of alternative candidates to the ruling party in many Woredas throughout the country was one of the unfortunate features of the 2000 elections. The debate held in Nazareth between OPDO, the Oromo National Congress (ONC) and the Oromo Unity Liberation Front (OULF) was also reported in detail as a news item in the Oromiffa program instead of showing the debate itself because the debate was in Amharic although the campaign was taking place in Oromia. The weekly women's program also discussed the role of women in elections to encourage more women participation in the electoral process.

Tigrigna

There was no election coverage in the News program on this service from 23/7/92 - 1/8/92. On other programs the debate in Mekele between TPLF and EDUP was covered. There were also items such as the statement by an election expert of the electoral board on the adequacy of civic education given in the media, a report on the need to pay attention to development policy issued by the Ethiopian Economic Association in relation to the debates it organized on "Economic Policy in the 2000 elections" and a statement by Ato Abate Kisho, the president of the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region, (SNNPR) asking candidates to observe rules in campaigning and the like.

Radio Fana

On Radio Fana some news items were different from those on Radio Ethiopia and E TV. There was an extensive report on the public's attitude about the election in different parts of the country. It carried brief interviews of veterans in Central Tigray, residents of Western Tigray, residents of Bahir Dar, women in the Borena and Jimma zones of Oromia region all saying that they are ready to vote because they were given sufficient civic education. Other party activities, electoral board announcements, and debates were also aired.

ETV

Except on the 29th, ETV had election related bulletins in its news. In other programs, about 9 candidates campaigned and the program "whom shall we chose?" presented debates held in Mekele and Nazareth. Election related issues were also present in other programs like the youth program, "*Lewtatoch*" and the weekly world news review, "*Alem Endet Senebetch*."

In general for this week, there was more coverage on election issues than the previous week. Candidate's introduction forum on the media started this week using the allotted free airtime. Debates held in different parts of the country were also covered. Almost all of the media focus emphasized certain issues like the announcement made by the electoral board to register monitors and the warnings given to candidates not to bad mouth opposing candidates. The Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU) was mentioned twice this week on the topic of election. The first was announcing that it has prepared a platform for interested candidates to introduce themselves to the working class and three days latter declaring that the labor force has gotten sufficient information because of the forum organized by the confederation and is ready to vote. Through out the week, inhabitants of different parts of the country were reported to have said that they are sufficiently informed and have already made up their minds about whom to vote for.

Week 4: 2/8/92 -10/8/92 00-18/4/2000)

Radio Ethiopia

Amharic

This week, Radio Ethiopia reported in detail on matters related to the election. On 2/8/92 (10/4/2000) it reported on the opening speech of President Negaso Gidada to the forum that brought 27 political parties together for a discussion on the election. In his speech the president instructed, everyone to put in their best effort so that the upcoming election would be fair and democratic. In this platform, political parties were given 10 minutes if they were national and 5 minutes if they were regional. However, the ruling coalition, EPRDF, was given 40 minutes, which disappointed the opposition parties.

Candidates went on presenting their platforms to the public using the free airtime allotted to them by Radio Ethiopia. On 10/4/2000 not less than 16 independent candidates and one party presented their platforms. Though the allotted time for national parties was only 15 minutes EPRDF (the ruling party) took more time than allowed. On 12/4/2000 EPRDF gave a press release detailing its "Peace and Economic Development program for the next 5 years". This was not included in the normal airtime allocation. From 13-18/4/2001 additional 57 independent candidates had the opportunity to present their platforms to the public. Three political parties also presented their campaign platform during this week. Debates between various parties in various towns of the country were reported or presented in full during the dates mentioned above.

Oromiffa

During this fourth week of campaign, two days have passed without news items related to election in the Oromiffa language service. The remaining days have some news pertinent to the upcoming election. Five independent candidates had presented their platforms on the allotted free airtime. Debates between various parties running in Oromia regional state have been presented in a series of programs.

All major news, such as the panel discussion among the 27 political parties and the opening speech of the president, were also repeated in translation.

Tigrigna

The Tigrigna language service did not transmit any thing related to the election for six days in the dates mentioned above. It did present the debate between three contending political parties in Awassa on 13/4/2000. There was no candidate who used the allocated free airtime to present his/her platform to the public.

Radio Fana

Radio Fana, in addition to its news items related to the election on every transmission of the station, had special programs on the upcoming election. It appears that it had made an extra effort to cover a wider part of the country in connection with election activities. In one of its programs it presented an article from the weekly "Abiyotawi Democracy," the ruling coalition's organ. The article focused on EPRDF's activities when it first came to power. It stated that EPRDF had tried to resolve the differences between various political parties a week after it took power. .etc. The three days discussion held in the U.N Conference Center among the 27 political parties got a 15 minutes coverage on 13/4/2000.

E TV

18 candidates were able to make use of the free air-time, provided by E TV during these aforementioned dates. ETV had news items and programs related to the election through out the week. On 12/4/2000 the National Electoral Board announced that the temporarily discontinued voter registration in Hadia Zone had resumed and also that new voter registration in the Gurage Zone of Dalocha and Lanfaro has started. Panel discussions, debates among parties in various parts of the country were also presented in a series of programs.

Week 5: 11/8/92 -21/8/92 (19-29/4/2000) Radio Ethiopia Amharic

During the dates mentioned above, Radio Ethiopia Amharic Service had given a wide coverage on issues related to the election. There were also special programs focusing on debates held in various parts of the country among contesting parties. Civic and professional associations as well as other non-governmental organizations prepared different forums for the political organizations to help them present their platforms to the public. Their discussions and public debates were rebroadcast on Radio Ethiopia.

On 12 and 13/8/92 (20 and 21/4/2000) Prime Minister Meles Zenawi gave a press release regarding the drought, the nation's sovereignty and the five-year development program. On the same date, Radio Ethiopia announced the postponement of the voter registration in some localities of Hadia zone. On 21/4/20000 it was announced that Radio Ethiopia had helped thus far 19 national and regional parties and 170 individual candidates.

The other language services (Tigrigna and Oromiffa) presented similar announcements and programs within the limits of their airtime. The Tigrigna service presented debates among ONC, AAPO, the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP), the Coalition of Alternative Democratic Forces (COADF) and EPRDF, which were prepared by Walta Information Center. The news coverage related to election was minimal towards the end of this week.

ETV

The Ethiopian Television presented debates held at the UN Conference Center in a series of programs. It also presented the prime minister's Press conference in full- for an hour on 20/4/2000. On 26/4/2000 the head of the Addis Ababa City Administration used most of the airtime allotted for election issues for the press conference he gave which focused on EPRDF's past five years achievements in Addis Ababa.

Radio Fana

Radio Fana still gave a wide coverage on issues related to the election. It also presented the discussion forums organized by CETU among competing parties including EPRDF, EDP, NDU and GPM on 20/4/2000 and the debate held in Jimma between various political parties organized by the Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA). It reported on the various developmental activities undertaken by the Addis Ababa City administration during the previous five years and added that Ato Ali Abdo the chief administrator- comments that the public should actively participate in the election process and elect candidates it whole heartedly support for the coming five years. It also reported that all necessary election materials are being distributed in various part of the country.

Conclusion on the Weekly Monitoring

As can be discerned from the foregoing, most of the free airtime allotted for the election was used by independent candidates and only three parties used their free airtime to introduce their platforms as an organized party. However, as can be seen from the table below, government officials, who are also leaders of the ruling coalition, used a significant amount of air time by way of press conferences organized to explain the achievements of the national and regional governments right in the middle of the election campaign. Five top government officials used a total of 434 minutes of airtime (all of it during prime time) on radio and television in the last couple of weeks of the election giving tremendous campaign advantage to the

ruling coalition. This does not include special programs, which were prepared in connection with the anniversaries of EPRDF member organizations such as OPDO and ANDM which was also substantial. It is obvious, therefore, that the media use during the 2000 election campaign was far from equitable for all contending candidates and a lot needs to be done in the future to effectively use the media to contribute towards achieving a free and fair election and thus help the overall democratic process.

Table 5: Estimated Usage of Free Air Time b Parties and Government Officials

No	Organization	Radio (Minutes)	ETV (Minutes)
1	AAPO	15	15
2	EDP	15	15
3	EPRDF	17+40	17+40
4	Ato Meles Zenawi	60	60
5	Ato Ali Abdo	30	30
6	Ato Addisu Leggese	45	45
7	Ato Abate Kisho	42	42
8	Ato Kuma Demeksa	40	40

Calculated from data collected by the media monitoring project.

1.3 Concluding Remarks

The overall coverage of the media in the 2000 elections was replete with problems. It did not contribute, as much as it should, towards making the election campaign fair or generate wide interest in the election process. Some of the problems observed are unique to

Ethiopia in that they are associated with the way the media institution is organized and operated in the country and the very nature of the electoral process. As intimated earlier, the very local nature of the election, the sheer size of the candidates contending for office coupled with lack of focus that could sharply define the elections (such as specific candidates running for national office) makes this election extremely difficult to cover in an interesting way.

As for the media institutions, first of all, the electronic media is very weak both in terms of its coverage (total airtime) and the way it is operated. Most of the programming is rather unexciting and usually tedious. Lack of adequate training and professionalism of most of the journalists involved in the electronic media has negatively affected the institution from playing its potential role.

Lack of competition among the media (all serving more or less the same master) has also weakened the drive among journalists. The absence of any alternative media outlet and the infancy of advertising institutions geared towards political advertising, combined with the timing of the available free airtime to opposition candidates, have also led to an ineffective use of the available space. Other than sitting in front of the camera and reading their campaign platform, none of the candidates were able to use more effective ways of communicating to the public using the electronic media especially in their presentation of a political and economic program that is different from that of EPRDF, the ruling party.

Clearly, as stated in the introduction to this report, the government and the ruling party had an advantage over the opposition candidates (independents or organized) by the mere fact that they have a monopoly over the electronic media. As can be seen from the weekly

reports, government officials got significant amount of extra free airtime by way of reporting on government functions, giving press releases on achievements of regional governments or the central government in the previous five years. While the total monopoly of the government and the ruling party over the electronic media is unique to Ethiopia and has significant negative effect on the fairness of the election, the benefits that incumbents get by way of wide coverage on government activities is a problem shared by many electoral processes even in countries with wider experience in the democratic process and deeper appreciation of the role of the media in influencing elections. The negative effect of the government's monopoly over the electronic media both in terms of making the election fair and helping the democratic process in general cannot be overstated. The government's unwillingness to open up this sector even after 2 years since the promulgation of the law allowing the operation of private electronic media, raises suspicion about the government's commitment to genuine democratization of the political process.

One bright spot in this media coverage of the elections, which also provided some focus to the election, was the coverage of the debates held by leaders of political parties and organized by various civil society institutions. In these debates, political parties used the platforms to sharply define their differences from each other. Although some of the participants in the debates were not themselves running for office, they were able to broadly outline their respective party's positions on various issues of concern to the electorate. It is fair to say that these debates, and the wide coverage they received in all the media have done more good both in making the election relatively more exciting and in giving opposition candidates a fair amount of hearing by the public than all the time allotted to individual

and party candidates through the electoral board. Even here, it was the organizers of these debates that were instrumental in not only creating these platforms, but also in pushing and cajoling the media to cover them. Although there were many debates organized by various NGOs, professional and trade associations, the government media was very selective in choosing which debates to cover and ended up covering mainly the debates organized by one preferred NGO over the other programs.

Without a doubt, the fairness of the electoral process is very much related to the degree to which contending candidates have equitable access to the media. One conclusion that cannot be escaped from this monitoring exercise is that such equitable allocation and balanced coverage cannot be expected given the current structure of ownership of the electronic media. Without a much broader ownership structure that allows for the operation of private electronic media, neither the overall effectiveness of the media in generating interest in the electoral process, nor providing fair access to the media to all competing political groups thus contributing towards the overall fairness of the electoral process can be ascertained in the future.

Finally, despite all its problems, monitoring the media during an election process is a useful exercise to raise public awareness about the importance of the media in shaping elections. It is also important to make journalists conscious of the implications of the way they cover the elections. However, to make the most out of such an exercise, it is important to put out these reports on a timely basis while the campaign is taking place.

This requires resources and timely preparation. We hope that such a monitoring, when it takes place next time, will start with adequate preparation much before the campaign starts. □