

Citizens' Political Security in Ethiopia

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Abstract

This article seeks to examine the situation of human rights by emphasizing the civil and political rights of citizens, the state of freedom of association and assembly, political parties, and media freedom. The article has come up with four major findings. The first is the lack of commitment to human rights obligations on the part of the incumbent regimes in Ethiopia. This had been manifested by the failure of the state party to carry out its human rights responsibilities or obligations that are included in three different dimensions to 'respect', 'protect', and 'fulfill'. The second is political intolerance that the refutation of freedom of association, assembly, and press particularly for critical political dissidents and opposition groups is the norm in Ethiopia. The existing regime did not demonstrate the will to respect these rights. The third feature is the drift towards narrow political space. This trend was manifested by government repressive measures against organized groups and civil society organizations. The last finding is that the regime engaged in the obstruction of the activities of independent media. There had been a stringent press law and the phenomena of intimidation and detention of journalists are common practices.

Keywords: Political security; citizens; human rights; freedom of association and assembly; political parties and media freedom

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1. INTRODUCTION

The political security of individuals is linked with the removal of threats to human rights. It necessitates the creation of a responsive political system that respects citizens' human and democratic rights¹. Political security is also about preserving freedom of association, assembly, and press. The most useful indicator of the prevalence of political security of citizens in a country is the commitment of the government to guard against the infringement of constitutionally guaranteed freedoms and rights. It can be strengthened by expanding the political space rather than perpetuating political repression that discourages and punishes free expression and political activity². It can also be meaningful when the obstacles to utilize them are removed. At the general level, the human rights situation in a given country attests to the level of the political security of individuals and groups. Specifically, the absence of political repression *vis-à-vis* freedom of political association, assembly, and press are the guarantee to usher the political security of the individuals. The main objective of this article is to explain the political security of the citizens of Ethiopia. Organizationally, this article first presents briefly the theoretical framework of political Security as an aspect of human security. The second part briefly indicates the methodology of the article. The third part of the article analyzes the political security of individuals (human rights and political tolerance) as the subjects of this research. The fourth part identifies the silent features that explain the status of the political security of citizens. The last section provides the conclusion.

2. POLITICAL SECURITY AS AN ASPECT OF HUMAN SECURITY

The term 'political security of individual' underlines many of the freedoms enjoyed by democratic societies³. The UNDP Human Development Report of 1994 defines political security in a narrow scope as 'mainly observing the subcategories of human rights and the repression of citizens by military regimes'⁴. The UNDP definition⁵ of political security as one dimension of human security conceptualized, political security as 'the respect for human rights, protection from military dictatorships or abuse, protection from political or state repression, protection from the practice of torture, ill-treatment or disappearance, and protection from political detention and imprisonment'. This definition is based upon the 1993 survey data by Amnesty International then and remains to be the most widely cited. In this regard, Tadjbakhsh⁶ defines political security of the individual as protection against 'political threats, which include violation of civil rights and human rights, violence stemming from armed conflicts, as well as irresponsible behavior on the part of public officials, a corrupt civil service, institutions characterized by instability, a deficient judicial system, lack of law enforcement, etc.'

Paris⁷ also defines political security as the 'enjoyment of civil and political rights, and freedom from political oppression'. According to Schmeidl⁸ political security 'however, does not just include a sense of physical safety, but also freedom of speech, press, and association'. Weissberg⁹ stated that the concept of political security is based on 'democratic government and the protection of human rights'. Other definitions are given by Nef¹⁰ (1999), Costa¹¹ (2008) and the Human Security Unit Office¹² also viewed political security in connection to safeguarding human rights. As the working definition of this study, the political security of an individual is conceptualized as the protection of human and democratic rights which are particularly focused on

freedom of speech, assembly, and political association.

3. INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL SECURITY IN ETHIOPIA

3.1. The Human Rights Situation

In contemporary Ethiopia, the salient issues related to human rights are associated with the political security of individuals because of the list of enumerated rights and freedoms stipulated in the constitution. A textual analysis of the incumbent constitution remarkably reveals that one-third of the contents of the Constitution deals with provisions of fundamental rights and freedoms¹³. According to article 11 (2) of the Constitution, the fundamental rights section of the Constitution shall be interpreted in line with international human rights instruments ratified by Ethiopia. This means that ‘by endorsing international human rights standards, the Ethiopian government is in principle willing to comply with international reporting obligations under the system and to accept international scrutiny of human rights implementation within the country’¹⁴. Furthermore, it also institutionalized the National Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Ombudsman. The introduced human rights legislation and institutions showed how the EPRDF has made more detailed verbal commitments to a democratic society than any of its predecessors¹⁵.

Despite the aforementioned facts, however, the track record of the incumbent government clearly illustrated the implementation aspect has been very poor¹⁶. While the regime overwhelmingly subscribed to most international and regional human rights norms and standards, the application of such instruments lags and a significant gap remains to be bridged¹⁷. Given this, it is stated that ‘to the dismay of the West and many Ethiopians, international human rights organizations have continued reporting violations of basic constitutional rights that the regime had vowed to protect’¹⁸. Various reports by notable international, domestic as well as external human rights bodies provide widespread evidence of the incumbent government's general failure to live up to expectations¹⁹. These reports summarize the lists of human rights violations in the form of political detention, systematic torture and ill-treatment, disappearances, and extra-judicial executions. The available empirical data for 1991-1997, 1997-2002, 2002-2006, and 2007-2008 on human violations reported by EHRCO demonstrated the magnitude of human rights violations by Ethiopian government forces. The table below indicates data collected from compiled reports of EHRCO covering the period from 1991-2008. It shows only those violations that were reported monitored and investigated.

Table 1 Human Rights Violation (1991-2008)

Type of violations	Number (case) in period			
	1991-1997	1997-2002	2002-2006	2007-2008
Extra-judicial killings	185	141	432	72
Torture (serious and light physical injuries by bullets, beatings, threat, and intimidation, and physical abuse)	70	31	805	249
Abduction and Disappearances	120	30	141	9
Illegal Detentions	5525	1052	6143	763

Source: Compile by the author from Dessalegn (2008:115) and EHRCO (1991, 2008).

Out of the four years under review, the 2002-06 interludes are the period when the intensity of human rights violations was very high. This could be attributed to particularly the crisis in the aftermath of the 2005 election in Ethiopia and the subsequent forceful government crackdown of protests²⁰. EPRDF made verbal commitments to uphold democratic freedoms and a multi-party-political system. As Tronvoll²¹ correctly noted ‘during electoral periods the political space becomes restricted and a tighter surveillance and suppression of the electorate-in particular the rural populace-is exhibited to curtail and prohibit possible political advances by the opposition parties’. The data in the table affirms the assertion that ‘human rights-violating practices are generally relaxed and reported violations are decreasing’²². After the subsiding of election seasons for instance, between 2006 and 2008 the violations seem to have decreased. Yet, such a decline of violations is not a genuine reflection of the reality on the ground. What is indeed certain is that learning from the 2005 electoral process challenges, the regime overstretched its control of matters all over the country, and left little room for maneuver. A sort of political apathy prevailed in the wake of the 2005 electoral crisis because of the harsh political repression experienced. Coupled with this, the regime constrained the political space using various measures and hence the resistance in those politically active urban areas became negligible as a result of which violations also comparatively ‘decreased’ in intensity.

The first plausible explanation for the lack of political tolerance of the regime ‘for alternatives, at least repression has been forced to take cover’²³. For Trueman²⁴ ‘human rights violations committed by the Ethiopian government are indicative of widespread oppression of any person or parties opposed to [the regime]’. Regrettably, ‘those who come into conflict with the party are hit just as severely by extra-judicial executions, torture and imprisonment without trial’²⁵ and they are branded as a threat to the state and the regime. Concerning the human rights situation of the country, yet another aspect that demonstrates the regime’s lack of commitment

to the national human rights institutions is the level of independence they enjoyed and the resources available to carry out their work²⁶. According to UNECA²⁷ report on the Governance Profile of Ethiopia, indicated the incapacity of the national human rights institutions safeguarding human rights violations in Ethiopia.

At the level of the indigenous civil society organizations particularly for those currently working in human rights advocacy, the political space within which they operate has been dwindled in Ethiopia. Here, human rights NGOs refer to groups neither governmental nor inter-governmental that address one or more issues of civil and political rights, and their focus of attention being on the country of origin²⁸. In this regard, the only non-governmental institution presently working on human rights advocacy in Ethiopia is EHRCO (it renamed HRCO (Human Right Council) as of December 11, 2010²⁹. EHRCO is the first and the only organization in the country that monitors and reports on human rights situations by the government since it was established in 1991³⁰. It has been working for the realization of political security of individuals and among other things, advocates Ethiopian citizens' freedoms from oppression and exploitation, bigotry and intolerance, discrimination and abuse, arbitrary rule and injustice, intimidation and fear³¹. Up until 2008, it disseminated its findings to the public through period reports comprising of '31 regular', '112 special', and '9 press releases and urgent calls'. However, about human rights issues, the EPRDF never consulted EHRCO. This was because the regime was not willing to let civil society organizations like HRCO play a significant role in influencing policy-making and implementation processes on vital areas of human rights issues that affect society at large³². Moreover, 'the pattern of repression of the [incumbent government] suggests that [the activity of EHRCO] perceived to be in favor of democratic openness will be viewed as anti-government'³³.

Seen in the above light, the relation between HRCO and the regime in power has been consistently antagonistic since the former is dedicatedly engaged in documenting the plight of victims demanding the government for corrective action as well as raising its voice on behalf of those who suffer abuses. The incumbent government refused to recognize this organization legally and branded it as an anti-regime political movement³⁴ and 'worked hard to discourage it in various ways'³⁵. Predominantly, the recently enacted Charities and Societies Proclamation threatens the role of HRCO in the country. It is alleged that this proclamation is the most restrictive of its kind in Sub-Sahara Africa³⁶. According to Human Rights Watch's analysis of this law, it is mentioned that the government wouldn't allow dependable 'human rights-related work carried out by non-Ethiopia organizations while at the same time making impossible conditions for domestic human rights organizations to operate with any real degree of effectiveness or independence'³⁷. In other words, Ethiopian organizations founded by Ethiopian nationals living abroad are now explicitly considered 'foreign' and are therefore forbidden from engaging in the advancement of human and democratic rights.

Ironically, the EPRDF's position regarding the restriction of local human rights NGOs that receives more than 1/10 of their funding from abroad is paradoxical while the regime has been receiving a large sum of overseas development assistance including direct budgetary support from the EU, US, and United Kingdom³⁸. For instance, between 2006 and 2008, the total amount received by the government equals an 'average of 32 percent of its revenue in foreign loans and grants'³⁹. While it is heavily dependent on the support of external donors for running its activities at the same time, it forbids local human rights groups from receiving a significant amount of their funds from abroad. This is indeed an illogical and fallacious argument in the sense that it doesn't have a moral ground to behave as such. However, the EPRDF-dominated rubberstamp parliament that endorses whatever the regime wishes, this law was promulgated without scrutiny.

The regime thus brought a significant impediment to the human rights activities of the HRCO in general. According to the head of the human rights monitoring department of HRCO, the incumbent government, using the Charities and Societies Agency (CSA) erased the provision that allows HRCO to engage in voter education⁴⁰. Second, because of the restrictions on foreign funding, it gives up much of its activities and dropped some of its members abroad. The consequence of this is that out of twelve branch offices that had been operating in the regional states, it has now closed nine of them. According to the current acting director of HRCO, it also reduced its working staff from sixty to twelve. Because of this the former EHRCO has lost its nomenclature and federal character and forced to change its name to HRCO⁴¹. In a nutshell, comparing the human and democratic rights enshrined in the constitution on one hand and the well-documented violations, on the other hand, the defining characteristics of Ethiopian human rights situation during the period between 1991 and 2008 was signified first by lack of commitment of the regime in power and second, the weakness of the institutional mechanisms that could ensure enforcement of existing commitments⁴².

3.2. The State of Freedom of Association and Assembly

The political security of individuals is crucial for democracy. In a democratic society, the core of the political security of individuals is the enjoyment of freedom of association, assembly, and press. The relationship between the state *vis-à-vis* political associations of individuals in a given country defines freedom of association for that state⁴³. Freedom of association is group rights and citizens of similar concern pursue a collectively organized way of political undertaking to articulate, campaign, and lobby for their aggregate interests with the state. In

Ethiopia, the legal basis of this relationship is sanctioned by Article 31 of the incumbent government Constitution. According to Vestal⁴⁴ ‘a review of what Article 31 means for the association will provide a standard by which to judge the status of freedom of association in Ethiopia’. Article 31 provides that as long as the purpose is lawful, ‘every person has the right to freedom of association for any cause or purpose’. In Ethiopia ‘political parties and pressure groups, as well as professional associations, or economic, social, and cultural associations of one form or another may be established based on [this] freedom of association’⁴⁵.

Under this constitutional provision not only the rights of individuals are protected informing their political organizations to compete for and hold political offices, but also the rights of groups are defended against arbitrary governmental regulations⁴⁶. About freedom of association, the Article prohibited those organizations established in violation of laws or organized to illegally subvert the constitutional order⁴⁷. In connection with this, and in accordance to what is declared in the constitutional provisions mentioned above, there is also political parties’ regulation proclamation that regulates the conditions by which citizens exercise their freedom of association.

Freedoms of assembly and demonstration are an essential part of the rights of association with a direct impact on the political security of citizens. The *de jure* base of peaceful assembly preserved in the Constitution provides that everyone has the right to assemble, demonstrate, and petition together with others peacefully and unarmed. Yet this right is not absolute by itself and the Constitution allows the imposition of restrictions on the manner of exercise of this right. The procedural limitation is, ‘in the interest of public convenience relating to the location of open-air meetings and the route of movement of demonstrators and, for the protection of democratic rights, public morality and peace during such a meeting or demonstration’⁴⁸. The other limitation is that such right does not exempt from liability under laws enacted to protect the well-being of the youth or the honor and reputation of individuals, and laws prohibiting any propaganda for war and any public expression of opinions intended to injure human dignity. To control the harm and damage that can result to individuals and property in the process of the exercise of democratic rights through peaceful demonstration of public political meetings the proclamation entitled ‘Peaceful Demonstration and Public Political Meeting Procedure Proclamation No. 3/1991’ has been issued. Accordingly, for the exercise of this right, there is the obligation to give prior notice to the concerned authorities and receive their acceptance on the particulars, which is not a limitation per se⁴⁹. Furthermore, the proclamation also provides that ‘any individual, group or organization that organizes a peaceful demonstration or public political meeting must give a written notice 48 hours before the intended peaceful demonstration or public political meeting is to take place’⁵⁰.

Notwithstanding freedom of political association and peaceful demonstration provided under the above articles are not respected in Ethiopia. On several occasions, these rights are in jeopardy. The incumbent government restricted these rights in practice particularly for those potential organizations that challenge its power, policies, and deeds⁵¹. For instance, civic and professional associations, including the Mecha Tulema Self-Help Organization, the former Ethiopian Teachers Association, the Ethiopian Free Journalists Association, and the Ethiopian Legal Professional Association (also called Ethiopian Bar Association) are some of the typical cases which demonstrate how the incumbent government violates freedom of association regularly⁵².

About freedom of association, the freedom of assembly has also been under a serious restriction. As opposed to what is allowed by law concerning peaceful demonstration, staging a public protest for civil society organization is hardly possible in Ethiopia. Freedom of assembly and demonstration are repressed through bureaucratic hurdles. If it is carried out, it would be accompanied by forceful measures of mass detention to terrorize oppositions and civil society organizations⁵³. In this connection, applying mass detention ‘appears to be the only technique of [the regime]...readily utilized against any form of peaceful and violent political protest’⁵⁴. For this purpose, the regime’s security and police officers are the instruments and they often obstructed the planned for and publicized peaceful assembly and demonstration called by the oppositions⁵⁵. And hence, as part of its intimidation mechanism, the government deliberately obstructing these rights and repressed those groups that attempt to hold public meetings. The explanation for why the incumbent regime infringes these rights of groups and citizens to associate and peaceful demonstration is to preclude them from meaningful participation in their country's political activities.

What is possible to conclude is that the state of freedom of association and assembly for those critical civil and political groups are under persistent intimidation and harassment. There are harshest practices as regards to the suppression of protests, demonstrations, and marches of Ethiopian citizens and groups. Conversely or as a reciprocally to this state of affairs, it is only those apolitical, loyal, and pro-EPRDF citizens and groupings have been significantly enjoyed to exercise their freedom of peaceful association, assembly, and demonstration provided under the law without any barrier⁵⁶. An analysis of the political right in Ethiopia shows that this right has deteriorated from time to time because of the country’s current state of ‘freedom recession’ and ‘electoral authoritarian’ trend. According to Freedom House annual survey of political and civil liberties freedom status index⁵⁷ (2009:12), Ethiopia is categorized as “partly free” due to the practice of limited respect for political rights and civil liberties. It is also argued that among other things, such a state is frequently characterized by an

environment of weak rule of law, ethnic strife, and often under dictates of a single political party that enjoys dominance despite the façade of limited pluralism.

As mentioned in the aforementioned section, political rights in Ethiopia have deteriorated due to the ongoing emphasis on the regime security of the EPRDF and at the same time, the further marginalization of the political opposition. Civil and political liberties declined in Ethiopia due to EPRDF's continued use of intimidation against the organized opposition political parties, its intolerance against potential power contenders, as well as its overarching control of matters all over the country. In the post-2005 election years, political rights rating in Ethiopia fell due to the narrowing of political space⁵⁸. Particularly, the government's crackdown on the operations of non-governmental organizations and its use of anti-terrorism legislation against political opponents are some of the factors. Indeed, the impact of these legislative restraints was perpetrated against the freedom of association of the civil society organization in Ethiopia, including a range of institutional regulations...geared at restricting democratic space in the country and undermining the constitutional protection of human rights on a long-term basis⁵⁹. This has led to the decline in the practical exercise of political and civil liberties on the part of citizens in general and political and civil society organizations in particular. Using the new civil society law, the government currently undermines the freedom of association of these organizations in general and the rights of individuals to engage in 'politics for change'.

3.3. Media Freedom

Freedom of expression is another set of democratic right which is essential to the functioning of democratic order and the political security of citizens. According to Dahl⁶⁰, freedom of expression is one of the pre-requisites for citizens to participate effectively in political life. In the absence of such a right, 'citizens would lose their capacity to influence the agenda of government decisions'⁶¹. The legal base of this right is specified in Article 29 of the FDRE Constitution. In addition to this constitutional provision that guaranteed freedom of the press and use of other mass media that includes specifically the prohibition of any form of censorship and access to information, the Press Proclamation No.34/1992 as well as the recently promulgated law of 2008 that replaced the previous one also dealt with the freedom, rights, and duties of the press.

Despite the constitutionally stated commitment to the principles of a free press and expression, an analysis of freedom of the press in Ethiopia from 1991 onwards shows that this right is under restriction, and the government generally restricts the flow of information and ideas within the state. Throughout this period, there have been growing pressures on press freedom. By analyzing the previous and the incumbent legal frameworks governing the press in Ethiopia, it could be argued that the previous press law was 'full of restrictive provisions and has been declared 'most undemocratic', with heavy-handed penalties for offenses or breaches that are considered petty by others laws of the county'⁶². The new press proclamation of 2008 inserted new features of restriction, such as a broad government power to initiate defamation suits regardless of the defamed official's interest, crippling financial penalties, and power to arbitrarily deny licenses and registration. It also 'further legalized the restrictive policies that the government had been practicing since 2005'⁶³. In this law, the oppressive 'elements of the previous proclamation were maintained, while new articles allowed prosecutors to summarily stop any publication deemed a threat to public order or national security, and the punishment for defamation was increased'⁶⁴.

In the last 18 years, freedom of expression has been legally instituted but remained under attack in Ethiopia and frequent abuse against the free press and free speech were experienced⁶⁵. In this context, the media environment was heavily polarized and it can be characterized by the prevalence of mutual suspicion between the government and private media. According to Tucker⁶⁶, the adversarial relationship between the government and the private press resulted in the frequent use of provisions of the press law to 'detain and charge journalists and editors, a practice many believed was part of an overall strategy intended to suppress both free speech and opposition activities'. The EPRDF government accused the private press of not being free from partisan politics and consumed by undisguised bias and they are not allowed to take part in the Prime Minister press conference sessions. For instance, the incumbent Prime Minister has repeatedly and publicly labeled the private press as 'gutter press' and they are 'in a ghetto'. At the same time, the private press blames the government for the purposeful crippling of media outlets that are outside its direct control.

It also argued that private 'press' access to the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government is severely restricted, and journalists who attempt to obtain information from these sources are subjected to intimidation and harassment by the government⁶⁷. The intimidation of the private press in Ethiopia reflected the regime's effort to limit criticism of its policies and hinder the establishment of dynamic civil institutions not linked to the ruling party. During the 1990s, dozens of journalists and publishers have been harassed, intimidated, imprisoned, and/or fined, often in violation of the 1992 press law⁶⁸. In the aftermath of the 2005 election violence, the government has prepared laws to curtail press freedom and the freedom of speech in an even more draconian manner than experienced before⁶⁹. In addition to the 2008 press law, the other infringement of freedoms of speech, expression, and press has occurred as a result of the new Anti-Terrorism

Proclamation. This law stated that ‘whatsoever publisher or causes the publication of a statement that is likely to be understood by some or all of the members of the public to whom it is published as a direct or indirect encouragement or other inducements to them to the commission or preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism stipulated under Article 3 of this proclamation is punishable with rigorous imprisonment from 10 to 20 years’⁷⁰.

Coupled with the above draconian measure taken against journalists by the government, the harsh provisions of the existing press and anti-terrorism law allow the government to readily use them for closing down media outlets and arresting journalists. As a result, what currently prevails in the exercise of freedom of the press and the realm of media work is the resurgence of fear. For instance, in December 2009, ‘the Addis Neger, one of the few remaining independent Amharic weekly newspapers, closed after its senior staff received threats and fled the country... credible sources, [stated that] they were afraid that they might be prosecuted under the anti-terrorism law’⁷¹. On the whole as a corollary of this imminent threat of the new law, significantly there is the revival of self-censorship in the private media.

4. THE SILENT FEATURES THAT EXPLAIN THE STATUS OF THE POLITICAL SECURITY OF CITIZENS

As mentioned in the preceding sections, in Ethiopia there prevails violations of human rights in general and freedom of association, assembly, and press in particular. This state of affairs presents interesting themes to identify the silent features that explain the status of the political security of citizens in Ethiopia.

4.1. Lack of Commitment to Human Rights Obligations

In the area of human rights concerns, Ethiopia has set commendable human rights goals in its constitution. However, the introduced human rights do not obligate state parties and ‘society into gradually complying with international standards of human rights’⁷². About human rights responsibilities, the incumbent regime is far from a rights-protective regime and it manifests more often the exception than the rule. Many human rights instruments and treaties require states to take measures within their maximum available resources to ensure that human rights are enjoyed by persons under their jurisdiction. Particularly, its corresponding human rights responsibilities or obligations on the duty-bearer subsumed under these different dimensions to ‘respect’, ‘protect’, and ‘fulfill’ human rights of their citizens⁷³.

First, in the obligation to ‘respect’ ‘the state and all its organs and agents to abstain from carrying out, sponsoring, or tolerating any practice, policy, or legal measure violating the integrity of individuals or impinging on their freedom to access resources to satisfy their needs...it also requires that legislative and administrative codes take into account guaranteed rights’⁷⁴. The government security state apparatus perpetuated frequent violations of citizens’ rights. Most of the time, abuse is carried out to protect the incumbent regime’s security of the countries. In Ethiopia, security capabilities can not generate public goods such as the safety of citizens at large. Rather they are the instrument for coercion. As a rule in the country, the security of the regimes in power is safeguarded at any cost even at the expense of the rights of citizens. Moreover, by taking control of the legislative organs, the incumbent regime introduced various legal frameworks and posed institutional and bureaucratic hurdles that constrain the exercise of freedoms on the part of citizens and organized groups. Hence the interference of the regime in the exercise of citizens’ rights is the defining feature of the situations in Ethiopia. A plausible explanation for why this regime does not refrain from interfering with the rights of citizens is because it has been determined to maintain the political status quo. In doing so, it undermined citizens from using especially their civil and political rights to challenge it. The other overarching purpose of this behavior is to destroy real or imagined internal political dissent that threatens the regime's survival.

Second, concerning the obligation to ‘protect’, the state and its agents are responsible to prevent the violation of rights by other individuals or non-state actors. Simultaneously, whenever violations occur, the state must guarantee access to legal remedies⁷⁵. However, the regime in Ethiopia is reluctant to take measures against a third party threatening the rights of citizens. However as opposed to guaranteeing legal remedies, in Ethiopia whenever violations do occur the regime pursued a blame-shifting strategy. The federal government tries to ‘distance itself from human rights violations...[and declares] that these violations are the responsibility of the regional states, and not the federal government’⁷⁶. Human rights violation cases are rarely or never investigated and reported to the public through government media.

Third, the obligation to ‘fulfill’ is shouldered by the state to take active measures necessary for guaranteeing the opportunities to access entitlements through human rights advocacy⁷⁷. However, regarding this responsibility, there are very few human rights NGOs, which stand at the forefront of the political struggle or seeking to implement human rights education and work for human rights monitoring and documenting violations of rights. This makes them the ardent enemies of the regimes and faced government pressures. Using legal and bureaucratic hurdles the regime repressed and marginalized these organizations. The incumbent government recently enacted civil society law considerably crippled these organizations that continue to work on rights and

governance issues by stripping them of access to foreign funding. In the cases of institutionalizing national human rights commissions, one could reasonably assign Ethiopia a higher score. This is because Ethiopia has instituted the establishment of a Human Rights Commission and the Institute of Ombudsman. However, the mere presence of these institutions in Ethiopia cannot guarantee human rights protection per se, since both these institutions are appointed and reviewed by the EPRDF-dominated parliament.

4.2. Political Intolerance

Political tolerance refers to a willingness to extend the rights of citizenship to all members of the state. It is also about allowing political freedoms to those who are politically different. A tolerant regime is one that is willing to permit the expression of ideas or interests that one opposes. Rights of political oppositions are consensually recognized as the *sine qua non* of a democratic system and the recognition of rights of political opposition is also an essential element of political tolerance⁷⁸. However, there is an interesting parallel to political intolerance in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, among other things, the dimensions of political intolerance are manifested by the denial of freedom of association, assembly, and press, particularly for those critical political dissidents and opposition groups.

4.3. Constrained Political Space

In contemporary Ethiopia, the political space is constrained, which resulted in undue government control. Opposition parties were provided relatively less access to the government-controlled media to air their views. They were hampered in their efforts to organize and hold peaceful public demonstrations. In the face of organized opposition political parties and political dissidents undertaking peaceful public demonstrations, the regime conventionally resorted to the use of brutal force to disperse rallies. In Ethiopia, mass detention has been a preferable strategy to contain the threat to the regimes in power. At this junction, one may argue that the incumbent regime is indistinguishable in terms of the degree and level of intolerance towards demonstration against its rule and policies. Thus, the state's success in quelling open dissent from the public was evident in many instances. In the Ethiopian case, the repressive laws such as the Charities and Societies Law restricting civil society and the so-called anti-terrorism law that criminalizes dissent and creates a pretext for suppressing any political opposition are illustrative of the prevailing situation. Civil society laws served as the repressive instruments of the regimes that muzzled out the space that these organizations previously enjoyed and worked as watchdog institutions.

4.4. Obstruction of the Independent Media

The state of freedom of the press and media in Ethiopia faces formidable challenges. The relation between the incumbent regime and the independent media has been contentious. While repressed by stringent regulatory frameworks that hinder the freedom of press and media in Ethiopia, there is indeed the phenomena of pre-trial detention, arrest without charges of journalists, and punitive penalties. The independent press has been decimated and many independent journalists were forced to exile, jailed, or have simply given up and/or exercise fear-induced self-censorship.

5. CONCLUSION

This article attempted to explain the political security of the citizens of Ethiopia. To explain citizens' political security state of affairs, it has examined the situation of human rights in the country by emphasizing civil and political rights of citizens, the state of freedom of association and assembly, political parties, and media freedom. Four common salient features were identified and analyzed in this article. The first focuses on the lack of commitments to human rights obligations on the part of the incumbent regimes in Ethiopia. This has been manifested by the failure of the state party or duty-bearer to carry out its human rights responsibilities or obligations that are included in three different dimensions. Considering the first dimension of the obligation to respect, it is pointed out that the country has constitutional provisions that subscribed to most international and regional human rights norms and standards. Conversely, it has violated the constitutional provisions regarding the rights of its citizens. The significant motivating factor behind such violations is the government's intention to maintain the political status quo. The regime used coercive means that discourage its citizens not to effectively exercise their democratic rights to challenge them. In this regard, the security forces of the regime played a significant role in maintaining regime security at the expense of individual freedoms of citizens. In the second dimension of the responsibility to protect, in Ethiopia, little or no action is taken whenever human rights violations occurred by state and non-state actors. The human rights violations cases by the security forces are rarely or never investigated; punished and reported to the public through government media. Consequently, the institutions charged with protecting rights and liberties have failed to live up to citizens' expectations. In the third dimension of the obligation to fulfill, Human Right Defenders which are working as watchdog human rights actors are harassed and their work is constantly hounded by the security agencies. The second identified

common salient feature drawn from the trend analysis of the civil and political rights violations in the country is political intolerance. The observation is that the refutation of freedom of association, assembly, and press particularly for critical political dissidents and opposition groups is the norm in Ethiopia. The respective regimes do not demonstrate the will to resolve and respect these rights. The current trend in the country is political dissenters continue to be intimidated, harassed, and arrested despite the constitutionally enshrined freedom.

Thirdly, the other most important feature is the drift towards narrow political space. This trend is manifested by government repressive measures against organized groups and civil society organizations. It has also evident that by introducing repressive laws, the regimes systematically suppress freedom of association for civil society organizations and political dissidents. The last salient attributes that both states shared is obstruction of the activities of independent media. There is stringent press law and the phenomena of intimidation and detention of journalists are common practices. This condition made the state of freedom of the press and media in both countries under shaky condition. The overall conclusion one can draw from the above findings of the main theme of this article is the political security of individuals in Ethiopia is very poor.

Notes

1. ITCO-Africa, *Ethiopia*.
2. HRW, *The Way Forward*.
3. Mceldowney, 'Political Security'.
4. Costa, 'Political Security', 560
5. UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 32.
6. Tadjbakhsh, *Human Security*, 30.
7. Paris, 'Human Security', 90.
8. Schmeidl, 'The Transition', 8.
9. Weissberg, 'Conceptualizing', 9.
10. Nef, *Human Security*.
11. Costa, 'Political Security'
12. HSUO, *Human Security*.
13. Mgbako, et al, 'Silencing'.
14. Tronvoll, 'Human Rights', 53.
15. Welch, *Protecting*.
16. Mohammed, 'Conquest'.
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