Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections(CECOE)

Overview of the CECOE's voter education during the Sixth General Elections of Ethiopia
and
CECOE's Media Monitoring Unit (MMU) report on: Media Outlets' Elections Coverage during the June and September 2021 Elections

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Acknowledgement

Part I

Overview of the CECOE's voter education during the Sixth General Elections of Ethiopia

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Background of the Overview Document

About the CECOE

The CECOE is a broad-based network of over 175 civil society organizations operating in the ten regional states and the two city administrations, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. On February 4, 2020, CECOE got a certificate of registration from the FDRE Civil Society Organizations Authority with the registration number 4748. The CECOE was established with the objective of coordinating civic engagement, increasing citizen participation in the 2021 Ethiopian General Elections, and bolstering a long-term civil society engagement in Ethiopia's electoral process in a sustainable manner.

During the Sixth National and Regional Elections of Ethiopia, the CECOE recruited and deployed over three thousand long-term and short-term observers in the nine regional states and two city administrations. Furthermore, the Coalition undertook a media monitoring initiative that monitored election related information on seven selected mass media outlets, 40 political party social media accounts, and 40 CSOs. In addition, the coalition also reached over 25 million online users and 40 million citizens using mainstream media outlets in its voter information and education program. The CECOE also coordinated the financing of voter education (VI) campaigns implemented by its members, raising over ETB 1,200,000.00 for VI activities in different regions.

The Sixth National and Regional Elections of Ethiopia

The 2021 Ethiopia's Sixth National and Regional Elections were important milestones in the furthering of the democratic opening that started in 2018. A new legal and regulatory framework resulted in a more inclusive and transparent election process, enabling more vibrant political competition, a more assertive judiciary, and greater space for civic engagement. The 2021 general elections were also the first, since 2005, that guaranteed civil society independence to observe and make meaningful comments on the electoral process. In line with this, key electoral stakeholders, including political parties, civil society, and most importantly, Ethiopian citizens, set their expectations for more inclusive, accountable, and transparent elections than those held in the past. Even though there were major problems with the pre-election, election day, and post-election processes, important changes laid the groundwork for future elections that will be more inclusive, open, and accountable.

However, the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, compounded by administrative and logistical issues, rising political tensions, and armed conflict, resulted in significant delays and a challenging environment for holding the elections. While the elections were scheduled to be conducted concurrently throughout the country on June 21, 2022, voting was postponed to September 30, 2021 in Harari, the Somali Regional States, and parts of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's (SNNP) region because of these

challenges. Furthermore, the Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CECOE) recognizes that the election cycle has not yet concluded, given that citizens in the entirety of the Tigray Regional State, most parts of the Benishangul Gumuz Regional State, and parts of the Afar, Amhara, and Oromia Regional States are still disenfranchised and have no representation in the House of People's Representatives (HoPR) or regional state councils.

The CECOE deployed thousands of volunteer Ethiopians to observe elections across the country and assess the quality of the process. With the opening of civic space and new regulatory frameworks, the CECOE observed aspects of the pre-election, election day, and post-election processes in all regions and administrative zones that held elections. In conducting election observation, the CECOE aimed to empower citizens to be active participants and monitor the inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, and overall integrity of the election process. Citizen observation provides independent, non-partisan information that citizens, political contestants, journalists, election, and government officials may use to determine whether an election is fair, free, and inclusive.

Based on reports received from its observers between March 2021 and October 2021, the CECOE found that all stages of the Six General Elections largely adhered to the procedural requirements enshrined in Ethiopia's Electoral Law. The elections were also peaceful, with no major incidents or election related violence reported. There were, however, limitations on its competitiveness. Likewise, fragile security situations in different parts of the country and logistical challenges resulted in frequent delays and disenfranchisement of significant numbers of voters.

Background

As the use of digital media like television, radio, social media, and websites grows by leaps and bounds, election officials have started using these modalities to educate constituents about voting processes. Various electoral experts also recommend the use of this approach over the face-to-face approach to reach the youth. (ACE, 2017). However, during the 6th Ethiopian National Elections, serious shortcomings in the use of digital media for voter education were observed. A study conducted by the CECOE titled 'Voter Education Activities by Ethiopian CSOs During the Sixth General Elections' revealed that 87.5% of the CSOs used the face-to-face approach to educate voters. According to the study, had the CSOs used multiple VE delivery methods, they would have reached more people.

The goals of the CECOE's voter education

The main goal of the CECOE's voter education project was to keep the voters, especially the disadvantaged sections of the society, informed, engaged, and encouraged to take part in the Six National Elections of Ethiopia. Other specific objectives of the project include:
• To raise the awareness of electorates on the use of mainstream media (Tv, Radio, Newspaper) during elections.
• To make young people more aware and interested in elections by using social media.
• To strengthen member CSOs' capacity in the provision of voter education.

Methodology, gap analysis, and research design

In order to launch a successful project, it was important to examine and identify gaps in previous voter education projects, election campaigns through the media and election media monitoring. The gap analysis was a comparison between what citizens ought to know and what they didn't. In order to identify these gaps, the CECOE, in cooperation with the International Republican Institute (IRI) and Zeleman Production, a communications consultancy company, hereinafter referred as the consultant, conducted a gap analysis and need assessment, to evaluate citizens' awareness about various aspects of the Six General Elections and election in general.

The research team utilized two key methodologies to uncover insights, aiding in the design of the comprehensive multiplatform media campaign for voter education and the management of content generation, coordination, and placement. Desk research and quantitative in-home interviews were the two methodologies employed. Desk research gave some preliminary facts and insights about Ethiopia's country profile that helped set the overall tone and approach of the assignment.

 The limitations of desk research was mitigated by using a nationwide quantitative face-to-face survey with 2021 respondents. The survey was conducted in-home across all regions of Ethiopia except Tigray, which was out of reach because of the conflict at the time the data was collected. The collection of data began on November 19th, 2020 and ended on November 30th, 2020.

Key Findings of the Study

Key influencers and opinion shapers

The study tried to look into the role of religion, art, and famous people in forming and shaping public opinion.

Religion

Ethiopia is known for its deep religious roots intertwined with its rich cultural heritage. Throughout the year, Ethiopians observe several fasting and religious observances as part of their religious practices, which extend back thousands of years.

According to the majority of respondents (70%), religion fosters religious values and beliefs among Ethiopians. Similarly, 56 percent of the respondents believe that religion plays an essential role in promoting peaceful coexistence between communities. The research unveiled that the power of religion can be leveraged through the inclusion of religious leaders in voter education for future elections.

Religion and culture in Ethiopia are often intertwined and mutually supportive. However, it appears that the role and importance given to religious and traditional leaders in promoting peace differ slightly. While both religious and cultural leaders play a crucial role in fostering peaceful coexistence between communities, most respondents (about 80%) seem to believe that traditional leaders are more responsible for creating peaceful coexistence than religious leaders (67 percent).

Distinctively evident, religious leaders reinforce religious values and beliefs as well as provide spiritual and moral guidance while cultural leaders (61% incidence) more than religious leaders (42% incidence) reinforce collective identity.

Art

Art, in particular music, plays a very important role among Ethiopians. When asked whether music is a unifying force, 85% of the respondents concurred that it is indeed a unifying force. But music is mostly a form of entertainment for 59 percent of the people who answered the survey. The politicization of ethnicity and the instrumentalization of difference could have hampered music's potential to unite people and effect social change.

Other important functions of music in Ethiopia include expressing affection, recounting historical events such as the battle of Adwa, and commemorating an event. Through an effective multi-media strategy, music can be used to educate voters in times of elections.

Key influencers

Influencers on community and regional level issues

Thirty percent of those surveyed believed that cultural leaders wield more influence in a particular community. In contrast, 29 percent of the respondents think that religious leaders have a greater influence in a specific community. In addition, 29% of respondents believe that cultural leaders have influence not just in their community, but also in the region they reside as a whole. This is not a surprise as Ethiopia's regions are ethnically demarcated. Respondents (25%) also added that politicians have an impact on how people feel about regional issues, while religious leaders (18%) have less of an impact. Therefore, cultural leaders are very important actors that should be included in voter education initiatives.
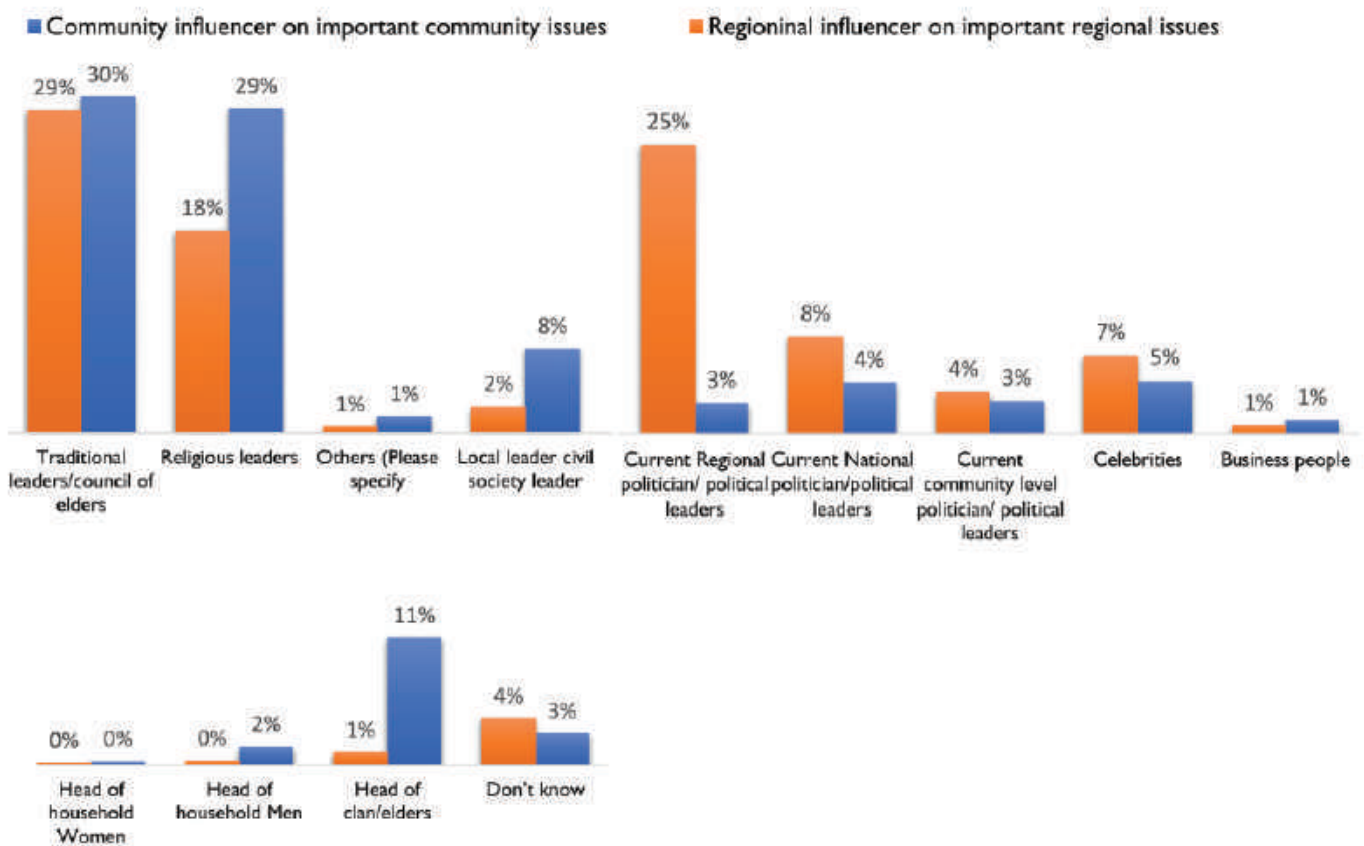
Religious leaders appear to wield greater power in Addis Abeba (43%), Amhara (35%), Harari (34%), and Oromia (34%), whereas traditional leaders wield considerable power in Somali (58%), Afar (42%), Dire Dawa (39%), Gambela (37%), and SNNPR (33%).

Traditional leaders seem to have a lot of power in Afar (53%), SNNPR (59%), Somali regions (52%), and Oromia (52%), but not in Addis Ababa (31%), or Amhara (30%), where religious leaders still play a big role in shaping opinions about regional issues. Regional politicians wield more influence in Gambela (68%) Dire Dawa (42%) and Harari (32%). In the Benishangul-Gumuz and Sidama Regions, religious and traditional leaders have a significant influence in shaping public opinions about regional issues. In these regions, there was more than one dominant center of influence that shaped public opinions on regional matters.

Stacked bar charts showing key influencer percentages by region (Addis Ababa, Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Dire Dawa, Gambela, Harari, Oromia, Sidama, SNNPR, Somali)

Legend:
- Traditional leaders/council of elders
- Religious leaders
- Other Leaders
- Local leader civil society leader
- Head of household Women
- Head of household Men
- Current Regional politician/ political leaders
- Current National politician/political leaders
- Current community level politician/ political leaders
- Celebrities
- Business people

Key influencer personalities

The study's findings recommended that the most influential famous people be used for the communication campaign. In this respect, Teddy Afro, the well-known Ethiopian pop musician was recommended. If he was not available; Haile Gebreselassie was planned to replace him. It was also suggested to mix the values of the two super stars in election communications.
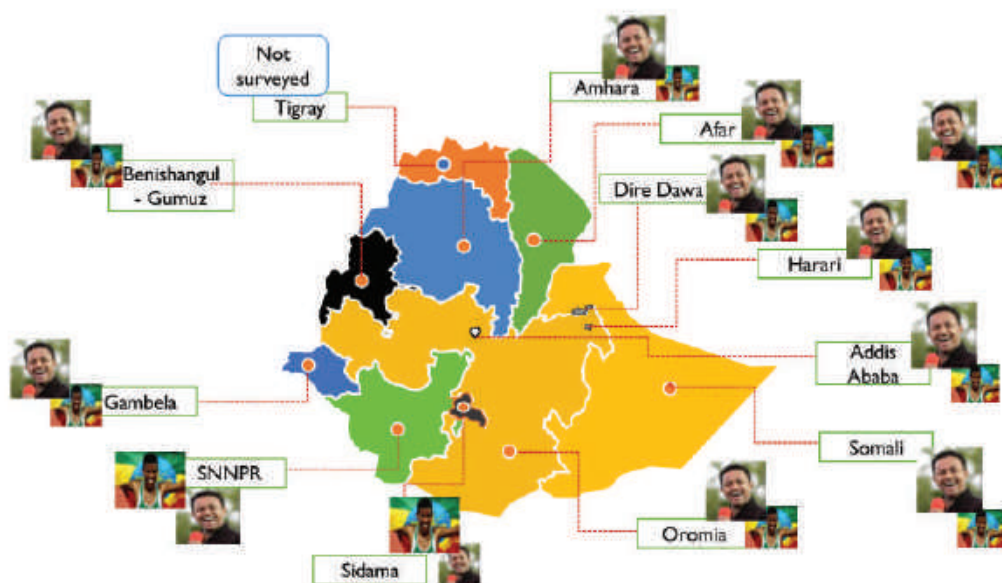
The use of social and mainstream media

Most respondents use both mainstream and contemporary media platforms because they had access. Eighty seven percent of respondents said that TV was the most available source of information. After this, we asked respondents from where they got most of their reliable information about current events in Ethiopia. TV was the most common answer, with 59%, followed by Facebook.

AVAILABLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION   **PRIMARY SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

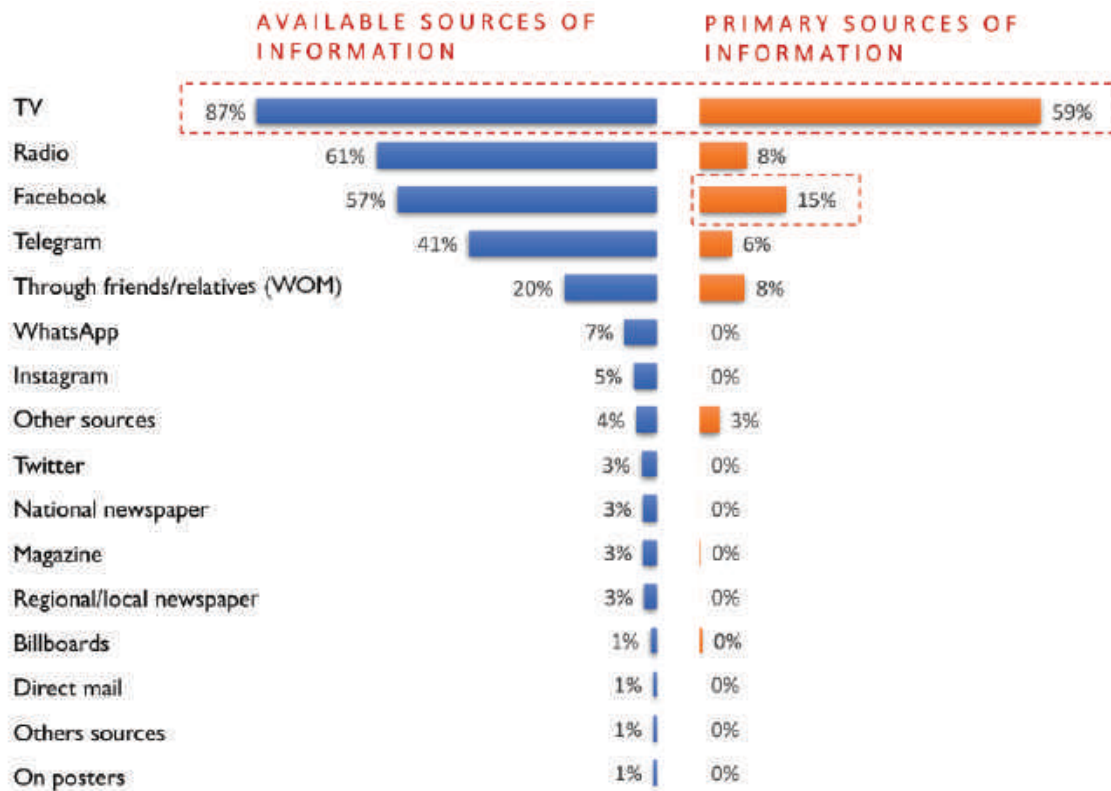| Source	Available	Primary
TV	87%	59%
Radio	61%	8%
Facebook	57%	15%
Telegram	41%	6%
Through friends/relatives (WOM)	20%	8%
WhatsApp	7%	0%
Instagram	5%	0%
Other sources	4%	3%
Twitter	3%	0%
National newspaper	3%	0%
Magazine	3%	0%
Regional/local newspaper	3%	0%
Billboards	1%	0%
Direct mail	1%	0%
Others sources	1%	0%
On posters	1%	0%

Available sources of information - analysis by residence

Among the top five major sources of news and information, television appears to be more popular in rural areas than in urban ones, with 77 % respondents alluding its importance to rural areas. On the other hand, 44% of responds said that Telegram is a good source of information in urban areas.

Available and primary sources of information

Many respondents rely mostly on television for news and information. Other outlets are accessible, but Facebook exceeds radio as the primary news and information medium. Facebook is the second most important source of information for respondents between the ages of 18 and 44.

The most popular TV and radio stations

Most respondents chose EBS as their favorite TV channel. The majority of respondents preferred regional radio station, with Fana FM 98.1 Radio station coming in second. The research also found that EBS TV appeals to younger to middle-aged viewers, while ESAT and ETV News are more popular with older to middle-aged viewers.

The most popular social media platform

Facebook is the most popular social media platform used by the majority of the respondents.

Commonly used social media platforms and frequency of use

Facebook is the most popular platform among respondents, followed by Telegram, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter. The majority of respondents indicated that they access their accounts every day. Facebook is a key source of information on current affairs for most of the respondents, while Telegram is used for business networking, job seeking, and e-commerce

Frequency	Facebook (Base: 997)	Telegram (Base: 699)	WhatsApp (Base: 67)	Instagram (Base: 57)	Twitter (Base: 29)
2-3 times a week	10%	10%	15%	21%	24%
4-6 times a week	10%	9%	19%	12%	14%
At least monthly	1%	1%	3%	7%	10%
Daily	68%	70%	21%	21%	21%
Less frequent	6%	7%	22%	12%	14%
Once a week	4%	4%	13%	26%	17%
Once every two weeks	1%	0%	6%	0%	0%

Commonly used social media platforms and frequency of access

Despite many overlaps in social media usage, 52 percent of respondents use Facebook and Instagram interchangeably as information sources. Twenty nine percent of respondents use Facebook exclusively.

COMMONLY USED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND FREQUENCY OF ACCESS

Social media usage and overlaps	Incidence	Percentage of incidence
Facebook & Telegram	619	52%
Facebook	349	29%
Facebook, Telegram & WhatsApp	69	6%
Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp, Instagram & Twitter	36	3%
Telegram	36	3%
Facebook, Telegram & Instagram	27	2%
Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp & Instagram	27	2%
Facebook, Telegram & Twitter	10	1%
Facebook, Telegram, Instagram & Twitter	6	1%
Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp & Twitter	6	1%
Facebook & Twitter	4	0%
Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram & Twitter	3	0%
Facebook & WhatsApp	2	0%
Telegram & Instagram	2	0%
Facebook, Instagram & Twitter	1	0%
Telegram & Twitter	1	0%
WhatsApp	1	0%

Ethiopians' primary concerns that warrant the actions of the government

Insecurity and crime top the list of the many concerns of respondents, which they believe should be handled by the national government. This is followed by unemployment, which is mentioned by 35 percent of respondents, and the quality of education, which is mentioned by 35 percent. Three percent of respondents stated that they are worried about COVID-19.

TOP CONCERNS AMONG ETHIOPIANS

Concern	Percentage
Insecurity/crime	52%
Unemployment	35%
Quality of education	29%
Poor Infrastructure and Roads	27%
Ethnical tension	23%
High Cost of living	22%
Political tension	20%
Corruption	19%
Access to clean water	14%
Access to healthcare	13%
Access to transport facilities	9%
The economy	7%
Disaster management	7%
Religious tension	5%
Food security	3%
The Coronavirus/Covid-19...	3%
Cost of doing business	3%
Other concerns	3%
Fuel prices	2%
Housing	2%

Political engagement of women and the youth

Forty three percent of the people who were interviewed said that women are not actively involved in Ethiopian politics, while 57 percent said that young people, regardless of gender, are actively involved in politics.

By top-2 and bottom-2 analysis, women in the regions of Benishangul-Gumuz (85%), SNNPR (63%), and Afar (57%) are the most active in politics, while in the regions of Somali (54%), Oromia (56%) Harari (53%), and Gambela (53%), women are not active as in politics as their counterparts in other regions. The same holds true for Amhara and Addis Ababa.

Level of activity	Involvement of women in Ethiopian politics?	Involvement of the youth in Ethiopian politics?
Very much active	2%	9%
Active	37%	48%
Not sure	18%	14%
Not active	34%	22%
Not active at all	9%	6%

Ethiopians' expectations after the election

Seventy-eight percent of respondents hoped to see free and fair elections, while 69% of the respondents responded that they would like to see peace and national stability reign in Ethiopia. Forty percent of the respondents wanted the government to beef up security by deploying more security personnel to ensure their security during the voting process.

Outlook of future elections	Percentage (most to least)
Free and fair	78%
Peaceful elections	69%
Have more security personnel	40%
Count all votes	21%
Include everyone in my community	18%
Include all candidates of my choice	11%
Have electronic voting options	9%
More voting/polling stations	7%
Have more/extended days to vote	2%

Decision and propensity to vote

The vast majority of respondents (96 percent) said they would vote on their own, without being influenced by others. In the same vein, most respondents (96%) said that they determine for themselves who to vote for. Eighty-one percent of these respondents planned to vote in the upcoming elections, while 12% said they would not vote and 7% were unsure. Respondents cited appropriate leadership (79 percent) and community development/change (53 percent) as the primary motivators for voting in elections, whereas insecurity and violence were the primary obstacles to voting (53 percent).

| Reasons for voting in the upcoming elections	Percentage (most to least)
I want to elect my candidate of choice/the right leader	79%
I want to see development/change in my community/country	53%
I just want to see change in my community/country	46%
I want fresh young leaders/tired of old regime	28%
Others reasons	3%
I just want to vote	0%

Reasons for not voting in the upcoming elections	Percentage (most to least)
There is too much violence/insecurity during the election day	53%
I have not decided yet	26%
I don't think my vote will make any difference	17%
I don't know where to register as voter	8%
There are no voter registration offices in my area	8%
I am busy with my life/it's a waste of time	7%
Voting process lacks integrity/is not free and fair	7%
I don't know how to register as a voter	5%
The polling station is too far	5%
Others reasons	5%
The process is too long/too many people	5%
Insufficient polling stations for the many voters who want to vote	2%

The majority of both males (83%) and females (79%) planned to vote in the upcoming election. Moreover, 80 percent of respondents between the ages of 21 and 59 said that they would participate in the upcoming elections. Except for Oromia, Harari, and notably Benishangul-Gumuz, where there appears to be a substantial number of potential voters who will not vote or are undecided about voting, respondents from all other areas indicated a high likelihood of participating in the next elections. The low voter turnout in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region could be attributed to years of marginalization from development projects, a sense of alienation among the public, lack of governance, insecurity, and a lack of basic services such as education and health facilities

PROPENSITY TO VOTE- BY AGE
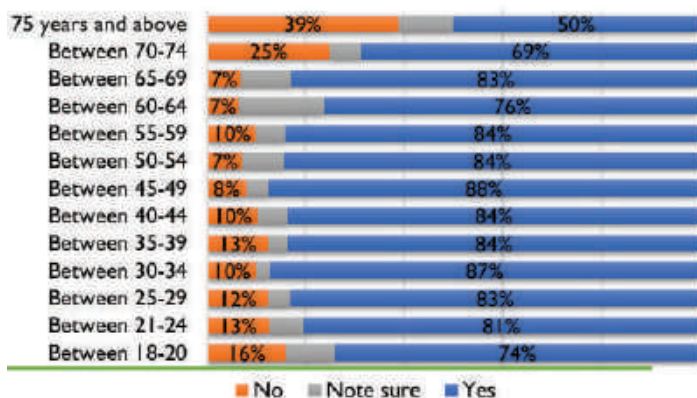
PROPENSITY TO VOTE- BY REGION
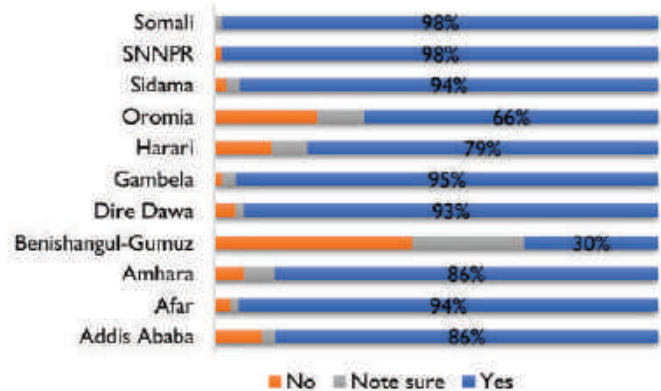
Perceptions and misconceptions about the electoral process

Six statements extracted from the general provisions on the electoral and voting processes of Ethiopia were read aloud to respondents, who were then asked to confirm whether or not the statements were accurate in regard to the voting process. The purpose of this exercise was to determine whether or not respondents understood the basic provisions governing the electoral and voting processes.

Three of the six statements were correctly identified, but three others (highlighted in grey) got a wide range of answers, which suggests that many potential voters may not understand the election laws and their proper implementation.

PERCEPTION AND MISCONCEPTIONS ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

Provisions of the electoral process	Total Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Totally Disagree
At the polling station voting is done secretly where voters can vote for their favorite party or candidate without any pressure	35%	59%	2%	3%	1%
Anyone who wishes to participate in the election can register as a voter as long as he/she is an Ethiopian and is of 18 years and above	41%	55%	1%	2%	1%
A voter can only cast his/her vote at a polling station where they are registered.	15%	58%	11%	14%	2%
A person can still vote even if his/her name is not listed in the voter registration roll/book	2%	12%	13%	49%	25%
A person can still vote even if he/she did not carry a voter's card to the polling station	2%	10%	11%	50%	28%
Those who don't know how to read or write are not eligible to vote	2%	5%	3%	44%	45%

The CECOE's voter education project

Based on the results and conclusions of the research, the CECOE launched voter education campaigns aimed at solving the identified gaps. To that end, the CECOE followed two different approaches to implement its voter education program. The first strategy is the digital voter education initiative, which utilizes social media and traditional media to improve citizen knowledge and involvement. The second strategy employed by the CECOE to encourage public participation in the Six General Elections was securing and facilitating financial sources for member CSOs to deliver voter education.

The I Vote Campaign

I Vote was a digital source of voter education that was established by the CECOE and its partners. It was independent, neutral, and reliable. The I Vote platform and its content were not associated with any political party and were handled by an experienced team. And the purpose of the platform was to inform, empower, and motivate Ethiopians to participate actively in the Sixth General Elections.

Campaign Objectives

The objective of the campaign was three-fold:

*   To educate citizens on the importance of voting.
*   To inform citizens of the basic facts and processes of voting.
*   To mobilize citizens to exercise their right to vote by encouraging voter participation throughout the entire election phase.

To attain these goals, the campaign had to show that it was a reliable source of facts for citizens and that it dealt with questions and events in a fair way and on time.

The philosophy of the campaign

The campaign's philosophy is predicated on the tenets of neutrality, impartiality, trust, independence, do-no-harm, and collaboration. The campaign philosophy appropriately acknowledged that the campaign platform should be viewed as a source of solid facts that is independent of government and party politics. In any election, but especially in controversial electoral contexts, confidence in the democratic process is crucial. Similarly, collaborations with media outlets, persons, and organizations were selected with care to ensure that none of them exhibited prejudice or a specific political orientation.

Regional identity

Ethiopia is a geographically and ethnically diverse country, with the vast majority of the population living in rural areas. Therefore, the platform had to take regional variety into account while fostering a sense of national unity. As a result, the project showcased "real Ethiopians" in content creation and messaging, allowing them to see themselves or their real lives mirrored in the campaign and making it easier for them to relate to. For the imagery, we chose regionally accurate images of people.

Language demographics

Ethiopia's vast linguistic diversity was a component in our advertising strategy selection. Therefore, we generate all material (including audiovisual, digital, and physical channels) in four languages: Amharic, Afan Oromo, Afar, and Somali. The brand identity was designed with Amharic as the primary language, which is always featured on the logo, and was adapted to incorporate other languages.

Gender

Encouraging women to participate in the voting process was crucial. 57% of people surveyed indicated that they thought women were politically active to at least some degree, and 79% of women surveyed said they were intended to vote. Still, this means that 21% of women were either undecided or did not plan to vote. Women's involvement was critical for two reasons: firstly, despite patriarchal practices and beliefs prevalent in some areas, women are the cornerstone of many families and do exert influence in their communities, even if indirectly. This made them a crucial touchpoint for information and influence. Secondly, for the women themselves, encouraging their involvement and mobilizing them in the election process allowed them to feel more confident in making their voices heard on issues that concern them directly.

Age

Based on the findings, it is widely believed that young people are actively involved in politics. This view may stem from the fact that, historically, political parties have organized and utilized youth for their own interests. Nonetheless, the poll revealed that just 74% of the 18 to 20-year-old age group planned to vote, leaving a sizable number who do not plan to vote, contrary to the assumption that young people are currently engaged. Youths who were not embraced by parties may not have been able to make informed decisions. Therefore, it was crucial to educate them on the importance of voting and the voting process, including the time required not only to vote but also for all votes to be counted and verified. This was important not just for this election, but also for future ones. This was not only useful for this election, but also for future elections as well.

Youth are well-positioned to spread and share information within their peer networks and families, and as such, they are proven to be a key factor in information dissemination. On the other hand, the elderly in the community were not forgotten. Their influence with families and communities cannot be discounted, and it was leveraged to help establish our campaign as a credible and trustworthy source of information. Interestingly, "uncertain about voting" was highest among those aged 60 to 64. This demographic cohort may have been jaded by previous election experiences. Therefore, election campaigns needed to encourage optimism and a willingness to engage the elderly.

Initial campaign concepts:

The current iteration required approval to position Amharic as the main text, with space for regional translations in the logo. It was vital to have a strong, engaging, and memorable brand identity to tie the campaign elements together. The brand identity was used on the website, in print, digital media, social media, and TV ads. Upon review of the initial suggested tag lines, we opted for the punchy option of I VOTE. This allowed us to have I VOTE as a singular campaign name, and we promoted it by translating it to regional languages. This name or tagline was chosen because it was the easiest of the others to translate and explain in Amharic.

Initially, the following alternatives were suggested:

- • - Every 1 Counts
- • - Your Vote Your Choice
- • - Have Your Say
- • - Your Choice Now!
- • - Vote Ethiopia!

The visual brand identity of the I Vote campaign has gone through phases before landing on the final brand logo with the thumbprint.

The I vote digital campaign (website, social media, TV and radio)

Website (www.ivote.et)

The website served as the main portal for voter education materials, containing information on how to get registered, how to vote, where to vote, when to vote and a range of informative articles.

Throughout the duration of the campaign, over 23 thousand users visited the site. The number of users spiked as election day approached and fell dramatically after election day. Seventy-three percent of the website's visitors were from Ethiopia. Despite the fact that the campaign did not specifically target Americans, they constituted the second largest audience, accounting for more than 8% of the total. Unlike the social media audience, the audience breakdown by gender is more balanced. Men make up the majority, with 54 percent, and women make up close to 46 percent. The age demographics breakdown is similar to that of social media, with 25–34-year-olds constituting the largest audience (33.50 percent) and 18–24-year-olds constituting the second largest audience (27.50 percent).
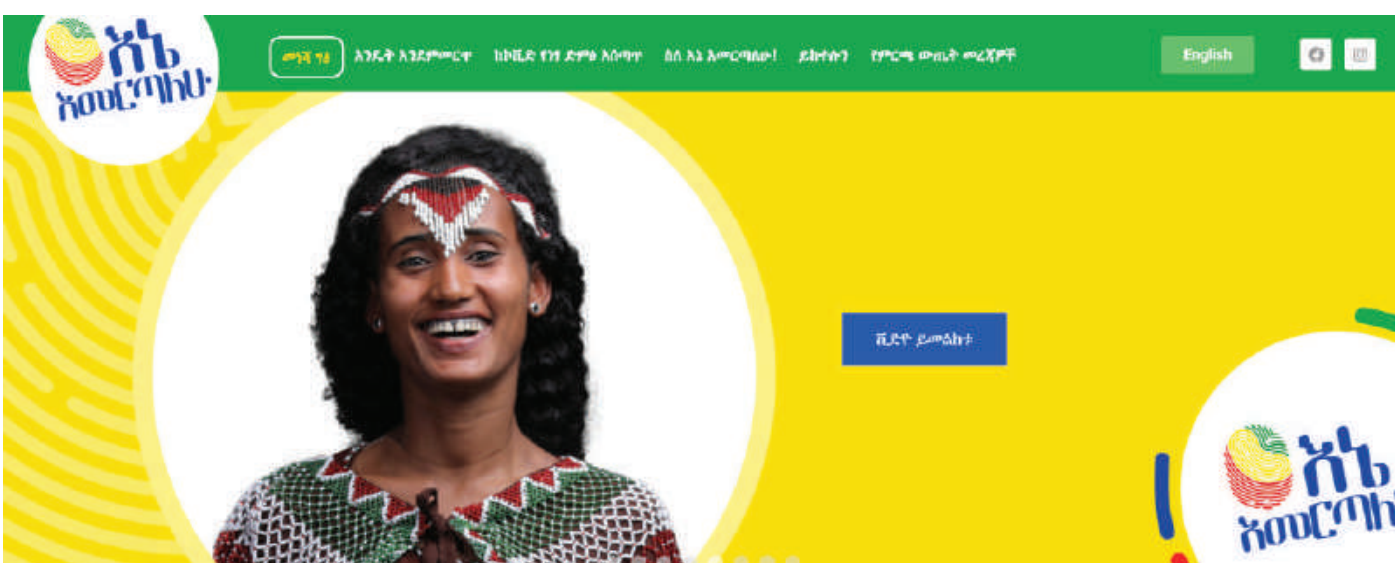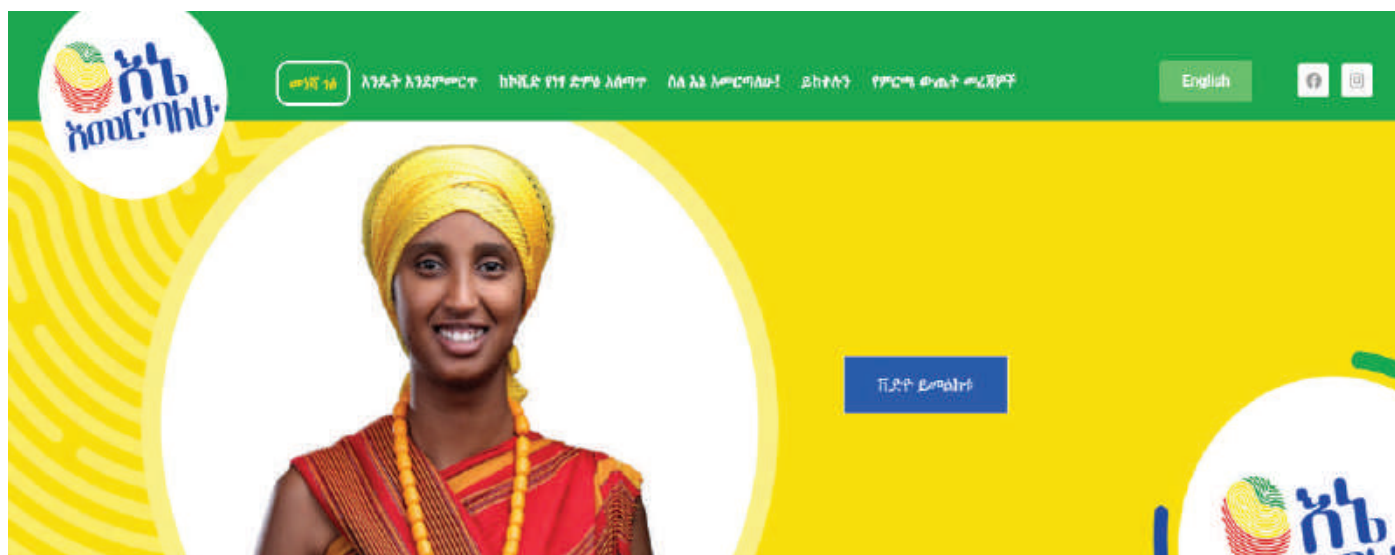
Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and websites)

Facebook was the main social media channel for the campaign. The I Vote campaign reached over 5 million users. At the end of the final election period, the page had 27, 676 followers. The bulk of the increase in the number of followers occurred in May 2021. Most of the reach was attributable to paid advertising. This is due to Facebook's algorithmic restrictions, which prioritize paid content over organic posts. Facebook blocked the campaign's paid advertisements in June. This was because Facebook classified the page as a political page and blocked access to advertisements for the remainder of the campaign. In the chart below, the fall in the reach in June, after the paid advertisement restriction is clear. The audience engaged with the content via "likes" or other reactions. Far fewer shared the posts. This is in line with general Facebook behavior across all demographics and all content types. The graph shows that the engagement had a sharp decline as the paid advertisements stopped in June, following a similar pattern to the reach. The campaign's audience is disproportionately male (90%), with 25–34-year-olds making up the largest age group (59%) and 35-44 being the second largest (24%). Our audiences are located across Ethiopia, with the largest group being in Addis Ababa (36.57%), followed by Bahir Dar (7.6%) and Hawassa (4.9%). In total, we had 82 Facebook posts. Our top Facebook posts in terms of engagement are highlighted below. Because the boosted posts were blocked in the September elections, there was a significant decrease in engagement compared to the engagement in the June election campaign.

Mainstream media (Television and radio)

A total of 1092 Ad spots were broadcast on television and radio stations.

The Somali scripts were not approved in time for transmission. In addition, there have not been any Somali TV or radio spots during this time.

Two types of ads with a slight difference were released. The first ad informed the audience that they would not be eligible to vote without registering and that they would receive an elector's card. The ad also informed voters that they had to bring their voter's card to the polling stations during the election day. The second ad highlighted similar points, but also stressed that the voter registration period was ending soon and pushed the audience to register as soon as possible so that they would not miss the opportunity.
From the total spots listed above:

- 197 spots were transmitted in the Somali language.
- 98 spots were transmitted in the Afarigna language.
- 118 spots were transmitted in the Oromiffa language.
- 675 spots were transmitted in the Amharic language.

These ads reminded people that voting day was coming up and informed them what to expect at the polling stations.

1. The first ad encouraged the audience to pledge to tolerate the views of their fellow Ethiopians. It reminded the audience that their role in building a positive future for the country starts with partaking in peaceful elections.
2. The second ad asked the audience to pledge to vote in the election for a peaceful future for Ethiopia. It reminded the audience that every vote counts.
3. The third ad reminded the audience of the times that the polling stations would be open and reminded the audience that details on the polling stations were available on the I Vote website.

Voter education activities delivered by member organizations

In addition to its own digital VE education campaign, the CECOE has reached millions of citizens through voter education programs implemented by its members. To empower its members, the coalition provided training to 150 master trainers, who then cascaded the knowledge to trainers who provided VE training at a grassroot level. Furthermore, the CECOE had solicited funds for selected member CSOs in order to alleviate the financial challenges they faced when implementing VE projects. The selected nine CSOs have received a total of 12 million Ethiopian birr, which they have used to reach 1.2 million citizens.
The list of members of the CECOE engaged in voter education were:

- Center for Concern
- Green Art
- EWF
- Reedim Generation
- Stand For Integrated Development for Ethiopia
- SID
- Positive for Action
- Future Generation

Conclusion

Overall, measured by the number of people reached, especially disadvantaged groups such as PWDs (People with Physical Disabilities), IDPs (Internally Displaced People) and Women, the CECOE's voter education program was successful. Based on indicators developed at the inception of the program, the coalition has managed to raise the awareness levels of millions of Ethiopians through its voter education program. Furthermore, the CECOE has also facilitated and streamlined conditions for its members operating in different parts of the country to provide voter education in their respective areas of operations.

Be that as it may, the voter education program was not free of limitations or challenges. Listed below are some of the challenges faced in the course of implementing the program:

- The National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) postponed the election several times, citing political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic as reasons. If the voter education program had started earlier, or in the anticipated period, we would have been able to build more trust with our audience and reach more people.
- Getting accreditation from the NEBE for a digital voter education program was a big challenge. As the board mainly focused on a face-to-face approach to deliver voter education programs, getting the accreditation and later reporting on the performance of the voter education program was difficult. The voter education reporting form was not prepared with the reporting requirements of CSOs engaged in digital voter education in mind.
- The process of running voter education Ads through several mainstream media outlets was fraught with significant challenges. The bureaucratic red tape and the lengthy processes to review and approve the content to be broadcast have reduced the number of Ads that could be aired and reach citizens.
- As voter education was delivered in several languages, finding content writers in some languages proved difficult. For instance, finding content creators for social media content in Afar and Somali languages was a challenge.
- As the CECOE's primary voter education delivery method was dependent on digital platforms, particularly on Facebook, the program's performance had been negatively impacted. A few months after we started the social media campaign on Facebook, the company issued a policy that restricts the reach of election related posts. This was a problem we had not foreseen when starting the campaign. If we had considered this ahead of time, we could have received Facebook's approval before starting the campaign.
- As internet and social media penetration grows by the day, the coalition has realized the potential of social media platforms to raise social awareness. According to our assessment, by using social media platforms, it is possible to reach more people with a lower amount of cost and time investment. As a result, the coalition has planned to launch other awareness raising social media campaigns in the near future.
- Although social media has a high potential to reach millions of citizens in the implementation of voter education programs, almost all CSOs engaged in voter education programs solely focused on the face-to-face approach. If other member CSOs or stakeholders engaged in digital voter education, we could have reached more people by sharing and retweeting each other's contents.

Recommendations

Based on best experiences and weaknesses observed during the implementation of the project, the CECOE would like to forward the following recommendations to its members and other key stakeholders who have an interest in voter education. We strongly believe that the experiences, both success and limitations, in this report will help to launch better digital voter education programs for future elections. To that end, the CECOE recommends:

To the National Election Board of Ethiopia:
- The NEBE should incorporate social media platforms as part and parcel of its awareness raising and advocacy campaigns. Furthermore, it should encourage CSOs that use digital platforms to deliver voter education.
- The NEBE should simplify the accreditation process and reporting mechanisms.

To other CSOs:
- Recent data by internationally renowned research firms shows that there are close to 10 million active social media users in Ethiopia. This number is close to 10 percent of the country's entire population. Moreover, as opposed to mainstream media, by using social media digital platforms we can easily get insight on the number of reached people and engagement rates. Therefore, CSOs should engage in digital based voter education programs for future elections.

To media outlets:
- Some media outlets (radio, Tv) often request a supporting letter to air each voter education Ad. This created challenges for both the CEOCE and content producing companies in producing and airing content on time. Therefore, media outlets, especially those that are owned or affiliated with the government, should cut bureaucratic red tapes associated with voter education campaigns.

To social media platforms:
- Currently, it is almost impossible to boost posts related to elections and voter education. The CECOE understands that this is a precautionary measure taken by social media companies (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) to prevent the misuse of their platforms by parties with ill intentions. However, this decision should have a mechanism to differentiate between parties that want to use the platforms for good causes.

Part II

Monitoring of the Ethiopian media outlets' coverage of the 21 June and 30 September elections

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
June 2022

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Introduction

About the CECOE

The CECOE is a coalition of more than 175 civil society organizations. It was established in 2019 as a result of the opening of civic space and the repeal of restrictions on civil society's participation in elections and human rights. Since then, the CECOE has been engaging in various activities. Notably, the coalition deployed thousands of observers to observe the pre-election, election day, and post-election stages of the Six General Elections of Ethiopia.

In conducting election observation, the CECOE aimed to empower citizens to be active participants and monitor the inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, and overall integrity of the election process. Citizen observation provides independent, non-partisan information that citizens, political contestants, journalists, election and government officials may use to determine whether an election is fair, free, and inclusive.

Based on reports received from its observers between March 2021 and October 2021, the CECOE found that all stages of the Six General Elections largely adhered to the procedural requirements enshrined in Ethiopia's Electoral Law. The elections were also peaceful, with no major incidents or election-related violence reported. There were, however, limitations on its competitiveness. Likewise, fragile security situations in different parts of the country and logistical challenges resulted in frequent delays and disenfranchisement of significant numbers of voters.

The 2021 Ethiopian Elections and the CECOE's Media Monitoring Unit

Ethiopia held the Six General Election in two rounds. The first round was held on June 21st, 2021, and the second was held on September 2021. The elections were originally slated to be held in August, 2020. However, the election date was frequently postponed by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE),[1] due to COVI-19 outbreak and logistical challenges. The CECEO, in partnership with the European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES) established a media monitoring unit (MMU) in March 2021. The main goal of the MMU was to monitor how the media covered the electoral processes and report on it. To that end, the unit monitored how the media covered the pre-election, voting-day and post-election periods and reported on what it found. The unit followed up on various training provided to media professionals to help them augment their knowledge of election reporting. According to the unit's report, the unit facilitated the provision of several media training courses for dozens of Ethiopian journalists during the pre-elections period.

Various studies conducted on the media coverage of elections in Ethiopia revealed that   previous national elections, particularly the 2005 elections, gained substantial coverage by the Ethiopian private print media outlets. The media coverage was highly dependent on official sources. In addition, the studies revealed that the Ethiopian media landscape in general and the privately owned print media in particular were partisan.[2]

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1 The National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) is an autonomous government agency which supervises the national elections of Ethiopia. The NEBE was established by Proclamation number 64/1992, and answers to the House of Peoples' Representatives.

2 Abate, Ashenafi. "The framing of the 2005 Ethiopian national election by privately owned print media outlets in Ethiopia." Unpublished MA thesis). Mid Sweden University, School of Journalism and Communication (2013).

According to the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, the media plays a major role in keeping citizens abreast of current events and raising the awareness of people on various issues of national concern. It also has a significant impact on the way people think and shapes or manipulates public opinion. The media becomes even more important in times of elections as it greatly shapes public opinion and determines the outcome of elections. Elections are litmus tests for the media because they show how impartial and objective the media is. The task of the media, especially national media outlets, is not and should not be to act as a mouthpiece for any government body or candidate. Its main role is to inform and educate the public and provide a neutral and objective platform for all points of views to be discussed freely.[3]

Taking this into account, the CECOE embarked on media monitoring activity by employing 9 Ethiopian media monitors. The media monitoring unit monitored election related activities from March 2021 to October 2021. The objectives of the media monitoring activity were the following:

- To monitor media incitements that might stir up election-related violence.
- To keep the CECOE' members updated on election related media coverage.
- To monitor and report all sorts of pressures on the media by political parties and other stakeholders in the election processes.
- To monitor misconduct or biased coverage by the media and alert regulatory bodies.
- To monitor political pluralism in the media and the diversity of voices, opinions, and analyses in the media.

The MMU monitored 9 selected broadcast media outlets. The 9 media outlets were selected based on the following criteria:

- Territorial reach
- Estimated audience/circulation
- Ownership and/or registration in Ethiopia

Using both quantitative and qualitative analysis, the monitoring of elections and political coverage attempted to examine and evaluate the extent to which the media delivered fair and balanced coverage of politicians and other stakeholders. The unit also monitored hate speech or inflammatory language, either reported on or originating from the media themselves. The unit also assessed if the media acted as agents of pacification or rather contributed to the escalation of potential election-related tensions. During different parts of the elections, the unit also looked at how political actors, civil society organizations (CSOs), and key political figures used social media.

Media Monitoring

Media monitoring is defined as the process of reading, watching, or listening to the editorial content of media sources on a continuing basis. It could also be defined as identifying, saving, and analysing media content using keywords or topics.[4] The media play a vital role in the conduct of a democratic election and the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms such as freedom of expression, the press and the media.[5] The media is also instrumental in encouraging the political participation of citizens as the media gives

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3 Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies: Media and elections (Cairo, 2016)
4 William J. Comcowich. "Media Monitoring: The Complete Guide." Cyber Alert, 0 0, 2010. http://www.cyberalert.com/downloads/media_monitoring_whitepaper.pdf.
5 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. "Handbook on Media Monitoring for Election Observation Missions | OSCE." Handbook on Media Monitoring for Election Observation Missions | OSCE. www.osce.org, July 13, 2012. https://www.osce.org/odihr/92057.

citizens important information to make an informed and conscious choice.[6]   Likewise, the media allows political actors to express their views and present their political programmes.[7] This is why the international standards for free and fair elections often include "fair access to the media by parties and candidates" and "impartial" media coverage of the electoral process.

Media monitoring is utilized by election management bodies, civil society organisations, election observer missions, and other media bodies to measure how well the media is playing its role during elections and the overall democratisation process.[8]

The following practices and principles are closely adhered to and kept in mind by media monitors when performing media monitoring:

- **Media monitors respect the rights of voters, candidates, political parties, and the media.**
- **Media monitors respect voters' rights to receive information:** Voters have the right to know about the different political alternatives and candidates' so that they can make informed choices
- **The rights of candidates to share information:** Candidates and parties have the right to communicate their political programs   and views. In order to do this, they should have the right to free and equal access to the media so that they can communicate their policies and opinions to the public.
- **The media's right to freedom of expression:** The media should have the freedom to inform the public about the diverse range of views in the electoral process. At the same time, they have a duty to give correct, accurate, transparent, and balanced information to voters.

Legal frameworks for media coverages of Ethiopia's elections

During elections, the most important aspect of media regulation is finding the right balance between respecting editorial independence and having rules to make sure media coverage is balanced.[9] Voluntary measures adopted by media professionals themselves, in particular in the form of codes of conduct or internal guidelines on responsible and fair coverage of electoral campaigns, are useful complements or alternatives to national legislation or regulation. Legal and electoral frameworks are the result of a variety of specific national traditions and practices, and there is no universal model that would produce the same results in different contexts.

In Ethiopia, there are a number of legal instruments that regulate access to the media both in general constitutional, media specific and election specific laws and regulations. The following section is a summary of the provisions in different laws governing the media coverage of elections.

The FDRE Constitution

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution under Article29 establishes[10] freedom of speech and expression. In line with other international human rights principles, the Constitution stipulates a list of

6 The Electoral Knowledge Network. "Media and Elections." The Electoral Knowledge Network. Accessed June 19, 2022. https://www.aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/me.
7 Ibid
8 Ibid
9 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. "Handbook on Media Monitoring for Election Observation Missions | OSCE." Handbook on Media Monitoring for Election Observation Missions | OSCE. www.osce.org, July 13, 2012. https://www.osce.org/odihr/92057.
10 Proclamation No.1/1995, The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 21 August 1995 (FDRE Constitution), Article 29

basic rights and limits on freedom of expression. In addition to the Constitutional provision, various laws have been enacted to promote and protect freedom of expression and media freedom.

Media proclamation 1238/2021

In February 2021, the Ethiopian parliament passed a proclamation that is widely perceived as a step toward establishing a more liberal media environment.[11] Although several aspects of the legislative framework have yet to be implemented, the adoption of a new law marks a significant step forward in media reform.

The new proclamation contains a variety of regulations governing media activities during elections. Article 71 of the Proclamation states that "Any broadcasting service licensee shall ensure that political parties or private candidates registered in accordance with relevant laws get equitable coverage during election periods." The media outlets are also expected to provide balanced and comprehensive coverage of election campaigns by featuring the views of all political parties and voters equitably in news, analysis, and debate programs.

According to the Proclamation, the Media Authority, in collaboration with the NEBE, shall set the period of free airtime allocated to political parties. Four factors are taken into consideration in allocating the free air time to political parties:[12] The first is the number of seats political parties hold in the House of People's Representatives and Regional Councils. The second factor is the number of candidates presented by political parties during election. The third determinant variable is the number of female or individuals with disabilities that political parties present as candidates for the election, and the allocation of equal airtime for all political parties participating in the election process is the last factor. Furthermore, the law states that the duration of equal airtime allocated to all political parties shall be guided by the basic principle of informing voters about the parties' objectives and programs so that they may make their own decisions. The minimum amount of airtime allotted to political parties must also be clearly defined.

Electoral laws

The Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation Number 1162/2019, also known as the Electoral Law contains provisions about how candidates and political parties can get access to the media. Pursuant to Article 44, political parties contesting elections are entitled to equal access to state-owned mass media outlets such as Radio, TV, and Newspapers.[13] Similarly, the law entitles candidates to get free airtime on state-owned mass media outlets.[14] The board is mandated to enact a code of conduct for the private media, state-owned mass media, and journalists covering elections. In this regard, the NEBE issued, Directive No. 02/2020. The directive contains several rules on election reporting ethics and working procedures for the mass media and journalists. The directive also outlines the rights,[15] responsibilities,[16] and obligations[17] of journalists covering elections.

11 MS. "New Liberal Media Law in Ethiopia | IMS." www.mediasupport.org, February 4, 2021. https://www.mediasupport.org/news/new-liberal-media-law-in-ethiopia/.

12 The Ethiopian Media Proclamation, Proclamation No. 1238/2021

13 The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. "The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration, And Elections Code of Conduct Proclamation 1162/2." nebe.org.et. Accessed June 17, 2022. https://bit.ly/3E57HgS

14 Ibid

15 Ibid, Article 14

16 Ibid, Article 17

17 Ibid, Article 15 and 16

Media Landscape

Before 1991, only government-owned newspapers including, Addis Zemen (Amharic), Ethiopian Herald (English), Berrisa (Afaan Oromo), Wogehata (Tigrigna), and Al-alem (Arabic) were available on the market. Similarly, the state-owned TV (then ETV, now EBC), and the national radio (Ethiopia Radio) were the only TV and radio broadcasters.

Since 1991, the media landscape in Ethiopia has taken different forms and has continued to evolve. During the early years of the 1990s, private newspapers and magazines popped up like mushrooms, but TV and radio stations had not yet been established. "Tobiya" magazine and " The Reporter" newspaper were the first two private print media outlets to be established. Then the English weekly newspapers "Addis Fortune '' and "Capital" joined the industry.

The print media experienced growth in the early years of the 1990s, whereas the broadcast media did not. From the late 1990s until 2005, the growth of print media was rather moderate. Back then, there were a lot of newspapers, including the first daily newspaper in Ethiopia's media history. From the late 1990s to 2005, the print media grew at a rather slow rate. However, since the 2005 Election, the EPRDF has extensively cracked down on dissident voices in the print media. Following, the elections, the government shutdown the private press and jailed journalists. Since then, freedom of speech or media freedom has gone off. Consequently, between 2009 to 2019, about 260 newspapers and magazines closed for various reasons, mostly by the government

The government crackdown following the 2005 national election put the media landscape at stake, and it remained the same for 13 years until the reformist government came to power. During the first days of the reformist government, the media landscape has shown improvement. But it couldn't go further as it was planned or supposed to be going. But on the contrary, the number of   broadcast, online, and digital media is increasing. .

Methodology

With an appropriate method based on objective indicators and criteria, it is possible to follow, and analyse, and monitor media content in broadcast and print media. Content analysis is the conventional methodology employed in media monitoring. However, this methodology is criticised for omitting non-measurable aspects, such as tone.[18]

The CECOE's media monitoring unit attempts to generate a media monitoring report based on established, reliable, and observable facts about media coverage of events throughout the election process. The report details the distribution of time slots to political actors, the content of their messages, the comments made, the tone employed, and the topics covered.

This monitoring was carried out by media analysts with different titles and levels of intervention. Nine monitors from all genders were selected based on pre-established criteria. Having received the required training from media monitoring experts, the monitors work during the entire election process under the constant supervision of a media monitoring expert. Extensive data has been collected and systematically reported. The data about coverage space and time is analysed quantitatively, with the results shown in graphs and tables. Qualitative data analysis was used to analyse qualitative outputs.

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18 The Electoral Knowledge Network. "Media and Elections." The Electoral Knowledge Network. Accessed June 19, 2022. https://www.aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/me.

Monitoring sample

The report sampled 7 media outlets, by purposefully selecting them based on their audience, legal status, and linguistic diversity.

Public Televisions	Monitored hours	Private Televisions	Monitored hours
Ethiopian Television (ETV)	6 -11 Pm	Fana Broadcasting Corporation	6 -11 Pm
ETV languages	6 -11 Pm and 2 to 4 pm	Walta	6 -11 Pm
Addis TV	6 -11 Pm	Oromia Broadcasting Service (OBS)	6 -11 Pm
Oromo Broadcasting Network (ONN)	6 -11 Pm		
Amhara Media Corporation	6 -11 Pm		

Quantitative analysis: measures how much space and time the media spends covering election related topics. The analysis also looks at how positive, negative, or neutral the media coverage of a certain subject was.

QUANTITATIVE	QUALITATIVE

• Quantifies the time dedicated to candidates and political parties by the media.
• Measures how much space and time the media spends to cover election related topics
• The analysis also looks at how positive, negative or neutral the media coverage of a certain subject was.
	• Systematic collection of nonnumeric observations that cannot be presented by numbers. e.g.,
	    • Styles of journalists
	    • Opinion polls
	    • Media biases
	    • Voter Education

Qualitative analysis: aims at looking at some aspects of media coverage that cannot be fully observed through quantitative methods.

The most common elements to be assessed are:

Journalistic style: Do journalists mix opinions and facts when reporting? Do journalists try to give the public accurate and in-depth analysis, or do they tend to report in a shallow and incomplete way?

Formats of the coverage used to cover the elections: Are there any examples of innovative election coverage? Is there any programming or writing in the language(s) of national minorities in the broadcast or print media? Are the media dealing with national-minority issues? Has the broadcast/print media produced any programme or article dealing with gender issues?

News omissions and distortions: Was any relevant piece of news omitted by the media. Was information conveyed in an inaccurate or distorted manner?

Women: Did media outlet devote coverages to women candidates or women's issues? Were there any programmes targeting such issues as a key component of the campaign? Did candidates and politicians (male or female) devote some of their time or space to discuss women's issues and roles as a part of their platform or campaign (both in editorial and advertising content)?

Voter education: Is there any specific campaign for voter education? Does it provide voters with correct and clear information on their right to vote and voting procedures? Does it target different audiences, particularly the disadvantaged or groups that are traditionally discriminated against ? Is it focused on a particular aspect or widespread problems n a specific country?

Coverage of election administration: Is the activity of the electoral commission being covered? Are sensitive issues related to the administration of the election being covered? Does the coverage make people feel more confident in institutions and the election process, or does it hurt their credibility?

Monitoring of hate speech: Monitors will scrutinise how the media report hate speech in election campaigns. This includes communicating inflammatory language, call for violence, discrimination, and derogatory language.

Who are the political actors?
Individuals or groups with a political role, a governmental role, a role within parties or within political forces

Defining criteria of political actors:
- Being a registered candidate
- Being a party leader/member/activist
- Being a member of the government (Ministers, President.)
- Being a member of Parliament
- Being a political party
- Being a coalition
- Being a member of the local administration.

Key findings

- OBN TV and ETV were the two media outlets that covered the election campaigns extensively. Both media accounted for more than 58% of the total coverage.
- News bulletins were by far the most frequent programs. While there were very few interviews and talk shows.
- Very little space was devoted to voter education. Hence, citizens were deprived of their rights to be informed about the candidates, electoral laws, and voting procedures.
- In the news, the Prosperity Party and the NEBE accounted for 75% of the news, while other parties and civil society organisations received only 2% of the news coverage.
- The monitoring found that the media had a blatant bias in favour of the incumbent. The ruling Prosperity Party got more than 64% of the coverage.
- The media paid particular attention to the NEBE's activities. The NEBE got 10% of the coverage.
- Twelve political parties participated in the debates that TV channels set up. The Prosperity Party had the lion's share of airtime in the debates.
- Most of the coverages on political actors had positive tones. Nonetheless, some negative and neutral reporting were observed, notably on Amhara TV (46% neutral and 18% negative) and Walta TV (38 % neutral and 10 % negative). The television stations that provided the greatest coverage of the Prosperity Party also provided the most favourable coverage, indicating a clear bias in media coverage of elections and politics.
- Four themes dominated the election campaign, accounting for more than 80 percent of the coverage. These included campaign activities, election preparations, security and politics.
- During the monitoring period, just 10% of the coverage was allocated to women political actors who were involved in political parties, election bodies, and civil society organizations.
- During the election campaign for the September 2021 election, the media gave greater coverage to the ruling Prosperity Party by neglecting other actors.
- During the September 2021 election, the media followed the rules of election silence period .
- During the monitoring period of the September 2021 election, only 13% of the coverage was devoted to women political actors.

Media monitoring results

Qualitative findings and analysis

Media agenda and format of coverage

Although election-related topics were often discussed, the media coverage was dominated by other political issues. In this respect, the media hosted several debates among political parties. The themes of the debates included education, poverty, health, the rule of law, democracy and land policy. On the other hand, the political and security situation in Tigray, the deteriorating security situation in the Oromia region, the potential for election violence, and whether the elections provide solutions to the country's problems were all covered in the news agenda of the media.

As for the format of the coverage, news and debates were the most common. The quantitative data shows that only a few reports, interviews, and talk shows were aired during the election campaigns.

Regarding the debates, since the start of the monitoring on May 3, 2021, eleven media outlets have hosted more than 27 debates in which each party had the same amount of time to introduce its policies and answer questions. The way the debates were set up made sure that everyone got the same questions, except for the part where political actors could ask questions of each other.

Twelve parties have participated in the debates. Parties that presented more candidates were invited to take part in many debates. Hence, the Prosperity Party, Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party, Enat Party, the National Movement of Amhara, and Freedom and Equality Party frequently participated in major debates. The representatives of the Prosperity Party did not attend four debates despite being invited to do so.

Ethics and deontology

The degree of respect for ethics and election code of conduct varies from one media to another. Most of the media outlets that were observed did not cover election campaigns in a balanced manner and did not follow good journalistic ethics. The coverage, especially in the talk shows, was one-sided and did not include other viewpoints.

With regards to hate speech, the NEBE cautioned the NAMA, PP, EZEMA, OFC, and other parties to refrain from hate speech and incitement to violence. The NEBE claimed that it noticed inflammatory and violent contents in some of the parties social media posts. For instance, in Facebook posts, the OLF/OFC, and their affiliates called on supporters not to participate in the process or intimidated those who did want, calling them "traitors." Another social media narrative by OLA/OFC discredited the election as "fake election"

On the other hand, the Freedom and Equality and Balderas for True Democracy parties frequently accused the NEBE of bias toward the ruling party. The heightened use of inflammatory rhetoric by opposition social media groups in Oromia and Tigray continued into election day. On election day and right after, there were also rumors of intimidation, violence, and fraud, including photos of result forms that had been changed.

 The Prime Minister was also the target of hate speech when an alleged audio clip including his voice was released by Kello Media on May 31st, 2021. The file quickly went viral. In the audio file, an alleged voice of the Prime Minister was heard declaring victory before the election day.

Voter education

Voter education was one of the topics that got the least media coverage. According to our research, during prime-time slots, a few ads with voter education content were aired, encouraging people to vote. So, the media did not fully recognize and respect the right of people to have enough information to make an informed choice.

The media coverage given to the NEBE

According to the quantitative data, the activities of the electoral authorities received a great deal of media attention and coverage. The voter registration process and the data provided by the NEBE were covered daily by the media. However, the coverage of the NEBE was not always neutral and positive. Examples of harsh criticism and negative coverage of NEBEs in some media outlets.

The media coverage given to the government

During the election campaign, the incumbent government and the ruling party received the largest amount of media coverage. This coverage highlighted the changes and reforms that the government has made in different parts of the country. Most of the criticism of the government and the Prosperity Party came during the debates, when opposition candidates had a chance to say what they thought.

The media coverage given to women and people with disabilities

During the period of election campaign, the media coverage about women and people with disabilities was very scant. Out of more than 130 panellists who participated in 27 rounds of election debates, only 25 (less than 20%) of them were women panellists. The women panellists were mostly from the Prosperity Party, the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party, and Freedom and Equality Party.

On May 21st, 2021, Arts TV organized the only debate on "Women empowerment." Six female political figures from the Prosperity (2), Enat (2), Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (1), and Freedom and equality parties (1) participated in the debate. Aside that, the media coverage given to female members of the NEBE, particularly to its Spokesperson, Soliyana Shimelis, and its Chairperson, Birtukan Mideksa, raised the proportion of women's coverage during the campaign. In addition to that, some media reported the concerns of political parties and civil society organisations over the lack of participation by women and persons with disabilities in the national election. Some media also reported on the Ombudsman Commission's assessment indicating that some polling stations were not accessible for people with disabilities.

Respect for the silence period

During the silence period, which started on June 17, 2021 and lasted until voting day, the majority of the mainstream media avoided covering campaigns and instead focused on subjects relating to election day preparations and the post-election period. But there were few minor incidents where the media breached

the silent period. Compared to the June 2021 election, the media fully respected the silence period for the September 2021 election.

Quantitative results

OBN TV and ETV provided the greatest coverage during the election campaign. Both media accounted for more than 58% of the total coverage, while Addis TV, OBS and Somali TV were not active, with coverage that did not exceed 1% for each.
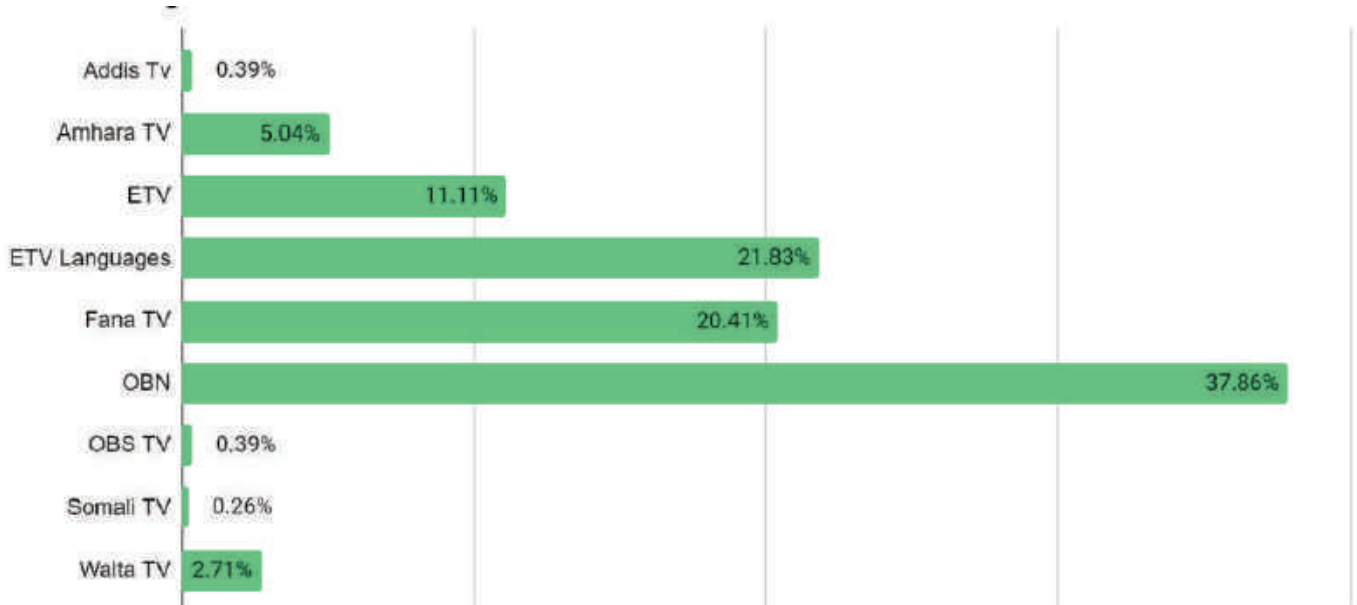

Coverage by program type

Although many debates took place during the campaign, the news remained by far the most dominant programme. There were very few interviews and talk shows, and very little time was devoted to voter education.
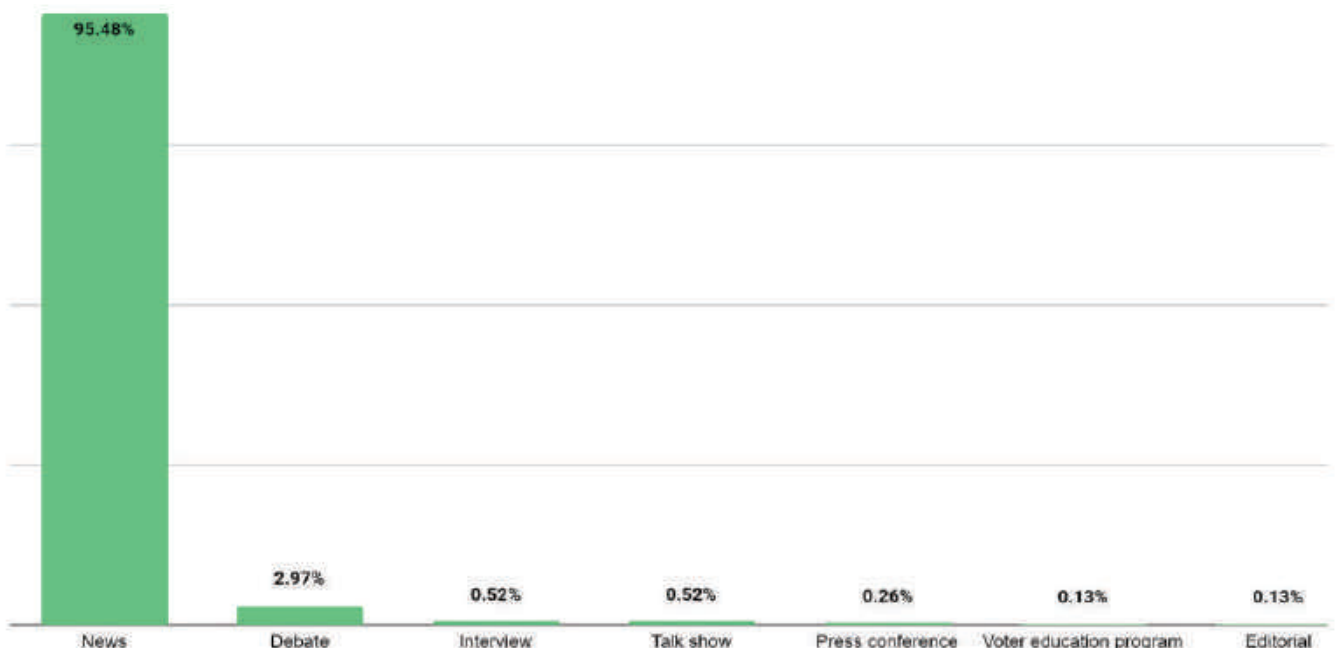
The media's coverage of election

The figures reveal an obvious bias in media coverage of election actors. One political party, the Prosperity Party, accounted for almost two-thirds of the media coverage onf the activities of candidates and other actors in the election. Similarly, the NEBE and its activities also received disproportionate media coverage.
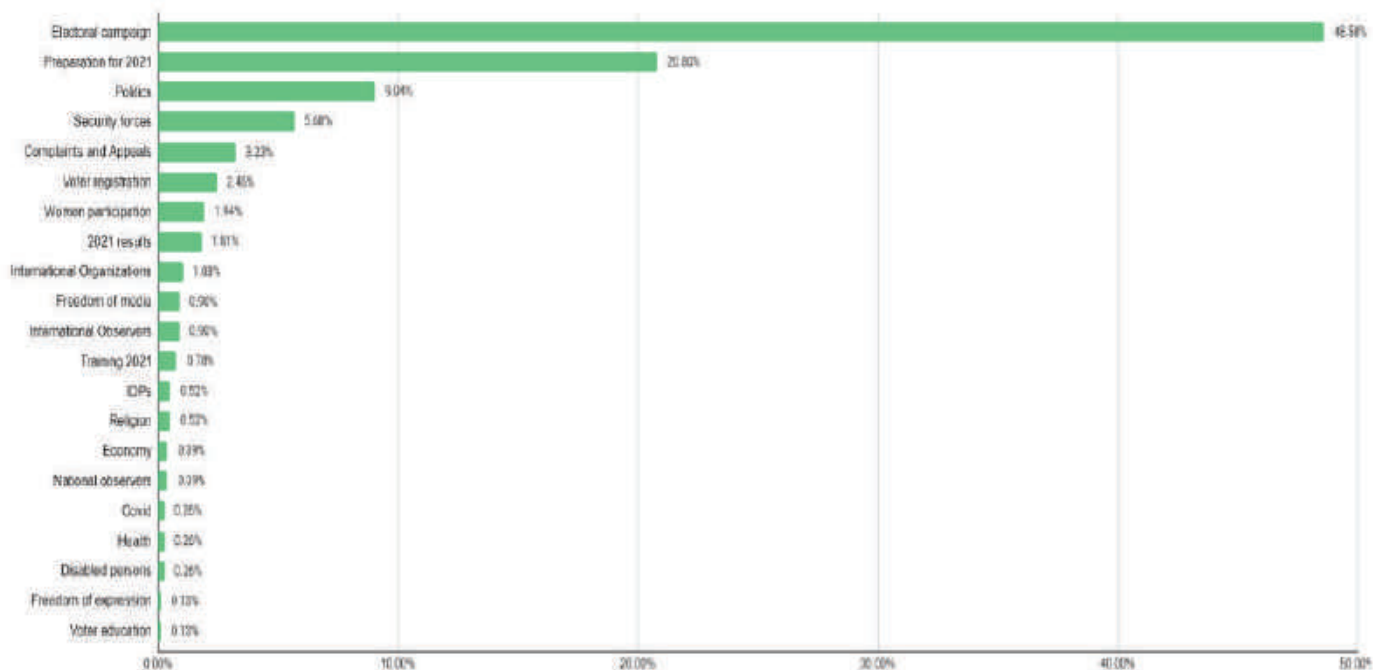

Political parties in the debate

The following chart shows that 12 political parties participated in the debates organised by the TV channels. The Prosperity Party took the lion's share of the time allotted for the debates, even though they didn't show up in four debates.
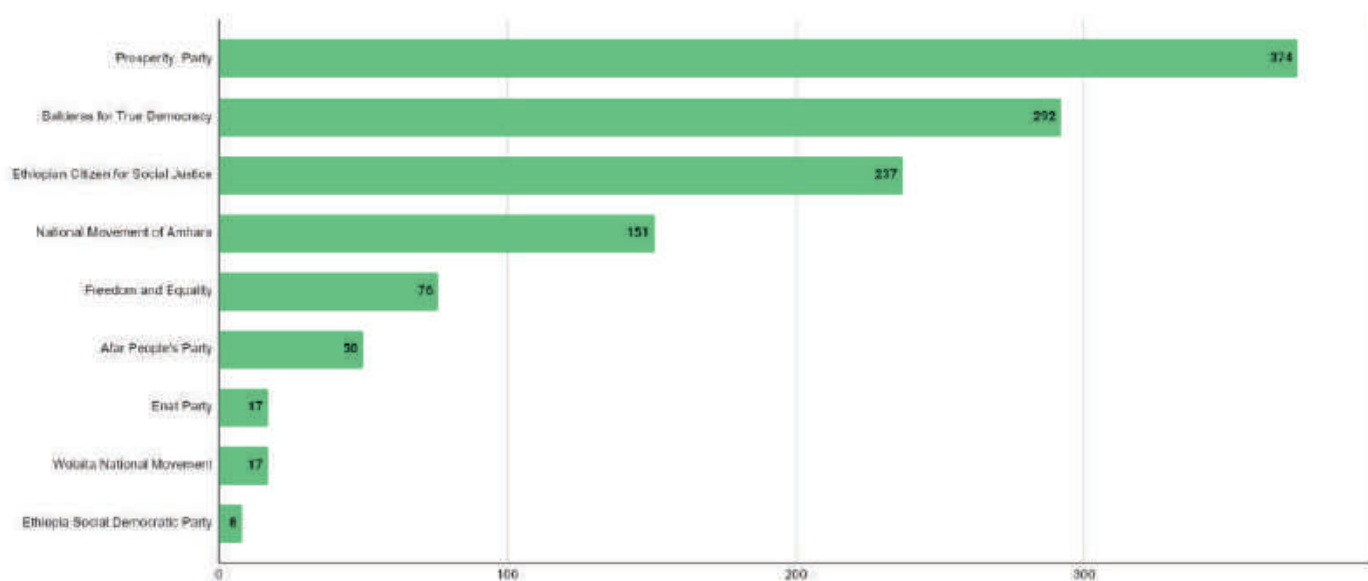
Coverage of political actors, institution, and CSOs in the news

In the news, the Prosperity Party and the NEBE accounted for 75% of the news coverage, whereas other parties and civil society organisations received only 2% of the total news coverage.
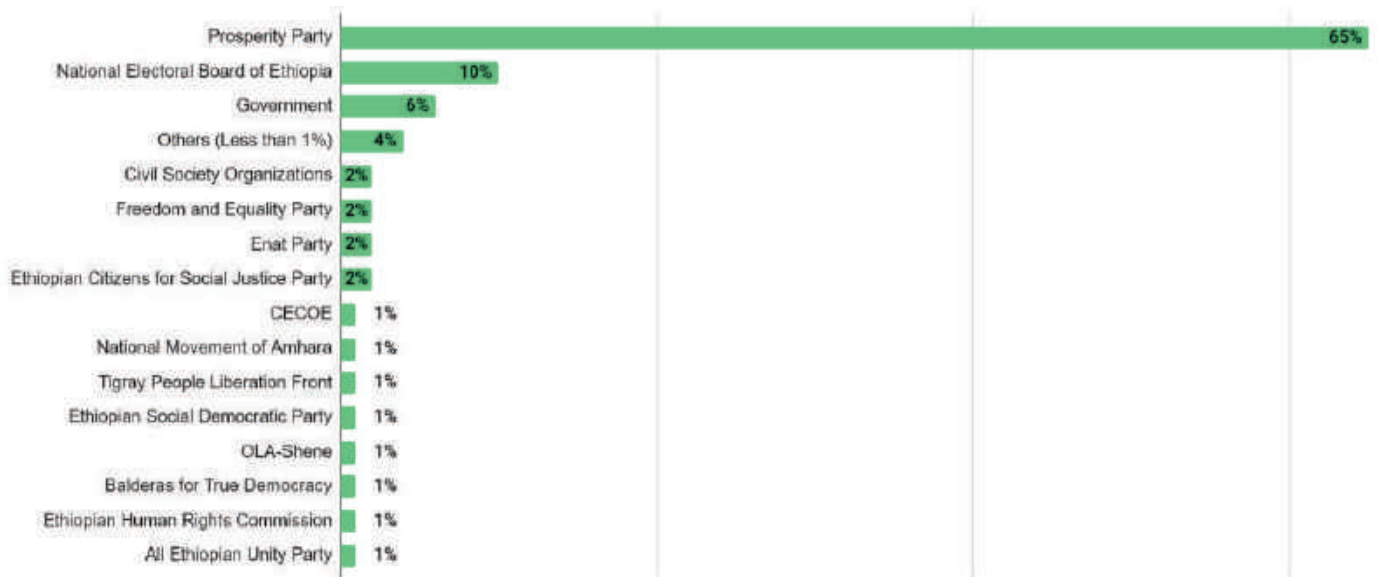
The tone of the coverages

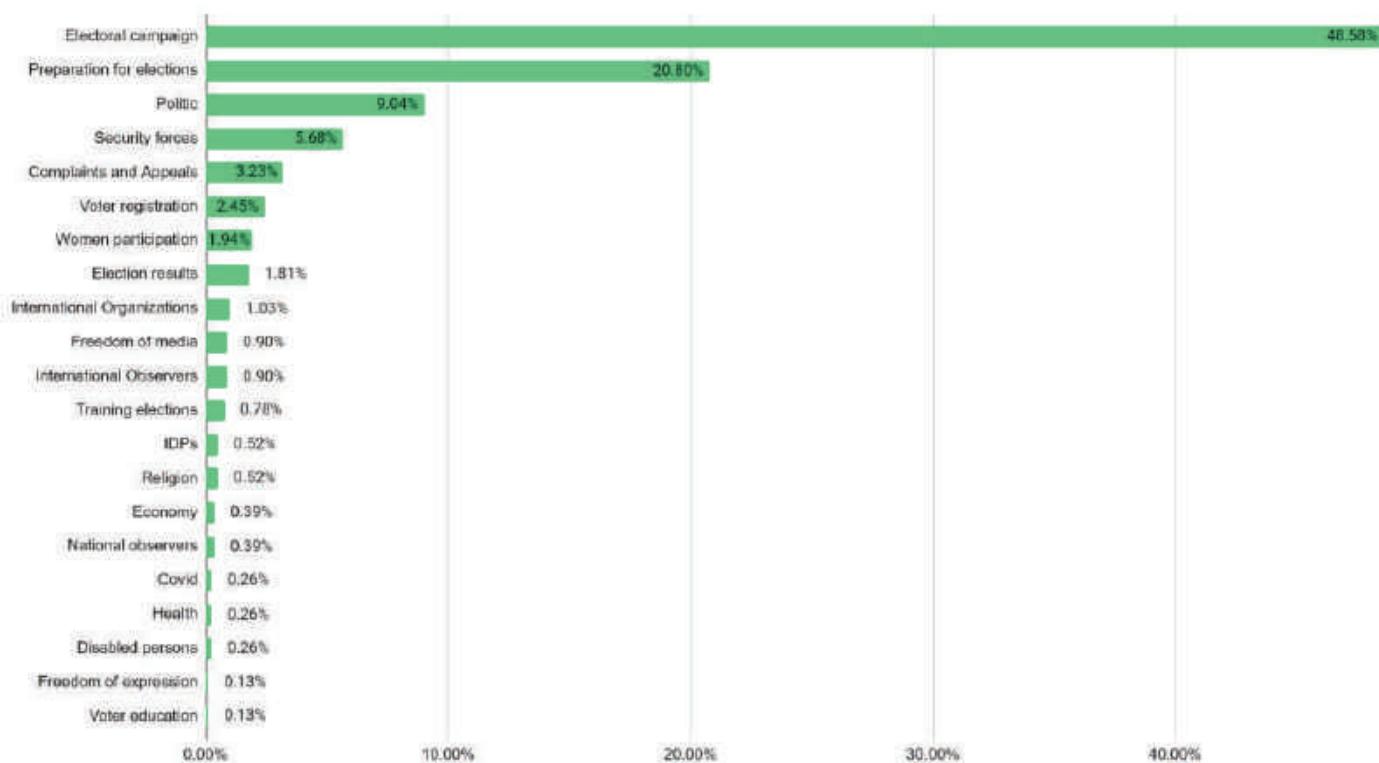Most of the coverages on political actors had positive tones. Nonetheless, some negative and neutral reporting were observed, notably on Amhara TV (46% neutral and 18% negative) and Walta TV (38 % neutral and 10 % negative). The television stations that provided the greatest coverage of the Prosperity Party also provided the most favourable coverage, indicating a clear bias in media coverage of elections and politics.
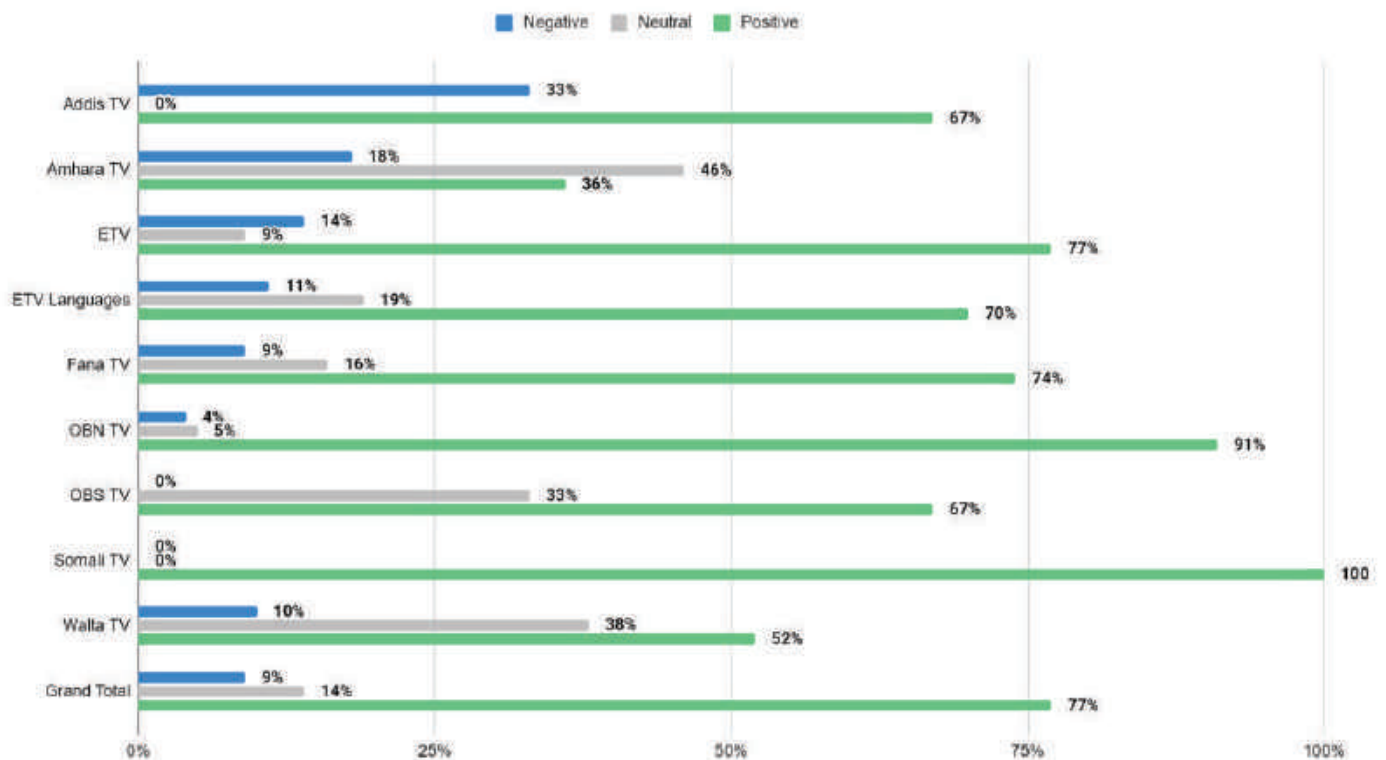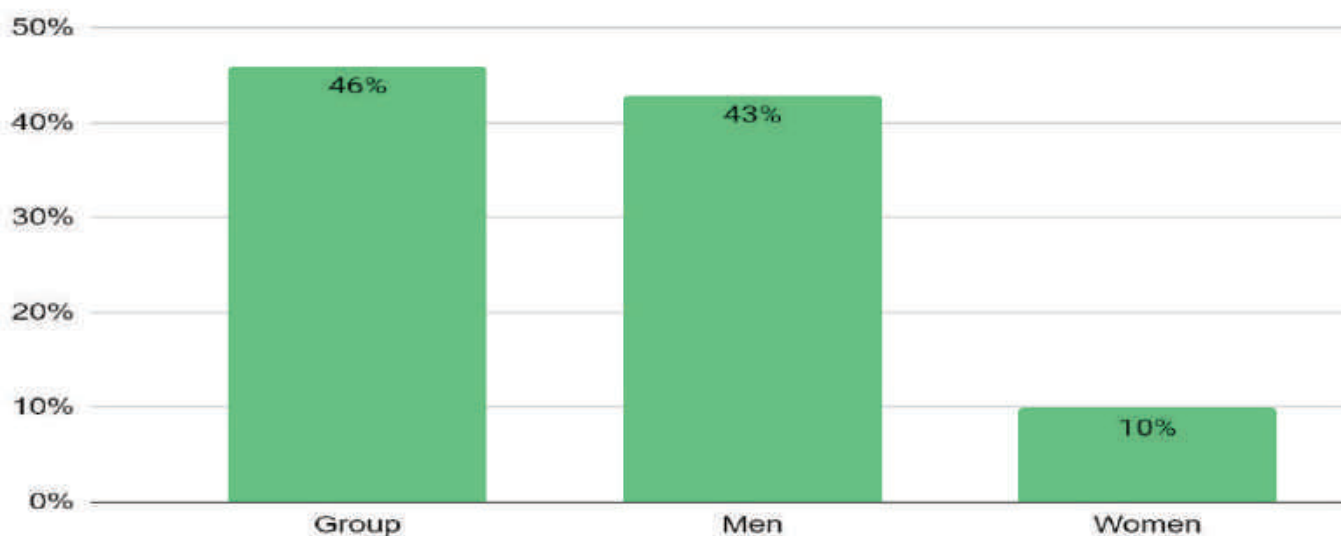
Coverage by Topics

Four themes dominated the election campaign, accounting for more than 80 percent of the coverage. These included campaign activities, election preparations, security and politics. There wasn't much talk about the economy and health in the media, even though one would think that these topics would be front and centre during election campaigns.

The media coverage did not give enough space to cover economic and health issues.

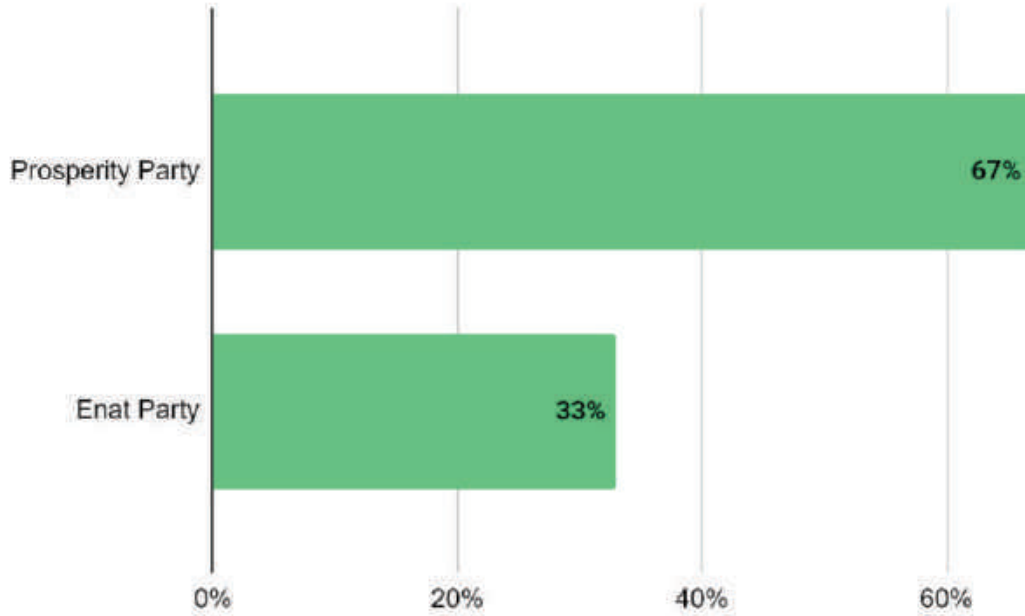| Topic	Percentage
Electoral campaign	46.58%
Preparation for elections	20.80%
Politic	9.04%
Security forces	5.68%
Complaints and Appeals	3.23%
Voter registration	2.45%
Women participation	1.94%
Election results	1.81%
International Organizations	1.03%
Freedom of media	0.90%
International Observers	0.90%
Training elections	0.78%
IDPs	0.52%
Religion	0.52%
Economy	0.39%
National observers	0.39%
Covid	0.26%
Health	0.26%
Disabled persons	0.26%
Freedom of expression	0.13%
Voter education	0.13%

Coverage of political actors by gender

Women in political parties, civil society organizations and other institutions only got 10% of the media coverage.
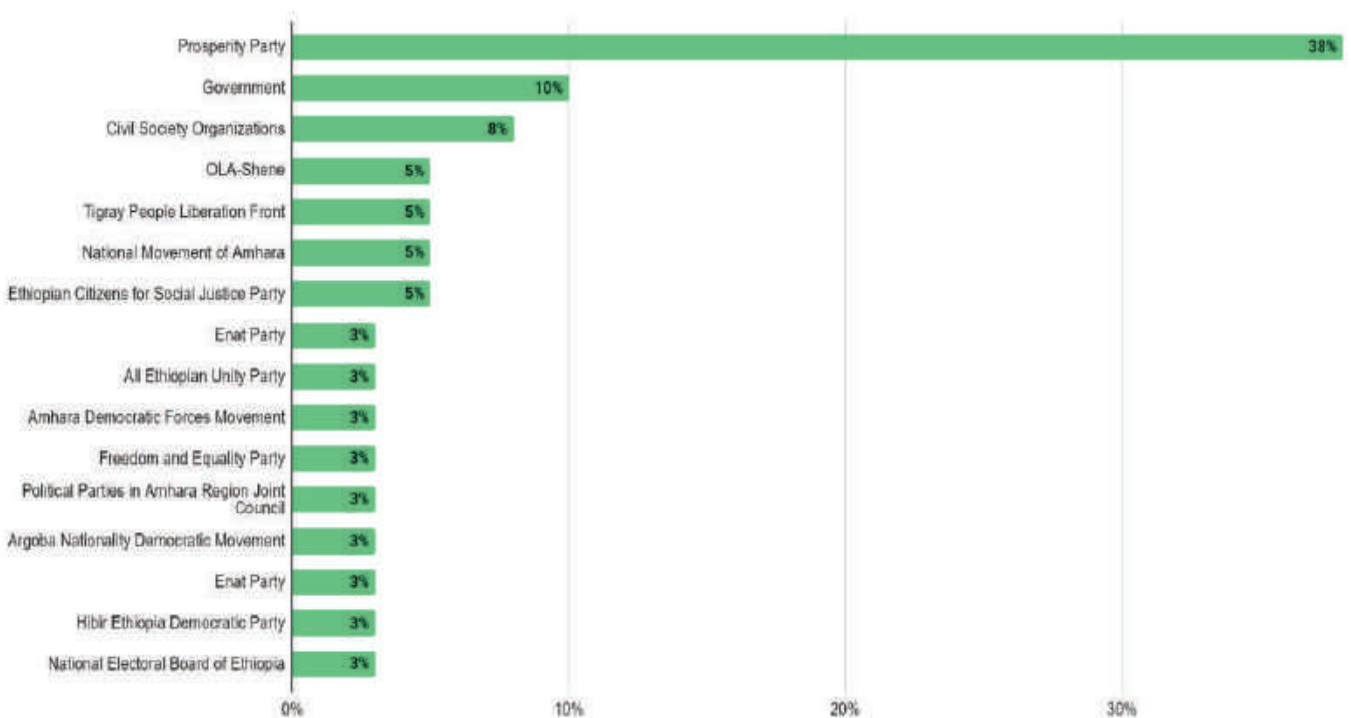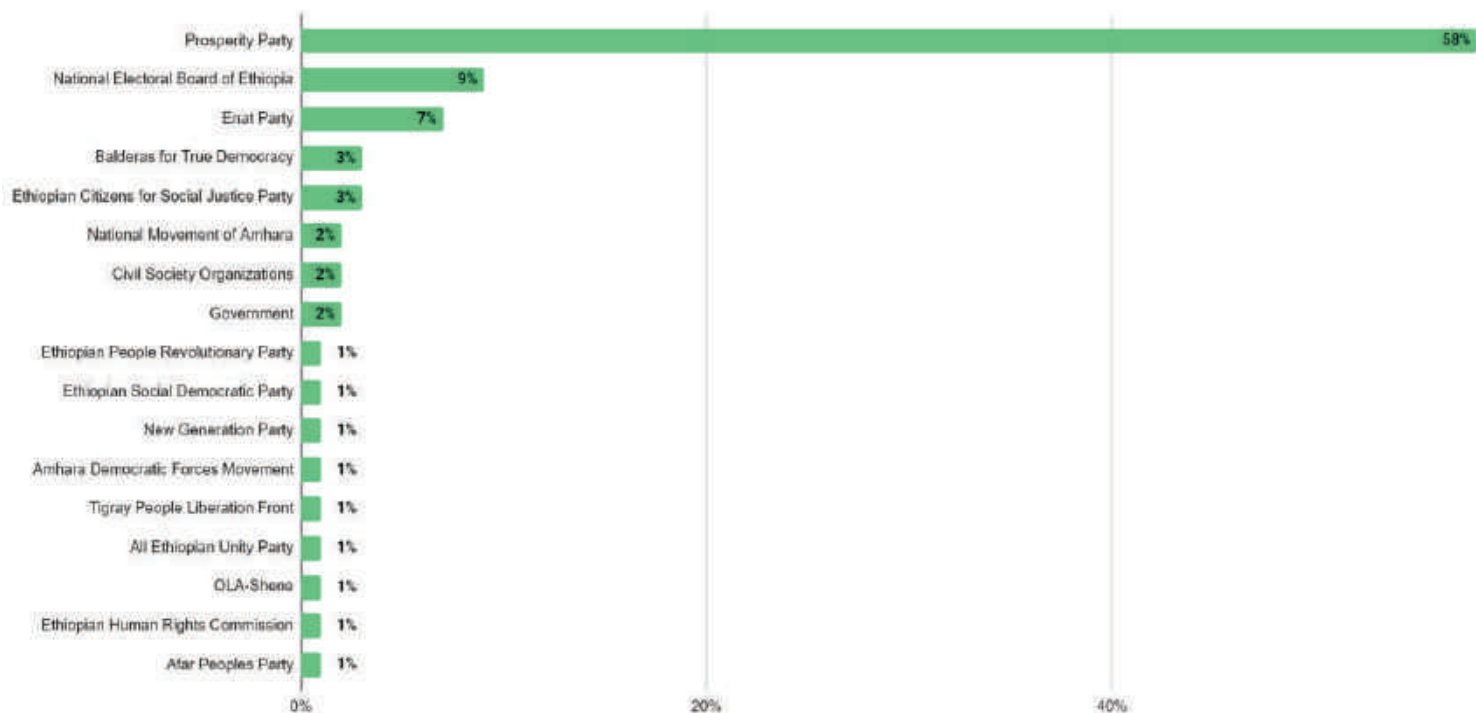
Category	Percentage
Group	46%
Men	43%
Women	10%

Coverage by media

Addis TV

Coverage vs. Political Actors/Institutions/Organizations

Actor	Coverage
Prosperity Party	67%
Enat Party	33%

Amhara TV

Actor	Coverage
Prosperity Party	38%
Government	10%
Civil Society Organizations	8%
OLA-Shene	5%
Tigray People Liberation Front	5%
National Movement of Amhara	5%
Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party	5%
Enat Party	3%
All Ethiopian Unity Party	3%
Amhara Democratic Forces Movement	3%
Freedom and Equality Party	3%
Political Parties in Amhara Region Joint Council	3%
Argoba Nationality Democratic Movement	3%
Enat Party	3%
Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party	3%
National Electoral Board of Ethiopia	3%

ETV

ETV language

Fana TV

OBN TV

OBS TV

National Electoral Board of Ethiopia — 100%

0%   50%   100%
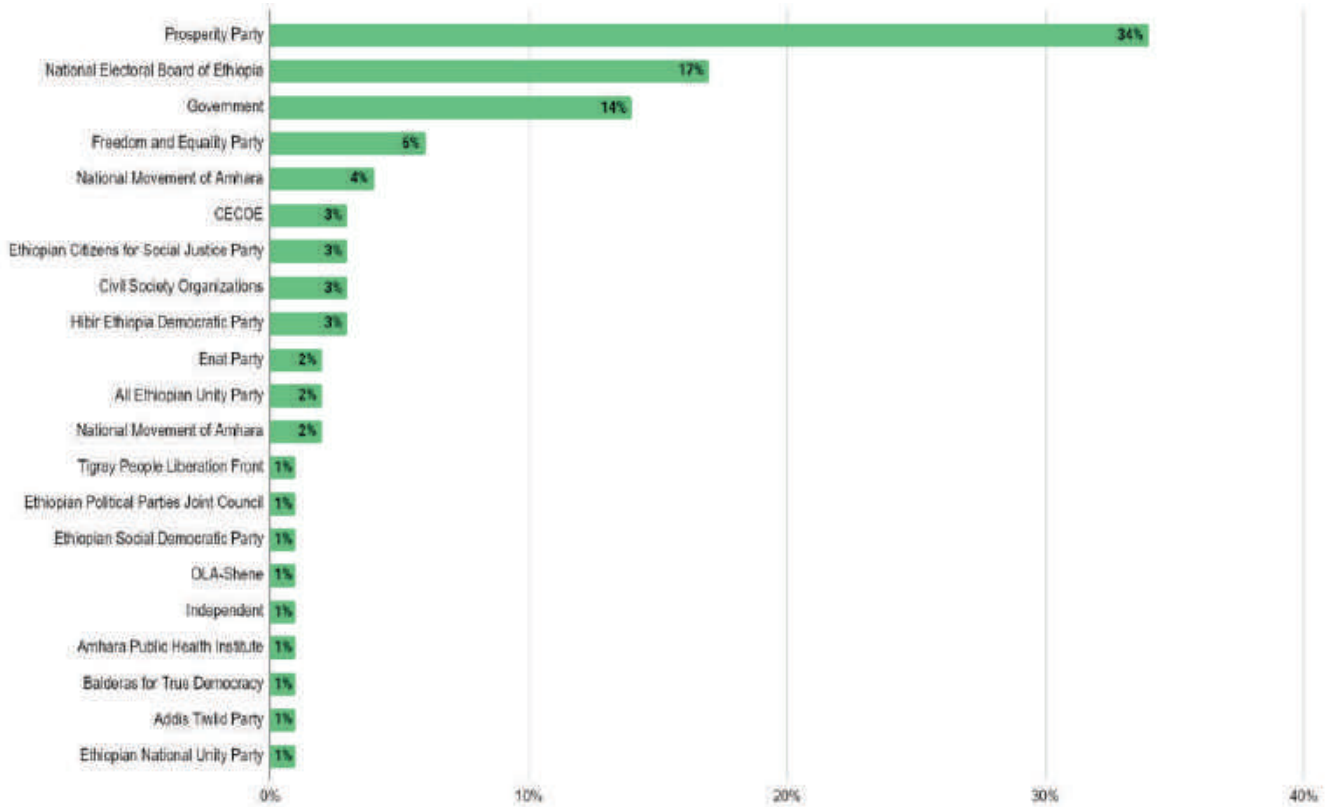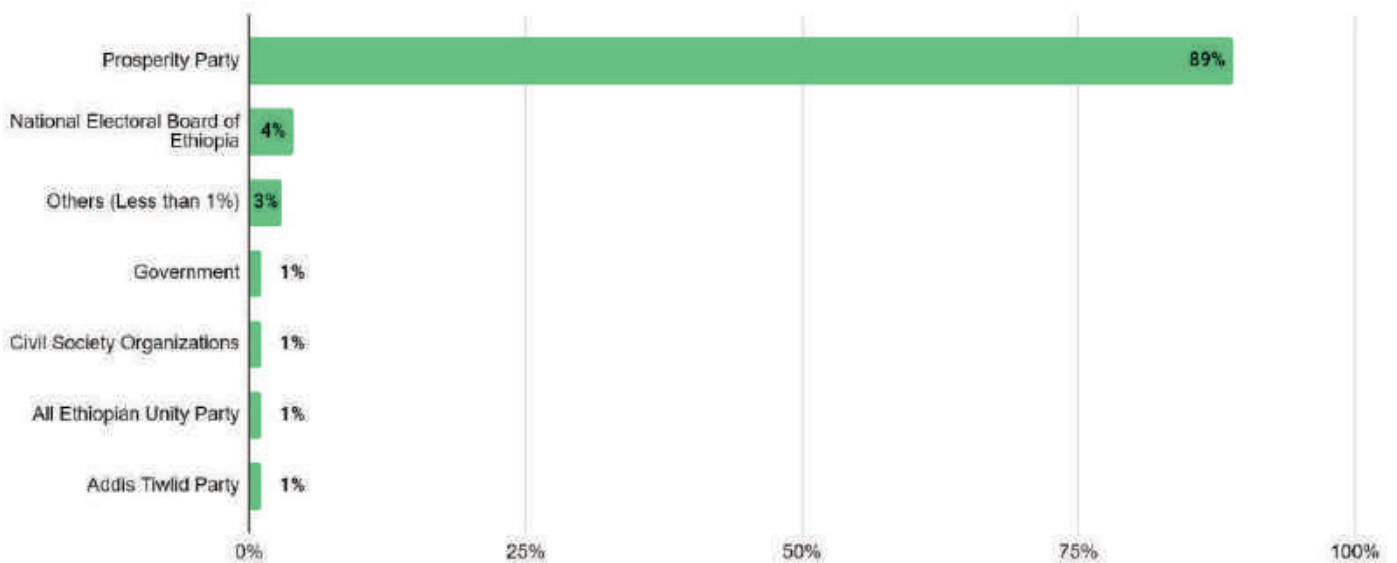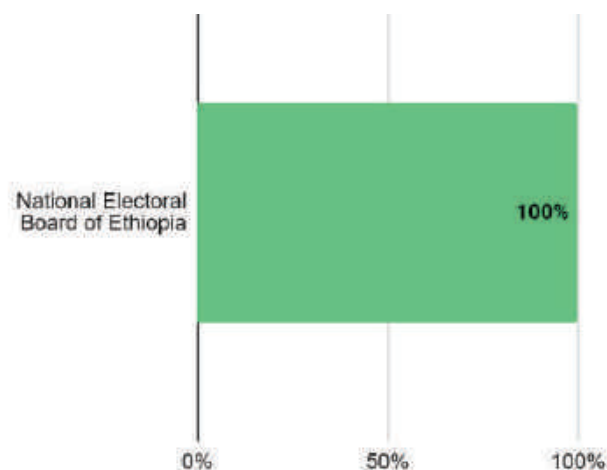
The use of Facebook during the electoral campaign

According to napoleoncat.com, nearly one-fifth of Ethiopians have access to the Internet, and as of January 2020, there were 6, 137,000 Facebook users. Although Ethiopia's internet penetration remains among the lowest in Africa, the use of social media has a paramount role, especially in times of elections. Our analysis focuses on Facebook because it is the most popular social media platform in Ethiopia.

Actors of the election such as the NEBE and the media, also extensively use Facebook to update followers. In terms of popularity, the official page of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is the most popular page in Ethiopia. The PM is followed by EZEMA, with its highly political social media content and enticing election campaign ads. Even during the campaign silence periods, EZEMA ran a significant number of ads. The other parties increased their Facebook posts in the final weeks of the campaign.

The Media Monitoring Unit monitored the Facebook page activities of the 9 most popular political parties, from the beginning of election campaigning on February 15th, 2021, to the end of the election campaign on April 30th, 2021.

The main objectives of the monitoring were to assess the importance of Facebook during the campaigns, to find out the topics and narratives presented by political actors on their Facebook accounts, and to assess the level of engagement of the actors by examining the number of comments, shares, and reactions to their posts.

In total, during the campaigning period, 9 parties published 1222 posts on Facebook, which is an average of 16 posts per day. It appears that the political parties had a sustained activity on Facebook during the campaigning period.

During the monitoring period, the Prosperity Party posted the highest number of posts, posting 374 items. This is followed by the Balderas for True Democracy with 292 posts, followed by the Ethiopian Citizen for Social Justice with 237 posts, and the National Movement of Amhara with 151 posts. The rest of the parties published less than 100 posts, with Freedom and Equality Party posting 76 posts, Afar People's Party 50, Enat Party 17, Wolaita National Movement 17, and Ethiopia Social Democratic Party 8 posts.

Our monitoring revealed that Facebook was an important communication platform used by political parties during this period. Political parties mostly used Facebook to broadcast election messages and to inform supporters about their campaign activities. Political parties posted diverse content ranging from text to images and videos. For instance, Balderas for True Democracy posted 35 videos while the Prosperity Party posted 18 videos. In addition to videos, political parties extensively posted direct quotes taken from the speeches of leaders to persuade people to vote for them.

When it comes to the level of engagement, posts published by Balderes for True Democracy and the National Movement of Amhara generated the highest number of interactions. Even though the Prosperity Party has a lot of followers, none of its posts made it into the top 100 posts with the highest engagement.

With regards to the contents of the posts, the posts of many political parties were focused on elections-related messages and the security situations of the country. Very few messages addressed social and economic issues.

The messages posted by the majority of political parties lacked depth and rigour. The messages are shallower when it comes to explaining their political and economic programs to their supporters. An exception to this is EZEMA. The party did some live broadcasts answering questions from the public about their programmes.

Post-election media coverage (June 22 to July 5)

In the post-election period, the media outlets gave extensive coverage to the announcements of preliminary election results. As there were early claims of victory on social media, the media outlets reiterated what the NEBE and other commentators had said, that the final results can only be announced at the constituency level, and the NEBE is the only legal body that can do that. Some also gave an explanation of how the election results would be announced.

During the two weeks that followed the June 21 general elections, the television stations covered a variety of post-election themes. Most of the news coverage was about the NEBE's press conferences and the reactions of political parties to the electoral process, voting and election result announcements.

The Prosperity Party gained significant coverage from state-owned media, while the Balderas Party's rejection of election result gained some coverage from some private media. The press releases of different political parties, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Joint Council of Political Parties, and other election observers such as Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organisation for Election, Women's Federation, Women Lawyers' Association, Ethiopian People with Disabilities' Association, Ethiopian Youth Mission for Peace and Prosperity, African Union Observers, and East Africa Standby Force. Besides, the police, the Federal Supreme Court and the opinion of voters also received significant coverage.

Government affiliated TV stations such as Fana TV, Walta TV, ETV, and OBN TV mostly focused on the reaction from the government side. Whereas other private TV stations tried to show the reactions of opposition political parties. In contrast to government-owned media sources, commercial TV stations also broadcast opposition party news releases, except for ETV and Walta, which broadcast EZEMA's press conference and complaints. Walta TV also reported the complaints filed by the Ethiopian Social Democratic Party and the Oromo Federalist Congress.

Ahadu TV, Walta TV, and ETV reported a statement by the National Movement of Amhara.   ETV, OBN TV, and Walta TV also reported a statement by the Joint Council of Political Parties at national and regional levels and the Prosperity Party's press conference about the successful completion of the election.

Media coverage of the second round of elections, September 30th, 2021

On September 30th, 2021, Somali, Harari, and SNNPR Regions held elections. The Prosperity Party, EZEMA, Freedom and Equality Party, the Ogaden National Liberation Front and the Western Somalia Party. The last two parties withdrew from the elections.
The media has largely covered the Prosperity Party, relegating other parties as shown below.
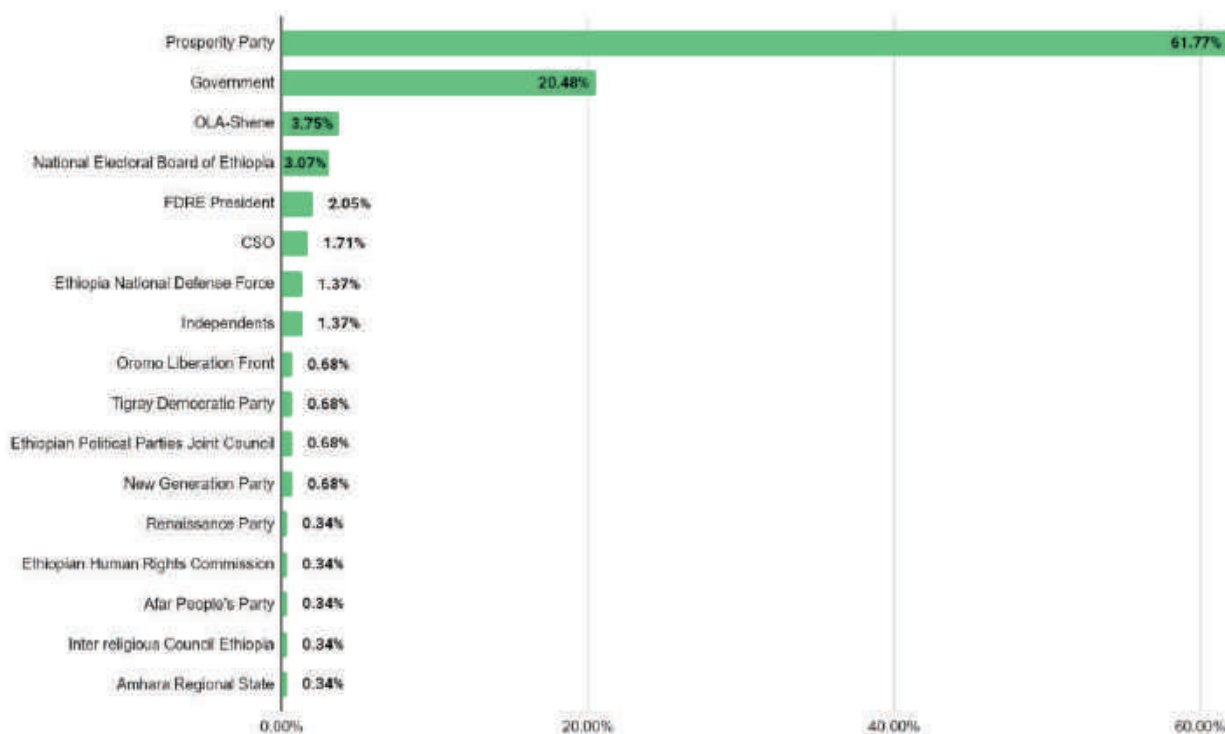
Coverage of political actors by gender

Women in political parties, civil society organizations and other institutions only got 13% of the media coverage.
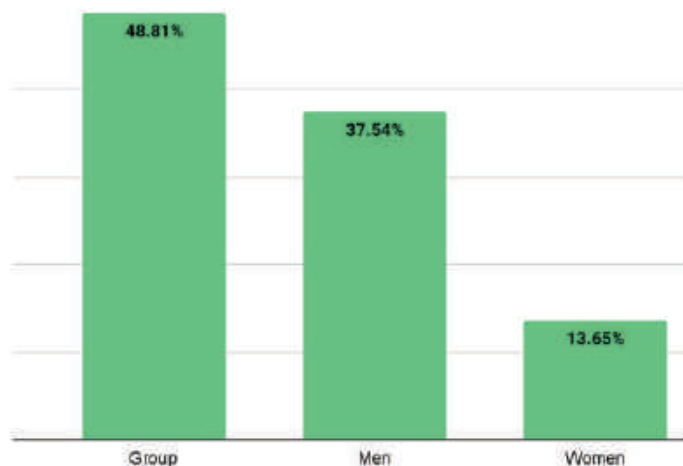
Recommendations

This report provides media institutions and other stakeholders with the following recommendations. We believe that the recommendations would enhance the role of the media in elections.

Recommendations for the media

- Adopting an editorial line.
- Developing an internal professional code of conduct during election campaigns. The code of conduct should spell out the rights and responsibilities of journalists who work in the media during election campaigns, as well as ways to punish them if they break the rules.
- Separating the administration and editorial staff in the media.
- Developing a clear programme and information strategy for election coverage.
- Respecting the electoral law and the decisions of the media regulatory bodies and the electoral administration.
- Providing training and refresher seminars to..... on the techniques of election coverage.
- Holding frequent editorial conferences or editorial meeting to timely detect mistakes and ethical breaches made by journalists covering election.
- Encouraging debates and talk show programmes in times of election campaigns. Voters got more useful information from debates and talk shows than they did from news bulletins.
- Creating cooperative platforms between media houses and other institutions that work on media development and elections.

Recommendations for journalists

- Ensuring all laws, regulations, decisions and codes of ethics relating to campaign coverage are well understood and respected by journalists.
- Ensuring journalists' strict observance of professional integrity and neutrality.
- Providing training for journalists in election coverage.
- Interest in the candidates' programmes should take precedence over their statements or side activities.

Recommendations for the government and media authorities

- The media authority should be more independent and better supported to be able to play its role in supporting the media.
- The government should give licenses to private media and encourage them to make a wide range of independent shows.
- Supporting the media sector by creating a favourable environment, institutional setup and market structure. The government should also protect journalists.
- Setting up a way for the public to get access to information about circulation, sales, and any other relevant information about the press market.
- Establishing a permanent media monitoring unit under the aegis of the Media Authority.

- Government authorities should regularly follow up with the media to identify gaps and improve the overall media environment.
- The law should establish a means for equal access to the media. In this respect, the proportionality criteria for media coverage should be well defined.

Recommendations for civil society organisations and journalists' unions

- Organizing training and refresher sessions for journalists. Members of the print and electronic media monitoring units should receive regular training on appropriate techniques and methodologies to be followed during election campaigns.
- Providing tailored training for media professionals. The training should be tailored to the needs of journalists in Ethiopia, taking into account their linguistic and regional differences. In addition to providing training in event-specific reporting techniques, the training should emphasize media ethics and giving international experience.
- Advocating for the protection of journalists and media freedom.
- Helping the media to develop their code of conduct
- Unions should be proactive in training journalists and protecting them when they are intimidated.

Recommendations for political parties

- Making election programmes and documents available to journalists.
- Encouraging candidates and party leaders to approach the media and be open to the media.

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