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Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society
Organizations for Elections

Netherlands Institute for
Multiparty Democracy



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European Union

Gender Analysis

*of the 6th General Election in
Ethiopia*



February, 2025



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Acronym

CECOE: Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

Covid-19: Coronavirus disease of 2019

CSOs: Civil Society Organizations

EMB: Electoral Management Body

ETB: Ethiopian Birr

EWLA: Ethiopian Women's Lawyers Association

EZEMA: Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice

GESID: Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Department

HoPR: House of People's Representatives

ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

IRI: International Republican Institute

IRI: International Republican Institute

NDI: National Democratic Institution

NEBE: National Electoral Board of Ethiopia

SNNPR: Southern Nation, Nationalities and Peoples

UDHR: Universal Declaration on Human Rights

UN: United Nations

USD: United States Dollar

Executive Summary

Women's participation in electoral processes is a fundamental right protected by international and regional frameworks, yet Ethiopia's 2021 general elections exposed a significant gender gap in political engagement, with low representation of women as candidates, voters, and observers due to systemic barriers. In response, the Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CECOE) commissioned a gender analysis under its broader initiative, "Enhancing the Participation of Ethiopian Women in Politics: Balancing the Scale," funded by the European Union and implemented with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy.

This gender analysis, employing primarily desk review and few KIIs, aims to identify gender disparities within the electoral process, offering insights to guide action plans, evaluate post-electoral dynamics, and address weaknesses while promoting gender equality in Ethiopia's democratic evolution. Accordingly, it adopted an assessment framework covering the legal and policy framework, election management bodies, voter registration, voter education, candidacy, observation, election day, and results announcements. The key findings can be summarized as follows:

Key Finding 1: Legal and Policy Framework

Ethiopia's legal framework, including the FDRE Constitution (1995), international treaties, and the Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation, guarantees women's political rights and strives to promote their participation. However, gaps persist, such as the absence of specific gender quotas and enforcement mechanisms for gender-related provisions.

Key Finding 2: Electoral Management Body

Gender-sensitive directives were introduced, such as mandatory quotas for grievance committees, yet implementation at polling stations was inconsistent. NEBE further provided capacity buildings.

2 of the 5 Management Board members are women. Further 50.6% of NEBE staff were women. However, a significant gap was observed at polling station level.

Key Finding 3: Voter Participation

In the June 21 Elections, women comprised 45% of the registered voters. However, the aggregated (including the September Election) shows that women accounted for 50.2% of registered voters but faced barriers, including cultural prejudices, security issues, and inadequate voter education.

Key Finding 4: Voter Education

Although several CSOs were accredited, only half of them provided voter education.

Voter education campaigns often failed to effectively reach rural women due to logistical constraints and limited funding.

Key Finding 5: Candidacy

Women constituted 20% of candidates nationally, with significant regional disparities due to several factors including gender stereotypes.

Key Finding 6: Election Monitoring and Observation

CSOs and women-focused organizations like EWLA played a role in election observation. Women comprised 51% of all election observers.

Key Finding 7: Result Announcement

Women had higher success rates than men, with 56% of female candidates winning seats compared to 22% of male candidates.

Key Finding 8: VAW-E

Incidents of violence against women occurred as evident in EWLA's observation and a study conducted by UN Women, NEBE and UNDP. Although all forms of violence were reported, the major form of violence reported was psychological violence.

In conclusion, women's electoral participation has shown promising results, especially in voter participation. This is primarily due to an enabling legal and policy environment. However, several areas of improvement exist including the need for mandatory quotas, robust enforcement and monitoring mechanisms, comprehensive voter education campaigns, strengthening accountability for violations and incorporating prevention mechanisms against VAW-E.

Introduction

Background

The participation of women in electoral processes is a fundamental right enshrined within international and regional frameworks. The United Nations (UN) emphasizes the necessity of safeguarding and promoting women's rights to engage fully in elections, recognizing that true electoral fairness hinges on equal opportunities for both women and men.¹ As elections are an essential democratic process, it is only when conducted inclusively and credibly that they empower citizens to select representatives who best reflect the will of the people and determine who has the right to govern.²

This being said, Ethiopia's 2021 general elections represented a pivotal moment in the nation's democratic evolution, yet a persistent gender gap in political engagement was highlighted. Despite ongoing initiatives aimed at fostering gender equality, women's participation as candidates, voters, and election observers was alarmingly low, exposing systemic barriers that restrict their involvement in the political sphere.

Highlights on the Participation of Women in the 6th National Election

Political Party Participation: women lead only one of the 53 registered political parties

Candidacy: As compared to 2015, the participation of women candidates in the 2021 elections decreased from 29 percent in 2015 to 21 percent. Of the registered political parties, only 13 parties successfully reached the 20 percent threshold of registered women candidates to qualify for additional funding.

Voters: in June 2021, 17,091,128 women were registered to vote, representing 45 percent of all registered voters, even though this was improved during the September Election.

In response to these disparities, the Coalition of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations for Elections (CE-

¹ United Nations (2005), Women and Elections: Guide to Promoting the Participation of Women in Elections.

² NDI, guidelines on gender considerations in international election observation, including violence against women in elections. See also, UN Women and UNDP, Inclusive Elections.

³ IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

COE)—a non-profit organization comprising over 175 member groups—has commissioned a gender analysis to investigate the factors contributing to the low electoral participation of women. This initiative is part of CECOE's broader project, "Enhancing the Participation of Ethiopian Women in Politics: Balancing the Scale," funded by the European Union and executed in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD).

A gender analysis relating to the electoral process is vital as it identifies disparities in opportunities for men and women within the electoral process.⁴ Gender-based analyses, conducted at various stages of the electoral, can assist the concerned organs to articulate their positions on gender equality and formulate a proper action plan. Especially, post-electoral period assessments present an opportunity to evaluate the electoral process, identify strengths and weaknesses, and gather gaps, opportunities, and lessons learned.

Objective

The primary objective of this assignment is to examine the factors influencing women's participation in the recent election. This will be achieved through a gender analysis of the sixth general election and the facilitation of validation workshops.

The specific objectives include:

1. Evaluating women's participation in the electoral process.
2. Investigating the factors influencing women's participation in elections in Ethiopia.
3. Analyzing the legal and policy frameworks related to gender equality in elections, including gender quotas, electoral laws, and relevant international conventions.
4. Assessing the effectiveness of these frameworks in promoting gender equity during the sixth general election.
5. Identifying strategies to overcome the barriers faced by women in Ethiopia.

⁴ ACE Project, Gender and Elections, <https://ace-project.org/ace-en/topics/ge/ge4/gender-assessments-of-the-electoral-process>

Methodology

To achieve the objective of gender analysis, a qualitative methodology involving document review and key informant interviews was employed.

Document Review

This involves conducting a desk review focusing on available reports, research, and any document pertaining to the subject matter in Ethiopia. The documents include:

1. Laws and policies related to elections;
2. Voters and candidates registry disaggregated by sex;
3. Voters turnout data;
4. Gender manuals, gender audits, or policies at NEBE; and
5. Election reports.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted to supplement the document review. The KIIs were targeted purposively to gather vital information to address the assessment questions.

Institution	Status	Purpose
NEBE	Governmental	As the organ is entrusted to administer and regulate election processes, to gather primary data on the status of women's participation in the 6th General Election
Ezema	Political Party	Understand the dynamics of gender equality within a political party as well as recruitment of candidates

Table 1: Governmental and Non-governmental Institutions targeted for the KIIs

Scope

Technical Scope: The conceptual framework outlined in Section 2 guided the technical scope of the gender assessment. The framework includes the legal and policy framework, election management bodies (EMBs), pre-election cycle, election day, and post-election day.

Methodology Scope: the assessment depends on document review and is limited to certain informant interviews.

Temporal/Spatial Scope: the assessment is limited to the 6th General National Elections (both, June and September).

Limitations

Technical Limitations: the conceptual framework (discussed in section 2) does not cover all aspects of the electoral process considering the lack of data.

Methodological and Geographical Limitations: The gender analysis is mainly limited to document reviews and a few KIIs covering NEBE and EZEMA. It does not include further KIIs due to time and logistical constraints. Hence, the gender analyses may miss out on substantive data at the regional level. To mitigate this risk, the assessment tried to utilize all available data including reports from CSO (e.g., CECO, EWLA, and TIMRAN) and region-disaggregated data from NEBE.

The Assessment Framework

Women's ability to fully and equally participate means they have equal access to the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as their fellow male citizens. They can participate as voters, candidates, and election workers without fear and discrimination. An election does not meet international obligations and is inconsistent with core principles unless it includes the opportunity, in law and practice, for full and equal participation by women and men.⁵

⁵ NDI, guidelines on gender considerations in international election observation, including violence against women in elections.

Several pieces of literature provide frameworks for assessing gender equality in election processes.⁶ The frameworks consider the electoral cycle to be a “continuous process.” According to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), the electoral cycle includes 3 periods:

Pre-election: is the phase before voting where major election-related activities occur. The pre-election period is whereby activities relating to the preparation of the legal framework, planning and implementation, budget allocation, preparation of the electoral calendar, preparedness and registration of political parties, recruitment, training and assignment of election officials, constituency delimitation, voters’ registration, gender inclusion, voter and civic education, engagement and operations of the media take place.⁷

Election Day: includes voting, vote counting, results announcement, loading of complaints, and resolution.⁸

Post-election: covers the period after election results are announced. During this period, a wide range of activities, such as post-election evaluation, preparations for constituency delimitation, and institutional strategic planning, take place.⁹ The table below outlines the framework adopted for the assessment based on the electoral cycle.

Category	Objectives	Assessment Questions
Legal Framework	International treaties and conventions signed by Ethiopia and existing laws and regulations enable men and women to participate equally and without fear of reprisal as voters, candidates, and election workers.	Does the legal framework guarantee women’s equal civil and political rights and prohibit discrimination based on gender in the election process? What election laws and regulations are in place to enhance women’s participation in EMBs, voters, candidates, or election officials? Are there any barriers to enforcing election law or other legislation, and/or policy enforcement?
Electoral Management Body (EMB) and Administration	Women can participate at all decision-making levels and in the election’s organization and administration by the EMB (voter education and outreach, candidate and voter registration processes, ensuring all voters can securely access a polling station). The EMB administers elections in a way that ensures women can participate.	What measures has the EMB taken to ensure women can serve on election management bodies at all levels in equal numbers as men? Has the election management body adopted a clear policy on gender inclusion? Does the EMB have a dedicated gender-focused staff capacity?
Electoral Management Body (EMB) and Administration	Women can participate at all decision-making levels and in the election’s organization and administration by the EMB (voter education and outreach, candidate and voter registration processes, ensuring all voters can securely access a polling station). The EMB administers elections in a way that ensures women can participate.	What measures has the EMB taken to ensure women can serve on election management bodies at all levels in equal numbers as men? Has the election management body adopted a clear policy on gender inclusion? Does the EMB have a dedicated gender-focused staff capacity?

6 This include OSCE and ODHR, Handbook for Monitoring Women’s Participation in Elections; UN Women and UNDP, Inclusive Electoral Processes; UN, Women and Elections; OAS Manual for Incorporating a Gender Perspective into OAS EOMs; EU Practical Core Team Guidelines for Assessing Women’s Political in Elections; and NDI Votes Without Violence and UN Chapter 7 Guidance.

7 NEBE, Electoral Cycle. <https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/Electoral-Cycle.pdf>

8 NEBE, Electoral Cycle. <https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/Electoral-Cycle.pdf>

9 NEBE, Electoral Cycle. <https://nebe.org.et/sites/default/files/Electoral-Cycle.pdf>

Voter Registration and Voters List	Women have equal opportunity and access to register to vote and receive the proper voting identification, if necessary, without fear or threat of violence.	What are the registration rates of men and women at all geographic levels? Is gender-disaggregated voter registration information accurately collected at all geographic levels? Are there any barriers to voter registration, including limited geographical or physical access, burdensome financial costs, or identification documents that women find more challenging to acquire/possess?
Voter Education	Voter education efforts are conducted in a way that allows men and women citizens to participate with full knowledge of any rules or requirements and ensures women can participate equally in and benefit from voter education efforts.	Is voter education conducted by the EMB and others sufficient to address the specific needs of women? Is it effective in reaching women throughout the country? Is there voter education tailored explicitly for/targeting women?
Candidate Registration and Financing		1. What are the incentives provided to support women's participation as candidates? 2. What is the rate of women participation?
Election Monitoring		Are women international and citizen election observers able to observe all aspects of the electoral process?
Voting	Women are equally able to participate in election day activities, including voting and poll watching, without fear or threat of violence. Voting is conducted in a transparent manner so that all women are able to participate with full knowledge of any process requirements or restrictions.	Are polling locations safe to get to and accessible for women? Are women able to vote in an equally accessible, secure, safe, secret, and free manner?
Results Announcements		What is female and male turnout? What is the percentage of winning female candidates/seats?
Electoral Violence, specifically VAW-E	Women are able to seek the nomination, conduct a campaign, register to vote, and work in the electoral process without fear or threat of violence in the pre-electoral period	What types of electoral violence were reported in the electoral process? Are women affected differently by such violence when compared to men?

Source: NDI, UN Women and UNDP¹⁰

Table 2: Assessment Framework

¹⁰ NDI, guidelines on gender considerations in international election observation, including violence against women in elections; un women and UNDP, inclusive electoral processes; OSCE and ODHR, handbook for monitoring women's participation in elections;

Gender Analysis of the 6th General Election

As per the FDRE Constitution of 1995, Ethiopia conducts a periodic election every 5 years to elect candidates to the House of People's Representatives (HoPR) and regional councils (including, the cities of Addis Ababa). The Election was scheduled to be held on August 29, 2020. However, the emergence of the global Covid 19 pandemic pushed the election process forward to September 2021, following the decision of the HoPR in September 2020.

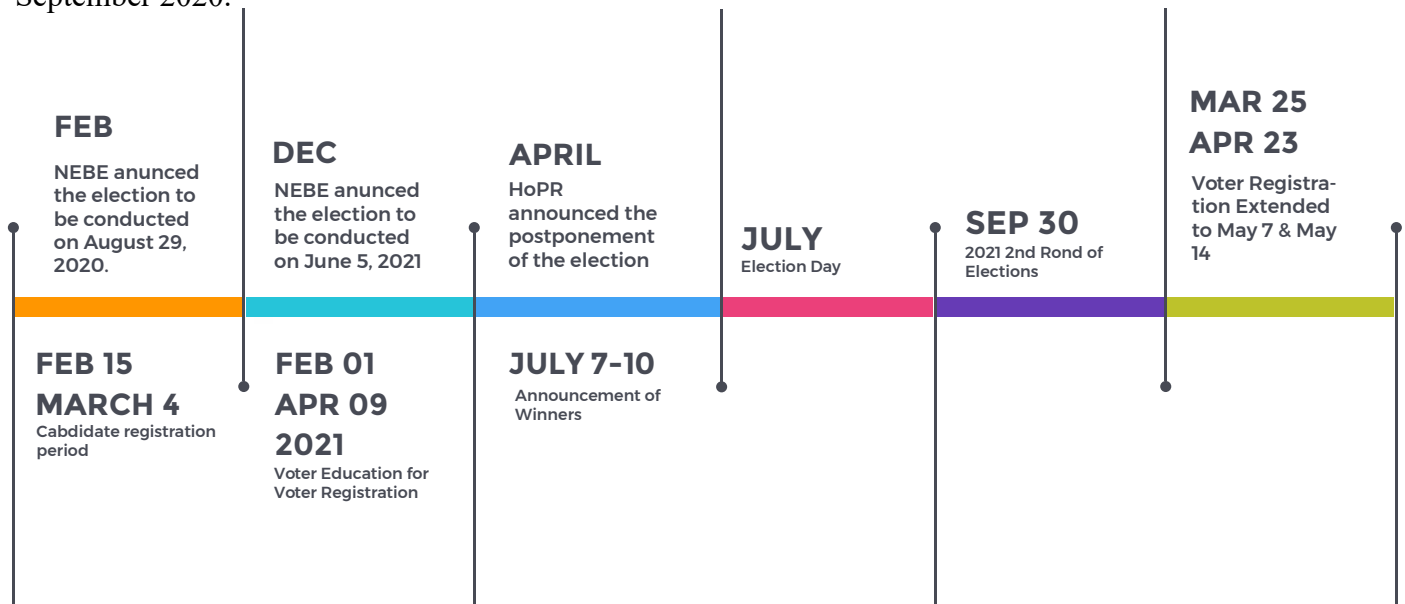


Figure 1: Overview of the Timeline of the 6th General Election

Source: NDI and IRI (2021)¹¹

The 6th General Election was conducted to fill the seats in HoPR and regional councils. The election was conducted in two rounds: June and September, following irregularities, security reasons and other reasons.¹² The June election was conducted in 9 regions: Addis Ababa, Afar, Amhara, partially Benishangul, Dire Dawa, Gambella, partially Oromia, Sidama, and SNNPR (partially). The September election included Harari, partially SNNP, and the Somali regional state. Notably, elections in 81 constituencies are yet to be conducted (see, the figure below).

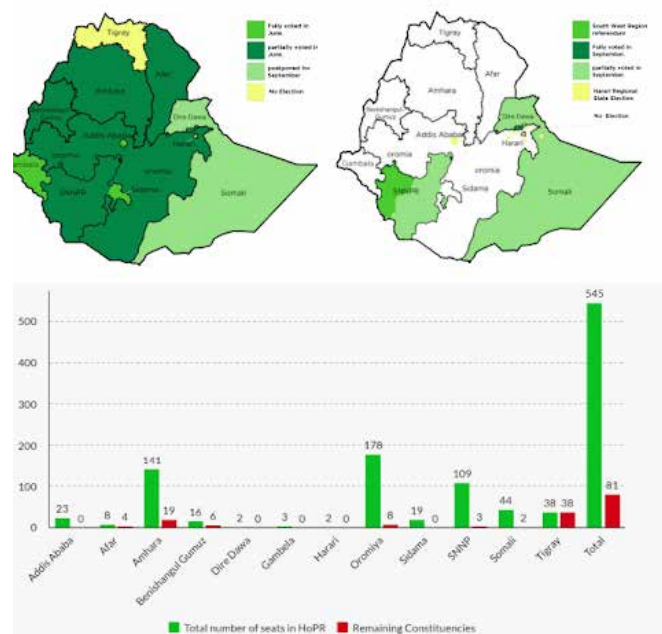


Figure 2: Summary of Election Conducted in June and September, and Remaining Constituencies

Source: CECOE Election Report¹³

¹¹ IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

¹² Reuters, Ethiopia Postpones vote in two Regions Citing Irregularities. June 11, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-postpones-vote-two-regions-citing-irregularities-2021-06-10/>

¹³ CECOE (2022), Final Observation Report: Sixth National and Regional Elections of Ethiopia.

The 6th National Election gender analysis is presented below based on the thematic areas stipulated in the framework.

Legal and Policy Framework

1. The legal and policy framework is assessed based on the following perspectives:
2. Does the legal framework guarantee women's equal civil and political rights and prohibit discrimination based on gender in the election process?
3. What election laws and regulations are in place to enhance women's participation in EMBs, voters, candidates, or election officials?
4. Are there any barriers to enforcing election law or other legislation, and/or policy enforcement?

Guarantees of Women's Rights to Participate in the Election Process

A country's constitutional and legal framework should guarantee equal civil and political rights to every person on a non-discriminatory basis.¹⁴ The legal framework in Ethiopia relating to women's participation in elections includes the international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Ethiopia and national laws.

At the international and regional level, Ethiopia has endorsed/ratified the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the African Charter and its Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and the Maputo Protocol. These instruments promote the right to election and strive to alleviate barriers for the full enjoyment of women's rights. The Ethiopian government has reiterated its commitment to gender equality by endorsing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a non-legally binding document.

Name of the document	Type of Document	Relevance to Women's Electoral Participation
UDHR	International Human Rights Instrument	contains general provisions that enhance the political participation of everyone (including women). • the right to participate in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives (Article 21(1)). • asserts that the government's authority shall be based on people's will expressed in periodic and genuine elections based on universal and equal suffrage.¹⁵ • protects everyone against discrimination based on, among other things, gender in the entitlement to all rights and freedoms outlined in the declaration.¹⁶

¹⁴ UN (2005), Women and Elections.

¹⁵ Such elections should further be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures. UDHR Article 21(3)

¹⁶ UDHR Article 2

ICCPR	International Human Rights Instrument	recognizes several rights and protections pertinent to elections: • rights of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights;¹⁷ • right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions on the basis of non-discrimination and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (b) to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors; (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.¹⁸ • oblige state parties to enforce the rights enshrined therein based on non-discrimination;¹⁹ • Oblige state parties to avail effective remedy to address any form of violation of the rights and freedoms;²⁰
CEDAW and relevant documents of the committee	International Human Rights Instrument	most comprehensive international human rights instruments that specifically aims to address gender issues and the specific needs of women. • obliges state parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country.²¹ • ensure women's right to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies.²² • ensure women's right to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation, and hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.²³ • ensure women's right to participate in non-government organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.²⁴
Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action	National Action Plan endorsed by state members to the UN	most comprehensive and transformative global agenda for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.²⁵ In respect of WPP, it incorporates the following: • Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, • Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership

17 ICCPR Article 3.

18 ICCPR Article 25.

19 Cumulative reading of Article 2(1) and Article 2(2) of the ICCPR.

20 Further, state parties have the obligation to ensure that such remedy involves the determination of the complaint (filed by any person) by competent judicial, administrative, or legislative authorities, or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, and to develop the possibilities of judicial remedy. Moreover, state parties have the obligation to enforce such remedies when granted. ICCPR Article 2(3)

21 CEDAW Article 7

22 CEDAW Article 7(a)

23 CEDAW Article 7(b)

24 CEDAW Article 7(c)

25 UN Women, Women's Rights in Review 25 Years After Beijing, 2020.

African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter)	Regional Human Rights Instrument	contains certain provisions that relate to the enhancement of WPP - obliges states to ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women, and also ensure the protection of the rights of women.²⁶ - asserts that every citizen has a right to freely participate in the government, either directly or through freely chosen representatives.²⁷
Maputo Protocol	Regional Human Right Instrument	regional counterpart of CEDAW as it obliges all state parties to take measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women. - recognizes the right of women to participate in the political and decision-making process. - recognizes their right to participate in all elections, equal representation at all levels in all electoral processes, and equal participation in the development and implementation of policies and development programs.²⁸

Table 3: Overview of International and Regional Human Rights Instruments ratified by Ethiopia pertaining to Women's Participation in the Election Process

The international guarantee is further reflected in Ethiopia's domestic legal framework, particularly through constitutional provisions. The FDRE Constitution (1995), which is the supreme law of the land, devotes an entire article to the rights of women (article 35) and recognizes general political rights including election rights. This article recognizes, among other things, women's right to enjoy the rights (including political rights) and protections provided in the Constitution equally with men.²⁹

Article 38 of the FDRE Constitution

“Every Ethiopian national, without any discrimination based on colour, race, nation, nationality, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion or other status, has the following rights:

- 1. To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly and through freely chosen representatives;***
- 2. On the attainment of -18 years of age, to vote in accordance with law;***
- 3. To vote and to be elected at periodic elections to any office at any level of government; elections shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors.”***

The 1995 FDRE Constitution also reiterates the State's international obligation to enforce women's right to eliminate the influences of harmful customs.³⁰ It further entitles women the right to participate in the formation of policies and designing and execution of projects; acquire, administer, control, use, and transfer property (including land); equality in employment, promotion, pay, and the transfer of pension entitlements; and access to family planning education, information, and capacity.³¹ The FDRE constitution also contains general rights and protections related to political participation.

Together, these constitutional and international guarantees provide a robust framework for ensuring women's equal representation in elected bodies and participation in the electoral process.

26 Banjul Charter Article 18(3)

27 Banjul Charter Article 13(1)

28 Maputo Protocol Article 9(1a-c)

29 FDRE Constitution Article 35 (1)

30 FDRE Constitution Article 35(4).

31 FDRE Constitution Article 35(6-8).

Policies that Promote Women's Access to Politics and Election

The policy framework at the national level includes the women's policy (1993) and the ten-year development plan. The Women's Policy, which was formulated by the Transitional Government of Ethiopia back in 1993, primarily aims to speed equality between men and women, improve the lives of rural women

(by increasing their access to basic social services), and gradually eliminate prejudices, customary and other practices based on patriarchy, and enable women to hold public offices and participate in the decision-making process at all levels.

The Policy obliges the government to take all appropriate measures to ensure the democratic and human rights of women are respected by guaranteeing them their freedom of speech, writing, peaceful assembly, and forming associations as well as their right to work in a governmental or nongovernmental organization, their right to form and join lawful organizations and their right to vote or be elected.

The ten-year development plan outlines a long-term vision of making Ethiopia an "African Beacon of Prosperity" by creating the necessary and sufficient conditions. With respect to WPP, the plan sets the following targets to successfully achieve the main objectives of the social justice and social security development plan for the coming ten years (2020/21-2029/30):³²

- make Ethiopia the Centre of Africa's Female Leaders by producing 10,000 capable female leaders;
- increase the share of female decision-makers in the legislative, and judicial to 50 percent, and maintain that of the executive organ at the present 50% level;
- increase the share of women in public institution leadership posts to 36%.³³

Election Laws and Women's Access to Election

The election-related laws in Ethiopia encompass the NEBE Establishment Proclamation No. 1133/2019, the Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2020, and various directives issued by NEBE. The NEBE Establishment Proclamation outlines the structure and functions of NEBE, emphasizing impartial election administration.

It is grounded in free, fair, and peaceful elections and aims to establish an independent election management body to ensure credible and transparent electoral processes.³⁴

The Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration, and Election's Code of Conduct Proclamation (Proclamation 1162/2020) includes specific provisions governing political party regulation and the overall election process. This law seeks to promote inclusivity and fairness in elections.

These laws encourage women's participation at various levels, including as members and leaders of election management bodies (EMBs), political party participants, voters, and candidates. They achieve this by:

Mandating gender representation in certain positions within EMBs and political parties. This includes in:

- NEBE Management: the NEBE Establishment Proclamation No. 1133/2019 asserts that the composition of the board shall take into account inter alia sex composition to the possible extent.³⁵
- Election official positions and grievance hearing committee: Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019 asserts that the recruitment of election officials shall ensure gender representation at constituency and polling station level.³⁶ It also states that there should be gender consideration in the composition of the Grievance Hearing Committee at constituency Level.³⁷
- Observer Status: Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2020 promotes the deployment of observers that consider gender representation.³⁸
- Political party members and political party leader: -Article 64(6) and 65(5) of Proclamation No.1162/2019 Assert that recruitment of founding members shall reflect gender considerations (both national and regional political parties).³⁹ It further asserts that the election for leadership positions within a political party shall consider gender representation.⁴⁰

34 (See the Preamble)

35 NEBE Establishment Proclamation No. 1133/2019, Article 6(2).

36 Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019, Article 13(5) and 15(9).

37 Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019, Article 13(6).

38 Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019, Article 15(11).

39 Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019, Article 64(6) and 65(5).

40 Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019, Article 15(11).

32 The Ten Years Development Plan (2021-2030) (English Version).

33 The Ten Years Development Plan (2021-2030) (English Version).

Prioritizing women during voter registration and casting votes: the election-related laws prioritize women during voting registration and vote casting.⁴¹

Promoting the collection of sex-disaggregated data. The electoral roll should include categories of gender, age and disability.⁴²

Offering incentives to political parties to enhance women's representation: the Electoral Proclamation states that the amount of financial support shall be based on the number of female candidates nominated by the political party and the number of female members and females in leadership positions.⁴³

Gap in the Legal and Policy Framework

Although the legal and policy framework in Ethiopia guarantees and strives to promote the electoral rights of women, it has certain gaps. One of these gaps is that the legal framework falls short of providing specific gender quotas. Ethiopia was one of the 17 countries in Africa, in 2021, that didn't have affirmative action provided in the constitution or electoral law. Indeed, the ruling party and few parties have adopted a voluntary quota system.⁴⁴ The problem of the voluntary quota system is that it heavily depends on one party and there is that obvious question relating to what happens if that party loses ground.⁴⁵ Hence, it is important to incorporate quota systems to enhance women's participation in the legislative and executive organs, as well as electoral management bodies. Also, as per Article 4(1) of CEDAW, HoPR and NEBE, as part of government organ, are obliged to provide specific gender quotas.

41 Article 22(3) of Voter Registration Directive No.6 Article 27(1) of Vote Casting, Vote Counting and Announcement Directive Prioritizes inter alia persons with disability, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and women accompanied by children during the voter registration and election day.

42 Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019, Article 22(6).

43 Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019, Article 100(2)(c and d).

44 Countries that have legislated gender quotas both in their constitution and election laws include Burundi, the Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Rwanda, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Uganda. Countries that have introduced gender quotas in their constitution only include Egypt, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. Countries that have incorporated gender quotas in their electoral law only include, Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Guinea, Lesotho, Mali, Liberia, and Mauritania. IDEA (2021), Women's Political Participation: African Barometer.

45 IDEA (2024), Women's Political Participation: African Barometer.

The other gap in the legal framework is that it fails to ascribe clear sanctions where political parties or any other person violates the provisions in the directives. Most of the provisions in the election-related laws strive to enhance women's participation in the electoral process uses the term "ensure gender composition" that is generic and difficult to ascertain liability. For instance, as discussed in the sub-sections below, some poll stations did not have any women official; in spite of this, no one was held accountable.

Electoral Management Body

EMBs are vital to enhance women's participation of women in the election process. The practical aspects of administering an election can have an important impact on women's participation.⁴⁶ And, women's participation in various layers of EMBs is crucial to advance this role of EMBs. In this regard, it is important to address the following questions:

1. What measures has the EMB taken to ensure women can serve on election management bodies -- at all levels -- in equal numbers as men?
2. Has the election management body adopted a clear policy on gender inclusion? Does the EMB have a dedicated gender-focused staff capacity?

Measures taken by NEBE

NEBE has strived to ensure the participation of women in regional and lower electoral management bodies. At the regional level, a directive issued by NEBE stipulates that the recruitment and employment of regional branch office heads consider gender.⁴⁷

With regards to the Polling Station Electoral Management Committee, the directive of NEBE requires that at least one of the committee members of the total 5 should be a woman, and emphasizes the need to take an effort to increase the gender composition above the minimum provided.⁴⁸ Further, pursuant to the COVID-19 Pandemic, polling stations are obliged to provide special treatment for election officers, candidate agents, observers, and other staff with infant children.⁴⁹

46 UN (2005), Gender and Women.

47 Directive on Recruitment of National Election Board of Ethiopia's Regional Branch Office Heads

48 Directive on Voting, Vote Counting, and Announcement of Results No. 14/2021, Article 7 (1).

49 Directive on Mitigating Covid-19 Pandemic during Election No.9/2021.

With regards to election officers, the recruitment of election officers should ensure gender representation,⁵⁰ as well as people living with disability and marginalized groups.⁵¹

Specifically, at least two of the five election officers at the polling station, and at least one election officer at the constituency level, should be a woman.⁵² This definitive requirement ensures that women would at all times participate as election officers.

There are three layers of grievance hearing committees; (1) Regional Grievance Hearing Committee (three members); (2) Constituency Grievance Hearing Committee (three members); and (3) Polling Station Grievance Hearing Committee. Although the Electoral Proclamation only provides for the consideration of gender representation in the organization of these committees,⁵³ the concerned directive of NEBE has set a mandatory quota system in the gender composition of these structures, particularly; there should be at least one woman in each of the structures.⁵⁴

A gender audit conducted by NEBE further indicates that it has undertaken capacity building for its staff and election officials.⁵⁵ Moreover, NEBE has technically and financially supported the establishment of the Joint Women's Politicians Council.⁵⁶ Further, NEBE has enacted more than 24 directives that are gender sensitive.⁵⁷ These directives (as discussed in the sub-section below) attempted to address areas not covered by the Proclamation, including setting gender quotas in certain circumstances.

Adoption of Specific Gender Policy and Designated Department

A gender audit conducted in 2022 indicates that no specific gender policy existed pertaining to the election process during the 6th National Election. However, NEBE has established the Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Department (GESID), under it to coordinate gender equality initiatives by integrating gender considerations into the Board's programmatic and operational agenda.

According to the Gender Audit (2022), the GSID has made significant strides in promoting gender mainstreaming despite lacking an approved strategic plan and formal accountability mechanisms.⁵⁸

By providing tools like checklists and manuals, building staff capacity, and offering technical support to Board units, political parties, women members, and candidates, GESID has driven progress through consistent follow-ups and collaboration with department leaders.⁵⁹

Its efforts include training women candidates, supporting coalitions of women political parties, and incentivizing women's inclusion through budget and airtime allocation strategies.⁶⁰ Additionally, GESID has contributed to gender-sensitive electoral directives, conducted media outreach to millions, prepared voter registration databases for women and people with disabilities, and monitored organizations focused on gender inclusivity.⁶¹ The Gender Audit (2022) confirms that these efforts have enhanced participation and representation in Ethiopia's electoral processes.

Participation of Women in EMB

The NEBE Board is composed of five members, of which two are women and three are men. The Chair of the Board (during the 6th National Election) was a woman. Further, out of the 15 managers and team leaders in decision-making positions, 10 (66.7%) were women while 5 (33.3%) were men.⁶² Looking at the staff of NEBE, during the election period, out of the then existing staff of 146, 74 (50.6%) are men and 72 (49.3%) are women.⁶³

50 Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019 Article 13(5) and article 15(9)

51 Directive on the Working Procedure and Code of Conduct of Election Officers No 7/2020, Article 7(8).

52 Directive on the Working Procedure and Code of Conduct of Election Officers No7/2020, Article 7(7).

53 Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019, Article 13(6).

54 Directive on Lodging Complaints Regarding the Election Process at Different Levels; Organization and Working Procedures of Grievance Hearing Committees Established at Various Levels, Article 11(2), 12(2), and 13(1).

55 NEBE (2022), Rapid Gender Audit of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), Revised Version.

56 NEBE (2022), Rapid Gender Audit of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), Revised Version.

57 Key Informant Interview with NEBE.

58 NEBE (2022), Rapid Gender Audit of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), Revised Version.

59 *ibid*

60 *ibid*

61 *ibid*

62 *ibid*

63 *ibid*

At lower management levels, women's representation among electoral officials varied. On June 21, an average of two electoral officials per polling station were female, with women serving as chairpersons in 20% (420) of the polling stations observed by CECOE.⁶⁴ On September 30, CECOE observers reported an average of four officers per polling station at the start of voting, 37% of whom were women.⁶⁵ However, CECOE data revealed that 11% of the polling stations visited had no female electoral officers, despite NEBE's requirement of at least one female officer per station.⁶⁶ Additionally, women served as chairpersons in 23% of the polling stations.⁶⁷

EWLA observation also revealed that women were underrepresented among the poll workers of those polling stations where EWLA deployed its observers. 83 percent of 369 polling stations visited by EWLA had men chairpersons, and only 18 percent had women chairs. Moreover, 9 percent of 369 polling stations did not have a single woman member.⁶⁸

An AU Observation report also indicated that women's participation as polling officials comprised only 35.8% of polling officials.⁶⁹

Gender Assessment of the Pre-election

The pre-election cycle includes voters' registration, voters education, candidates registration, election campaign, and resources.

Voters Registration

The voter registration was analyzed based on the following:

1. What are the registration rates of men and women at all geographic levels? Is gender-disaggregated voter registration information accurately collected at all geographic levels?
2. Are there any barriers to voter registration, including limited geographical or physical access, burdensome financial costs, or identification documents that women find more challenging to acquire/possess?

64 CECOE (2022), Final Observation Report: Sixth National and Regional Elections of Ethiopia

65 *ibid*

66 *ibid*

67 *ibid*

68 EWLA (2021), Preliminary Statement of VAW-E Monitoring.

69 African Union Election Observation Mission to The 21 June 2021 General Elections in The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Preliminary Statement, 23 June 2021.

Participation of Women as Voters

For the June 2021 elections, a total of 17,091,128 women were registered to vote, representing 45 percent of all registered voters.⁷⁰ While all regions have approximately the same share of women voters, the Afar region recorded only seven percent of women registered voters.⁷¹ However, in the aggregate of the 6th National Election, amounting a total of 40.7 million voters registered, women accounted for 50.2%; while men accounted for 49.72%.⁷² At the regional level, Benshinagul Gumuz, Afar and Amhara Regional State recorded the lowest rate; while, Oromia, Somali and Sidama recorded above 50% (see, the table below).

70 IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report; and African Union Election Observation Mission to the 21 June 2021 General Elections in The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Preliminary Statement, 23 June 2021.

71 IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

72 NEBE, 2021 General Election Voter Registration Data.

Region/City Administration	Total number of registered voters			% of Men and Women	
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Addis Ababa	923,257	831,006	1,754,263	52.63%	47.3%
Afar	1,194,471	908,409	2,102,880	56.80%	43.20%
Amhara	3,901,263	3,368,801	7,270,064	53.66%	46.34%
Benshangul-gumuz	133,080	121,500	285,985	46.53%	42.48%
Dire Dewa	102,962	95,659	198,621	51.84%	48.16%
Gambella	212,263	198,885	411,148	51.63%	48.37%
Hareri	67,463	60,434	127,897	52.75%	47.25%
Oromia	7,023,950	8,157,876	15,181,826	46.27%	53.73%
Sidama	907,943	977,295	1,885,238	48.16%	51.84%
Somali	2,509,468	2,613,033	5,122,501	48.99%	51.01%
Central Ethiopia	1,146,727	1,092,949	2,239,676	51.20%	48.80%
South Ethiopia	1,434,382	1,338,260	2,772,642	51.73%	48.27%
South West Ethiopia	689,021	679,976	1,368,997	50.33%	49.67%
Total	20,246,250	20,444,083	40,721,738	49.72%	50.20%

Table 4: Number and Percentage of Registered Voters (by Sex and Region)

Source: NEBE, Voter Registration Summary of the 2021 National Election

As indicated further, the Electoral Proclamation also obliges the electoral roll to include a sex-disaggregated data.

Barriers during Voter Registration

Initially scheduled to run from 1 to 25 March 2021, voter registration was put back by the NEBE to the period 25 March–23 April.⁷³ The NEBE expected over 50 million voters to register. However, only 18 million voters had registered by the end of this period, forcing the NEBE to extend its deadlines.⁷⁴ Even after this—and a campaign encouraging registration—the total was less than expected, at about 38 million voters for the June 21 Election.⁷⁵ According to Birtukan Mideksa (NEBE Chair), low registration was caused by problems relating to the ‘transportation of election materials, inability to establish special polling stations (those for Internally Displaced Persons, the military and students), congestion of electoral schedule, security problems and the negative effect imprisonment and intimidation of opposition candidates has on voter registration’.⁷⁶

CECOE, which deployed 144 observers across the country who witnessed voter registration at 1,192 polling stations, also highlighted the security and logistical challenges that hampered voter registration. It also raised concerns about the accessibility of polling stations for persons with disabilities and the underrepresentation of women and polling station officials.⁷⁷ A study conducted by UN Women, UNDP and NEBE also revealed that some polling stations were not friendly to women with disabilities, or pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. This study also highlighted the lack of adequate female security officers, absence of separate toilets and long queues as major challenges.⁷⁸

⁷³ Zemelak A. Ayele (2022), Covid- 19 and Ethiopia’s Sixth General Election: Case Study.

⁷⁴ *ibid*

⁷⁵ *ibid*

⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁷ CECOE (2022), Final Observation Report: Sixth National and Regional Elections of Ethiopia.

⁷⁸ UN Women, UNDP and NEBE (2023), Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWIE) in Ethiopia: The Case of Addis Ababa, Amhara, Oromia, and Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Region.

Further, according to NRI and IRI LEOME Report, some interlocutors alleged a variety of violations and irregularities, including intimidation, undue enticement, and misuse of resources or abuse of office.⁷⁹ In explaining the low voter registration in Afar, the LEOME Report further states, “although the region traditionally reports low voter interest, additional factors such as poor voter education and security concerns combined with cultural prejudices towards women’s involvement in public life may have led to the exclusion of eligible women voters from the 2021 elections”.⁸⁰

Voter Education

Voter education is a key element in the election cycle.⁸¹ Inclusive voter education that addresses women and marginalized groups is important to the effective exercise of citizenship rights in relation to the right to vote and stand in elections. In this regard, the assessment focuses on the following:

1. Is voter education conducted by the EMB and others sufficient to address the specific needs of women? Is it effective in reaching women throughout the country? Is there voter education tailored explicitly for/targeting women?

In respect of voter education, a directive of NEBE asserts that any organization or institution providing voter education shall emphasize the equality of women and men regarding the right to vote and be voted or other democratic rights; similarly, any organization, institution, or trainers it deploys shall utilize teaching methods, languages, documents or materials that encourage women’s participation and shall not reflect stereotypical societal views.⁸² Similar considerations are made in relation to people with disability.⁸³

To ensure compliance, the Voter Education Directive of NEBE obliges the organization or institution accredited to provide voter education to produce a performance report every three months or whenever requested by NEBE and a final report after the completion of the provision.⁸⁴

The NEBE is also a primary institution responsible for voter education. In total, the NEBE conducted three waves of voter education campaigns, starting in February 2021.⁸⁵ The first wave focused on candidate registration procedures, the second and the longest wave targeted voter education.⁸⁶ Closer to election day, the NEBE shifted the voter education content to explain election day procedures.⁸⁷

The NEBE assigned two voter education experts per each region and actively placed public service announcements (PSAs) on national, regional, and both public and private TV and radio, as well as in print, online, and social media. Advertisements were available in five main languages and were often translated into minority languages by community radios.⁸⁸ According to the NEBE, it reached around 38.2 million people via its voter education efforts.⁸⁹

Further, in an attempt to increase the coverage of CSOs working on voter education, the NEBE issued small grants to 12 CSOs with a total amount of ETB 4 million (some USD 95,000) to conduct voter education in remote areas and for marginalized communities, including women, person’s with disabilities, voters residing in pastoral areas, and internally displaced persons.⁹⁰

Despite the substantial voter education efforts, many election observers expressed concerns that significant sections of the population did not have enough information about elections.⁹¹ This was due to the limited reach of voter education. It was reported that, of the 155 CSOs accredited to provide voter education,⁹² observers indicated that only about half of them were able to conduct voter education and their reach remained marginal limited to urban areas.⁹³ According to most observers, the activities of CSOs were mostly concentrated in Addis Ababa and other large urban centers.⁹⁴

85 IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

86 IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

87 *ibid*

88 *ibid*

89 NEBE, June 21 National Election Report.

90 IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

91 *ibid*

92 NEBE, List of Accredited CSOs to Provide Civic and Voter Education.

93 African Union Election Observation Mission to The 21 June 2021 General Elections in The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Preliminary Statement, 23 June 2021.

94 IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

79 IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

80 IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

81 UN (2005), Gender and Women.

82 Voter Education Accreditation and Code of Conduct Directive, Article 13(5).

83 *ibid* Article 13(6)

84 *ibid* Article 22(1)

Main voter education activities included face-to-face meetings (with a limit of 50 persons per session due to COVID-19 preventive measures in place), road shows, and dissemination of flyers and brochures, as well as text-messaging.⁹⁵ Finances were a challenge for many organizations that may have believed that accreditation would be accompanied by funding.⁹⁶ Many did not commence their efforts up until the very end of the voter registration process.⁹⁷

Candidate Registration

Women's participation as candidates is another key element since it creates the opportunity to hold public offices. In this regard, the following is assessed:

1. What are the incentives provided to support women's participation as candidates?
2. What is the rate of women participation?

Incentives provided to Support Women's Participation as Candidates

To support women's participation as candidates, the NEBE has availed financial incentive to political parties with an increased number of women nominees for candidacy.⁹⁸ The amount of financial support to be distributed to political parties (that have attained above 5% of gender composition) is 25% of the total amount provided by the government.⁹⁹ The directive excludes political parties who have not meet the 5% benchmark.¹⁰⁰ The specific amount to be allotted to each political party (that attained the benchmark) is determined by the management board.¹⁰¹

The NEBE allocated ETB 98 million (USD 2.2 million) to political parties in two phases. The first payment of ETB 483,452 (USD 10,998) was transferred to each contesting political party starting at the end of April. The second phase, comprising the remaining three-quarters of the funds, was distributed from the end of May based on a formula providing bonuses: ETB 2,643 (USD 60) for each registered HoPR and regional state council candidate, ETB 9,982 (USD 227) for each woman candidate, ETB 155,722 (USD 3,542) for each candidate with disabilities, and ETB 255,062 (USD 5,802) for each woman in a senior party executive role. The Prosperity Party received the largest share (ETB 23.2 million or USD 528,000), followed by EZEMA (ETB 11.3 million or USD

257,000), Freedom and Equality Party (ETB 4.6 million or USD 105,000), Enat Party (ETB 3.5 million or USD 80,000), and others such as United Ethiopia Democratic Party, All Ethiopian Unity Organization, and NAMA. Initially excluded, independent candidates were later granted ETB 50,000 (USD 1,137) each on the eve of the campaign silence period. However, no directive regulating funding, as required by law, was issued.¹⁰²

Further, Media Proclamation No. 1238/2021 asserts that the number of female candidates is one of the factors in determining the allotted campaign airtime.¹⁰³ In this regard, a directive enacted by NEBE ascribes that twenty percent (20 %) of the total airtime and newspaper column allocated to contesting political parties must be allocated based on the number of female candidates nominated for federal and regional councils.¹⁰⁴

Despite the above measures, of the 9,505 candidates (from 46 political parties and of which 148 were private candidates), women candidates accounted for 1,987 (20%).¹⁰⁵ The ruling party, PP, achieved the highest women's participation standing at 41% in HoPR and 41.6% at the regional council level.¹⁰⁶

At national level, a total of 2076 candidates were registered to contest for HoPR seats. Of these, only 15.95% were women (see, the table below). Notably, regional variances are noticeable, where Afar (30%), Oromia (22.22%) and Addis Ababa (21.52%) recorded above the national average. On the other hand, SNNPR (13.61%), Amhara (10%) and Dire Dawa (6%) saw the lowest women's participation.

95 *ibid*

96 *ibid*

97 *ibid*

98 Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2020, Article 100(2cd)

99 The directive for Determining Financial Support Given by Government to Political Parties, Article 14(1).

100 *ibid* Article 14(2)

101 *ibid* Article 14,(3)

102 IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

103 Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2020 Article 71 (4c).

104 Directive on the Use and Allocation of Mass Media During Election Campaign.

105 NEBE, June 21 Election Report.

106 Seblewongiel Kidanie and Eden Hailu (2024), Women's Participation in Ethiopia's 2021 Elections: The Role of Political Parties.

Region	Number of Men and Women Candidates			% of Men and Women	
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Addis Ababa	48	175	223	21.25%	78.48%
Afar	12	28	40	30%	70%
Amhara	80	715	795	10.6%	89.94%
Benishangul Gumuz	5	26	31	16.13%	83.87%
Dire Dawa	1	16	17	5.88%	94.12%
Gambela	2	8	10	20%	80%
Hareri	2	7	9	22.22%	77.78%
Oromia	82	194	276	29.71%	70.29%
Sidama	16	73	89	17.98%	82.02%
SNNP	69	438	507	13.61%	86.39%
Somali	14	65	79	17.72%	82.28%
Grand Total	331	1745	2076	15.94%	84.06%

Table 5: Number and Percentage of Candidates for HoPR (by Sex and Region)

Source: NEBE, Candidate Data for 6th General Election.

A slightly higher women candidates were observed for the regional councils. Of the 7446 candidates, 22.32% were women. The highest representation was recorded in Oromia (39%), Dire Dewa (30%), Harai (27%), and Addis Ababa (27%). On the other hand, the lowest was noted in Somali (14%), Afar (16%), and Amhara (16%).

Region	Number of Men and Women Candidates			% of Men and Women	
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Addis Ababa	234	634	868	26.96%	73.04%
Afar	66	347	413	15.98%	84.02%
Amhara	238	1,246	1,487	16.01%	83.99%
Benishangul Gumuz	53	212	265	20%	80%
Dire Dawa	102	235	337	30.27%	69.73%
Gambela	126	426	552	22.83%	77.17%
Hareri	23	61	84	27.38%	72.62%
Oromia	258	401	659	39.15%	60.85%
Sidama	183	526	709	25.81%	74.19%
SNNP	271	1,022	1,293	20.96%	79.04%
Somali	108	671	779	13.86%	86.14%
Grand Total	1,662	5,784	7,446	22.32%	77.68%

Table 6: Number and Percentage of Candidates for Regional Councils (by Sex and Region)

Source: NEBE, Candidate Data for 6th General Election.

EZEMA employs a voluntary quota system that requires at least 2 female candidates (out of 5 candidates) at district level to ensure fair representation.¹⁰⁷ This quota is enshrined in internal documents.

Further, the AU Observation revealed that women's participation as party agents stood at 21.1%.¹⁰⁸ The low participation of women as candidates and party agents stems from the gender stereotypes. In this regard, one KII said, "This perception [politics is dominated by men] deeply rooted in our patriarchal culture, where questions such as 'How can a woman lead?' or 'What can a woman contribute if elected?' have created significant barriers for women."

In this regard, the Gender Social Norm Index (2022) reveals that at least 98.77% of the Ethiopian population holds at least 1 bias relating to women's participation in education, economy, political and physical integrity; and 77.75% of the population holds at least 2 biases. The study further reveals that more than half of the population (45%) holds at least 1 bias against WPP. In further noting this, IDEA (2021) notes that Ethiopia is a patriarchal society with strong cultural and religious influences evident in several proverbs the society uses to discourage women's public appearance. It mentions the following proverbs "Set Wode Majet wond wode segenet", meaning "let women to be in their kitchen but men to the offices"; "set btawk bewond yalk" meaning "No matter what a woman knows, it is by a man a thing is finished"; and "ye set eras wond" meaning "A man is the head of a woman."¹⁰⁹ Further, women's overall candidacy is affected by their involvement in political parties, which is in turn, low due to family burden, financial constraints, and lack of education.¹¹⁰

Election Monitoring

Election observation is a valuable tool for enhancing the transparency of the electoral process and increasing public confidence in election results.¹¹¹

1. Are women international and citizen election observers able to observe all aspects of the electoral process?

Gender is a critical consideration in election monitoring. In this regard, The Electoral Proclamation asserts that the NEBE should ensure that the allocation of observers (international and local) should consider gender representation.¹¹² To this effect, the directive concerned emphasizes that the team comprising of international observers should strive to ensure gender composition amongst the members.¹¹³

Further, the team of international observers should incorporate in its' observation report the situation regarding gender composition and inclusion of disabled persons and marginalized groups.¹¹⁴ Similarly, the concerned directive requires the submission of a report by local observers that reflect on the gender representation during the election process.¹¹⁵

Reflecting an expansion in political space for civil society, numerous CSOs across Ethiopia engaged in election observation, deploying both long-term and short-term observers for general and thematic monitoring. The NEBE accredited 45 CSOs as citizen election observers, with 32 CSOs deploying 47,932 observers on election day.¹¹⁶ The election monitoring involved general and specific thematic areas.

With respect to general thematic areas, CECOE, a collective of 175 CSOs and consortiums nationwide. CECOE recruited and trained over 100 long-term observers and deployed more than 2,000 trained observers for the June 21 elections.¹¹⁷ With respect to specific themes, FEAPD concentrated on the participation of persons with disability, deploying 50 long-term and 100 election day observers in four states and Addis Ababa, culminating in a comprehensive report on PWD involvement in the electoral process.¹¹⁸ EWLA monitored violence against women in elections, fielding 150 long-term and 130 election day observers and issuing a detailed report on their findings.¹¹⁹ CETU, representing organized labor, deployed 1,130 observers across 25 cities.¹²⁰

¹¹² Ethiopian Electoral Proclamation No. 1162/2019 Article 15(11)

¹¹³ Directive on Accreditation, working Procedures and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, Article 11(3).

¹¹⁴ Directive on Accreditation, working Procedures and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers, Article 21(3)(b).

¹¹⁵ Local Election Observers' Accreditation, Working Procedure and Code of Conduct Directive, Article 12.

¹¹⁶ IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

¹¹⁷ *ibid*

¹¹⁸ *ibid*

¹¹⁹ *ibid*

¹²⁰ *ibid*

¹⁰⁷ Key Informant Interview with EZEMA.

¹⁰⁸ African Union Election Observation Mission to The 21 June 2021 General Elections in The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Preliminary Statement, 23 June 2021.

¹⁰⁹ IDEA (2021), Women's Political Participation: African Barometer.

¹¹⁰ Key Informant Interview with EZEMA.

¹¹¹ UN (2005), Gender and Women.

Additionally, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) devised plans to monitor voting in Internally Displaced Persons polling stations.¹²¹

Women's and youth associations collectively deployed a significant number of election day observers. According to the AU Observation, 51% of election observers were women.¹²² Concerns were raised about the transparency of funding for these groups, with some experts highlighting their historical affiliation with the ruling party and questioning their independence.¹²³ Further, general challenges were noted in the observer accreditation process, though accredited observers generally had unhindered access to polling stations. Isolated issues arose, such as CECOE reporting that 3% of its observers were barred from polling stations despite proper credentials, and EWLA documenting difficulties faced by some observers during polling station entry.¹²⁴ The NEBE denied accreditation to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), citing its quasi-governmental status, though EHRC still deployed 100 observers and released a report focusing on human rights aspects of the elections.¹²⁵

Gender Assessment of the Election Day – Voting

There are various factors that can affect women's ability to vote during the election day.¹²⁶

- Are polling locations safe to get to and accessible for women? Are women able to vote in an equally accessible, secure, safe, secret, and free manner?

The desk-review revealed that the election was conducted peacefully in several areas.¹²⁷ Further, to accommodate voters, NEBE extended voting hours by two hours, a move welcomed by many given the dual-ballot voting process and high numbers of registered voters per polling station.¹²⁸ However, the extension of the election time to 9:00 PM was an influencing matter for election observation and voting. EWLA mentions that the lack of women's representation among poll workers and other electoral stakeholders, and the lack of safety guarantees led to its

women observers leaving polling stations early, before the voting and counting was completed. Furthermore, EWLA states that the gender-based stereotypes and potential for gender-based violence, already made 6:00pm voting end time not safe enough for women electoral stakeholders, especially at polling stations with only men election officials. Family members often do not allow women to stay outside home after dusk. However, incidents of violence near polling stations were reported, along with material shortages that, in some cases, delayed the opening of polling stations.¹²⁹

Gender Assessment - Results Announcement

This includes the following:

1. What is female and male turnout? What is the percentage of winning female candidates/seats?
2. Percentage of Wining Female Candidates and Seats won by Females

In the 6th General Election, the turnout rate stood at 87% that is lower than the 2015 Election (93.2%).¹³⁰ Note that the turnout rate disaggregated by sex was not available.

In the 6th General Election, women had a higher wining rate. Of the 1938 female candidates that participated in the 6th General Election, 56% won seats in the HoPR and Regional Councils.¹³¹ On the other hand, of the 6,912 male candidates, only 22% won seats in the HoPR and regional councils.¹³²

Further, in the HoPR, female representation has risen to 41.3% in the 2021 National Elections, up from just 2% in 1995.¹³³ This is significantly higher than the average for the African continent which stood at 26% for the Lower Houses of Parliament (counterpart of the HoPR).¹³⁴ In the 6th National Election (2021), women's representation in regional councils reached an average of 41.97%, a significant rise from 24% in 2015 and 12.9% in 2000.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ *ibid*

¹³⁰ Morgan Winsor (2015), Ethiopia Elections 2015: Ruling Party Declares Historic 100% Victory in Parliamentary Polls.

¹³¹ NEBE (2022), Gender Audit of the NEBE, Revised Version.

¹³² *ibid*

¹³³ Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) Data Base for Ethiopia.

¹³⁴ IDEA (2024), Women's Political Participation: African Barometer.

¹³⁵ Agenagn Kebede (2020), Women's Political Participation in Ethiopia from Ancient Times to the Present, International Journal of Research in Social Sciences Vol.10, Issue 02.

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¹²² African Union Election Observation Mission to The 21 June 2021 General Elections in The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Preliminary Statement, 23 June 2021.

¹²³ IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

¹²⁴ *ibid*

¹²⁵ *ibid*

¹²⁶ OSCE and ODHR, Handbook on Observing and Promoting Women's Electoral Participation.

¹²⁷ IRI and NDI, Ethiopia June 21, 2021, National Elections Report.

¹²⁸ *ibid*

Region	Number of seats won	Proportion of Women
Addis Ababa	138	46.38%
Afar (election not held in 6 constituencies)	69	42.03%
Amhara (election not held in 5 constituencies)	254	37.80%
Benishangul Gumuz (election not held in 6 constituencies)	28	28.57%
Dire Dawa (NA)	189	44.44%
Gambella	149	38.93%
Oromia	513	44.44%
Sidama	190	48.95%
SNNPR (3 constituencies excluded)	287	43.55%
Somali	263	33.08%
Harari	36	44.44%
Total	2,116	41.97%

Table 1: Representation of Women in Regional Council (2021)

Source: NEBE, June and September Election (2021) Reports per Region/City Administration

Violence against Women in Election

VAW-E is a “a form of violence against women intended to impact the realization of women’s political rights in an electoral context. This includes women’s participation as candidates, voters, activists, party supporters, observers, election workers, or public officials”.¹³⁶ It is a major factor that impedes women’s participation in the electoral process. The following questions are addressed, for the purpose of this section:

1. What types of electoral violence were reported in the electoral process?
2. Are women affected differently by such violence when compared to men?

Reports suggest that the security environment was a major factor that impacted the June 2021 General elections. The AU, in this regard, notes the report of observes that in the run-up to the elections, several NEBE offices were attacked and destroyed in some regions such as Oromia and Amhara, which affected smooth electoral operations in those areas.¹³⁷

EWLA’s election observation revealed various forms of VAW-E during the 6th National Election. the election observation covered all regions, with an exception to Tigray Regional State. This election observation focuses on two cycles; pre and during election. The pre-election observation involves receiving and verifying cases from survivors, and hearsays. Further, EWLA had utilized a hot-line 7711 (that applies to any violence against women) to receive complaints. However, the during-election observation involves cases identified by the observers. The election observers assigned by EWLA observed the polling stations remotely, due to financial and resource limitations. Notably, unverified cases were excluded from the election observation report.

¹³⁶ UN and UNDP, Violence Against Women in Elections: Programming Guide.

¹³⁷ African Union Election Observation Mission to The 21 June 2021 General Elections in The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Preliminary Statement, 23 June 2021.

Election Cycle	Finding
Pre-election phase	voter education materials targeting women were seen or heard in Addis Ababa, although to a limited extent; -27 cases of threatening or intimidating against women were reported; -5 cases of sexual harassment against women were reported; -4 cases of physical assault/physical attacks, and 2 cases of security forces interrupting campaigning of women candidates was witnessed; -In 10 cases, women voters were discouraged to participate in voter education or campaign events; -Destruction of property of women candidates (6 cases) were recorded; -Women were excluded from campaign events (10 cases); - reported 21 cases of political party members, and local government representatives attempting to buy votes of women voters or potential women voters. - On 49 occasions, EWLA observers witnessed or heard complaints from persons with disabilities about access to the election and/or mistreatment by election officials.

Election day (June 21,2021)	- There were cases reported by EWLA observers of sexual harassment of women voters in queues; - EWLA observers also reported 13 cases of violence against women on election day, including physical violence (2), sexual harassment (3), and psychological violence (12).
Election Day (September 30 residual elections)	Although there was no reported significant interference, at 3 polling stations out of 59 visited by EWLA observers, between 1 to 10 women voters were not allowed to vote because they were not on the voters' list and at one polling station between 1 to 10 women voters were not allowed to vote for a different reason.

Source: EWLA

Table 8: Summary Finding of the Violence against Women in Elections Observation during the Sixth Ethiopian National and Regional Elections

Further research conducted by UN Women and UNDP in collaboration with NEBE is also worth mentioning. The study, covering 4 regions (Amhara, Oromia, Addis Ababa, and SNNPR), 905 participants, and several KIIs, revealed various forms of VAW-E in all phases of the electoral cycle.

Specifically, the study found a total of 78 survey respondents that experienced VAW-E across the pre-election (24), election day (33), and post-election (21) phases. This trend was consistent among both voters and candidates, with psychological violence being the most prevalent, followed by physical, sexual, and economic violence. From the survey, 103 incidents of VAW-E were documented, and categorized as psychological (74), physical (24), sexual (4), and economic (1). Psychological violence included intimidation and coercion to vote for a non-preferred party. Physical violence involved beatings and, in some cases, torture. Sexual violence predominantly took the form of non-verbal and visual harassment.

The sole economic incident involved the destruction of household property and a three-wheeler (bajaj). These acts aimed to discourage women candidates, force them to withdraw from their candidacy and hinder their participation as voters.¹³⁸

In this regard, the legal framework does not explicitly mention the term VAW-E, with an exception to the Directive on the Code of Conduct of Security Officers No. 12/2021. Article 7(3) of this directive explicitly obliges security officers to prevent VAW-E. Other than this directive, no national law mentions the term VAW-E let alone provides the indicators, standards, and forms constituting VAW-E, as well as defines prevention, mitigation, and response mechanisms to VAW-E.¹³⁹

The study conducted by UN Women, UNDP, and NEBE (2023) also shows that the lack of a legal framework was a primary challenge. In addition to this, gender norms and other factors (including disability) were the contributing factors for the VAW-E incidents.¹⁴⁰

138 UN Women, UNDP and NEBE (2023), Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWiE) in Ethiopia: The Case of Addis Ababa, Amhara, Oromia, and Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region.

139 NEBE (2022), Gender Audit of NEBE.

140 UN Women, UNDP and NEBE (2023), Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWiE) in Ethiopia: The Case of Addis Ababa, Amhara, Oromia, and Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region.

Conclusions

The report revealed that while women constituted 50.2% of registered voters, their participation as candidates (20% nationally) and election officials (35.8%) remained significantly lower than men. Women faced systemic barriers including cultural norms, logistical challenges, and inadequate voter education. However, women's higher success rate (56% of female candidates winning seats) was recorded.

Key factors limiting women's electoral engagement included cultural prejudices, financial constraints, and inadequate enforcement of legal provisions. Violence Against Women in Elections VAW-E, including psychological, physical, sexual, and economic violence, further hindered participation, with 103 incidents recorded. Limited access to voter education, particularly in rural areas, also contributed to reduced engagement.

The legal framework, while aligned with international standards, lacks mandatory gender quotas and enforcement mechanisms. Provisions such as financial incentives for political parties fielding female candidates and directives for gender representation in electoral management bodies were inconsistently applied. The absence of specific legislation addressing VAW-E highlights a significant gap in the policy landscape.

Despite progressive legal provisions, implementation challenges persist. Observations revealed instances of non-compliance, such as polling stations lacking female officials despite directives mandating their presence. While women held key positions within NEBE, representation in lower-level election bodies remained inadequate, limiting the framework's effectiveness in promoting gender equity.

Recommendations

Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Introduce mandatory gender quotas for candidates, political party leadership, and EMBs to ensure equitable representation.
- Amend election laws to include clear definitions, indicators, and consequences for non-compliance with gender representation requirements.
- Incorporate legal provisions to address VAW-E including prevention, mitigation, and response mechanisms.

Enhance Women's Electoral Participation

- Expand financial incentives for political parties that field a higher percentage of female candidates and establish clear guidelines for fund allocation.
- Develop mentorship programs and leadership training for aspiring female candidates and party leaders.
- Promote flexible and family-friendly schedules for women participating as election officials, observers, or candidates.

Address Violence Against Women in Elections (VAW-E)

- Establish secure complaint mechanisms for reporting VAW-E and ensure timely investigation and resolution of cases.
- Train security forces and election staff to identify, prevent, and respond to incidents of VAW-E.
- Raise public awareness about VAW-E and its impact on democratic participation through campaigns and educational initiatives.

Strengthen Voter Education and Outreach

- Design and implement targeted voter education campaigns addressing the unique needs of women, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.
- Allocate sufficient resources to CSOs and organizations focused on voter education for women, ensuring nationwide coverage.
- Incorporate gender-sensitive materials and methods in voter education, avoiding stereotypes and promoting equality.

Build Institutional Capacity of NEBE

- Develop a comprehensive gender policy within NEBE, ensuring alignment with international standards and local realities.
- Strengthen the GESID by providing adequate resources, training, and strategic planning support.
- Institutionalize monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance with gender-sensitive directives across all electoral processes.

Promote Accountability and Transparency

- Regularly publish accurate gender-disaggregated data on voter registration, candidate participation, election results, and observer activities.
- Establish independent audits and reviews to evaluate the implementation of gender-related electoral policies.
- Ensure greater transparency in funding allocation for political parties and voter education initiatives.

Foster Cultural and Social Change

- Conduct community engagement programs to challenge cultural biases and promote the role of women in politics and public life.
- Partner with educational institutions, media outlets, and religious leaders to foster gender-sensitive narratives.
- Incentivize political parties to adopt internal reforms promoting gender equality, including voluntary quotas and leadership opportunities for women.

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Women's Voter Turnout: Women made up 50.2% of registered voters in the 6th General Election in Ethiopia.

Candidate Disparity: Only 20% of candidates nationally were women, despite efforts to increase their participation.

Higher Success Rate for Women: Interestingly, 56% of female candidates won seats, compared to only 22% of male candidates.

Violence Against Women in Elections (VAW-E): Incidents of VAW-E were reported, with psychological violence being the most prevalent form.

Legal Framework Gaps: The legal framework lacks mandatory gender quotas and specific provisions for VAW-E.

Election Observation: 51% of election observers were women.

NEBE's Efforts: The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) implemented gender-sensitive directives and provided capacity building, but implementation at the polling station level was inconsistent.

Cultural Barriers: Strong cultural and religious influences, reflected in proverbs, discourage women's participation in public life.



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