

4. Current Political Instability and its Impact on the Process of State Building in Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study aimed at examining the current political instability and its impact on the process of state building process in Ethiopia. Thus, in this study qualitative research method was employed. Both primary and secondary sources of data were gathered where the primary data was collected through key informant interviews having 18 participants of the community elders, religious leaders including academicians in Ethiopian Universities in the field of political science. The secondary data was obtained through books, articles and journals. The data was analyzed by using document and thematic analysis techniques. The study found out that limited or independent media, frequent ethnic tensions, ineffective governance, racism, loose national unity, lack of trust on the national government, an increase in political conspiracy, security gaps, legitimacy gaps, the issue of secession and disintegration weakened the unity and strength of the country as a whole thereby posing obstacle in the state building process in Ethiopia. Finally, this study recommended that strong democratic institutions are mandatory to bring peace and stability which will in turn consolidate the state building process in Ethiopia.

Keywords: *Instability, Political Instability and State Building*

1. Introduction

According to Cambridge English Dictionary, instability entails uncertainty caused by the possibility of a sudden change or a kind of turmoil and disorder in the present situation. Oxford English Dictionary also defines it as the quality of a situation in which things are likely to change or fail suddenly.

Given that the degree of political instability in a state is not explicit, it has posed a challenge for various scholars to define the meaning of the concept. Despite these challenges the term is understood as interrupted continuation of political democracy and the prevalence of major political movements which is the direct opposite of a democratic rule of the game. It is also

defined as a condition in a political system by which the institutionalized patterns of authority break down or the expected compliance to political authorities is replaced by political violence (Pin, 2008).

Political instability has become a serious and threatening problem especially in developing and underdeveloped countries. It is creating massive problems and hindering the progress of a stable state. Functionalist modernization analysis essentially viewed political instability as a challenge facing traditional societies as they move into modernity (Ahmed, 2018). In these countries, the functional prerequisites of the political system, namely, political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, political communication (input), rule-making, rule application, and rule adjudication (output), are not performed effectively by political structures (Ibid).

Political instability is the propensity for regime or government change, political upheaval, or violence in society, or instability and uncertainty in government policy, like regulatory, tax, property, or human rights law (<https://online.kettering.edu/news>). When the political system fails in its primary roles of integration and adaptation and, therefore, system maintenance will be jeopardized. The problem of instability creates political disorder which has to do with the level of institutionalization of political organizations and procedures. Institutionalization could be measured by the level of adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence of these organizations and procedures, and political instability is a function of the decay of political institutions (Ibeanu, 2014). In the absence of order and stability everything will be at stake that is any state could never prosper or advance in a holistic manner, nor could it develop with political instability (Ahmed, 2018).

2. Methodology and Methods

In this study qualitative research method was applied. A phenomenological research design was employed. Both primary and secondary sources of data were gathered where the primary data was collected through key informant interviews having 18 participants of the community elders, religious leaders including academicians in Ethiopian Universities in the field of political science. In addition the secondary data was acquired through books, articles and journals. The data was analyzed by using document and thematic analysis techniques.

3. The Current Problems and Their causes

According to Badwaza (2018) in his "Review of Current Developments in Ethiopia", the issues which have been mentioned as a challenge to Ethiopian current reform practices are the indications for the persistence of political instability and disorder in the country. Internal power struggles within and between the four constituent parties of EPRDF have not yet been resolved definitively. Party and government officials who are not on board with the "reform" agenda are in a position to disrupt the momentum of change and cause frustration among the public. Most of the media that are existing in Ethiopia today have a damaging impact on the stability of the country because of lack of rationality and misguiding the public through conflict provoking information. Ethnic-based clashes are also indicators for the current political instability which is expressed as frequent and protracted violence and political instability. The existing ethnic and identity based clashes that flared in Oromia, SNNPR, Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz and Somali regions caused the death of hundreds of civilians and the displacement of more than one million people. The injection of armed members of former insurgent groups into an already tense ethnic and political dynamics in these parts of the country easily fueled violent clashes. Violent confrontations between these rebel forces and federal and regional government security forces have already been witnessed in parts of the Oromia Region as a major problem for stability.

The state's most basic function is to ensure security and maintain control over its territory. Terrorists and other criminal groups often take advantage of a government's inability to control its territory in order to mount violent, hostile, or illicit acts. The state plays a central role in meeting the basic needs of its people by providing education, health care, and an environment conducive to economic growth. When a state fails to meet these needs, the people are vulnerable to poverty, disease, humanitarian crises, and political upheavals. States foster legitimacy by protecting basic rights and freedom and by enabling citizen participation in the political process. An absence of legitimacy allows for violent political opposition and increases opportunities for corruption (Badwaza, 2018).

In addition, Erwin Van Veen (2016) found that the historical factors that led to political instability in Ethiopia are legacy of centralization, control and coercion which continues to

influence styles of rule and administrative approaches, legacy of exclusionary rule with ethnic undertones that limits broader distribution of power and risks counter-mobilization. According to Annett (2000), political instability or unrest has its own indicators like the occurrence of a civil war, increased number of assassinations, ineffective control of the nation power structure, any successful or unsuccessful armed rebellions whose aim is independent from the central government, violent demonstrations or clashes involving physical force, an increasing threat to the survival of a government. In one way or the other most of this indicators are being frequently observed these days in Ethiopia and their by threatening political order or stability.

4. State Building and Political Instability

State-building involves development of effective governance institutions to serve the society's developmental, social, and political needs (Wang, 2009). The idea of state-building contains assumptions about an ideal type of well-functioning state, a politically impartial civil service, taxation, welfare and service delivery (Thidu, 2009). It is concerned with the state's capacity, institutions and legitimacy, and with the political and economic processes that underpin state-society relations (DFID, 2010). Center for Global Development (www.cgdev.org) defined state building as creating and strengthening the institutions necessary to support long-term economic, social, and political development. These institutions are legislatures, judicial systems, executive agencies, and police including the military forces. It also implies the re-construction of functional countries, in other words countries that are capable of providing their citizens with basic functions and services and that meet their responsibilities and obligations as members of the international community. A weaknesses in legitimacy, authority, and capacity leads to political instability that becomes a threat for state building process.

Generally state- building process stresses state-society relations by taking the social contract at a centre stage. Because it is operating at the interface between state and society, It is quit essentially political in character, it is about how power and authority is used, and in whose interests. Even it is not a technical process but a transactional one and also essentially concerned with how the state interacts with society, that is its legitimacy, responsiveness and accountability; and state-building is principally an endogenous process, shaped by national actors(Ingram, 2010).

State building process is manifested by strengthening/establishing democratic processes that help to build trust (election support, mediation/ reconciliation, transparency, accountability, anti-corruption campaigns, etc.); working closely with legitimate local institutions (projects should be perceived as projects set up by the government as opposed to donors or local NGOs); strengthening pluralism and civil society and getting the population involved in the planning ; implementation of policies and measures (participation); political mediation in crises; legitimate UN peacekeeping missions; reinforcement of the military and civil security sector; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants; promotion of the rule of law, e.g. through legislation, courts and the administration of justice and promotion of human rights organizations and the free press. In one way or the other all the above listed manifestations are resulted from political disorder and instability (Henning, 2017).

5. Causes of Current Political Instability in Ethiopia

In its Ministry of Report the Danish Immigration Service (2018) stated that in Ethiopia interregional confrontations over political representation and resources are common. Many of these confrontations are acted out as localized inter-communal violence between different ethnic groups. Ethiopia is a linguistically and culturally diverse country of more than 80 ethnicities/nationalities. In order to keep the country together Ethiopia's new administrative structure has been built on the principle of ethnic federalism. The core of these principles is that the nine regional states of Ethiopia to a certain extent have self rule, have the right to elect their leadership and use their own language. According to several interlocutors, ethnicity remains an engine for political conflict. Ethnic competition and mistrust can be felt at all levels of society, including in organizations where much efforts have been invested in creating a workplace free of ethno-nationalist sentiments. All of these factors are current stability problems thereby threatening the state building process in Ethiopia.

According to the interview results, while thinking about causes of political instability the incapability to reach on consensus over the history, constitution and state structure of the country is the main obstacle. Failure to respond to identity questions and boundary related problems of regional states also can be taken as the major causes. There are varying perceptions on the history of Ethiopia. Some say that Ethiopia is created by force during Menelik II which is mainly raised by TPLF/EPRDF, OLF and other extremist groups. These groups argue that for the sake

of state formation, many ethnic groups were lost their lives and as they were oppressed by the ruling class particularly the Amhara political elites and the general public. On the other side there are arguments on Ethiopia's having a long history which is estimated to be over three thousand years. They believe that the state formation was accomplished consent and force. Therefore, by his contradiction is apparent in the current Ethiopian political scenario which becomes a cause for the frequent political instability in the country.

One of the interview result also shows that the disagreement on the provisions of FDRE constitution and the existing state structure namely ethnic federalism. Many political groups exposed that the constitution was enacted based on the interest of TPLF and OLF rather than the people. This was due to the general public was not consulted or represented during the enactment process and the constitution does not give rights for the citizens rather for the ethnic groups. In addition it also considers a particular group as oppressor of all other ethnic groups in the state. Further the document takes ethnic federation as panacea to ensure the equality of nations and nationalities. Many scholars and political groups suggest that the constitution must be revised through the participation of the people. To them ethnic federalism weakens the national unity of the state. They raise the various ethnic conflicts that are prevalent throughout the country as a major evidence for this case. On the other side extremist ethno nationalists consider the constitution as significant for the equality and peaceful co-existence of the state in general. Such a disparity paves the way for political instability which then poses a considerable impact on the state building process in the nation.

One of the key informants also added that economic, political and social marginalization is another cause for the happening of political instability in the country. It is believed that a certain political group is dominating the economy and the political power which creates antagonism among the political groups. Weak state institutions like parliament, constitutions, electoral boards, media, security (police and defense forces), human rights commissions, etc. These institutions are unable to respond the real problems or questions (identity and establishment of regional states) of the people instead they always provide political responses. So these institutions are becoming an instrument to target the groups which have a political stand against the ruling political parties. An ongoing poverty and unemployment is also added to the above mentioned problems to be worsened and more aggravated the problem failure to bring harmony

among the political parties in EPRDF. For instance, the relation between TPLF and ADP can be mentioned. The political conspiracy is also poses a threat to the political stability and order of the country. Ineffective governance, ethnic nationalism, hate speech, ineffective legal system, and the former misguided policy advocated by TPLF further provoke the problem.

As it is evident from the above discussions, the prevailing political instability adversely affects the state building process. This is because the instabilities and disorders happening in the country leads to secession and disintegration. Today, some regions are not willing to take orders and tasks raised from the federal government, unbalanced political and economic power and authority, chaos and civil war, emergence of regional questions like Sidama, Wolaita, etc., lack of trust on the national government and border conflicts between neighboring regions all of which in one way or the other produce weak national unity and this clearly jeopardizes the state building process of the country in general.

6. Conclusion

Political instability creates a serious problem and it becomes an obstacle for order or stability of a state. There are some indications for the incidence of current political instability in Ethiopia. These include, limited or independent media, frequent ethnic tensions, ineffective governance, racism, loose national unity, lack of trust on the national government, an increase in political conspiracy, security gaps, legitimacy gaps, the issue of secession and disintegration like the case of Sidama and Woilata are a clear indication which weaken the unity and strength of the country as a whole. The idea of state-building contains assumptions about an ideal type of well-functioning state, a politically impartial civil service, taxation, welfare and service delivery. So when we look at the case in Ethiopia it is the opposite. This implies that all of these current instable political developments greatly affect state building process which further hinders its progress.

7. Recommendations

To avert the occasion of political instability in Ethiopia, the government should first set up an equal ground for all citizens in every affair that concerns them. It should change the existing biased media to be neutral and independent. The government must also establish law and order by implementing its legal means of force when illegal acts prevail in the country. Strong democratic institutions are also mandatory to bring peace and stability and thereby consolidate

the state building process. The main problem in Ethiopia today is everyone wants to have his or her own interests be fulfilled by forgetting what is expected from each of them. So not only we consider our interests but we should also think about responsibilities. Most importantly we Ethiopians need to work greatly on attitudinal change at the grassroots level.

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