

Electoral Engineering: The Need for Moderating Ethnic Division and Political Polarisation in the Ethiopian Federal System

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Abstract

Forming elected governments may be considered the first and foremost objective of elections and electoral systems. Nevertheless, the skilful choice of electoral systems in ethnically divided polities seems to have particular value in establishing elected governments to deal with the seemingly intractable ethno-cultural conflicts characterising these polities, including Ethiopia. Conscious and skilful engineering of electoral systems, so this article argues, can be considered as one such institutional mechanism. The main objective of this study is thus to examine the consequences and implications of Ethiopia's first-past-the-post (FPTP) system for ethnic division and political polarisation, and to suggest a possible redesign of the electoral system to enable it to deal with these issues more effectively. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research approach has been employed. Additionally, previous studies on the electoral system of Ethiopia, interviews, and various legal documents have been used as key sources of data for the construction and discussion of the findings of this study. The study reveals that the FPTP system supports neither political pluralism nor legitimacy of government. It also finds that the FPTP system has left ethnic minorities largely unrepresented in the regional political economy. Above all, the study reveals that the FPTP system neither incentivises nor constrains forces active on the political stage to moderate their views and stances on ethnically or politically divisive issues. The article generally concludes that the FPTP system is an ill-devised electoral system that cannot address Ethiopia's current needs and realities. It is suggested therefore that the Ethiopian federation seek to redesign a new electoral system capable of fostering the inclusion of its ethno-political groups and of encouraging inter-ethnic and political moderation in the interests of achieving stable political democracy.

Key Words: *Democracy, Consociation, Centripetalism, Election, Polarization, Ethnicity and Political Party*

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1. Introduction

No dispute arises over the fact that free, fair, and periodic elections constitute one of the most necessary, if not sufficient, conditions of multiparty democracies. However, electoral multiparty democracies never operate in a vacuum because there are a series of electoral institutions governing election processes and, as such, influencing electoral outcomes and the democratic nature and the overall legitimacy of democratic institutions created by electoral contests. Electoral systems are among many of the electoral institutions having such crucial effects. 'Electoral systems' refer to a set of rules determining the ways votes are cast and the method through which votes cast are converted into seats (Reynolds & Reilly, 2002). Elections taking place in various multiparty democracies and the electoral systems in accordance with which the elections are held could have certain objectives. Elections, most importantly, are considered as key instruments in forming the government and its institutions (Ishiyama, 2012). Thus, forming elected governments may be considered the first and foremost objective of elections and electoral systems. Owing to the competitive nature of multiparty democratic elections, there are winners and losers in every election.¹

In recent times, however, scholars of democracy have stressed that the importance of elections and their associated electoral systems goes beyond winning or losing a single event of an election, since arguably no political institution shapes the nature and character of the political landscape of democratic countries more strongly than their electoral system (Dahl, 1998). This means that the choice of electoral systems in multiparty democracies affects the stability of elected governments, the breadth and legitimacy of representation, the capacity of political systems to manage conflict, the extent of public participation, the fractionalisation and polarisation of political party systems, voter turnout and voting behaviour, and the overall responsiveness of political systems (Diamond & Plattner, 2006; Ishiyama, 2012). It can be argued therefore that the choice of electoral system has much to do with the quality and sustainability of the multiparty democracy that countries wish to establish. The conscious and skilful choice of electoral systems seems to have particular value in ethnically di-

¹ For information on the competitive nature of elections and the need for electoral integrity in multiparty democracies, see ACE Encyclopaedia (2013).

vided polities that employ multi-ethnic federalism to deal with the apparently intractable ethno-cultural conflicts that so often characterise them.²

Ethiopia is one of the few federations in Africa and, since 1991, has employed a form of pluralist federalism known as “ethnic federalism”.³ Ethiopian ethnic-based federalism focuses on accommodating ethno-national diversity in order to achieve the goal of building “one political community” wherein inter-ethnic solidarity can be promoted among the country’s “nations, nationalities, and peoples” (NNPs) so as to ensure overall stability. However, it is asserted in this article that ethnic federalism alone cannot be a guarantee of inter-ethnic unity or the country’s stability because there are “other crucial factors”, such as the electoral system⁴ that work either in moderating or intensifying inter-ethnic or political conflict.

Few studies were conducted of Ethiopia’s electoral system, the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. While some of them⁵ focus on the effects of the FPTP system on political pluralism, the legitimacy of the government, and the political participation rights of ethnic or regional minorities in regional politics, only two of the studies⁶ attempt to examine the need for inter-ethnic or political moderation. Even they do not scrutinise the effects of the current FPTP system on ethnic division and political polarisation in the federal system of Ethiopia, especially in a context of relatively

² For more information on electoral systems that scholars have proposed in the context of ethnically divided societies, see Diamond & Plattner (2006).

³ In respect of the characterisation of pluralist federalisms as “multicultural federalism” and “ethnic federalism”, see Fleiner (2011), who describes Ethiopia as an instance of ethnic federalism.

⁴ For “other crucial factors” affecting an effectiveness of federal systems other than the specific form or type of federalism, such as ethnic federalism, adopted by various political communities to deal with the issue of ethno-cultural diversities, see Erk and Anderson (2009).

⁵ While Bayeh (2018) argues that Ethiopia’s FPTP and parliamentary system facilitate the creation of a dominant-party system, Beza (2013) stresses the ill effects of the FPTP system on the rights of ethnic or regional minorities in regional politics. Gebremeskel (2017) could be viewed as a more general study because it attempts to assess the ill effects of the FPTP system on political pluralism or multipartyism, the legitimacy of the government, and inter-ethnic or political conciliation. None of these studies examines the effects of the FPTP system on ethnic division and political polarisation in depth, however.

⁶ Both Van der Beken (2018) and Fessha (2009) explore the effects of the FPTP system and indicate its weakness in terms of moderating ethnic division and political polarisation. However, these studies do not sufficiently deal with the way out. Even some of the solutions suggested by the studies seem to have very limited potential in addressing the problem of ethnic division and political polarisation, as will be discussed in this article.

widened political space.⁷ Nor do the studies suggest pragmatic alternative electoral system designs that could help in moderating ethnic division and political polarisation while at the same time maintaining the inclusion of ethnic or political groups.

This article examines the implications of Ethiopia's FPTP electoral system for ethnic divisions and political polarisation. It makes an in-depth appraisal of the current electoral system and the reform proposals suggested by previous studies, doing so with an eye to finding ways of moderating divisions and maintaining the inclusion of ethnic or political groups. To realise these objectives, a qualitative research approach has been employed. The major sources of data were journal articles, in-depth interviews, legal documents, and the FDRE Constitution.

The article is organised into four sections. The first is the introductory section; the second section sets out the conceptual framework of the study. The third is the "results and discussion" section, dedicated to examining the consequences and implications of the FPTP electoral system for ethnic division and political polarisation. This section also discusses possible means to overcome the ill effects of the FPTP electoral system through different methods of electoral engineering. The last section provides concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

2.1 Electoral systems

Although electoral systems vary without end (Dahl, 1998), they can be categorised into three major families: plurality or majoritarian systems; proportional systems; and mixed systems (Baldini & Pappalardo, 2009; Reilly, 2004; Taagepera, 2007).

⁷ April 2018 may be considered "a point of departure" in Ethiopian politics in terms of opening up political and media space for diverse political views. However, this appears to have contributed to bolstering "inter-ethnic" tensions and conflicts due to some polarising political issues and narratives espoused by ethnic entrepreneurs. These polarising issues and narratives have been examined and presented in this article as "wake-up calls" to political actors to think about possible ways of moderating ethnically divisive issues and cynical political behaviour through a form of electoral engineering. April 2018 was the period when a new premier, Dr Abiy Ahmed, ascended to power through strong political rhetoric on "Ethiopianism", which was, in a way, different from the previous leaders of the former long-ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

Plurality-majority systems comprise two types of plurality systems, FPTP and the block vote, and three types of majority systems: the two-round run-off, the alternative vote, and the supplementary vote. The difference between plurality and majoritarian systems lies in the need to secure an absolute majority in majoritarian systems, whereas obtaining a relative majority suffices in plurality systems for candidates to win seats (Reilly, 2004). Otherwise, both systems never consider the proportion of votes received by the candidates as such, with the implication that some votes will be wasted (IDEA, 2005). It means that plurality-majority systems such as FPTP enable the winner to take the only seat at stake (Baldini & Pappalardo, 2009). That is why plurality-majority systems are said to have been rooted in the tenet of “the winner-takes-all, while the loser-takes-none” (Lijphart, 2012); to this end, plurality-majoritarian systems essentially serve the purpose of “governability” or “government decisiveness” (Baldini & Pappalardo, 2009).

In contrast, proportional representation (PR) systems strive to reflect the strength of political parties in the electorate (Ishiyama, 2012) by allocating seats to parties taking part in elections proportionally to the total vote each receives in the elections (Baldini & Pappalardo, 2009; Diamond & Plattner, 2006; IDEA, 2005; Reilly, 2004; Taagepera, 2007). In other words, “party proportionality is central in PR systems”, as PR systems are focused on converting a party’s share of votes into an equivalent share of legislative seats (Klingemann, 2009, p. 160). PR electoral systems thus aim at serving the purpose of “government composition”, which is the antithesis of “government decisiveness”, by creating an electoral arrangement in which the legislative government looks like “a miniature of the society it represents” (Baldini and Pappalardo, 2009, p. 18).

The third family of electoral systems, the mixed systems, aim at blending certain elements of the two major electoral systems (the plurality-majoritarian and the PR systems) with a view to harnessing the positive aspects of these two systems and moderating their negative aspects. The two most common variants of

mixed electoral systems are mixed member proportional (MMP) and mixed member majoritarian (MMB) systems, also called parallel systems (IDEA, 2005).⁸

The classic choices of electoral systems, as discussed above, are mainly concerned with either the “representation” or “governability” leverages of proportional electoral systems and plurality or majoritarian electoral systems, respectively (Bogaards, 2003). In ethnically plural societies, where citizens are divided by socio-cultural characteristics such as ethnicity and religion, the additional question, however, is how ethnic groups in such societies can peacefully coexist within the same democratic polity through the design of an electoral system (Bogaards, 2003). “Electoral engineering” is the deliberate process of using electoral system designs in a given democratic polity to produce certain political or electoral outcomes.⁹ The question of how stable democracy could be promoted in ethnically divided societies has spurred ongoing debate in scholarly circles, with the epicentre of the debate being the choice of electoral system.

It is hence worthwhile to review literature on the possible nexus between ethnicity in a democratic polity and the design of an electoral system from the perspective of managing ethnic division in ethnically divided societies and thereby promoting stable democracy. In this context, ethnically divided polities are ones in which ethnicity is a salient cleavage around which interests are organised for political purposes such as elections (Reilly, 2004).

⁸ IDEA (2005) clearly differentiates these two variants of mixed electoral systems. The mixed-member proportional (MMP) system, as a mixed system, combines the list PR system with plurality or majoritarian systems, usually the FPTP, in such a way that the list PR system is made to compensate for the disproportional effects of the plurality or majoritarian system. The mixed-member majoritarian (MMB), or the parallel system, simply combines the list PR system with the FPTP plurality system to elect members of a single body without considering the separate election results obtained from each of the electoral systems (the list PR and the FPTP). This is why the MMB system is also known as the parallel system. Nonetheless, as explained by IDEA (2005), the MMB system tends to produce semi-proportional outcomes, the proportionality of which falls somewhere between plurality or majoritarian systems and PR systems, such that the result is more proportional than in the plurality or majoritarian system but less proportional than in PR systems, whereas the MMP system generally produces proportional election outcomes.

⁹ Though Reilly (2004) does not directly define the term “electoral engineering”, he is well-known for promoting electoral engineering in ethnically divided societies, particularly in connection with his theory of “centripetalism”. See Horowitz (1991) for an elaboration on the concepts of institutional and electoral engineering.

In this light, “polarised” political views in ethnically divided societies are assumed to spring from the ethnic divisions primarily defining and organising the body politic.¹⁰ For the purpose of this study, political polarisation in Ethiopia refers to the radically divergent views advanced by different political forces on key areas such as history and constitutional design.¹¹

2.2 The interface between ethnicity and electoral systems

Until the 1960s, the dominant assumption in respect of the prospect of democracy in ethnically divided societies was that stable democracy could not flourish in such societies. In the 1970s, however, when scholars started to explore and understand the interests of political actors involved in ethnic conflicts rather than merely judge the causes of the conflicts as primordial manifestations of irrationality and traditional rivalries, several theory-based explanations began to surface (Reilly, 2004). In this regard, constructionist thinking on ethnicity came into sharp contrast with the primordial way of understanding ethnicity. This school of thought gained popularity in the 1970s even though many still adhered to the primordial view of ethnicity. Ethnicity is, for the constructionists, a socially constructed identity – it is perceived as something created by society, rather than a naturally determined phenomenon, and as possessing a dynamic aspect (Yang, 2000).¹²

The fact that the constructionist underpinning of ethnicity has surfaced does not, however, mean that primordial accounts, or the concepts of primordialism, have been entirely ruled out. Bayar (2009), for instance, argues that primordialism still has sub-

¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of the contending ethnic nationalisms that have dominated the political scene in Ethiopia since the late 1960s and the journey to the establishment of the current ethnic federal system, see Merera (2003).

¹¹ There seems to be no dispute about the need for reaching greater consensus among Ethiopia’s groups and citizens on the history and common destiny of its peoples if the body politic is to remain stable and advance democracy. See Merera (2003) for an account of the contradictory interpretations of Ethiopia’s past by various political groups in respect of the country’s history of state formation. See Semir (2020) for the different options in constitutional design preferred and promoted by various political groupings and how these options spring from these groupings’ differing interpretations of Ethiopia’s history.

¹² For the purpose of clarity, there also exists another theory of ethnicity known as instrumentalism: it views ethnicity as a means to realise material objectives of ethnic actors and the ethnic groups which the actors claim to represent (Messay, 2001; O’Leary, 2001a). This theory of ethnicity can be considered a variant of a constructionist understanding of ethnicity because it shares with the latter the idea that ethnicity is a social construct. See Yang (2000) for the differences between instrumental and constructionist theories of ethnicity.

stantial power to explain ethnic phenomena and refers to cases in sub-Saharan Africa and the United States of America (USA). The logic behind introducing previously mentioned theories of ethnicity lies in the need to indicate the possible relationship between different theories of institutional design suggested for ethnically divided societies, namely consociationalism and centripetalism, and their interpretations of ethnicity and hence electoral systems.

Indeed, there is scarcely a vivid causal relationship between ethnicity and electoral systems. This, however, does not mean that no relationship exists between ethnicity and electoral systems, as there have been several efforts by the scholarly circle to address issues of ethnicity with a view to finding institutional solutions to enable stable democracy in deeply divided societies. Stated differently, scholarly efforts have sought to analyse and understand the relationship between ethnicity and electoral systems, though indirectly under the banner of finding various institutional approaches to ensure stable democracy in ethnically plural societies. In this regard, two schools of thought, consociationalism and centripetalism, are identified and discussed.

2.2.1 The consociational school

The theory of consociationalism is strongly associated with Arend Lijphart. Consociationalism is described by Lijphart as a power-sharing model of democracy founded upon four important pillars. The pillars are “grand coalition” of ethnic leaders from all significant segments of a society; minority veto that seeks mutual agreement among the coalition partners over key governmental decisions; proportional representation of all significant groups in elected and administrative offices; and segmental or group autonomy via federalism or similar devices with respect to cultural and societal life (Lijphart, 1977 & 1992). In one of his famous articles entitled “Consociational democracy”, Lijphart argues that consociationalism seeks the deliberate joint efforts of political elites to stabilise consociational systems. Thus, consociational democracy entails “government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy” (Lijphart, 1969, p. 2016).

The gist of the consociational school of thought is that if all of the main warring parties, representing various societal groups, are

incorporated in the political system, then they are more likely to develop vested interests in its stability and proper functioning (Lijphart, 1977 & 1992). With this in mind, Lijphart goes to the extent of asserting that majoritarian systems produce majority dictatorships and civil strife, rather than democracy, in severely divided societies (Lijphart, 2012). This is why he strongly argues for consociationalism as the only democratic institutional model with stabilising capacities in such societies (Lijphart, 2004).

As the aim of this article is to examine the possible nexus that may exist between ethnicity and electoral systems, the relevance of PR electoral system, as part of the consociational model, in managing ethno-cultural conflicts and promoting stable democracy needs to be stressed. In this respect, Lijphart asserts that the choice of electoral systems, as far as a sharply divided society is concerned, has to consider the representational quality of the electoral system being proposed. In view of that, Lijphart recommends PR as the optimal system. More specifically, he proposes list PR systems with closed lists on the ground that such systems encourage the formation and maintenance of strong and cohesive political parties. He also suggests that the PR system be designed in a manner that ensures a high degree of proportionality, with multi-member districts that are not too large so as to avoid distance between voters and their representatives (Lijphart, 2004). Lijphart's emphasis on management of district magnitude seems to stem from the criticism often made by detractors of PR systems that majoritarian systems produce close association between voters and members of parliament (MPs), thereby fostering democratic accountability, while PR systems create some gap between MPs and their constituents, hence constraining democratic accountability.¹³

In a related argument, Lijphart claims that intermediate electoral systems such as the cumulative and limited vote (semi-proportional systems), which have been employed at state and local levels in USA, and the single non-transferable vote practised in Japan until 1993, may support minority representation, though not as accurately and consistently as PR. Similarly, the plurality system of India and Lebanon, which combines a system of guaranteed representation for specified minorities, has been denounced by

¹³ For the merits and demerits of the two dominant families of electoral systems, namely PR systems and plurality or majoritarian systems, see Reynolds & Reilly (2002).

Lijphart as less secure and accurate. Lijphart draws the conclusion that PR is the only system that provides “equal” and “even-handed” treatment for all groups, in addition to guaranteeing the proportionality and minority representation through which ethnic division in ethnically plural societies can be accommodated and thereby fostering inter-ethnic cooperation and political stability (Lijphart, 2004).

It may be noted that Lijphart regards ethnic communities as fixed and static entities that need to be politically represented as they are. Lijphart thus seems to advance the primordial conception of ethnicity, which treats ethnicity as a naturally determined, given trait rooted in hostilities of ethnic sentiment.¹⁴ Lijphart’s primordial conception of ethnicity can be inferred from his understanding of ethnic elites as leaders of “rival subcultures” (Lijphart, 1969, p. 211).¹⁵ In addition, consociationalists such as Lijphart argue for some form of proportional representation in divided societies because they believe that this system of election enables all significant ethnic groups to define themselves in ethnically based parties (Reilly, 2004). This idea aligns with a central notion of primordialists that every ethnic cleavage “naturally” transforms into political cleavage.¹⁶ The primordialist conception of ethnicity predominates in the consociational school of thought. As a result, Lijphart’s recommendation of consociational democracy in general and its associated features, namely the PR electoral system in particular, has been strongly criticised.

The strongest criticism of using PR electoral systems in divided societies has come from Lardeyret. First, Lardeyret (2006) argues that PR is dangerous for divided societies such as Belgium, mentioning that Belgian politics became little more than a feud between the Flemish and the French-speaking Walloons when the introduction of PR incentivised the emergence of linguistic parties. He warns that Belgium would have disintegrated had the monarchy not cemented its national unity. Secondly, Lardeyret argues that PR tends to give small parties disproportionate power because such parties control the “swing” votes that are needed to make up a majority coalition. In a related point, he maintains

¹⁴ For an account of primordial ethnicity, see Geertz (1963) and Shils (1957).

¹⁵ Primordial thought basically understands members of different cultural groups as rivals or natural targets of violence to each other (Adlparvar & Tadros, 2016).

¹⁶ It is clearly maintained in Ghai (2000) that primordialists understand ethnic identities as natural phenomena that “directly” transform into political identities.

that a party that has made significant election gains might not find a partner and hence be compelled to remain in opposition. Lardeyret also suggests that PR systems tend to give extremist parties a chance to take part in government. Thirdly, Lardeyret claims that PR systems do not often survive serious discord over particular measures, thereby inducing instability. He stresses that PR systems need inordinate amounts of time to build new coalitions after the collapse of a former coalition government, thus creating executive vacancy. New elections conducted to fill the vacancy generally return the same politicians, thereby cementing non-alternation (Lardeyret, 2006).

Consociationalism has been attacked for creating an environment in which ethnicity freezes and radicalises rather than being mitigated or moderated (Horowitz, 1985; Reilly, 2004).¹⁷ As a result, a competing school of thought known as “centripetalism” has emerged on the academic and political scene as an alternative approach to thinking about the possibility of creating stable democracies in divided societies by managing ethnic division through electoral engineering (Reilly, 2004).

2.2.2 The centripetal school

Centripetalism refers to “a centripetal political system in which political competition is directed at the centre, not at the extremes” (Reilly, 2004, p. 7). In this theory, for political competition to focus at the centre, political actors such as political parties and candidates need to be incentivised with centripetal institutions designed to encourage “moderate” and “centrist” forms of political competition rather than extremist and polarising ones. Centripetalism is an approach to conflict management in ethnically divided societies that involves providing centripetal incentives for political actors to produce positional shifts that can only be uncovered by the process of active engagement, discussion, and negotiation (Reilly, 2004). The goal of centripetalism generally or centripetal institutions in particular is thus not creating consensus but rather ensuring accommodation in which “divergent” interests and preferences of different ethnic groups can be processed into “centripetal” outcomes in which “win-win” exchange-

¹⁷ In this regard, these scholars decisively criticise the consociational model for putting so much faith in the willingness and ability of leaders to reach accommodation after elections have entrenched and polarised ethnic solidarities, instead of seeking to bridge divisions and forge conciliation in advance through pre-electoral coalitions (Horowitz, 2003; Reilly, 2004).

es are made possible amongst political actors (Reilly, 2004). For centripetal outcomes to occur, majoritarian electoral systems that promote “vote-pooling” across ethnic groups, parties and candidates claiming to represent the ethnic groups have been suggested by Horowitz and Reilly as means of forming moderate and accommodative environments in divided societies.¹⁸ Thus, the essence of the centripetal theory of democracy is that creatively crafted electoral rules hold particular promise because they structure the “incentives” and “pay-offs” available to political actors in their search for electoral victory, making some types of behaviour more rewarding than others (Reilly, 2004).

More specifically, Horowitz, for instance, asserts that majoritarian electoral systems, in particular the alternative vote, give parties and candidates a robust incentive to seek popular support across group lines, as this system demands that political contestants maximise votes to win elections, hence encouraging them to adopt moderate stances on ethnically divisive matters (Horowitz, 2003). In other words, majoritarian electoral systems are thought to bridge ethnic differences by rewarding moderate politics, on the one hand, and punishing extremist politics, on the other (Norris, 2008). In this respect, Norris implies that a vote-pooling electoral strategy is founded on the assumption that moderate electoral behaviour and appeals foster cultural values of social tolerance, accommodation, and cooperation in divided societies (Norris, 2008).

Stressing the importance of an alternative-vote electoral system, Horowitz argued in the 1990s that it should be viewed as the centrepiece of a selection of accommodation-inducing structures, such as federalism and elected presidential posts, in post-apartheid South Africa (Horowitz, 1991). By contrast, Lijphart contended that alternative voting produces disproportional election results similar to those in many other majoritarian electoral systems (Lijphart, 2004).

Of the many scholars focusing on vote-pooling strategies, Reilly appears to be the one most dedicated to understanding the merits, if any, of “electoral engineering” for conflict management in divided societies. He argues that politicians and political parties

¹⁸ For detail on the vote-pooling electoral systems suggested by Horowitz (2003) and Reilly (2004) for use in divided societies, see Diamond & Plattner (2006).

running in divided societies should be provided with incentives to cooperate across ethnic lines, on the ground that political parties are “normally ethnic parties” and voters likewise “normally ethnic voters”, all of which makes politics “a centrifugal game” (Reilly, 2004, p. 10). Reilly warns that office-seeking politicians might even push their ethnic supporters in the direction of ethnic hostility and fuel perceptions of group insecurity, thus paving the way for ethnic violence. Reilly asserts that a vote-pooling electoral system that changes the conditions fostering “ethnic chauvinism” and “rivalism” is of central importance in divided societies to encourage moderate, cooperative, centrist, and accommodative politics. Vote-pooling systems are described by Reilly as institutional rules that enable politicians to campaign for the “second-choice” votes of electors, on the presumption that the first choice often goes to a co-ethnic candidate rather than one from a rival group. Politicians therefore will have good reason to make cross-ethnic appeals and, in doing so, demonstrate their capacity to represent ethnic groups other than their own (Reilly, 2004).

However, although vote-pooling electoral systems are prescribed by centripetalists for their potential merit of transcending ethnicity and curbing ethnicity’s tendency to undermine the stability of divided societies, centripetalism has not escaped criticism. That ardent promoter of consociationalism, Lijphart, criticises vote-pooling systems of centripetal theory such as the alternative vote. He observes that the latter is a majoritarian system that can leave ethnic minorities severely under-represented. Hence, he warns, any electoral system that does not ensure the fair and full representation of every group in an ethnically plural society risks the group’s alienation and rejection of the system (Lijphart, 2004).

Overall, the review above of the interface between ethnicity and electoral systems in the consociational and centripetal schools indicates that consociationalists embrace a primordial conception of ethnicity, while centripetalists hold constructionist conceptions of ethnicity. This is evident in the fact that consociationalists prefer to accommodate ethnic division through the use of list PR systems that foster the conversion of every ethnic cleav-

age into political cleavage. This is in line with a primordialist understanding of ethnicity that takes ethnicities for granted.¹⁹ The centripetalists prefer to accommodate ethnic groups and their divergent interests via “exchanges” between groups and their leaders that convert them into a “political middle ground” via vote-pooling electoral systems. The process of political exchanges between the ethnic groups and their leaders in election campaigns by appealing across ethnic lines in a centripetal politics seeks influencing members of different ethnic groups, and bringing them into a somewhat compromised ethno-political position over polarising issues. The idea that ethnicities are dynamic and can be contextually influenced²⁰ is in keeping with the constructionist understanding of ethnicity that underlies the centripetal school of thought.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Consequences and implications of the FPTP system

The Constitution of Ethiopia declares that members of the House of Peoples’ Representatives (HoPR), the highest authority of the federal government,²¹ shall be elected by a plurality of votes cast from candidates in each electoral district for a term of five years on the basis of universal suffrage and by direct, free and fair elections held via secret ballot.²² The recently enacted electoral law of federal Ethiopia similarly provides that a candidate who obtains the highest number of votes among contestants shall be declared a winner and this shall also hold true for election of regional councils, except where, in accordance with regional constitutions, more than one candidate is elected to regional councils; the candidates who obtain the highest number of votes shall, in the order of their votes, be declared winners.²³ It is therefore evident that Ethiopia has adopted the purest form of the plurality electoral system known as the FPTP system. The six general elections in the country were accordingly governed by this system. The latter, it is argued, could be viewed as one of the country’s most instrumental institutions and as accountable for myriad socio-political consequences in the last three decades. The effects

¹⁹ For detail on primordialists’ characterisation of ethnicity, see Yang (2000).

²⁰ For detail on constructionists’ characterisation of ethnicity, see Yang (2000).

²¹ See Article 50(3) of the FDRE Constitution.

²² See Article 54(1) & (2) of the FDRE Constitution.

²³ See Article 4(1) of the new electoral law, Proclamation No. 1162/2019.

of the FPTP electoral system are considered under three headings, namely political pluralism and legitimacy, party politics and party systems, and ethnic minorities.

3.1.1 Political pluralism and legitimacy

One of the “natural” consequences of the FPTP electoral system can be observed in the composition of the lower parliament, the HoPR,²⁴ which for many years has been characterised by a considerable lack of political pluralism (Van der Beken, 2018). This is mainly due to the fact that the FPTP electoral system was greatly exploited by the former ruling coalition, the EPRDF, in that it was put in place to benefit the EPRDF by creating a “manufactured majority”²⁵ status for it.²⁶ The manufactured majority status of the EPRDF was not, however, without consequences. The political consequence of the FPTP system appears to have been felt conspicuously in the 2005 general election,²⁷ an election that might be regarded as the most competitive one in the electoral history of Ethiopia.

The 2005 general election was contested by three major groupings, namely the EPRDF, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), and the United Ethiopian Democratic Front (UEDF). The contest between the EPRDF and CUD could be described as particularly high-stakes and decisive. Thirty-five political parties took part, of which four parties from the opposition and one independent candidate managed to win parliamentary seats. The EPRDF, with 10,260,413 popular votes, took 327 seats out of the 547 parliamentary seats of the HoPR, while the CUD, with 4,594,668 votes, gained 109 seats; the UEDF, with 1,741,670 votes, gained 52

²⁴ The FDRE Constitution recognises two federal houses: the House of Peoples’ Representatives and the House of Federation. These can be understood as the lower and the upper parliaments, respectively. See Article 53 of the FDRE Constitution.

²⁵ The term “manufactured majority” in this study refers to an electoral context in which a single party or a coalition receives more seats than it does popular votes.

²⁶ For detail on how the present FPTP system of election enabled the EPRDF to remain in power for so long, see Bayeh (2018), Gebremeskel (2017) and Van der Beken (2018).

²⁷ It should be remembered that the rationale for singling out the 2005 general election lies in the highly competitive, relatively free, and democratic nature of this election, especially in the pre-election period and on the day of the election, which thus helps one to evaluate the comparative impact of the plurality system, the FPTP and the PR system on government composition. In all the elections before and after the 2005 general election, including the 2015 general election in which the EPRDF recorded a landslide victory over its contestant political parties, the opposition was disregarded in the HoPR. The same trend seems to have continued in the 2021 general election, which saw the Prosperity Party (PP) registering a landslide victory over its political contestants, despite the fact that some political parties managed to win very few seats in the HoPR. Indeed, one regional state, Benishangul-Gumuz, has yet to hold the sixth general election, in spite of its marginal effect on the composition of the HoPR.

seats, and the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM), with 454,435 votes, gained 11 (Gebremeskel, 2017).

The electoral outcomes of these four political organisations would, however, have been different had the seats been allocated using the list PR system. If we consider electoral simulation using PR and disregarding the FPTP, the EPRDF would have won 274 seats, which reduces its share by 53 seats, while the CUD would have had secured an additional 14 seats to the 109 seats it secured using the FPTP system. In the same fashion, the OFDM, which got 11 seats, would have secured one additional seat had the electoral outcome been calculated using the list PR system; the UEDF would have lost five seats from the 52 seats it achieved using FPTP had the system in use been a PR electoral system (Gebremeskel, 2017).

This simulation generally implies that a considerable number of popular votes were wasted due to the FPTP system, thereby hampering the relative strength of the opposition political parties in the Ethiopian parliament, the HoPR. In all of the six largely non-competitive elections save the 2005 general election, smaller political parties managed to obtain few or no seats at all. As a result, strong political pluralism has been absent in the HoPR, hence making the parliament devoid of diverse political views that could have been exploited for good in enriching and qualifying several significant decisions endorsed by this parliament and affecting the lives of millions of Ethiopians.

The other ill effect of the FPTP system is associated with the breadth and, hence, legitimacy of representation. Electoral systems that foster broader representation through accommodating various social groups are often welcomed and considered legitimate (Irvine, 1979). For this reason, representative institutions such as parliaments need to become more inclusive of diverse political parties in order to enhance the representation of different popular views, which would consequently strengthen democracy as well as legitimacy of the representative institutions (Van der Beken, 2018). In short, the more inclusive and representative electoral systems are, the more legitimate the electoral systems would be. However, the FPTP system employed in Ethiopia has largely been running in the opposite direction when considered in terms of representing different views. On balance, as lucidly

indicated above by Gebremeskel's 2017 study of the 2005 general election, 43 seats would have been distributed to other parties which failed to obtain any seat on the basis of FPTP electoral system. This shows that the votes cast for the smaller parties that could have earned them 43 seats were wasted; resultantly, the smaller parties were left unrepresented or misrepresented (Gebremeskel, 2017). The more votes are wasted due to a manufactured majority created by the use of the FPTP system, in which the manufactured bigger party²⁸ receives more seats disproportionate to its popular votes, the more illegitimate the elected government (Gebremeskel, 2017).

The case of the 2015 general election, in which the former ruling coalition claimed an extraordinary electoral victory, seems a very appropriate electoral case to explain the sort of legitimacy crisis the EPRDF confronted in 2016 and thereafter. The critical point that needs to be explained here is why the fifth general election was followed by popular protests. The protests were observed shortly after the declaration by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) of the total electoral victory of the EPRDF, in which it took all the seats of the HoPR.²⁹ The reasons for the spread of anti-regime protests, which began in about 2015 and culminated in April 2018,³⁰ were numerous.³¹ In spite of this,

²⁸ The bigger party, in the Ethiopian context, refers to the former ruling coalition, the EPRDF and more recently the Prosperity Party (PP), the successor to the EPRDF, which excludes the TPLF yet include the former affiliate parties of the EPRDF. The latter can be considered the bigger party, whereas electoral parties which have no legislative seats at all, or legislative parties with few parliamentary seats, can be regarded as smaller parties.

²⁹ Van der Beken (2018) states that the reasons for the spread of popular protests immediately after the fifth general election were rooted in much wider discontent about the performance of the EPRDF in the administration of the country, in spite of the triggering effect of the "Addis Ababa Master Plan". However, such a performance-based explanation of the popular protests that were seen in many areas of the Oromia and Amhara regional states as of 2016 seems superfluous because the underlying reasons for the protests had many faces. Indeed, Van der Beken himself also attempted to explain the reasons for the popular protests in relation to the demand for substantive political reforms, such as of the electoral system, rather than simply describing it in relation to the performance of the EPRDF. In this regard, even the reasoning related to the electoral system glosses over several of the motives that drove the popular protests. Constitutional issues, namely the federal structure, border and identity issues with the Tigray region, the alleged hegemony of the TPLF in the EPRDF coalition, lack of authentic representation of the Amhara people in government and party institutions, human rights violations, and perceived or actual socio-economic injustices were some of the most common issues raised by the Amhara protestors. Similarly, the alleged hegemony of the TPLF in the EPRDF coalition, the lack of authentic representation of the Oromo people in government and party institutions, human rights violations, and perceived or actual socio-economic injustices were among the primary factors driving the popular protests of the Oromo youth.

³⁰ The ascension of a new premier to the federal executive has at least rescued the country from the brink of disintegration by subduing the serious protests and tensions seen in the Oromia and Amhara regional states.

³¹ See note 29 for the reasons.

there seems no doubt that the complete lack of political pluralism in the fifth parliament of the HoPR was attributable to the FPTP system,³² which fostered the “de-legitimation” of the newly reconstituted government in the aftermath of the 2015 general election.³³ Politico-legal reforms, such as the demand for a new electoral arrangement, that the EPRDF initiated immediately after the 2015 general election seem to have been motivated by its need to restore the legitimacy it lost due to the FPTP system, which, as discussed, benefited, and continues to benefit³⁴ bigger parties at the expense of smaller ones. The efforts of the EPRDF towards electoral reform in 2016, reform which was geared towards combining plurality systems with proportional features, seems to substantiate the theory that plurality systems such as FPTP undermine the legitimacy of elected governments in divided societies, where broader representation of social cleavages matter for upholding stability and cohesion via elite cooperation (Lijphart, 1991). Indeed, not only consociationalists such as Lijphart but also centripetalists such as Horowitz have generally agreed on the ills of plurality elections in divided societies and, as such, have counselled against the use of plurality systems such as FPTP, even though they disagree on the alternative to it (Bogaards, 2003).³⁵

³² The FPTP system could be described as the major systemic factor in the creation of a parliament so entirely devoid of political pluralism as the 5th Parliament of Ethiopia.

³³ The reasons for the popular protests that erupted in 2016, shortly after the extraordinary electoral victory of the EPRDF, were many and multidimensional. However, the FPTP system might be blamed for technically supporting the EPRDF in its hegemonic position in the political scene of federal Ethiopia. This system seemed to fuel anger among protestors in that it created an electoral arrangement helping the EPRDF to stay in power, thereby leaving no institutional room for protesting youth to deal with the aforementioned socio-economic and political reasons driving the protests. Bluntly speaking, the FPTP system could be viewed as a major impediment barring alternative political forces, or the opposition, from taking part in the HoPR, where the socio-economic and political issues raised by protestors could at least have been institutionally presented and voiced by means of opposition political forces, had these forces taken hold of some legislative seats in the HoPR.

³⁴ To understand the effects of the FPTP system on the political composition of the HoPR in the recent general election (the sixth), one can take the popular votes received by each contesting political party and the number of seats won by the current ruling party (PP), as well as the remaining parties participating in the election. Then, intuitively, a comparison of the numbers in respect of popular votes and seats won speaks to the bias of the FPTP system towards the PP and its negative repercussions for all other political parties contesting the election. The reason for not calculating the popular votes and seats won in the sixth general election and simulating the electoral outcomes under the list PR system lies in the limited impact of this election compared to the third general election, which is remembered by many as the most competitive of all the elections ever seen in Ethiopia. Furthermore, one regional state (Benishangul-Gumuz) has not yet conducted this general election, which hence leaves the electoral simulation incomplete.

³⁵ While consociationalists prefer the use of list PR systems, centripetalists promote the use of vote-pooling electoral systems such as the alternative vote in divided societies (Bogaards, 2003).

3.1.2 Party politics and party systems

The consequence of the FPTP electoral system is vividly seen in the party politics and party system of Ethiopia, which can be examined by considering the number of political parties and the intensity of the polarity characterising them. The number and nature of political parties defining the character of party systems in democratic societies is directly linked to the electoral system in place (Erk & Anderson, 2009). Ethnicity is a core means of state organisation and political representation, one with constitutional recognition since 1995, given that the FDRE Constitution has made ethnicity the most salient basis upon which politics can be organised.

This constitutional decision has permitted ethnic cleavages to be readily translated into political cleavages, so triggering the formation of ethnically or regionally organised political parties.³⁶ Nowadays, almost all Ethiopian ethno-linguistic groups have at least one political party designated in their names. The party system is thus markedly fragmented, with small, ethnically organised political parties mushrooming and failing to integrate into a viable multi-ethnic political force capable of acting as a credible, broad-based, and robust alternative that, in the past, could challenge the former long-ruling coalition, the EPRDF, or, in the present, do so in regard to the present governing party, the PP. Thus, the fragmentation of the party system could be described as a constitutional decision, inasmuch as the Constitution incentivises organising along narrowly defined ethnic lines.³⁷

Reasonably speaking, the Federal Constitution has inherently provided for a fragmented ethnic party system by activating organisation of party politics around ethnicity, while at the same time reinforcing its fragmentation by adopting the plurality FPTP

³⁶ Before the NEBE asked all political parties to re-register by fulfilling all the requirements of the new electoral law, Proclamation No. 1162/2019, the total number of registered political parties was around 109, of which many were ethnically and regionally defined. More specifically, the total number of the political parties registered and certified by the new electoral law declined to 51, of which about 34 were registered as regional political parties. For that matter, if a careful examination of some of the political parties registered as nationwide political parties is done, a good number would be found to have certain ethnic or regional inclinations. This is simply to refer to the point that the post-1991 Ethiopian political landscape is dominated by ethnically defined politics.

³⁷ The automatic translation of ethnic cleavages into political cleavages seems to spring partly from the largely primordial conception of ethnicity embedded in the Federal Constitution. See Aalen (2006) and Abbink (2011 & 2006b) for detailed discussion of the understanding of ethnicity embodied in the FDRE Constitution.

system of election. Party systems in ethnically divided societies could be classified as “multi-ethnic” party systems, “ethnic” party systems, and “non-ethnic” party systems (Bogaards, 2007).³⁸ With this in mind, one can readily note that the Ethiopian party system has been intrinsically, constitutionally decided to favour and most likely act as an ethnic party system because the Federal Constitution recognises and promotes ethnic nationalism and the corresponding ethno-national politics. That is why almost all Ethiopian ethno-linguistic groups have at least one political party designated after their names, as noted earlier. There seems no dispute over the fact that the Ethiopian party system has largely dissociated itself from the non-ethnic party system because no constitutional or legal barrier exists hindering an aggregation or translation of ethno-social cleavages into political cleavages. The remaining menu of party systems possibly characterising the Ethiopian party system would thus be multi-ethnic party systems or ethnic party systems.

The next most important political institution³⁹ that comes here to further distinguish the Ethiopian party system as a multi-ethnic or ethnic party system is the electoral system in place. In this regard, it can be asserted that the FPTP system of election fails to integrate the Ethiopian party system that the Federal Constitution has already fragmented. In other words, the federal system adopted the FPTP system, which further disaggregates the constitutionally recognised and already fragmented ethno-social political cleavages, as such fashioning the Ethiopian party system into an ethnic party system.

It should, however, be stressed at this juncture that plurality systems such as the FPTP are traditionally associated with the integration of political parties and the creation of two-party systems or party dualism, rather than with fragmenting political parties and party systems (Dahl, 1998). The reason for the fragmenting

³⁸ As aptly described by Bogaards (2007), multi-ethnic party systems are associated with the aggregation of ethno-social cleavages into broader political cleavages, while ethnic party systems are linked with the translation of ethno-social cleavages into a number of political cleavages as high as the number of the ethno-social cleavages. Multi-ethnic party systems are thus identified with the creation of some multi-ethnic political parties, whereas ethnic party systems are recognised by the mushrooming of a number of ethnically defined political parties. In contrast, non-ethnic party systems, according to the same author, are party systems that neither aggregate, nor translate ethno-social cleavages into political cleavages. Hence, non-ethnic party systems are known for blocking ethno-social cleavages because they often organise politics around ideological or developmental issues.

³⁹ The Federal Constitution was the first political institution.

effect of the FPTP system in Ethiopia lies in the fact that the FPTP system has been applied in a context where ethno-linguistic groups are not only politicised but also generally geographically concentrated.⁴⁰

The impact of the FPTP electoral system goes beyond fragmenting the party system because it has also constrained the political forces or parties forming the Ethiopian party system to remain at one or other extreme in a political spectrum of ethnicity. The rise of ethnicity has been a significant departure in Ethiopia's modern history and politics, because it aligned Ethiopian political forces into ethno-nationalist and pan-Ethiopianist camps as of late 1960s (Asnake, 2009; Merera, 2003). Since then, political forces have been in a continuous state of antagonism, which in turn has markedly affected inter-ethnic relationships and the overall stability of the body politic.⁴¹ While ethno-nationalist forces generally favour the present ethno-constitutional design along with its salient features, pan-Ethiopianist forces repudiate the ethnic federal system and its striking features such as the right of secession (Semir, 2020) – these forces are consequently at different ends of the political continuum. It can be said, in other words, that forces that should have been playing key roles in advancing democracy by aggregating disparate interests have been divided from the very start of the multiparty democratic system in Ethiopia. That is to say, the Ethiopian party system could be viewed as having been born polarised right from the start of organised party politics in the country in the 1960s and 1970s.

In conflict-prone societies⁴² such as Ethiopia that are ridden with a myriad divisive agendas, the importance of political parties is all the more magnified as they are the most important political structures affecting the political stability of transitional democracies and their move towards consolidating democracy. However, political parties in transitional democracies need to be effectively

⁴⁰ Most of the ethnic political units which have been formed in terms of the “principle of ethnic self-determination” enshrined in Article 39 of the FDRE Constitution enjoy ethnic majorities, a fact which prohibits the FPTP system from carrying out its expected role of integrating parties and party systems.

⁴¹ For detail on the origins of, as well as divisions among, Ethiopian political forces since the late 1960s, see Merera (2003) and Asnake (2009).

⁴² Conflict-prone societies are societies commonly understood as ethno-culturally divided societies where ethno-cultural divisions could play, or are playing, marked roles in national politics and hence party politics (Reilly, 2008). Ethiopia is one of the most salient examples in this regard because ethno-cultural politics is openly and constitutionally allowed.

regulated if they are to play an irreplaceable role in ensuring stability in conflict-prone societies exercising multiparty democracy (Reilly, 2008). The first and foremost political institution in this regard is an electoral system (Reilly, 2004). Skilfully crafted electoral systems could help parties with divisive political agendas find political middle ground by regulating their behaviour and that of their supporters (Reilly, 2004). The current FPTP system lacks the potential to regulate the behaviour of Ethiopian political forces and generate a “political middle ground”. This is because it neither incentivises nor constrains forces and their supporters to moderate their stance on ethnically or politically divisive issues such as the present federal design and the issue of secession.

That is why the most competitive election held in federal Ethiopia, the third general election, resulted in loss of life and destruction of property – it somehow elevated pan-Ethiopianist or unity forces and brought them onto the scene, along with their narratives and political agendas that directly opposed the narratives and agendas of the EPRDF. The post-election crisis could be partly explained by the EPRDF’s fear of working with a new political force advancing a political agenda diametrically opposed to its own.⁴³ That is, the EPRDF had been the champion of the current ethnic federal system, while its contestant, the CUD, could be said to be an anti-system force, as it disavowed the ethnic federal system in its present form, along with its controversial clauses such as the one on secession.⁴⁴ This is simply one instance of the polarisation of party politics observed in the third general election after the opening up of the political space by the EPRDF for modest competition among Ethiopian political forces.

Another clear example of polarising politics has been the opening up of space after the ascent of Dr Abiy Ahmed to premiership. With the opening up of the political space, several parties with “extremist” agendas, such as the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and the National Movement of Amhara (NaMA), appeared on the scene. The ODP, for instance, boldly vowed to work for confirming ownership of Addis Ababa by the Oromo ethnic group at some point in time during the first days of the reform that was orchestrated by a group of EPRDF re-

⁴³ For an in-depth explanation of the Ethiopian democratisation problem, see Abbink (2006a).

⁴⁴ For detail on the programmes and policy positions of the CUD on the present federal design and other relevant issues, see the CUD’s Manifesto prepared for the 2005 general election.

formers known as ‘Team Lemma’ (ICG, 2019).⁴⁵ The ODP angered the Amharas and others (ICG, 2019). Such posturing in respect of the federal capital, Addis Ababa, created a fissure between the ODP and Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) and other member parties of the former EPRDF such as the Southern Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Movement (SEPDM) on the question of Addis Ababa. While the ADP and SEPDM promoted the idea that Addis Ababa belongs to all Ethiopians, the ODP posited the ownership of Addis by one ethnic group, the Oromo.⁴⁶ This dispute between the three “sister” parties passed, leaving tremendous uncertainties and suspicions on Abiy’s “reformist” government.⁴⁷ A historically rooted claim of ownership of Addis Ababa was echoed primarily by Oromo nationalists during the reform. There has also been an equally valid question of belongingness to the city by rejecting any claim of exclusive ownership by a single ethno-linguistic group (Eyob, 2020). In this respect, NaMA was one of the ethno-nationalist forces that took a bold response to the radical Oromo nationalists in the ODP by producing its own historical narrative on who “rightfully” owns Addis Ababa. This seemed to complicate the issue of the ownership politics of Addis Ababa.

The NaMA, claiming to work for the dignity and interests of the Amhara people, generally seemed to further polarise the country’s political landscape. It claimed that the interests and rights of the Amhara people⁴⁸ had been deliberately hindered by the TPLF/EPRDF regime. It initially accused the TPLF of being a “terrorist” group despite the fact that the federal government, later, officially labelled the TPLF “terrorist”. The point here is that the NaMA’s accusation that the TPLF is a terrorist group created anger among members and supporters of the TPLF.⁴⁹ Likewise, as an organic party claiming to work for the Tigray people, the TPLF has deep roots in Tigray, such that the attempt of the NaMA to accuse the TPLF as terrorist group would unequivocally create certain annoyance by the Tigrayans, which consequently could contribute towards developing animosities and mistrusts between

⁴⁵ See also Borkena news on 7 March 2019. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3wkvqrL>.

⁴⁶ See Borkena news on 26 March 2019. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3L28kdo>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ NaMA is an Amhara-centred ethno-nationalist party that was formed in June 2018 with the primary objective of defending the socio-economic and political interests and rights of the Amhara people, which it claimed had been seriously and deliberately undermined by the former TPLF/EPRDF coalition.

⁴⁹ Interviews with Tigrayan elites, 26 February 2019.

the two neighbouring and historically interrelated peoples (the Amharas and Tigrayans).⁵⁰

At this juncture, it is worth noting that many of the political divides in federal Ethiopia have been creating corresponding ethnic divides between Ethiopian ethno-linguistic groups because Ethiopian politics has, essentially, been organised around ethnicity since 1991. The problem, however, is not the mere fact that politics is chiefly organised around ethnicity. Rather, as discussed in various scholarly works,⁵¹ the divides between the political forces potentially involve the ethnic groups they claim to represent, ultimately leading to clashes and mistrust between the groups, in turn harming the stability and political unity of the federation. One therefore needs to question why ethnic politicians “recklessly” conduct politics in a manner that tries to satisfy the “interests” of certain sections of the Ethiopian community at the expense of others. This question could be partly answered by the inherent weakness of the present FPTP system of election, which neither incentivises nor constrains politicians to take moderate views on ethnically divisive issues such as the previously noted issue of ownership of Addis Ababa. In such contexts, electoral systems that compel politicians to demand support from ethnic groups other than their own might be used to aggregate disparate interests and hence calm down historically polarising interests. Distribution requirements are one among many other electoral systems with such potential.⁵² Electoral systems can influence the way parties campaign and the way political elites behave, thereby helping to determine the broader political climate; they may encourage, or retard, the forging of alliances between parties; and they can provide incentives for parties and groups to be broad-based and accommodating, or to base themselves on narrow appeals to ethnicity or kinship ties (Reynolds & Reilly, 2002).

From the discussion above, it can be seen that radical ethnic agendas will continue to surface in the Ethiopian political land-

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ For detail discussion, backed by empirical findings, of “ethnic clashes” and mistrust between Ethiopian ethnic groups in the post-1991 period, see Aalen (2006); Abbink (2011 & 2006b); Asnake (2009); Bekalu (2017); Semir (2019); and Vaughan (2003).

⁵² For information on what “distribution requirements” are as one type of vote-pooling electoral system, as well as practical cases of application of this electoral system in countries such as Nigeria, see Bogaards (2007).

scape, destabilising the unity of ethnic groups and hindering the stability and unity of the federation insofar as no mechanisms are built in to shape the behaviour of the political actors. The key point is that the fragmentation and polarisation of the party system would persist, advantaging the incumbency to remain in power, on the one hand, and increasing the fragmentation of opposition political forces, on the other. The problem would be intensified, and even leave the country devoid of a government with parliamentary majority, if the incumbent government were to lose power in an election or by other means, given that the forces active on the political stage have such polarising and contradictory agendas. In such a context, forming a stable government will be very problematic if none of the political parties in Ethiopia is able to secure a majority of seats in the HoPR in the upcoming elections.⁵³

The rationale for discussing the highly polarising and ethnically charged politics of federal Ethiopia and its undesirable repercussions stems from the need to single out and demonstrate the weakness of the FPTP electoral system in generally regulating the ethnic and political divides characterising the Ethiopian federation. Yet it does not mean that the FPTP system has no advantages at all. For that matter, each electoral system has its merits and demerits (Wall & Salih, 2007). The clearest advantage of the FPTP system in Ethiopia is its capability of fostering the political representation of spatially concentrated ethnic groups, despite the counterargument that could be made as regards the authentic representation of those geographically concentrated ethnic groups⁵⁴ from the viewpoint of the repressive nature of the EPRDF. Factually speaking, however, this kind of counterargument is not at all associated with the very character of the FPTP system. The FPTP system, as discussed earlier, can effectively replace the list PR electoral system in fostering the conversion of ethnic cleavages into political cleavages as long as the ethnic

⁵³ Article 56 of the Federal Constitution provides that “[a] political party, or a coalition of political parties that has the greatest number of seats in the House of Peoples’ Representatives shall form the Executive and lead it”. It should be known that none of the ethnic groups comprises a majority in federal Ethiopia. In this regard, Fiseha (2007) points out that the instability of regimes in Ethiopia may be explained partly by the absence of a Staatsvolk majority group, which means a demographically and electorally dominant ethno-linguistic group. See O’Leary (2001b) for an explanation of the concept of Staatsvolk.

⁵⁴ For detail on challenges constraining ethnic representation in the Ethiopian federation, see Beza (2018).

groups are generally territorially concentrated. This “ethnic representation” advantage is perhaps the only advantage of FPTP in federal Ethiopia other than assuring geographical proximity between elected representatives and constituents in a single-member district (SMD) electoral system. Advocates of SMD systems defend them for creating clarity of responsibility and democratic accountability by giving citizens in each district the ability to hold their representative accountable (Ishiyama, 2012). Otherwise, the FPTP system cannot offer the Ethiopian federation its key theoretically supported benefits of stability and governability. The relative stability and governability of the Ethiopian body politic in the ruling time of the former EPRDF could thus be plausibly attributed to the extra-constitutional or ideological principles according to which the EPRDF had been operating.⁵⁵

Generally, as can be understood from the preceding appraisals, though the FPTP system appears to serve the goal of ethnic representation or inclusion in crude terms, the other very important goal that electoral systems need to serve, in particular in divided societies such as Ethiopia, namely moderation, has not been satisfied.⁵⁶ As a result, the political scene has been replete with highly polarising ethnic agendas, which in turn generates conflict, mistrust and suspicion between ethnic groups, thereby undermining the stability and unity of the federation. This, in other words, shows that unless ethnic politics⁵⁷ is regulated by shaping the behaviour of ethnic political actors; creating incentives compelling them to seek cross-ethnic support during elections; and hence urging them to compromise and adopt moderate agendas on ethnically divisive issues, the common state is at risk of disintegration.

⁵⁵ For elaborate discussion of the factors (extra-constitutional ideological principles) that helped the EPRDF to rule Ethiopia for almost three decades in relative peace and stability, see Semahegn (2014).

⁵⁶ For analysis of a variety of electoral systems and their consequences, see Reynolds and Reilly (2002). See also Gebremeskel (2017) and Van der Beken (2018) who, in some depth, discuss the weakness of Ethiopia’s FPTP system and its failure to create a moderate political environment among ethnically organised, polarised parties.

⁵⁷ Politics organised around “permanent” identities such as ethnicity is frequently filled with a highly polarised, sectarian appeal that creates resentment among “ethnic others” who are organised in different ethnic camps, or even among those who prefer not to organise on ethnic lines at all. In addition, ethnic entrepreneurs who organise and lead ethnic parties usually vilify ethnic others, consequently creating ethnic animosity and suspicion between groups which otherwise live together in peace. Furthermore, ethnic party leaders often make inflammatory speeches, especially during elections, with a view to maximising support from the ethnic groups they claim to represent, without considering the collateral damage of their words on relationships between Ethiopians of different ethnic backgrounds otherwise living together peacefully.

3.1.3 Ethnic minorities

The issue of ethnic minorities⁵⁸ is one of the areas deserving examination from an electoral systems' design point of view. Minority office-holding is one of the criteria in choice of electoral systems (Horowitz, 2003). In the ethnic federal system of Ethiopia, wherein titular ethnic groups claim to own ethnically defined governments such as regional states and ethnic local governments, the political economy of ethnic minorities would be all the more serious. In such political contexts, it is advisable that electoral systems be designed in a way they can support the interests of minorities (Reynolds, 2006). The present FPTP system, however, seems unable to protect the interests of ethnic minorities inhabiting all corners of the federation.

The FPTP system potentially plays the role of list PR systems in ethnically divided societies such as Ethiopia by fostering the conversion of every ethnic cleavage into a political cleavage, thereby creating a socio-political environment in which ethnic majorities decide at the expense of spatially dispersed ethnic minorities⁵⁹ in almost all ethnically defined political units of federal Ethiopia.⁶⁰ It needs to be underscored that proportional electoral systems incentivise political parties to reinforce their bonds with core homogeneous groups of people,⁶¹ while majoritarian electoral systems reward political parties' bridging appeals to heterogeneous groups (Norris, 2004). Notwithstanding this, the apparently majoritarian system, the FPTP system, replacing the role of proportional systems, seems to have been failing to play its "natural" role of bridging political appeals in the context of fed-

⁵⁸ The term "minority" is one of the most confusing terms in the literature of federal studies and beyond. However, in the context of this study, the term "ethnic minority" is used to refer to geographically dispersed, individual Ethiopian citizens who live in the "wrong" regional state or ethnic local government. The expression "wrong" regional state or ethnic local government refers to citizens living outside the boundaries of their "own" ethnic regional state or ethnic local government in whose name the regional state or the local government is designated. Kymlicka, in his analysis of Ethiopia's ethnic federalism, mentions that ethnic federalism has not ensured the protection of human rights and democratic freedoms of all citizens because it involves discrimination against those who belong to the "wrong" group in sub-units of the federation. See Kymlicka (2006) for more details.

⁵⁹ For detail on the effects of ethnic federalism and the FPTP electoral system on the socio-economic and political rights of ethnic minorities, see Beza (2013).

⁶⁰ However, the condition of ethnic minorities seems worse in highly multi-ethnic regions, where these minorities reside in relatively high numbers. This includes multi-ethnic regional states such as the state of Benishangul-Gumuz, Oromia Regional State, and the SNNPRS. For more information, see Beza (2018 & 2013).

⁶¹ Ethnic groups are core homogeneous groups of people that are often considered as readymade electoral resources to be exploited by ethnic entrepreneurs in the Ethiopian federal context.

eral Ethiopia for the reason mentioned earlier. This is why the FPTP system leaves ethnic minorities unrepresented in several of the regional states of Ethiopia. The fact is that in a political context where one ethnic group numerically dominates, the votes of ethnic minorities are meaningless because the FPTP system promotes the “winner takes-all, while the loser takes-none” approach. In respect of “politics of number”, as clearly maintained by Beza (2013), ethnic minorities residing in the regional states comprise a numerical minority in most electoral constituencies, as such making it difficult for them to win legislative seats both in the HoPR and regional councils as they are outnumbered by the titular ethnic majorities under the electoral rule of the FPTP system, which rewards candidates with the highest number of votes cast.

There seems no dispute about the fact that politically deprived ethnic minorities would also be socio-economically deprived.⁶² The minorities not only lack political agents which help reflect their voices in key legislative institutions such as regional councils making political and socio-economic decisions affecting the lives of ethnic minorities, but are also largely perceived as aliens by the titular ethno-national groups that claim to own those ethnically defined units wherein they (the minorities) reside. In a context of ethnic politics, “inclusion may affect the distribution of vital material and nonmaterial goods, including the prestige of the various ethnic groups and the identity of the state as belonging more to one group than another” (Horowitz, 1994, p. 35).

At this juncture, it seems worth mentioning the argument made by Salih & Markakis (1998) that ethnicity is a potent force of political mobilisation in Africa, one determining the mode of economic production and distribution of resources. Simply put, failing to take part in ethnicised politics means failing to secure socio-economic resources vital for one’s livelihood. Amazingly,

⁶² Detaching from political power, in the African political economy, might mean detaching from socio-economic power. See Salih and Markakis (1998) for a detailed explanation of why the state in Africa has been a centre of social conflict. See also Franck & Rainer (2012) for the relationship between ethnicity in power (political ethnicity) and resourceful ethnicity. Horowitz (1993, p. 35) nicely frames this tendency of creating relationships between political ethnicity and resourceful ethnicity as a propensity for “conflation of inclusion in the government with inclusion in the community and exclusion from government with exclusion from the community”. See Beza (2013) for concrete illustration of the socio-economic marginalisation of ethnic minorities in federal Ethiopia.

the socio-economic and political marginalisation of Ethiopian citizens⁶³ runs contrary to the protection of democratic rights proclaimed in the FDRE Constitution.⁶⁴ In addition, such political and socio-economic alienation of ethnic minorities would eventually create mistrust between ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities, as it exposes the minorities to the tyranny of majorities, which consequently leads violent ethnic conflict,⁶⁵ reminding us of the counsel of Reynolds that “conflict is often bred from, or perpetuated by, exclusion” (Reynolds, 2006, p. 3). In this regard, Guinier advises that minorities ought to influence decision-making; if not, the minorities take a turn to rule even for the benefit of the majority because a political context in which minorities influence decision-making would help the majority to rule more legitimately (Guinier, 1994).

It may therefore be deduced that the impact of the FPTP system in the Ethiopian federation has not been restricted to fragmenting the political parties of the party system; it has also been, in effect, disempowering ethnic minorities in the guise of empowerment of ethnic majorities in whose names ethno-political units have been constituted as regional states or ethnic local governments. This is why Fessha asserts that the impact of the FPTP system should be evaluated in abstract as it replaces the role of list PR systems in fostering the political “representation” of Ethiopian ethnic groups that are generally geographically concentrated (Fessha, 2009).

The preceding discussion largely suggests that minority office-holding, which is one of the criteria in the choice of electoral systems (Horowitz, 2003), was ignored by the drafters of the Federal Constitution. This is probably due in part due to the fact that the Constitution presupposes territorial concentration of the so-called NNPs, thereby considering that the political representation rights of such territorially concentrated groups could be served by the FPTP system, as this system can also play the role of list PR systems in converting ethnic cleavages into political

⁶³ The category “Ethiopian citizens” includes those individuals who are analysed in this article as ethnic minorities.

⁶⁴ See chapter three, part two of the FDRE Constitution, which provides for a number of democratic rights with social, economic, and political dimensions.

⁶⁵ For discussion of the consequences of ethnic majorities on ethnic minorities, especially of what Fiseha termed “local tyranny”, see Fiseha (2007). See also Fiseha (2017) for a study of the challenges of “intra-unit minorities”.

cleavages in terms of which the ethnic cleavages can be assured of political representation. However, this sort of constitutional presupposition still contradicts the realities in Ethiopia where one finds, on the one hand, a huge number of ethnically mixed citizens whose political interests might not be satisfied merely by ethnically organised parties competing under the electoral rule of the FPTP, and, on the other, a sizeable number of citizens living outside their “homeland” units. For that matter, the FDRE Constitution acknowledges that “[e]very Ethiopian has the right to engage freely in economic activity and to pursue a livelihood of his choice anywhere within the national territory”.⁶⁶ This constitutional phrase allows that Ethiopians of different ethnic origins might live in different areas of the country. It therefore appears that the Federal Constitution drafters deliberately chose the FPTP system to preclude the political participation and representation rights of ethnic minorities despite the drafters’ knowledge that Ethiopian citizens of different ethnic origins live in different areas of the federation, as could be indirectly confirmed by the formerly cited article of the Constitution.

3.2 The way out: Alternative electoral system designs for Ethiopia

Given the undesirable consequences of FPTP and considering the need for moderation of ethnic division and political polarisation, Ethiopia needs to re-design a new electoral system that could address its socio-political realities. Before examining previous studies on alternative electoral designs, it is important to underscore some of the commonly mentioned criteria for designing electoral systems. Reynolds & Reilly (2002, pp. 9–14), for example, succinctly identify some common criteria that need to be considered when searching for an appropriate electoral system. These include representation capacity, accessibility and significance, inter-party conciliation and moderation incentives, stability and efficiency of government, accountability, and simplicity and cost. More specifically, the potential of each electoral system should be evaluated in the light of the extent to which the system promotes representation of various groups; provides incentives for inter-party conciliation; serves the stability and efficiency of government; upholds accountability; and is accessible, signifi-

⁶⁶ See Article 41(1) of the FDRE Constitution.

cant, simple, and cost effective. In the same vein, Horowitz (2003, pp. 4–8) identifies six important criteria: proportionality of seats to votes; accountability to constituents; durable governments; victory of the “Condorcet winner”; inter-ethnic or religious conciliation; and minority office-holding.

Although the criteria set out by Reynolds & Reilly and Horowitz are similar, there are potential contradictions in between the criteria themselves. For instance, an electoral system that better satisfies proportionality, such as the list PR system, could have its own trade-offs in respect of the formation of stable and effective government, as the list PR system potentially converts every social cleavage into a political cleavage, thus complicating the establishment of majoritarian government securing legislative majority. This in turn may expose the durability problem of the government system.⁶⁷

A conscious choice on the basis of country-specific conditions is a sound basis for choosing an appropriate electoral system (Wall & Salih, 2007). Although there are common experiences in different regions of the world, the effects of a certain electoral system depend to a large extent on the socio-political context in which it is used.⁶⁸ Differently speaking, the choice of an appropriate electoral system seeks to consider factors pertinent to the political community in question. The question in Ethiopia’s political community would thus be identifying the “needs and realities” of federal Ethiopia and designing an appropriate electoral system that could address its needs and realities. In this regard, the preceding appraisal of the FPTP system and the corresponding discussion of it appears to suggest that Ethiopia needs to moderate ethnic division and political polarisation and yet ensure inclusion of its ethnic and or political groups. With this framework and some other important criteria in mind, various electoral reform proposals suggested for Ethiopia by previous studies are reviewed hereunder. The electoral reform proposals hitherto suggested can be categorised into two: the list PR system and mixed electoral system.

⁶⁷ For detail, see Reynolds & Reilly (2002) and Horowitz (2003).

⁶⁸ For an extensive discussion of the consequences of a variety of electoral systems in different political contexts, see Reynolds & Reilly (2002) and Wall & Salih (2007).

3.2.1 List PR system

There are different rationales for proposing the list PR system for Ethiopia. Bayeh (2018), for instance, advises that the current FPTP system should be eliminated based on the reasoning that it, along with the constitutionally adopted parliamentary form of government,⁶⁹ has contributed to the upsurge of the dominant-party system. He thus proposes outlawing the FPTP system so that the multiparty system may flourish. Bayeh would seem to be suggesting the use instead of the list PR system, on the thinking that it is more likely than any other electoral system to favour multipartyism. However, the proposal to abrogate the FPTP system with a view to promoting multipartyism is “unqualified” for the very simple reason that, on the one hand, it is based merely on satisfaction of one of the goals of electoral system, which is fostering representation of various groups in parliament by giving political parties legislative seats proportional to the votes they received; on the other hand, his proposal does not purposefully consider the potential of anti-plurality or majoritarian systems such as the list PR to further fragment already fragmented ethnic and political divisions affecting the stability and unity of the federation. Furthermore, the difficulty of using the list PR system to create stable and effective government is not meaningfully contemplated. The list PR electoral system is often associated with multiparty systems (Dahl, 1998).

In the same vein, Beza (2013) proposes adopting the list PR electoral system, or combining it with the current FPTP system. His proposal appears to be motivated by the failure of the FPTP system to assure the political representation of ethnic or regional minorities. Beza’s central argument is that the FPTP system and the setting up of electoral constituencies (especially for the purpose of representation at the regional council level) have played a significant role in hindering different ethnic groups, especially ethnic or regional minorities, from securing adequate representation proportional to their numerical presence in the regional councils. This is mainly because, according to Beza, the FPTP system declares the winner by a simple majority of votes and in effect reduces the rights of regional minorities because these re-

⁶⁹ See Article 45 of the FDRE Constitution for the form of government adopted in Ethiopia.

gional minorities also comprise a numerical minority in most of the electoral constituencies of the country. Though the proposal seems generally convincing in terms of reforming the current electoral system in a way that assures representation for regional minorities, such a proposal, akin with Bayeh's, would satisfy merely one of the objectives of electoral systems, which is representation of various sections of political communities. That is good on its own, but Beza's proposal lacks the "necessary" qualification when examined in the light of the broader and numerous objectives that electoral systems need to serve in the context of Ethiopia.

Fessha has also argued for list PR system, though by way of a different logic: the logic of "inter-ethnic solidarity" and "social cohesion". He posits that the list PR system could foster inter-ethnic solidarity and social cohesion by encouraging parties to establish state-wide objectives (Fessha, 2009). Fessha's argument is premised on the idea that because list PR systems encourage parties to maximise votes both in areas where they are strong and where they are weak, the fact that every vote is aggregated at a larger level thus gives the parties an incentive to appeal to "other" voters who might not be part of their "core" ethnic or ideological base. To this end, list PR systems might encourage moderation of "ethnic chauvinism" and the "inclusiveness of minorities" in campaign appeals (Reynolds, 2006, p. 21).

Arguably, Fessha's proposal glosses over socio-political conditions, in that the list PR electoral system could foster inter-ethnic unity and social cohesion by incentivising ethnic political actors to endorse state-wide objectives and hence appeal to various ethno-national groups. If, for instance, one wants to evaluate the validity of Fessha's proposal in Ethiopian regional contexts, most of the regional states are dominated by one majority ethnic group in whose name ethnic political parties are established. In such political contexts, needless to say, the ethnic parties emerge as major parties that may not necessarily need to appeal to minority votes because the major ethnic parties can establish a government by controlling the majority of the legislative seats of the regional councils, leaving the minorities to the mercy of the majorities. Indeed, minority parties representing minority votes may gain few legislative seats of the regional councils, at least to present their voices if not to influence the decisions of the majority gov-

ernment. Such an opportunity where minority votes are at least represented would even be assured provided that the total votes are aggregated at regional levels, an electoral district system taking “regions” as one constituency.⁷⁰ Otherwise, because regional minorities are geographically dispersed, it would be highly unlikely for them to secure legislative seats in many of the regional councils in federal Ethiopia even if the list PR system were used. For the list PR system to meet the electoral objectives suggested by Fessha, either the electoral constituencies need to be ethnically heterogeneous, in which case no ethnic group alone dominates at best,⁷¹ or the total votes need to be aggregated at regional level at worst.⁷² This reminds us of the key note of Reynolds that the potential of the list PR system to promote inter-ethnic conciliation would be particularly strong if majority parties need minority votes to make it more than a given threshold or to have enough seats to form a government. This incentive could, however, dissipate if the majority group did not need extra votes, and if appealing for such votes would lose them members of their “core constituency” which were opposed to accommodatory overtures to minorities (Reynolds, 2006).

3.2.2 Mixed electoral system

With a view to rectifying the potential ills of a mere list PR electoral proposal, a few studies argue for the use of mixed electoral systems to address the socio-political needs and realities of Ethiopia. This advice came first from Samuel Huntington, who predicted the socio-political malaise that the newly reconstituted Ethiopia would be facing early in the 1990s.⁷³

At the time, Huntington, based on a premise that ethnic parties and ethnic appeals would dominate Ethiopian politics, cautioned that Ethiopia’s future socio-political scene should enable people

⁷⁰ This is because most of the ethnic minorities inhabiting many of the regional states in Ethiopia are spatially dispersed, which makes it difficult for them to dominate or win most of the electoral constituencies established by the NEBE.

⁷¹ Such kinds of electoral constituencies are, however, absent in most cases; hence, seeking redrawing the existing electoral constituencies whose feasibility seems unrealistic in the short run.

⁷² In this case, there need to be at least two major parties contesting elections head-to-head, a contest in which the “minority votes” could be required as “factors of difference” in deciding which of the major parties win the election. The major parties would thus be compelled to appeal broadly to garner the support of minority votes. Such kinds of scenarios also seem unrealistic in the Ethiopian context, where animosity between ethnic groups appears to have been increasing.

⁷³ For detail on the predictions, see Huntington (1993).

to express their ethnic identities and interests in politics, while at the same time encouraging inter-ethnic collaboration and multi-ethnic political appeals by parties and candidates. Huntington, more specifically, maintained that while a pure list PR system would produce a legislature reflecting Ethiopia's ethnic diversity by encouraging each ethnic group to have its own political parties, thereby complicating legislative decision-making, the use of a straight Anglo-American plurality system would, on the contrary, leave some ethnic groups as permanent minorities in their districts with no representation in Parliament. Huntington therefore recommended a "mixed electoral system"⁷⁴ that would allow ethnic parties to have a voice but also promote multi-ethnic coalitions. Specifically, he suggested the use of run-off elections and an alternative-vote system with a view to allowing ethnic expression while promoting inter-ethnic coalitions (Huntington, 1993).

These recommendations, however, lack qualification. This is primarily because both run-off and alternative-vote systems seek multi-ethnic electoral constituencies wherein no ethnic group alone dominates the electoral constituencies if electoral candidates and parties are to have an incentive to appeal across ethnic lines during elections. Nevertheless, this condition (the condition of multi-ethnic electoral constituency) is missing in many of the electoral constituencies of Ethiopia, as the present electoral constituencies are by and large dominated by one ethnic group, which, therefore, might not incentivise ethnic politicians to appeal broadly or across ethnic lines. This is the primary criticism of the goal of "multi-ethnic accommodation" supposed by Huntington to be promoted by run-off and alternative-vote systems. Furthermore, insofar as "ethnic expression" is concerned, no plausible justification was suggested by Huntington as to how the electoral systems he recommended for multi-ethnic federal Ethiopia would serve the other goal: "ethnic expression".

⁷⁴ The term "mixed electoral system" was employed by Huntington from the vantage point of using different electoral systems, such as run-off and alternative vote, which serve "ethnic expression and multi-ethnic accommodation". Run-off and alternative vote systems belong to the family of plurality or majoritarian electoral systems. The term "mixed electoral system" thus conveys a different meaning in Huntington's analysis than it does in the literature on electoral systems. Conventionally, mixed electoral systems refer to the use of some plurality and proportional electoral systems in combination.

In the same vein, Van der Beken (2018), after analysing the risks and problems of the FPTP system vis-à-vis the relative opening up of the political space since 2018, proposed the use of hybrid electoral systems combining the list PR system to foster ethnic and political inclusivity of various groups, on the one hand, and the alternative-vote system to promote moderation and inter-ethnic or political collaboration between the groups, on the other. Van der Beken's proposal is driven by the need for striking a balance between the competing needs for ethnic and political pluralism and the need for compromise among ethno-political actors. From this perspective, he advocates the use of a hybrid electoral system in which part of the federal legislative seats can be filled in with a list PR system and the remaining seats with alternative vote (Van der Beken, 2018).

The analysis and recommendation for a hybrid electoral system on the grounds of addressing "inclusivity" and "moderation" seems generally convincing, with the exception that the use of alternative vote is conditionally delimited to a context of multi-ethnic electoral constituency, which, as noted earlier, is largely missing in the context of Ethiopia's current electoral constituencies. This hinders the potential of alternative votes for ethnic and political moderation.⁷⁵ The other criticism of Van der Beken's suggested electoral design is that the "inclusivity issue"⁷⁶ can actually be advanced by the present FPTP electoral system in abstract, as aptly argued by Fessha (2009), for the very reason that Ethiopian ethnic groups are generally spatially concentrated, such that the ethnic groups could be readily politicised and mobilised in the current system of ethnic federalism to be represented by political parties that are established after the names of the ethnic groups. Simply put, the conversion of ethnic cleavages into political cleavages that could be done under the list PR system could also be similarly advanced by the FPTP system insofar as the inclusion of geographically concentrated ethnic groups is concerned. This, therefore, might undermine Van der Beken's proposal of replacing the FPTP system with the list PR system.

⁷⁵ In addition to the lack of a multi-ethnic electoral constituency in federal Ethiopia, the alternative vote seems less acceptable when considering the issue of literacy that the system requires. One of the criteria against which electoral systems are evaluated is simplicity. It is known that the alternative vote is among the most relatively sophisticated electoral systems to be applied in a context such as Ethiopia's, where a large number of its citizens, in particular the peasantry, are not literate enough to understand and use such a complicated electoral system.

⁷⁶ Van der Beken suggests the use of a list PR electoral system to deal with the "inclusivity issue" of ethno-political groups or actors.

Notably, Gebremeskel's study on the electoral system of Ethiopia is the more comprehensive. This is because Gebremeskel primarily evaluates the effects of the present FPTP system on political pluralism or multipartyism, interethnic or political conciliation, and legitimacy of the government. He then finds that the present FPTP system has not fostered political pluralism, multipartyism, inter-ethnic or political conciliation, or the legitimacy of the government (Gebremeskel, 2017). This thus compels Gebremeskel to deduce that the FPTP system is an inappropriate electoral system for the socio-political needs and realities of Ethiopia. On the basis of this conclusive remark, he identifies some seven criteria⁷⁷ that could sum up what Ethiopia normatively wants to achieve and avoid, and then examines alternative electoral systems⁷⁸ against the identified criteria. More specifically, the list PR systems are positively evaluated to foster effective opposition oversight by allowing all major political parties to be fairly represented in legislative parliament, while they are critically appraised for complicating legislative decision-making by opening up the door for coalition politics and also for providing tiny geographic connections between constituents and elected representatives (Gebremeskel, 2017).

List PR systems alone, as stressed by Huntington and Van der Beken, would create a legislative parliament largely reflective of the ethno-linguistic composition of political societies insofar as descriptive representation is concerned.⁷⁹ At the same time, list PR systems complicate legislative decision-making by bringing various ethnically and regionally defined political parties on board that could not forge a legislative majority to decide on common issues of concern (Huntington, 1993; Van der Beken, 2018). Leg-

⁷⁷ Simplicity to understand and administer, accountability to constituents, proportionality of seats to votes, interethnic or intercultural conciliation, effectiveness of parliament or opposition oversight, stability and efficiency of government, and minimising wastage of votes were the seven normative criteria against which alternative electoral systems were evaluated. These criteria are adapted from the work of Horowitz (2003). Indeed, they are common criteria identified by many scholars working on the design of electoral systems, including Reynolds & Reilly (2002).

⁷⁸ The plurality of electoral systems such as the FPTP system were totally ruled out, and hence not considered, in Gebremeskel's examination and search for the "best" electoral system for multi-ethnic federal Ethiopia because the FPTP system has proved to be an unhealthy choice for divided polities. Indeed, the literature on electoral systems commonly warns against the use of the FPTP system in divided polities. For this reason, the criteria-based evaluation included only the PR system and the mixed electoral system, along with their respective variants.

⁷⁹ Descriptive representation, as briefly noted by Reynolds and Reilly (2002), pertains to a state of reflecting or representing all socio-economic divisions of a society within a parliament, including men and women, the young and old, the wealthy and poor, different religious affiliations, and linguistic communities and ethnic groups within the society.

islative majority and the corresponding stability of governance are some of the positive features of plurality electoral systems such as the FPTP system, which are generally missing in the list PR systems.

This is why Gebremeskel emphasises mixed electoral systems that combine the “best of the two worlds” with a view to utilising the positive attributes of the two major categories of electoral systems while at the same time subduing their negative characteristics. The mixed electoral systems, specifically the mixed member parallel (the MMP) system,⁸⁰ have been evaluated to retain the proportional merits of the PR electoral system, as it promotes fair representation of political and ethnic groups while at the same time encouraging representation of widely dispersed ethnic groups so that their votes are not disregarded, as happens in the FPTP system, thereby fostering issue-based campaigning and voting rather than merely lining up ethnically or regionally organised parties as examined by Gebremeskel. The MMP system, according to Gebremeskel, would also ensure geographical representation of voters, thereby promoting accountability of elected representatives by creating the luxury of two votes, one for the party and one for the constituent’s local MP. The MMP system has generally been considered to reduce the number of wasted votes, encourage inter-ethnic or intercultural conciliation, and increase the representation of the opposition, thereby promoting strong parliamentary oversight over the actions of the executive. Gebremeskel thus concludes that the MMP system, with its two tiers, performs well in all the criteria,⁸¹ hence making this system for divided polities such as Ethiopia the “best” electoral system in terms of ensuring a fair representation of political and ethnic groups, advancing political stability by mitigating feelings of exclusion, and promoting conciliation for multi-ethnic nation-building without overstating the virtues of the existing electoral system, the FPTP system (Gebremeskel, 2017).

The electoral system proposal of Gebremeskel appears good from the perspective of finding an electoral system fostering eth-

⁸⁰ The MMP system is a variant of the mixed electoral system in which two tiers of electoral system, namely the list PR tier and the FPTP tier, are linked. It provides compensatory list seats from the PR component or tier to parties that are underrepresented in the constituency-based FPTP component or tier. See Gebremeskel (2017, p. 24) for an example.

⁸¹ See Table 3 of Gebremeskel’s study (2017, p. 27) entitled “Comparative assessment of electoral systems vis-à-vis some electoral goals”.

nic and political inclusivity and yet moderating ethnic divisions and political polarisation in an ethnically divided context. This occurs, according to Gebremeskel (2017), not merely by combining the two electoral system tiers, namely the list PR tier and the FPTP tier, but also by creating causal relationships between these two system tiers. More specifically, the MMP system counselled by Gebremeskel has the potential of supporting an inclusion of geographically dispersed minorities due to the compensatory list seats from the PR component or tier to parties that are under-represented in the constituency-based FPTP component or tier, indeed, on top of serving the two competing goals: inclusion of ethno-political groups and moderation between the ethno-political groups.

4. Concluding remarks

The overall analyses and discussions above on the design of the present electoral system of Ethiopia demonstrates that the FPTP system is an ill-devised electoral system with a host of limitations, as shown in the past six national elections undertaken in Ethiopia. It is worth mentioning, as rightly maintained by Bogaards (2003), that even the two leading scholars of multi-ethnic democracy,⁸² in spite of all their differences, firmly agree in their counsel against plurality elections in a polarised society, by quoting Arthur Lewis's dictum that the surest way to kill the idea of democracy in a plural society is to adopt the Anglo-American electoral system of first-past-the-post.

The FPTP system of Ethiopia would be increasingly risky in the time to come as it provides no incentives for political actors to work together and forge national consensus on divisive ethnic and political agendas. Over time, the ethnic and political polarisation, coupled with a progressive opening up of the political space, could lead to a political environment in which a large number of ethnically and regionally organised political parties join the parliament, the HoPR, to the extent reflecting the ethnic composition of federal Ethiopia. This might, however, occur at the expense of multi-ethnic political groups that could bridge polarised and fragmented ethnic appeals. Bluntly speaking, the consequence of continuing with the FPTP electoral system would be nasty, as this

⁸² The two leading scholars on democracy, consociationalism and centripetalism in ethnically divided societies are Arend Lijphart and Donald Horowitz.

system could create a political stalemate in a legislative parliament replete with highly polarised ethnic and political agendas, thereby fostering socio-political instability and paving the way to the eventual crumbling of the common state. This reminds us of the warning of Donald Horowitz that, in divided societies, elections amount to a census: “under conditions of free elections, groups in polarised societies will line up behind ethnically based political parties representing their respective groups” (Horowitz, 1991, p. 96).

In a nutshell, the FPTP system seems to have contributed to sharpening ethnic division, cultivating exclusionary ethnic nationalism, hindering inter-ethnic solidarity, undermining a sense of allegiance to the common state, and generally weakening the process of building one political community. The Ethiopian federation, therefore, seeks to design a new electoral system capable of effectively capturing its “current needs and realities”. Choosing a new electoral system first involves determining what one wants it to do (Horowitz, 2003).

Collectively, the foregoing analyses and discussions have indicated that multi-ethnic federal Ethiopia seeks to foster inclusion of ethno-political groups, while at the same time encouraging inter-ethnic or political moderation between ethno-political groups. A stable and sustainable federal political community might be constructed wherein ethnic identities could be kept as well as promoted, yet without undermining a common Ethiopian identity, an identity which could be capitalised on through inter-ethnic solidarity. This is to say that the choice of an electoral system for federal Ethiopia ought to dwell on satisfying the two most common criteria, namely inclusion or representation and moderation. In addition, stability or governability should also be considered as the other criterion against which the choice of a new electoral system should be evaluated. Furthermore, the extent to which the electoral system fosters minority inclusion similarly needs to be contemplated, because spatially dispersed minorities seem to be left to the tyranny of the majorities in the federal system.⁸³

⁸³ For detailed discussion of the problem of “intra-unit minorities” in the Ethiopian federal system, see Fiseha (2017 & 2007) and Beza (2018 & 2013).

As a final point, it appears needless to point out the importance of considering simplicity criteria in a country where a significant number of citizens are illiterate. Should these suggested criteria be largely accepted, as they potentially capture “Ethiopian needs and realities”, by political actors, the task of designing the new electoral system would be well-disposed. In obvious terms, a newly proposed electoral system would blend certain elements from the “best of the two worlds” electoral system designs. Refining and crafting the final electoral system design should be a matter of technical expertise to be carried out by veteran experts in the field insofar as the political actors largely agree upon the criteria against which possible electoral system designs are evaluated. Consequently, the specific electoral system design satisfying all the criteria would be eventually determined.

In relation to this, as stressed by some scholarly works such as Beza (2013), once the overall broader electoral system framework in respect of the electoral system design is decided at federal level, some room may be left for regional states to design very specific electoral systems that capture the regional states’ particular needs and realities, if any.

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