

## Can Change in Power Relationship Solve Ethiopian Problem?

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Before trying to answer this question I will extensively quote from my book what I wrote about one of the variables measuring success of a federation based on criteria of language or ethnic groups. “The fundamental purpose of ethnic federation is to achieve unity and understanding among the constituent groups. Ethnic federation is used specifically in the context and strategy of resolving an ethnic conflict on a permanent basis. In addition to the common “federal functions” (defence, foreign policy, currency, and external and interstate trade), the problems of solving ethnic conflicts require additional structural elements and functions peculiar to the system of ethnic federation. One of the problems is related to the asymmetric power relationship among the ethnic groups”...

“In an ethnic federation, there is a problem of treating unequal ethnic groups equally. In principle, ethnic groups are the independent subjects of the federation and they enjoy equal status. As Table 1.1 shows taking the case of Ethiopia, in reality the ethnic groups are different in terms of their territorial size, population and economic potential. Who is to occupy offices in the legislative and executive branch of the federal government? Is the federal government offices dominated by ethnic groups that are big in size of territory and population? Is the allocation of federal government offices based on the principle of proportional representation?

Table 1.1. Population, Area, Number of Zones and Districts of Regional States

Regional States	Population (1996/97)	Area in thousands Km <sup>2</sup>	Regional Capital	Number of Zones	Number of Weredas districts	Number of Special Weredas-Districts
Tigray	3,358,358	60.2	Mekele	4	35	
Afar	1,131,437	77.0	Aysaita	5	28	
Amhara	14,769,360	188.8	Bahirdar	10	102	1
Oromiya	20,012,952	360.0	Nazret	12	176	
Somale	1,978,600	215.9	Jijiga	9	47	
Benishangul	492,689	46.8	Assosa	2	13	
South National,	11,064,818	112.0	Awasa	9	71	5

Nationalities & Peoples						
Gambella	194,755	26.1	Gambella	2	8	
Harrari	143,587	0.3	Harrar	3	19	
Addis Ababa	2,341,964	0.4	Addis Ababa	6	28	
Diredewa	277,245	1.6	Diredewa	4	23	
Total	55,765,765	1089.1		66	550	6

Source: Website of The Parliament of Ethiopia.

<http://www.ethiopar.net/English/basinfo/reginfo.htm>

The federal government is comprised of three branches; the legislative, the executive and the judicial branch. Each branch has a distinct responsibility that is separate and apart from the others. The legislative branch of the government is responsible for making law. Its members are directly elected by the people periodically and may represent a broader range of interests/characteristics/places. The executive branch of the government is responsible for organizing the laws enacted by the legislative branch of the government and implementing and enforcing those laws. The executive branch is divided into different ministries and it performs its governmental duties partly as an independent force and partly in conjunction with other governmental bodies both at the national and sub-national levels - the former including parliament and the head of state; the latter, regional governments. The overwhelming majority of laws, the parliamentary agenda, and decisions by the head of state are all prepared or proposed by the executive body of the federal government. At the same time, it is also responsible for the implementation of these decisions. The government carries out its directional activities independently and within constitutional limits and can take actions on any matter that falls within the sphere of public administration. It is entitled to directly supervise any branch of public administration and also to set up separate bodies, which handle special assignments. The government can establish offices, committees, consultative and advisory bodies, appoint government commissioners, and transfer parts of authority to these and other arms of the government.

The judicial branch of the government is an independent organ that has the responsibility of resolving disputes that citizens of the community have with one another. They are, of course, charged with the responsibility of resolving those disputes in a fair, just, impartial and expeditious fashion. In many instances they must resolve disputes in accordance with rules

and regulations enacted by the legislative branch or enforced by the executive branch of the government.

The question is now how is power to be shared by the ethnic groups in the three branches of government. Should power and offices be distributed proportionally according to the size and economic potential of the ethnic groups? Asymmetrical distribution of power, i.e., treating different ethnic groups differently, may raise a fundamental political problem. The option of giving more federal government offices to big ethnic groups requires the consent of minority ethnic groups to receive less office in the federal government. If it is difficult to get their consent, is it fair to treat all ethnic groups similarly, in the face of the reality that there are very wide and relevant differences among them? The federal government has to find solutions to such kinds of problems.” (End of quotation, Tsegaye Tegenu, 2006, pp. 19-21).

Coming back to the question, let us assume that solution has been found in creating symmetric power relationship among the ethnic groups and let us assume that this solution has been found either through a popular revolt or armed struggle as some prescribed. Can proportional distribution of power and office based on the size of ethnic groups solve the economic problems of the Ethiopian people?

The answer depends on your point of reference. If your point of reference is asymmetric power relationship among ethnic groups, then the Ethiopian problem is solved. If you observing point is business the solution can be different. Everything is different depending on where you are looking at from. I want the observing point to be the size and speed of population growth in Ethiopia. It is not enough to ask what is that we are changing. We must ask how fast a change in power relationship solves the economic problems of the people.

Einstein said that when you are on a train and you are travelling faster, time is actually moving slower. If you are on board on a rapid growing population train, the reform time moves slower and growth actually looks not enough. According to UNFPA (2011), by 2050 Ethiopia’s population is projected to reach 174 million to become the 9<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world. This means Ethiopian economy will labor under the burden of rapid population growth for decades to come. For me size and speed matters above all else, and as I have tried to argue, the solution is green revolution and rural industrialization. If you are on a population growth time, changes in the asymmetric power relationship among ethnic groups do not solve the economic problems of the Ethiopian people. You have to have the right development policy and this requires change in cognition and not in composition of ethnic identity.

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