



The 2026 Ethiopian Elections and Good Governance: Pre-election Strategic Inter-Party Policy Dialogue

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Introduction

Good Governance Africa – Horn of Africa Regional Office (GGA-HARO) initiated a three-part pre-election public dialogue series based on the conviction that evidence-based policy dialogue among political parties and key stakeholders significantly contributes to efforts to improve governance, civic participation, and broader socioeconomic development. As Ethiopia approaches its seventh national elections scheduled for June 1, 2026, GGA-HARO believes the political and social landscape demands substantive and evidence-based policy deliberation. In collaboration with the Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council (EPPJC), this series was designed to facilitate an informed and inclusive dialogue among competing political parties. Participating political parties were selected for each session based on the number of candidates they enrolled for the upcoming elections and their specific relevance to the issues under discussion. Notably, while two different opposition parties participated in each of the dialogue sessions, the ruling Prosperity Party was represented in all three.

The series sought to achieve three primary objectives: (1) offering an impartial platform for political parties to share their manifestos and policy programmes on civil service, youth, and local governance; (2) providing citizens with evidence-based information to enhance public awareness of core governance issues and party positions; and (3) encouraging constructive engagement among political parties, academics and civil society organizations on key governance issues. GGA-HARO identified the civil service, youth empowerment, and local governance as among the critical pillars, alongside other factors, underpinning Ethiopia's long-term stability and democratisation processes. By grounding these discussions in empirical evidence provided by senior academics from Addis Ababa University, GGA-HARO aimed to transform the conventional political party debate into an interactive policy dialogue that effectively bridges the gap between research and political practice.

DIALOGUE 1:

Strengthening the Civil Service for Good Governance (April 16, 2026)

The inaugural session focused on the status of the Ethiopian civil service, in terms of institutional competence, neutrality, and accountability. The discussion was preceded by an issue paper presented by Dr Berhanu Temesgen from Addis Ababa University. In his presentation, Dr Berhanu traced the historical evolution of the Ethiopian civil service, noting that while it is one of the oldest structures in Africa, it remains far from being modernised. He argued that the sector is currently hampered by three major bottlenecks – systemic corruption, political partiality, and a lack of professional standards – and underscored that a well-structured and meritocratic civil service is an indispensable engine for the country's socio-economic transformation.

Party Positions and Panellists' Arguments

The panel featured three representatives from major competing parties:

- **Dr Mekuria Haile (Prosperity Party – PP):** Serving as the Federal Civil Service Commission Commissioner, Dr Mekuria argued that the post-2018 reforms introduced under the PP are building a “model civil service in Africa”. He highlighted the digitalization of service delivery, specifically the *Mesob One-Stop Service Center*, as a key achievement in reducing corruption and bureaucratic red tape while enhancing efficiency. He clarified that the PP intends to build competent human capital rather than reduce the workforce, noting that Ethiopia's civil service is smaller than those of comparable developing nations.
- **Dr Rahel Bafe (Ethiopian Social Democratic Party – ESDP):** Dr Rahel strongly questioned the ruling party's claims, contending that the current civil service is far from being neutral and frequently discriminates based on political leanings. She highlighted that low salary



ABOVE: Panellists of the second session of the dialogue with GGA-HARO Board and staff members. From left to right: Daniel Marhatsidk (CEU), Darot Guma'a (PEC), Dr Asnake Kefale (GGA-HARO), Dr Firehiwot Sintayehu (GGA-HARO), Dr Mohammed Edris (PP), Dr Mohammed Dejen (AAU) and Prof Bahru Zewde (GGA-HARO).

scales and frequent restructuring have eroded staff commitment, fuelling administrative malpractices. She specifically challenged the transparency of qualification exams, viewing them as a “guised” strategy for staff reduction without stakeholder consensus.

- **Kemal Seid (Freedom and Equality Party – FEP):** Kemal pointed to a “huge discrepancy” between official government success stories and the reality of politicisation of the civil service on the ground. He argued that unchecked political interventions and a lack of clear standards compromise the civil service’s mission. He further alleged that meritocracy is routinely bypassed for nepotism and political affiliation, leading to a serious erosion of public trust in the institution.

In conclusion, the first public dialogue on strengthening the civil service established a shared consensus that a professional, competent, and politically neutral civil service is an indispensable engine for Ethiopia’s socio-economic transformation. All participating parties underscored the value of digitalisation and the necessity for the service to transcend any particular political regime to ensure civil institutional stability. Despite this general consensus on foundational principles, the discussion also revealed diverging perspectives regarding the implementation of current civil service reforms.

The Prosperity Party defended its ongoing initiatives as evidence-based and quality-focused, while opposition representatives from the ESDP and FEP contended that the sector remains politicised and instrumentalised to serve the interests of the ruling party. A major point of friction was the administration of qualification exams, which the incumbent administered as part of the claimed civil service reform aimed at ensuring meritocracy and improving service delivery. However, the opposition parties questioned these exams, viewing them as a non-transparent strategy for political purging or staff reduction.

**DIALOGUE 2:
Youth Political Representation for Good Governance (April 30, 2026)**

The second dialogue focused on the challenges and opportunities of youth empowerment for democratization and good governance. While youth (aged 15-29) make up about 30 percent of Ethiopia’s population, their meaningful inclusion in policy making and implementation remains limited. Framing the discussion, Dr Mohammed Dejen from Addis Ababa University presented a paper highlighting that despite their demographic weight, youth remain marginalised and underrepresented in policy formulation due to a lack



ABOVE: Participants of the dialogue on Youth Political Representation in Ethiopia.

of relevant legal frameworks and tailored institutional arrangements. He pointed out a significant institutional challenge: unlike countries such as Kenya and Rwanda that utilise quota systems to ensure youth representation in parliament, Ethiopia lacks a similar legal framework to enhance youth participation. Furthermore, Dr Mohammed argued that the 2004 Youth Policy of Ethiopia is outdated and fails to accommodate the evolving aspirations of the current generation, leading to recurring discontent and potential instability. He warned that reducing youth empowerment to economic needs like job creation amounts to using it as a means of political co-optation and instrumentalisation. The findings underscored the need to treat youth as genuine “engines of development” endowed with substantive agency in the country’s socio-economic and political transformation.

Party Positions and Panellists’ Arguments

- **Dr Mohammed Edris (Prosperity Party – PP):** Dr Mohammed argued that the PP is “largely of the youth” and grew out of youth struggles. He claimed that the party has been redefining youth from “threats” to “engines of development” and noted that more than half of its leadership is composed of young people. The party’s future plan focuses on large scale employment, promoting youth-led

organisations, and restructuring youth associations to ensure their independence.

- **Daniel Marhatsidk (Coalition for Ethiopian Unity – CEU):** Daniel vehemently challenged the incumbent, stating that Ethiopian youth are living in an “atmosphere of fear and hopelessness” due to repressive security tactics. He argued that the PP government’s focus on job creation is largely a form of political co-optation to silence demands for genuine agency. He cited the marginalisation of youth in Addis Ababa, unemployment and “tokenism” as primary drivers of mass emigration.
- **Darot Guma’a (Peace for Ethiopia Coalition – PEC):** Darot emphasised a policy deficit and the lack of enabling institutional arrangements for genuine youth engagement. He reiterated that existing youth associations are politicised and instrumentalised by the ruling party. He warned that the current system has rendered the youth dependent and powerless, creating a dangerous vacuum where they could be mobilised for instability.

The dialogue concluded that the meaningful inclusion of young people is indispensable to promote democratisation process and peace in Ethiopia. Participants underscored that policy responses to youth demands must transcend



ABOVE: Panellists of the third session of the dialogue. From left to right: Endalkachew Arega (Hidassie Party), Abraham Tadesse (PP), Dr Muluaem Tegegnwork (EZEMA) and Dr Zerihun Mohammed (GGA-HARO).

mere job creation to include genuine political agency in policy formulation and implementation. However, a significant distinction remained among the parties regarding their position on the nature of current practices in youth engagement. The Prosperity Party highlighted its commitment to promoting youth political representation through internal leadership quotas and by redefining of youth as “engines of development.” However, opposition representatives characterised these efforts as symbolic “tokenism” and political “instrumentalisation” intended to silence youth demands.

DIALOGUE 3: Revitalising Local Governance in Ethiopia (May 14, 2026)

The final dialogue session addressed the “neglected tier” of Ethiopia’s governance – local governance – which has faced a significant “democratic deficit” as local elections have not been conducted since 2013.

In his framing presentation, Dr Zemelak Ayitenew, from Addis Ababa University, described local governments as “frontline players” indispensable for advancing democratic governance, effective service delivery, and popular participation. However, he noted that in

non-democratic societies, these structures are often instrumentalised by elites to advance political interests rather than local development, particularly in contexts where ethnicity is institutionalised. He further highlighted that while Ethiopia’s constitution formally recognises local government, these tiers remain neglected in political processes, budget allocation, and resource administration. Most strikingly, he pointed out that local elections have not been conducted since 2013, creating a 13-year democratic gap that exemplifies this neglect. Ultimately, Dr Zemelak underscored the urgent necessity of balancing local autonomy with central oversight to enhance institutional capacity and prevent the reproduction of corruptive practices or elite capture.

Party Positions and Panellists’ Arguments

- **Abraham Tadesse (Prosperity Party – PP):** Abraham acknowledged the decade-long delay in local elections but attributed it to resource shortages and the Electoral Board’s capacity rather than a lack of political will. He reaffirmed that local empowerment is a priority area in the party’s manifesto and promised that the party would adhere to an electoral schedule by the Electoral Board.
- **Dr Muluaem Tegegnwork (Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice – EZEMA):** Dr Muluaem argued that the neglect of local government is a by-product of a political



ABOVE: Participants of the dialogue on Revitalising Local Governance in Ethiopia.

culture that institutionalises ethnicity and quota-based leadership. He contended that under the current regime, local structures serve the purpose of political control rather than service delivery. He proposed a constitutional reform to abolish the ethnic quota system in favour of a meritocratic, citizenship-based model.

- **Endalkachew Arega (Hidassie Party):** Endalkachew commented that complex bureaucracy and corruption at the local level have eroded public trust in government. The lack of public participation and transparency at this level reinforces corrupt practices. He highlighted the importance of fiscal autonomy to ensure local governments can function independently of central political whims.

In summary, the dialogue on revitalising local governance established a shared recognition that local governments are the “frontline players” in advancing good governance and that the current “democratic deficit” created by the lack of elections since 2013

must be addressed immediately to ensure institutions can effectively respond to citizens priorities.

While all parties converged on the necessity of regularizing the electoral schedule and granting fiscal autonomy to local tiers, their strategic approaches to structural reform presented distinct perspectives. Specifically, representatives from EZEMA and the Hidassie Party advocated for structural constitutional changes to abolish the institutionalised ethnic quota system in favour of a meritocratic, citizenship-based model. In contrast, the Prosperity Party maintained that meaningful local empowerment and inclusive governance are already achievable within the current constitutional framework through ongoing regional-state reforms and capacity-building initiatives.



ABOVE: Panellists of the first session of the dialogue with GGA-HARO Board and staff members. From left to right: Dr Berhanu Temesgen (AAU), Dr Rahel Bafe (ESDP), Dr Mekuria Haile (PP), Prof Bahru Zewde (GGA-HoA), Kemal Seid (FEP) and Dr Zerihun Mohammed (GGA-HARO).

Conclusion

The public dialogue series on the Ethiopia’s Election 2026 marked a significant achievement in GGA-HARO’s mission to foster a more evidence based democratic culture in Ethiopia. By bridging academic research and political practice, the initiative facilitated an informed dialogue not only among the political parties but also the audience which represented key stakeholders. Political parties were compelled to address core issues of civil service, youth empowerment, and local governance, ensuring these remained central to national policy debate.

A defining feature of the series was the active participation of diverse stakeholders – civil servants, CSOs, academics, and the media – whose questions pushed party representatives beyond prepared manifestos. Concerns over corruption, merit based recruitment, youth agency, and neglected local government highlighted the urgency of reform and strengthened democratic accountability.

The implications are clear. Ethiopia’s transformation in terms of its governance architecture requires evidence based dialogue, a professional and politically neutral civil service, genuine youth inclusion, and revitalised grassroots democracy. These priorities form the core focus of a roadmap for post election reform.

Looking ahead, GGA-HARO must move from dialogue to implementation. This means sustained policy advocacy, rigorous research, and continuous youth engagement through programmes such as Young Advocates for Good Governance (YAGG) continue to be the priority areas of engagement. Key takeaways of this pre-election dialogues will be carried forward to the planned post-election dialogue, which aims to examine the commitment of the newly formed government to address key governance issues raised. The success of the dialogue series demonstrates that such platforms should become permanent features of GGA-HARO’s activities, ensuring resilience and stability in Ethiopia’s democratisation processes.



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**7TH ETHIOPIAN NATIONAL
ELECTION
PANEL DISCUSSION AMONG
POLITICAL PARTIES ON
GOOD GOVERNANCE**

CAPITAL HOTEL

APRIL 16, 2026 – MAY 14, 2026

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