

**Book Review**

**BIRHANU NEGA: Democracy and Overall Development in Ethiopia**  
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The prime goal of this book review is to show readers the relevance of the fledgling democratic system that has great influence on the positive perception of the people about the government which in turn can cause both sustainable and consistent economic development and societal changes. The first chapter of the book starts by stating that economic development would be viably possible only when clear and contextually convenient situations are available in the country. The writer of the book discloses that a better socio-political system can be analyzed in two peculiar approaches for the purpose of making the system better. The first approach emphasizes the importance of the political system that is granted to the political society, and the second one stems from the types of the socio-political system that could be appropriate for answering the basic questions continuously arising from the society.

Thus, as clearly stated in the book, conceptually there is no much disparity expressed among the Ethiopian political elite in the formation of the socio-political system although there are two controversial issues raised in the process of building a better system. The first controversy is observed when the elite express their thoughts on the practicability of the socio-political system, and the other one is when an individual has different views about the system. However, the book mainly argues that the political elite lack the will to pursue a common goal in the establishment of a better political system in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the writer of the book argues that the political system to a certain extent should be analyzed based on the following criteria. The first and foremost criterion is the fairness/justice of the political system. A system that is not fair and just is vulnerable to be a system that is full of anarchism and violence which in turn is a means to assume political power with force rather than through a democratic process. In addition, the poor capacity of law enforcement agencies, a tendency to follow cult personality and corruption are the main indicators

of having a poor political system in the country. Maintaining the peace and security of citizens is the second criterion of a political system in a country.

Chapter Two of the book mainly examines the major challenges deterring the process of building a better political system in the country. Although the possible challenges are rife, the writer identifies the basic ones. Controversies over some aspects of the history of the country among the elite, inconsistent and unfair distribution of resources, and an ethnic-based political system are the basic constraints identified in the book as the major challenges. The second challenge identified in the book is religious-based disputes in different groups. Even though Ethiopia is known for religious tolerance for a long time, there are some spasmodic symptoms of religious conflicts along with other major challenges that put the existence of the country in danger. Finally, the book in this chapter identifies the attitude citizens have towards the justice system as one of the major challenges in Ethiopia. Chapter Three of the book focuses on the economic system in the country. The author stresses that people who want to live long, ought to interact with others. This relationship could satisfy different interests observed in different groups. However, historically, the social system reminds us that power is a burning issue. The book also argues that the economic system is similar to the social system. Though there is no one best economic system in the world, there are systems that give people freedom of thought, production and equal share and that is promoted by many people in the world.

In Chapter Four, the author articulates that to establish a good economic system in Ethiopia, identifying basic and structural problems are best recommended. The author further argues that using policy, weak government and unjust actions threaten a country's economic system. However, the author believes that the problem is beyond these issues. He adds that in Ethiopia low agricultural production and being unable to transform different sectors of the economy are typical examples of a structural headache existing in the country. The book identifies the challenges which obstruct the overall development system. First, extreme poverty exposes the community to psychological, educational and social problems. Second, lack of accepting new innovations, not giving equal opportunity for competitiveness, and discriminatory laws and legal systems are some of the other problems facing the country.

In Chapter Five, the author outlines the challenges of population growth and environmental protection activities. The author claims that human beings have the potential of thinking, problem

solving and keeping the environment safe. The main issues which are stated in the book are short-and long-term environmental protection challenges in Ethiopia. The book explains causes of Ethiopia's deforestation, agrarian-based production and the rising of population growth. According to the book, it is estimated that 60,000 hectares of forest are cleared for agriculture every year. The drying up of many lakes, wildfire in the national parks, flooding and soil erosion are critical issues mentioned in the book.

The strong point of this book is that it gives a comprehensive description of democratic systems and holistic developments in Ethiopia. The imperatives include the essence of better political system and challenges in the process of adopting a democratic system in Ethiopia. The reviewer believes that the way the author of the book identifies and articulates challenges faced by the current political system of Ethiopia is worthwhile. Thus, those challenges identified by the author are underpinned by the political history of the country. Furthermore, Birhanu synchronized different theoretical frameworks and conceptual understandings regarding the relationship between democracy and a holistic development in the context of Ethiopia. Hence the author suggests his own concepts of both theoretical and practical approaches to transform the country's economic development and democracy. This particular standpoint, perhaps, opens room for an academic debate. The reviewer believes that Birhanu's work will alert all parties involved in the process of building a democratic system and initiating an economic transformation in Ethiopia.

Methodologically, the work lacks variety of primary data sources, entirely depending on secondary sources. The reviewer believes that, though such description has substance, in some respects it seems quite exaggerated. In addition, the reviewer observes some theoretical gaps. For instance, in the fifth chapter of the book, the author discusses various issues related to environmental resource conservation, and he supports his arguments with empirical data. The reviewer also feels that, in certain respects, the author follows a reductionist approach. Paying sufficient attention to religious-based conflicts and cultural proactivity towards corruption, the book overlooks the role of politicized ethnicity which is detrimental to the national unity and socio-economic well-being of the country. Ethnic entrepreneurs have used ethnicity as a political tool; it leads the country to political and social instability. Furthermore, the author remarks nothing about the domino effect of the current political landscape – the way it has affected the country's democratic and economic opportunities.