

The Contemporary State: The Prosperity Party Period (2019–Present)

Introduction: A New Era of Reform and Conflict

The **Prosperity Party (PP)** period, beginning with the election of **Dr. Abiy Ahmed** as Prime Minister in 2018 and the party's formal establishment in 2019, marks the most recent and arguably most volatile chapter in modern Ethiopian history. This era is defined by a dramatic shift away from the EPRDF's ethnic-federalist coalition model toward a unified, national political entity. Abiy's government launched ambitious political and economic reforms aimed at national unity and liberalization, but this transition has been severely tested by internal conflicts, most notably the devastating **Tigray War**. The period represents a critical juncture where Ethiopia attempts to reconcile its diverse ethnic identities with the need for a strong, centralized state.

I. The Transition and the Birth of the Prosperity Party

Abiy Ahmed's rise to power in April 2018 was a direct consequence of the widespread Oromo and Amhara protests against the EPRDF's TPLF-dominated leadership. His initial actions were hailed as a “**Medemer**” (synergy/coming together) moment, promising a new democratic opening.

Initial Reforms (2018–2019)

The first year of Abiy's premiership was characterized by a rapid series of political and diplomatic reforms:

- **Political Liberalization:** Release of thousands of political prisoners, unbanning of opposition groups, and lifting of the state of emergency.
- **Peace with Eritrea:** Abiy ended the “No War, No Peace” stalemate with Eritrea, signing a peace agreement with President Isaias Afwerki in July 2018. This act earned him the **2019 Nobel Peace Prize** [1].

- **Judicial and Security Reform:** Efforts were made to reform the security apparatus and the judiciary to ensure greater independence and accountability.

Formation of the Prosperity Party (2019)

In November 2019, Abiy dissolved the EPRDF and merged three of its four regional parties (OPDO, ANDM, SEPDM) and five affiliate parties into the new, unified **Prosperity Party (PP)**.

Feature	EPRDF Model	Prosperity Party Model
Structure	Coalition of four ethnically-based regional parties.	Unified, national party with a single central committee.
Ideology	Revolutionary Democracy (State-led Developmentalism).	<i>Medemer</i> (Synergy/Unity) and Liberal Political Economy.
Goal	To accommodate ethnic diversity through federalism.	To foster national unity and move beyond ethnic politics.

The TPLF, the dominant force in the former EPRDF, refused to join the new party, viewing it as an unconstitutional attempt to dismantle the ethnic federal system and centralize power. This refusal set the stage for the subsequent conflict.

II. The Homegrown Economic Reform Agenda

The PP government pivoted away from the EPRDF's state-led developmental model toward a more market-oriented approach, encapsulated in the **Homegrown Economic Reform Agenda**.

Key Economic Policies

- **Privatization:** The government initiated the partial privatization of key state-owned enterprises, including the telecommunications sector (Ethio Telecom) and the sugar corporations, to attract foreign direct investment and increase efficiency.
- **Debt Management:** Focused on securing debt relief and restructuring to manage the country's growing external debt burden.

- **Focus on Private Sector:** Emphasis on empowering the private sector as the engine of growth, a significant ideological shift from the EPRDF's state-centric approach.

This economic liberalization was intended to unlock Ethiopia's development potential but was severely hampered by the outbreak of internal conflict.

III. The Tigray War (2020–2022)

The political friction between the federal government (PP) and the TPLF-led regional government of Tigray escalated into a full-scale armed conflict in November 2020.

Causes of the Conflict

The war was the culmination of a political and constitutional crisis:

1. **Constitutional Dispute:** Tigray held regional elections in September 2020, which the federal government deemed illegal and unconstitutional, as the national elections had been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. **Military Escalation:** The conflict began when the TPLF allegedly attacked a federal military base in Tigray, prompting a massive military response from the federal government and its allies, including Eritrean forces [2].
3. **Power Struggle:** The conflict was fundamentally a power struggle between the new, centralizing government and the old guard of the EPRDF, who were determined to protect the autonomy of the Tigray region.

Historical Incidents and Humanitarian Crisis

The two-year war was marked by extreme brutality and a devastating humanitarian crisis:

- **Siege and Blockade:** The Tigray region was subjected to a near-total blockade of communication, banking, and humanitarian aid for extended periods.
- **War Crimes:** Numerous reports from international human rights organizations documented widespread atrocities, including massacres, sexual violence, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure by all parties to the conflict.

- **Famine:** The conflict-induced blockade led to a severe food crisis, with reports of starvation being used as a weapon of war [3].

The Pretoria Peace Agreement (2022)

The war officially ended in November 2022 with the signing of the **Pretoria Peace Agreement** between the federal government and the TPLF. The agreement included provisions for the disarmament of the TPLF, the re-establishment of federal authority in Tigray, and the resumption of humanitarian and essential services.

IV. Government Structure and Political Challenges

The PP era has seen a consolidation of power around the Prime Minister and a re-emphasis on the central government's authority, challenging the core tenets of the EPRDF's ethnic federalism.

Centralization and the Federal System

The PP's move toward a unified national party is seen by many as a step toward re-centralizing the Ethiopian state, potentially undermining the autonomy of the regional *Kilils*. This shift has led to increased political tension and conflict in various regions, including Oromia and Amhara, where regional forces have clashed with the federal military.

The 2021 General Election

The first general election under the Prosperity Party was held in June 2021. The PP won a landslide victory, securing a strong mandate for Abiy Ahmed. However, the election was boycotted by several opposition parties and was not held in the conflict-affected Tigray region, leading to questions about its inclusivity and fairness.

V. Legacy and Future Trajectory

The Prosperity Party period is a time of profound paradox. On one hand, it has delivered a historic peace with Eritrea and initiated crucial economic reforms. On the

other hand, it has presided over a devastating civil war and a significant increase in internal political and ethnic conflict.

Achievement	Challenge
Peace with Eritrea (2018)	Tigray War (2020–2022) and ongoing regional conflicts.
Economic Liberalization (Privatization)	High inflation, currency devaluation, and massive war-related debt.
Political Unification (Formation of PP)	Increased ethnic polarization and challenges to the federal structure.

The future of the Ethiopian state under the Prosperity Party will depend on its ability to successfully implement its national unity agenda while managing the deep-seated ethnic and political grievances that the recent conflicts have brought to the forefront. The period is a stark reminder that the quest for a stable, modern Ethiopian state remains a continuous and challenging process.

References

[1] The Nobel Prize. (2019). *The Nobel Peace Prize 2019*. Retrieved from <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2019/summary/> [2] Human Rights Watch. (2022). *Ethiopia: Events of 2022*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/ethiopia> [3] The Conversation. (2022). *Starvation as a weapon of war: how Ethiopia created a famine in Tigray*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/starvation-as-a-weapon-of-war-how-ethiopia-created-a-famine-in-tigray-268395> [4] Brookings Institution. (2019). *Ethiopia's Newly Unified Ruling Party Pivots to a Liberal Political Economy*. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/ethiopias-newly-unified-ruling-party-pivots-to-a-liberal-political-economy/> [5] Wikipedia. *Prosperity Party*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosperity_Party [6] Wikipedia. *Tigray War*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tigray_war