

# Who is Abiy Ahmed Ali (PhD)?

Who is Abiy Ahmed Ali (PhD) ?



Abiy Ahmed (PhD), Prime Minister of Ethiopia

Abiy Ahmed Ali (Ge'ez: ሙሴ አህመድ አሊ; born 15 August 1976) is an Ethiopian politician serving as 4th Prime Minister of Ethiopia of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia since 2 April 2018. He is the first Oromo chairman of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) from the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), which is one of the four coalition parties of the EPRDF. Abiy is also an elected member of the Ethiopian parliament, and a member of the ODP and EPRDF executive committees.

A former army intelligence officer, since becoming Prime Minister Abiy has launched a wide programme of political and economic reforms, and worked to broker peace deals in Eritrea, South Sudan, and a transition agreement in the Republic of the Sudan. Abiy was awarded the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize for his work in ending the 20-year post-war territorial stalemate between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Abiy Ahmed was born in the small town of Beshasha, located near Agaro, Oromia. His deceased father, Ahmed Ali, was a Muslim Oromo (and had four wives), while his deceased mother, Tezeta Wolde, was a Christian Oromo. Despite some sources claims that his

mother was an ethnic Amhara, Dr. Abiy witnessed on Oromia Broadcasting Network interview said that both of his parents are Oromo and asserted no one is given and taken away my Oromummaa. Abiy's Father was a typical Ethiopian farmer and was only able to speak Afaan Oromo while Mrs. Tizita was a fluent speaker of both Oromo and Amharic.

Abiy is the 13th child of his father and the sixth and youngest child of his mother, the fourth of his father's four wives. His childhood name was Abiyot (English: "Revolution"). The name was sometimes given to children in the aftermath of the Derg revolution of 1974. The then Abiyot went to the local primary school and later continued his studies at secondary schools in Agaro town. Abiy, according to several personal reports, was always very interested in his own education and later in his life also encouraged others to learn and to improve.

Abiy is a devout Protestant born of a Muslim father and an Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Christian mother. He was raised in a family of religious plurality. He, along with his entire family, is a regular church attendee, and Abiy also occasionally ministers in preaching and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ at the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers' Church. His wife Zinash Tayachew is also a devout Protestant Christian who ministers in her church as a gospel singer. Abiy frequently underscores the importance of faith and as a result, almost all faith communities are enjoying greater liberality in his tenure. The 4 main state television stations (ETV (Ethiopia), Walta TV, Addis TV and Fana TV) have been airing religious services almost every day since the outbreak of COVID-19.

While serving in the Ethiopian National Defense Force, Abiy received his first degree, a Bachelor's degree in computer engineering from the Microlink Information Technology College in Addis Ababa in 2001.

Abiy holds a Master of Arts in Transformational Leadership earned from the business school at Greenwich University, London, in collaboration with the International Leadership Institute, Addis Ababa, in 2011. He also holds a Master of Business Administration from the Leadstar College of Management and Leadership in Addis Ababa in partnership with Ashland University in 2013.

Abiy, who had started his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) work several years ago as a regular student, completed his Ph.D. in 2017 at the Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Addis Ababa University. He did his Ph.D. work on the Agaro constituency with the PhD thesis entitled "Social Capital and its Role in Traditional Conflict Resolution in Ethiopia: The Case of Inter-Religious Conflict In Jimma Zone State". As a follow-up to his Ph.D. thesis, he published a research article on de-escalation strategies in the Horn of Africa in a special journal issue dedicated to countering violent extremism.

Abiy met and married his wife, Zinash Tayachew, an Amhara woman from Gondar, while both were serving in the Ethiopian Defense Forces. They are the parents of three daughters and one recently adopted son. Abiy is multilingual and speaks Afaan Oromo, Amharic and English. He is a fitness aficionado and professes that physical health goes hand in hand with mental health and, as such, he frequents physical and gym activities in Addis Ababa. Abiy is a devout Evangelical Pentecostal Christian of the Full Gospel Believers' Church. As such, he believes that he's "doing God's work" when promoting peace and reconciliation.

As a teenager and in early 1991, he joined the armed struggle against the Marxist–Leninist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam after the death of his oldest brother. He did so as a member of ODP (Oromo Democratic Party), which at that time was a tiny organization of only around 200 fighters in the large coalition army of about 100,000 fighters that resulted in the regime’s fall later that year. As there were only so few ODP fighters in an army with its core of about 90,000 Tigrayans, Abiy quickly had to learn the Tigrinya language. As a speaker of Tigrinya in a security apparatus dominated by Tigrayans, he could move forward with his military career.

After the fall of the Derg, he took formal military training from Assefa Brigade in West Wollega and was stationed there. His military post was in intelligence and communications. Later on he became a soldier in the now Ethiopian National Defense Force in 1993 and worked mostly in the intelligence and communications departments. In 1995, after the Rwandan genocide, he was deployed as a member of the United Nations Peace Keeping Force (UNAMIR), Kigali, Rwanda. In the Ethio-Eritrea War between 1998 and 2000, he led an intelligence team to discover positions of the Eritrean Defence Forces.

Later on, Abiy was posted back to his home town of Beshasha, where he – as an officer of the Defense Forces – had to address a critical situation of inter-religious clashes between Muslims and Christians with a number of deaths. He brought calm and peace in a situation of communal tensions accompanying the clashes. In later years, following his election as an MP, he continued these efforts to bring about reconciliation between the religions through the creation of the Religious Forum for Peace.

In 2008, Abiy was one of the co-founders of the Ethiopian Information Network Security Agency (INSA), where he worked in different positions. For two years, he was acting director of INSA due to the director’s leave of absence. In this capacity, he was board member of several government agencies working on information and communications, like Ethio Telecom and Ethiopian Television. He attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel before deciding in 2010 to leave the military and his post as deputy director of INSA to become a politician.

Abiy started his political career as a member of the ODP (Oromo Democratic Party). The ODP is the ruling party in Oromia Region since 1991 and also one of four coalition parties of the ruling coalition in Ethiopia, the EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front). He became a member of the central committee of ODP and congress member of the Executive Committee of the EPRDF – in quick succession. In the 2010 national election, Abiy represented the woreda of Agaro and became an elected member of the House of Peoples’ Representatives, the lower chamber of the Ethiopian Federal Parliamentary Assembly. Before and during his time of parliamentary service, there were several religious clashes among Muslims and Christians in Jimma zone. Some of these confrontations turned violent and resulted in the loss of life and property. Abiy, as an elected member of parliament, took a proactive role in working with several religious institutions and elders to bring about reconciliation in the zone. He helped set up a forum entitled “Religious Forum for Peace”, an outcome of the need to devise a sustainable resolution mechanism to restore peaceful Muslim-Christian community interaction in the region.

In 2014, during his time in parliament, Abiy became the director-general of a new and in 2011 founded Government Research Institute called Science and Technology Information Center (STIC). The following year, Abiy became an executive member of ODP. The same year he was elected to the House of Peoples' Representatives for a second term, this time for his home woreda of Gomma.

Starting from 2015, Abiy became one of the central figures in the violent fight against illegal land grabbing activities in the Oromia Region and especially around Addis Ababa. Although the Addis Ababa Master Plan at the heart of the land-grabbing plans was stopped in 2016, the disputes continued for some time resulting in injuries and deaths. It was this fight against land-grabbing, that finally boosted Abiy Ahmed's political career, brought him into the spotlight and allowed him to climb the political ladder.

In October 2015, Abiy became the Ethiopian Minister of Science and Technology (MoST), a post which he left after only 12 months. From October 2016 on, Abiy served as Deputy President of Oromia Region as part of the team of Oromia Region's president Lemma Megersa while staying a member of the Ethiopian Federal House of Peoples' Representatives. Abiy Ahmed also became the head of the Oromia Urban Development and Planning Office. In this role, Abiy was expected to be the major driving force behind Oromia Economic Revolution, Oromia Land and Investment reform, youth employment as well as resistance to widespread land grabbing in Oromia region. As one of his duties in office, he took care of the one million displaced Oromo people displaced from the Somali region from the 2017 unrest.

As head of the ODP Secretariat from October 2017, Abiy crossed over religious and ethnic divides to facilitate the formation of a new alliance between Oromo and the Amhara groups, both making up two-thirds of the 100 million Ethiopian population.

In early 2018, many political observers considered Abiy and Lemma Megersa as the most popular politicians within the Oromo community, as well as other Ethiopian communities. This came after several years of unrest in Ethiopia. But despite this favorable rating for Abiy Ahmed and Lemma Megersa, young people from the Oromia region called for immediate action without delays to bring fundamental change and freedom to Oromia Region and Ethiopia – otherwise more unrest was to be expected. According to Abiy himself, people are asking for different rhetoric, with an open and respectful discussion in the political space to allow political progress and to win people for democracy instead of pushing them.

Until early 2018, Abiy continued to serve as head of the ODP secretariat and of the Oromia Housing and Urban Development Office and as Deputy President of Oromia Region. He left all these posts after his election as the leader of the EPRDF.

Following three years of protest and unrest, on 15 February 2018 the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, announced his resignation – which included his resignation from the post of EPRDF Chairman. Historically, the incoming EPRDF Chairman is the next Prime Minister. The EPRDF Chairman on the other hand is one of the heads of the four parties that make up the ruling coalition: ODP, ADP, SEPDM, and TPLF.

Hailemariam's resignation triggered the first ever contested leadership election among EPRDF coalition members to replace him. A lot of political observers made Lemma Megersa (the ODP Chairman) and Abiy Ahmed the front-runners to become the Leader of the ruling coalition and eventually Prime Minister of Ethiopia. Despite being the clear favourite for the general public, Lemma Megersa was not a member of the national parliament, a requirement to become Prime Minister as required by the Ethiopian constitution. Therefore, Lemma Megersa was excluded from the leadership race. On 22 February 2018, Lemma Megersa's party, ODP, called for an emergency executive committee meeting and replaced him as Chairman of ODP with Abiy Ahmed, who was a Member of Parliament. Some observers saw that as a strategic move by the ODP to retain its leadership role within the coalition and to promote Abiy Ahmed to become Prime Minister.

On 1 March 2018, the 180 EPRDF executive committee members started their meeting to elect the leader of the party. Each of the four parties sent in 45 members. The contest for the leadership was among Abiy Ahmed of ODP, Demeke Mekonnen, the Deputy Prime Minister and ADP leader, Shiferaw Shigute as Chairman of SEPDM and Debretsion Gebremichael as the Leader of TPLF. Despite being the overwhelming favorite by the majority of Ethiopians, Abiy Ahmed faced major opposition from TPLF and SEPDM members during the leadership discussions.

On 27 March 2018, a few hours before the beginning of the leadership elections, Demeke Mekonnen, who had been seen as the major opponent to Abiy Ahmed, dropped out of the race. Many observers saw this as an endorsement of Abiy Ahmed. Demeke was then approved as Deputy Prime Minister and got for another term. Following Demeke's exit, Abiy Ahmed received a presumably unanimous vote from both the ADP and ODP executive members, with 18 additional votes in a secret ballot coming from elsewhere. By midnight, Abiy Ahmed was declared Chairman of the ruling coalition in Ethiopia, the EPRDF, and was considered as the Prime Minister Designate of Ethiopia by receiving 108 votes while Shiferaw Shigute received 58 and Debretsion Gebremichael received 2 votes. On 2 April 2018, Abiy Ahmed was elected as Prime Minister of Ethiopia by the House of Representatives and sworn in.

On 2 April 2018, Abiy was confirmed and sworn in by the Ethiopian parliament as Prime Minister of Ethiopia. During his acceptance speech, he promised political reform; to promote the unity of Ethiopia and unity among the peoples of Ethiopia; to reach out to the Eritrean government to resolve the ongoing Eritrean–Ethiopian border conflict after the Eritrean–Ethiopian War and to also reach out to the political opposition inside and outside of Ethiopia. His acceptance speech sparked optimism and received an overwhelmingly positive reaction from the Ethiopian public including the opposition groups inside and outside Ethiopia. Following his speech, his popularity and support across the country reached an historical high and some political observers argued that Abiy was overwhelmingly more popular than the ruling party coalition, the EPRDF.

Since taking office in April 2018, Abiy's government has presided over the release of thousands of political prisoners from Ethiopian jails and the rapid opening of the country's political landscape. In May 2018 alone the Oromo region pardoned over 7,600 prisoners. On 29 May Ginbot 7 leader Andargachew Tsege, facing the death penalty on terrorism charges,

was released after being pardoned by President Mulatu Teshome, along with 575 other detainees.

That same day, charges were dropped against Andargachew's colleague Berhanu Nega and the Oromo dissident and public intellectual Jawar Mohammed, as well as their respectively affiliated US-based ESAT and OMN satellite television networks. Shortly thereafter, Abiy took the "unprecedented and previously unimaginable" step of meeting Andargachew, who twenty-four hours previously had been on death row, at his office; a move even critics of the ruling party termed "bold and remarkable". Abiy had previously met former Oromo Liberation Front leaders including founder Lencho Letta, who had committed to peaceful participation in the political process, upon their arrival at Bole International Airport.

On 30 May 2018, it was announced the ruling party would amend the country's "draconian" anti-terrorism law, widely perceived as a tool of political repression. On 1 June 2018, Abiy announced the government would seek to end the state of emergency two months in advance of the expiration its six-month tenure, citing an improved domestic situation. On 4 June 2018, Parliament approved the necessary legislation, ending the state of emergency. In his first briefing to the House of Peoples' Representatives in June 2018, Abiy countered criticism of his government's release of convicted "terrorists" which according to the opposition is just a name the EPRDF gives you if you are a part or even meet the "opposition". He argued that policies that sanctioned arbitrary detention and torture themselves constituted extra-constitutional acts of terror aimed at suppressing opposition. This followed the additional pardon of 304 prisoners (289 of which had been sentenced on terrorism-related charges) on 15 June.

The pace of reforms has revealed fissures within the ruling coalition, with hardliners in the military and the hitherto dominant TPLF said to be "seething" at the end of the state of emergency and the release of political prisoners. These hardliners, centered around TPLF chief Debretsion Gebremichael, had grown to deeply resent the leadership of Abiy's predecessor Hailemariam (at times supposedly bringing him to the brink of tears) and had hoped to place a more assertive figure in the prime minister's office willing to "act with an iron fist", rather than a reformist.

An editorial on the previously pro-government website Tigray Online arguing for the maintenance of the state of emergency gave voice to this sentiment, saying that Abiy was "doing too much too fast". Another article critical of the release of political prisoners suggested that Ethiopia's criminal justice system had become a revolving door and that Abiy's administration had quite inexplicably been rushing to pardon and release thousands of prisoners, among them many deadly criminals and dangerous arsonists. On 13 June 2018, the TPLF executive committee denounced the decisions to hand over Badme and privatize SOEs as "fundamentally flawed", saying that the ruling coalition suffered from a fundamental leadership deficit.

In 2018, to expand the free press in Ethiopia, Abiy invited exiled media outlets to return.

However, since assuming office in April 2018, Abiy himself has only given one press conference, on 25 August 2018 and around five months after he assumed office, where he answered questions from journalists. As of 21 March 2019, he has not given another press

conference where he has not refused to answer questions from journalists (rather than reading prepared statements).

In his briefing to the parliament of 18 June 2018, Abiy announced that he would set up a commission aimed at reviewing the divisive system of ethnic federalism, which he said was failing to adequately deal with the proliferation of localized disputes over which particular ethnicity was entitled to control certain towns and districts, potentially paving the way for sweeping constitutional reform.

In June 2018, the ruling coalition announced its intention to pursue the large-scale privatization of state-owned enterprises and the liberalization of several key economic sectors long considered off-limits, marking a landmark shift in the country's state-oriented development model.

State monopolies in the telecommunications, aviation, electricity, and logistics sectors are to be ended and those industries opened up to the private-sector competition. Shares in the state-owned firms in those sectors, including Ethiopian Airlines, Africa's largest and most profitable, are to be offered for purchase to both domestic and foreign investors, although the government will continue to hold a majority share in these firms, thereby retaining control of the commanding heights of the economy. State-owned enterprises in sectors deemed less critical, including railway operators, sugar, industrial parks, hotels, and various manufacturing firms, maybe fully privatized.

Aside from representing an ideological shift with respect to views on the degree of government control over the economy, the move was seen as a pragmatic measure aimed at improving the country's dwindling foreign-exchange reserves, which by the end of the 2017 fiscal year were equal in value to less than two months worth of imports, as well as easing its growing sovereign debt load.

In June 2018, Abiy announced the government's intention to establish an Ethiopian stock exchange in tandem with the privatization of state-owned enterprises. As of 2015, Ethiopia was the largest country in the world, in terms of both population and gross domestic product, without a stock exchange.

In May 2018, Abiy visited Saudi Arabia, receiving guarantees for the release of Ethiopian prisoners including billionaire entrepreneur Mohammed Hussein Al Amoudi, who was detained following the 2017 Saudi Arabian purge.

In June 2018, he met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Cairo and, separately, brokered a meeting in Addis Ababa between the South Sudanese president Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar in an attempt to encourage peace talks.

Since taking power Abiy has pursued a policy of expanding landlocked Ethiopia's access to ports in the Horn of Africa region. Shortly before his assumption of office, it was announced that the Ethiopian government would take a 19% stake in Berbera Port in the unrecognized Republic of Somaliland as part of a joint venture with DP World. In May 2018, Ethiopia signed an agreement with the government of Djibouti to take an equity stake in the Port of

Djibouti, enabling Ethiopia to have a say in the port's development and the setting of port handling fees.

Two days later a similar agreement was signed with the Sudanese government granting Ethiopia an ownership stake in the Port of Port Sudan. The Ethio-Djibouti agreement grants the Djiboutian government the option of taking stakes in state-owned Ethiopian firms in return, such as Ethiopian Airlines and Ethio Telecom. This in turn was followed shortly thereafter by an announcement that Abiy and Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta had reached an agreement for the construction of an Ethiopian logistics facility at Lamu Port as part of the Lamu Port and Lamu-Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET) project.

The potential normalization of Ethiopia-Eritrea relations likewise opens the possibility for Ethiopia to resume using the Ports of Massawa and Asseb, which, prior to the Ethio-Eritrean conflict, were its main ports, which would be of particular benefit to the northern region of Tigray. All these developments would reduce Ethiopian reliance on Djibouti's port which, since 1998, has handled almost all of Ethiopia's maritime traffic.

Upon taking office, Abiy stated his willingness to negotiate an end to the Ethio-Eritrean conflict. In June 2018, it was announced that the government had agreed to hand over the disputed border town of Badme to Eritrea, thereby complying with the terms of the 2000 Algiers Agreement to bring an end to the state of tension between Eritrea and Ethiopia that had persisted despite the end of hostilities during the Ethiopia-Eritrea War. Ethiopia had until then rejected the international boundary commission's ruling awarding Badme to Eritrea, resulting in a frozen conflict (popularly termed a policy of "no war, but no peace") between the two states.

During the national celebration on 20 June 2018, the president of Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki, accepted the peace initiative put forward by Abiy and suggested that he would send a delegation to Addis Ababa. On 26 June 2018, Eritrean Foreign Minister Osman Saleh Mohammed visited Addis Ababa in the first Eritrean high-level delegation to Ethiopia in over two decades.

In Asmara, on 8 July 2018, Abiy became the first Ethiopian leader to meet with an Eritrean counterpart in over two decades, in the 2018 Eritrea–Ethiopia summit. The very next day, the two signed a "Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship" declaring an end to tensions and agreeing, amongst other matters, to re-establish diplomatic relations; reopen direct telecommunication, road, and aviation links; and facilitate Ethiopian use of the ports of Massawa and Asseb. Abiy was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 for his efforts in ending the war.

In practice, the agreement has been described as "largely unimplemented". Critics say not much has changed between the two nations. Among the Eritrean diaspora, many-voiced disapproval for the Nobel Peace Prize focusing on the agreement with Eritrea when so little had changed in practice. In July 2020, Eritrea's Ministry of Information said: "Two years after the signing of the Peace Agreement, Ethiopian troops continue to be present in our sovereign territories, Trade and economic ties of both countries have not resumed to the desired extent or scale."



The dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam has become a national preoccupation in both countries. Ahmed has warned: "No force can stop Ethiopia from building a dam. If there is a need to go to war, we could get millions readied."

After the murder of activist, singer and political icon Hachalu Hundessa ignited violence across Addis Ababa and other Ethiopian cities, Abiy hinted, without obvious suspects or clear motives for the killing, that Hundessa may have been murdered by Egyptian security agents acting on orders from Cairo to stir up trouble. An Egyptian diplomat responded by saying that Egypt "has nothing to do with current tensions in Ethiopia". Ian Bremmer wrote in a Time magazine article that Prime Minister Abiy "may just be looking for a scapegoat that can unite Ethiopians against a perceived common enemy".

Ethiopia is a country of various religious groups, primarily Christian and Muslim communities. Both inter-religious and intra-religious divisions and conflicts were a major concern, where both the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and the Ethiopian Islamic Council experienced religious and administrative divisions and conflicts. In 2018, he was given a special "peace and reconciliation" award by the Ethiopian Church for his work in reconciling rival factions within the church.

In June 2018, Abiy, speaking to senior commanders of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) declared his intention to carry out reforms of the military to strengthen its effectiveness and professionalism, with the view of limiting its role in politics. This followed renewed calls both within Ethiopia and from international human rights groups, namely Amnesty International, to dissolve highly controversial regional militias such as the Liyyu force. This move is considered likely to face resistance from TPLF hardliners, who occupy much of the military high command.

Notably, he has also called for the eventual reconstitution of the Ethiopian Navy, dissolved in 1996 in the aftermath of Eritrea's secession after an extraterritorial sojourn in Djibouti, saying that "we should build our naval force capacity in the future." It was reported that this move would appeal to nationalists still smarting from the country's loss of its coastline 25 years prior. Ethiopia already has a maritime training institute on Lake Tana as well as a national shipping line.

On 7 June 2018, Abiy carried out a wide-ranging reshuffle of top security officials, replacing ENDF Chief of Staff Samora Yunis with Lieutenant General Se'are Mekonnen, National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) director Getachew Assefa with Lieutenant General Adem Mohammed, National Security Advisor and former army chief Abadula Gameda, and Sebhat Nega, one of the founders of the TPLF and director-general of the Foreign Relations Strategic Research Institute Sebhat's retirements had been previously announced that May.

A large peaceful demonstration was organized in Addis Ababa at Meskel Square on 23 June 2018 to show support for the new prime minister. Just after Abiy had finished addressing the crowd a grenade was thrown and landed just 17 metres away from where he and other top officials were sitting. Two people were killed and over 165 were injured. Following the attack, 9 police officials were detained, including the deputy police commissioner, Girma Kassa, who was fired immediately. Questions were asked as to how a police car carrying attackers got so close to the prime minister and soon after the car was

set alight destroying evidence. After the attack the prime minister addressed the nation on national TV unhurt by the blast and describing it as an “unsuccessful attempt by forces who do not want to see Ethiopia united”. On the same day, the prime minister made an unannounced visit to the Black Lion general hospital to meet victims of the attack.

In the parliamentary session held on 16 October 2018, Abiy proposed to reduce the number of ministries from 28 to 20 with half of the cabinet positions for female ministers, a first in the history of the country. The new cabinet restructures included the first female president, Sahle-Work Zewde; the first female minister of the Ministry of Defense, Aisha Mohammed Musa; the first female minister of the new Ministry of Peace, Muferiat Kamil responsible for the Ethiopian Federal Police and the intelligence agencies; the first female press secretary for the Office of the Prime Minister, Billene Seyoum Woldeyes.

The internal political power shift has created fears for Tigrayans, and already “simmering anti-Tigrayan sentiments have led to violence” people told IRIN, “from barricading roads and forcibly stopping traffic to looting and attacks on Tigrayan homes and businesses in the Amhara and Oromia regions”. Tens of thousands Ethiopian Tigrayans have been displaced from their homes (or killed), due to ethnic based violence, since Abiy assumed office.

Since the 2018 election of Abiy, around 1.5 million Ethiopians were forced from their homes by ethnic violence – the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) of any country in 2018.

Some of the worst calamities were in the south, where more than 800,000 Ethiopian Gedeos have fled from the district of West Guji amid persecution by the Oromo Liberation Front. Abiy’s government has been accused by humanitarian groups of ignoring the ethnic violence and withholding of aid from Gedeon refugees. In September 2018, pogroms in the town of Burayu, near Addis Ababa, killed 65 people.

In the north of Ethiopia, and especially in Tigray which was the cradle of the successful revolt against the Derg that in 1991 put in place the current governing coalition, there are reports of increasing anger and ethnic tension as Abiy’s shake-up of the Ethiopian state, which has targeted Tigrayans in top positions, is widely seen as biased and vindictive.

Government spokesmen have countered that there are many ex-officials accused of amassing billions in the past decades that are wanted by law enforcement on corruption charges and that many of these defendants come from the ruling Tigrayan elite of the past decades. These legal proceedings are sometimes conflated with ethnic persecution, especially by those ex-officials that fear persecution.

Debretsion Gebremichael, the acting President of Tigray Region and currently chairman of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and part of the EPRDF ruling coalition, has been reported as having accused prime minister Abiy of “conducting ethnic profiling in the name of fighting corruption” and described “recent arrests of senior military officials as being politically motivated and implemented along ethnic lines”, and his criticisms are echoed by other prominent TPLF members and people of Tigray. A local University law professor that IRIN talked to, added and said “there is a lot of [lies] and propaganda, and the TPLF has

been made the scapegoat for all vice". Abiy has also sacked around 160 Tigrayan army Generals and much more lower ranking army officers, in his reforms.

In a March 2019 interview with the Financial Times of London, Debretsion Gebremichael said: "concentrating on one ethnic group is dangerous", when talking about Abiy's crack-down on Tigrayan government workers and politicians, and the fact that Abiy is calling them "daytime hyenas" (a phrase being interpreted as an ethnic slur).

According to the NGO NetBlocks, Politically motivated Internet shutdowns have intensified in severity and duration under the leadership of Abiy Ahmed despite the country's rapid digitalization and reliance on cellular internet connectivity in recent years. In 2020, Internet shutdowns by the Ethiopian government have been described as "frequently deployed". Access Now said in a statement that shutdowns have become a "go-to tool for authorities to muzzle unrest and activism."

On 21 November 2019, upon approval of EPRDF ruling coalition, a new party, Prosperity Party, is formed via merging of three of the four parties that made up the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and other five affiliate parties. The parties include the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM), the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), the Harari National League (HNL), the Ethiopian Somali Peoples Democratic Party (ESPDP), the Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP), the Gambella Peoples Unity Party (GPUP), and the Benishangul Gumuz Peoples Democratic Party (BGPDP). The programs and bylaws of the newly merged party were first approved by the executive committee of EPRDF. Abiy believes that "Prosperity Party is committed to strengthening & applying a true Federal system which recognizes the diversity and contributions of all Ethiopians".

Abiy has been described as a "liberal populist" by the academic and journalist Abiye Teklemariam and the influential Oromo activist Jawar Mohammed. Journalist Michela Wrong, a longtime observer of Ethiopian politics, has written that he resembles the likes of Trump and Vladimir Putin, populists who "use jingoistic appeals to nationalism to truncate or supplant domestic political debate and institutional processes." [136] Alemayehu Weldemariam, a U.S.-based Ethiopian lawyer and public intellectual, has called Abiy "an opportunistic populist jockeying for power on a democratizing platform." On the other hand, Tom Gardner argues in a foreign policy article that he's not a populist, but more of a liberal democrat. However, he acknowledges that Abiy has "occasionally used language that can be read as euphemistic and conspiracy-minded", and might have "exploited the system's vulnerabilities, such as a pliable media and politicized judiciary, for his own ends."

Read more at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abiy\\_Ahmed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abiy_Ahmed)