



ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

**THE PRACTICE OF MEDIA AND POLITICS IN PROMOTING HUMAN RIHGTS IN
ETHIOPIA:**

A Case Study on EBC

BY

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Abstract

This study investigates the interplay between media performance, political communication, and the promotion of human rights in Ethiopia, with a specific focus on the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC). The primary objective is to assess how effectively the media serves as a platform for human rights advocacy and political accountability in a complex and often restrictive political environment.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining content analysis of selected EBC news broadcasts with survey data collected from journalists at EBC and university students as well as one-to-one conversations with audiences. The content analysis focused on media framing, thematic representation, brief analysis of constitution, and visual symbolism related to human rights, while the survey explored perceptions of media freedom, political expression, and media credibility.

Findings reveal that EBC's coverage of human rights is limited and often shaped by government agendas, with journalists facing editorial restrictions and legal uncertainty. Students and journalists alike perceive the media as biased, cautious, and ineffective in holding power accountable. Additionally, the Ethiopian “political” landscape is seen as confusing and inconsistent to human rights, further weakening the media's ability to contribute meaningfully to civic awareness and human rights discourse.

The implications of this study are multifaceted. Practically, it highlights the urgent need to strengthen the editorial independence of public media institutions. Policy-wise, it suggests reforms to enhance legal protections for journalists and ensure institutional accountability. Theoretically, the study contributes to media performance theory by situating it within the context of authoritarian states where state media and political structures are deeply intertwined.

The study recommends further research into the role of private and digital media in Ethiopia's human rights landscape, comparative studies across regions, and longitudinal analysis to track changes in media performance. Strengthening philosophy and civic education, promoting human rights journalism, and fostering institutional transparency are essential steps toward realizing the media's potential in safeguarding democratic principles and human rights.

1. Introduction

The promotion and protection of human rights are fundamental to any democratic society, and the media plays a crucial role in this effort. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) is a major state-affiliated media institution with the potential to influence public awareness, political discourse, and social accountability. However, its role in human rights promotion has been questioned due to concerns over political interference, limited editorial independence, and restricted journalistic freedom. This study seeks to examine how EBC performs in promoting human rights in Ethiopia by assessing its content, media practices, and institutional constraints. The research draws on Media Performance Theory and Institutional Trust Theory, Framing Theory to explore the ways in which public trust, political alignment, and media in shaping, promoting and understanding of human rights issues. Using both qualitative and quantitative data from EBC journalists and university students, the study investigates how media narratives affect awareness, engagement, and public perception. The findings aim to contribute to policy, journalism education, and the broader dialogue on strengthening media's democratic functions in Ethiopia.

The importance of media in promoting human rights cannot be overstated, especially in a politically sensitive environment like Ethiopia. Given the ongoing human rights violations in the country, understanding the role media plays in both reporting these issues and advocating for human rights is crucial. This study is timely and significant because it addresses the gap in existing research concerning the interplay between media, political engagement, and human rights. By examining how media framing and content influence public understanding and political response, this research contributed valuable insights into how media can be harnessed as a tool for human rights promotion, advocacy, and accountability. The findings can potentially inform both media practice and policy-making, encouraging more effective and responsible media coverage of human rights issues in Ethiopia.

In this study Media Performance Theory, Institutional Trust Theory, and Framing theory reveal how vague-institutional information control and limited media contribute to a public climate of fear and misinformation. Media Effect Theory create short and long term effect on public opinion and behavior including desensitization to violence or increased polarization.

Moreover, as study focus on the three variables, such as the interdisciplinary challenges of media, politics and human rights, the study asks basic questions "What is the politics of Ethiopia?" The nature of, the characteristics of Ethiopian so called "politics" also deeply-touched to know if the system was fertile to the respect of human rights.

2. Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were gathered through structured questionnaires distributed to 100 university students and journalists who work for EBC. Both quantitative and Qualitative data came from 22 journalists' response and six focus group participants and one-to-one conversations. A content analysis of selected EBC news broadcasts was also conducted. The data were analyzed thematically using descriptive statistics.

3. Discussion

The findings reveal that most EBC journalists feel constrained by political pressure and editorial interference, limiting their ability to cover human rights issues freely. Students also report hesitation in openly discussing politics or rights-related matters, showing a climate of fear and mistrust. The content analysis shows EBC rarely challenges state narratives or offers in-depth reporting on violations. Instead, it often promotes government achievements while downplaying or ignoring abuses. This aligns with Media Performance Theory, which emphasizes that media under political control fail to function as democratic institutions. Furthermore, Institutional Trust Theory explains why public skepticism toward EBC remains high: the lack of credible, independent media has eroded trust. This mutual distrust creates a media vacuum where alternative voices are marginalized. Although Ethiopia has taken steps toward reform, the persistence of ethnically polarized narratives and legal loopholes continues to hinder press freedom. In effect, the media is neither a watchdog nor an educator, but often an instrument of state propaganda. A more autonomous, rights-conscious media system is urgently needed.

4. Key Findings

1. The study found that the media in Ethiopia, particularly state-run outlets like EBC, play a limited and often compromised role in promoting human rights and "political" accountability. Journalists operate under tight restrictions and "political" influence, which undermines their ability to report freely and critically. Both students and media professionals as well as one-to-one conversations of audiences acknowledge the potential of the media to support human rights, yet they point to biased coverage and avoidance of sensitive political and human rights issues. Furthermore, Ethiopia's political system itself is often confusing, marked by mixed messages, unclear commitments to democratic principles, and inconsistent enforcement of rights, which complicates the media's role and further weakens public trust in both institutions.

In this study of literature review and analysis highlight the problem of politicians and the media not properly understanding where human rights begin. As a result, human rights violations are being treated as a daily occurrence, and the number of victims has increased. Furthermore, citizens are being terrorized and silenced by the suppression of reports, the distortion of justice, and the distortion of history.

2. The study has found that the definitions of politics are too many and very confusing. However, through reviewing different literatures the Leninist-Ethnic-Federalism is not politics, but it is an experiment to test if it works, but many Africans and Europeans were once tried yet avoided that it was not working. Many scholars have said that the collective trends are incomprehensible in causing chaos, anger, a lot of disagreement, not only in Ethiopia but also around the world. If we take an example from Africa that language based administration is both controversial and unintelligible (Vaughan, 2003, p.15). Vaughan (2003) further explained that internationally and domestically Ethnic or language federalism was seen as a new initiative and then reaching peak in other parts of Africa, most notably in Eritrea and South Africa, both of whose governments publicly expressed concern about the Ethiopian experiment. Given Yugoslavia and the collapse of neighboring Somalia, such an act of ethnicizing politics in Ethiopia-surely thereby of inflaming ethnic passions-appeared to many to be inexplicable, irresponsible and dangerous.(Vaughan,2003:15).Notably , Abbink (2017) exposed to ridicule the Leninist political

model which is ...often dubbed an "**experiment**". Ethnic identity politics makes Ethiopia unique in Africa, where ethnicity becomes a national politics but in Kenya ethnic parties are not allowed. In Ethiopia they are the norm to run election (Abbink, 2013).

Therefore, based on the various literatures, there is no modern politics in Ethiopia. Politics started from one man not from groups. The respect of one man is not personal; it is societal because many collectivists think one man's rights are personal things i.e. full of fallacy. If whatever policy or politics does not have personal value to think, it is a force imposing on society what is not satisfying true democracy. Based on this philosophical assumptions there should be real democratic politics for the respect of human rights. In democratic principles no parliament or anybody can not separate the right to life from the property rights. Sadly, in Ethiopia it is usual, kebele officials, PM members decide openly on property rights which is a violation of the right to life indirectly. The collectivist trends and human rights are completely unrelated variables. Therefore, there are two bodies who violate the citizens in different ways i.e. the government and the criminals (Ayn, 1989).

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

This study explored the role of the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) in promoting and protecting human rights within Ethiopia's evolving media and political environment. The findings show that while EBC, as a state-affiliated media outlet, has wide reach and potential influence, it faces significant constraints due to political control, limited editorial independence, and a lack of consistent professional ethics. Journalists report facing restrictions that prevent them from fully addressing human rights concerns, while students express skepticism toward the credibility and neutrality of public media.

Content analysis reveals that human rights coverage often aligns with state narratives, downplays violations, and rarely engages in critical or investigative reporting. This supports Media Performance Theory, which argues that media under political dominance often fail in their democratic role. Institutional Trust Theory also helps explain the declining public confidence in EBC's ability to promote accountability and empower citizens.

Since the Ethiopian media system established on the ground of ethnicity, It would be impossible to freely exercise the freedom to write, speak and use one's God given potential not only in the field of communication but also in the fields of science and technology to flourish using only one's mind(ibid).

To address these challenges, it is not enough to merely reform laws or enhance institutional capacity. There must also be an ideological transformation—a shift in how state institutions, journalists, and the public view the role of media in society. Media should no longer be seen as a tool for regime reinforcement but as an independent institution that exists to serve the people, question authority, and advocate for human rights.

In conclusion, a sustainable democratic media environment in Ethiopia requires both structural reform and ideological change. Only then can public broadcasters like EBC fulfill their mission to inform, educate, and protect the rights of all citizens.

5.2. Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to improve the role of EBC and similar media institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights in Ethiopia. First, it is essential to strengthen media autonomy by revising existing laws and policies to ensure editorial independence and reduce political interference. Journalists must receive regular training on human rights principles, ethical reporting, and investigative journalism to enhance their professional competence. Moreover, civic and media literacy should be integrated into university curricula to empower young citizens to critically engage with media content and demand accountability.

Independent media oversight bodies should be established to monitor fairness, accuracy, and ethical standards, free from political influence. Public access to reliable information must be enhanced through transparent communication systems and improved legal frameworks, such as freedom of information laws. Additionally, efforts should be made to discourage ethnically biased reporting by promoting inclusive, balanced narratives across all media platforms. Building public trust in media institutions requires transparency, consistency, and responsiveness in news reporting.

Partnerships between media organizations, civil society groups, and human rights institutions should be encouraged to increase the visibility of rights issues and support advocacy efforts. Lastly, empowering local and regional media outlets will help diversify the national discourse and ensure that voices from all communities are represented in the media landscape.

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Figures

Figure 1.Q- How well do you think the government protects human rights?

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Very poorly	9	40.9%
Poorly	8	36.4%
Fairly	5	22.7%
Total	22	100%

Table 8- Government Responsibility on Human Rights

Figure2. Q- How do you rate the civic space in Ethiopia?

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Narrowed	4	18.2
Obstructed	3	13.6
Repressed	6	27.3
Closed	9	40.9
Total	22	100

Table 9- Journalists' Perception of Civic Space in Ethiopia

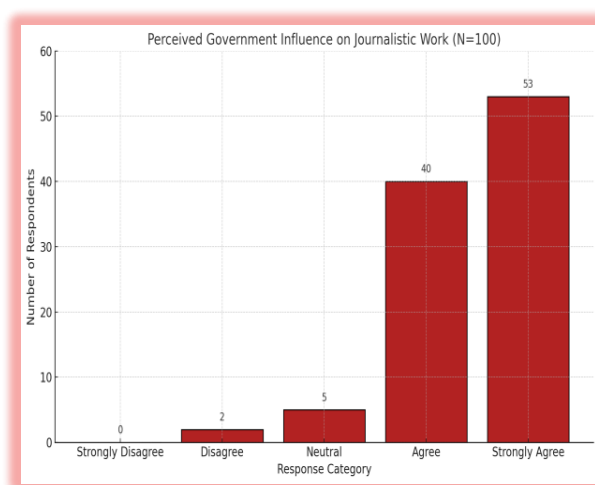


Figure 4- Government influence on journalists

Figure3. Content Table

ID	Date	Program Title	Human Rights Issues	Tone	Actor mentioned	Frame used	Call for action	Source cited	Violation described	Accountability	Visual
1	03/11/2024	TV news	Displacement	Neutral	Government official	Responsibility	No	Government official	Yes	No	yes
2	10/12/2024	Law task	Extrajudicial killings	Critical	Victims family	Human interest	YES	Victim	Yes	Yes	No
3	05/01/2025	Human Rights and Law	Freedom of expression	Supportive	Journalist	Morality	Yes	NGO	No	No	yes
4	18/02/2025	እውነትንፍለጋ (seeking truth)	Sexual violence(Rape)	Denial/ discrediting	Government spokesperson False witnesses	Victim blaming	No	Government media	No	No	Yes
5	22/01/2025	የህዝብጥያቄ (public demand)	Mass killing Wellega	Omission/Minimization	Local officials	Security justification	No	Local officials	yes	No	none
6	5/02/2025	የጠቅላይ ሚኒስትር ትሩግግር(PM speech)	Incitement / hate speech	Aggressive	Prime Minister	Tribalism /blame game	Implied violence	PM speech	Yes	No	Live parliamentary broadcast
7	10/03/2025	Drone attack information	Drone attacks on civilians	Denial	Military officials	National security	No	Defense Ministry	Yes	No	Aerial Imagery/Explosions