

## Coverage of Democratic Issues in the Ethiopian Press

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### Abstract

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*The press is very vital in building democracy and democracy cannot be thought without respecting the rights of citizens. Democratic governments express their loyalty to citizens through allowing freedom of expression and press. The present study aims at finding out the coverage pattern of news regarding the different democratic issues covered in three selected national daily newspapers in Ethiopia in order to demonstrate how the press framed news in the nation's democratic process. This is because the degree and nature of news coverage of the press is believed to indicate how the press functions towards democracy. In the study quantitative content analysis method was employed to analyze data obtained through systematic random sampling. Based on the sampling method proportional sample newspapers were taken from about one year's publication by forming continuous and constructed weeks. A total of 168 (56 each) sample newspapers were included. From the sample newspapers only news items were taken and classified into 12 identified major categories. The news items were analyzed quantitatively using frequencies and percentages by measuring the number of news appeared and the space provided for the categories and sub categories. The finding of the study revealed that Amhara, Oromiya, Tigray and SNNPR, and Addis Ababa City council obtained more coverage than the other regional states and Dire Dawa city council. The result of study also indicated that the private press neglected national news and focused more on international affairs. Moreover, there was also difference in the degree of fairness where the government press was less critical unlike the private one. Generally, it was found out that the coverage pattern of the press was much affected by the ownership style and that, in turn, affected the degree of fairness of the press in providing balanced information towards serving democracy.*

**Key Words:** *democracy, press, newspapers, framing, national, balance, news coverage*

### INTRODUCTION

The press touches the whole gamut of life since it functions in the socio-political, economic and cultural milieu. Mainly, press and politics have been mutually reinforcing and one affects the other. Gripsrud (2008)

mentions that democracy is linked up with the press where the latter is one of the major forces in any political system. Consequently, “media-centered investigations of power that seek to

document the political, economic and cultural means by which media is shaped to further advantage those in power” would portray the overall condition in which the press functions. The press is taken as an icon for democracy and so it becomes the public sphere through its coverage pattern Jeffrey (2005). The coverage pattern of the press particularly newspapers depends on bringing up stories based on ones editorial policy and capacity to set agenda. This is because, according to Theaker, (2004:148) by “selecting the stories which go on the front page or are included in nightly television news programmes, the media determine what people think about.” This may indicate how the press covers up stories based on its own ideological choice. The press is a mediator or becomes, according to Theaker, promoter of democracy. This is enhanced by the press being an arbitrator through its coverage about politicians and citizens where direct communication between them is often difficult. So the mass media is expected to be a bridge between the public and the government through its coverage.

Ocitti (1999) discusses the relationship between press and democracy. The press is the vessel through which citizens are well informed for free participation in democracy where the ultimate political authority is vested in the people. Consequently, citizens should be well informed about all government’s actions and decisions and the press is the means in which citizens are guaranteed to exercise their rights. However, the degree of informing citizens can be determined by the ownership style and responsibility of

the press. This is because ownership can affect how the press outputs are farmed. In relation to this, DeFleur and Denis (1991) view the activity of the press as designed to influence various audiences through the meanings conveyed by professional communicators. Moreover, the press has its psychological effect on users particularly in various social, cultural and political spheres. It is also believed that the press provides an image of the world and explanation of the world, but there is possibility of content bias as it is a mediated communication. Besides, the press frames the meaning in which the overall social and political system operates (Entman 2007). When interpreting an event, journalists also frame or create the schema of interpretation of categories and influence the minds of users.

It is strongly believed that the press and democracy are mutually reinforcing. From this perspective, it is useful to examine how the press functions in Ethiopia. Of course, the role of the press in Ethiopia towards democracy has been much appreciated in the Constitution of Ethiopia (1995) and other subsequent press proclamations. In addition, many scholars duly argue for the vitality of the press in building democracy in Ethiopia (Gudeta, 2008, Birhane 2006, Getachew 2003). However, no research was found on the coverage pattern and how the press has gone in line with those political and academic expectations through its contents towards building democracy. Thus, the present study aimed at addressing how the press has functioned by examining the contents of three daily

newspapers towards serving democracy in Ethiopia.

### Theoretical Framework

The coverage pattern of the press is the function of the framing strategy, which emanates from the editorial policy and the journalists perception of the world and the image created. According to Iorgoveanu and Corbu (2012) our perception of reality and how we represent reality is the byproduct of the framing strategy. How issues are labeled and events presented indicate how meanings are made and become part of our cognitive structure. The framing of an issue may imply the degree of importance given to an issue, which may partly become an issue of agenda setting.

In similar vein, Reese (2001) states the study of news framing of a media helps to understand the role of media in political life. Framing is defined as it is “the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals, and their audiences”. Particularly, framing of news gives the whole picture in which the media works and how different issues are constructed, and meanings are made. Reese mentions

that the way media represent reality or topic can be researched as frame analyses. Frames link the process of news production and the cognitive structure developed by receiver through the contents produced. According to Gorp (2007:61) the framing entails to “the typical manner in which journalists shape news content within a familiar frame of reference and according to some latent structure of meaning”. This indicates that the press or “mass media provides the public with story lines, or frames, for understanding the news”, Brewer and Sigelman (2002:23).

Thus, examining how the news is framed can indicate the coverage pattern in one hand and how they work towards promoting democracy in Ethiopia on the other. Consequently, the study aimed at examining how the contents of the press were framed in line with covering democratic issues.

### METHODS OF THE STUDY

The study employed quantitative content analysis method to analyze the content manifestations of the press in Ethiopia. Generally, the universe of the data was the publications of the three national dailies of the government and the private newspapers

namely *Addis Zemen*, *The Ethiopian Herald* and *The Daily Monitor* of one year’s publications from January 2007 – December 2008. The relevant data were gathered from news stories of these three newspapers. The reason why these

newspapers were chosen is that they were the only national dailies in the nation. Furthermore, it would be difficult to include other government or private newspapers for comparison since most of them are weeklies.

The sampling procedure involved a number of steps. First, the researcher made a pilot study about the thematic categorization and tested their relevance to the contents of the newspapers. Next, the researcher took continuous and constructed weeks' publications from the year 2007/08. Then the researcher took four continuous and constructed weeks all throughout the year in random selection. In other words, from the annual publications of the newspapers, the researcher randomly selected four continuous and four constructed weeks' publications considering time and financial constraints. The year was divided into four sub periods of three months. A continuous and a constructed week were randomly selected from each sub period. The diversification of the samples is believed to create diversity in the sampled editions in the way they become representative of the universe. The systematic variations of the news sample of the publications are quite of great use in sampling because as Lacy, Robinson and Riffie (1995: 336) say "Variations of simple random sampling have been developed to control for systematic variation in daily newspaper content." Step three involved the categorization of the news and editorials that appeared in the publications based on their major thematic category, sub categories (of democratic issues), page wise coverage (front, and

inside), and geographical (local, zonal, regional, national, continental and international) and news balance (favourable, neutral and unfavourable )

The data taken was comprised a total of 56 publications of each newspaper. In each sub period one continuous and one constructed week were chosen. The sample population was about 15.34 % for the three national dailies as it was believed to be representative of the universe, Lacy and Riffe (1995). The one year period was divided into four sub periods, that is, January to March, April to June, July to September and October to December. Moreover, from each sub period continuous weeks were chosen randomly. A continuous week was taken from each sub period which totally makes four weeks publication and form twenty eight newspaper for each newspaper. The same number of newspapers was included for each newspaper. The constructed weeks were formed as they make artificial weeks taking a day from one week and take the second day from the next week (from the coming week), take the third day from the week that follows the second week and so on. In the constructed week on average more than two weeks were taken from each sub period and the samples taken were 28 publications for each newspaper.

As a result, the total issues included in the study for each newspaper became 56 and totally 168 newspapers for the three daily newspapers were taken as samples. Two standardized sheets were set about the news coverage of the three newspapers. The first sheet enlists the thematic category, their

geographical distribution, and frequency along with the news and editorial item. The second sheet includes the democratic issues together with the regional states in the way they got coverage. It also consists columns for the front and inside page coverage in the way to show the contents of the newspapers in the inside and front pages.

Based on the prepared coding sheets the democratic issues that appeared in the newspapers were coded and quantified. The coding process itself marks the measurement

of the contents and it is taken in the same way between coders. The degree of variations about the coders was measured by inter-coder reliability because reliability is the rubber stamp for validity of the research. The validity of the research can be assured by measuring reliability of the coded message or data.

The study, therefore, applied the formula used by Holisti (1969) for the method of finding the reliability of coded messages. The formula is presented as follows.

$$R = \frac{2(\text{total number of agreed decisions between two coders})}{\text{The number of sample newspapers taken by coder one} + \text{coder 2}}$$

The number of sample newspapers taken by coder one + coder 2

This can be easily put as:

$$R = \frac{2(S)}{C1+C2}$$

where S denotes the shared decisions between coders, C1 represents first coder and C2 stands for coder 2.

The news items were considered as items of analysis. The frequency of this genre was counted and put in terms of their appearance in the sample newspapers. The counted items were dealt within their categories. The data classified were interpreted using quantitative method of analysis. The data were put in tabular forms and further interpreted in percentages for analysis. Then the data was analyzed based on the figures indicated in the tables in numbers and percentages.

The variation in the space given to a news item differed based on the importance of the issue as the news room prioritizes. All the news items were measured in centimeter and the news items appear in the front page and which continued in the inside page is taken as it is in the front case. The pictures that appear in the front page were treated in the same way as front page news. Besides, correction factor was used since there are differences among the newspapers in their columns and total space. The space given to the news and editorial items was measured in column centimeters. Then the percentage

of the space availed to the categories and subcategories were calculated in relation to the total space of the newspapers. Thus, first it is relevant to calculate the total space of each of the subject categories and put it in relations to the spaces given to the various categories and comparison was made. The

correction factor for the newspapers was calculated using one column centimeter of body type contains four agate lines with the column of 25ems as 12 ems=1 inch as the way of calculation was seen based on Murthy(1998).

**Table1-** Correction Factor Calculated for the Dailies

Newspapers	Correction Factor
Addis Zemen	0.84
The Ethiopia Herald	0.84
The Daily Monitor	0.68

$$K = \frac{W}{25} \times \frac{L}{4 \times 10}$$

Where

K = correction factor

W= Width of the column in ems

L= Average Number of Lines of body type per 10 centimeters

Normally the extent of coverage, that is, the contents, the news framing strategy of following fairness principle, the agenda of the press, the regional states coverage, and the pattern of democratic issues coverage portray how democracy is practiced in the country.

In order to measure the degree of fairness the formula for measuring the coefficient of imbalance was applied as proposed by Janis and Fadener (1965).

$$C_f = \frac{f^2 - fu}{rt} \quad f > u$$

$$C_u = \frac{fu - u^2}{rt} \quad f < u$$

Where f= favourable units of contents, U=unfavourable, t=number of units of total content and r= total units of relevant content.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The news coverage of the selected three newspapers was categorized into twelve major categories and twelve sub categories under the democratic issues category which is the area of concern. These include ruling party, opposition party, election, good governance, gender equality, human rights, public participation, conflict resolution, sustainable development, freedom of press

and expression, minority and ethnic groups, and others. Moreover, the extent of coverage, that is, the contents, the news framing strategy of following fairness principle and the agenda of the press, the regional states coverage, and the pattern of democratic issues coverage portray how democracy is practiced in the country.

## RESULTS

### Balance of News Coverage

#### Frequency of Coverage

As indicated in the table below (table 2) the democratic issues got the second highest coverage of the favorable news from all the categories in *Addis Zemen*. It got 342 (24.90%) for favorable, neutral 100 (21.01%) and 49 (30.82%) unfavorable frequencies news following the development news which got the highest total coverage

and the highest coverage for favorable and neutral news items, that is, 539(36.66%)and 105 (22.06%). Though the development news was given the highest coverage for positive and neutral news, it got the second highest for the negative news, 8.81%. The least covered news category in all the newspapers is the entertainment category.

S. No	Categories	Addis Zemen						The Ethiopian Herald						The Daily Monitor					
		F		N		U		F		N		U		F		N		U	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	Democratic Issues	342	24.9	100	21.0	49	30.8	231	24.7	26	19.2	9	52.9	33	19.2	18	36.0	15	36.5
2	Development Economy &	539	36.6	105	22.0	14	8.8	401	42.9	52	38.5	1	5.8	42	24.4	14	28.0	7	17.0
3	Finance	94	8.3	52	10.9	21	13.2	86	9.2	25	18.5	0	0.0	19	11.0	1	2.0	2	4.8
4	Social Welfare Culture &	58	3.6	22	4.6	3	1.9	40	4.2	7	5.1	1	5.8	4	2.3	3	6.0	1	2.4
5	Heritage National	36	2.8	13	2.7	10	6.2	21	2.2	4	2.9	1	5.8	15	8.7	1	2.0	0	0.0
6	integration Science &	38	2.1	4	0.8	12	7.5	23	2.4	1	0.7	1	5.8	8	4.6	5	10.0	7	17.0
7	Technology International	19	4.1	3	9.03	0	6.9	14	1.5	3	2.2	0	0.0	3	1.7	1	2.0	0	0.0
8	Affairs	54	12.4	19	16.1	1	12.5	98	10.5	14	10.3	0	0.0	32	18.6	3	6.0	1	2.4
9	Human Interest	6	1.2	0	5.4	0	5.0	7	0.75	2	1.4	4	23.5	5	2.9	0	0.0	2	4.8
10	Entertainment	40	0.7	2	0.4	2	1.2	1	0.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
11	Sport	45	2.7	32	6.7	7	4.4	9	0.96	0	0.0	0	0.0	10	5.8	3	6.0	6	14.6
12	Others	11	0.1	0	0.0	2	1.2	2	0.2	1	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	2.0	0	0.0
	Total	1282	100	352	10	121	100	933	100.	135	100	17	100.0	172	100	50	100	41	100

**Table 2-** Nationwide Frequency of News Coverage in the Dailies



*The Ethiopian Herald* covered the highest frequency for development and then to democratic news for favorable (F) and neutral (N) news stories. The development news obtained 42.98% (401) for favorable, 38.52% (52) for neutral where democratic issues secured 24.76% (231) and 19.26% (26) respectively. As in table 2, *The Daily Monitor* the highest coverage of the national interest was given to the democratic issues, but the highest of the favourable news was given for development news followed by democratic issues and international affairs. The democratic issues gained the highest neutral and unfavourable (U) stories. The newspaper covered 172 for favourable, 50 for neutral and 41 for unfavorable frequencies of news.

### Space Wise Coverage

Unlike the frequency of the news, the space coverage of the newspapers is presented in summarized way as indicated in the tables that follow. The overall news coverage of all the categories in *Addis Zemen* depicts that it devoted the highest space. It totally

provided 574677.3 column centimeters and 482729 being measured with agate lines as in table 3. *Addis Zemen* has 0.84 correction factor and with that the total space allotted to it is multiplied. Besides, the second, *The Ethiopian Herald* got space coverage of 332,497.1 whereas *The Daily Monitor* got 263,973.5 square centimeters.

*Addis Zemen* devoted 33.26% for democratic issues, 21.27% for development 21.27% and sport 8.90% and 8.65% for economy and finance. The least covered news categories are national integration with 2.23%, entertainment 1.68% and others 0.35%. *The Ethiopian Herald* provided space for democratic issues that accounts 25.01%, development 25.00%, international affairs 13.10% and economy and finance 9.26%. The least covered news categories in terms of the space of coverage are culture and heritage, 1.58% and entertainment, 1.05%. Still, *The Daily Monitor*, on the other hand, provided lesser space compared to *Addis Zemen*. The democratic issues from all the categories were given the highest coverage with 42.48%. The second top most covered category was development.

**Table 3-** Space wise News coverage of the Dailies

S. No.	Categories	Addis Zemen			The Ethiopian Herald			The Daily Monitor		
		Space/cm	Standardized	%	Space	Standardized	%	Space	Standardized	%
1	Democratic issues	227538.3	191132.1	33.26	99012.59	83170.58	25.01	164900	112132	42.48
2	Development	145523.8	122240	21.27	98970.25	83135.01	25.00	17011.5	11567.82	4.38
3	Economy and Finance	59155	49690.2	8.65	36647.68	30784.05	9.26	9888.25	6724.01	2.55
4	Social Welfare	32381.5	27200.46	4.73	16984.5	14266.98	4.29	1920	1305.6	0.49
5	Culture and Heritage	18842	15827.28	2.75	6250.75	5250.63	1.58	4769	3242.92	1.23
6	National Integration	15228.5	12791.94	2.23	12158.5	10213.14	3.07	4780.25	3250.57	1.23
7	Science and technology	16629	13968.36	2.43	29545.5	24818.22	7.46	10411.25	7079.65	2.68
8	International affairs	42020.5	35297.22	6.14	51862.33	43564.36	13.10	64737.25	44021.33	16.68
9	Entertainment	11469.75	9634.59	1.68	4170.25	3503.01	1.05	11268.25	7662.41	2.90
10	Human Interest									
10	Story	52108.68	43771.29	7.62	10619	8919.96	2.68	12334.5	8387.46	3.18
11	Sport	60860.5	51122.82	8.90	29258.75	24577.35	7.39	85996	58477.28	22.15
12	Others	2382.25	2001.09	0.35	349.75	293.79	0.09	180	122.4	0.05
<b>Total</b>		<b>574677.3</b>	<b>482729</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>332497.1</b>	<b>279297.5</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>263973.5</b>	<b>221737</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*The Ethiopian Herald* gave the highest coverage to democratic issues where it gained 34685.5 cms that accounts 53.40% from the total space allotted to all editorial coverage. Development story got 13.52% and national integration category got 12.53%. Still, culture and heritage gained 7.10%. The economy and finance category secured only 5.42% and the social welfare category got 4.28%, the international affairs 2.69%. However, the rest of the categories got less than one percent as they got insignificant space coverage. *The Daily Monitor* provided 32263.62 centimeters space coverage to all the categories where it

gave only 5.77% of the total coverage for democratic issues. This, however, brings the democratic issues into third largest coverage in *The Daily Monitor* because much of the coverage goes to the international relations category which alone secured 72.27%. In other words, the highest coverage of the editorial stories was given to international relations category. The second highest coverage next to international relations is national integration, which also gained small percentage, 7.99%. The development category got 3.83%, science and technology 2.65%, and social welfare and sport categories gained 2.24% each.

### Geopolitical Coverage of News

Ethiopia is a federal state which is comprised of nine regional states and two autonomous city councils. Based on this, how the coverage pattern went along with the federal structure was analyzed. So table 4 presented about region wise coverage of news in the newspapers. The region wise coverage of the three selected newspapers in the present study was worked out by examining the news coverage of the twelve categories. News items of national or central level significance were also categorized separately. Such news types did not belong to any of the regions or autonomous cities. Therefore, it would be wise to treat such news separately as national news where they are equally important to each of the states and autonomous cities. In regional level, news items that had the concern of each separate region or autonomous cities were treated

separately from news of national importance.

With regard to region wise coverage of the administrative regions the central government obtained the highest coverage of 592 news from total of 1755 news items in *Addis Zemen* where the favourable news makes 33.8% from the total 1501 favorable news. The newspapers altogether provided 2169. *The Ethiopian Herald* provided 487(52.2%) of news items to central government from 933 favorable news items and 556 news from the total 1085 favorable news items out of the total 1713 news. *The Daily Monitor* provided 200 news of national importance from the total of 2689 news. The most covered regions include Amhara, Oromiya, SNNPR, Tigray and Addis Ababa city council with 277, 246, 125,91 and 91 in *Addis Zemen*

whereas 122, 111, 59, 58 and 34 for Amhara, Oromiya, Tigray, Addis Ababa city council and SNNPR respectively in *The Ethiopian Herald*, respectively as in table 4. However, *The Daily Monitor* provided, in fact, limited coverage to news of nationwide importance and Addis Ababa where the rest of the regions were provided minimal or no coverage at all. Among the regions Harare, Afar, Gambelle and Benshangul Gumuez got little or no coverage in the national dailies as in table 4.

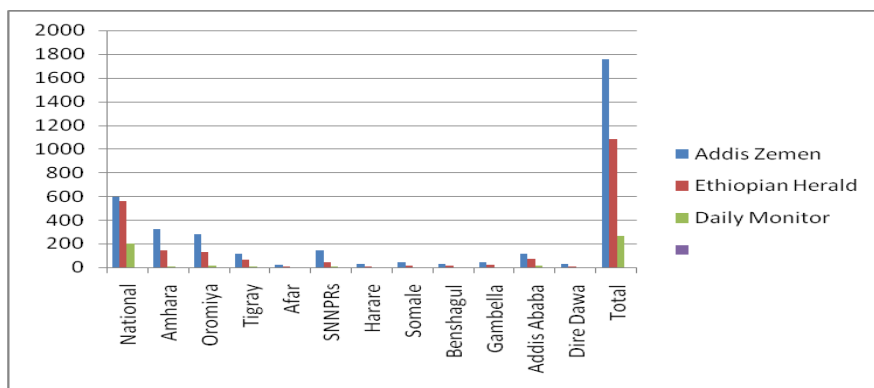
**Table 4-** Geopolitical coverage of the Dailies

S. No.	Regional Representation	Addis Zemen				The Ethiopian Herald				The Daily Monitor									
		F Freq.	N %	U Freq.	U %	F Freq.	N %	U Freq.	U %	F Freq.	N %	U Freq.	U %						
		71.																	
1	National	507	33.8	56	39.7	29	25.6	487	52.2	62	45.9	7	41.1	115	9	48	81.3	37	84.1
2	Amhara	277	18.4	16	11.3	26	23.0	122	13.0	22	16.3	0	0.0	7	4.4	2	3.4	1	2.2
3	Oromiya	246	16.4	14	9.9	21	18.6	111	11.9	14	1.3	2	11.7	10	6.2	2	3.4	0	0.0
4	Tigray	91	6.0	11	7.8	11	9.7	59	6.3	6	4.4	1	5.9	4	2.5	1	1.7	0	0.0
5	Afar	20	1.3	3	2.1	1	0.9	7	0.7	0	0.0	1	5.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
6	SNNPRs	125	8.3	13	9.2	6	5.3	34	3.6	9	6.6	0	0.0	8	5.0	0	0.0	2	4.5
7	Harare	27	1.8	3	2.1	1	0.9	7	0.7	2	1.5	0	0.0	2	1.2	1	1.7	0	0.0
8	Somale	33	2.2	5	3.5	2	1.7	14	1.5	2	1.5	1	5.9	3	1.9	0	0.0	0	0.0
9	Benshagul	22	1.4	5	3.5	1	0.9	11	1.1	1	0.7	2	11.7	2	1.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
10	Gambella	35	2.3	5	3.5	1	0.9	15	1.6	4	2.9	1	5.9	0	0.0	1	1.7	0	0.0
11	Addis Ababa	91	6.0	10	7.0	13	11.5	58	6.2	12	8.9	2	11.7	7	4.3	2	3.4	4	9.0
12	Dire Dawa	27	1.8	0	0.0	1	0.9	8	0.8	1	0.7	0	0.0	2	1.2	2	3.4	0	0.0
	Total	1501	100.	141	100	113	100.	933	100	135	100	17	100	160	100	59	100	44	100

Of the democratic issues category news of national importance got the highest coverage with 592 frequencies in comparison with each of the states and city councils in *Addis Zemen*. At regional level, or news that have the concern of each separate region is treated separately from news of national importance. The highest covered regions are Amhara, Oromiya and SNNPRs in *Addis Zemen* whereas Amhara, Oromiya and Tigray are highest covered regions in *The Ethiopian Herald*. However, *The Daily Monitor* mostly covered nationwide coverage, and provided little

attention to regional issues except that it provided relatively better coverage to Addis Ababa City council.

Addis Zemen provided the highest news items of national importance from the three newspapers as it is observed from the graph below. Besides, news of nationwide coverage obtained more coverage compared to news covered about any of the regional governments. The least covered regional governments are Afar, Harare, Somale, Benshangul and Gambella. One of the two city councils, Dire Dawa also obtained very less coverage.



**Graph 1-** Geopolitical Distribution of News

Although all the three newspapers provided different coverage for the democratic issues, the category obtained due emphasis in all the three. In fact there is a wide range of variation from the highest covered sub category, that is, good governance to the least covered opposition party sub category. In *Addis Zemen* good governance got 225, which is the highest. Good governance sub category gained 37.98%, 53.49% and 75.76% from the total for favorable, neutral and unfavorable news respectively. In table

4 the degree of coverage in terms of the frequencies of news provided to the different democratic issues or sub categories is demonstrated. The good governance sub category was given 78.67% for favorable, 10.22% for neutral news and 11.11% for unfavorable news. In addition, sustainable development news sub category was the second most covered democratic issue and it got 93.10% for favorable news out of 87 frequencies given to the sub category. Moreover, it provided 2.30% for neutral and

4.60% for unfavorable news stories. The third highly covered news story was the ruling party and it got 63 frequencies of news and the favorable news accounts to 100.00%. The least covered democratic sub category, that is, opposition party was given the total frequency of only 6 news stories in the sampled newspapers of *Addis Zemen* and 5 of the 6 news was covered under neutral news.

Moreover, the next most important in the newspaper from the democratic issues was women participation sub category and it got 43 frequencies of news where the favorable news got 90.70%, neutral stories account for 6.98% and unfavorable news. The sixth important issues out of the eleven democratic issues is the election news and got 32 frequencies and the favorable news was given 84.38%, whereas the neutral and unfavorable news account only 15.63% and 0.00%, respectively. The citizen participation issue was also given 30 frequencies and the favorable news Election is the third largely covered democratic issues and it got 8.66% for favorable, 16.00% for favorable and 16.67% for unfavorable news. The least covered democratic issues are conflict resolution 0.43%, opposition party 0.87% and 1.73% for minority and ethnic group in covering favorable news. Generally, the three most highly covered democratic issues in the government English daily are good governance with 92 frequencies, sustainable development with 60 frequencies and election, 26 frequencies. However, the least covered democratic issues of countrywide coverage include

accounts for 100%. The human rights were given 22 frequencies and favorable news only was given the total percentage, that is, 100.00%. The conflict resolution issue also got 12 frequencies and it makes 100.00%.

Like in *Addis Zemen*, the major democratic issue in *The Ethiopian Herald* (government English daily) is good governance (table 5). *The Ethiopian Herald* devoted 268 frequencies of news for democratic issues of nationwide importance. The favorable news alone got 231 frequencies, which is the highest and many times larger than the frequencies for neutral and unfavorable where the latter two got 25 and 12. The good governance gained 73 frequencies (31.60%) for favorable news, 14 frequencies (56.00%) for neutral and 5 frequencies (41.67%) for unfavorable news. The second largest coverage was given to sustainable development, 24.68% for favorable, 8.00% for neutral and 8.33% for unfavorable news.

conflict resolution and opposition party categories.

*The Daily Monitor* (private daily) provided a scanty coverage where it covered only 66 frequencies. Out of the total frequencies good governance got the highest coverage, that is, 66.67% with 34 frequencies, sustainable development 27.27% and gender issues 6.06%. Out of the total coverage the favorable news got 33 frequencies, whereas the neutral and unfavorable news together got the rest 33 where the former got 18 and the latter got 15 frequencies.

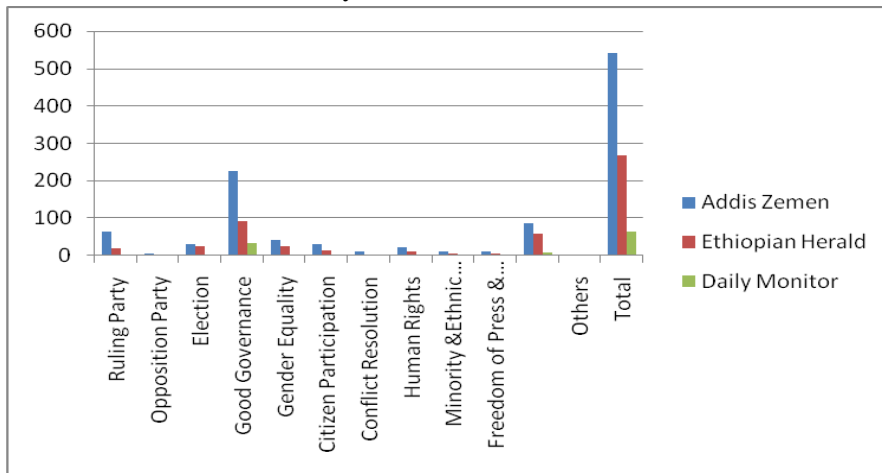
**Table 5.** Democratic Issues Frequency of News coverage

	Addis			Zemen			The Ethiopian Herald			The Daily Monitor		
	F	Ne	U	F	Ne	U	F	Ne	U	F	Ne	U
1 Ruling Party	63	-	-	20	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
2 Opposition Party	1	5	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
3 Election	27	5	-	20	4	2	-	2	-	2	-	3
4 Good Governance	177	23	25	73	14	5	22	11	1	-	-	-
5 Gender Equality	39	3	1	23	0	2	2	-	2	-	-	2
6 Citizen Participation	30	-	-	15	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	-
7 Conflict Resolution	12	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-
8 Human Rights	17	3	2	10	1	1	-	2	-	2	-	1
Minority & Ethnic												
9 Groups	9	2	1	4	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Freedom of Press &												
10 Expression	10	-	-	6	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	4
Sustainable												
11 Development	81	2	4	57	2	1	9	-	1	-	-	1
12 Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
N=	466	43	33	231	25	12	33	18	15	-	-	-



The coverage pattern of the democratic issues, in graph 2, indicated that good governance was the major democratic issue in the government dailies. *Addis Zemen* provided the highest coverage to democratic issues from any of them. The least covered issues were about opposition party, conflict resolution, minority and

ethnic relations and freedom of press as in the following graph. *The Daily Monitor* provided the least coverage of democratic issues because it rarely covered about national matters for its focus on international affairs, entertainment and sports.



**Graph 2-** Democratic issues coverage

In regard to space wise coverage, country wide news was covered 117,775.1 centimeters in *Addis Zemen*, 52689.78 centimeters in *The Ethiopian Herald* and 5527.55 square centimeters in *The Daily Monitor*. Among the democratic issues, good governance was the most highly covered issue where it got 44.06% in *Addis Zemen*, 31.86% in *The Ethiopian Herald* and 33.60% in *The Daily Monitor*. The least covered democratic issue is the opposition party sub category and it accounts only 0.66%. The other highly covered democratic issue that follows good governance is sustainable development. It got the second space coverage in *Addis Zemen* with 16.61% and, which is also the second largest in *The Ethiopian Herald*

with 24.86%, but it became the fourth largest covered in *The Daily Monitor* with 11.56%. Moreover, the ruling party is the third highly covered democratic issue as it got 11.68% in *Addis Zemen*, but it became the sixth largest covered news story in *The Ethiopian Herald* with 6.42%, but the second least covered in *The Daily Monitor* with 0.62% next to minority and ethnic group, which was given no space. The most highly covered democratic issues in *The Ethiopian Herald* newspaper were Good Governance, sustainable development and election where they got 31.86%, 24.86% and 10.77% space coverage respectively.

S. N o.	Categories	Addis Zemen			The Ethiopian Herald			The Daily Monitor		
		Space	Standardized	%	Space	Standardized	%	Space	Standardized	%
1	Ruling Party	16370.75	13751.43	11.68	4025.5	3381.42	6.42	50	34	0.62
2	Opposition Party	924.75	776.79	0.66	213	178.92	0.34	1082.5	736.1	13.32
3	Election	5555.75	4666.83	3.96	6752.75	5672.31	10.77	1197.5	814.3	14.73
4	Good Governance	61770.5	51887.22	44.06	19985.43	16787.76	31.86	2731.25	1857.25	33.60
5	Gender Equality	10403.75	8739.15	7.42	5566	4675.44	8.87	502.5	341.7	6.18
6	Citizen Participation	8355.5	7018.62	5.96	5349.75	4493.79	8.53	245	166.6	3.01
7	Conflict Resolution	2408.25	2022.93	1.72	0	0	0.00	282.5	192.1	3.48
8	Human Rights	5991.5	5032.86	4.27	2677	2248.68	4.27	715	486.2	8.80
9	Minority and ethnic group	2836.25	2382.45	2.02	1710.25	1436.61	2.73	0	0	0.00
10	Freedom of press and expression	2302	1933.68	1.64	855.25	718.41	1.36	940	639.2	11.56
11	Sustainable Development	23289.5	19563.18	16.61	15591	13096.44	24.86	382.5	260.1	4.71
12	Others	0	0	0.00	0	0	0.00	0	0	0.00
	Total	117775.1	117775.1	100.00	52689.78	52689.78	100.00	5527.55	5527.55	100.00

**Table 6-** Democratic Issues Space wise News coverage

Gender equality was the other democratic issue, which got better coverage compared to the rest of the democratic issues with 8.87% followed by citizen participation that gained 8.53% space. The least covered democratic issues in regard to the space they were allotted by the respective newspaper were conflict resolution that gained no space allotted to it, opposition party 0.34% and freedom of press and expression 1.36%. Specifically to *The Daily Monitor* the space wise coverage of the democratic issues portrays that good governance like the rest two newspapers got the highest coverage. It got 33.60% out of the space provided to the democratic issues that were covered at local, zonal, regional and national levels. The second largest coverage goes to election that secured 14.73% and followed by opposition party, which accounts to

13.32%. The least covered democratic issues in *The Daily Monitor* were minority and ethnic group with no space allotted to the subcategory followed by the incumbent party that secured only 0.62%. The news space provided to human rights accounts to 8.80%, which is the fourth largest space coverage. Besides, gender Issues got 6.18% and it became the sixth largest covered. The space allocated to sustainable development only makes 4.71%, it is the seventh largest covered democratic issue.

Normally the extent of coverage, that is, the contents, the news framing strategy of following fairness principle is important to indicate the direction of news coverage. The degree of fairness in news coverage was calculated using coefficient of imbalance by Janis and Fadener cited in Murthy (1998).

	<u>Direction of Coverage</u>				<u>Coefficient of Imbalance</u>
	N	F	Ne	UF	
Addis Zemen	2169	1556	426	187	0.56
The Ethiopian Herald	1713	1046	500	167	0.44
The Daily Monitor	2689	716	979	994	-0.43

N =News Items, F=Favourable, Ne=Neutal, U=Unfavourable;

*Table 7. Degree of Fairness in news coverage*

It was found that *The Daily Monitor* covered more unfavourable news. However, the government dailies covered more favourable news. As a result, there is “north -south dichotomy” between the government and the private press. The coefficient of imbalance demonstrated the news coverage pattern of the government

dailies was mostly positive with 0.56 and 0.44 for *Addis Zemen* and *The Ethiopian Herald* respectively. However, *The Daily Monitor* had negative coefficient of imbalance. It is believed that the press forms one of the major player in a society and it can meet the expectations by presenting accurate, timely and fair and

exact news. In other words, the press should present fair and balanced news in order to feed the society with accurate and exact news which become the base for appropriate political, social and legal

actions. This is not an exception to the Ethiopian press to exercise its right towards addressing social evils by disclosing ill deeds and urging for legal measures.

## DISCUSSION

The framing strategy of the news items in the press usually emanate from the ownership style or editorial policy of the newspapers. Besides, the representation of reality emanates from journalists perception of reality and the already created image, Iorgoveanu and Corbu (2012). It was found out that democratic issues were the most covered news items among the identified categories in the study because they were framed as the major issue of the nation. Generally, among the democratic issues good governance issues were framed as most important ones compared to the rest of the sub categories as demonstrated in graph 2 and table 6 by three of the newspapers. This implies that the press has dealt more on good governance issues, which is the key aspect of a democratic system.

It has been noted that the issue of democracy and the use of press as a mean of promoting democracy is underlined in the Constitution of Ethiopia. Consequently, the government press also tended to follow this path of the government. However, the government press covered more favourable news about democratic issues compared to the private press, which seemed also to take a separate path in the news coverage. This implied that the government press framed the news items

in such a way that it favours the efforts of the government whereas the private press seemed to relatively cover unfavourable news about the democratic issues, this can emanate from framing bias coming from the type of the press as Entman (2007). This was revealed in the coefficient of imbalance calculated where the principle of fairness is not much upheld. The journalists of the private press seemed to cover more unfavourable news about democratic issues, perhaps, in relation to the editorial policy of the press on one hand and their perception of reality on the other because the coverage pattern is affected by the ownership style and journalists attitudes.

Finally, there were variations among the newspapers in their coverage of news items of nationwide importance where *Addis Zemen* framed the news items which have national importance. *The Ethiopian Herald* covered on national matters, but emphasis was also given to international affairs as an English medium. On the other hand, *The Daily Monitor* provided meager coverage to the democratic issues as it provided very limited news of nationwide importance. These coverage patterns were followed as indicated above by the framing strategy employed by the press based on the influence of ownership style and journalists

framing of different issues (Theaker, 2004). The tendency to neglect national news and more coverage of international affairs and entertainment by the private press may

indicate the less contribution of the press playing towards the democratic development of the nation.

### CONCLUSION

Democratic issues were framed as one of the top most agenda of the three national daily newspapers. In fact, it was found out that the coverage pattern of the press was highly governed by the ownership style of the press in the country. This is seen from the very fact that government newspapers demonstrated more news slant to the government than the private newspaper whereas the private newspaper was more critical to government activities. Besides, the private newspaper covered rarely about political matters and it gave more coverage for international matters. No matter how the government and the private press differ in their focus and being critical, they provided due emphasis for democratic issues particularly to good governance. The dailies took democracy at the top of their agenda when they framed their news, but the government newspapers covered mostly favourable news whereas the private newspaper mostly covered unfavorable news

of nationwide matters. It was also found out that the unbalanced and less critical approach in the nature of news coverage of the government press, disregard of the private press for domestic issues coverage in favour of foreign news, and very less or unbalanced coverage among the regional governments as national dailies except Amahara, Oromiya, Tigray and SNNPR and Addis Ababa City Council, which of course obtained better coverage, could hamper the role the press towards playing its active role in the democratic process of Ethiopia. In turn, the less functioning of the newspapers in terms of following proximity principle along with unbalanced coverage of news might indicate the social and political lacunae that possibly prevail in the democratization of the country. Hence, from the limitations vividly portrayed it can be possible to say that the press in Ethiopia should be highly improved towards democratizing the country.

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