

# Explaining Divergent Political Transitions in the Horn of Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Ethiopia and Sudan

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**Abstract:** Political regime transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) exhibit a pronounced bifurcation between peaceful transformation and violent upheaval, yet conditions and causal mechanisms for stable, nonviolent change remain scant, partly due to pervasive treatment of structural and agency factors in isolation. This study advances an integrative, qualitative comparative framework that elucidates how individual political agency and structural dynamics interact to produce divergent outcomes, using Ethiopia and Sudan as focal cases. It synthesizes leadership trajectories, coalition architecture, and socio-political ecologies to trace how leadership turnover, party organization, and state–society relations converge to foster stability or provoke volatility. Ethiopia’s episodic leadership changes within a relatively cohesive ruling coalition, reinforced by a reformist orientation and functional parliamentary mechanisms, facilitated continuity and negotiated reform, while Sudan’s extended tenure, succession ambiguity, and shift toward centralized rule undermined legitimacy, intensifying civil–military contestation amid economic distress. By foregrounding mechanisms through which individual traits (ambition, inclusivity, legitimacy-building capacity) interact with institutional configurations (coalition coherence, reform and ideological reorientation, power-sharing norms) and broader context (economic pressures, diaspora mobilization, international scrutiny), the analysis demonstrates that peaceful transitions emerge from nested interactions across levels rather than any single dimension. The study concludes with policy implications for integrated strategies that bolster inclusive governance, institutional resilience, and adaptive leadership in SSA, advocating holistic reform over siloed interventions.

**Keywords:** Political Regime Transition, Comparative Case Study, Agency, Structure, Ethiopia, Sudan

## Introduction

Political regime transitions represent critical junctures in a country’s history, shaping governance trajectories, stability, and democratization processes. Ethiopia and Sudan—neighbouring countries in the Horn of Africa—have recently undergone significant political transitions but with markedly different outcomes. Despite enduring similar levels of challenges such as legacies of authoritarianism, ethnic and regional diversity, and socio-political unrest, Ethiopia’s 2018 transition was largely peaceful and driven by elite-led reforms, whereas Sudan’s transition from 2019 was characterized by violent confrontations and military coups. Understanding why Ethiopia’s transition was comparatively nonviolent, while Sudan’s was marred by violence, is essential for analysing the determinants of peaceful democratic transitions and conflict resolution in fragile states.

Existing scholarship on regime transition in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has extensively documented structural, institutional, and agency-related factors influencing political transitions. However, much of this research tends to isolate these determinants rather than examine their complex interplay. Moreover, there is a notable scarcity of comparative, cross-national studies that integrate these dimensions to provide broader explanatory frameworks. Most analyses focus on single-country case studies, limiting the generalizability of findings across SSA (Cheeseman, 2015). Likewise, theoretical propositions explaining regime transformations in SSA have faced competing interpretations and limited empirical testing, particularly through quantitative methods. This research addresses these gaps by

systematically analysing the political, economic, and institutional variables shaping peaceful versus violent transitions, using Ethiopia and Sudan as contrasting cases.

This study posits that nonviolent political transitions in SSA are most likely when institutional safeguards exist, leadership is reform-oriented, and socio-economic challenges are addressed through inclusive negotiations rather than repression. While structural pressures such as economic instability and institutional weakness create demands for change, the presence of strong institutional frameworks and ideologically moderate leadership decisively influences whether transitions remain peaceful or become violent. Challenging the assumption that economic crises or international pressure alone precipitate political change, this research demonstrates that outcomes largely depend on how political institutions and actors respond to public discontent. Where institutional mechanisms enable political adaptation and negotiation, unrest is channelled constructively; in their absence, leadership agency becomes pivotal. Reformist leadership with clear vision promotes peaceful transitions, while authoritarian or fragmented leadership increases the likelihood of violent outcomes. Ultimately, the variation in transition outcomes and the success of nonviolent processes in SSA can be understood as a function of interrelated structural and behavioural factors.

Motivated by intellectual inquiry and a commitment to advancing democracy and governance in Africa, this research responds to the growing complexity and unpredictability of regime transitions in SSA. Recent peaceful power handovers in Ethiopia (2018), Zimbabwe (2017), and Zambia (2021) contrast sharply with violent coups in Sudan (2019), Mali (2020, 2021), and Burkina Faso (2022), underscoring the need for systematic, cross-national analyses that integrate structural, institutional, and agency factors. Theoretically, there remains a pressing demand for more sophisticated frameworks capturing the dynamics between structural forces and actor agency in political transitions. Empirically, there is a gap in comprehensive quantitative studies and in-depth comparative case research on the emergence of nonviolent successes versus violent failures in SSA's political transformations. Addressing these deficiencies, this study employs a qualitative comparative methodology to investigate the divergent cases of Ethiopia and Sudan, aiming to provide actionable insights for scholars, policymakers, regional organizations, and civil society actors engaged in fostering stable and democratic transitions across Africa.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a comparative case study design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively analyze political transitions in Ethiopia and Sudan. The comparative case study method focuses on understanding how institutional conditions, leadership agency, and socio-political dynamics interact in both countries to produce divergent transition outcomes. Ethiopia represents a peaceful, elite-driven transition, whereas Sudan exemplifies a violent transition marked by military coups and instability. This approach allows for identification of causal mechanisms and insights that statistical methods alone cannot capture (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Ethiopia and Sudan were selected based on their geographical proximity in the Horn of Africa, shared socio-political challenges, and contrasting recent regime transitions. Both countries share a long border and intertwined histories but differ sharply in governance structures, ethnic dynamics, and transition experiences, making them ideal for comparative analysis.

The selection was also informed by the availability of reliable longitudinal data on leadership transitions, socio-economic indicators, and institutional variables, ensuring rigorous empirical analysis and contextual understanding. Quantitative data are drawn from established datasets including the African Leadership Change (ALC) Dataset (Carbone & Pellegata, 2020) for leadership transitions, the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators for economic and institutional factors, and the Polity V Project for democracy measures. These sources provide detailed, comparable information on leadership tenure,

transition types, institutional design, economic performance, and political stability. Qualitative data for Ethiopia and Sudan encompass historical records, political developments, and recent transition events, analyzed through primary and secondary sources to capture leadership decisions, institutional reforms, and conflicts that shaped each country's trajectory.

## Results and Discussion

### *Overview of Ethiopia and Sudan's Political Transitions*

Sudan and Ethiopia are closely linked through social ties, geographic proximity, shared resources like the Nile rivers, and similar socioeconomic challenges such as poverty and underdevelopment. Their intertwined histories—including refugee flows and humanitarian crises in the 1970s and 1980s—create a rich basis for comparative political analysis. Politically, both countries experienced turmoil from the 1970s to 1990s, marked by military coups, civil wars, and authoritarian regimes. Ethiopia's monarchy under Emperor Haile Selassie (1930–1974), grounded in a divine-right ideology, suppressed dissent despite his pan-Africanist stance (Mandela, 1995). The 1974 military coup led to the Derg regime (1974–1991), whose Marxist-Leninist authoritarian rule brought widespread violence, including the Red Terror campaign causing approximately 1.5 million deaths (Tessema, 2018). Economic decline and famine further destabilized Ethiopia until the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) overthrew the Derg in 1991.

Sudan's political instability stems from its colonial legacy under the British-Egyptian Condominium and deep north-south ethnic-religious divisions. Following independence, cycles of military and civilian rule ensued. General Ibrahim Abboud's 1958 coup inaugurated authoritarianism marked by civil wars. President Nimeiry's 1969 coup and Islamization policies worsened tensions, leading to his removal in 1985. Omar al-Bashir seized power in a 1989 coup, enforcing authoritarian rule amid civil conflicts and human rights abuses, notably in Darfur. Whereas, Ethiopia's EPRDF, led by Meles Zenawi, implemented a federal system aimed at ethnic management and achieved economic growth but maintained authoritarian tendencies, prompting protests that led to Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn's 2018 resignation and Abiy Ahmed's reformist, peaceful transition (Keller, 2018; Bach, 2016). Conversely, Sudan's 2005 peace agreement granted autonomy to the south, but the 2011 secession of South Sudan worsened economic crises. Al-Bashir's 2019 ouster by the military gave way to a fragile civilian-military transitional government, destabilized by a 2021 coup and ongoing unrest. A 2023 agreement to resume civilian-led governance faces persistent challenges.

Sudan's transition remains fragile, with enduring authoritarian legacies, economic woes, and power struggles undermining democratization hopes. Its future depends on inclusive dialogue and cooperation among all stakeholders to overcome deep grievances and build stability.

Table 1. Summary of historical political transition and its mode (1961-2021)

Year	Incoming leader	Transition mode
<b>Sudan</b>		
1969	Gaafar Nimeiry	Incumbent resigns
1985	Abdel Rahman Suwar al-Dahab	Coup
1986	Sadiq al-Mahdi	Electoral
1989	Omar Al-Bashir	Coup
2019	Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf/Abdel Fattah Burhan	Coup
<b>Ethiopia</b>		
Pre-1974	Haile Selassie I	Authoritarian Monarchy
1974	Aman Andom/Mengistu Haile Mariam/Tafari Benti	Coup
1991	Meles Zenawi	violent, guerilla takeover
2012	Hailemariam Desalegn	Natural death
2018	Abiy Ahmed	Peaceful, incumbent resigns

Table 1 highlights the contrasting political transition histories of Sudan and Ethiopia. Sudan has witnessed frequent leadership changes driven predominantly by military coups in 1969, 1989, and 2019, the latter following widespread popular protests that ousted Omar al-Bashir. Ethiopia's political landscape, while tumultuous—including the 1974 overthrow of Haile Selassie and the violent EPRDF takeover in 1991—also reflects periods of relative stability, such as the transition after Meles Zenawi's death in 2012 and the peaceful ascension of Abiy Ahmed in 2018 following Hailemariam Desalegn's resignation. Sudan's transitions are thus largely characterized by military intervention and instability, contrasted with Ethiopia's mix of upheaval and stability. Both countries share historical patterns of authoritarianism, civil conflict, and pronounced ethnic and regional divisions. Sudan's prolonged north-south divide parallels Ethiopia's ethnic fractionalization, fuelling civil wars and humanitarian crises. Authoritarian military leaders—Omar al-Bashir in Sudan and Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia—maintained control through repression. Recent transitions, however, diverge sharply: Ethiopia's 2018 elite-driven, relatively peaceful reform under Abiy Ahmed contrasts with Sudan's 2019 revolution, marked by mass protests and enduring instability.

Barrington Moore (1966) theorizes that political revolutions emerge when regimes fail to protect majority rights amid escalating inequality, manifesting either as “revolutions from above” (elite-driven reforms) or “revolutions from below” (mass uprisings). Applying this lens clarifies the divergent outcomes in Ethiopia and Sudan. Ethiopia's 2018 transition exemplifies a “revolution from above,” whereby internal elite negotiations and reformist agendas within the ruling coalition drove peaceful change. Conversely, Sudan's 2019 transition constitutes a “revolution from below,” propelled by grassroots mobilization and widespread protests that toppled authoritarian rule. This comparative analysis illustrates how the interplay of elite behaviours, social mobilization, and institutional factors shaped distinct political trajectories. Moore's framework thus offers a valuable tool for understanding regime change in sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing the differing paths toward democratization shaped by who drives the transformation—the elite or the masses.

### ***Ethiopia: Prior and during the transition***

Ethiopia's 2018 political transition emerged from a complex interplay of longstanding grievances and shifting national and regional dynamics. Historically, Ethiopia evolved from the “divine rule” monarchy under Emperor Haile Selassie, through the radical centralization of the socialist-communist Derg regime, to the EPRDF's ethnically based federal system grounded in revolutionary Marxism-Leninism and a developmental state ideology. Since 1991, the EPRDF maintained tight control, but growing ethnic marginalization—especially of the Oromo and Amhara peoples, who constitute over 60% of the population—and political repression fuelled widespread protests beginning in 2015 (Bimerk, 2020; Verjee, 2021). Although the EPRDF initially sought to manage ethnic diversity via coalition governance and ethnic federalism, power increasingly concentrated within the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), alienating major segments of society. The government's developmental state pursuit further entrenched ideological dominance, suppressing dissenting views and marginalizing intellectuals (Yohannes, 2021).

As Zadiq Abraha (2025) notes, Ethiopia's century-long political transitions have been marked by unresolved structural tensions between state and society. This “deep diversity,” with its intricate ethnic and religious overlaps, demands delicate balance between accommodation and national unity. Despite ethnic federalism's intent to decentralize power, the EPRDF failed to effectively address these complexities, igniting demands for fundamental reform (Addis Compass Media, January 12, 2025) and culminating in the 2018 transition.

In an interview with Addis Compass Media (2025), Zadig Abraha further reflects that: *“When the EPRDF came to power in 1991, it faced significant challenges. Around 1993, the party encountered strong resistance that threatened its stability. Following this, protests erupted at Addis Ababa University, and again in 1997, similar unrest emerged. During these three critical moments, the EPRDF successfully suppressed anti-government movements. However, by 2018, the EPRDF ultimately unable to continue doing so.”*

Ethiopia’s 2018 political transition was driven by internal fragmentation within the EPRDF, elite divisions, and widespread public dissatisfaction, amplified by diaspora-driven social media. The uprising began in rural areas, led by educated but unemployed youth demanding political representation (Addis Compass Media, 2025). The death of strongman Meles Zenawi left a leadership vacuum, weakening the party. Although the EPRDF consisted of four parties, the TPLF dominated decision-making, causing resentment among Amhara and Oromo factions, whose rising youth cohorts shifted power internally (Ibid). The 2016 Oromo protests against the Addis Ababa Master Plan escalated nationwide demands for reform and ending state violence (Verjee, 2021). External pressure from international diplomacy and human rights scrutiny further eroded the EPRDF’s legitimacy (United Nations, 2018). Ultimately, these intertwined factors led to the peaceful transition.

In April 2018, under public and elite pressure, Hailemariam Desalegn resigned, and Abiy Ahmed became Prime Minister, ushering reforms focused on democratic aspirations, socioeconomic development, and national unity (Kassahun, 2020). Abiy’s transparent, inclusive leadership fostered trust and optimism by releasing political prisoners, lifting media restrictions, and initiating peace with Eritrea (Van der Beken, 2018). International support, notably from the African Union and Western nations, reinforced these reforms (Baker, 2019). Opposition groups engaged constructively, contributing to a hopeful and cooperative political climate (International Crisis Group, 2018). Economic liberalization and infrastructure projects further stabilized Ethiopia (Yohannes, 2021; World Bank, 2021). In contrast, Sudan’s 2019 transition followed decades of sociopolitical and economic crises, culminating in mass uprisings that ousted Omar al-Bashir, marking a critical political turn.

### ***Sudan: Prior and during the transition***

Sudan’s transition was sparked by mounting discontent with Bashir’s long-standing authoritarian rule, marked by human rights abuses, economic mismanagement, and pervasive corruption. With Bashir in power since a 1989 coup, political dissent was routinely suppressed, creating a climate of fear and marginalization. In 2019, Sudan’s economy deteriorated further after the loss of oil revenue from South Sudan in 2011, leading to rising inflation, shortages of basic goods, and unpopular austerity measures. The immediate trigger was bread-price hikes in December 2018, which catalysed widespread protests that quickly spread from Atbara to Khartoum and broadened into demands for Bashir’s removal amid concerns over inequality and corruption. The protests culminated in a military intervention in April 2019, when the Transitional Military Council (TMC) ousted Bashir and sought to govern through military-led rule. Civilian groups, notably the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), mobilized mass protests and pressed for a transitional arrangement, while international actors raised concerns about human rights and governance. A power-sharing agreement reached in July 2019 intended to balance military and civilian representation, but the arrangement remained fragile amid ongoing tensions between military factions and civilian leadership, undermining confidence in a sustainable democratic transition.

Several factors contributed to the transition’s challenges and ultimate instability. The absence of cohesive transitional institutions and a unified vision among opposition factions weakened negotiations and governance planning. The military’s dominance and its reluctance to cede power to civilian authorities sparked deadly confrontations, including the June 2019

crackdown on protesters. Economic distress—high inflation, food shortages, and unresolved fiscal pressures—further eroded public support for any transitional arrangement. International responses were inconsistent, providing some initial support but faltering after human rights abuses, which limited external leverage. Together, these dynamics illustrate how entrenched autocracy, fragmented civilian leadership, economic hardship, and uneven international engagement impeded a peaceful, durable transition in Sudan.

### *Comparative Analysis*

The political transitions in Ethiopia in 2018 and Sudan in 2019 marked significant moments in the histories of both nations, as citizens mobilized against long-standing authoritarian regimes. However, while both transitions were fueled by popular uprisings and aspirations for democratic governance, they differed fundamentally in execution, key players, political frameworks, and subsequent challenges.

In Ethiopia, the transition was shaped by an internal leadership shift within the ruling party, the EPRDF. Following widespread protests, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned in early 2018, paving the way for Abiy Ahmed, a reformist leader, to assume power. In this context, it is also crucial to raise a key question regarding who determined the nature and direction of the change. In this regard, Tesfaye Beljige Dara, a chief minister in Abiy's current administration and a senior former member of the EPRDF regime's Executive Committee, in his interview with ACM Media on January 12, 2025, asserted that the transition was primarily brought about by the reformist faction within the EPRDF party ultimately shaping the process.

Dara (January 12, 2025), in his interview with Addis Compass Media (ACM) further pointed out that: "... Starting in 2015, the EPRDF initiated reforms to address rising public unrest but failed to satisfy demands, resorting to states of emergency to quell protests. In December 2017, a critical 17-day closed-door review was held, recognizing that widespread protests—beginning in Oromia and spreading to Amhara—signaled inevitable change. Within the party, two views emerged: one advocating gradual, cosmetic reforms, and a reformist faction pushing for bold action to prevent national disintegration. The reformists prevailed, acknowledging the EPRDF's outdated ideology, internal divisions, and declining legitimacy as obstacles. Key issues identified were restricted democratic space, marked by rights abuses and political repression, and deepening tensions between ethnic identity politics and national unity."

Ethiopia and Sudan followed markedly different paths during their recent political transitions, shaped by governance structures, leadership decisions, and institutional design. In Ethiopia, reform momentum within the ruling coalition was sustained through internal assessments and a calculated resignation: Hailemariam Desalegn stepped down as PM and party chair, enabling Abiy Ahmed's ascent from within the EPRDF. The presence of institutionalized transition mechanisms within the ruling coalition, coupled with ethnic federalism and decentralized governance, provided channels for addressing grievances non-violently. This internal cohesion and structured succession helped prevent a power vacuum and facilitated a relatively smooth transfer of authority.

Sudan's transition, by contrast, was dominated by military domination and fragmented civilian leadership. The ouster of Omar al-Bashir led to the TMC seizing control, resulting in a violent power struggle with civilian forces such as the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC). The absence of robust, agreed transition institutions and reconciliatory mechanisms undermined trust and continuity. The military's handling of protests, culminating in the June 2019 Khartoum massacre, destabilized the process and eroded prospects for a peaceful transfer to civilian rule. The lack of a unifying leadership figure akin to Abiy contributed further to divisions and instability. International involvement amplified these dynamics.

Ethiopia benefited from broad international engagement that supported dialogue and reform, bolstering Abiy's legitimacy and the transition's credibility. In Sudan, external backing was inconsistent, particularly after the crackdown on protesters, complicating civilian-military negotiations and delaying democratization. This divergence underscores how external support can reinforce or hinder domestic transition outcomes, depending on the alignment of actors and institutions.

Socioeconomic contexts also mattered. Ethiopia's economy grew rapidly before the transition, with reforms aimed at sustaining growth and improving inclusivity, though inflation and ethnic disparities persisted. Sudan faced severe economic distress, including high inflation and food insecurity, which amplified public discontent and challenged the legitimacy of any transitional arrangement. Taken together, these factors illustrate why Ethiopia achieved a comparatively orderly transition within an internal framework, while Sudan experienced a more volatile process, underscoring the critical roles of institutional design, leadership, and inclusive governance in determining transition trajectories.

Table 2 below presents the comparative summary of why one succeeded and the other failed, highlighting the critical variables that influence the nature of political transitions in in Ethiopia and Sudan.

Table 2. Comparative Summary of Success and Failure in Political Transitions

Factor	Ethiopia (Peaceful)	Sudan (Violent)
<b>Leadership</b>	Reformist leader (Abiy Ahmed) guided the transition with a conciliatory approach.	Military dominated, with no unifying civilian leadership figure.
<b>Institutional Framework</b>	Transition was managed within the ruling EPRDF coalition, ensuring stability.	Institutional collapse and lack of frameworks for peaceful negotiation.
<b>Public Mobilization</b>	Protests were met with concessions and reforms, reducing tensions.	Protests faced violent crackdowns, escalating resistance.
<b>Governance Model</b>	Ethnic federalism provided partial autonomy, preventing total fragmentation.	Deep divides led to mistrust and hindered national unity efforts.
<b>International Engagement</b>	Leveraged diplomatic ties to garner international support for reforms.	International mediation was slow, and sanctions worsened economic crises.
<b>Socioeconomic Factors</b>	Experienced rapid growth prior to the transition but faced rising inflation.	Faced dire economic conditions marked by high inflation, food shortages, and significant public discontent.

While both Ethiopia and Sudan witnessed pivotal moments of protest-led political transitions in recent years, the underlying dynamics propelled by internal leadership changes versus military interventions, presence versus absence of institutionalized mechanisms, levels of international support, and socioeconomic contexts illuminate divergent pathways and challenges. Ethiopia's relatively more structured transition under a reformist leadership within an existing institutional framework contrast sharply with Sudan's tumultuous and fragmented shift, where the absence of cohesive institutions and military intervention fueled instability. These differences highlight the challenges of navigating political change in societies marked by deep-rooted grievances and historical legacies.

The next section offers a more detailed descriptive comparative analysis of both countries, focusing on structural, institutional, and leadership dynamics. The analysis relies on quantitative data from social economic conditions, governance indicators, and leadership

profiles. Our objective is to identify any discernible patterns that may have contributed to one transition being peaceful while the other was marked by violence.

Table 3. Leadership Agency: A Comparison Between Incumbent and Successor Leaders

	<b>Ethiopia</b>		<b>Sudan</b>	
	<b>Incumbent (2012-2018)</b>	<b>Successor (2018-Present)</b>	<b>Incumbent (1989-2019)</b>	<b>Successor (2019--)</b>
<b>Leaders' tenure in days</b>	1958	60	10561	1
<b>Leader's ideology</b>	Centre-left	Center-left	Center-right	Unknown
<b>Leaders age in days</b>	19157	15265	22746	21782
<b>Leaders' education</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree	3 <sup>rd</sup> Degree	1 <sup>st</sup> Degree	1 <sup>st</sup> Degree
<b>Institutional choice (Design)</b>	Parliamentary Federalism/ Decentralization	Parliamentary Federalism/ Decentralization	Presidential Unitary	Dictatorship Unitary

Table 3 summarizes the agency variables (leader characteristics) for incumbents and successors in Ethiopia (2018) and Sudan (2019). A concise comparison reveals factors associated with Ethiopia's peaceful transition versus Sudan's instability. Leaders' tenure and ideology: In Ethiopia, both incoming and outgoing leaders had relatively short tenures, promoting continuity and renewal. The 2018 transition occurred between two leaders sharing a Centre-left ideology, likely aiding stable governance and ideological alignment during the transition. In Sudan, by contrast, the incumbent had governed for over three decades, and the successor's ideology was unclear. This misalignment and extended incumbency likely contributed to disengagement from public sentiment and ambiguity about governance, undermining a peaceful transition.

Age and education: Ethiopian leaders were comparatively younger and possessed advanced degrees (incumbent with a second degree; incoming with a third). This combination suggests greater openness to reform and strategic leadership. In Sudan, both leaders held only a first-degree credential, signalling comparatively limited educational breadth, which may have constrained governance capabilities during the transition. Institutional framework: Ethiopia operated under a parliamentary system, which tends to foster inclusive governance, dialogue, and smoother leadership transitions. Sudan's incumbent led under a presidential system, with an ensuing shift toward authoritarianism by the successor. The transition's rigid institutional structure tended to marginalize opposition, heighten tensions, and impede a peaceful outcome. Overall assessment: The Ethiopian case illustrates how younger, better-educated leaders with a shared ideological orientation within a flexible parliamentary framework and decentralized institutions can facilitate a peaceful transition. By contrast, prolonged authoritarian rule, unclear leadership, and a rigid institutional structure in Sudan appear to have generated distrust, eroded public consensus, and contributed to a failed transition.



Table 4. Socio-economic and institutional variables (five years average)

	Ethiopia				Sudan			
	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<b>Growth</b>	9.292	1.444	6.82	10.39	.246	2.637	-2.68	3.47
<b>Inflation</b>	9.522	2.967	6.63	13.83	36.258	20.493	16.91	63.29
<b>Unemployment</b>	2.526	0.160	2.35	2.75	17.204	0.207	17	17.51
<b>Control of Corruption</b>	-0.49	0.056	-0.58	-0.44	-1.498	0.065	-1.56	-1.41
<b>Government efficiency</b>	-.658	0.126	-.76	-.44	-1.568	0.077	-1.66	-1.48
<b>Political stability</b>	-1.482	0.176	-1.68	-1.27	-1.996	0.254	-2.33	-1.7
<b>Regulatory quality</b>	-1.052	0.050	-1.11	-.98	-1.578	0.081	-1.67	-1.49
<b>Rule of law</b>	-.486	0.033	-.53	-.45	-1.192	0.063	-1.28	-1.13
<b>Accountability</b>	-1.314	0.107	-1.43	-1.16	-1.79	0.083	-1.85	-1.65
<b>Institutional quality</b>	-1.436	0.230	-1.69	-1.19	-4.004	0.130	-4.21	-3.85
<b>Polity</b>	-2.2	1.789	-3	1	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
<b>Government size</b>	10.15	1.000	9.01	11.13	6.214	0.414	5.59	6.71
<b>Openness</b>	36.496	5.612	31.24	44.38	30.74	5.372	25.92	38.72
<b>Exchange rate</b>	20.062	5.392	14.41	27.43	16.604	18.526	2.67	45.77
<b>Mobile subscribers</b>	31.421	18.769	0	48.649	72.452	2.449	70.414	76.365
<b>Ethnic fragility</b>	0.69	0.000	0.69	0.69	0.71	0.000	0.71	0.71
<b>ODA</b>	3.995e+09	6.443e+08	3.239e+09	4.941e+09	1.029e+09	2.915e+08	8.091e+08	1.535e+09

Table 4 presents the socioeconomic and institutional figures (five-year average preceding the political transition, 2014-2018 for Ethiopia and 2015-2019 for Sudan) for the two countries. The contrasting statistics for the two countries paint a vivid picture of the two countries' economic performances and governance structures, providing additional evidence for the challenges faced by Sudan in its recent history compared to Ethiopia's relatively favorable conditions in 2018.

### *Comparison with respect to Economic Performance*

Ethiopia and Sudan diverged markedly across macroeconomic indicators during their recent political transitions. Ethiopia posted a mean growth rate of 9.292, with a narrow range from 6.82 to 10.39, signalling robust and resilient economic expansion. Inflation averaged 9.522 over five years, fluctuating between 6.63 and 13.83, reflecting a relatively stable macroeconomic environment. Employment was strong, with an average unemployment rate of 2.526 and a tight range between 2.35 and 2.75, indicative of stable job creation. Conversely, Sudan's average growth was only 0.246, spanning -2.68 to 3.47, underscoring substantial economic challenges prior to and during political upheaval. Inflation was dire in Sudan, with a five-year average of 36.258 and fluctuations from 16.91 to 63.29, pointing to severe macroeconomic instability and eroding purchasing power. Unemployment was alarmingly high in Sudan, averaging 17.204 with a narrow 17–17.51 range, signalling a persistent employment crisis and potential for social unrest. Additional indicators further highlight the contrast in economic governance and openness. Ethiopia exhibited a larger government size (mean 10.15) and a higher degree of economic openness (36.496), suggesting a more active state role coupled with greater integration into the global economy, which may facilitate reform and investment. Sudan showed smaller government size (mean 6.214) and lower openness (30.74), indicating more constrained state capacity and weaker global integration. Taken together, these differences reflect Ethiopia's relative macroeconomic stability and policy space, contrasted with Sudan's fragile economy, high inflation, elevated unemployment, and limited openness—factors that likely contributed to divergent political trajectories and outcomes.

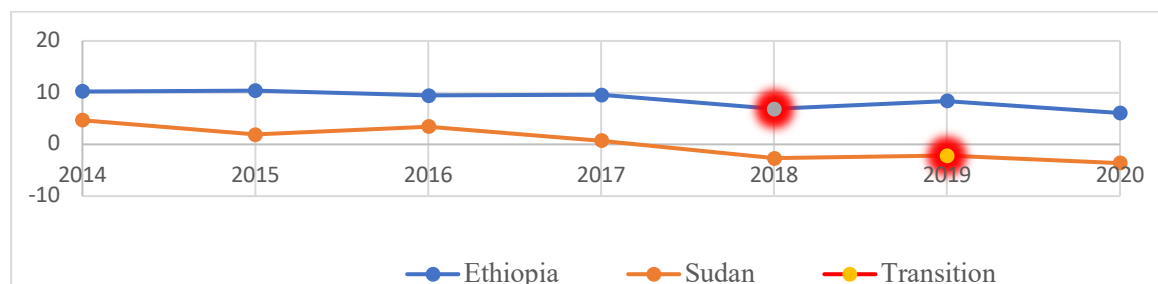


Figure 1. Trends of Economic growth performance in Ethiopia and Sudan

Figure 1 illustrates a distinct difference in the economic performance of the two countries before, during, and after the leadership change. In Ethiopia, although the economy exhibited a downward trend during the transition, the growth rate remained relatively high at 6.82%. Additionally, there was a swift recovery to 8.36% immediately following the transition. This underlines the importance of peaceful transition for a country's economic recovery and growth performance. In contrast, Sudan experienced a consistent decline prior to the transition, with the growth rate falling below zero at -2.18% during the transition. This downward trend continued, decreasing further to -3.63% after the transition.

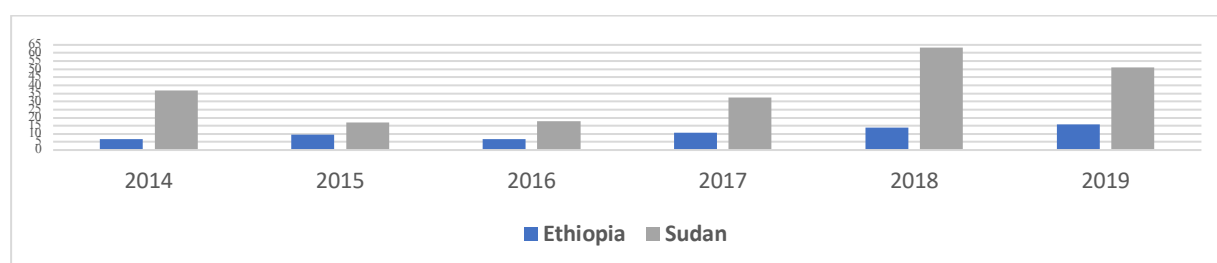


Figure 2. Trends of inflation in Ethiopia and Sudan

The inflation trends for Ethiopia and Sudan immediately before the transition were contrasting (see Figure 2). Sudan's inflation rate one year prior to the transition reached a historic high of 63.23%. In contrast, Ethiopia experienced a rising trend, but the inflation rate was relatively low at 10.69% in 2017, one year before the change occurred. Additionally, during the transition period, Sudan continued to face inflationary issues, with a rate of 60%. This significant difference in the cost of living could have contributed to the differing nature of the transitions in both countries.

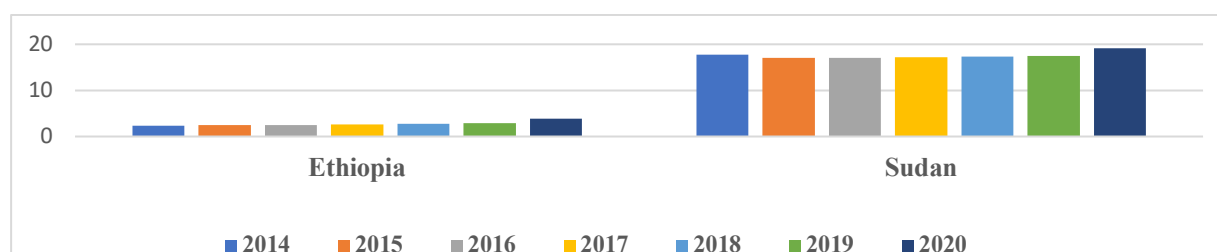


Figure 3. Trends of unemployment in Ethiopia and Sudan

Figure 3 illustrates the unemployment trends between 2014 and 2020 for the two countries. The data indicate a significant disparity between them; specifically, the unemployment rate in Sudan was roughly four times higher than that of Ethiopia throughout the years considered. Additionally, the unemployment rate in Sudan remained stagnant at around 17% over the five years, showing

no signs of improvement. In contrast, Ethiopia experienced a slight upward trend in inflation, rising from 2.35% in 2014 to 2.75% in 2018, which is relatively low. The high level of joblessness in Sudan may have contributed to citizens losing hope in the existing government structure, leading to grievances and violence that ultimately influenced the nature of the leadership change at that time.

Moreover, comparison with respect to other key indicators, Ethiopia and Sudan present markedly different governance profiles that help explain their contrasting political transition trajectories. Ethiopia's control of corruption score (-0.49) indicates corruption exists but is not overwhelming, contrasting with Sudan's deeper challenge (-1.498). Government efficiency also favours Ethiopia, with a score of -0.658 versus Sudan's -1.568, suggesting better public service delivery and government responsiveness in Ethiopia. Political stability follows a similar pattern: Ethiopia's score (-1.482) signals relatively greater stability and lower risk of violence than Sudan (-1.996), a factor that supports investment and growth. The rule of law and accountability further differentiate the two: Ethiopia's -0.486 (better legal effectiveness) and -1.314 for accountability imply a more dependable legal environment, while Sudan's -1.192 and -1.79 indicate weaker enforcement and diminished transparency, undermining trust in governance.

Other indicators reinforce the divergent development paths. Notably, mobile connectivity is higher in Sudan (72.452 subscribers) than in Ethiopia (31.421), suggesting technology diffusion is not automatically translating into broader development, given Sudan's persistent socio-economic challenges. The broader narrative shows Ethiopia combining stronger macroeconomic performance, relatively more effective governance, and more stable institutions, which aligned with a peaceful transition in 2018. In contrast, Sudan's stagnant growth, high inflation, elevated unemployment, and systemic governance weaknesses appear to underpin its ongoing instability and the propensity for more volatile political change. To foster sustainable stability, Sudan likely needs reforms centered on transparency, accountability, and strengthening governance structures, alongside inclusive economic policies that translate technological assets into broad-based development.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The political transitions in Ethiopia and Sudan offer important lessons for democratic movements in similar contexts. First, internal unity and clear leadership are crucial. Ethiopia's relatively successful peaceful transition was led by reformist Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who unified opposition factions and civil society around an inclusive vision. In contrast, Sudan's fragmented opposition post-Bashir weakened its bargaining power and consensus-building efforts. Second, the role of the military is pivotal. Ethiopia's transition was an internal ruling party shift allowing a smoother power transfer, whereas Sudan's military takeover undermined civilian democratic aspirations by prioritizing its own control. This underscores the need for institutional frameworks that limit military influence post-transition to prevent authoritarian relapse. Third, consistent international engagement matters. Ethiopia benefited from sustained international support reinforcing reforms, while Sudan faced hesitancy and inconsistent backing that weakened civilian governance. A unified international approach is essential for empowering reform efforts and holding military actors accountable. Finally, socioeconomic conditions affected transition outcomes. Ethiopia's economic growth provided a platform to pursue reforms and ideological reorientation, aiding stabilization. Sudan's severe economic crisis fuelled public discontent and complicated legitimacy-building. Thus, post-transition governments must prioritize swift economic recovery and development to maintain political stability and public support.

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