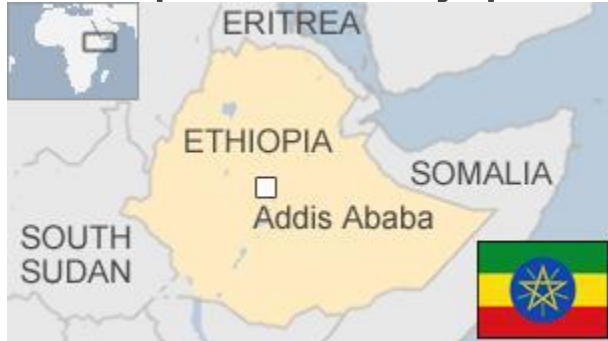


Ethiopia country profile



Ethiopia is Africa's oldest independent country and its second largest in terms of population. Apart from a five-year occupation by Mussolini's Italy, it has never been colonized.

It has a unique cultural heritage, being the home of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church - one of the oldest Christian denominations - and a monarchy that ended only in the coup of 1974.

It served as a symbol of African independence throughout the continent's colonial period, and was a founder member of the United Nations and the African base for many international organizations.

Drought and civil conflict left Ethiopia in a state of turmoil under a Marxist dictatorship from the fall of the monarchy until 1991, when the long authoritarian rule of Meles Zenawi brought a degree of stability.

Since 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has launched a campaign of political liberalization at home and sought to end disputes with Ethiopia's neighbors, in particular Eritrea.

Profile compiled by **BBC Monitoring**

FACTS

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Capital: Addis Ababa

- **Population** 102.5 million
- **Area** 1.13 million sq km (437,794 sq miles)
- **Major languages** Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya, Somali
- **Major religions** Christianity, Islam
- **Life expectancy** 63 years (men), 67 years (women)
- **Currency** Birr

UN, World Bank

LEADERS

President: Sahle-Work Zewde



Ms Sahle-Work is the first female head of state since Empress Zawditu (1928-1930) Parliament elected Sahle-Work Zewde as the Ethiopia's first woman president in October 2018. Ms Sahle-Work, an experienced diplomat, promised to work to make gender equality a reality at her swearing-in to the largely ceremonial post. She took office a week after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed appointed a cabinet with half the posts taken by women.

Prime minister: Abiy Ahmed



Abiy Ahmed was chosen to lead the ruling Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front coalition after the unexpected resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in 2018.

The new leader pledged to try to end longstanding tensions with neighbouring Eritrea, and within months the two countries declared that the state of war between them was over.

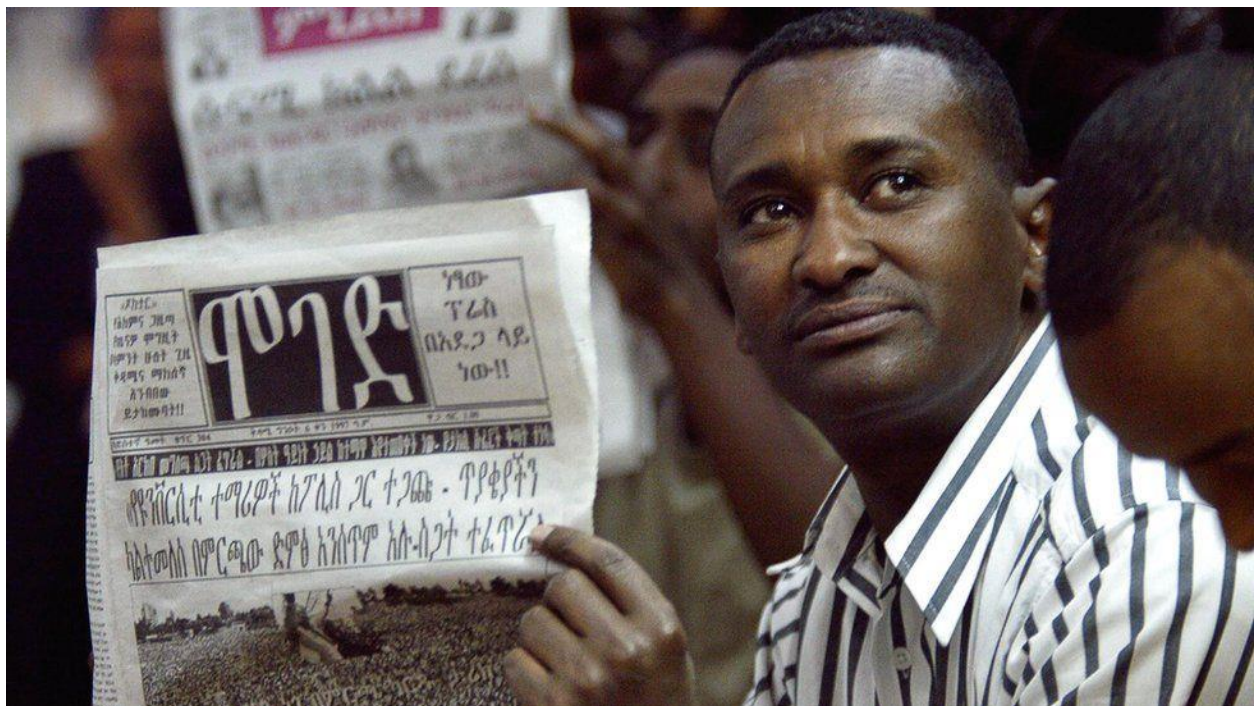
Mr Abiy also pledged to bring more transparency to government and reconciliation to a country that had been torn by protests since 2015.

He is Ethiopia's first leader from the Oromo ethnic group, which has been at the centre of anti-government protests since 2016.

The prime minister faced the first major challenge to his political course in a coup attempt in Amhara State in June 2019. The army chief and governor of Amhara State were killed in putting down the coup.

Another challenge arose in late 2020, when tensions with Tigray region led the federal government to send in troops after an unsanctioned regional election.

MEDIA



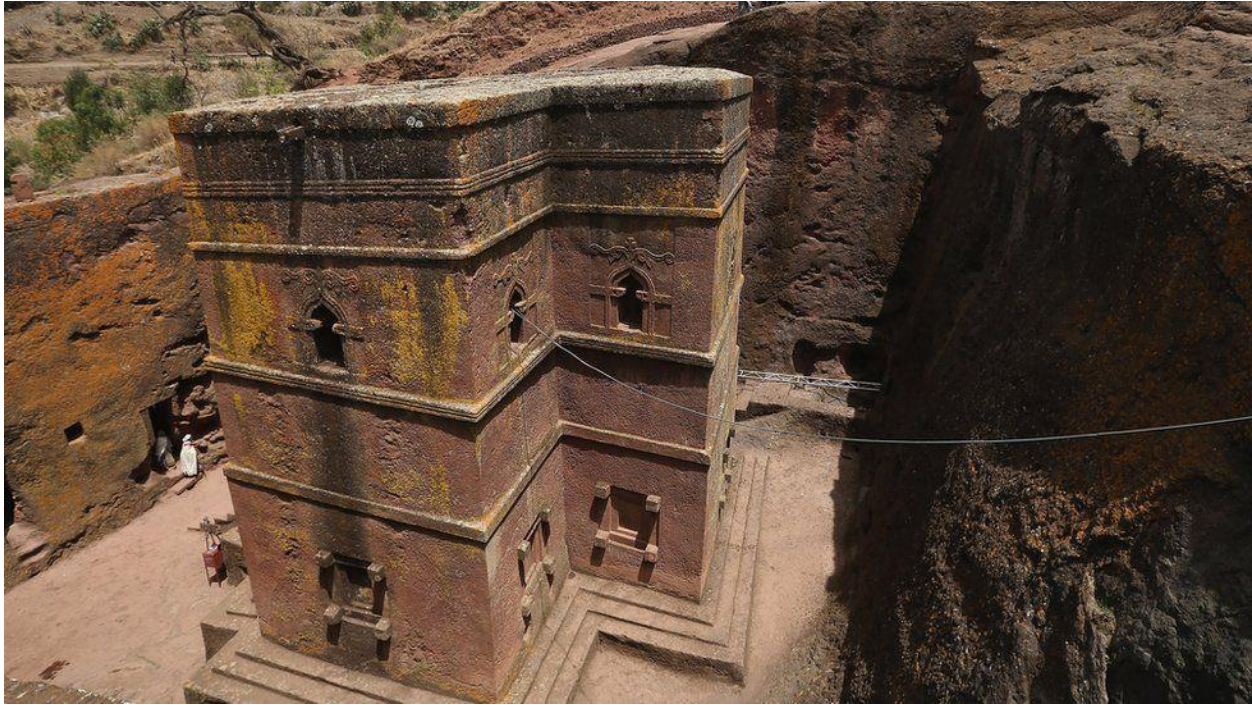
The change of government in 2018 looked set to usher in a new era for the media, which for many years had operated in one of the region's most restrictive environments.

The state controls most broadcasting outlets, including national broadcasters ETV and Radio Ethiopia.

Internet and mobile services have been restricted during periods of social unrest.

[Read full media profile](#)

TIMELINE



The rock-hewn churches of Lalibela are thought to have been built in the 11th and 12th century

Some key dates in Ethiopia's history:

4th century - Christianity becomes the state religion.

1855-1868 - Reign of Emperor Tewodros II, who lays the foundation for the modern Ethiopian state.

1896 - Invading Italian forces are defeated by Ethiopians at Adwa.

1935-1941 - Italy deposes Emperor Haile Selassie and annexes Ethiopia, before being driven out by British, Commonwealth and Ethiopian forces.

1962 - Haile Selassie annexes Eritrea, which becomes an Ethiopian province.

1974 - Haile Selassie overthrown in military coup after government fails to deal with famine.

1977-79 - Thousands are killed in "Red Terror" orchestrated by Marxist dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam.

1984-85 - Another serious famine devastates much of the country.

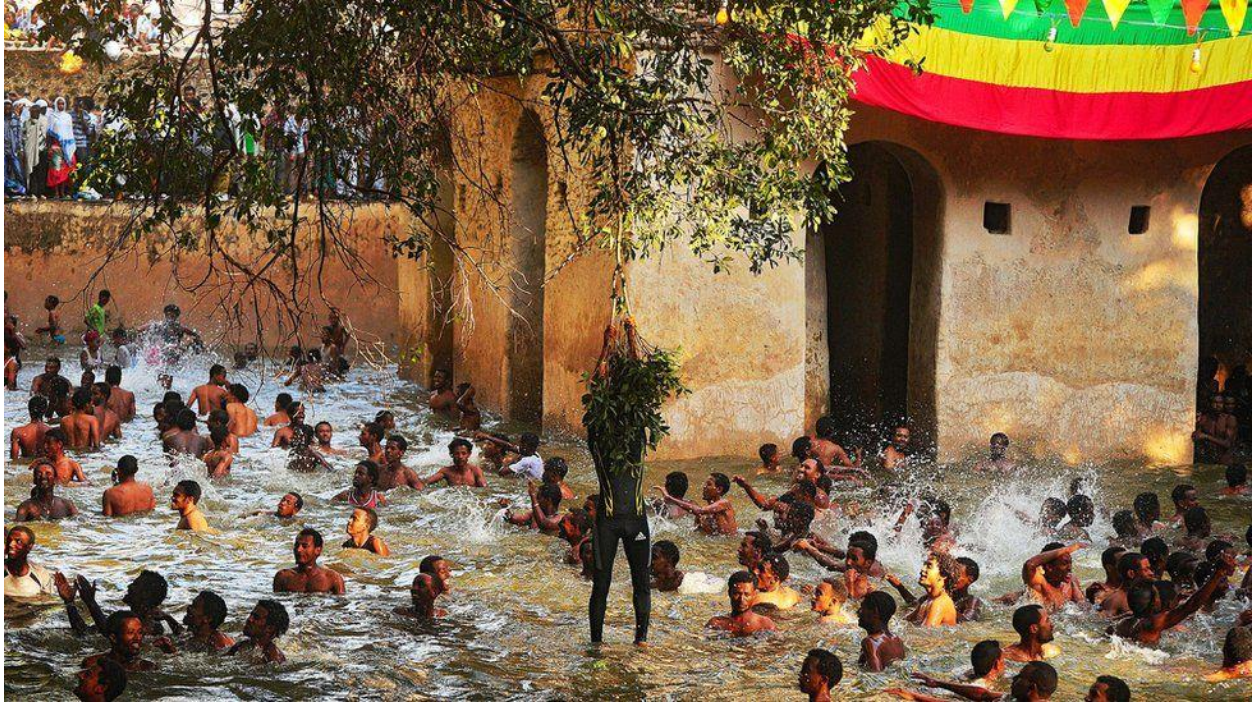
1991 - Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front deposes Mengistu. Meles Zenawi establishes stability and achieves considerable economic progress in his 19-year authoritarian rule.

1993 - Eritrea becomes independent.

1999-2000 - Ethiopian-Eritrean border war.

2018 - Abiy Ahmed becomes prime minister and launches reform programme at home. Ends state of war with Eritrea.

- **[Read full timeline](#)**



Crowds bathe to celebrate Timkat - the Ethiopian Orthodox Epiphany - in the ancient capital Gondar