

Ethiopia's electoral commission has announced that its scheduled August general election **will be postponed**, due to the effects of the Coronavirus crisis. The vote was due to test the reform agenda of prime minister Abiy Ahmed, in power since April 2018.

He has overseen rapid change in Africa's second most-populous country, including unprecedented opening of the political sphere and ambitious plans to **liberalize its state-led economy**.

Free and fair polls would mark an unlikely, and rapid transition to democratic governance after decades of authoritarianism. They would also boost Ethiopia's growth story, which has been criticized for relying on autocratic politics for impressive GDP figures - averaging 9.5% annually from 2009 - 2019.

The delay could be good news in this regard.

While Ahmed's reforms have won him global recognition - including a Nobel peace prize - his fast and furious approach has also stirred simmering ethnic and political divisions.

Up to 2m people have been internally displaced since 2018, amid calls for more autonomy from some regional ethnic groups, while Ahmed has survived at least one assassination attempt.

This has raised doubts about the government's ability to maintain law and order, and concerns that a free and fair election in 2020 is simply **too much, too soon**, for Ethiopia.

The delay - which has been backed by key opposition groups - offers much-needed time for authorities to prepare.

They must use it well.

This report reflects the views of the author alone, not those of Invest Africa

This week's Picks

From The Continent

Ratings agencies Fitch and Moody's have downgraded leading South African banks including Standard Bank and Nedbank to 'junk', following the latter's removal of the country's only remaining investment-grade rating last week. The move heaps further pressure on South Africa's struggling economy, which fell into its second recession in as many years in the final quarter of 2019. **More: [Reuters](#)**

Senegal is in discussions with the International Monetary Fund over a \$221m emergency disbursement to help counter the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. The country joins at least 20 others across Africa - many already struggling with high debt - to seek help from the lender since the start of the crisis. **More: [IMF](#)**

THE WEEKLY STAT

6,000

The number of health workers Kenya plans to hire as part of its Coronavirus response. **More: [Bloomberg](#)**

The Global Perspective

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has warned that airlines in Africa and the Middle East have lost \$23bn due to the Coronavirus pandemic, calling for more government interventions to protect the industry. Commercial aviation, already struggling in Africa, has been especially hard hit by the pandemic. **More: [Reuters](#)**

German technology and startup investor Rocket Internet has sold its 11% stake in Africa-focused e-commerce firm Jumia. Once hailed as Africa's first tech 'unicorn', the company has fallen from grace since listing on the New York Stock Exchange in April 2019, following allegations of poor governance. **More: [CNA](#)**