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How Elections Can Shape Long-Term Political Views: Lessons from the 2005 Ethiopian National Election

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Executive Summary

Ethiopia has hitherto had no election that has been as contested as the 2005 national election. In the run-up to this election, opposition parties had considerable opportunities to share their views with the public in private and state-owned media. Particularly, a pan-Ethiopian-based political party called Coalition for Unity and Democracy emerged as a significant political force with the potential to outbid the then ruling party. The most debated issues during the election campaigns were the role of ethnicity in Ethiopian politics and the fate of ethnic-based federalism. In light of this, I examine the long-term effects of the election on individuals who were at their formative ages during that time about their social identity (national vs ethnic) and their preferred type of federalism (geographic vs ethnic) using Afrobarometer survey data. My results show that the election has a modestly positive effect on national identity; that is, individuals who were at their formative ages during the election are more likely to identify with their Ethiopian identity than their ethnic identity compared to other demographic groups. My finding is consistent with the impressionable year hypothesis, which posits that important political and economic events shape young individuals' long-term political and economic views. I also find that the election has a positive effect on young individuals' preference for geographic-based federalism, although the effect is not statistically significant.

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Introduction

Since the advent of the multi-party system in Ethiopia, the country has never had as contested an election as the 2005 parliamentary election. International observers lauded the run-up to the 2005 election as being relatively free and open. Opposition parties had considerable opportunities to debate and campaign, including in state-owned and private media.¹

Between 1991 and 2005, identity-based politics took centre stage in the country and remained unchallenged. However, in 2005 a then newly formed opposition party, called the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), leveraged the opening up of the political space during that time to highlight the dangers of identity politics that had hitherto dominated the country's political landscape. More specifically, the CUD strongly advocated that ethnicity should be relegated from Ethiopian politics, and political mobilization should be based on a pan-Ethiopian identity or citizenship. Additionally, the party campaigned that the federal system should be restructured not only in a way that accounts for culture and language, but also geography and economy, among other things. Overall, the 2005 election period raised the political consciousness of the different segments of Ethiopian society, resulting in a voter turnout of 80–90 per cent.² Anecdotal evidence also suggests that it particularly influenced the youth to embrace politics with enthusiasm, as manifested in their high level of participation in voluntary election campaigns.

As per the official results of the 2005 election, the opposition parties combined won about a third of the 547 parliamentary seats, most of which went to the CUD. Additionally, the CUD won all 23 seats in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. Despite opposition parties rejecting the official results and asserting that they won a majority of the votes, the election results themselves can be considered a significant success. This is evident when compared to the elections before and after 2005, in which opposition parties secured fewer than 30 seats.³

Given this context, the paper seeks to explore whether important political events play a significant role in shaping the long-term views of youth. More specifically, I ask whether the 2005 Ethiopian parliamentary election has impacted the identity (ethnic vs national) and the preferred type of federalism of individuals who were at their formative ages during the election. In social psychology, it is posited that individuals' outlook towards life, including political views, are formed during their formative years – the age between 18 and 25.⁴ Thus, I hypothesize that the 2005 election has led to a lasting impact on the political views of those citizens who were in their formative years during the election, given its political salience in the country's recent history.

My paper contributes to literature that has explored whether individuals at their formative ages are malleable and can be influenced by salient political, social, and economic events. For instance, one study examined the long-term effects of exposure in early life to

¹ J. Abbink, "Discomfiture of Democracy? The 2005 Election Crisis in Ethiopia and Its Aftermath," *African Affairs* 105, no. 419 (2006): 173–99; J. Abbink, "Ethnic-based Federalism and Ethnicity in Ethiopia: Reassessing the Experiment after 20 Years," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 4 (2011): 596–618; L. R. Arriola and T. Lyons, "Ethiopia: The 100% Election," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1 (2016): 76–88; J. W. Harbeson, "Ethiopia's Extended Transition," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 4 (2005): 144–58; A. I. Samatar, "The Ethiopian Election of 2005: A Bombshell & Turning Point?," *Review of African Political Economy*, 32, no. 104/105 (2005): 466–73; L. Smith, "Implications of the 2005 Elections for Ethiopian Citizenship and State Legitimacy," *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 53–71.

² Abbink, "Discomfiture of Democracy?"

³ Abbink, "Discomfiture of Democracy?"; Arriola and Lyons, "Ethiopia: The 100% Election."

⁴ G. Firebaugh and K. Chen, "Vote Turnout of Nineteenth Amendment Women: The Enduring Effect of Disenfranchisement," *American Journal of Sociology* 100, no. 4 (1995), 972–96.

the 1968 student movements on political preference.⁵ That study found that individuals exposed to the movements in their early lives gravitate towards embracing right-wing political preferences as they become older. Another study showed that those who came of driving age during the oil crises of the 1970s tend to drive less later in life, indicating an enduring effect of the crisis on young individuals.⁶ Another related study found that young individuals who grew up during a recession are likely to have a positive attitude towards redistribution, both in the short term and long term.⁷

Although some studies have qualitatively explored the consequences of Ethiopia's ethnic-based federalism, for example, on fuelling inter-ethnic conflicts, there is a dearth of empirical evidence on the factors that affect the development of national identity and citizens' preferred type of federalism.⁸ An exception in this regard is a study that examined the effects of socialization under Ethiopia's ethnic-based federalism on national identity.⁹ By taking the 2005 Ethiopian election as an example, my paper contributes to the literature by improving our understanding of whether important political events shape the long-term development of national identity and citizens' preferred type of federalism.

Using Afrobarometer survey data, I find that individuals at their formative ages during the 2005 Ethiopian election are more likely to identify with their Ethiopian identity rather than their ethnic identity long after the election. I also find that the election appears to have had a positive effect on individuals who were young during the election towards supporting geographic-based federalism in the long term, although the effect is not statistically significant.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section provides a brief account of Ethiopia's recent political history, especially focusing on the ethnicization of politics. Section three presents and discusses the data, and the estimation strategy used in this paper. Section four presents the econometric results, and the last section summarizes the major findings.

⁵ G. Barone, G. de Blasio, and S. Poy, "The Legacy of 1968 Student Protests on Political Preferences," *Economics Letters* 210: 110198.

⁶ C. Severen and A. A. van Benthem, "Formative Experiences and the Price of Gasoline," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 14, no. 2 (2022): 256–84.

⁷ J. Bietenbeck and P. Thiemann, "Revisiting the Effect of Growing Up in a Recession on Attitudes towards Redistribution," *Journal of Applied Econometrics* 38, no. 5 (2023): 669–797.

⁸ B. A. Taye, "Ethnic Federalism and Conflict in Ethiopia," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 17, no. 2 (2017), 41–66.

⁹ J. Ishiyama, "Does Ethnic Federalism Lead to Greater Ethnic Identity? The Case of Ethiopia," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 53, no. 1 (2023): 82–105.

Context

In 1991, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) overthrew the military government of Ethiopia and introduced a new constitutional order anchored in ethnic-based federalism. Although some African countries have adopted federalism, Ethiopia’s federalism is unique in Africa in the way it created ethnically defined regions.¹⁰ Moreover, unlike other African countries such as Ghana and Uganda that ban ethnic-based political parties, the Ethiopian constitution allows for the formation of political parties along ethnic lines.¹¹

Given the salience of ethnicity in the constitution, Ethiopia has seen a proliferation of ethnic-based political parties. According to the National Electoral Board’s report, more than 65 per cent of the political parties registered for the 2015 election were ethnic-based.¹² In fact, the EPRDF, which ruled the country between 1991 and 2019, itself was a coalition of four ethnic-based political parties: the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, the *Amhara* Nationals Democratic Movement, the *Oromo* People’s Democratic Organization, and the Southern Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement.¹³

As per the architects of the constitution, the new model of governance is a response to the ethnic diversity that defines the country and an attempt to save the country from disintegration.¹⁴ Some empirical studies have, however, warned of the dangers of institutionalizing ethnicity into a country’s politics. For example, political mobilization along ethnic lines might promote patronage-client networks and lead to ethnic fragmentation, which could impede economic growth.¹⁵ Additionally, it may adversely affect the democratization process of a country. Some observers attribute the recent massive-scale identity-based killings and displacements in Ethiopia – including the war in the northern part of the country, which claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands – to the politicization of ethnicity.¹⁶

¹⁰ Arriola and Lyons, “Ethiopia: The 100% Election”; J. Erk, “‘Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’: The Ethnopolitics of Ethnofederalism in Ethiopia,” *Ethnopolitics* 16, no. 3 (2017): 219–31; Y. T. Fessha, “The Original Sin of Ethiopian Federalism,” *Ethnopolitics* 16, no. 3 (2017), 232–45.

¹¹ A. Habtu, “Multiethnic Federalism in Ethiopia: A Study of the Secession Clause in the Constitution,” *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 35, no. 2 (2005): 313–35.

¹² Fessha, “The Original Sin of Ethiopian Federalism.”

¹³ Erk, “‘Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples.’”

¹⁴ During the military regime, a number of ethnic based liberation fronts were mushrooming and threatening the disintegration of Ethiopia. The EPRDF used this as one of their justifications for their choice of ethnic-based federalism.

¹⁵ A. Alesina and E. la Ferrara, “Ethnic Diversity and Economic Performance,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 43, no. 3 (2005): 762–800; W. Easterly and R. Levine, “Africa’s Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Divisions,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1203–50; J. G. Montalvo and M. Reynal-Querol, “Ethnic Diversity and Economic Development,” *Journal of Development Economics* 76, no. 2 (2005): 293–323.

¹⁶ J. Ishiyama, “Ethnic Identity and Conflict: The Case of Ethiopia,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 24, no. 1 (2023): 12–18.

Methodology

Data and descriptive statistics

The paper uses survey data collected by Afrobarometer, a research network that conducts annual surveys on nationally representative individuals from African countries regarding their socioeconomic conditions and opinions on democracy and governance. Since 1999, the network has conducted surveys in selected African countries, including Ethiopia, where it has thus far conducted surveys in 2013 and 2020. In this paper, I use both the 2013 and 2020 surveys. Since both were conducted long after the 2005 election, they enable us to examine the long-term effects of that election. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for my outcome variables, treatment variable, and controls.

Outcome variables

As highlighted in the introduction, two outcome variables are of interest for this paper. The first outcome variable is the type of identity individuals embrace. In the 2013 and 2020 surveys, individuals were asked the extent to which they identify as Ethiopians or with their ethnic groups. The specific question asked was: *Let's suppose you had to choose being an Ethiopian or your own ethnic group. Which of the following statements best expresses your feeling?* The respondents had the option to choose one of the following: 1) I feel only my ethnic group; 2) I feel more my ethnic group than Ethiopian; 3) I feel equally Ethiopian and my ethnic group; 4) I feel more Ethiopian than my ethnic group; and 5) I feel only Ethiopian. The responses are coded so that a higher value indicates that an individual tends to identify with her Ethiopian identity rather than her ethnic identity.

Figure 1: The extent of Ethiopian vs ethnic identification

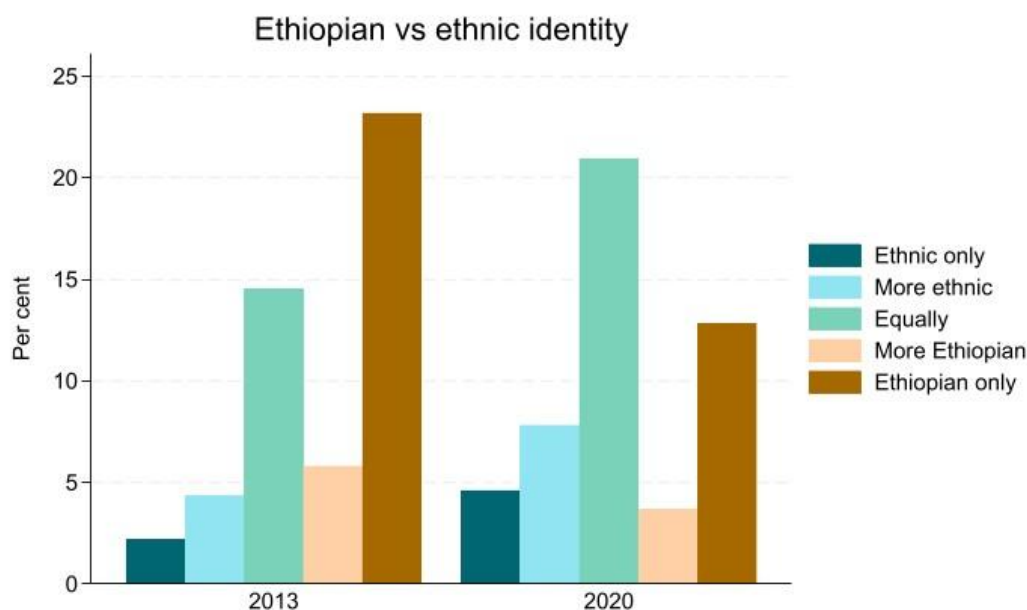


Figure 1 displays the sample individuals' responses regarding the degree of their Ethiopian identity vis-à-vis their ethnic identity. As seen in the figure, most respondents consider themselves as Ethiopian only, or equally Ethiopian and their ethnic group. In 2020, however,

the number of individuals that identify only as Ethiopians shows a substantial drop compared to 2013.

The second outcome variable is individuals' preferred type of federalism. In addition to the type of identity individuals embrace, respondents were asked about their views towards Ethiopia's ethnic-based federalism. Unlike the identity question, the federalism question was only asked during the 2020 Afrobarometer survey. To elicit their responses about the preferred type of federalism, the following statements were presented to the respondents, and they were asked to rank them on a 4-point scale.

Statement 1: If Ethiopia remains a federal system, then the current system of ethnic federalism, where regions are defined based on ethnic groups, should be kept.

Statement 2: If Ethiopia remains a federal system, it should change to a system where regions are based only on geographical features of the country, not on where different ethnic groups live.

The respondents had the option to choose one of the following: 1) Agree very strongly with statement 1; 2) Agree with statement 1; 3) Agree with statement 2; and 4) Agree very strongly with statement 2. The responses are coded so that a higher value indicates that an individual tends to support a geographic-based federalism rather than ethnic-based federalism.

Figure 2: Support for ethnic- vs geographic-based federalism

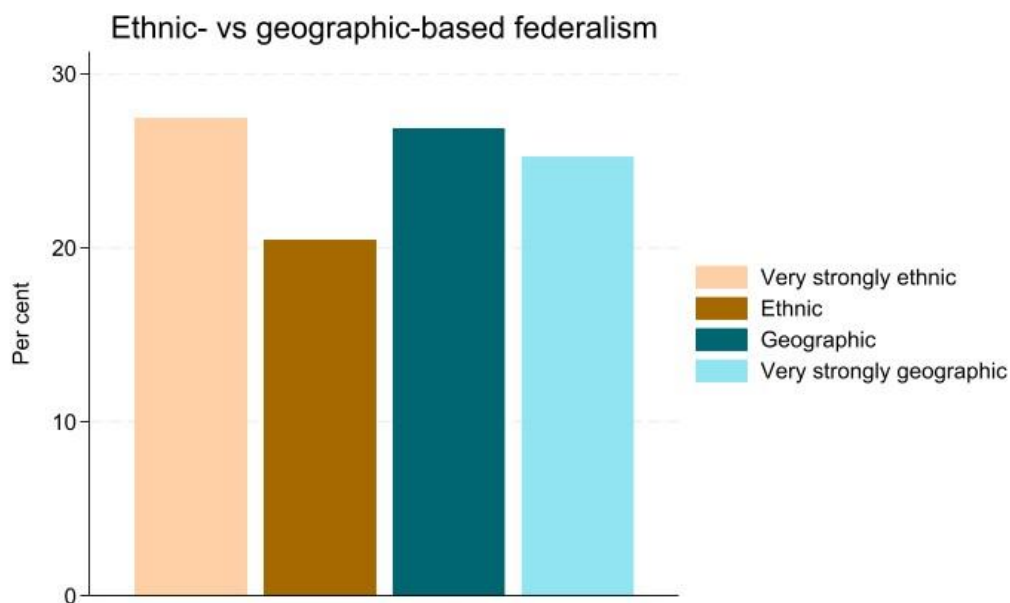


Figure 2 displays the number of sample respondents supporting the different types of federalism. According to the survey, the different types of federalism have comparable support, indicating the level of polarization on the topic. Indeed, in the Ethiopian political debates, nothing seems to be as controversial as the current ethnic-based federalism. However, this finding somehow appears to contradict the survey results on the strength of national identity. Given that most of the respondents favour their Ethiopian identity, one would expect majority support for geographic-based federalism. But it is also important to keep in mind that the question regarding federalism was asked in 2020, when the number of individuals viewing themselves only as Ethiopian was substantially lower compared to 2013.

The treatment variable

My explanatory variable of interest is the level of exposure to the 2005 parliamentary election during one's formative ages. Back then, most of the political debates were mainly communicated to the public via written media such as newspapers and magazines, whose distribution was mainly limited to urban areas. Moreover, opposition parties had a limited presence in rural areas, in part due to a lack of resources. As a result, the ruling party faced stiff competition in urban areas but not in rural areas. Therefore, I argue that the level of exposure to the election events, including the debates, hinges on the level of education and whether the person lives in an urban area. Thus, I measure the level of exposure by interacting with whether individuals are at their formative ages during the election, and the level of education and urban¹⁷ status. By using these interactions, I can also take into account any cohort-specific, unobserved characteristics, such as trends and fads, which could affect political views and raise endogeneity concerns.

Afrobarometer data contain information on respondents' ages, and hence, it is straightforward to determine whether an individual was in her or his formative ages during the election. Following the literature, I define formative age (also referred to as impressionable years) as the age between 18 and 25 years.¹⁸ The survey results show that 22 per cent of the sample respondents were at their formative ages during the 2005 election. In addition, the data contain information on the level of education and whether respondents were living in urban areas during the survey years (i.e. 2013 and 2020) but not during the 2005 election. Nevertheless, level of education and urban status during the survey years could be good proxies for an individual's level of education and urban status during her formative ages.

Control variables

To attenuate the endogeneity problem, I control for a host of variables that could affect the type of identity individuals embrace and their preferred type of federalism. In general, I control for two types of variables: individual- and district-level variables. The individual-level variables, as the name implies, could vary from individual to individual, while district-level variables take similar values for individuals from the same district.

The individual-level controls include several variables. For instance, I control for the level of education, urban status, and access to media, which are considered markers of modernization. Both theory and empirical evidence support the notion that these markers of modernization could influence individuals' national identity, and hence could also influence the type of federalism they support. However, their direction of influence remains inconclusive.¹⁹ In the survey, while level of education is measured as a categorical variable on a 10-point scale (0 indicating no formal education and 10 postgraduate education), urban status is measured as a dummy variable (1 indicating an individual lives in an urban area and 0 otherwise). The survey results show that the average level of education for the sample

¹⁷ Individuals who were living in urban areas during the 2013 and 2020 surveys might have lived in rural areas back in 2005. This implies that individuals' urban status in 2013 and 2020 might not be a good proxy for their 2005 urban status. But about 80 per cent of the Ethiopian population still live in rural areas, and hence it is likely that only a small portion of the sample is affected by urbanization. Moreover, in rural Ethiopia, it is customary that individuals start their families and settle down during their formative ages, even sometimes before their formative ages. Once they settle in rural areas, their likelihood of out-migrating to urban areas is slim. Taken together, individuals' urban status in 2013 and 2020 could be a good proxy for their urban status back in 2005.

¹⁸ D. F. Alwin and J. A. Krosnick, "Aging, Cohorts, and the Stability of Sociopolitical Orientations over the Life Span," *American Journal of Sociology* 97, no. 1 (1991): 169–95.

¹⁹ A. L. Robinson, "National versus Ethnic Identification in Africa: Modernization, Colonial Legacy, and the Origins of Territorial Nationalism," *World Politics* 66, no. 4 (2014): 709–46.

respondents is 3, and 26 per cent of sample respondents live in urban areas. I also have data on three variables that could signal access to media. These are: i) TV ownership (1 if an individual does not own a TV and 0 otherwise), ii) Radio ownership (1 if an individual does not own a radio and 0 otherwise), and iii) Mobile phone ownership (1 if an individual does not own a mobile, 0 otherwise). The survey results indicate that whereas mobile phone ownership is about 75 per cent, TV and radio ownership among respondents is about 23 per cent and 49 per cent, respectively. In addition to being indicators of access to media, these variables could also be measures of income/wealth, which might also influence whether individuals embrace national or ethnic identity.²⁰

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Identity	4166	3.56	1.27	1.00	5.00
Federalism	2079	2.49	1.14	1.00	4.00
Formative age	4166	0.22	0.41	0.00	1.00
Sex	4166	0.51	0.50	0.00	1.00
Education	4166	3.17	2.19	1.00	10.00
Age	4166	35.66	13.97	18.00	120.00
Amharic	4166	0.35	0.48	0.00	1.00
Living condition	4166	0.28	0.45	0.00	1.00
Urban	4166	0.26	0.44	0.00	1.00
Radio	4166	0.51	0.50	0.00	1.00
TV	4166	0.77	0.42	0.00	1.00
Motor vehicle	4166	0.96	0.20	0.00	1.00
Mobile	4166	0.24	0.43	0.00	1.00
Oromo	4166	0.31	0.46	0.00	1.00
Tigre	4166	0.07	0.25	0.00	1.00
Ethnic proportion	4166	0.81	0.29	0.01	1.00
Ethnic fractionalization	4166	0.19	0.25	0.00	0.81
Orthodox	4166	0.38	0.49	0.00	1.00
N	4166				

In the regression analyses, I also control for two other indicators of income/wealth. The first indicator is subjective living standard, which is individuals' self-assessments of their living conditions. About 28 per cent of the sample respondents consider their living conditions as either very bad or fairly bad. The second indicator is whether individuals own motor vehicles. The survey results show that 96 per cent of the respondents do not own motor vehicles.

Furthermore, I control for sex, age, ethnicity, religion, and the primary language spoken at home. The survey results show that about 51 per cent of the respondents are male, and the respondents are, on average, about 37 years old. To capture ethnicity, I introduce two dummy variables. The first one is a Tigray dummy, which indicates whether an individual belongs to the Tigray ethnic group. The second one is an Oromo dummy, which indicates whether an individual belongs to the Oromo ethnic group. This implies that our base category captures all other ethnic groups, including Amhara. The survey results reveal that 31 per cent and 7 per cent of the respondents are Oromos and Tigrayans, respectively. For reli-

²⁰ P. Ahlerup, T. Baskaran, and A. Bigsten, "Regional Development and National Identity in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 45, no. 3 (2017): 622–43.

gion, I include a dummy variable that indicates whether an individual is Orthodox Christian, and for language I include a dummy variable that indicates whether the primary language spoken at home is Amharic. The survey results show that 38 per cent of the sample respondents are followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and 35 per cent speak Amharic as their primary language at home.

In addition to the individual-level variables, I also control for two district-level variables related to ethnicity. The first is the proportion of an individual's ethnicity in a district. The proportion of an individual's ethnicity is computed by simply dividing the number of respondents from a specific ethnic group in a district by the total number of respondents surveyed by the Afrobarometer Institute. This variable takes a value that ranges from 0 to 1; a smaller value indicates that an individual is from a minority ethnic group in a district. The survey results show that the average size of ethnic proportion is 0.81.

The second is the level of ethnic fractionalizations (diversity) at a district level, which measures the likelihood of two randomly chosen individuals belonging to different ethnic groups. Here, I compute the Herfindahl-Hirschman ethnic diversity index. The survey results show that the average ethnic diversity index at a district level is 0.19. The index takes values between 0 and 1; a smaller value signifies a lower level of ethnic diversity at a district level and vice versa.

Empirical strategy

To examine the exposure of the youth to the 2005 Ethiopian election and its effects on their identity and their preferred type of federalism, I run the following regression model:

$$\text{Outcome}_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{LevelofExposure2005}_{it} + \beta_k X_{ikt} + Y + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where Outcome_{it} is the level of an individual's, i , national identity/preferred type of federalism in survey year, t ; $\text{LevelofExposure2005}_{it}$ is an interaction between whether an individual was at her formative years during the 2005 election, and her level of education and whether she lives in an urban area; X_{ikt} is a vector of an individual's socioeconomic characteristics; β_0 , β_1 & β_k are the coefficients to be estimated; Y is whether the survey was carried out in 2013 or 2020; and ε_{it} is the disturbance term with the usual assumptions.

The coefficient of interest in equation 1 is β_1 . To get an unbiased estimate of β_1 , the identification assumption should hold true, that is, my treatment variable – exposure to the 2005 election – should be orthogonal to the disturbance term. In this paper, I argue that the identification assumption can be reasonably invoked for two reasons. First, in the regression, I control for a host of socioeconomic characteristics that could affect my outcome variables. Second, I define the treatment variable in such a way that it creates variation within similar age-cohort groups: The level of exposure of the youth to the election event depends on the level of education and urban status. By defining it this way, I try to address the identification concern that could emanate from the existence of unobserved age-cohort-specific characteristics.

Results and discussion

Table 2 presents the results of the OLS estimates on the effects of the 2005 election on the strength of individuals' national identity vis-à-vis ethnic identity. As explained earlier, my outcome variable is defined in a way that a higher value signifies a strong Ethiopian identity, whereas a lower value signifies a strong ethnic identity. Column 1 presents the OLS estimates based on the 2013 survey year, where the standard errors are clustered at the region level. The number of regions during the survey period was nine, including two autonomous city administrations. Given that the number of clusters is small, I thus estimate wild bootstrap p values,²¹ and the discussions below are based on these values. The results indicate that individuals who were at their formative ages during the 2005 election with better education and living in urban areas are likely to have a stronger national identity, albeit the coefficient is statistically significant only at the 10 per cent level.

One possible explanation for this finding could be the following. As highlighted in the introduction, before the 2005 election, the Ethiopian political landscape had been mainly dominated by ethnic-based political parties, including the ruling party. However, during the 2005 election period, pan-Ethiopian political parties, such as the CUD, had ample opportunities to share their ideologies and inculcate that in the minds of the youth who could be swayed. To date, no election is as memorable as the 2005 one among the Ethiopian public, not least because it was the most competitive election the country has ever witnessed. According to the Ethiopian constitution, a citizen is eligible to vote if he or she is 18 years old or older. This means individuals at their formative ages had the opportunity to legally vote for the first or, at most, second time in the 2005 election. Thus, the 2005 election represented an important political socialization event for the youth at that time, with implications on the strength of their national identity vis-à-vis their ethnic identity, as this featured greatly in the political debates.

Column 2 presents the clustered OLS estimates based on the 2020 survey year. Although the results indicate that the treatment variable is positively associated with my outcome variable, the coefficient is not statistically significant. Column 3 presents the clustered OLS estimates for the pooled survey. The results look similar to the OLS estimates based on the 2013 survey: Individuals who were at their formative ages during the 2005 election with better education and living in urban areas tend to have a stronger national identity. In the pooled regression, I control for the survey-year fixed effect, and I find that the strength of national identity is lower in 2020 than in 2013. Why is the strength of national identity lower in 2020? A somewhat related question is: Why does the coefficient for my treatment variable lose its statistical significance in 2020? This could be due to the decaying effect of time. The 2005 election was eight years ago in 2013, but it was fifteen years ago in 2020, and with time, the effect of the election could lose its steam. Another possible explanation is that, in recent years, Ethiopia has witnessed significant political upheavals, which might eclipse the effect of the 2005 election. Since Abiy Ahmed became the prime minister in 2018, there have been massive displacements and identity-based attacks, including killings, as has been documented by independent human right organizations. These identity-based attacks might have weakened individuals' national identity, which was once bolstered by the 2005 election. The latter explanation is in line with studies on behavioural economics that find

²¹ D. Roodman, M. Ø. Nielsen, J. G. MacKinnon, and M. D. Webb, "Fast and Wild: Bootstrap Inference in Stata Using Boottest," *The Stata Journal* 19, no. 1 (2019), 4–60.

the latest events have a disproportionate effect on humans' thinking and decision-making.²²

Table 2: The effect the 2005 election on national identity

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	2013	2020	Pooled
Formative age*Education*Urban	0.0195*	0.0146	0.0119*
	(0.00900)	(0.0161)	(0.00762)
	[0.067]	[0.3874]	[0.0751]
Survey-Year FE			-0.591***
			(0.176)
Control variables	YES	YES	YES
N	2087	2079	4166
R-sq	0.070	0.219	0.176

The standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at the region level. The wild bootstrap p values²³ are in brackets. Significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 3 presents the results of the OLS estimates on the effect of the 2005 election using the type of federalism support as a dependent variable. The OLS estimates are based on the 2020 survey only, as the question that elicits this information was not asked during the 2013 survey. My results show that there is a positive association between being young during the 2005 election, being better educated and living in an urban area, and supporting geography-based federalism. However, this relationship is not statistically significant. Nevertheless, the lack of statistical significance is not surprising, given that the election also has no statistically significant effect on national identity when the regression analysis is based on the 2020 survey data only.

Overall, my results appear to be consistent with the findings of earlier studies that look at the long-term effects of salient political and economic events on individuals who were at their formative ages at the time. For example, one study conducted in the United States finds that women who grew up during or just after the period when women could not vote were less likely to vote in elections between 1952 and 1988 (long after women were given the right to vote in 1920).²⁴ Another study, on the other hand, finds that individuals who were at their formative ages during student movements around 1968 tend to embrace right-wing political ideologies later in life.²⁵

Similarly, studies demonstrate that important economic events shape the long-term views of individuals who were young when these events unfolded. For example, one study finds that individuals who experienced a recession during their formative years are likely to favour redistribution in the short term and long term.²⁶ Another study finds that the macroeconomic conditions under which individuals grew up affect their preferences for the type of job they prefer over the long term.²⁷ Accordingly, individuals who grew up during a

²² A. Tversky and D. Kahneman, "Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases: Biases in Judgments Reveal Some Heuristics of Thinking under Uncertainty," *Science* 185, no. 4157 (1974): 1124–31.

²³ Wild bootstrap p values are estimated using `boottest` stata command.

²⁴ Firebaugh and Chen, "Vote Turnout of Nineteenth Amendment Women."

²⁵ Barone, de Blasio, and Poy, "The Legacy of 1968 Student Protests on Political Preferences."

²⁶ Bietenbeck and Thiemann, "Revisiting the Effect of Growing Up in a Recession on Attitudes towards Redistribution."

²⁷ M. Cotofan, L. Cassar, R. Dur, and S. Meier, "Macroeconomic Conditions When Young Shape Job Preferences for Life," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 105 no. 2 (2023): 467–73.

recession tend to give priority to income, those that grew up during an economic boom tend to give priority to the meaning provided by a job.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the relationship between the outcome and the treatment variable is weak. Here, I offer some possible explanations. First, it could be because 8 years or 15 years is too long a period to have any noticeable effect. Second, it could be because the 2005 election is not that salient in terms of influencing the political views of youths, including their national identity. Third, and related to the second reason, is that recent political developments in the country have overshadowed the effects of the 2005 election.

Table 3: The effect of 2005 election on the type of federalism support

	2020
Formative age*Education*Urban	0.0177
	(0.0270)
	[0.5646]
Control variables	YES
N	2079
R-sq	0.134

The standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at the region level. The wild bootstrap p values are in brackets. Significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Conclusion


In this paper, using Afrobarometer survey data, I examine the long-term effects of the 2005 election on young individuals' national identity and their preferred type of federalism. My results show that the 2005 election has a modestly enduring effect on young individuals' identities; individuals who were between 18 and 25 years old during the 2005 election are likely to identify with their Ethiopian identity instead of ethnic identity long after the election compared to other demographic groups. My finding is consistent with the impressionable year hypothesis, which posits that important political and economic events have an enduring effect on young individuals' political and economic views. My results further indicate that the election has a positive effect on the support of individuals who were at their formative ages during that time for geographic-based federalism, but the effect is not statistically significant.

From a policy perspective, the results of this paper suggest that political actors interested in shaping Ethiopia's long-term political trajectory need to work with today's youth who are at their formative ages. This is because, not only do youth currently represent the majority of the country's population, but their ages also provide an important window of opportunity to shape their worldviews, including on politics.

The other implication of the paper's results is that the effects of conflicts and political upheavals happening in Ethiopia are not necessarily limited to the present, but might also have ramifications for the country's long-term economic, political, and social aspects by influencing and shaping young individuals' views. Thus, parties to the conflicts and other stakeholders need to factor in, not only the conflicts' current economic and human costs, but also its future costs, including the country's political trajectory.

This paper investigates the long-term effects of one of the most salient political events in the country on the views of youth since the EPRDF assumed power up until Abiy Ahmed became the prime minister, thereby leading to the dissolution of the front. Given the rise of significant political events that have appeared since Prime Minister Abiy has taken office – events that overshadow the 2005 election – it is important to explore the effects of these events on the shaping of youths' political views as well as others in the short term and long term.

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