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News release

Ethiopians prefer federal to centralised government, but split over delineation, Afrobarometer survey reveals

A majority of Ethiopians still view federalism with independent regional governments as the best form of government for the country, although support for this view has declined, a new Afrobarometer survey shows.

Citizens are evenly divided as to whether Ethiopia's federalism should continue to be based on regions defined in accordance with nations, nationalities, and peoples' identities or should change to a system based on the geographic features of the country.

The fate of federalism has been a subject of intense debate for many years. Ethiopian politics essentially continues to be a battleground between federalist and unitarist political ideologies, with ongoing debates among politicians, scholars, and civil society representatives on whether the country should maintain the multinational federalism that has been in place since the federal Constitution was ratified in 1995, modify it, or shift to a unitary form of government.

Key findings

- A majority (54%) of Ethiopians prefer a federal over a unitary system of government, viewing it as the best system to accommodate the country's cultural and linguistic diversity. About four out of 10 (42%) see federalism as a system that leads to conflict and favour a shift to a unitary form of government (Figure 1).
- Compared to the results of the previous Afrobarometer survey, in 2020, the proportion of people who favour the federal form of government declined by 7 percentage points, from 61% to 54%, while the corresponding share in support of a unitary government rose by 5 points (Figure 2).
- If a federal system of government is maintained, Ethiopians are split as to what it should look like: About half (49%) say federalism should continue to be based on regions defined in accordance with nations, nationalities, and people's identities, while the other half (48%) say the regions should be based on geography, not on where different nations and nationalities live (Figure 3).
 - Urban residents are more likely to favour a geographic basis (54% vs. 44%), while residents in rural areas, which tend to be less culturally and linguistically diverse, are more likely to prefer the current definition based on identify (51% vs. 47%).
 - At the country level, these views have not changed significantly since the 2020 survey (Figure 4).

Afrobarometer surveys

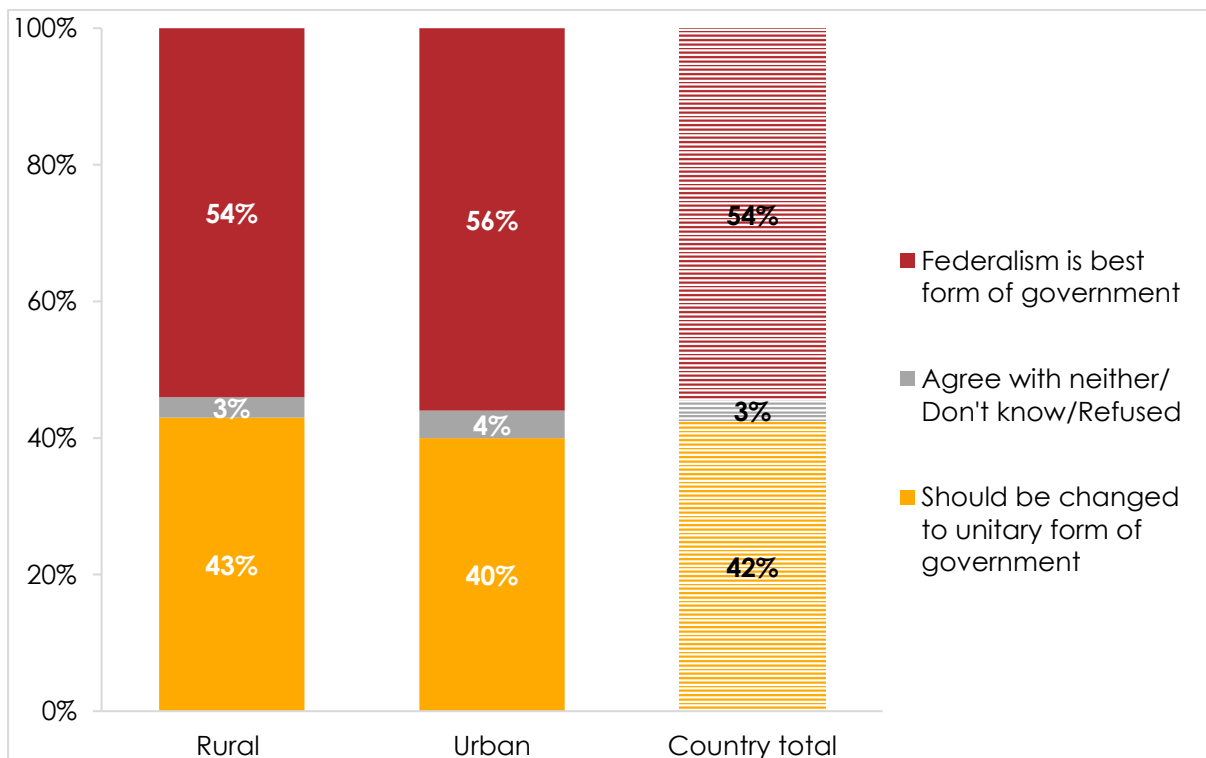
Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 9

surveys (2022/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

With support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Afrobarometer team in Ethiopia, led by ABCON – Research & Consulting, interviewed 2,400 adult Ethiopians between 25 May and 22 June 2023. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. A previous survey was conducted in Ethiopia in 2020.

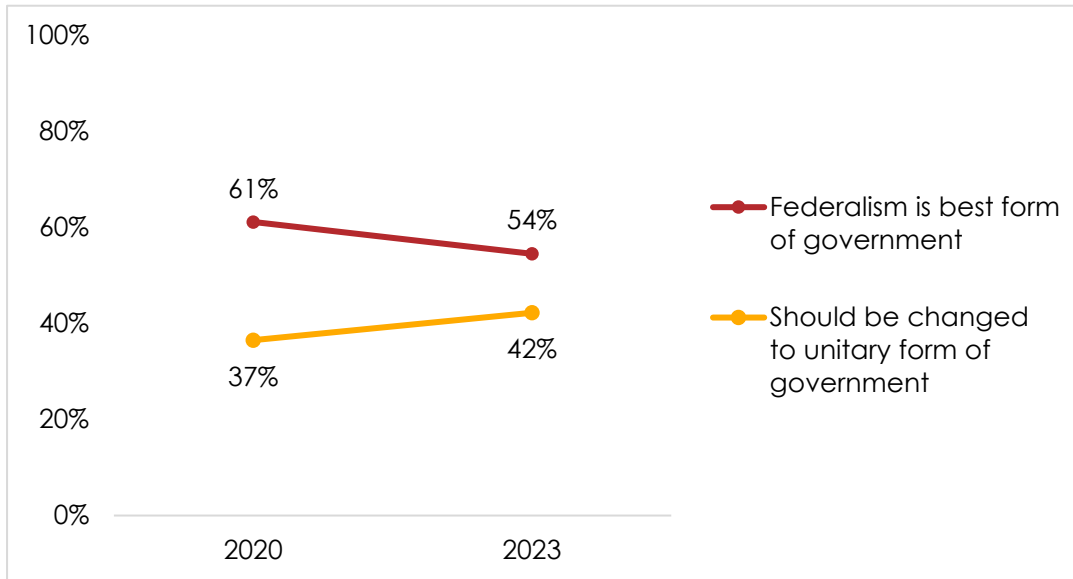
Charts

Figure 1: Should Ethiopia remain federal or change to a unitary form of government?
 | by urban-rural location | Ethiopia | 2023



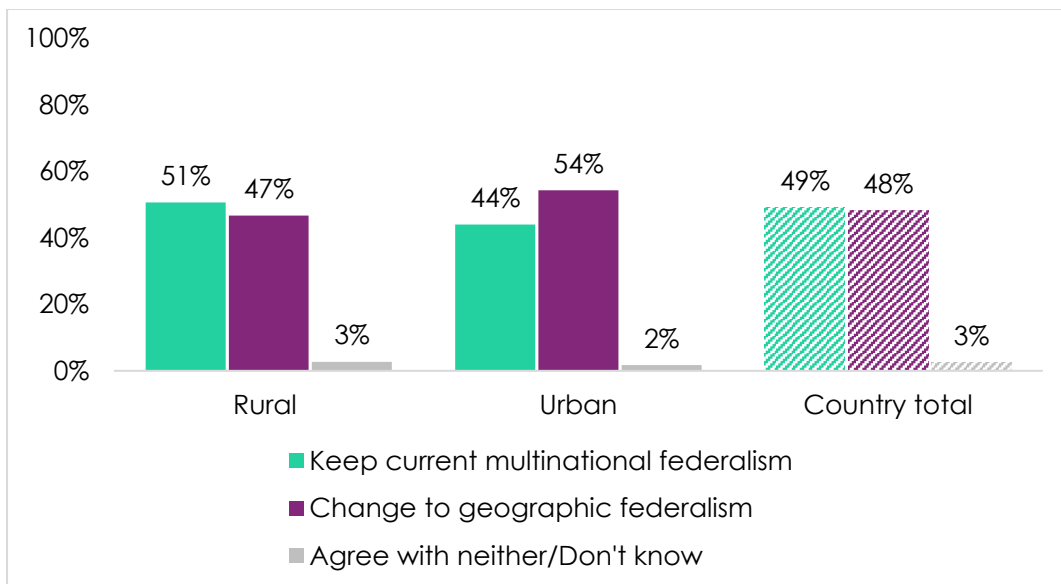
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Because of Ethiopia's cultural and linguistic diversity, some type of federalism with independent regional governments is still the best form of government for the country.
 Statement 2: Because federalism based on cultural and linguistic identity sometimes leads to conflicts, Ethiopia should change to a unitary government in which the central government has more authority in decision making.
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

Figure 2: Change over time: Federal vs. unitary government | Ethiopia | 2020-2023



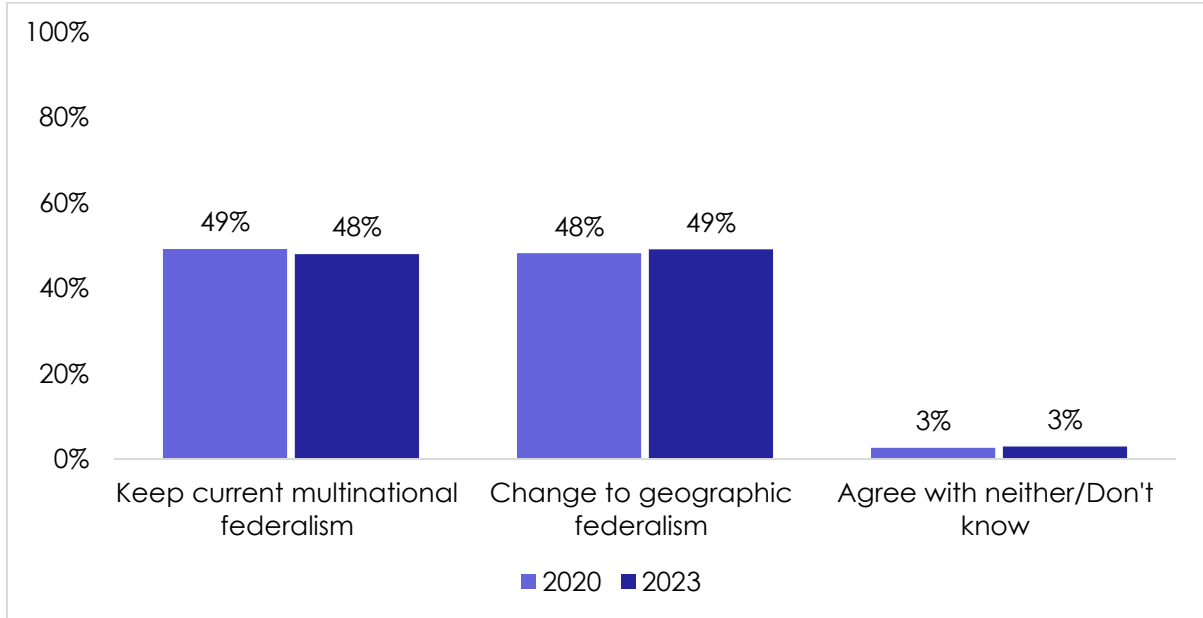
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Figure 3: Type of federalism: Multinational vs. geographic | by urban-rural location | Ethiopia | 2023



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: If Ethiopia remains a federal system, then the current system of federalism, where regions are defined based on nations, nationalities, and peoples' identity, should be kept.
 Statement 2: If Ethiopia remains a federal system, it should change to a system where regions are based only on geographical boundaries, not on where different nations, nationalities, and peoples live.
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

Figure 4: Change over time: Multinational vs. geographic federalism | Ethiopia
 | 2020-2023



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