



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
25 August 2020

## News release

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### Ethiopians support constitutional amendments to add federal government languages and limit PM terms, divided on other changes

Ethiopians favour amending the country's Constitution to make the federal government multilingual, limit the prime minister to two terms, and establish a Constitutional Court, a new Afrobarometer survey shows. However, they are divided on private land ownership, the right to self-determination, the national emblem, and the status of the capital city, Addis Ababa.

Large majorities say that the Constitution should be amended – rather than replaced or maintained as it is – to reflect the needs of contemporary Ethiopia and that ordinary citizens should be consulted during the review process.

Majorities also support designating more working languages – in addition to Amharic – for the federal government, instituting a two-term limit for the prime minister, and establishing a Constitutional Court separate from the House of Federation.

The survey shows some popular support – as well as significant opposition – regarding proposed constitutional provisions that have been controversial among the political elite. These include the removal of Article 39, which enshrines the right of nations, nationalities, and peoples to self-determination; the extension of land ownership rights to individuals; and removal of the emblem at the center of the national flag.

The survey results will feed into the ongoing debate regarding the Constitution in Ethiopia's newly opened political space. The past two years have been marked by the return of opposition voices calling for constitutional changes and a proliferation of media outlets that have engaged the political elite in a series of debates on the Constitution.

#### Key findings

- Seven out of 10 Ethiopians (69%) support amending the Constitution, while only 11% want it to be discarded or replaced and 18% say it should be kept unchanged (Figure 1).
- Proposed constitutional amendments favoured by a majority of survey respondents include (Figure 2):
  - Designating additional working languages for the federal government (73%).
  - Limiting the prime minister to serving a maximum of two terms (68%).
  - Establishing a Constitutional Court separate from the House of Federation, which is currently vested with the power to interpret the Constitution (55%).
- Other proposed amendments win only minority support:
  - Four in 10 Ethiopians (43%) support removing Article 39 guaranteeing the rights of nations, nationalities, and peoples to self-determination, secession, and establishment of their own regional state government. But half (50%) of citizens want to maintain this guarantee.
  - Respondents are almost evenly split over whether to change (46%) or maintain (49%) the constitutional provision that all land be owned by the state rather than by individual citizens.

- Fewer than four in 10 Ethiopians (37%) want to remove the emblem at the center of the national flag, while a majority (52%) are opposed to its removal.
- Only about one-third (35%) of respondents think Addis Ababa should be made a member state of the federation; a majority (54%) oppose the idea.
- Ethiopians are divided concerning the best timing for the constitutional review: One-third (34%) say it should take place before the next national election, while similar proportions want it to happen soon after the election (33%) or at least a year after the election (29%) (Figure 3).
- An overwhelming majority (92%) of Ethiopians say ordinary citizens should be consulted during the constitutional review process. Only 7% would leave amendment decisions to elected political leaders (Figure 4).

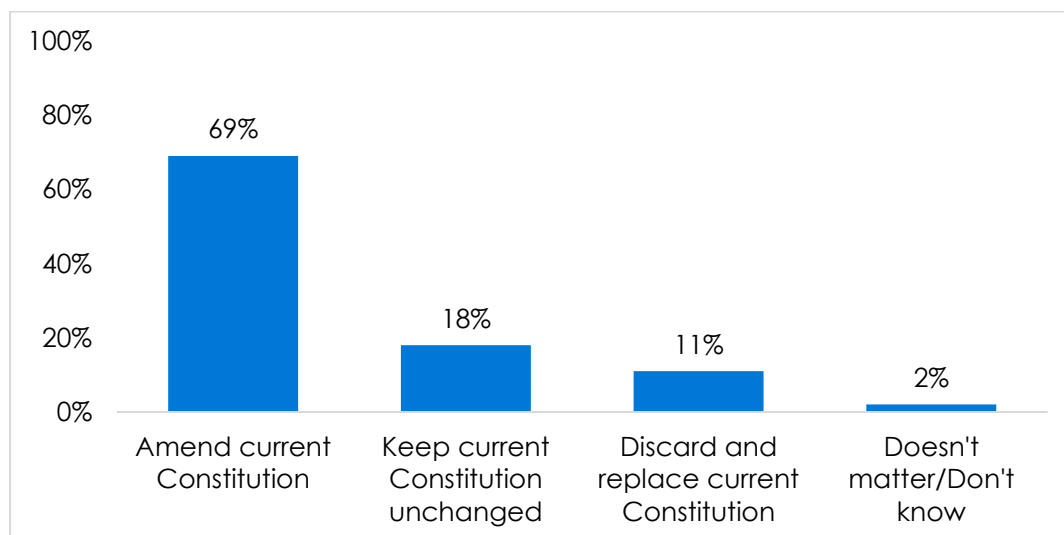
### Afrobarometer surveys

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. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2020 are planned in at least 35 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

With support from Freedom House, the Afrobarometer team in Ethiopia, led by ABCON – Research & Consulting, interviewed 2,400 adult Ethiopians in December 2019 and January 2020. 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 2013.

### Charts

**Figure 1: Should Ethiopia's Constitution be kept as it is, amended, or replaced?**  
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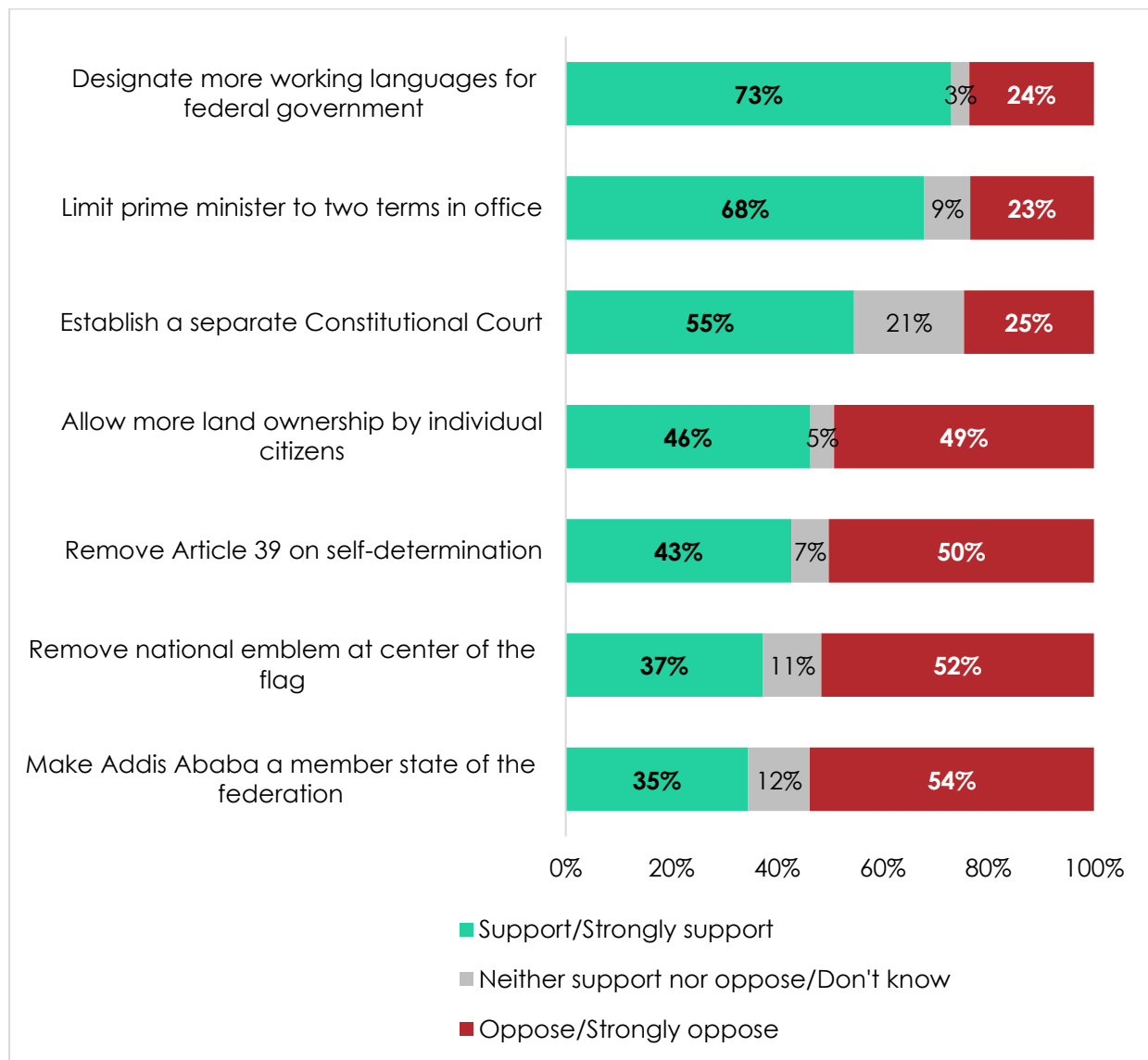
**Respondents were asked:** Which of these statements is closest to your view?

*Statement 1: The current Constitution of Ethiopia should be kept as it is; there is no need for changes or reforms.*

*Statement 2: The country's current Constitution should be kept, but it should be amended to meet the needs of the current time.*

*Statement 3: The current Constitution should be discarded and replaced with a new Constitution.*

**Figure 2: Views on proposed constitutional amendments | Ethiopia | 2020**



**Respondents were asked:**

A number of proposals have been made about how Ethiopia should amend or replace some provisions in the current Constitution. Would you support or oppose each of the following proposed changes to the Ethiopian Constitution, or haven't you heard enough to say?

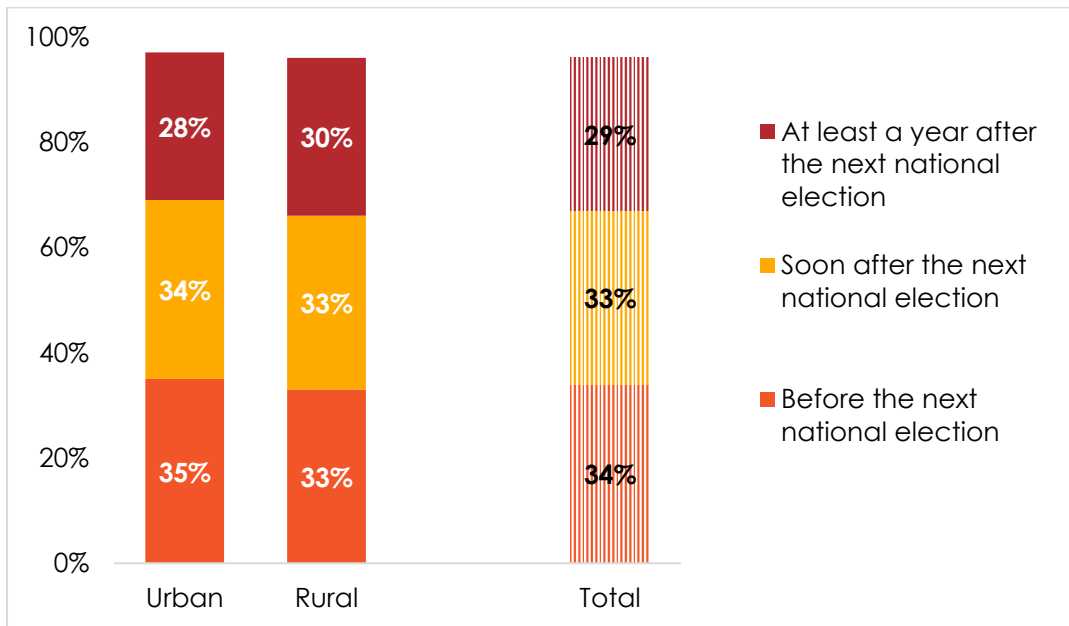
- Article 39, which ensures the rights of nations, nationalities, and peoples to self-determination, secession, and establishment of their own regional state government should be removed.
- The provision that all land should be owned by the state should be changed or removed to allow more ownership rights for individual citizens.
- The national emblem at the center of the Ethiopian flag should be removed.
- Other languages in addition to Amharic should be designated as working languages of the federal government.
- Constitutional Court that is separate from the House of Federation should be established.
- Addis Ababa should be made a member state in the federation.

Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: The Constitution should limit the prime minister to serving a maximum of two terms in office.

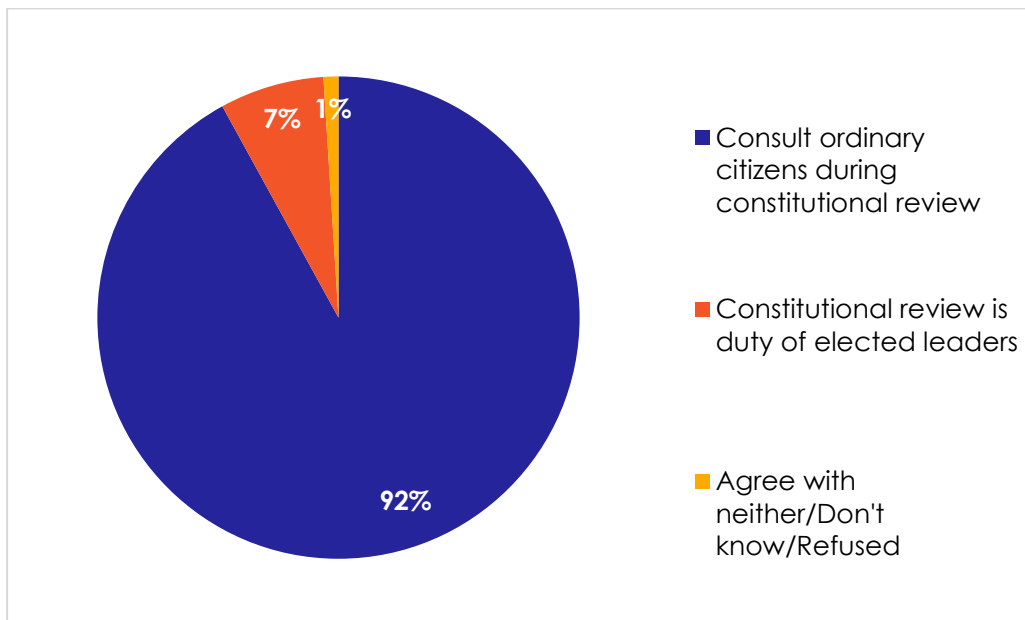
Statement 2: There should be no constitutional limit on how long the prime minister can serve.

**Figure 3: Timing of constitutional review** | by urban-rural residency | Ethiopia | 2020



**Respondents were asked:** *If the Constitution is to be amended or reviewed, when do you think this process should take place?*

**Figure 4: Should constitutional review involve consultation with ordinary citizens or be left to elected political leaders?** | Ethiopia | 2020



**Respondents were asked:** *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*  
 Statement 1: *If a constitutional review process takes place to revise or replace the current Ethiopian Constitution, it should include consultation with ordinary Ethiopians.*  
 Statement 2: *Amendment or replacement of the Ethiopian Constitution is the duty of elected political leaders; there is no need to consult ordinary Ethiopians.*  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

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