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News release

Ethiopians embrace federalism but are split over whether it should be ethnic or geographic, Afrobarometer survey shows

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

But citizens are evenly divided as to whether Ethiopia's federalism should continue to be based on regions defined by ethnicity or should change to a system based on geographic features of the country.

The fate of federalism has been intensely debated since the country launched a reform agenda two years ago. Both private and public media have been hosting debates by politicians, scholars, and civil society representatives on whether the country should maintain the ethnic/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

- Six out of 10 Ethiopians (61%) prefer a federal over a unitary system of government. Almost four out of 10 (37%) see federalism as too divisive and favour a shift to a unitary form of government (Figure 1).
- 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 by ethnicity, while the other half (48%) say the regions should be based on geography, not on where different ethnic groups live (Figure 2).
 - Urban residents are more likely to favour a geographic basis (54% vs. 44%), while residents in rural areas, which tend to be less ethnically diverse, are more likely to prefer the current ethnicity-based definition (51% vs. 47%).

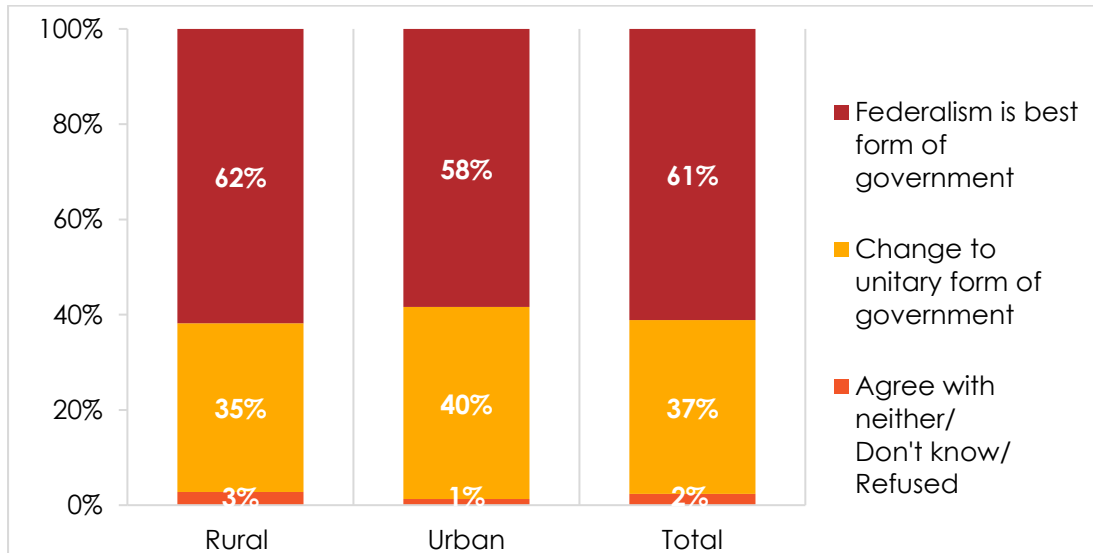
Afrobarometer surveys

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 ABC CON – 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.

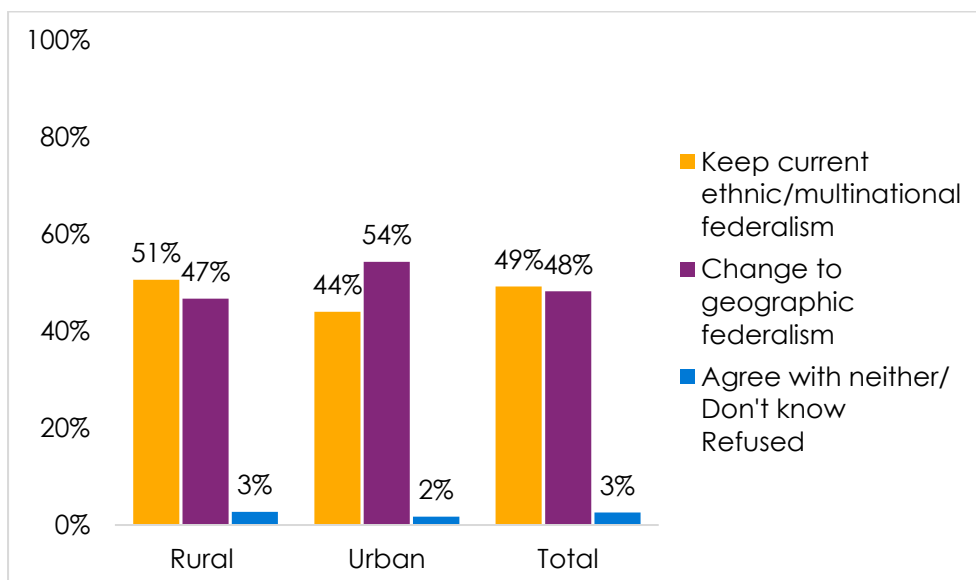
Charts

Figure 1: Should Ethiopia remain federal or change to a unitary form of government?
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Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Because of Ethiopia's diversity, some type of federalism with independent regional governments is still the best form of government for the country.
 Statement 2: Federalism is too divisive and leads to conflicts; Ethiopia should change to a unitary government in which the central government has more authority in decision-making.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Figure 2: Type of federalism: multinational/ethnic vs. geographic | Ethiopia | 2020



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 ethnic federalisms, 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 geographic features of the country, not on where different ethnic groups live.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

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