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WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ETHIOPIA: THE INTERSECTION OF FEDERALISM AND GENDER

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ABSTRACT

The topic of women's political participation in Ethiopia is complex, with various factors affecting women's ability to engage in politics. One key factor is the country's federal system, which has implications for gender equality and women's participation in political decision-making processes. This article examines the intersection of federalism and gender in Ethiopia and explores how the country's political system affects women's political participation. The article draws on existing literature to highlight the challenges facing women in Ethiopia, as well as the opportunities presented by the federal system. Ultimately, the paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between federalism and women's political participation in Ethiopia and to provide insights that can inform policy and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the country.

Keywords: Gender, Federalism, Ethiopia, women's political participation, empowerment

RESUMEN

El tema de la participación política de las mujeres en Etiopía es complejo, ya que existen diversos factores que afectan a la capacidad de las mujeres para participar en política. Un factor clave es el sistema federal del país, que tiene implicaciones para la igualdad de género y la participación de las mujeres en los procesos de toma de decisiones políticas. Este artículo examina la intersección entre federalismo y género en Etiopía y explora cómo el sistema político del país afecta a la participación política de las mujeres. El artículo se basa en la literatura existente para destacar los retos a los que se enfrentan las mujeres en Etiopía, así como las oportunidades que presenta el sistema federal. En última instancia, el artículo pretende contribuir a una mejor comprensión de la relación entre el federalismo y la participación política de las mujeres en Etiopía y aportar ideas que puedan servir de base a los esfuerzos políticos y de promoción encaminados a fomentar la igualdad de género y el empoderamiento de las mujeres en el país.

Palabras clave: Género, federalismo, Etiopía, participación política de las mujeres, empoderamiento.

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I. INTRODUCTION

There have been significant advancements in women's involvement in politics in recent years, with an increase in studies on federal systems and women's participation. It is widely recognized that an inclusive political process, where different sections of society can participate equally and meaningfully, is fundamental to a democratic and fair System (Intenernational Insitute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2020). International organizations have launched initiatives to support women's political participation, resulting in progress in women's rights, even in federal governments. In African countries with a federal system, such as South Africa and Nigeria, women are more represented in politics than in some developed democracies (African Barometer, 2021). This is because of affirmative action measures that promote women's participation in political institutions and processes. Women's inclusion in political participation is critical for their access to political platforms. In recent years, there has been even more progress in women's political participation in federal systems. For example, many countries have implemented policies such as gender quotas for political parties or reserved seats for women in legislative bodies. These measures have been shown to be effective in increasing women's representation, although they are not without controversy.

To support women empowerment, Ethiopia ratified the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981. Further, Ethiopia also ratified the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Person and the Exploitation of Prostitution of others. The Legatum Institute notes that Ethiopia is at a pivotal moment in its history and that the future path is not only vital for Ethiopian citizens but will have an impact on the development of the continent as a whole, that why women participation and inclusivity is important in Ethiopia's federal system (Legatum Institute, 2021). However, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) shows that in Ethiopia the focus on gender overlooks other identity markers, such as ethnicity, age and education, that lead to the excusion of some women while propelling others into politics (Institute for Security Studies, 2022). Against this background it is essential to explore how the federal system has created opportunities and challenges for women political participation.

II. THEORIES OF FEDERALISM

They are different theories in relation to federalism and this section will discuss these theories and link them to the concept of federalism and female representation in Ethiopia.

William Riker characterized federalism as a system in which two levels of government share authority over the same land and population. He explained that each level of government has a certain degree of autonomy in at least one area of governance, and there are measures in place to ensure that each government maintains its autonomy within its own sphere (Riker, 1964). Daniel Elazar caracterised federalism as "self-rule plus shared rule" within a political system (Elazar, 1987). Similarly, Ronald Watts described federalism as a system that combines elements of shared rule and regional self-rule. Based on these definitions and the perspectives of federalism scholars, we can identify some key elements of federalism: (a) the presence of at least two levels of government with sovereign power in certain areas, (b) a shared rule that is not subject to unilateral amendment. Shared rule is a significant aspect of governance in any form of government. The existence of two levels of government in federalism empówers women to participate in politics, as it distributes power across different levels of government.

Scholars have put forth various interpretations of the underlying rationale or objective of federalism, and they have identified four major reasons why states choose to adopt this system. The first reason, as outlined in the Federalist Papers in support of the ratification of the United States Constitution, is that federalism can safeguard individual liberty, promote economic growth and freedom, and ensure the establishment of a democratic form of government. Further, Elazar developed the democratic, liberty, equality and freedom justifications of federalism (Elazar,1987). The author contends that federalism is a system that optimizes individual rights, fairness, freedom, and strengthens democratic self-rule within a political entity. In this context, federalism can serve as a means of improving women's representation by offering them greater democratic participation and freedom.

Further, the Ethiopian political landscape is predominantly authoritarian. Authoritarian regimes are nations where there is little or no political diversity and pluralism is significantly restricted. Such countries are typically ruled by absolute monarchs or dictators and may have certain formal democratic institutions, but they are largely symbolic and have limited significance. Civil liberties are frequently violated, and elections, if they occur, are not conducted fairly or freely, often resembling fraudulent or sham elections. The media is frequently controlled by either the state or groups linked to the ruling regime, and the judiciary is not independent. Censorship and repressive measures against government criticism are prevalent in such regimes (Democracy Index, 2015). Authotarian government may hinder women representation and participation. Further, to justify the federal system, Elazar stipulated that federalism aims to institute a workable political arrangement based on a just moral order. Hence, according to this view, the superiority of federalism, as a system of state organization, to bring a workable polity with a just moral order is the reason why states adopt or should adopt federalism.

The second theory focuses on the existence of external military or diplomatic threat for the origin of federalism. The Riker challenges the notion that states adopt federalism in order to safeguard liberty and ensure democracy (Brams et al., 2022). Instead, he proposes that federalism arises as a result of a bargain struck between politicians who make the offer and those who accept it. He argues that such a bargain is feasible when the politicians seeking the bargain desire to extend their territorial control, typically in response to an external military or diplomatic threat or to prepare for military or diplomatic aggression or expansion. Conversely, those who accept the bargain and relinquish some degree of independence for the sake of unity are willing to do so because of a military-diplomatic threat or opportunity. Therefore, for the author, the confluence of these factors –the expansion and military conditions– leads to the emergence of federalism. This might be one of the factors behind the ongoing ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia, as some ethnic groups are more dominant than others, and this has also affected female presentantion in Ethiopia.

The third theory postulates that federalism originates from a mismatch between the political identity and the geographic boundaries of a political entity. Malcolm Feeley and Edward Rubin advance this theory (Krane, 2011). According to the third theory, states adopt federalism as a result of a "tragic compromise" to address the mismatch between political identity and geographic governance. Unlike the first theory, which views federalism as a way to reduce human vice in a political community, Feeley and Rubin regard federalism as a "tragic aspect of life" that arises from the misfortune of conflicts in political identity. They argue that the main reason for the emergence of federalism is "to resolve conflicts among citizens that arise from the disjuncture between their geography-based sense of political identity and the actual or potential geographic organization of their polity." Therefore, given the ongoing ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia, federalism may be an ideal way to address the ethnic tensions that have persisted for a long time.

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From the reviewed theories it is clear that federalism allows greater participation in decision-making by people at the local level. In many African countries, there are significant regional, ethnic, and linguistic differences that can make it difficult for a centralized government to effectively represent the interests of all citizens. By devolving some power to regional governments, federalism can help to ensure that the needs and concerns of local communities are taken into account. At the same time, federalism can also create challenges for political participation. For example, if power is too heavily concentrated in regional governments, it can limit opportunities for citizens to participate in national decision-making. In addition, federal systems can sometimes lead to conflicts between different levels of government, as well as between different regions or ethnic groups as seen in Ethiopia. The relationship between political participation and federalism in Africa is complex and depends on a range of factors, including the specific political context and the design of the federal system. However, federalism can provide an important framework for addressing issues of political participation and governance in diverse and complex societies.

A recent study by Stockmer and Wiggonton found out that on average, countries that have federalism enshrined in their constitution have seven percentage points more female deputies in their parliaments (Vickers et al., 2020). Federal systems also provide more opportunities to lobby for reforms, and this is especially helpful in the case that the central government blocks demands and agreemetns. The constituent unit can act as laboratories for innovation. Alttough political parties at the federal level and political elite can act as gatekeepers to women–friendly policies, notably gender quotas (Vickers et al., 2020). These obstacles can be bypassed in a federal system, as those pursuing reforms have the opportunity to pursue their objectives at the subnational level. When innovative gender friendly policies are established in subnational units, they are likely to be copied in other subnational units, or even at the federal level.

Federal systems can play an important role in promoting female political participation. In a federal system, power is distributed among different levels of government, which can create opportunities for women to participate in politics and decision-making at the local and regional levels. One of the key advantages of federalism is that it allows for the devolution of power and decision-making to the local level. This can create opportunities for women to participate in politics and decision-making at the grassroots level, where they may have greater access to resources and support networks. In addition, federal systems often provide for greater representation of diverse groups, including women, in regional and local institutions. Moreover, federal systems can provide opportunities for women to gain political experience and build networks, which can help to prepare them for leadership roles at higher levels of government. For example, women who serve in constituent unit´s governments may be better positioned to run for state or national office in the future. Further, federal systems can help to promote female political participation by providing opportunities for women to participate in politics and decision-making at the local and constituent unit´s levels. This can create opportunities for women to gain political experience, build networks, and prepare for leadership roles at higher levels of government.

However, it is important to note that conservative constituent units may block progressive reforms established by the central government (Forster, 2020). One way federalism may block progressive reforms is through the legal and political powers of the states. In a federal system, constituent units have their own governments, constitutions, and laws, which can differ from those of the federal government. This means that constituent units can pass their own laws and regulations that may conflict with or undermine progressive policies established by the central government.

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For example, in the United States, some states have passed laws restricting access to reproductive healthcare services, despite federal laws that protect a woman's right to choose. Similarly, some states have passed laws that limit or prevent local governments from implementing progressive policies, such as raising the minimum wage or establishing gun control measures (CAP, 2021). Another way federalism may block progressive reforms is through funding. In many federal systems, the feederal government provides funding to the constituent units for various programs and initiatives. However, the federal government may withhold funding or attach conditions to funding in order to ensure that the constituent units comply with progressive policies. If the constituent units refuse to comply or do not have the resources to comply, the progressive policies may not be fully implemented. Federalism can create challenges for implementing progressive reforms established by the federal government. However, it can also provide opportunities for experimentation and innovation in policy implementation, as different constituent units can try out

III. ETHIOPIAN FEDERALISM AND STATUS OF WOMEN

Ethiopia, a country located in the Horn of Africa, has a land area of about 1.1 million square kilometre and a population size of 122 million in 2022. It is the third most populous country in Africa with the 67% of the population live in absolute poverty. Due to its rapid rate of population growth, Ethiopia has a very young population which is 45% of the population is under the age of 15 (Multi Demishion Poverty Index, 2022). Women in Ethiopia occupy the lowest status in the society. Even though they represent 49.8% of the population and contribute mainly to food production and other, they have not shared the fruits of development (Ethiopia National Report Progress, 2022). Rights such as, access to land, credit and other productive resources are difficult for women to attain. They also experience multiple forms of other deprivations such as longer working days, women-specific diseases and low levels of education relative to men. While adult literacy rate for women is about 32% and net female primary enrolment ratio is about 27%, it is about 42% for males. Further, violence and discrimination against women is still widespread in the countryUN (Women, 2022). Further, violence against women, lack of education etc, their representation and participation in leadership and decision-making position has also been limited. The Government has been advocating policy of equal opportunity for both men and women to participate in the democratization of the country, however, women have not been adequately represented at all levels of decision-making positions. Women represent only 7.6% of the House of People Representative (Parliament) and 12.9% of State (Regional) Council.

Federalism was introduced in Ethiopia in 1991, following the fall of the Marxist-Leninist regime known as the Derg (Mehretu et al., 2022). The adoption of federalism was a response to the country's diverse ethnic and linguistic composition, with over 80 ethnic groups and languages spoken in the country.The new constitution, ratified in 1995, established a federal system of government with nine regional states and two administrative cities, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. Each state has its own government and parliament, with the power to legislate on issues related to education, health, agriculture, and other matters within their respective territories. The federal government retains authority over foreign policy, defense, and other matters that affect the country as a whole. The constitution also provides for the creation of a House of Federation, composed of representatives from each state, to serve as a forum for resolving disputes between the federal government and the states. The adoption of federalism in Ethiopia was intended to address long-standing grievances of ethnic and linguistic minorities, who had often been marginalized and excluded from political power. However, the implementation of federalism has been fraught with challenges,

including tensions between the federal government and some of the regional states, as well as inter-ethnic conflicts within certain regions.

In Ethiopia's decentralized system, the federal government constitutes the first tier, followed by regional governments as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1 *Decentralisation structure of Ethiopias federal Government*
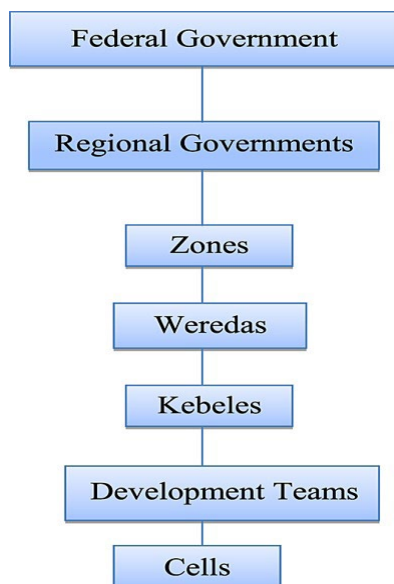
Source: Adapted from Synder et. al (2014)

The constitution stipulated the foundation for further decentralization by requiring the regional states to establish and adequately empower local government. This constitution enshrined the principles of regionalism and ethnic self-governing, devolving power to regional states, several of them coalitions of smaller ethnic groups. It also enshrined, for the first time as a constitutional principle, national ownership of land.

The country's first multiparty elections were also held in 1995, but they were boycotted by most opposition groups in protest against the harassment, arrests, and other actions instigated by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)-led government (Synder et al., 2014). The multiethnic EPRDF easily retained control of the federal government and most of the regional states. Negasso Gidada, a Christian Oromo who had served as minister of information in the transitional government, became president, and Meles became prime minister. The ethnic balance of the country was reflected in the careful selection of members for the Council of Ministers. The constitution empowered people to be participating directly in the administration of local government (FDRE Constitution Art. 50). Furthermore, Article 25 of FDRE constitution guarantees all persons equality before the law, and prohibits any discrimination on grounds of gender (FDRE Constitution, 1995). Lastly, Article 35 of FDRE constitution provides equal opportunity for women to participate in the decision-making process by giving them the right to vote and be elected. The historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia taken into account, women, in order to remedy this legacy, are entitled to affirmative measures.

The history of federalism in Ethiopia has been marked by both progress and setbacks, and the ongoing debate over the appropriate balance of power between the federal government and the states continues to shape the country's political landscape.

IV. WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN ETHIOPIA

Studies show that Ethiopian women are still largely underrepresented at all levels of political intuitions, and this means low participation of women. Political parties in Ethiopia generally admit that the proportion of women in the different party structures and decision-making positions is quite low (Synder et al., 2014). There are two primary categories of factors, external and internal, that shape the environment affecting advancements in promoting gender equality and women's representation in formal institutional politics. Internal factors involve aspects related to political parties and their institutional dynamics, such as internal party documents like constitutions, manifestos, and other policy-related materials, as well as internal party structures and regulations governing leadership elections, candidacy, and other matters. External factors, on the other hand, are more encompassing, covering legal and institutional factors as well as the overall political climate.

Figure 2. *Women representation in Ethiopia*
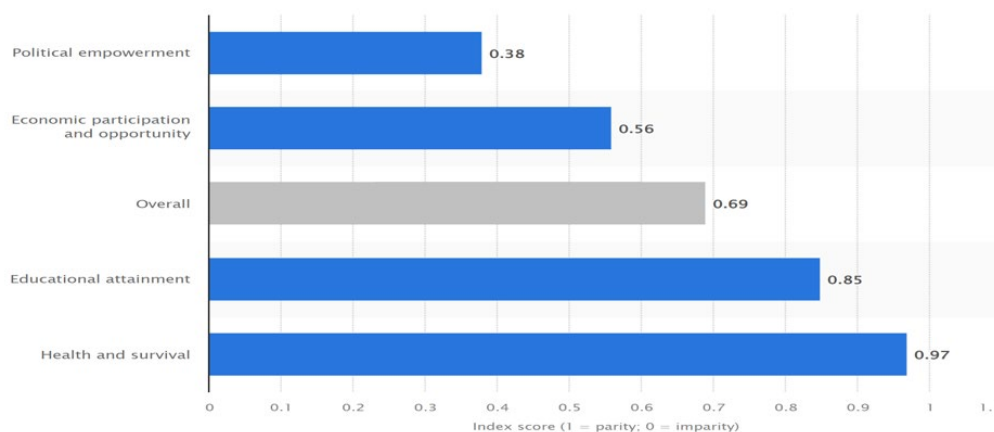
Source: Gender Gap Development Index

Further, in late 2021, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's administration announced the establishment of a national dialogue lasting three years, aimed at addressing Ethiopia's political crisis and addressing pressing domestic issues such as ongoing civil conflict, inflation, unemployment, and drought. During that same year, a total of 1,976 women were listed as candidates by political parties, while six ran independently. Qualification requirements for candidates differed across political parties, with more women running for regional council elections (22%) than for the HoPR (16%). While women accounted for approximately 42% of the ruling PP party's candidates, opposition parties reportedly struggled to include female candidates on their lists. Some political parties adopted specific gender policies, however, only 13 parties successfully reached the 20% threshold of registered women candidates to qualify for additional funding[1]. In terms of women's representation, women also make up 24% of the total members in all twelve parliamentary standing committees, with 17% and 42% serving as chair and deputy chair, respectively. Ethiopia has also emplemented isntution to empower women participation as follows: *National Women's Policy*

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1. Chapter 7, Article 100. Government Funding: Amount and Eligibility Criteria.

1. The government shall grant annual financial support for political parties to enable them conduct legal operations and meet their obligations, based on the vote they win at Federal and State Council elections, the support and donations they receive from members and supporters, the number of female and disabled candidates they nominate as candidates, and other relevant criteria.

In 1993, the Ethiopian government implemented the National Women's Policy, which aims to address the issues facing women across all areas of development. The policy recognizes that women in Ethiopia face discrimination in political, economic, and social spheres due to the patriarchal system that is reinforced by traditional cultural and religious norms. Women's status in Ethiopian society is often tied to their role in the household, which limits their access to public services, involvement in public affairs, and control over property. Additionally, the policy acknowledges the harmful effects of traditional practices on women and calls for a collaborative effort to combat discrimination against women and promote gender equality. To achieve this goal, the policy has established institutional mechanisms at all levels of government, including grassroots structures.

Women's Affairs Departments (WAD) in Federal Offices

The Women's Affairs Departments are found within ministries, commissions, agencies, or authorities, and their primary purpose is to incorporate gender considerations into the creation and execution of development plans within their respective organizations. The WADs' overall goals are based on the national women's policy, while their particular aims are established by aligning the institution's objectives with those of the national policy.

Women's Affairs at Regional levels

In Ethiopia, there is a women's affairs structure that operates at various levels including regional, zonal, Wereda, and Kebele. These levels are not formally connected, but each has its own chain of command and administrative body, with councils at the regional, Woreda, and Kebele levels. The Regional Women Affairs Bureaus (WABs) report to the President and are responsible for incorporating gender mainstreaming into development plans and their execution within their respective regions. This illustrates Ethiopia's commitment to promoting women's participation.

However, out of a total of 65 high-level executive positions, which includes ministerial, sub-ministerial, and commission positions, only nine are currently held by women. Specifically, there are only two women who are ministers, while the remaining seven women hold sub-ministerial positions. In terms of decision-making positions, women hold only 22 percent of the total 1251 positions. Additionally, women's representation in leadership and decision-making positions in the Political, Economic, and Social sectors is only 14 percent, 13 percent, and 16 percent respectively. In the law enforcement sector, only 11 percent of leadership positions, including those in the police and prosecutor offices, are held by women. As shown in figure 3, women are involved in politics compared to other decsion making positon in 2015 by 32%, hower the figure is still abit lower compared to men who held 68%.

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Figure 3: *Female participation in key positions in %*
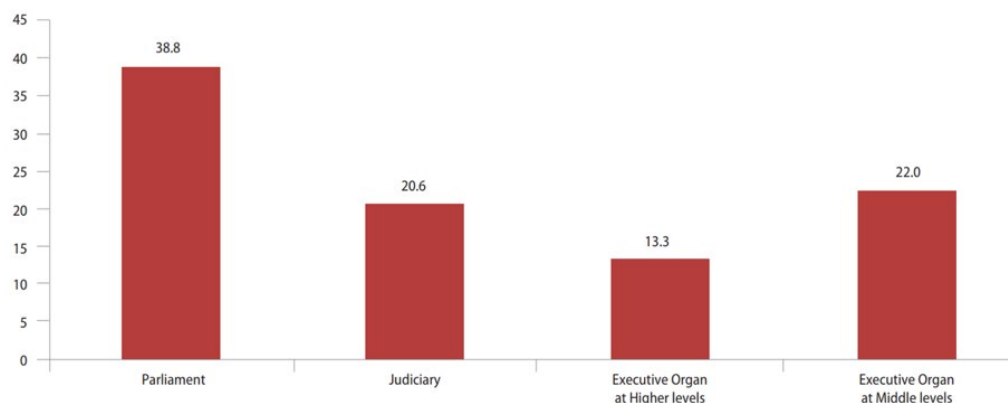
Source: Adapted from IIRR

Role of NGOS/INGOS Improving women Status

Ethiopia has an opportunity of NGOS supporting women empowerment. UN organizations, including UNDP, UNICEF, WFP, and the African Center for Women and Economic Commission for Africa, have a significant role in promoting women's participation and gender mainstreaming at all levels. They focus on reducing poverty, promoting equal rights for women and children, providing food aid for vulnerable women and children, mainstreaming gender, supporting the implementation of UN resolutions and conventions on gender equality, advocacy and policy analysis for gender mainstreaming, women's support, mainstreaming gender issues in all operations, and providing access to food and information dissemination on gender. In addition, bilateral organizations such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) play important roles in mainstreaming gender, governance and democracy, and ensuring that women are fully included as beneficiaries of all CIDA-funded projects. NGOs also play a major role in improving the status of women through activities such as promoting social justice, gender training, ending violence against women, construction of stoves, maternal and child health and family planning, rural water development, hand-dug wells, pond construction, spring capping and protection, income generation schemes, integrated water, health and sanitation, and savings schemes. However, there is still a gap for non-state actors to support women's political participation.

V. CHALLENGES OF THE FEDERAL SYSTEM AND WOMEN PARTICIPATION

The federal sytem in Ethiopia has increased regional autonomy and decision-making power, which can enable local authorities to address specific challenges faced by women in their communities. Additionally, federalism has provided a platform for greater representation of women in government and public life at the local level, as they may have more opportunities to participate in regional and local politics.However, federalism has led to disparities in policies and services across different regions, which could negatively impact women's access to resources and support.

Just so mention some challanges, the federal system in Ethiopia has created a fragmented political landscape, where power is decentralized and spread across different regions and ethnic groups. This can make it difficult for women to gain a foothold in politics, as they may not have access to the same networks or resources as established male politicians. Further,despite some progress in recent years, women remain significantly

underrepresented in political decision-making bodies at both the national and regional levels. This makes it difficult for their voices and concerns to be heard, and for policies to be developed that are sensitive to women's needs and priorities.

Federalism in Ethiopia has seen a number of ongoing conflicts. It is important to note that There are multiple factors that contribute to conflicts, not just federalism. These factors include the type of federalism being used, such as territorial, multi-national, or ethnic, as well as the form of federalism, such as symmetric or asymmetric, congruent or incongruent. Additionally, the socio-cultural context of the society, the degree of autonomy given to sub-national governments, and the strength of totalitarian institutional structures can also play a role. Ethiopia has been experiencing conflicts based on ethnicity. However, it's important to note that ethnicity, as a natural difference between people, is not inherently a source of conflict. (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Central Statistics, 2010).The forms of the federal structure (when ethnic) coupled with the politicisation of tribal identity cause such problems. Although there has not been a thorough investigation into the specific obstacles that Ethiopian women encounter in politics, female political party members confront numerous hurdles such as political violence, societal expectations that favor men, and a prevalent discourse throughout Ethiopia (Cohen,1995). The nature and scale of political violence perpetrated against women is particularly disempowering and affects their ability in political space.While attitudes to gender equality, sexual violence and gender discrimination are often trivialized, they remain ever-present threats in women's lives. Even when women overcome social pressure to pursue their political ambitions, patriarchal views and practices within political party structures about the role of women significantly undermine their active participation and engagement (Chatham House, 2022).

Some proponents of ethnic federalism believe it is the ultimate solution for maintaining a united Ethiopia with diverse ethnic groups, but others view it as a perilous notion that could ultimately result in the country's fragmentation (Cohen, 1985).In 2015, the conflict between different ethnic groups in the vicinity of Addis Ababa began with residents of the Oromia region, which encircles the capital, and the central government that was primarily controlled by the Tigrayans, including Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Zenawi had previously held a high-ranking position in the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which had spearheaded the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in toppling the emperor and putting an end to the Ethiopian monarchy that had existed for hundreds of years (Ottowa,2018). Nationalists view the federal policy as an intentional strategy aimed at weakening the country's sense of national identity, which is a setback to the nation-building initiative. Some people believe that ethnic federalism is a harmful tactic implemented by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) to create rifts among different ethnic groups, thereby enabling the Tigrayan minority to remain in power. The political system creates divisions instead of promoting unity, as it fosters mutual distrust and sets up ethnic power dynamics that can quickly escalate into chaos.

When federalism was introduced in Ethiopia in the early 1990s, it did not receive a warm reception. Although the militarily victorious, ethnic-based liberation movements presented federalism as the only viable path to democratization and stability, many others saw it as a method to disintegrate the country (Muhammad,2010). The appropriateness of federalism in addressing Ethiopia's challenges remains a prominent topic of discussion in constitutional and political circles, but the focus of the debate has changed over time. Nowadays, it's challenging to find any political group that openly opposes or questions the relevance of federalism. Instead, the discourse has moved towards the nature and quality of the federal arrangement, particularly the ethnic-based approach, which many believe has aggravated ethnic divisions, fueled intergovernmental conflicts, and relegated some individuals to a secondary status in the place they call home.

In additon, Ethiopia is a patriarchal society where traditional gender roles and norms are deeply ingrained. Women who seek to enter politics may face resistance from their families, communities, and even their own political parties, who may view them as challenging traditional gender roles and norms. Further, women who do enter politics in Ethiopia face violence, harassment, and intimidation, particularly if they challenge traditional gender roles or advocate for women's rights. This deters women from seeking political office or speaking out on issues that are important to them.Women in Ethiopia compared to men have limited access to resources, such as education, financial resources, and networks, that are necessary to enter and succeed in politics. This further limit their opportunities for political participation and leadership.

Although the presence of women in Ethiopian parliament is a positive step, the gender gap in political participation is more severe when considering women's influence on important political decisions across regions in Ethiopia. The gender gap is severe in womens participation compared to other socioeconomic activitiies. It is concerning that Ethiopia has not significantly improved its rank in the women participation. Women in Ethiopia not only have the lowest level of education compared to neighbouring countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, but they have also fallen behind on other gender equity indicators (NEWA,2021). Political empowerment, as defined by the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, is measured by the number of women in decision-making positions such as ministerial-level and parliamentary positions, as well as the number of years a female head of state has served compared to males in the last 50 years(NEWA, 2021). Women's involvement in political affairs is considered a key indicator of their empowerment, and the situation in Ethiopia has not improved as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4. *Gender Gap in Ethiopia*

Region	Education	Health	Economy	Participation	GDI
Tigray	0.75	0.56	0.60	0.27	0.55
Afara	0.25	0.00	0.87	0.07	0.30
Amahara	0.75	0.33	0.40	0.20	0.42
Oromiya	0.50	0.00	0.47	0.20	0.29
Somali	0.08	0.00	0.53	0.13	0.19
Benshangul	0.50	0.11	0.60	0.20	0.35
SNNP	0.67	0.22	0.53	0.20	0.41
Gambella	0.17	0.11	0.67	0.07	0.26
Harari	0.42	0.33	0.47	0.27	0.37
Addis Ababa	0.75	1.00	0.67	0.40	0.71
Dire Dawa	0.50	0.56	0.47	0.20	0.43
National	0.47	0.11	0.47	0.14	0.30

Source; Adapted from from Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (2021)

Traditions continue to emphasize women's primary roles as mothers and housewives and to restrict them to those roles in most countries. A traditional strong, patriarchal value system favors sexually segregated roles, and 'traditional cultural values' militate against the advancement, progress and participation of women in any political process.

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Societies all over the world are dominated by an ideology of 'a woman's place'. In most African countries like Ethiopia there is still a gender gap in socio and economic life of women (NEWA,2021). This is the environment, in which a certain collective image of women in traditional, apolitical roles continues to dominate, which many women face. So that today, cultural ideas about women can affect women's levels of representation throughout the political process, from an individual woman's decision to enter politics, to party selection of candidates, to the decisions made by voters on election day. In additional, women face prejudice as leaders because people tend to assume that leadership is a masculine trait. In the Ethiopia, there is a traditional belief that, women are made to take care of children and do kitchen works than participating outside home activity and there is division of works between men and women, which means home activities are belongs to women and outside home activities are belongs to men. Women are over-burdened with different household activities like cooking, take caring kids, washing and so on. These all activities make women busy in the household and impede their involvement in the politics of the country.

Further, socio-economic status of women to a greater extent plays a significant role in enhancing their participation and representation in political decision-making bodies. In this regard Shvedova in 2002 argues that social and economic status of women in society has a direct influence on their participation in political institutions and elected bodies. Lack of economic resources is one of the biggest obstacles that prevent women from participating in politics in greater numbers. Making it easier for women to access economic resources, therefore, is a key in expanding women's presence in the political realm.

VI. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

From this article, it is clear that one potential avenue for promoting female participation in Ethiopian politics is through the empowerment of local communities. By devolving power to regional states, the federal system allows for more grassroots participation in governance. This can be particularly beneficial for women, who may face less discrimination and greater opportunities to participate in decision-making at the local level.

Another potential solution is to increase education and training opportunities for women in Ethiopia. This can help to build their capacity to participate in politics and governance, and to challenge cultural norms that prioritize male leadership. By providing women with the skills and knowledge they need to participate effectively, Ethiopia can create a more inclusive and democratic society.

Literature has shown that the federal system promotes female political participation. Further, statistics have shown that over the years, female participation has improved has improved in Ethiopia, However there is more than can be done to encourage more female participation in politics, thus, this study recommends support of the gender quota.There is a wider consensus that gender quota is an effective tool to increase women's participation and representation in governance structures and a larger number of countries across the different regions of the world are implementing it hence Ethiopia can put a strong monitoring system in its federal structures to make sure there is always improvement in women participation. African experiences show that the implementation of gender quota frameworks that have a fundamental share in the achievements gained in bringing more women into African parliaments. In particular, the achievement of those that rank among the top 50 countries in the world in the proportion of women's representation in their national parliaments is attributable to mandatory gender quotas they have adopted and implemented; for example, reserved

seats in Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda; legislated candidate quotas in Angola and Senegal. Further non state actors should support projects/ programmes dealing with female particpation. There so many NGOS/INGOS working on women empowerment in Ethiopia, projects and programmes should delibarely focus on female participation and this will promote female political partcipation.

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