Fostering civic engagement in polarized, autocratic regimes: Evidence from a field experiment in Ethiopia

Sewareg Adamu[*] David A. Dow[†] Fitsum Hailu[‡]
Mesele Mengsteab[§] Jeremy Springman[¶] Juan Tellez[‖]

July 18, 2024

There is a sustained effort by scholars and practitioners to understand how to increase civic participation, based on the premise that increased engagement improves governance. Most of this work has been conducted in stable, civically liberal societies. However, in autocratic and polarized settings, there is a risk that new engagement will be stifled or take on an illiberal form. We present evidence from a civic engagement field experiment in Ethiopia, an electoral autocracy with deep ethnic polarization. We randomized invitations to workshops aimed at fostering tolerant civic engagement among Ethiopian youth. Four months post-intervention, we observed increases in both self-reported and behavioral measures of civic engagement, effects that increase with the formation of new social ties. Some of that participation, however, was organized along ethnic lines, but without worsening inter-group attitudes. Our results indicate that fostering new engagement in illiberal contexts is possible, but likely to be channeled through existing opportunity structures.

Word count: 10,789 (9,187 excluding references)

---

[*] Lodestar Associates Consult PLC

[†] Assistant Professor, National Security Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School

[‡] Executive Director, Initiative for Peace and Development

[§] Assistant Professor of Social Work and Social Development, Addis Ababa University

[¶] Senior Research Associate, PDRI-DevLab, University of Pennsylvania

[‖] Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of California, Davis

INTRODUCTION

A wide range of scholars, practitioners, and policymakers view robust citizen engagement in civic life[1] – through volunteering, participating in organizations, mobilizing, and the like – as essential for good governance and a key contributor to social cohesion (Dahl, 1973; Mo, Holbein and Elder, 2022; Paxton, 2002). Major strands of democratic theory and empirical research argue that a healthy civil society fosters government responsiveness in both democratic and nondemocratic settings (Putnam, 1994; Tsai, 2007) and that individual engagement in civic organizations can lead to greater political participation (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995). Participation in civil society, by creating bonding and bridging ties, can also strengthen social capital by increasing interpersonal trust and social cohesion (Lijphart, 1997; Putnam, 2001). This consensus matters: in 2022, the United States alone allocated billions of dollars in foreign assistance to promote civic engagement in over 100 countries and regions worldwide.[2]

Motivated by this view, there is a large body of literature on how to increase civic engagement and its consequences (Barnes and Burchard, 2013; Bursztyn et al., 2021; Ferrali, Grossman and Larreguy, 2023; Holbein and Hillygus, 2016, 2020; Van Ingen and Van der Meer, 2016). However, with some exceptions (Croke et al., 2016), most of this evidence comes from studies of: (1) largely consolidated democracies — states with strong civil protections for expression and participation, and where there are often ample opportunities to engage; and (2) countries that enjoy relative stability and low levels of societal conflict. We argue that basing our knowledge of "what works" on these liberal, low-conflict societies raises questions on at least two fronts.

---

[1] While civic engagement is often treated as a catch-all term (Berger, 2009), for the purposes of this study we define civic engagement as voluntary participation in organized social and community life that remains relatively autonomous from state institutions and organized political parties. We thus separate civic engagement from political participation, by which we mean formal and organized participation in political life such as voting, joining a political party, etc.

[2] Data from https://www.foreignassistance.gov/. Accessed July 18, 2024.

First, we know that civic engagement, political participation, and other forms of collective action can look quite different in nondemocratic settings. Some regimes may severely restrict civic participation, while others may compel it to demonstrate allegiance (Croke et al., 2016; Hollerbauer et al., 2023; Magaloni, 2006; Teets et al., 2022). In these settings, citizens may become 'deliberately disengaged' (Croke et al., 2016), perceiving civic action as costly yet futile behavior (Karklins, 1986; Posner and Simon, 2002). This disengagement poses a challenge for democratic transitions, as evidence shows that people often develop a habit of civic participation from a young age (Andolina et al., 2003; Coppock and Green, 2016). As a result, interventions to increase civic engagement in these settings simply may not work. This possibility is salient considering that over two thirds of the world's population live in autocracies (Wiebrecht et al., 2023) and only 40% of the world's countries rank high in both civil and political liberties (Freedom House, 2023).

Second, regardless of whether a country is broadly democratic or nondemocratic, there is no guarantee that new civic engagement will pursue 'tolerant', liberal ends. Normative theorists have long warned about the potential "dark side" of civil society and social capital, even in otherwise peaceful, democratic societies (Armony, 2004). Writing about the United States, Gutmann (1998) notes: "Although many associational activities in America are clearly and directly supportive of liberal democracy, others are not so...and still others are downright hostile to, and potentially destructive of, liberal democracy". These concerns are heightened in societies characterized by ongoing conflict, polarization, or deep ethnic divisions, as new engagement may be shaped by these dynamics (Wilkinson, 2006). Existing research has identified general psychological processes to depolarize and reduce intergroup tensions (Alan et al., 2021; Benier et al., 2024; Blair et al., 2023; Lowe, 2021; Mousa, 2020; Paluck et al., 2021), but little of this work has been done in the context of promoting civic engagement. This is problematic if we expect that levels of civic engagement and inter-group conflict affect one another: citizens' level of engagement is likely to depend on how polarized society is, and vice versa.

Our study examines the potential for new civic engagement in countries with illiberal rule and deep societal divisions, and explores the nature of such engagement. To this end, we conduct a field experiment in Ethiopia to test an intervention aimed at fostering tolerant civic engagement among university students. Ethiopia presents a compelling context for this study. As an 'electoral autocracy' (Wiebrecht et al., 2023), the country is marked by a highly constrained civic space, barriers to political participation, and significant limits on free expression. Deep ethnic divisions, perhaps reinforced by its system of ethnic federalism (Taye, 2017), are a defining feature of Ethiopian politics. These dynamics only intensified leading up to our study in response to the outbreak of the Tigray War (2020–2022), which mobilized multiple ethnically defined armed groups (Paravicini and Endeshaw, 2020). Our focus on university students is also valuable, as prior research suggests that civic engagement begins early (Andolina et al., 2003), and Ethiopia's universities are often hot-spots for contentious ethnic politics (Adamu, 2019).

Our field experiment evaluates the effectiveness of Tolerant Engagement Forums (TEFs), one-day workshops led by a local civil society organization. In short, TEFs aimed to increase civic engagement while reducing the potential for ethnic tensions that could arise from such engagement. The workshops sought to achieve this through three mechanisms. First, TEFs connected students with high-level representatives of Ethiopian civil society organizations, providing them with access to actionable volunteer opportunities. This component was designed to reduce barriers to participation that disproportionately affect youth (Holbein and Hillygus, 2020). Second, TEFs placed students in small-group, ethnically diverse structured dialogues to generate political discussion among peers and emphasize 'superordinate' identities that transcend regional and ethnic cleavages. This intervention draws on recent research on depolarization, perspective-taking, and inter-group contact

(Blair et al., 2023). Finally, building on research demonstrating the importance of social dynamics in civic engagement (Bursztyn et al., 2021; Campbell, 2013; Eubank and Kronick, 2021; Masterson, 2023), both components of the intervention provided students with opportunities to form new social ties with peers interested in civic engagement.

We randomized invitations to participate in the TEFs among a representative sample of roughly 1,000 students at Addis Ababa University, arguably Ethiopia's top university. We collect rich baseline data from both treatment and control groups, focusing on attitudes and behaviors bearing on civic engagement, inter-group tolerance, and other relevant outcomes. We supplement the quantitative data with qualitative focus groups that informed the design of the TEFs. We also collect data on what happened *during* the TEFs, tracking new network connections made by participants. Finally, we collected endline data four months after treatment — a significant gap in time that ensures any observed effects are not merely short-term changes — to estimate the intervention's effects. Importantly, we collect data on both *reported* civic engagement, through surveys, and *observable* civic engagement, by cross-referencing participants with local civil society organizations' membership rosters.

Intent-to-treat (ITT) estimates indicate that, four months after the intervention, participants in the treatment group report higher levels of civic engagement compared to their peers in the control group. These differences are also reflected in higher levels of *observed* civic participation in local civil society organizations. Importantly, this new civic engagement is distinctly not politically partisan; we find no changes in participants' engagement with political parties or partisan institutions. Effect estimates among compliers (CACE) corroborate these findings. Interestingly, data from the TEFs reveal two key points: 1) a significant number of new, including cross-ethnic, ties were formed; and 2) the intervention's effects are primarily driven by participants who made new connections during the workshops. While these patterns are correlational, we discuss the potential of network ties to facilitate collective action in the conclusion (Masterson, 2023).

What about the *quality* of engagement generated by the TEFs? Our findings show no changes at endline in inter-group tolerance, social cohesion, or other outcomes that could indicate rising ethnic tensions. These patterns corroborate accounts of the TEFs either failing to *improve* inter-group relations or successfully *mitigating* the negative impact of new civic engagement on inter-group tensions. However, we do find some evidence that new engagement is identitarian in nature, characterized by reported interest in joining or actual membership in ethnically-defined organizations. Jointly, the results suggest that while attitudes towards other groups are not shifting in response to the intervention, some of the increased engagement among youth is being channeled through ethnically-defined organizations or interest groups.

The results make significant contributions to our understanding of civic engagement in broadly illiberal and polarized countries, where a majority of the world's population resides. First, we show that fostering new civic engagement is possible, and that there is substantial appetite for participation among young people in these settings (Ferrali, Grossman and Larreguy, 2023). Broadly, these results suggest that we should not necessarily fear that civic participation will atrophy in the face of structural barriers to participation. Second, the correlation between intervention effects and the formation of network ties highlights the importance of the social dimension of civic life (Campbell, 2013; Eubank and Kronick, 2021; Masterson, 2023). Our work underscores the idea that civic engagement is primarily a social activity: social ties draw people into civic organizations and sustain their involvement (Campbell, 2013).

Third, our findings on the *quality* of civic engagement —- that participants become more invested in ethnically-defined forms of participation while exhibiting no changes in inter-group tolerance — raise thorny normative questions for civic engagement in polarized settings. Is mobilization around identity categories in these settings inherently troubling, or can citizens work within identity organizations to deepen democracy (Calhoun-Brown, 2000)? Our findings underscore the importance of the often-overlooked *opportunity environment* for civic engagement (Oliver, 1999; Vráblíková, 2014). In countries where the opportunity environment is dominated by identity-based groups, individuals who become civically engaged may do so through available channels, even if they are not motivated by inter-group animus. The quality of opportunity environments likely varies dramatically across countries, reflecting underlying tensions between ethnic groups or the regime's preferences over acceptable forms of mobilization (Hollerbauer et al., 2023; Lyons, 2019).

The quantity and quality of civic engagement

A common refrain among development practitioners and democracy advocates is that civic participation is crucial to effective governance, yet there is little of it in many of the world's democracies. Scholars argue that broad civic engagement is associated with positive development outcomes, such as higher levels of social cohesion, interpersonal trust, and reciprocity (Lijphart, 1997; Putnam, 2001). Conversely, wide disengagement can undermine political accountability (Pavão, 2018), while *uneven* engagement may result in policies that mirror the preferences of the active minority (Anzia, 2013; Fowler, 2013; Madestam et al., 2013).[3]

Despite the high stakes, a 2018 Pew Research Center report finds low rates of civic engagement across 14 democracies (Rosenberg, 2018). These patterns are especially pronounced among young people, whose participation in public life is dwarfed by that of their elder counterparts (Holbein and Hillygus, 2016). As a result, there is a large body of work seeking to understand why engagement is so low and how citizens can be brought more effectively into civic life. This research includes interventions aimed at increasing motivation and self-efficacy, reducing barriers to engagement, and changing institutional rules that make engagement more difficult[4] (Holbein and Hillygus, 2020).

---

[3] The problem of policy reflecting the preferences of an active minority is especially pernicious for young people in Africa, where levels of participation remain low despite rising demographic importance (Lekalake, 2016; Logan, Sanny and Han, 2021).

While valuable, this work largely misses what is happening in non-democratic settings, where the forms of civic engagement that are either common or possible differ in important ways. The result is a mismatch between academic scholarship and the development field, given the latter's interest in engagement in autocratic settings. As the top panel of Figure 1 shows, the United States' foreign assistance obligations aimed at promoting civic engagement and popular participation are concentrated in closed and electoral autocracies. These regimes are also where the bulk of the world's population lives (Wiebrecht et al., 2023). Can levels of civic engagement be improved in these settings? And what would the consequence of doing so be? Given the significant international investment in these areas, answering these questions is crucial. However, there is no guarantee that research from the world's democracies travels to these areas.

Here, we focus on *electoral autocracies*: hybrid regimes that hold elections with some degree of contestation – though rarely enough to challenge the incumbent – and permit limited forms of popular participation (Levitsky and Way, 2010). Electoral autocracies are common: by VDEM's operationalization, they are the most common regime type in 2020, governing roughly 43% of the world's population.

In these regimes, incumbents may encourage participation among supporters while using violence or the threat of violence to demobilize the opposition, as Young (2019) finds in Zimbabwe. Moreover, electoral autocracies often ban or discourage non-state organizations (i.e., NGOs and civil society organizations) perceived as threatening to the regime, as seen in Russia's 'undesirable organizations' law (Flikke, 2016). Media is also typically curtailed in these settings to limit speech critical of the incumbent regime, as in Tanzania (Adıgüzel et al., 2023).

---

[4] For example, same-day voter registration in the United States.

These and other constraints mean that ‘what works’ in democracies may not travel to non-democratic settings. For instance, Croke et al. (2016) show that the close link between higher levels of educational attainment and participation typically found in democracies is reversed in electoral autocracies: increases in education result in *less* engagement because participation is perceived as futile or dangerous (Karklins, 1986). Equally concerning is a growing body of work that suggests civic participation is a habit that people develop early in life (Akee et al., 2018; Andolina et al., 2003; Holbein et al., 2022; Mo, Holbein and Elder, 2022). People are socialized into civic participation by their parents, friends, and communities, with long-term consequences for civic behavior. For example, Coppock and Green (2016) show that, with respect to voting, “...habits formed early in life can persist for decades”. Thus, what is at stake in closed and electoral autocracies is the possibility that civic life could atrophy due to significant barriers to participation – that civic *dis*engagement could become a habit that is difficult to shake.

Concerns of this form ultimately question whether what we know about increasing the *quantity* of civic engagement applies to nondemocratic settings. A separate, yet closely related concern is about the *quality* of civic engagement in non-democracies. Here, we do not want to stake a position on what civic engagement *ought* to look like. Instead, we follow much of the literature in distinguishing between civic participation that is broadly pluralistic, tolerant, and peaceful, and participation that is broadly exclusionary, intolerant, and often violent. Is there a risk that new civic engagement in these contexts could tend toward the latter form?

To be clear, there is plenty of reason to be concerned about the quality of civic engagement in democracies. Normative and empirical scholars have questioned Putnam’s optimistic view of civil society in democracies like the United States, highlighting how in these societies popular participation has been mobilized for oppressive and intolerant ends (Alcorta et al., 2020; Armony, 2004; Asal, Nagar and Rethemeyer, 2014; Gutmann, 1998).

Many modern democracies, such as India, also have deep ethnic or sectarian divisions that color the quality of popular mobilization in troubling ways (Wilkinson, 2006).

That said, it is still reasonable to worry about the quality of civic engagement in non-democracies, and perhaps especially so. As the bottom panel of Figure 1 shows, measures of societal polarization—the extent to which a country is divided between distinct, antagonistic camps—tend to be higher in autocracies than in democracies, and highest of all in electoral autocracies. The most polarized countries in the world, such as Turkey, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, and Belarus, are often electoral autocracies.[5] Polarization, deep societal divisions, and other forms of conflict tend to cluster in non-democracies.

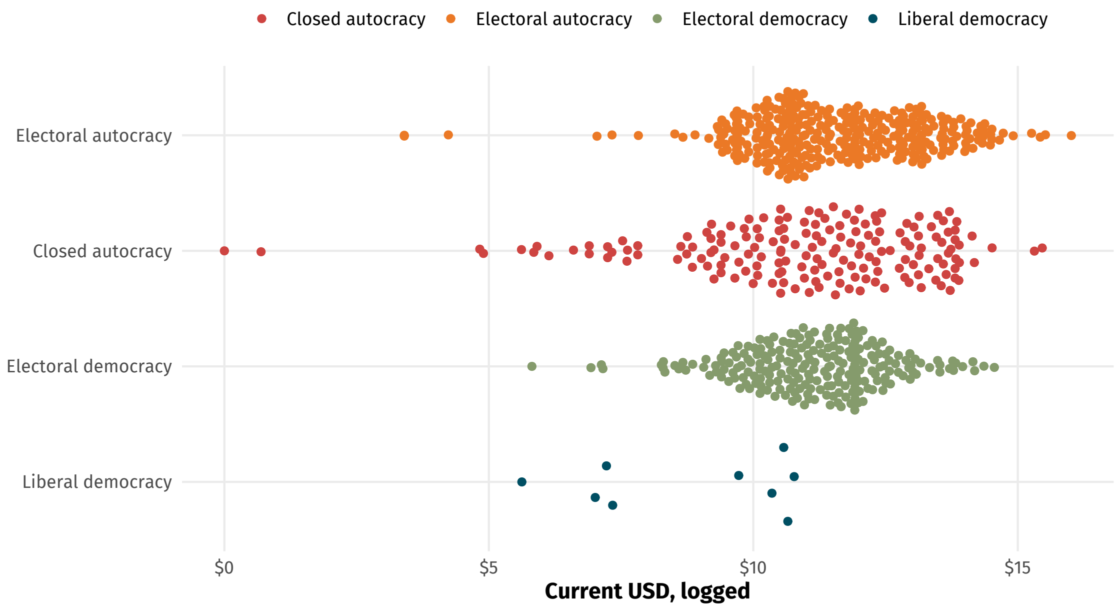
It is not surprising, then, that a large body of literature on reducing ethnic tensions, depolarization, and improving inter-group relations has often focused on non-democratic settings (Charnysh, Lucas and Singh, 2015; Mousa, 2020; Paler, Marshall and Atallah, 2020; Svensson and Brouneus, 2013), with some exceptions (Blair et al., 2023). Findings from this literature, which we revisit in our discussion of the study's intervention, suggest that collaborative contact can increase cohesion among members of otherwise antagonistic groups (Charnysh, Lucas and Singh, 2015; Mousa, 2020). In particular, dialogues and group-based problem-solving can reduce divisions (Charnysh, Lucas and Singh, 2015; Svensson and Brouneus, 2013), even when these conversations are brief (Benier et al., 2024).

This work offers valuable insights into improving inter-group relations generally, but we know comparatively little about how to do so in the context of promoting civic engagement. We argue that the *quantity* and *quality* of civic engagement must be studied together since they are likely to be mutually reinforcing. People may feel more interested or comfortable with civic participation depending on how polarized the country is. On the other hand, a country can become more or less polarized as its citizens become more engaged. Our contribution in this project is to provide evidence on an intervention that tackles both of these dynamics jointly, in a context characterized by non-democratic rule and where societal divisions run deep.

---

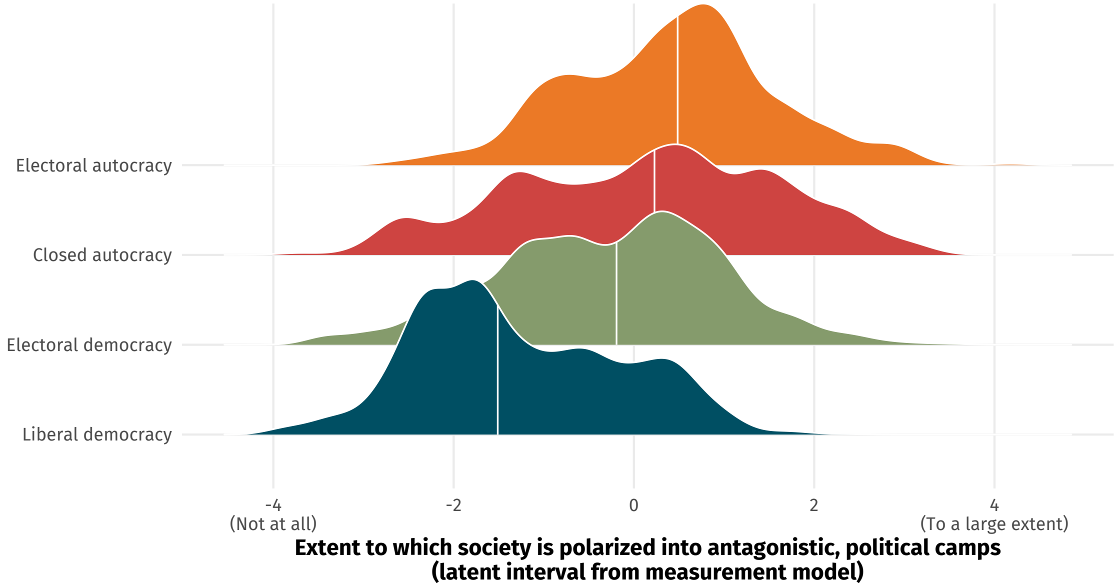
[5] Measures of polarization may even fail to capture dynamics such as those in Ethiopia, where significant societal divisions exist across *more* than two camps.

(a) distribution of US foreign aid obligations for engagement projects



Source: foreignassistance.gov. Fiscal year 2022.

(b) distribution of polarization by regime type



Source: VDEM (1945-2020).

Figure 1: Top panel: Foreign assistance obligations where activity descriptions refer to citizen engagement, youth engagement, civic engagement, or civil society engagement. Bottom panel: distribution of societal polarization as measured by VDEM indicator *v2cacamps*, from 1945-2020.

Context: Civic engagement and ethnic conflict in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a rising power in East Africa, the second most populous country on the continent (behind Nigeria), and one of the fastest growing economies in the world (Klobucista, 2020). Here, we focus on two elements of contemporary Ethiopian politics that shape the quantity and quality of civic engagement in the country: the institutional environment and the quality of ethnic relations.

For most of its history, Ethiopia has been characterized by closed civic spaces, low levels of political participation, and autocratic rule. During the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974) and the Derg military junta (1974-1991), Ethiopia was a closed autocracy with severely limited and repressed autonomous civil society organizations. Following the 1991 civil war, which replaced the Derg with a ruling coalition of ethnic parties known as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Ethiopia experienced a significant yet limited opening toward democratic rule (Lyons, 2019). Since then, the country has been categorized as an electoral autocracy, holding elections that are sometimes contested but fall short of being free and fair, with some constrained openings for civil society.

The health of civil society in Ethiopia has ebbed and flowed in recent years. Outside of formal politics, Ethiopia has a long history of informal mutual aid organizations working on humanitarian assistance (Dercon et al., 2006). In the world of formal politics, the 2005 elections marked a significant democratic opening, with unprecedented opposition party participation, live televised debates, and political meetings in rural areas (Lyons, 2019). Yet, in response to surprising opposition support, the ruling EPRDF reversed course, passing the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation and the Charities and Societies Proclamation of 2009, which restricted civil society organizations from receiving foreign funding (Arriola and Lyons, 2016). The proclamations "largely eliminated what were already weak independent media and fledgling civil society institutions" (Lyons, 2019). The top panels of Figure 2 roughly capture Ethiopia's trajectory relative to OECD countries: low levels of free expression and participatory democracy that have improved modestly over time.

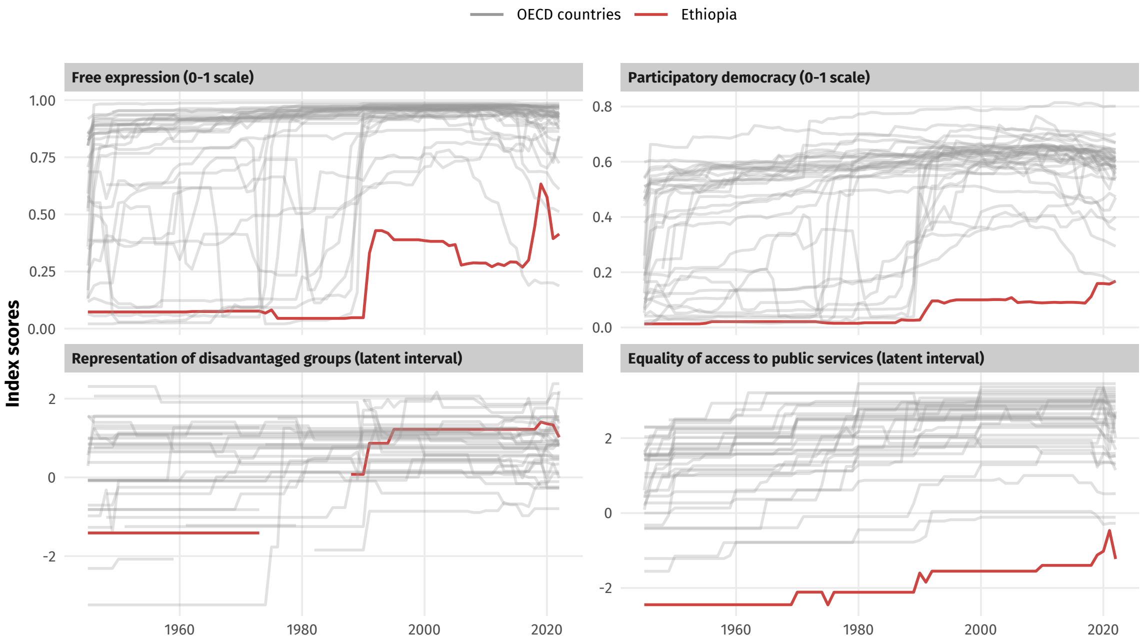


Figure 2: Source: Varieties of Democracy.

With respect to inter-group relations, Ethiopia is a remarkably diverse country, home to dozens of ethnic groups, religious faiths, and languages. However, ethnic divisions run deep. One of the most significant political innovations after the end of the civil war in 1991 was the institution of ethnic federalism by the ruling EPRDF, which devolved federal power to territorial regions based on ethnic homelands (Keller et al., 2002). This system has created or reinforced a division of power along ethnic lines, yet often favors the party at the center.

Meles Zenawi, the leader of the EPRDF and the architect of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, encapsulated the ethos of the system: "People should be proud of their identity and ethnic identity…what incites disintegration is the view that we are all one" (Lyons, 2019). Yet, secessionist demands and inter-group conflict have been persistent features of Ethiopian politics since the civil war. The bottom panel of Figure 2 highlights the unique nature of ethnic relations in the country: while there are unusually *high* levels of representation for disadvantaged groups due to the system of ethnic federalism, there are *low* levels of equality in access to key public services.

Finally, given our emphasis on *youth* civic engagement, it is worth discussing youth-specific challenges in Ethiopia. Young Ethiopians face substantial obstacles, including significant deficits in access to healthcare and education, persistent gender inequalities, and a precarious labor market (OECD, 2017). The Global Youth Development Index 2020 ranked Ethiopia 158th out of 181 countries (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2020). Empirical research on the political and civic participation of young people in Ethiopia is scarce. However, existing studies suggest that youth participation is low due to barriers to access, limited opportunities to engage, and the closing of civic spaces in recent years (Sabu, 2020). Although a National Youth Policy was implemented in 2004 to "...enable youth to be citizens with [a] democratic outlook...so that they can actively, efficiently and widely participate and benefit from the country's ongoing activities" (Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Culture, 2004), there is little scholarship on to what extent such measures were implemented or successful. Data from our own focus groups, discussed in Appendix I, also highlights the extent to which polarization and ethnic divisions present barriers for young people to civically engage.

The timing of our study coincided with an extremely challenging period for Ethiopia that further strained the quality of civic participation and ethnic relations in the country. Two major events — the COVID-19 pandemic and the brutal, multi-party Tigray War (2020-2022) (Center for Preventive Action, 2023) — occurred in the lead-up to our study, profoundly affecting the lives of Ethiopians. Both the pandemic and the war, which saw TDF rebels and allies closing in on the country's capital at one point, led to a further tightening of civic space through various security measures. The ethnic nature of the conflict also placed additional strain on inter-group relations in the country, including among our study population at Addis Ababa University.

The intervention: Tolerant Engagement Forums (TEFs)

The core of our contribution is evaluating the efficacy of a civic engagement intervention in Ethiopia: the Tolerant Engagement Forums (TEFs). In broad terms, TEFs sought to address both the *quantity* and *quality* of civic engagement among Ethiopian youth by increasing youth civic participation while mitigating the potential for exacerbating ethnic tensions. The TEFs were led by a local NGO with expertise in peace-building and development issues in Ethiopia. Participants were recruited from Addis Ababa University in Addis Ababa.

TEF events took place over the course of a full day and were divided into two sessions.[6] An overview of the TEF events is provided in Table 1.[7]

---

[6] TEF participants were exposed to both sessions by default. We decided not to separate the sessions into distinct treatment arms to preserve statistical power, given concerns about low treatment uptake due to the ongoing situation in Tigray and existing COVID restrictions.

[7] Due to space constraints and to respect COVID safety protocols, we conducted three identical (to the best of our ability) one-day workshops (June 17-19, 2022). This also allowed students to engage in smaller groups, arguably improving the quality of interactions.

Session	I Morning	II Afternoon
Description	CSO and NGO fair, presentations, panels, networking with CSO representatives	Facilitator-led discussions of country's challenges, youth-based issues, social and political challenges
Mechanisms	Information, motivation, networking	Inter-group contact, cross-cutting cleavages, perspective-taking, networking
Groups	All participants	Small groups (approx. 10)

Table 1: Description of TEF events

Prior to fielding the TEF intervention, we conducted qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs) to tailor both the intervention and our data collection efforts (e.g., survey questionnaire design) to the local context. Our FGDs included students actively engaged in youth organizations for semi-structured discussions. These discussions centered on students' experiences with civic and political engagement, identifying the most pressing issues for youth in the country, their attitudes towards political tolerance, cohesion, and diversity, and feedback on the design of the TEF interventions and survey questionnaire. We specifically sought feedback on effective strategies for addressing difficult or sensitive topics in the TEFs and surveys. Some of the highlights of our discussion are summarized in Appendix I.

Session I: Intervention and theory

The first, morning session of each TEF event focused on increasing the *quantity* of youth civic engagement. In concrete terms, Session I provided a venue for students to connect with high-level representatives of Ethiopian civil society organizations. These organizations were primarily non-partisan, volunteer organizations that worked on broad, public issues, such as addressing the consequences of climate change in the country. Representatives gave presentations on their organizations' work and held panel discussions on the importance of youth civic engagement for the country and opportunities for youth to get involved. These sessions included a 'career fair' where students could network with civil society organization representatives and learn about actionable opportunities to volunteer with civic organizations.

Theoretically, Session I aimed to reduce informational and motivational barriers to engagement, issues that disproportionately demobilize youth across a variety of settings, including in Ethiopia (Holbein and Hillygus, 2020; Sabu, 2020). A unique element of informational barriers in autocratic settings like Ethiopia is that, given substantial constraints on which civil society organizations are allowed to operate, identifying *which* organizations do exist and are allowed to operate is challenging. With respect to motivational barriers, we anticipated that the social connections participants made with civil society organizations and other participants would increase their motivation to participate. Research shows that new and existing ties with active peers can drive higher levels of political participation through social pressure and sanctioning (Bursztyn et al., 2021; Eubank and Kronick, 2021).

Session II: Intervention and theory

The second, afternoon session focused on improving the *quality* of civic engagement. Participants were divided into small discussion groups, each led by a facilitator from the implementing NGO. Groups consisted of approximately ten students, with a minimum of three women and three ethnic minorities.[8] The discussions aimed to normalize political discussions among peers and emphasize issues affecting youth broadly, such as unemployment, while at the same time not avoiding divisive topics like ethnic conflicts and their debated solutions. Students were encouraged to express their perspectives and hear from others in a safe, moderated setting.

---

[8] Under this randomization procedure, there could be up to eight majority-ethnic group men in a group of 11, though this rarely occurred. Beyond this minimum, we randomly varied the number of women and ethnic minorities in each group to assess the impact of greater diversity on outcomes.

Session II's theory of change is rooted in research on depolarization, contact theory, and perspective-taking (Corno, Ferrara and Burns, 2019; Lowe, 2021; Mousa, 2020; Scacco and Warren, 2018). This work suggests that, under the right conditions, collaborative contact among members of antagonistic groups can build tolerance, increase social ties, and reduce tensions. One such condition is the presence of cross-cutting or 'superordinate' identities – such as the participants being young, or attending the same university – that can reduce the salience of group boundaries (Charnysh, Lucas and Singh, 2015; Paluck et al., 2021). For instance, Paler, Marshall and Atallah (2020) show that inter-group discussions in Lebanon between Christians, Sunnis, and Shia reduced support for sectarian politics, especially when individuals shared the same economic class, creating a basis for solidarity. These results suggest that combining increased contact with measures to decrease the salience of group differences may strengthen the impact of that contact on tolerance.

Finally, we also expect the TEFs to facilitate the formation of new social ties. These ties can form between participants and NGO/CSO representatives in Session I, and among participants in both sessions, particularly during small group discussions in Session II. Theory and evidence suggest such network ties are crucial for mobilizing people into organizations and keeping them active (Bursztyn et al., 2021; Campbell, 2013; Eubank and Kronick, 2021; Masterson, 2023). To this end, we collected network data on the formation of new social ties during the TEFs.[9]

---

[9] In the pre-analysis plan, we conceptualized the formation of network ties during TEF events as 'treatment intensity.' We now view these network ties as potential mechanisms or moderating factors shaping TEF effects. However, our tests and analysis remain unchanged.

Research design

Sample and randomization

The population of interest in this study is students at Addis Ababa University (AAU). This population is valuable for two key reasons. First, as previously argued, there is theoretical and practical justification for increasing *youth* civic engagement (Holbein and Hillygus, 2020). Young people are less engaged, and if participation is a habit, there is value in developing those habits early. Second, our population being students at AAU is also notable. AAU is arguably the most prestigious university in the country. Some of its students are likely to assume significant roles in business, government, and NGOs in the future. As a result, their attitudes and beliefs about civic participation and inter-group tolerance are likely to have substantial real-world implications.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the study design. We begin with baseline data collection that captures survey responses from students who would eventually be randomized into a control or treatment group. The baseline survey collected demographic characteristics and pre-treatment measures of our outcomes. To recruit participants we relied on the university registrar to access the universe of students enrolled at the university. Students were primarily invited to participate in the baseline survey via their university email. We also used a survey firm to follow up through phone calls in order to reduce non-responses.[10] In total, 968 students were recruited for the study through baseline data collection. In Appendix B we discuss the representativeness of our sample by comparing the attributes of participants with those of the broader student body. We highlight a few differences but conclude that they are minor. Baseline characteristics of our sample are available in Appendix C.

---

[10] As a financial incentive, students received $5 USD in exchange for their participation. A total of 6,309 students received an initial email invitation to take the survey. We captured responses from the first 968 students to respond.

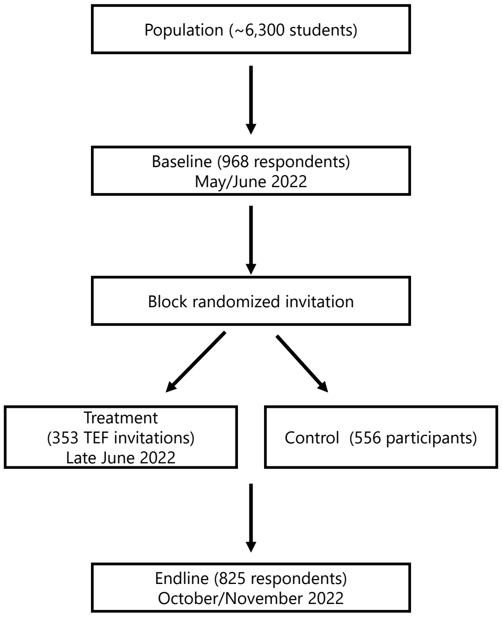

Population (~6,300 students)
Baseline (968 respondents)
May/June 2022
Block randomized invitation
Treatment
(353 TEF invitations)
Late June 2022
Control (556 participants)
Endline (825 respondents)
October/November 2022

Figure 3: Study outline

Following baseline data collection, we randomly selected 353 students who completed the baseline survey to receive invitations to the TEF workshop.[11] To ensure a sufficiently diverse group of invitees, we used block randomization based on gender and ethnic minority status. The implementing NGO then coordinated with students to schedule their attendance for one of the workshop days. A total of 257 students attended the TEF workshops in June 2022. Later on, we discuss the estimation of treatment effects in the face of non-compliance.

Following the TEF events, we conducted endline data collection in October and November of 2022, measuring student outcomes and, for those in the treatment group, asking about their experiences at the TEFs. We aimed to recontact all original baseline survey participants (both treatment and control) and achieved a high follow-up rate of 91%. The attrition was balanced between the treatment and control groups, with an 11% attrition rate for the control group and an 8% attrition rate for the treatment group.[12]

---

[11] We randomize *invitations* because attendance was ultimately voluntary; we discuss the implications of this for estimating treatment effects in our section on estimation.

It is worth highlighting the timing of the TEF intervention (June of 2022) relative to when the outcomes were measured at endline (fall of 2022). Approximately four months pass between the TEF workshops and the measurement of outcomes at endline, which has important implications for the effects we estimate. If TEF effects are stronger immediately after the intervention and decay over time, our design may not capture these short-term effects. On the other hand, the effects we estimate after four months are arguably more meaningful due to their durability.

Outcome measures

At the broadest level, our goal is to test whether TEFs meaningfully shift participants' levels of engagement and tolerance. To this end, we collect data on a wide range of attitudes and behaviors related to these outcomes, measured at both baseline (pre-TEF) and endline (post-TEF). A key challenge in using multiple outcomes to measure treatment effects is addressing concerns about multiple comparisons, i.e., how to determine whether an intervention is effective based on the results of multiple tests. Here, we provide a general overview of our pre-registered approach to this problem and our strategy for estimating treatment effects. More detailed information is available in Appendix D, and the full wording of survey questions can be found in the Pre-Analysis Plan[13].

We group our outcomes into two *families*: engagement and tolerance (Table 2). Each family consists of *primary* indicators: outcomes most directly related to the theory of change in the TEF intervention. For example, civic engagement is a primary indicator

---

[12] Students were again offered a $5 USD incentive for participating in the endline survey. To further reduce attrition, we introduced a lottery in which six randomly selected endline respondents received a $30 payment.

[13] The pre-analysis plan is hosted at ANONYMIZED.

Outcome family	**Primary indicators**	**Secondary indicators**
Engagement	1. Civic engagement 2. Political engagement	1. Sectarian (ethnic or religious) engagement 2. Sense of efficacy and obstacles 3. Future career plans
Tolerance	1. Political/ethnic tolerance 2. Social cohesion	1. Perceptions of discrimination 2. Preferences for ethnic federalism 3. Out-group social contact

Table 2: Outcome variables and indicators. Note: in response to reader feedback, we slightly changed the labeling of outcome families from the pre-analysis plan for clarity.

within the engagement family that we expect TEFs to increase. Each family also contains *secondary* indicators: outcomes more distantly related to the intervention, or those that act as mechanisms related to a potential treatment effect. Participant's anticipated career trajectories – whether they want to work in the NGO or public sector, for instance – are secondary indicators of engagement.

Each primary and secondary indicator is comprised of individual outcome *measures*. For the civic engagement indicator, these include measures of whether participants have attended an NGO event or volunteered in civic activities during the study period. For the purposes of hypothesis testing – e.g., whether the TEF events meaningfully increased civic engagement – our pre-registered approach is to aggregate these outcome measures into averaged z-score *indices*. Each primary and secondary indicator thus has an associated index constructed from multiple outcome measures linked to the indicator. The key benefit of this approach is with respect to the multiple comparisons problem: instead of deciding whether the estimated TEF effects across a series of individual outcome measures are jointly meaningful, we assess whether the overall index shifts in response to treatment in our hypothesis testing. Nonetheless, in the results section, we report both the estimates for the outcome indices and the individual variables that comprise each index.

Estimation of treatment effects

Participation in the TEFs was ultimately voluntary. As a result, we randomized *invitations* to participate among a subset of students from the baseline survey. Participants received invitations to participate in the TEFs, while those in the control group did not. Compliance was relatively high in our study: approximately 73% of participants who were invited to the TEFs actually attended, and we observed only one-sided non-compliance (i.e., no one in the control group attended a TEF). Non-compliance appears to be largely idiosyncratic, with many invited participants unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts.

Our primary estimand is thus the intent-to-treat (ITT) effect. Roughly speaking, the ITT estimand tells us what the likely impact of the intervention is on a population but leaves open the possibility that some participants do not comply with treatment assignment (e.g., some invited to participate in the TEFs did not attend). The ITT estimand is commonly used in this literature and whenever researchers cannot control treatment uptake but can meaningfully manipulate the *probability* of uptake.

To estimate the ITT effect of the TEF intervention on the outcomes of interest, we estimate Equation 1:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_1 T_i + \beta_2 Y_{i,t-1} + \beta X_i + \gamma(T_i \times Block_i) + \epsilon \tag{1}$$

where Y_{it} is the value of participant i on an outcome measure or index at endline and T_i is an indicator for whether participant i received an invitation to participate in the TEFs. β_1 represents our estimate of the ITT effect of the TEFs on participant outcomes. In all models we control for *baseline* values of the outcome measure for respondent i, $Y_{i,t-1}$, and we present results with and without an optional vector of pre-treatment control variables X_i. Finally, we include block fixed effects interacted with the treatment indicator (γ) and calculate HC2 robust standard errors. Further details on estimation are available in

Appendix E.

While valuable, ITT estimates can be difficult to interpret (Gupta, 2011). we cross-referenced invitations to participate with actual participation in the TEF events to identify which invitees actually attended the TEFs and thus complied with the treatment assignment. Our secondary estimand is the Complier Average Causal Effect (CACE) of TEF participation. The CACE captures the effect of *actual* TEF participation, rather than just being *invited* to participate, among those who complied with the treatment assignment.

We estimate the CACE using the standard two-stage least squares (2SLS) approach, with the randomized invitation to participate serving as an instrument for actual participation. More details available in Appendix E. Given the low and idiosyncratic nature of non-compliance, we argue that the CACE is a credible and policy-relevant quantity of interest.[14]

Results

More civic, but not political, engagement

Our results suggest that increasing youth civic engagement is possible in electoral autocracies. Overall, we find that invitation to the TEF had a positive effect on student's engagement in the four months following the intervention.[15] Figure 4 plots the ITT estimates for our civic engagement index and its sub-items. Specifically, we find a significant and positive effect of the TEFs on the overall civic index, as well as on attendance at community and student government meetings, intentions to join a voluntary organization, and participation in protests.

The size of the TEF effect for the civic index is a modest but important increase of approximately 0.11 standard deviations. Further, the TEF is associated with a 0.36 increase in the count of attended community or student government meetings (a 35% increase from a mean of 1.04). Similarly, TEF attendance is associated with a 0.16 increase in participants' intent to join a voluntary organization (a 4% increase from a mean of 4.33) and a 0.18 increase in the reported count of protest attendance (a 44% increase from a mean of 0.38). The effect on protest attendance is normatively interesting as protests are potentially contentious forms of collective action. We return to this finding in the conclusion.

---

[14] Finally, as specified in the PAP, we also explore heterogeneous effects across several relevant subgroups. In these models, we interact our subgroup indicator of interest with the treatment indicator.

[15] Our results remain largely similar when we consider TEF effects amongst students that actually attended the workshop, as shown in Appendix G for the Complier Average Causal Effects. Additionally, we do not observe significant differences in treatment effects by reported gender or ethnic minority status.

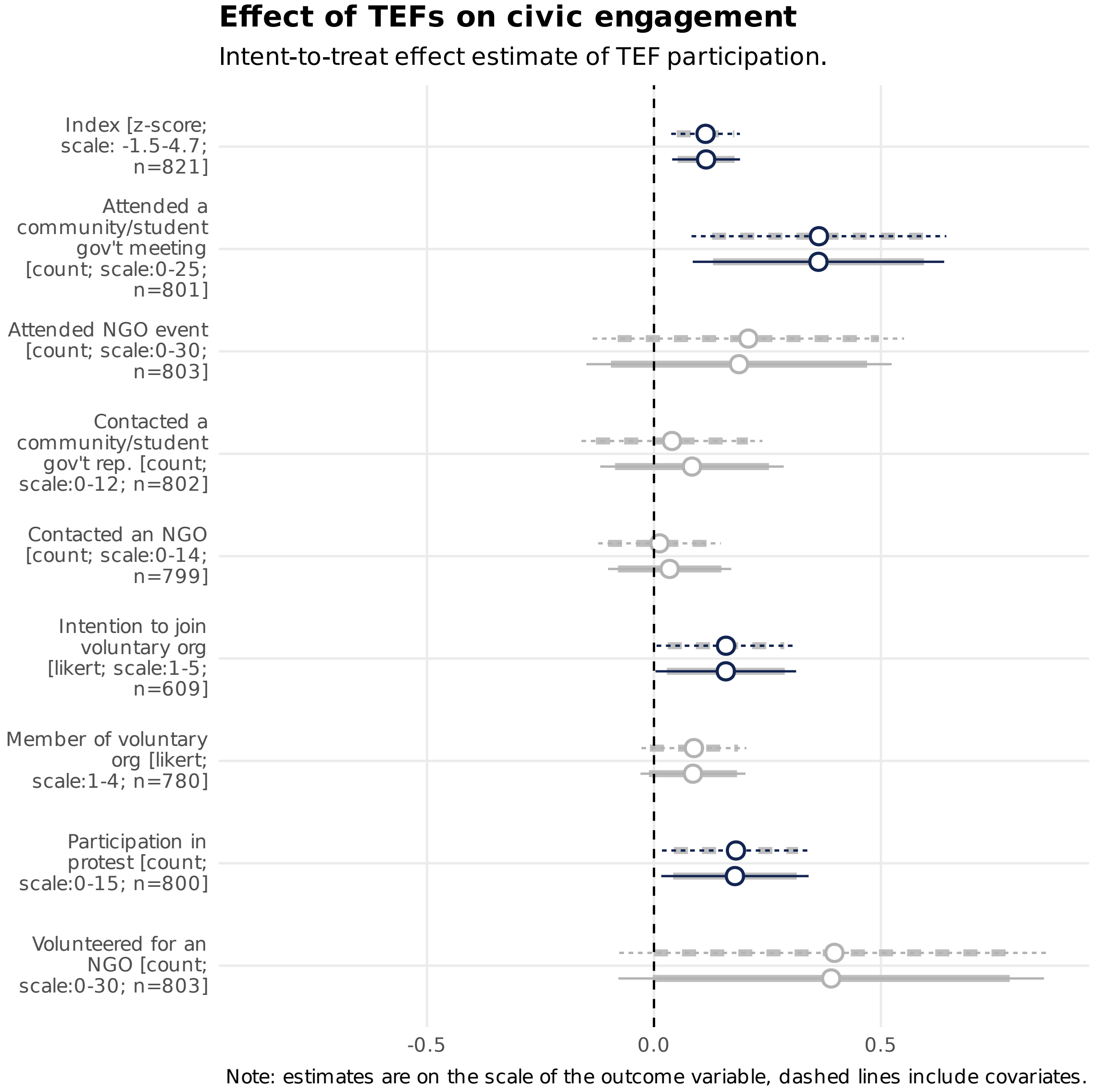


Figure 4: Effect of the TEFs on civic engagement. Estimates are on the scale of the outcome variable, dashed lines include estimates from models using pre-treatment covariates.

These effects are decidedly *civic* rather than *political* or partisan in nature (Figure A5). Overall, we find no evidence that TEFs had a significant impact on levels of political engagement. This aligns with our expectations, as the TEF events were designed to be as "nonpartisan" as possible, with NGOs and CSOs selected to maintain some distance from the incumbent regime. Additionally, the largely closed nature of the incumbent regime likely discourages direct political engagement with the state (Croke et al., 2016).

We observe increases in *self-reported* levels of civic engagement, but do these changes translate into actual behavior? There is concern that social desirability dynamics could be biasing our treatment estimates. To address these concerns, we also provide some evidence of changes in real-world behavior. A core part of the intervention involved connecting participants with representatives of civil society organizations to learn about engagement opportunities. To assess whether participants took advantage of these opportunities, we collaborated with civil society representatives who attended the TEFs to identify students in the treatment and control groups who volunteered with their organizations for the first time in the four months following the TEFs.

Using administrative data on recent volunteers compiled by these organizations, we matched names, email addresses, and phone numbers to link recent volunteers with our sample of students. We found evidence that TEF participants volunteered with these organizations at much higher rates. Specifically, 14% of students in the treatment group (36 students) volunteered with at least one of these organizations in the four months after the TEFs. In contrast, only 1.4% of students in the control group (7 students) volunteered during the same period (Figure 5). Figure A6 presents the same results via regression.

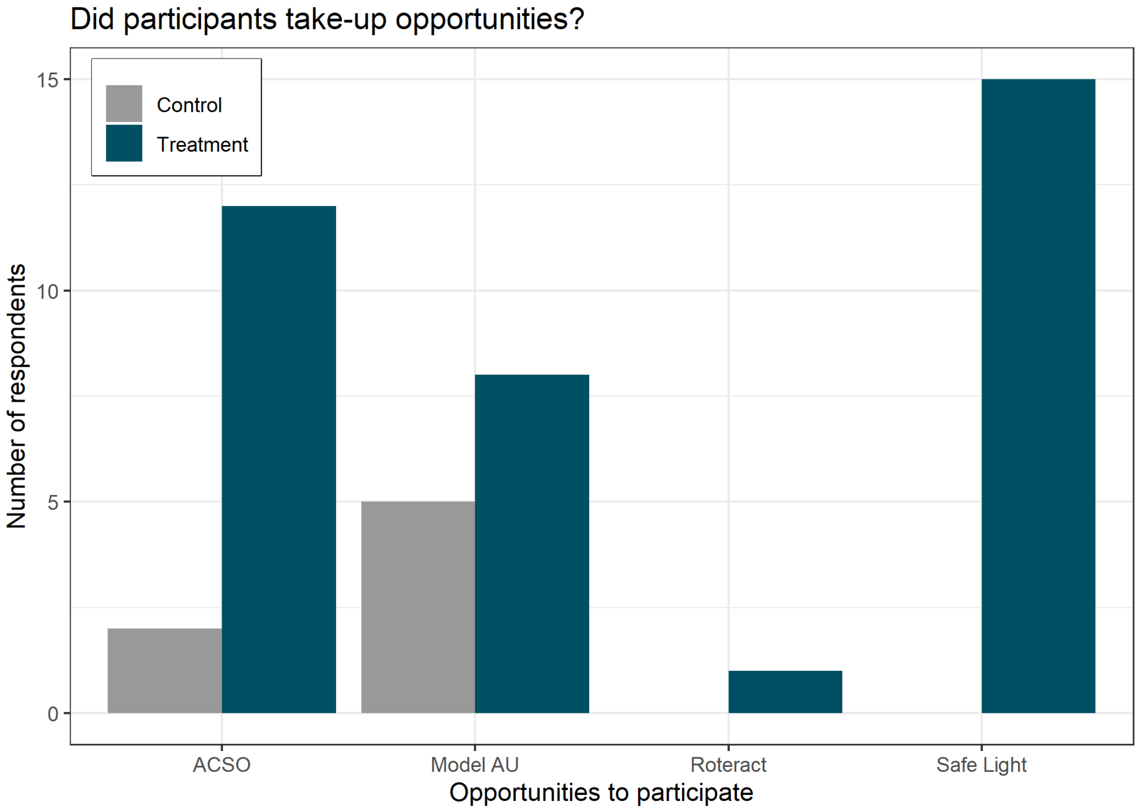


Figure 5: Participation in volunteer groups following TEF events, comparing across participants in treatment and control conditions.

Stronger effects among participants who forged new social ties

A key component of Session I of the TEFs was the idea that participants might build ties to one another, and that these ties would increase their motivation to participate, as suggested by prior work (Campbell, 2013). In Session II, inter-group contact was theorized to reduce inter-group tensions (Mousa, 2020). To this end, we tracked what took place *during* the TEFs by asking respondents at endline to list up to three new connections or friends they had made with other TEF attendees (if any). We cross-referenced these names with the roster of TEF attendees to ensure that the named connections were substantively meaningful and to explore the characteristics of students who formed ties.

We find that new connections are indeed an important element of the TEFs (Figure 6) and that many of these ties are *across* ethnic groups. Of the 257 invitees who actually attended the TEFs, 224 TEF attendees reported making at least one new connection and close to half of these connections were cross-ethnic ties, defined as whether the two attendees belonged to different ethnic groups.[16]

---

[16] We acknowledge that defining a cross-ethnic tie in Ethiopia is made complicated by the fact that not all cross-ethnic pairings are equally likely.

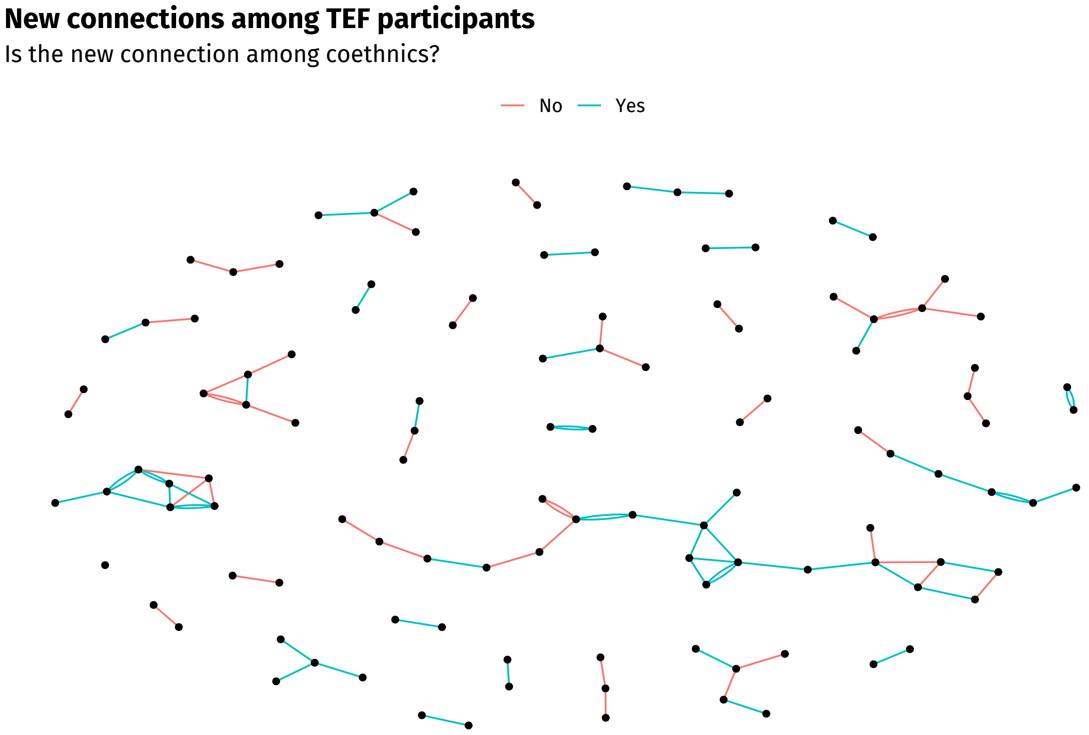

New connections among TEF participants
Is the new connection among coethnics?
No
Yes

Figure 6: New connections among TEF participants. Nodes indicate participants, edges indicate the presence of a new connection.

We provide suggestive evidence that these new ties meaningfully moderate TEF effects on participants by interacting treatment assignment with an indicator for whether the participant made at least one new connection. Overall, we find that TEF effects are *stronger* among participants who made new connections. Appendix Figure A13 plots estimates of the interaction term, showing that the effect of TEFs on civic engagement is higher among those who form new connections.[17] We stress that these results are suggestive and correlational: we did not randomize the formation of these ties, and so any factor that correlates with the formation of these ties could bias estimates (Imai et al., 2011). We interpret these results as proof of concept that new ties can bring people in to civic life.

New engagement does not worsen tolerance, but does increase interest in ethnic organizations

Our results thus far suggest that it is possible to increase the *quantity* of at least some forms of engagement in illiberal settings like Ethiopia. But what about the *quality* of that engagement? Could new engagement heighten existing ethnic tensions or generate other forms of group-based mobilization?

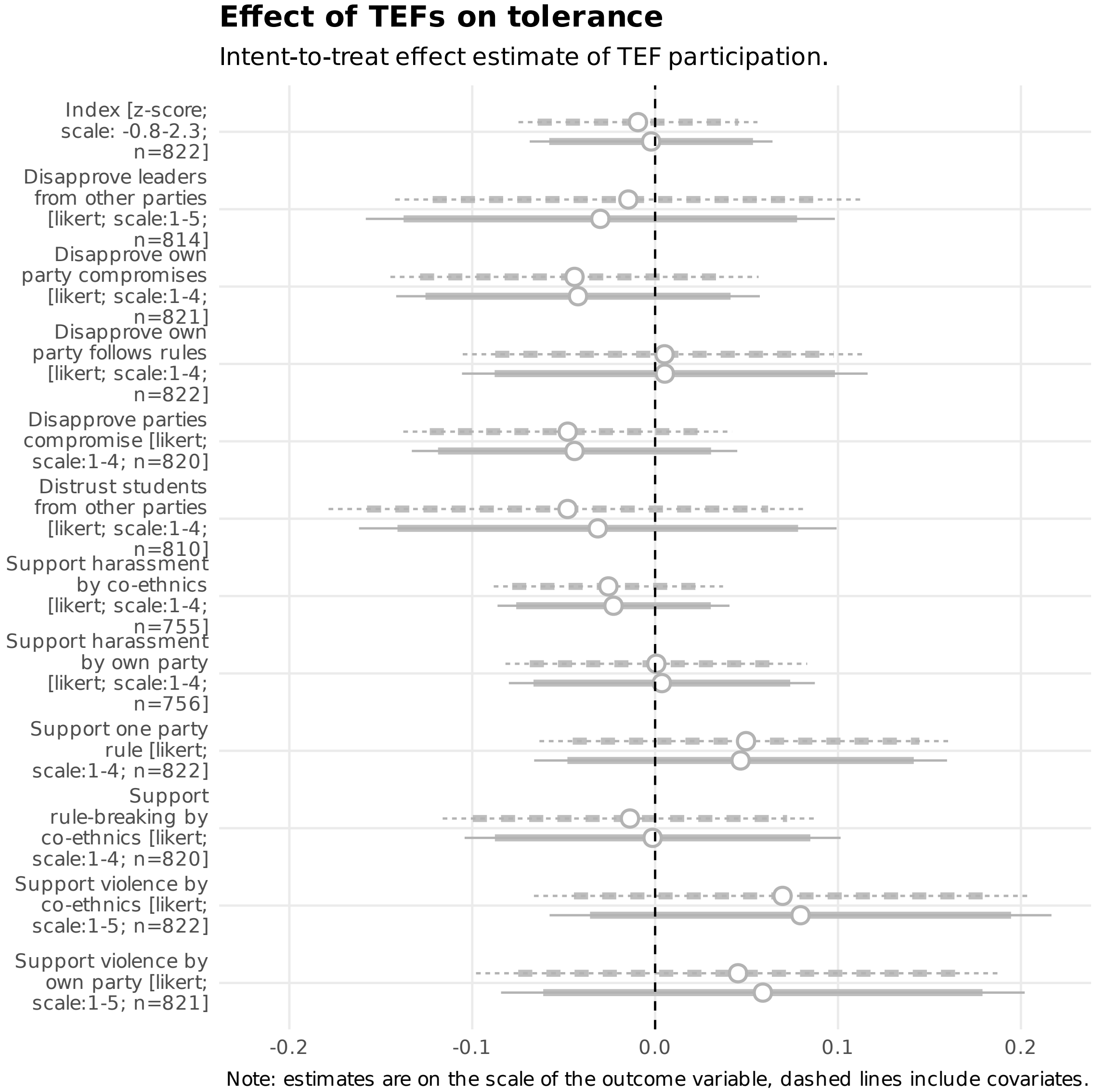
Overall, we find no evidence that TEFs produced changes in the primary indicators of tolerance, which include measures of political and ethnic tolerance (Figure 7) and social cohesion (Figure A7). This is true of both the overall indices of each indicator and the sub-items that comprise each index. These patterns are consistent with two interpretations.

One possibility is that the TEFs (and especially the tolerance-focused Session II portion) failed to improve inter-group relations and attitudes. This failure could be a function of the treatment being weak or ineffective, or the population we consider being especially resistant to change in attitudes. There is some possibility, based on high baseline levels of tolerance among our sample (Appendix C), of a 'ceiling effect' that limits TEF impact. A different possibility is that the new engagement generated by the TEFs (particularly Session I) worsened inter-group relations, and the tolerance interventions in Session II successfully *mitigated* those negative effects. In this scenario, the TEFs *can* work to improve inter-group relations that would otherwise have been worsened by increases in engagement.

---

[17] Since our control group did not attend the TEF and therefore could not make new friends, they are always equal to zero. Since the control group is always equal to 0, the main term for new friends drops out of this model. Our estimate is therefore equivalent to subsetting the data to only treated respondents and estimating the 'effect' of making new friends among the treated.

We cannot definitively distinguish between these possibilities. However, in either scenario, the TEFs do not appear to meaningfully *worsen* inter-group tolerance: participants become more active and engaged without an accompanying increase in tensions. This is an important finding, which we revisit in the conclusion.


Effect of TEFs on tolerance

Intent-to-treat effect estimate of TEF participation.

Note: estimates are on the scale of the outcome variable, dashed lines include covariates.

Figure 7: Effect of the TEFs on tolerance. Estimates are on the scale of the outcome variable, dashed lines include estimates from models using pre-treatment covariates.

We do, however, find some evidence that the new engagement is being channeled through organizations tied to ethnicity. Figure 8 visualizes ITT estimates of the TEFs on forms of participation we categorize as *sectarian*—where the defining quality of the group is either ethnic or religious. We find that the invitation to the TEF increased the sectarian engagement index by 0.11 standard deviations. This effect appears to stem from an increased interest in joining ethnic interest groups rather than religious groups. Specifically, the invitation to the TEF is associated with a 0.22 unit increase in students' intentions to join ethnic interest groups (a 9% increase from a mean of 2.48) and a 0.08 unit increase in membership in ethnic interest groups (a 4% increase from a mean of 1.87).

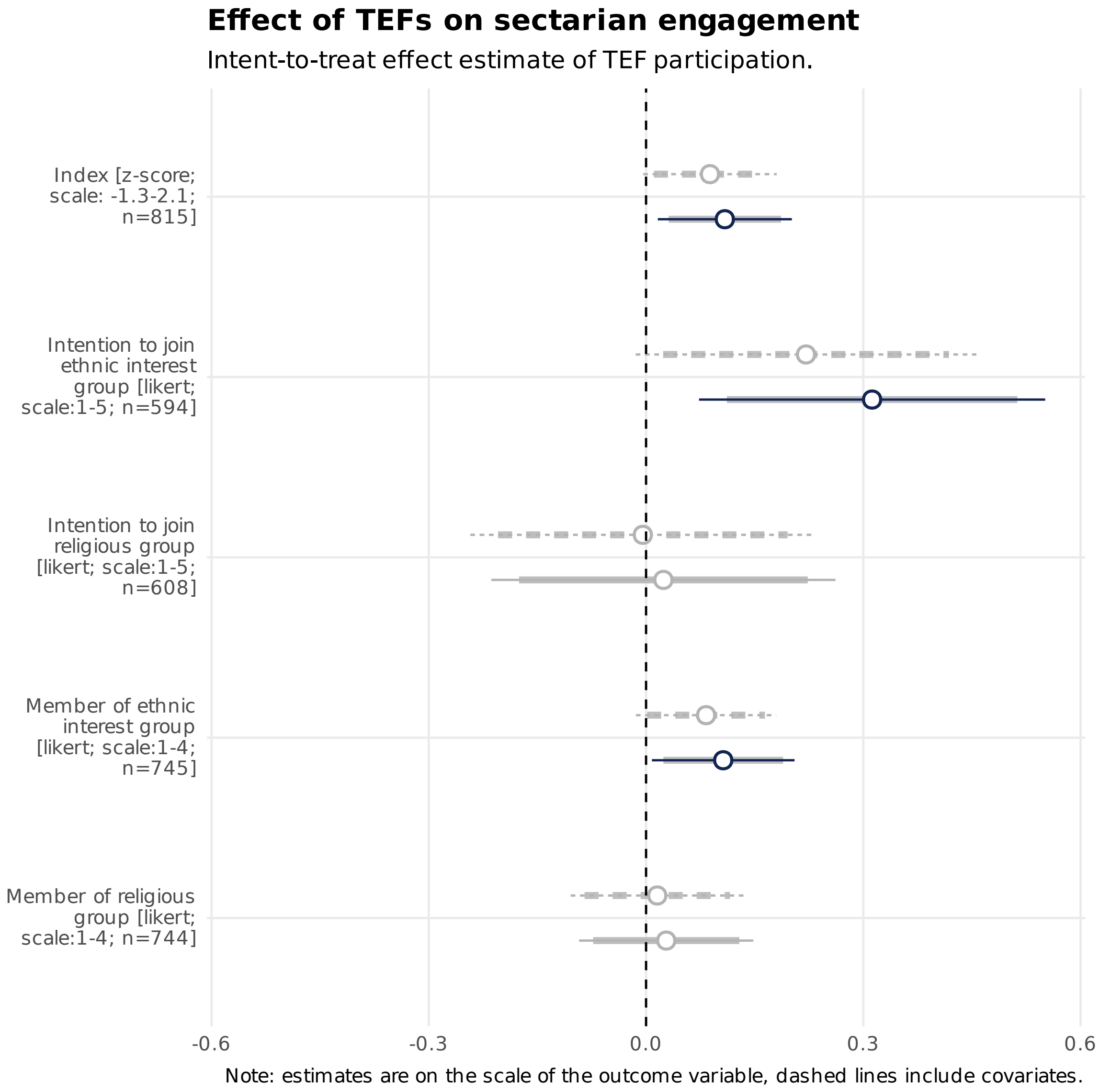


Figure 8: Effect of the TEFs on sectarian engagement. Estimates are on the scale of the outcome variable, dashed lines include estimates from models using pre-treatment covariates.

Together, these results suggest participants become more invested in forms of organizing linked to ethnicity, even as levels of inter-group tolerance remain unchanged. We discuss these results in more depth in the conclusion.[18]

Conclusion

Many modern autocracies do not fully prohibit popular participation; rather, they constrain and channel it into acceptable, non-threatening forms. These constraints shape both the *quantity* and *quality* of civic engagement that can, and does, occur in these settings. There is a fear that, in the face of these barriers, citizens will become disengaged in ways that stifle nascent drives for democratic form (Croke et al., 2016). A related fear is the possibility that when people do mobilize, it is towards illiberal, intolerant ends. This latter fear exists in all regimes but is particularly acute in modern autocracies, where the rules of the game are illiberal and societal divisions often more pronounced.

Our study provides evidence that there is more room for civic engagement in these settings. We find that there is appetite for more engagement among young people, who exhibit higher levels of engagement four months after our randomized intervention. These effects are strongest among participants who made new connections during our interventions, which belies the social dimension of civic life. Overall, these findings suggest that fears of citizens in authoritarian regimes fully disengaging may be unwarranted. Young people desire to participate more, even under difficult circumstances (Holbein and Hillygus, 2020).

Based on our analysis of participant's experiences during the TEFs, we speculate that some of this new engagement is a function of network ties that can mobilize people and keep them mobilized (Campbell, 2013). A limitation of our work – and indeed, most work on network effects (Masterson, 2023) – is that the formation of these new ties is endogenous to various factors we cannot manipulate. An open question is whether it is the ties themselves that are doing the work of amplifying intervention effects or whether it is variation in sociability acrosss individuals. If the former, it would be valuable to understand the exact mechanism by which ties increase engagement: is it through information dissemination or social pressure to avoid free-riding (Bursztyn et al., 2021; Eubank and Kronick, 2021)? If the latter, there is an opportunity to connect with the extensive literature in social psychology on why people vary in the value they derive from social interactions.

---

[18] Finally, we find no evidence of TEFs moving secondary indicators related to efficacy and obstacles to participation, future career plans, perceptions of discrimination, preferences for ethnic federalism, or out-group social contact (Appendix Figures A8 - A11).

To what extent does the second fear – that new engagement could be "hostile to democratic life" (Gutmann, 1998) bear out? Our findings point to increased mobilization around ethnicity even as a battery of outcome measures bearing on inter-group hostility remain unchanged. What to make of this pattern, normatively, is difficult. On the one hand, there is nothing that says organizing around identity categories is, in and of itself, troubling for democracy. Black churches, for instance, were central to the deepening of democracy in the United States during the civil rights era (Calhoun-Brown, 2000). The fact that we do not find worsening inter-group relations is encouraging. On the other hand, a history of ethnic conflict in Ethiopia and similar contexts raises concern about ethnic mobilization becoming precursors to violence or inter-communal hostilities (Sambanis and Shayo, 2013; Wilkinson, 2006).

Part of what is at stake in the question of whether more ethnic mobilization is inherently troubling is how a country's opportunity environment structures civic participation (Oliver, 1999; Vráblíková, 2014). In Ethiopia, ethnicity plays a dominating role in structuring mobilization. The link between ethnicity and politics is inscribed in the Constitution through articles that outline ethnic groups' preeminent relationship to the nation, creates a system of federalism that assigns ethnic homelands to each major ethnic group, and stresses the rights of ethnic groups to self-determination (Lyons, 2019). In light of this context, it is not surprising that newly mobilized young people would find themselves channeled through ethnic organizations, even if they were not motivated by inter-group animus. We suspect opportunity environments vary dramatically from country to country; what we need is more work that characterizes and explains variation in such opportunity structures (Vráblíková, 2014). One approach is to extend interventions of this kind to settings that are more or less restrictive in their opportunity environments. A different possibility is to manipulate the opportunity environment in lab or lab-in-the-field designs, as Masterson (2023) cleverly shows is possible with respect to manipulating the composition of social networks.

REFERENCES

Adamu, Abebaw Yirga. 2019. "Ethnic Violence Challenging Ethiopian Universities." https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/world-view/ethnic-violence-challenging-ethiopian-universities.

Adıgüzel, Fatih Serkant, Nuzulack Dausen, Diego Romero and Erik Wibbels. 2023. "The Impact of Legal Repression on Citizen Online Behavior: Evidence from Tanzania's Jamii Forums.".

Akee, Randall, William Copeland, E. Jane Costello, John B. Holbein and Emilia Simeonova. 2018. Family Income and the Intergenerational Transmission of Voting Behavior: Evidence from an Income Intervention. Technical report National Bureau of Economic Research.

Alan, Sule, Ceren Baysan, Mert Gumren and Elif Kubilay. 2021. "Building Social Cohesion in Ethnically Mixed Schools: An Intervention on Perspective Taking." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 136(4):2147–2194.

Alcorta, Ludovico, Jeroen Smits, Haley J. Swedlund and Eelke De Jong. 2020. "The 'Dark Side' of Social Capital: A Cross-National Examination of the Relationship Between Social Capital and Violence in Africa." *Social Indicators Research* 149(2):445–465.

Andolina, Molly W., Krista Jenkins, Cliff Zukin and Scott Keeter. 2003. "Habits from Home, Lessons from School: Influences on Youth Civic Engagement." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 36(2):275–280.

Anzia, Sarah F. 2013. *Timing and Turnout: How off-Cycle Elections Favor Organized Groups.* University of Chicago Press.

Armony, Ariel. 2004. *The Dubious Link: Civic Engagement and Democratization.* Stanford University Press.

Arriola, Leonardo R. and Terrence Lyons. 2016. "Ethiopia: The 100% Election." *Journal of Democracy* 27(1):76–88.

Asal, Victor H., Na'ama Nagar and R. Karl Rethemeyer. 2014. "Building Terrorism from Social Ties: The Dark Side of Social Capital." *Civil Wars* 16(4):402–424.

Barnes, Tiffany D. and Stephanie M. Burchard. 2013. ""Engendering" Politics: The Impact of Descriptive Representation on Women's Political Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Comparative Political Studies* 46(7):767–790.

Benier, Kathryn, Nicholas Faulkner, Isak Ladegaard and Rebecca Wickes. 2024. "Reducing Islamophobia through Conversation: A Randomized Control Trial." *Social Psychology Quarterly* p. 01902725231217246.

Berger, Ben. 2009. "Political theory, political science and the end of civic engagement." *Perspectives on politics* 7(2):335–350.

Blair, Robert, Jessica Gottlieb, Marie Schenk and Christopher Woods. 2023. "Depolarizing Within the Comfort of Your Party: Experimental Evidence from Online Workshops.".

Bursztyn, Leonardo, Davide Cantoni, David Y Yang, Noam Yuchtman and Y Jane Zhang. 2021. "Persistent Political Engagement: Social Interactions and the Dynamics of Protest Movements." *American Economic Review: Insights* 3(2):233–250.

Calhoun-Brown, Allison. 2000. "Upon This Rock: The Black Church, Nonviolence, and the Civil Rights Movement." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 33(2):169–174.

Campbell, David E. 2013. "Social Networks and Political Participation." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16:33–48.

Center for Preventive Action. 2023. "Conflict in Ethiopia." https://cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ethiopia.

Charnysh, Volha, Christopher Lucas and Prerna Singh. 2015. "The Ties That Bind: National Identity Salience and pro-Social Behavior toward the Ethnic Other." *Comparative Political Studies* 48(3):267–300.

Commonwealth Secretariat. 2020. *Global Youth Development Index and Report 2020.* Vol. 1 Commonwealth Secretariat.

Coppock, Alexander and Donald P. Green. 2016. "Is Voting Habit Forming? New Evidence from Experiments and Regression Discontinuities." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(4):1044–1062.

Corno, Lucia, Eliana La Ferrara and Justine Burns. 2019. Interaction, Stereotypes and Performance: Evidence from South Africa. Technical report IFS Working Papers.

Croke, Kevin, Guy Grossman, Horacio A. Larreguy and John Marshall. 2016. "Deliberate Disengagement: How Education Can Decrease Political Participation in Electoral Authoritarian Regimes." *American Political Science Review* 110(3):579–600.

Dahl, Robert A. 1973. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition.* Yale university press.

Dercon, Stefan, Joachim De Weerdt, Tessa Bold and Alula Pankhurst. 2006. "Group-Based Funeral Insurance in Ethiopia and Tanzania." *World Development* 34(4):685–703.

Eubank, Nicholas and Dorothy Kronick. 2021. "Friends Don't Let Friends Free Ride." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 16(4):533–557.

Ferrali, Romain, Guy Grossman and Horacio Larreguy. 2023. "Can low-cost, scalable, online interventions increase youth informed political participation in electoral authoritarian contexts?" *Science Advances* 9(26):eadf1222.

Flikke, Geir. 2016. “Resurgent Authoritarianism: The Case of Russia’s New NGO Legislation.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32(2):103–131.

Fowler, Anthony. 2013. “Electoral and Policy Consequences of Voter Turnout: Evidence from Compulsory Voting in Australia.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 8(2):159–182.

Freedom House. 2023. Freedom in the World 2023: Marking 50 Years in the Struggle for Democracy. Technical report Freedom House.

Gupta, Sandeep K. 2011. “Intention-to-Treat Concept: A Review.” *Perspectives in Clinical Research* 2(3):109–112.

Gutmann, Amy. 1998. *Freedom of Association.* Vol. 17 Princeton University Press.

Holbein, John B., Catherine P. Bradshaw, B. Kal Munis, Jill Rabinowitz and Nicholas S. Ialongo. 2022. “Promoting Voter Turnout: An Unanticipated Impact of Early-Childhood Preventive Interventions.” *Prevention Science* pp. 1–12.

Holbein, John B. and D. Sunshine Hillygus. 2016. “Making Young Voters: The Impact of Preregistration on Youth Turnout.” *American Journal of Political Science* 60(2):364–382.

Holbein, John B. and D. Sunshine Hillygus. 2020. *Making Young Voters: Converting Civic Attitudes into Civic Action.* Cambridge University Press.

Hollerbauer, Simon, Maria Nagawa, Graeme Robertson, Jeremy Springman and Erik Wibbels. 2023. “The Effect of Government Intervention on the Operational Decisions of NGOs: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Three Electoral Autocracies.”.

Imai, Kosuke, Luke Keele, Dustin Tingley and Teppei Yamamoto. 2011. “Unpacking the Black Box of Causality: Learning about Causal Mechanisms from Experimental and Observational Studies.” *American Political Science Review* 105(04):765–789.

Karklins, Rasma. 1986. “Soviet Elections Revisited: Voter Abstention in Noncompetitive Voting.” *American Political Science Review* 80(2):449–469.

Keller, Edmond J. et al. 2002. “Ethnic Federalism, Fiscal Reform, Development and Democracy in Ethiopia.” *African Journal of Political Science* 7(1):21–50.

Klobucista, Claire. 2020. “Ethiopia: East Africa’s Emerging Giant.” https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ethiopia-east-africas-emerging-giant.

Lekalake, Rorisang. 2016. “Does less engaged mean less empowered?-Political participation lags among African youth, especially women.”.

Levitsky, Steven and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War.* Cambridge University Press.

Lijphart, Arend. 1997. "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma Presidential Address, American Political Science Association, 1996." *American political science review* 91(1):1–14.

Logan, Carolyn, Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny and Kangwook Han. 2021. "Who gets Involved? Insights on Civic Engagement in Africa and Implications for Fostering Volunteerism in Pursuit of Development Goals.".

Lowe, Matt. 2021. "Types of Contact: A Field Experiment on Collaborative and Adversarial Caste Integration." *American Economic Review* 111(6):1807–44.

Lyons, Terrence. 2019. *The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics.* Lynne Rienner Publishers, Incorporated.

Madestam, Andreas, Daniel Shoag, Stan Veuger and David Yanagizawa-Drott. 2013. "Do Political Protests Matter? Evidence from the Tea Party Movement*." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 128(4):1633–1685.

Magaloni, Beatriz. 2006. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico.* Vol. 296 Cambridge University Press Cambridge.

Masterson, Daniel. 2023. "Refugee Networks, Cooperation, and Resource Access." *American Political Science Review* pp. 1–17.

Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Culture. 2004. "National Youth Policy.".

Mo, Cecilia Hyunjung, John B. Holbein and Elizabeth Mitchell Elder. 2022. "Civilian National Service Programs Can Powerfully Increase Youth Voter Turnout." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119(29):e2122996119.

Mousa, Salma. 2020. "Building Social Cohesion between Christians and Muslims through Soccer in Post-ISIS Iraq." *Science* 369(6505):866–870.

OECD. 2017. "Key Issues Affecting Youth in Ethiopia - OECD." https://www.oecd.org/countries/ethiopia/youth-issues-in-ethiopia.htm.

Oliver, J. Eric. 1999. "The Effects of Metropolitan Economic Segregation on Local Civic Participation." *American journal of political science* pp. 186–212.

Paler, Laura, Leslie Marshall and Sami Atallah. 2020. "How Cross-Cutting Discussion Shapes Support for Ethnic Politics: Evidence from an Experiment in Lebanon." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 15(1):33–71.

Paluck, Elizabeth Levy, Roni Porat, Chelsey S. Clark and Donald P. Green. 2021. "Prejudice Reduction: Progress and Challenges." *Annual review of psychology* 72:533–560.

Paravicini, Giulia and Dawit Endeshaw. 2020. "Ethiopia Sends Army into Tigray Region, Heavy Fighting Reported." *Reuters* .

Pavão, Nara. 2018. "Corruption as the Only Option: The Limits to Electoral Accountability." *The Journal of Politics* 80(3):996–1010.

Paxton, Pamela. 2002. "Social capital and democracy: An interdependent relationship." *American sociological review* 67(2):254–277.

Posner, Daniel N. and David J. Simon. 2002. "Economic Conditions and Incumbent Support in Africa's New Democracies: Evidence from Zambia." *Comparative Political Studies* 35(3):313–336.

Putnam, R.D. 2001. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster.

Putnam, Robert D. 1994. "Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy.".

Rosenberg, Stacy. 2018. "Many Around the World Are Disengaged From Politics.".

Sabu, Getachew Mijana. 2020. "Factors That Affect Youth Political Participation in Ethiopia: Its Impacts on the Democratization Process." *Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 3(3):61.

Sambanis, Nicholas and Moses Shayo. 2013. "Social Identification and Ethnic Conflict." *American Political Science Review* 107(2):294–325.

Scacco, Alexandra and Shana S Warren. 2018. "Can Social Contact Reduce Prejudice and Discrimination? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Nigeria." *American Political Science Review* 112(3):654–677.

Svensson, Isak and Karen Brouneus. 2013. "Dialogue and Interethnic Trust: A Randomized Field Trial of 'Sustained Dialogue' in Ethiopia." *Journal of Peace Research* 50(5):563–575.

Taye, Bekalu Atnafu. 2017. "Ethnic Federalism and Conflict in Ethiopia." *African Journal of Conflict Resolution* 17(2):41–66.

Teets, Jessica C., Reza Hasmath, Timothy Hildebrandt, Carolyn L. Hsu and Jennifer Y.J. Hsu. 2022. "Volunteerism and Democratic Learning in an Authoritarian State: The Case of China." *Democratization* 29(5):879–898.

Tsai, Lily L. 2007. "Solidary groups, informal accountability, and local public goods provision in rural China." *American Political Science Review* 101(2):355–372.

Van Ingen, Erik and Tom Van der Meer. 2016. "Schools or Pools of Democracy? A Longitudinal Test of the Relation between Civic Participation and Political Socialization." *Political Behavior* 38:83–103.

Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E Brady. 1995. *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics.* Harvard University Press.

Vráblíková, Kateřina. 2014. "How Context Matters? Mobilization, Political Opportunity Structures, and Nonelectoral Political Participation in Old and New Democracies." *Comparative Political Studies* 47(2):203–229.

Wiebrecht, Felix, Yuko Sato, Marina Nord, Martin Lundstedt, Fabio Angiolillo and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2023. "State of the World 2022: Defiance in the Face of Autocratization." *Democratization* 30(5):769–793.

Wilkinson, Steven I. 2006. *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India.* Cambridge University Press.

Young, Lauren E. 2019. "The Psychology of State Repression: Fear and Dissent Decisions in Zimbabwe." *American Political Science Review* 113(1):140–155.