

LASER PULSE

Long-term Assistance and Services for Research (LASER) Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine (PULSE)

The Effect of Social Ties on Engagement & Cohesion: Evidence from Ethiopian University Students

Final Report

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AOR Name: Kevin Roberts

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AUTHORS

Mesele Mengsteab, Addis Ababa University
David A. Dow, University of Arizona
Jeremy Springman, University of Pennsylvania
Juan F. Tellez, University of California-Davis
Sewareg Adamu, Lodestar Associates Consult PLC
Fitsum Hailu, Initiative for Peace and Development

ABOUT LASER PULSE

LASER (Long-term Assistance and SErvices for Research) PULSE (Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine) is a \$70M program funded through USAID's Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub, that delivers research-driven solutions to field-sourced development challenges in USAID partner countries.

A consortium led by Purdue University, with core partners Catholic Relief Services, Indiana University, Makerere University, and the University of Notre Dame, implements the LASER PULSE program through a growing network of 3,000+ researchers and development practitioners in 74 countries.

LASER PULSE collaborates with USAID missions, bureaus, and independent offices, and other local stakeholders to identify research needs for critical development challenges, and funds and strengthens the capacity of researcher-practitioner teams to co-design solutions that translate into policy and practice.

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Acronym

AAU	Addis Ababa University
CACE	Complier Average Causal Effect
CSO	Civil Society Organization
IPD	Initiative for Peace and Development
ITT	Intention to Treat
IWE	Interaction-weighted estimator
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
TEF	Tolerant Engagement Forum
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

Overview

This report describes findings from an impact evaluation of youth engagement workshops in Ethiopia, called Tolerant Engagement Forums (TEF), showing that connecting university students with representatives of civil society and interested peers was a fast, cost-effective way to increase student participation with civil society groups. The report also provides recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers seeking to incorporate insights from this research into civic engagement programming and recommends that the intervention be deployed at larger scale and in new contexts. This research was funded by LASER (Long-term Assistance and Services for Research) PULSE (Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine) through USAID's Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub.

Context and Motivation

In Ethiopia, youth represent a large and growing share of the population (Desta et al 2018). However, as in many other countries, youth are less civically and politically engaged than older citizens (Sabu, 2020a). This engagement gap means that youth issues are often neglected by policymakers. Thus, increasing youth participation in civic and political life is crucial for fostering policies that better serve the youth population. At the same time, Ethiopia has experienced sustained conflict and it is important that increased youth engagement does not exacerbate the country's existing societal divisions.

To address these development challenges, researchers at Addis Ababa University (AAU) partnered with Initiative for Peace and Development (IPD), an Ethiopian non-governmental organization, to use insights from social science to increase youth engagement while mitigating the potential for conflict. AAU and IPD implemented three 1-day workshops, each involving about 100 AAU students. These workshops were designed to increase participation by connecting students with political and civic leaders, providing actionable opportunities to participate in civic life, and connecting students with their politically interested peers, making future participation an opportunity for social interaction. At the same time, these forums included structured dialogue among small groups of diverse students emphasizing participants' common youth and national identities.

Research Methods and Key Findings

The impact of these workshops was evaluated using a randomized control trial (RCT) design comparing workshop participants with a similar "control" group of students on a variety of attitudinal and behavioral outcomes related to civic and political engagement, inter-group tolerance, and social cohesion. Political engagement involves engagement with government institutions and political parties, such as contacting officials or joining a party, and civic engagement includes engagement with non-government institutions and organizations, such as attending student government meetings or joining a voluntary organization. Inter-group tolerance refers to having tolerant and peaceful views towards other ethnic groups and political parties, while social cohesion is defined as valuing Ethiopian unity and social diversity.

Findings show that the intervention had a significant and positive impact on students' civic engagement in the months after the intervention. For example, administrative records show that 14% of students in the treatment group volunteered with an organization represented at the TEFs in the 4-months after the intervention, compared with only 1.5% of the control group. For students that made a new friend at the workshop, there was also a positive and significant increase in political engagement.

This increase in civic engagement was also significant for both women and ethnic minority students, suggesting that the TEF is an effective tool for boosting participation amongst students from both dominant and marginalized groups. However, the intervention also increased sectarian forms of engagement, such as joining an ethnic or religious organization, and did not improve political or ethnic tolerance or attitudes regarding social cohesion.

Recommendations

This evaluation shows that connecting students at AAU with representatives of civil society, providing them with actionable opportunities for future participation, and creating new social ties with their politically interested peers, caused a significant, sustained increase in civic engagement. We hope that the insights from this research will be incorporated into future programming and encourage more research.

We make two recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers interested in increasing youth civic engagement.

- First, we recommend that the TEFs be implemented and evaluated at a larger scale. This could involve a broader sample of Ethiopian universities to foster more widespread increases in student participation at the national level. This could also involve implementing TEFs outside of a university setting. Since levels of civic and political participation are generally lower among populations without university degrees, the TEF model may cause even larger increases in participation for non-university youth.
- Second, we recommend implementing and evaluating a version of the TEFs that are expanded from one to two or three days. The limited duration of the structured dialogue component of the workshop may explain the failure to increase tolerance and social cohesion. Students that participated expressed a desire for more of these dialogues. Longer dialogue sessions may allow for stronger social ties between students and could provide a stronger basis for enhancing social and political tolerance.

Introduction and Background

In many countries, youth face unique social and economic challenges. Compared to older generations, youth face significantly worse labor market outcomes (Pastore, 2018; Zimmermann et al., 2013; Nganwa et al., 2015), political and social exclusion (Gupta, 2014; Lin, 2011), and are disproportionately targeted for radicalization and recruitment into violent conflict (Rink and Sharma, 2018; Beber and Blattman, 2013). The prevalence of poor outcomes among youth around the world is especially alarming given that, due to reduced infant mortality in low-income, high-fertility countries, young people are a historically large and rapidly growing share of the population in many places, especially developing countries (Gupta, 2014).

The poor outcomes faced by youth is likely due in part to their low levels of political and civic engagement, especially with formal institutions (Gupta, 2014). Although youth often play a central role in securing political change through mass, anti-regime mobilization (Fluckiger and Ludwig, 2018; Gerling, 2018; Yair and Miodownik, 2016; Goldstone, 2002), in Ethiopia and elsewhere, they tend to vote, attend community meetings, and join civic organizations at much lower rates than older citizens (Sabu, 2020a). Increasing youth engagement with formal civic and political institutions is one way to increase their relative political power and render governments more responsive to their needs (Gupta, 2014). In this report, we focus on both civic and political participation. We refer to civic engagement as activities that involve participation in non-government institutions and organizations, and political engagement as activities where youth engage directly with government institutions and political parties.

Addressing the issues affecting youth poses two related policy challenges. On one hand, increasing youth civic and political engagement can incentivize governments to align their policies, which are often tailored to the needs of older, more politically active generations, with the unique needs facing youth. At the same time, it is important to take steps that ensure increased mobilization does not exacerbate existing societal divisions, especially in contexts of ongoing violent conflict. For these reasons, there is an urgent need for interventions that can increase youth engagement while mitigating the potential for the types of conflict often associated with youth mobilization.

Encouraging strategic social ties presents one possible method to accomplish both increased engagement and social cohesion among youth. Recent research suggests that social ties can increase engagement through two mechanisms: first, by increasing access to information and second, by increasing social pressure to participate. First, evidence from diverse contexts—including in Ethiopia—suggests that a lack of information (often due to unfamiliarity) about how to engage is a major and disproportionate barrier to youth engagement (Sabu, 2020a; Holbein and Hillygus, 2020). Building social ties between youth and members of civil society and government can connect youth with potential sources of information about specific opportunities to participate with civic and political organizations. Second, social connections to politically active peers can also increase youth participation in political and civic life, in part by increasing social pressure and social sanctioning. A growing body of research demonstrates that new and existing friendships with politically active peers can motivate higher levels of costly political participation (Eubank and Kronick, 2021; Bursztyń et al., 2021).

Finally, encouraging social ties may impact the second set of key outcomes in our study: social cohesion and tolerance. We conceptualize social cohesion as the degree to which youth identify

with and value the common good and national unity, as well as trust members of other ethnic groups. Though social cohesion is a debated concept, this understanding follows a significant amount of work in the area (see Schieffer & van der Noll, 2017 for a recent review; Moussa 2020). Analytically, a large body of evidence suggests that inter-group social contact and structured dialogue can increase cohesion and trust (see Paluck et al., 2021 for a recent review). Opportunities to form inter-group social ties and exchange perspectives may be a powerful way to increase inter-group tolerance and reduce support for conflict.

We apply these lessons in Ethiopia, where youth played a crucial role in a recent political transition but have largely refrained from engaging with formal civic and political institutions (e.g. Sabu, 2020a; Sabu, 2020b; Muluye, 2019) and have a history of mobilizing along ethnic lines (e.g. Markakis & Ayele, 1977; Kelecha, 2021). To test the impact of encouraging strategic social ties, we implemented a randomized control trial (RCT) in partnership with Addis Ababa University (AAU), a local peace-building NGO, Initiative for Peace and Development (IPD), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Purdue University, and the LASER (Long-term Assistance and Services for Research) PULSE (Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine) Consortium.

Specifically, we randomly assigned¹ 353 students at Addis Ababa University to one-day interactive forums designed to increase civic and political engagement by connecting youth with peers and political and civic elites. The forum provided them with potential sources of information and actionable opportunities to participate in civic life, and connections with politically interested peers, creating a social incentive for political engagement. At the same time, these forums deploy inter-ethnic social contact and structured dialogue designed to emphasize common youth and national identities. In this report, we evaluate the impact of these Tolerant Engagement Forums (TEFs) on students' civic engagement, political engagement, and social cohesion using a variety of attitudinal and behavioral measures.

This randomized impact evaluation fills key research gaps by linking separate bodies of research on the importance of social ties for both cohesion and engagement among youth. Importantly, this research helps clarify how youth development programs might increase civic engagement and mobilization while mitigating the potential for this mobilization to contribute to ethnic conflict, strife, and instability. In addition to providing an opportunity to test the impact of presenting students with opportunities to participate on future behavior, this exercise also allows us to observe which specific opportunities students in our sample respond to.

Ultimately, we find strong evidence that TEFs significantly increased levels of civic engagement among participants in the 4-months following the intervention. The increase in civic engagement was significant for both women and ethnic minority students, suggesting that the TEF is an effective tool for boosting participation amongst students from both dominant and marginalized groups. However, TEFs did not increase political participation or engagement with government. Relatedly, the TEFs also increased sectarian forms of engagement, such as joining an ethnic or religious organization, but did not improve political or ethnic tolerance or attitudes regarding social

¹ Random assignment allows us to estimate the impact of the intervention on our outcome, controlling for all pre-treatment differences among potential participants. We use block randomization to ensure balance by gender and minority status. Budget constraints limited the number of attendees to ~300. 353 was the number of randomized invitations sent in an effort to reach 300 attendees.

cohesion. Additional analysis suggests that the TEF was most effective at increasing engagement among students that formed new social ties as a result of their participation.

Our results suggest that building connections among politically active youth and between youth and members of civil society is a cost-effective way to increase civic engagement amongst university students. Given the prevalence of the youth-engagement gap across many countries and contexts, and the increasing importance of aligning government policy with youth interests as youth populations surge in many regions, this is an exciting finding. Future trials should test whether similar interventions are similarly effective at a larger scale and among non-student youth populations. However, concerns about increased engagement contributing to ethnic tensions remain. In the final section, we return to these considerations and recommend future research on how to mitigate risks associated with increased youth engagement.

Increasing Engagement & Cohesion Through Social Ties

Low youth engagement with civic and political institutions is a common problem around the world. Low levels of engagement often coincide with a lack of responsiveness of political institutions to youth needs and poor economic and social outcomes for youth relative to older generations (e.g. Saba 2020a; Tracey 2016). However, in extremely polarized environments, increased mobilization risks contributing to societal divisions. This risk is especially problematic in contexts of ongoing violent conflict. Fortunately, a growing body of empirical research, which we describe next, evaluating the effect of social ties suggests that interpersonal connections may provide means to simultaneously increase youth engagement while mitigating societal divisions.

First, social ties can transmit valuable information about how to participate. Using data from the United States, Holbein and Hillygus (2020) find that even in the most high-information political environments, young people are disproportionately deterred by several barriers to participation, including a lack of past experience with participation and a lack of confidence in their political knowledge. Connecting youth directly with individuals with political knowledge and experience presents an important potential way to increase levels of youth engagement.

Similarly, Bursztyn et al. (2021) find that experimentally incentivizing students in Hong Kong to participate in protests caused a long-term increase in participation, suggesting that the initial “leap” into participation is a crucial barrier. Importantly, this increase in future participation was driven by students that formed new social ties as a result of their experience. While encouraging, research has yet to test the impact of directly manipulating social ties to politically active peers and elites as means of increasing engagement. Furthermore, research has yet to test the impact of these ties in a deeply divided society.

In addition to providing information, recent research provides strong evidence that these ties can increase social incentives for youth participation. For example, individuals with more socially active friends face greater social pressure to participate in politics. Eubank and Kronick (2021) analyze metadata from more than 30 billion cell phone interactions in Venezuela to show that individuals with more social ties are more likely to attend protests and sign petitions. Drawing on survey and qualitative data, the authors find evidence for the role of social pressure in driving this behavior.

A separate body of research shows that structured social contact can increase social cohesion (or arrest the deterioration of social cohesion) among members of opposing social groups, even in highly

antagonistic and post-conflict settings (Lowe, 2021; Mousa, 2020; Corno, La Ferrara and Burns, 2019; Scacco and Warren, 2018). Specifically, these results suggest that collaborative contact increases social ties and cooperation among members of antagonistic groups. However, the effects of contact on cohesion tend to be weaker when group differences are more salient and limited to behaviors toward specific outgroup members rather than changing highly generalized attitudes about the outgroup as a whole (Paluck et al., 2021). Relatedly, dialogue among groups has also been shown to increase social cohesion. For example, structured dialogue around ethnic conflict increased trust among Ethiopian university students from antagonistic ethnic groups but also increased the salience of ethnic identities (Svensson and Brouneus, 2013). Similarly, Paler et al. (2020) show that inter-group discussions in Lebanon between Christians, Sunnis, and Shia resulted in less support for sectarian politics but only when individuals also belonged to the same economic class, allowing for learning about shared preferences along a cross-cutting identity.

Importantly, Paler et al's (2020) results suggest that although contact generally increases cohesion, combining contact with measures to decrease the salience of group differences may strengthen the impact of contact on cohesion. Previous research suggests that emphasizing a broader, 'superordinate' identity² can reduce the salience of conflicting ethnic identities and reduce discrimination (Charnysh, Lucas and Singh, 2015). These findings suggest that combining inter-group contact with dialogue focused on problem-solving to address common interests and challenges may be a particularly potent means of promoting cohesion among youths from opposing social groups.

Taken together, these distinct but related bodies of evidence suggest that the multi-faced benefits of social ties may be combined into a single intervention designed to boost youth civic and political engagement with formal institutions while fostering social cohesion. In summary, such an intervention could contribute to four changes/benefits. First, connecting youth with civic and political elites to increase the flow of information about how to participate. Second, connecting youth with politically active peers to increase social pressure in favor of engagement. Third, using inter-group dialogue to induce inter-group contact and cooperation answering questions that emphasize common youth identity. Fourth, providing a valuable experience that may increase confidence in participants' understanding and ability to contribute to political activities and conversations in the future.

Research Context: Youth, Universities, and Ethnic Conflict

Ethiopia's youth played a central role in the massive political changes the country has undergone in recent years. In the face of brutal state repression, youth groups orchestrated sustained, cross-ethnic protests, ultimately securing a transition of power and extensive liberalization, including the release of thousands of political prisoners and the repeal of the 2009 CSO Law that decimated civil society.³

These successes belie the reality that the political mobilization of Ethiopia's youth has been uneven and has not translated into government policies targeted at addressing youth issues. Despite their

² Superordinate identity refers to a broader, overarching identity that cuts across other identities where "in-group" and "out-group" divisions exist.

³ Ethiopia: Abiy's First Year as Prime Minister, Review of Freedom of Association', April 4, 2019.

Human Rights Watch, https://web.archive.org/web/2020*/https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/04/ethiopia-abiy-first-year-prime-minister-review-freedom-association

role in securing this radical political change, young Ethiopians still face a number of unique socio-economic challenges, including high rates of unemployment and informality, low access to education, and stark gender inequalities.⁴

While many of Ethiopia's youth have clearly demonstrated their desire and ability to influence governance in their country, youth participation in politics has often been through extra-institutional channels such as mass protests rather than formal channels like voting, attending community meetings, membership in civil society organizations, or contacting public officials (Sabu, 2020a). Alternatively, others remain disengaged due to a lack of political knowledge or socialization, or a fear of reprisals from opposite-minded peers or local elites (Sabu, 2020a; Gebremariam and Herrera, 2016). Furthermore, youth political mobilization has also been centered around regional and ethnic identities and interests (Yusuf, 2019). Political leaders, including many youth themselves, have mobilized young people around ethnic and regional interests rather than national issues that affect youth broadly.

The political knowledge that facilitates youth participation is often transmitted from generation to generation through a process of socialization, whereby children learn about politics and how to participate from their parents (Sapiro, 2004). This represents a problem for youth mobilization in societies emerging from less inclusive political systems (Kitanova, 2020) like Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, older generations often lack experience with political participation and are more likely to transmit fear of engagement to younger generations (Sabu, 2020a; Gebremariam and Herrera, 2016).

Yet, efforts to increase youth mobilization and civic engagement must contend with the current security situation in Ethiopia, which has been characterized by conflict, ethnic tensions, polarization, and electoral instability. Ethiopia's highly federalized system of governance has ensured that much of Ethiopian politics is organized around ethnic and regional identities. Liberalization has facilitated the rise of ethno-nationalist parties in both rural and urban areas, including the federal capital Addis Ababa (e.g. Chanie & Ishiyama, 2021). The resurgence of ethno-nationalist political forces poses a challenge to Ethiopian democracy and to the meaningful inclusion of youth in Ethiopia's political development. Youth mobilization has often been explicitly linked to ethnic identities and interests. This highlights the need for any increase in youth participation and engagement to be met with similar efforts to reduce tensions and foster social cohesion.

The ethnically charged nature of youth engagement is also apparent in Ethiopia's universities. Public universities have become a site for ethnic-centered conflicts, and violent clashes and protests led by politically mobilized youth have resulted in property destruction, school closings, and even deaths.⁵ Universities are important in that they are settings where many youths come into contact with electoral politics, and where social movements, civil society organizations, and political parties recruit members.

Youth also take on significant roles in university politics, participating in student government and forming civically oriented clubs and associations. Given their importance as sites of political

⁴ 'Key Issues affecting Youth in Ethiopia', Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200118174729/https://www.oecd.org/dev/inclusivesocietiesanddevelopment/youth-issues-in-ethiopia.htm>.

⁵ Danish Immigration Service, Ethiopia: Political situation and treatment of opposition, 10 October 2018, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5beadac74.html>

socialization (Parreira et al., 2023), instability in Ethiopia’s universities is particularly troubling for the prospect of peaceful civic engagement. Increasing social cohesion among university students from diverse backgrounds could be a high leverage point to intervene and reduce ethnic tensions both on campuses and in students’ communities of origin.

In sum, it is critical that Ethiopia’s youth mobilize to advocate for policies that will advance their common interests. The state’s recent reorientation towards public dialogue and political organization provides an opportunity for such engagement to take place. However, youth have often been mobilized around distributive conflicts between competing ethnic groups that result in conflict. To secure the long-term interests of Ethiopia’s youth, it is important to connect youth to non-violent modes of participation and reduce ethnic and regional tensions. Given their role in political socialization and recent experience with ethnic conflict, the university is a fruitful setting to intervene on these outcomes.

Evaluation Methods and Design

Tolerant Engagement Forums Intervention

In this project, we implement and evaluate the impact of structured dialogue forums designed to promote youth civic and political engagement and social cohesion. Our “Tolerant Engagement Forums” (TEFs) consisted of two components. First, we brought together students and high-level representatives of government and civil society to connect youth to actionable opportunities to participate in formal political and civic institutions. Second, youth participants engaged in structured political dialogue emphasizing ‘superordinate’ youth and national identities in small, diverse groups.

Our intervention sought to increase youth political participation through formal channels while encouraging this participation to target the social and economic policies that affect all Ethiopian youth. In this report, we investigate whether connecting youth with representatives of civil society and government who provide actionable information about opportunities for political participation can increase levels of engagement with formal political and civic institutions. Furthermore, we study whether structured dialogue and social contact that emphasizes shared rather than competing interests can increase social cohesion in a conflict setting.

While the literature on information and participation suggests ways to increase youth engagement through formal channels, if youth continue to mobilize around regional and ethnic cleavages, this is unlikely to create pressure for governments to implement more youth-oriented policies. To avoid this outcome, our intervention paired activities aimed at increasing youth engagement with activities that were designed to increase social cohesion among participants and reduce the salience of regional and ethnic cleavages.

We worked with an Ethiopian nongovernmental organization, Initiative for Peace and Development (IPD), to conduct three identical one-day TEF workshops (June 17-19, 2022). Students from Addis Ababa University were invited to attend one of these workshops. Each TEF consisted of multiple sessions. The

first session involved panel presentations and discussions about the state of youth civic engagement and current opportunities for increasing youth engagement in Ethiopia. Presentations were made by representatives of Ethiopian civil society organizations (CSOs) and government ministries. Afterward, students were able to engage in discussions and networking with these organizational representatives about opportunities for youth civic engagement and were given the opportunity to sign-up to receive additional information about opportunities to volunteer. The second session involved structured dialogue in groups of approximately 10 people, led by IPD facilitators. The afternoon sessions were designed for students to discuss several key issues including the challenges and obstacles to youth engagement, opportunities for future inclusion, and causes and potential solutions to Ethiopia's ethnic conflicts. Students were randomly assigned to a discussion group composed of either 10 or 11 students, with a minimum number of women (3) and ethnic minorities (3).⁶ Above this minimum, we randomly varied the number of women and minorities in each group to assess the impact of greater diversity on outcomes.

Methods

We use a randomized control trial (RCT) to evaluate the causal impact of the TEF workshop. RCTs estimate the impact of an intervention by comparing outcomes for treated units against outcomes for a “counterfactual” group that was randomly selected to not receive the treatment (Fisher & Eden, 1927). This technique provides a straightforward way to understand program effects and how outcomes would be different if the intervention had not taken place. The random assignment of treatment and control units is the most scientifically rigorous way to establish a causal relationship between an intervention and outcomes and is considered the “gold standard” in program evaluation.

Our study randomized individual students into treatment and control groups. After conducting a baseline survey with 909 AAU students, we randomly invited 353 students to attend one of the TEF events. To ensure that a sufficiently diverse group of students were invited to the event, we block-randomized the invitations on the gender and ethnic minority status of potential participants. IPD then worked with students to schedule their in-person attendance on one of the workshop days. A total of 257 students attended one of the workshops in June of 2022 (49 on the 17th, 102 on 18th, and 106 on the 19th). We then conducted an endline survey approximately 4 months after the TEF workshop in October-November 2022. Details on each stage of data collection are discussed next.

Data Collection

Qualitative Data - Focus Group Discussions

First, our study intervention and survey instruments were informed by first holding structured focus group discussions (FGDs) with students at Addis Ababa University (AAU) in April of 2022. The primary objective of the FGDs was to collect qualitative data from members of student clubs and associations to inform the design of the Tolerant Engagement Forum (TEF) curriculum guide, used as an intervention with the project's treatment group. The FGDs also informed the development of key concepts related to

⁶ Under this randomization procedure, there could be up to 8 majority-ethnic group men in a group of 11, though this was rare.

which indicators should be included in the baseline and endline surveys, as well as how to measure them.

With this in mind, the FGD sessions included discussions of the main organizational objectives and activities of the AAU student clubs and associations, the clubs' experiences in handling discussions of sensitive topics regarding politics and ethnicity, and traditions of student civic and political engagement. The FGD sessions included raising questions related to youth political and civic behavior, as well as the barriers that prevent engagement. The sessions also explored attitudes related to political tolerance, social cohesion, and diversity. Finally, we sought feedback on the potential design of the TEF intervention and asked participants for their opinions on what issues would be relevant, and which might be too sensitive, to be included in the TEF events.

We used a purposive sampling technique to select student clubs and recruit FGD participants. The inclusion criteria and recruitment strategies for including a student club/association included the following:

- Formally registered in the Addis Ababa University Dean of Students Office, which is mandated for supervising all forms of student organizations;
- Are currently active and functioning;
- Activities are associated with youth development, empowerment, civic engagement and leadership;
- Have active student membership; and
- Have active club members preferably with leadership experience in leading the clubs and in civic engagement.

In addition to the above recruitment strategies, we placed particular emphasis on the inclusion of members of the AAU Students' Peace Club because of the club's rich experience in organizing discussion forums, which they formally call 'Sustainable Dialogues'. These forums are specifically focused on fostering discussion of sensitive social and political topics among its ethnically diverse members.⁷ We expected that lessons drawn from the Peace Club would be particularly helpful for devising mechanisms of cultural and ethnic sensitivity in designing the TEF intervention and preventing the potential for backlash or conflict between participants. Based on the inclusion criteria and consultation with the Student Organization Expert of the AAU Dean of Students Office, four clubs were chosen: 1) Peace Club, 2) Act on Youth Empowerment, 3) *Bego Sew* (meaning "Virtuous Man" in English) and 4) the Female Students' Association. The Female Students Association was selected in order to address the objectives of the project specifically from a female youth perspective.

After club selection, we worked with the Dean of Students Office to send an open invitation to all members of the selected clubs to sign up to participate in one of the FGD sessions. The objectives of the FGD and the identities of the researchers were communicated to potential participants. In addition to the Students Organization Expert, chairpersons/presidents of the four clubs were also consulted in recruiting 32 participants from a total of 70 various club members who signed up to participate. Leadership experience in being a member of the clubs' executive body, active participation in their respective clubs, active civic engagement, very good speaking skills, and good knowledge of the student community within the university setting were the recruitment strategies we applied for selecting eight participants from each club. Apart from this, participation in three of our focus group discussion sessions

⁷ Sustainable dialogue encourages continued communication between individuals or groups by taking a holistic approach to development and peacebuilding and by accounting for differences in power and resources.

was not restricted by any other background characteristics, such as gender, age, year of study, or department. However, female students were exclusively recruited for participation in the fourth FGD session in order to focus specifically on women's perspectives and barriers to women's civic engagement.

The FGD questionnaire consisted of questions grouped into three parts. The first part dealt with questions about the functions and objectives of the clubs; the second part covered the experiences of the club members in civic engagement and political participation and related barriers. The third part addressed the proposed tolerant engagement forums (TEF) and the potential topics which participants thought should be included or excluded from the TEF events. Generally, materials used for facilitating the FGD sessions included a participant registration form, FGD questionnaire, consent form, facilitators guide, and audio-recorders. The discussions lasted approximately 2 hours each and were conducted by 1 of 4 different individuals from the local research team in Ethiopia. For more information, see [Appendix 4](#).

Quantitative Data - Baseline and Endline Surveys

Data for the baseline survey were collected in May and June of 2022 through the online platform Qualtrics. To select participants we drew on a listing of all students enrolled at AAU and excluded students who would graduate before the onset of the TEF intervention. Students were primarily invited to participate in the survey via email, although we also used a survey firm to follow up through telephone calls with non-responses and encourage participation. A total of 6,309 students received an initial email invitation to take the survey. As a financial incentive, students received \$5 USD in exchange for their participation. We captured responses from a total of 968 students at baseline. Of these baseline respondents, 909 were at least somewhat interested in receiving an invitation to the TEF event. Figure 1 below shows the basic demographic characteristics of our baseline sample. While female students responded to the baseline survey at a slightly lower rate than male students, the demographic composition of the sample is similar to the enrolled undergraduate population at AAU. Women comprised about 37% of the list of eligible enrolled students. See [Appendix 1](#) for additional descriptive statistics on the baseline sample.

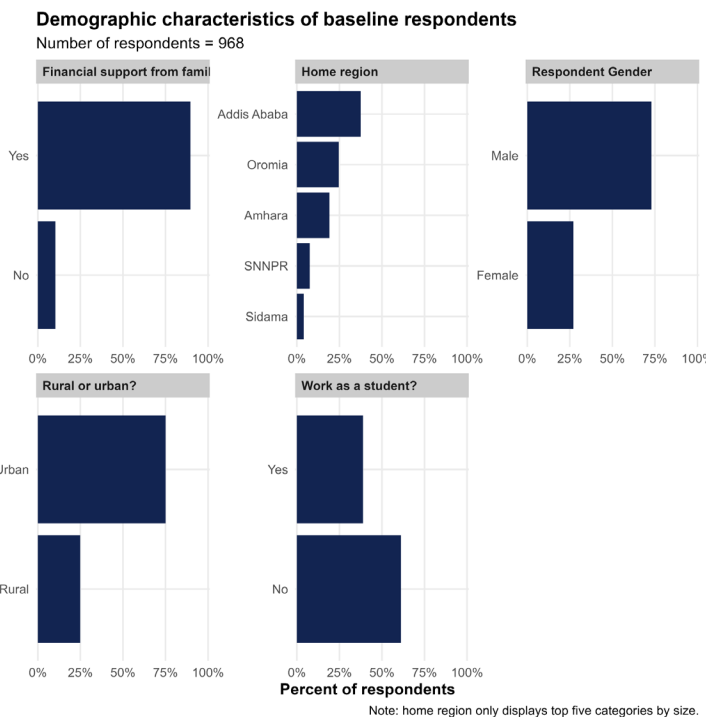


Figure 1: Demographic Characteristics of Baseline Survey Participants

Data for the endline survey was collected in October and November of 2022. The survey was conducted via Qualtrics by contacting all baseline survey recipients using the same contact information. Students were once again offered a \$5 USD incentive for participating in the endline survey. Our endline survey did not suffer from significant attrition. Of the 909 baseline respondents eligible for a TEF invitation, we were able to collect endline responses from 825 of them (~91% follow-up rate). The attrition that did occur was also balanced between treatment and control groups in the experiment with an 11% attrition rate for the control group and an 8% attrition rate amongst the treatment group.

Outcomes, Hypotheses, and Indicators

This section summarizes the primary and secondary indicators used to test the effect of the TEF intervention on our two main outcome families (1) political and civic engagement and 2) tolerance and social cohesion. Table 1 provides an overview of our main outcomes and indicators. We briefly describe below each outcome family that the treatment has been designed to affect and present hypotheses formally specifying the expected impact on each outcome. Primary outcomes are those that we interpret as the strongest evidence for each objective and secondary outcomes represent measures that are either less likely to be affected by the treatment or are less directly related to the objective under consideration. [Appendix 2](#) provides a description of each indicator and its components. For more information about the data and methods used for creating each outcome, including the full wording of our survey questions, please see the Pre-Analysis Plan (<https://osf.io/h5xeb>). For more information about the TEF curriculum and the content of structured dialogue, please see our Tolerant Engagement Forum Curriculum Guide (Hailu et al 2022).

Table 1: Outcome Families, Primary and Secondary Indicators

Outcome Family	Primary Indicators	Secondary Indicators
Outcome Family 1: Political and Civic Engagement	1. Political Engagement Index 2. Civic Engagement Index	1. Sectarian Engagement 2. Efficacy and Obstacles 3. Future career plans
Outcome Family 2: Tolerance & Social Cohesion	1. Political/Ethnic Tolerance Index 2. Social Cohesion Index	1: Perceptions of Discrimination 2. Preferences for Ethnic Federalism 3. Out-group Social Contact

Primary Outcome Family 1: Political and Civic Engagement

First, we consider the impact of the TEF on political and civic engagement. The intervention aimed to increase political engagement by connecting participants with representatives of government agencies and civic engagement by connecting with representatives of civil society. However, given the sensitive political context, we expected increased engagement with government to be a more difficult objective than increased civic engagement. We state our hypotheses below in reference to *invitations* to the TEF, rather than participation, since invitations were randomized in the experiment.

Hypothesis 1a: Invitation to the TEF workshop will increase political engagement

Hypotheses 1b: Invitation to the TEF workshop will increase civic engagement

Primary Outcome 2: Social Tolerance and Cohesion

In addition to engagement, the TEF intervention was designed to increase intergroup tolerance and social cohesion through contact and dialogue with peers from other groups. To measure the effect of the TEFs on tolerance and cohesion, we draw on endline survey questions measuring attitudes and behavior toward political and ethnic outgroups. See [Appendix 2](#) for descriptions of these measures and indices.

Hypothesis 2a: Invitation to the TEF workshop will increase tolerance.

Hypothesis 2b: Invitation to the TEF workshop will increase social cohesion.

Estimation

To estimate the effect of the TEF intervention on the outcomes of interest, we implemented Equation 1 using Ordinary Least Squares. Our primary estimand is the intent-to-treat (ITT) effect of TEF participation on the outcomes of interest. The specification is as follows:

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

β_1 is the coefficient of interest for the treatment indicator T_i . $Y_{i,t-1}$ is the baseline value for the dependent variable, X_i is an optional vector of pre-treatment control variables, and γ are block fixed effects interacted with the treatment indicator. We report results both with and without the baseline covariates below. To account for heteroskedasticity, we calculate HC2 robust standard errors.

We opt for ANCOVA rather than a difference-in-differences estimator due to the greater statistical power when autocorrelation of outcome variables is relatively low without reduced power when autocorrelation is high (McKenzie, 2012). Since respondents were assigned to treatment arms with differential probability across blocks, we include the interactions between the treatment indicator and block fixed effects suggested by Gibbons, Serrato and Urbancic (2019). 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.

While ITT is the primary estimand, we also estimate a Complier Average Causal Effect (CACE) of TEF participation using two-stage least squares (2SLS), where the randomized invitation is treated as an instrument to participation. Because interest in participation was extremely high in the baseline sample and non-compliance⁸ was often driven by idiosyncratic factors (for example, many invited respondents were not available to participate on the specific days when a TEF was being held), we argue that this is also a credible, and policy-relevant, quantity to estimate.

Results/Findings

Primary Findings for Outcome 1: Political and Civic Engagement

In this section, we present and discuss the main results of our intent-to-treat analysis of the TEF workshop's effects. Our results remain largely similar when we consider TEF effects amongst students that actually attended the workshop, as shown in [Appendix 3](#) for the Complier Average Causal Effects. We begin with our primary outcomes for political engagement and civic engagement. Figure 2 plots the intent-to-treat effect estimates for the TEF on a political engagement index, as well as its constituent parts. The dashed lines represent the estimates using models that include covariates, while the solid lines are from models without covariates. Overall, we find no evidence that the TEF had a significant impact on levels of political engagement in the 4 months following the intervention. The point estimate for the index outcome is very close to zero and not significant at even the 90% confidence level. Additionally, we do not find significant effects for any sub-item outcomes.

⁸ In this study, we only observed one-sided non-compliance since no one from the control group attended the TEFs.

On the other hand, we do find that the TEF had a significant effect on student’s *civic* engagement in the months following the intervention. Figure 3 plots the intent-to-treat estimates for our civic engagement index and its sub-items. Specifically, we find a significant and positive effect of the TEF invitation on the overall civic index, as well as attendance at community & student government meetings, intentions to join a voluntary organization, and participation in a protest. The size of the TEF effect for the civic index is a modest but important increase of approximately 0.11 units. Furthermore, the TEF is associated with a 0.36 increase in attendance of 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 voluntary organization (a 4% increase from a mean of 4.33) and a 0.18 increase in protest attendance (a 44% increase from a mean of 0.38).

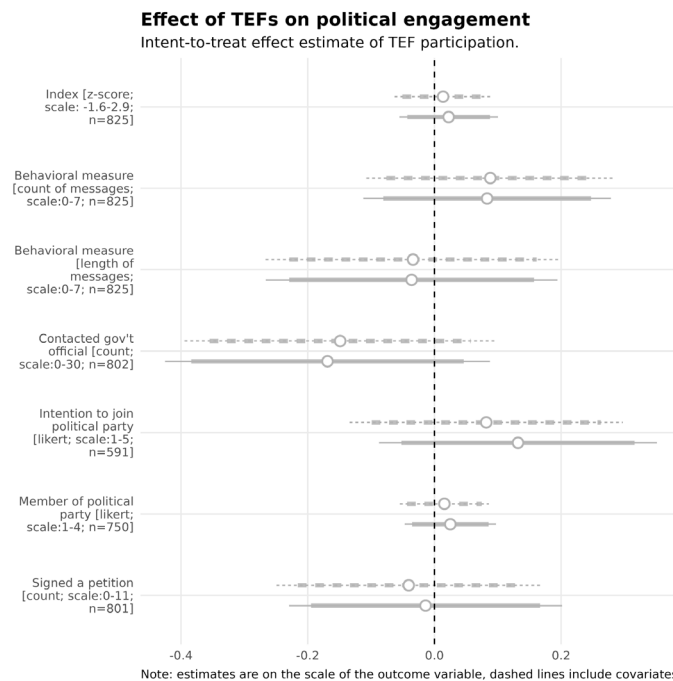


Figure 2: Effects of TEF on Political Engagement Outcomes

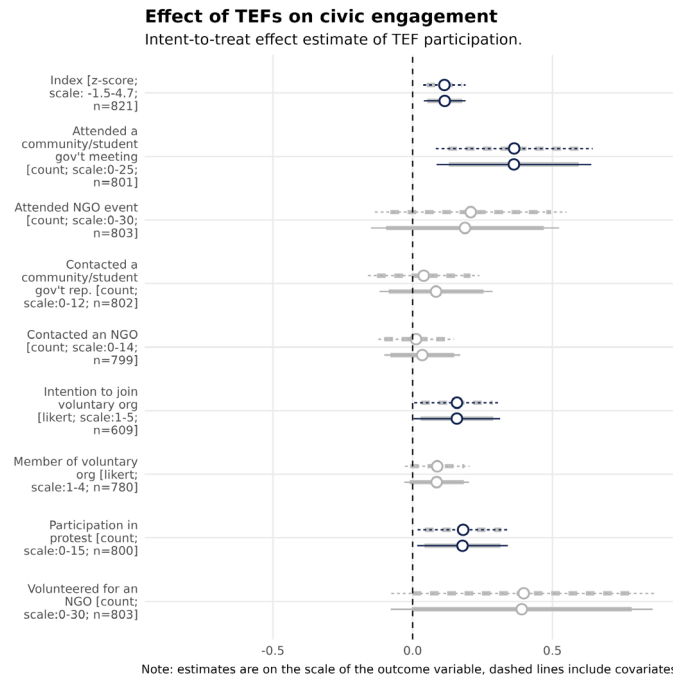


Figure 3: Effects of TEF on Civic Engagement Outcomes

In addition to these survey-based measures of engagement, we also provide evidence from real-world behavior. A core part of our intervention was connecting student participants with representatives of civil society organizations. Students were given the opportunity to interact with these representatives and obtain information about opportunities to volunteer with the organizations these representatives work with. To assess whether students took advantage of these opportunities, we worked with civil society representatives that attended a TEF to identify any students in the treatment or control groups that volunteered with their organization for the first time in the 4-months after TEFs were implemented. Using administrative data on recent volunteers compiled by these organizations, we used names, email addresses, and phone numbers to link recent volunteers with our sample of students. We find strong evidence that TEF participants volunteered with these organizations at much higher rates. Specifically, we find that 14% of students in the treatment group (36 students total) volunteered with at least one of these organizations in the 4-months after the TEFs. Over the same period of time, only 1.4% of students in the control group (7 students total) volunteered.

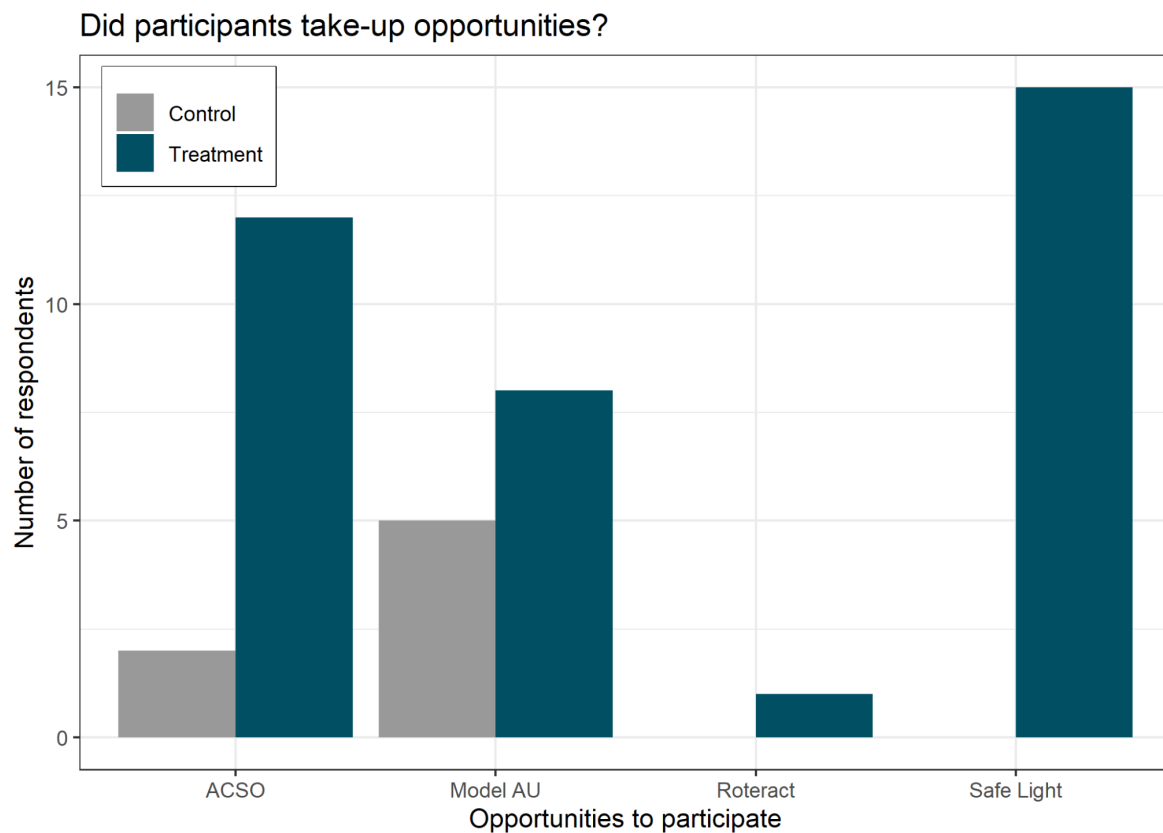


Figure 4: Volunteering with civil society organizations by treatment and control

Secondary Findings for Political and Civic Engagement

Next, we turn to analyses of secondary outcomes related to political and civic engagement. We present results for 3 key families of outcomes in this section: 1) sectarian engagement; 2) perceptions of efficacy and obstacles to participation; and 3) future career plans.

In many contexts, civic and political engagement are often structured or channeled through sectarian groups. In Ethiopia, ethnicity and religion are important identities for many people and interest groups focused on these identities may provide avenues for increased engagement as well. Figure 5 plots the effect of the TEF on sectarian forms of engagement. We find that invitation to the TEF increased the sectarian engagement index by 0.11 units, though this effect is significant only at the 90% confidence level when including covariates. This effect stems from an increased interest in joining ethnic interest groups but not religious groups. Invitation to the TEF is associated with an increase of 0.22 units in students’ intentions to join ethnic interest groups (a 9% increase from a mean of 2.48) and 0.08 units in membership in ethnic interest groups (a 4% increase from a mean of 1.87).

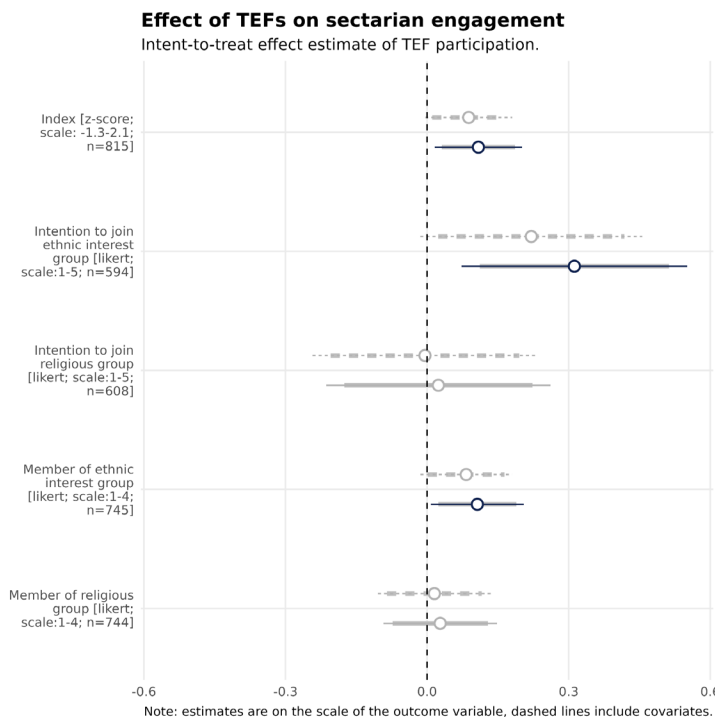


Figure 5: Effects of TEF on Sectarian Engagement

In our next set of outcomes, we examine whether TEF invitation increased students’ perceptions of self-efficacy, youth efficacy, and the obstacles they face in participating in Ethiopia. Figure 6 plots the effects on efficacy. We do not observe a statistically significant increase in either the efficacy index or any sub-components at the 95% confidence level. However, the index is significant at the 90% confidence level ($p < 0.08$) and coefficients on the constituent variables are positive and meaningful in size. Thus, increases in civic or sectarian engagement may be partly driven by changes in students’ sense of efficacy. However, we cannot state this with confidence.

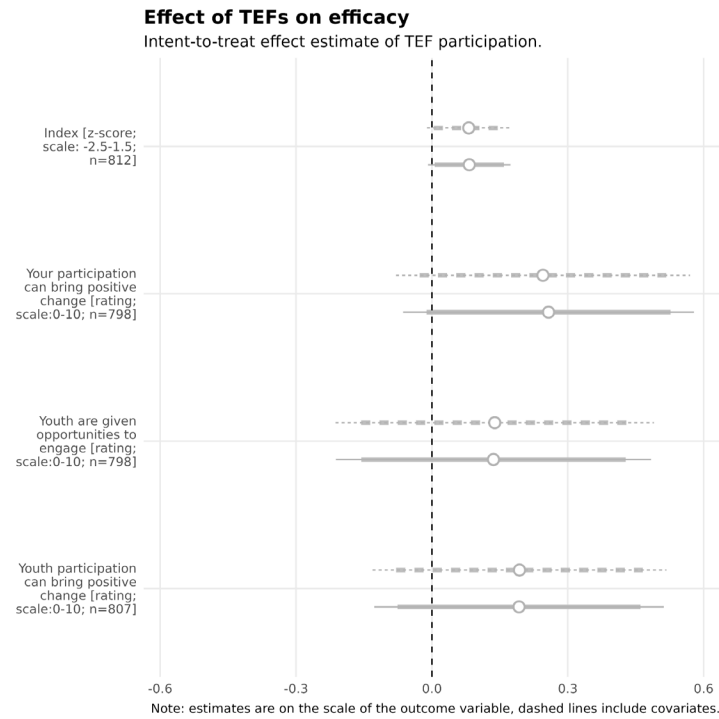


Figure 6: Effects of TEF on Youth Efficacy Outcomes

Similarly, Figure 7 plots the effect of the TEF on students’ perceptions of the obstacles to their participation. Once again, we do not find any statistically significant differences between the TEF treatment and control groups at the 95% confidence level. The estimate for the obstacles index is almost exactly zero. Two outcomes are significant at the 90% level: 1) fear of consequences from others and 2) lack of information. The TEF invitees appear to worry less about consequences from others, perhaps as a result of their TEF attendance. However, TEF invitees actually cite a lack of information as a key obstacle to participation at endline at a higher rate than the control group. If true, one possibility for this finding is that the TEF may have highlighted for students how much information they were previously lacking, while also failing to meet students’ demands for more information due to time constraints.

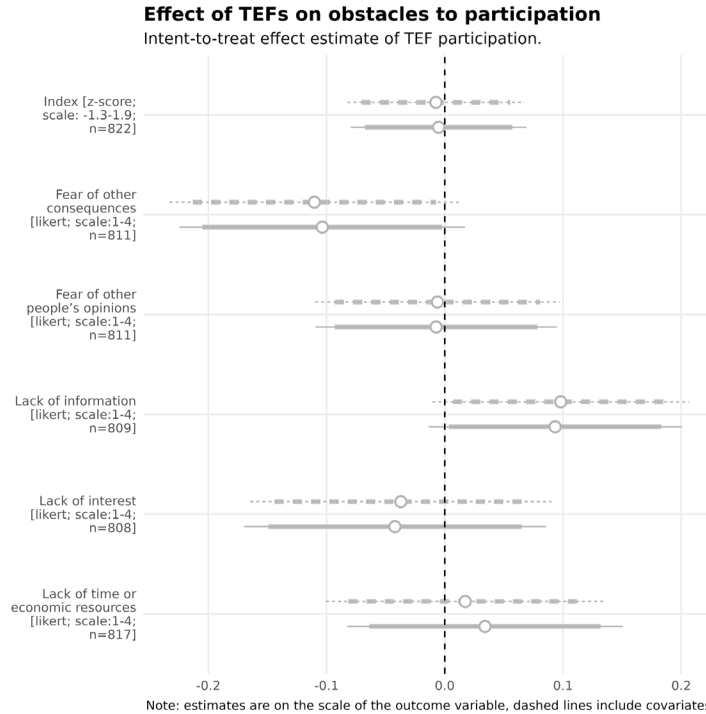


Figure 7: Effects of TEF on Obstacles to Participation

Finally, we examine the effect of the TEF on students’ future career plans. While this outcome is not directly related to the content of the TEF workshop, it may have nevertheless provided new information or generated new interest about potential career paths for participants. Figure 8 plots the results for these outcomes, which are mixed. We find that the TEF increased the overall index, but only a small amount (0.06 units) and significant only at the 90% confidence level. Much of this effect is driven by a 0.09 increase in the treatment group’s interest in starting an NGO in the future (a 19% increase from a mean of 0.47).

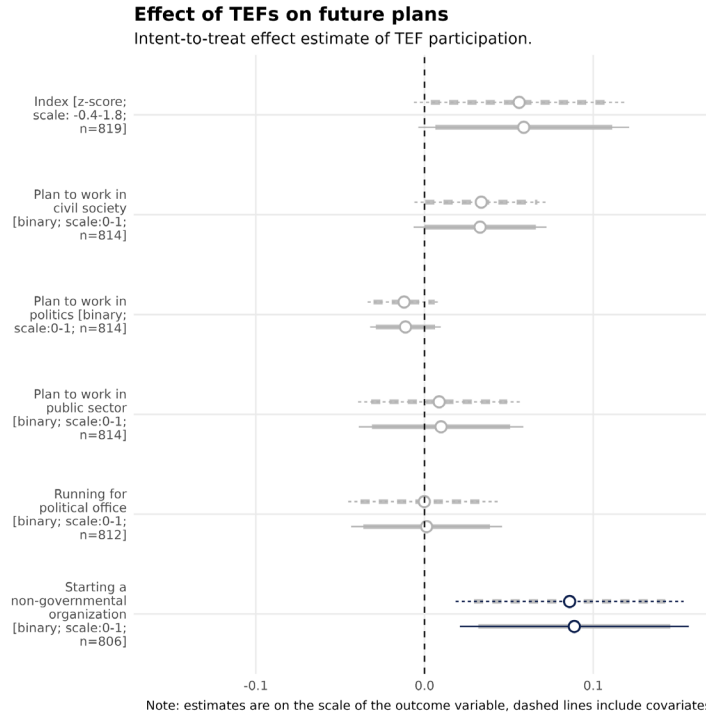


Figure 8: Effects of TEF on Future Career Plans

Primary Findings for Outcome 2: Tolerance and Social Cohesion

Next, we present results for our second primary outcome family related to tolerance and social cohesion. Overall, we find no evidence that the TEF had a causal impact on students’ reported attitudes on these dimensions. First, Figure 9 plots the TEF estimates for measures of tolerance. We do not find any evidence that the TEF was able to improve either political or ethnic tolerance across a wide variety of measures. The point estimate on the overall index outcome is very close to zero and not significant at the 90% confidence level—as are our estimates for all sub-items. Second, Figure 10 plots the results for measures of social cohesion. Once again, we do not find evidence of a TEF effect as neither the index nor sub-items are statistically significant.

We offer two possible interpretations of these null results. First, while the TEF was designed to discuss solutions to problems of social intolerance and polarization in Ethiopia, it may have been too weak of a treatment to move attitudes on these issues that are often crystallized by political conflict and discrimination. Second, our study sample does hold relatively tolerant attitudes to begin with as demonstrated by our baseline data (see Figure A1 in [Appendix 1](#)). Any TEF effect may therefore have been hampered by “ceiling effects” as the treatment group did not have a sufficient amount of room to improve on these outcomes to differentiate it from the control group.

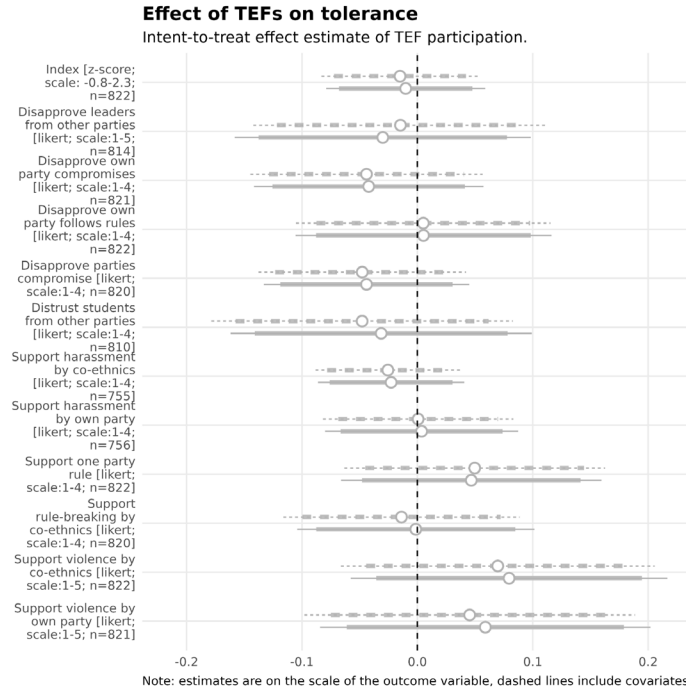


Figure 9: Effects of TEF on Political and Ethnic Tolerance

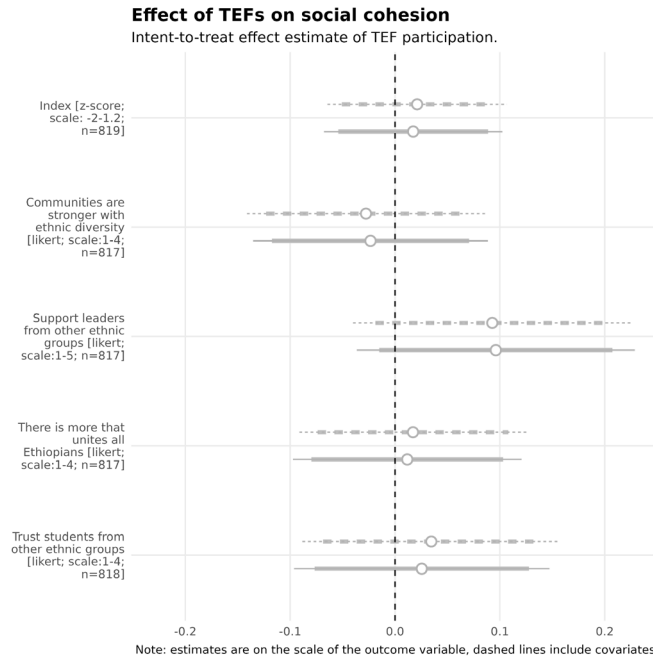


Figure 10: Effects of TEF on Social Cohesion

Secondary Findings for Tolerance and Cohesion

As in the case of our primary outcomes on tolerance and cohesion, we do not find significant effects for the TEF on our secondary outcomes. First, in Figure 11, we do not see any differences between treatment and control groups in terms of how they perceive ethnic discrimination against other groups or whether they prefer federal states to be defined by ethnic homelands. Then, in Figure 12, we do not observe significant effects of the TEF on the frequency of interactions with people from other ethnic groups or other political parties. Our endline data reflects the fact that, in a very significant way, students at Addis Ababa University already regularly experience outgroup social contact. Our sample reported generally high levels of contact with outgroup members. About 70% of respondents reported that they interacted “sometimes” or “very frequently” with members of other political parties, while 95% of respondents reported similarly frequent interaction with members of other ethnic groups.

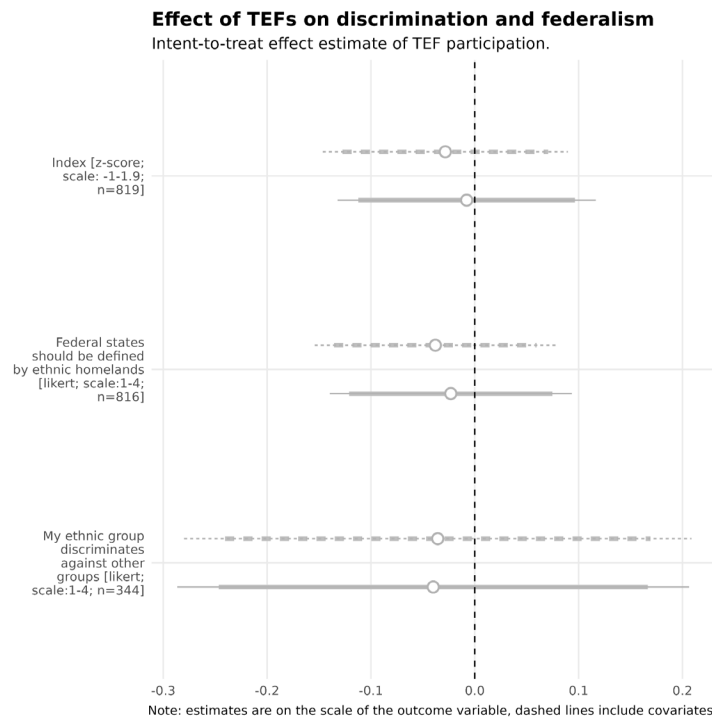


Figure 11: Effects of TEF on Discrimination and Federalism

Effect of TEFs on outgroup contact

Intent-to-treat effect estimate of TEF participation.

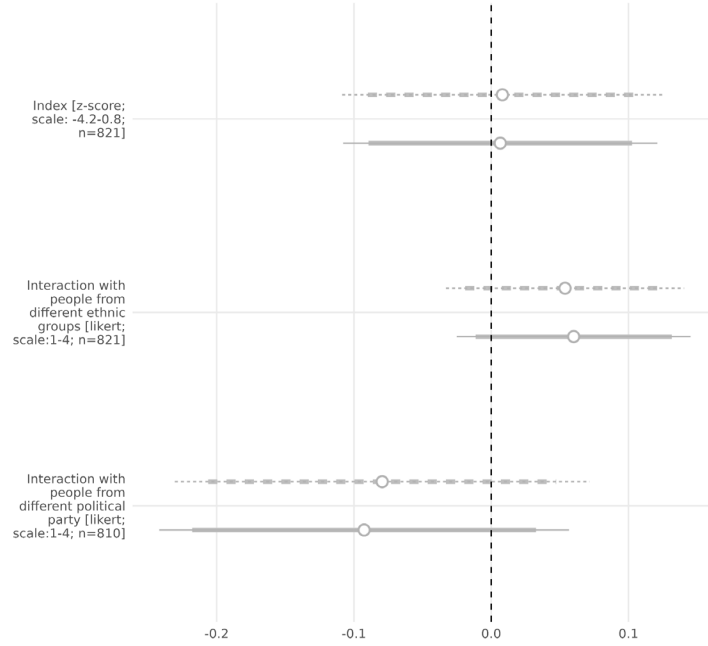


Figure 12: Effects of TEF on Outgroup Contact

Table 2: Summary of Main Findings

Primary Indicators	Results
<u>Outcome Family 1: Political & Civic Engagement</u>	
Political Engagement Index	Null
Civic Engagement Index	Positive, significant
Topic Modeling of Participation	TBD
Efficacy and Obstacles	Null
Future career plans	Null overall; positive on starting an NGO
Sectarian Engagement	Positive, significant
<u>Outcome Family 2: Tolerance & Social Cohesion</u>	
Political/Ethnic Tolerance Index	Null
Social Cohesion Index	Null
Perceptions of Discrimination	Null
Preferences for Ethnic Federalism	Null
Out-group Social Contact	Null

Heterogeneous Treatment Effects: Gender & Ethnic Minorities

In addition to the main effects of the TEF, we also explore whether it had heterogeneous effects on our primary outcomes by gender and ethnic identity. First, we present results on the *differences* in the estimated TEF effects between men and women. In outcome family 1, our main finding is that the TEF increased levels of civic engagement, and this appears to have occurred for both men and women. The

left panel of Figure 13 shows that there are no estimated differences in the TEF effect on political engagement. This confirms that the null result above doesn't differ by gender. In the right panel of Figure 13, we also observe that the civic engagement outcomes are very similar across genders. The only significant difference appears to be that men experienced a somewhat smaller increase in their likelihood to contact an NGO compared to women. Overall, we interpret these similarities as strong evidence that the TEF worked in increasing civic engagement for women as well as men. This is important since women face significant additional barriers to participation and our results suggest that interventions like the TEF, designed with gender sensitivity in mind, can help overcome those barriers.

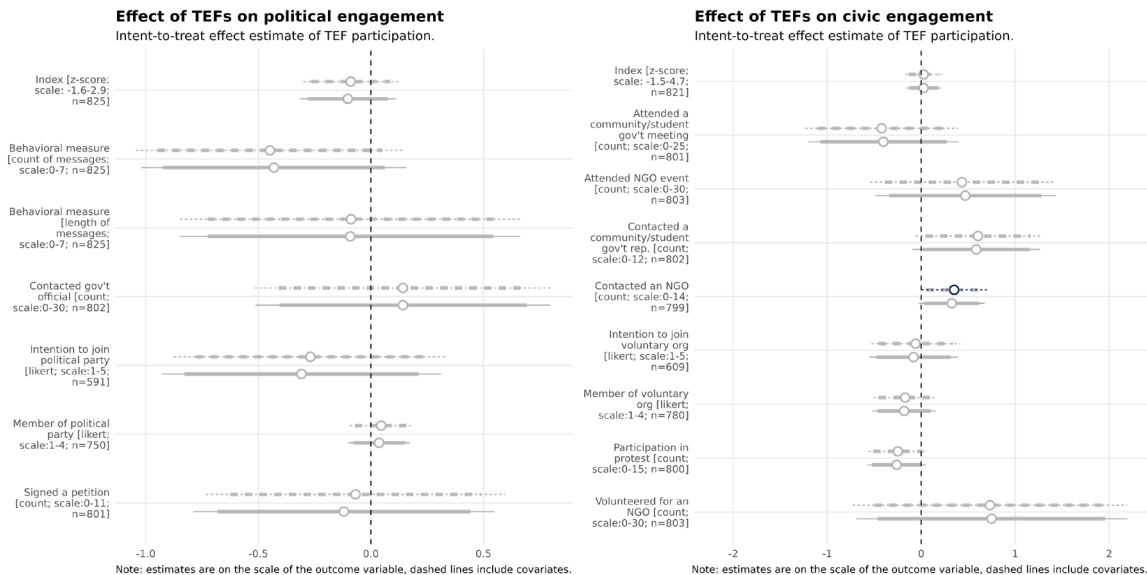


Figure 13: Differences in TEF Effects on Political and Civic Engagement by Gender

Next, Figure 14 plots the estimated differences in TEF effects for our outcome family 2 on social tolerance and cohesion. Though we found no significant overall effect of the TEF on these outcomes, we do see some major differences across gender. We see some evidence that treatment caused a larger decrease in trust of students from other parties and a larger increase in support for leaders from other ethnic groups among women. However, it is important to remember that the overall effect of the TEF is null for these outcomes.

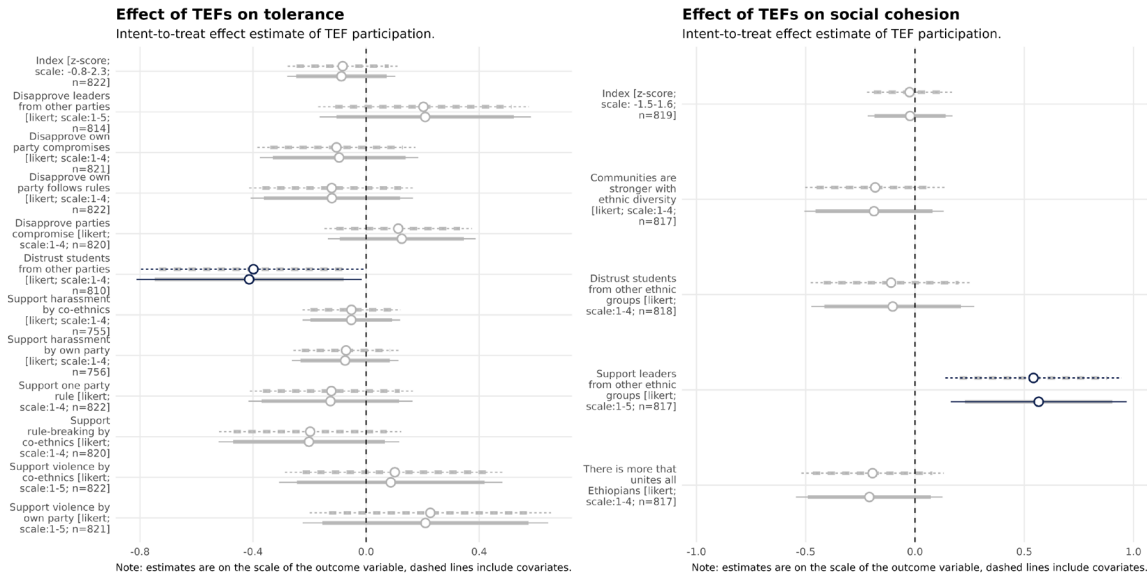


Figure 14: Differences in TEF Effects on Political and Civic Engagement by Gender

Next, we examine whether there are any differences in treatment effects based upon the ethnicity of the participants. To do so, we categorize participants into either ethnic minority (35% of sample) or majority status (65%). Figure 15 shows the estimated differences by ethnic minority status for political and civic engagement outcomes. Once again, we see no statistically significant differences across groups. This is encouraging on the civic engagement outcomes, suggesting that the TEF workshop effectively increased participation amongst participants from both minority and majority groups.

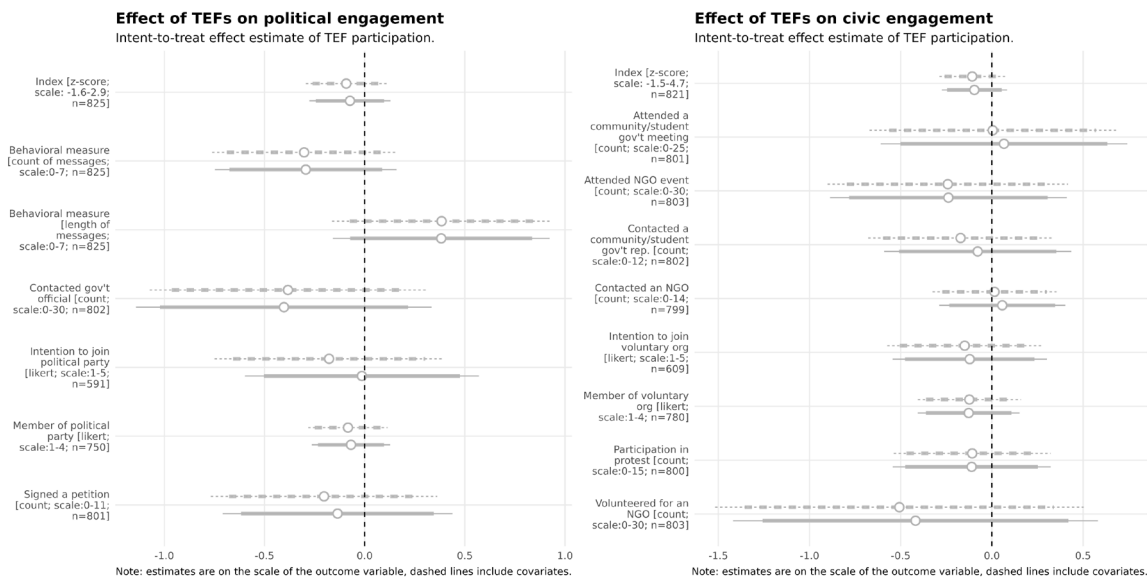


Figure 15: Differences in TEF Effects on Political and Civic Engagement by Ethnic Minority Status

Finally, we examine differences in treatment effects for our primary outcomes of social tolerance and cohesion. Figure 16 shows that there is a slightly larger increase in the tolerance index for ethnic minority participants compared to ethnic majorities.

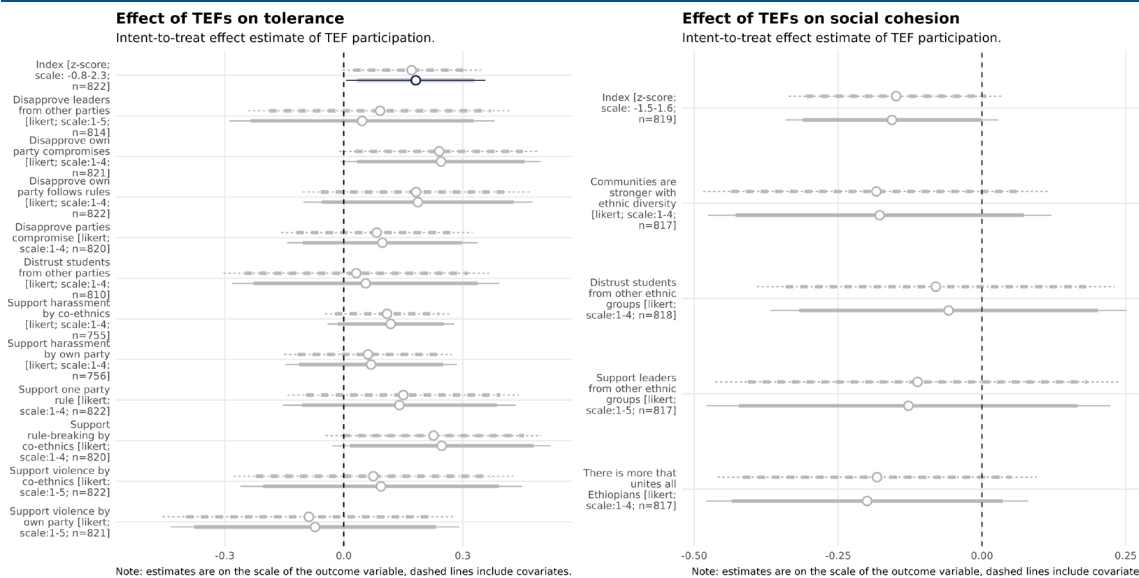


Figure 16: Differences in TEF Effects on Tolerance and Cohesion by Ethnic Minority Status

Mechanisms Analysis: New Social Ties

A central aspect of the design of the TEF was to establish and strengthen social ties between student peers. In this section, we present results on how our main findings are moderated by whether TEF participants made persistent connections with their peers at the workshop. In our endline survey, we asked respondents to provide us with a list of up to 3 new friends/connections that they made with other TEF attendees as a result of the workshop. We use this information as a proxy for the amount of social ties that were generated by the TEF and estimate whether attendees that made new friends had significantly different endline outcomes than attendees that did not report making new friends.

In our analysis, we interact our treatment indicator with a binary indicator for whether a TEF attendee reported making new friends (equal to 1) or not (equal to 0). Since our control group did not attend the TEF and therefore could not make new friends, they are always equal to zero.⁹ In total, 224 TEF attendees reported making at least one new friend that they have connected with since the TEF workshop while 129 did not.

If our expectations surrounding social ties are correct, then we would expect higher levels of engagement amongst TEF attendees that made new connections than those that did not. Interestingly, our results suggest that the effect of the treatment on political engagement was much stronger for participants that formed new social ties. In fact, the treatment had almost no effect among students that did not form new social ties. As Figures 17 and 18 show, this holds across both our primary and secondary measures of engagement, though the difference is smaller for civic engagement. Importantly,

⁹ 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 just amongst the treated.

the formation of new social ties as a result of TEF was not randomly assigned, so it is possible that individual traits associated with friendship formation are responsible for these differential increases, rather than the friendships themselves. However, we consider this strong (though not conclusive) evidence that facilitating peer-to-peer social ties is the main mechanism through which the TEFs increased participant engagement.

Although we did not register these expectations in the PAP, we also find that forming new social ties was associated with an alarming decrease in tolerance in Figure 19. Although we must be more cautious when interpreting results that were not pre-registered, this suggests that something about the opportunity to connect with peers and discuss politics may have reinforced intolerant attitudes. Considered together with the increase in sectarian engagement, these findings emphasize the importance of pairing interventions to increase engagement in divided societies with efforts to increase tolerance and cohesion. We return to this argument in the final section.

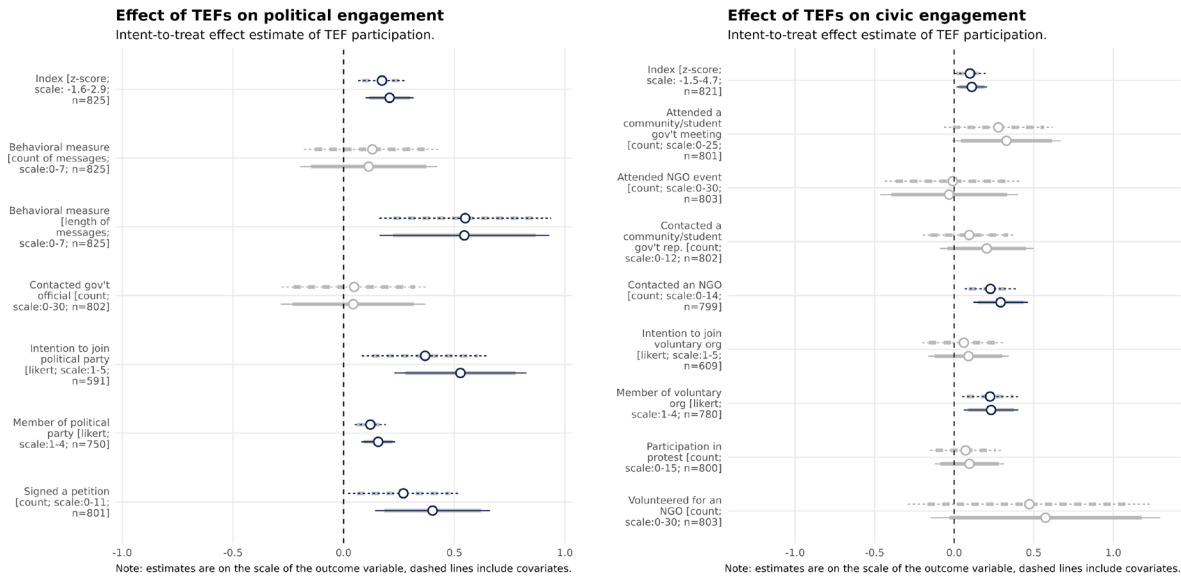


Figure 17: Differences in Engagement by New Social Ties

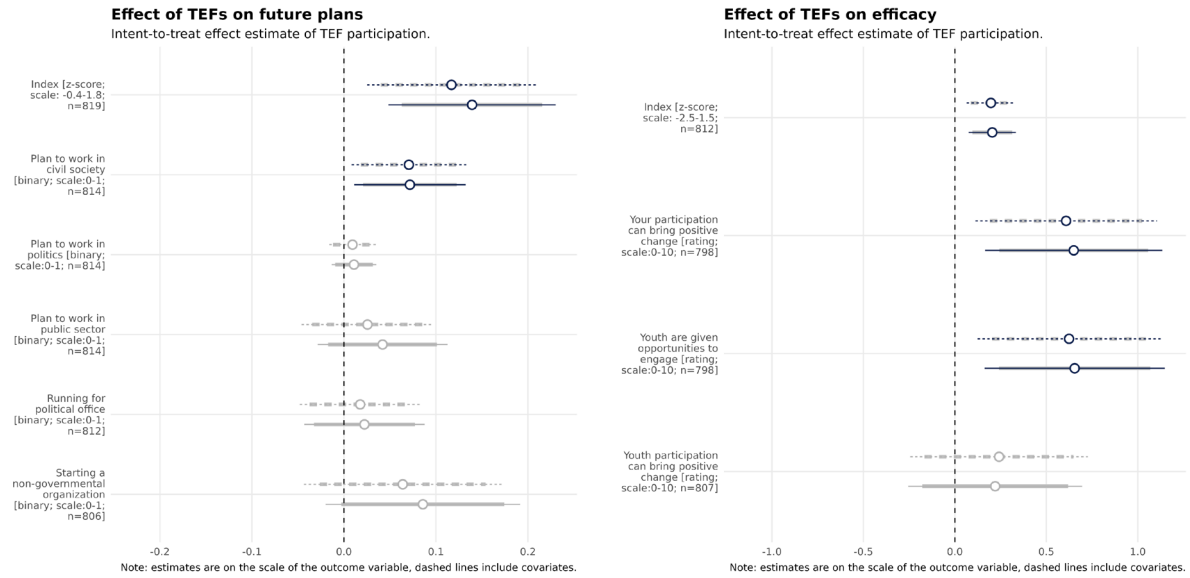


Figure 18: Differences in Future Plans and Efficacy by New Social Ties

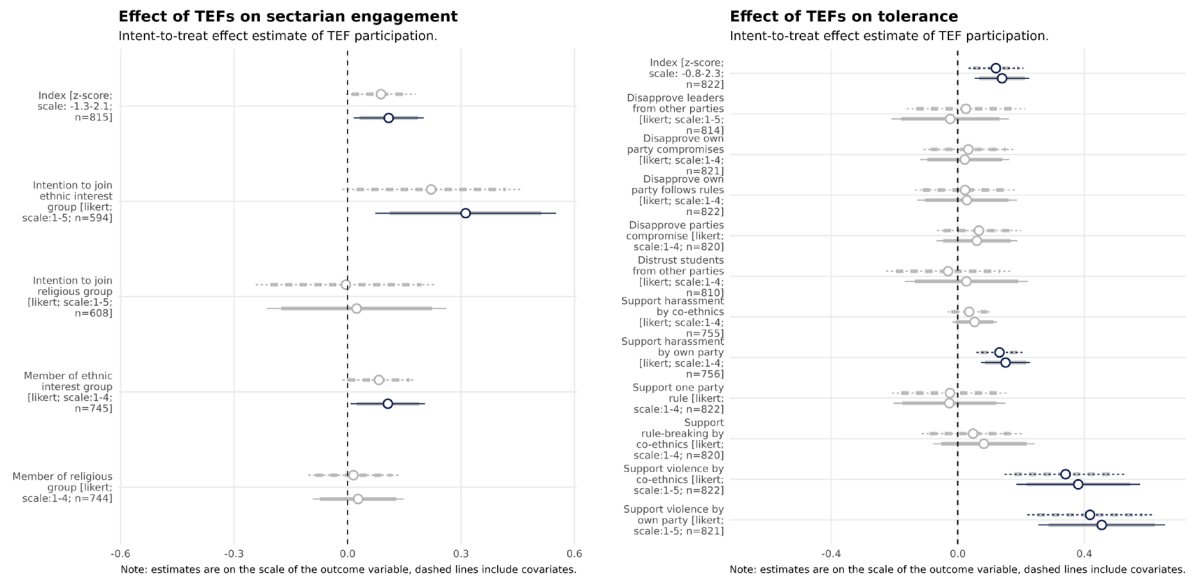


Figure 19: Differences in Sectarian Engagement & Tolerance by New Social Ties

Recommendations & Lessons Learned

Drawing on these results, we make the following recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers interested in increasing youth civic engagement.

Recommendation 1: Scale TEF Workshops to Increase Student Engagement

First, we recommend that the Tolerant Engagement Forum be expanded to include other universities around the country in an effort to increase student engagement in civil society. We recommend the TEF should be expanded because our findings indicate that it can increase civic engagement without increasing intolerance or social conflict. Further, it also has a positive effect on political engagement when social ties can be established between TEF attendees. Not only can youth make a positive impact on the strength and diversity of civil society in the current time period, many students will go on to hold important positions in the future. The practice of the TEF workshops should be expanded into other universities, including those outside of Addis Ababa, to aid in increasing engagement.

Recommendation 2: Invest Additional Resources to Increase Intensity of Workshops

While the broader literature on social contact suggests that inter-group contact and dialogue can improve tolerance and cohesion, we do not find such effects in our study. We posit that one potential source of these minimal effects was the limited scope of our intervention, which entailed only one day of contact between students. Additional days of organized dialogue would help to encourage stronger social ties between students of different identities and would potentially provide a stronger basis for enhancing social and political tolerance. Furthermore, designing additional sessions that focus on improving tolerance and forming persistent connections between students from different ethnic and political backgrounds would help to guard against potentially increasing sectarian and conflictual forms of engagement. Dedicating at least an entire day of the intervention to reducing partisan conflict and polarization has been shown to be effective in the United States (Barron et al, 2022), though it may take longer to achieve such effects in contexts where divisions are based on different types of identities (e.g. Lowe 2021) and in countries with ongoing or recently concluded violent civil conflicts (e.g. Mousa 2020).

Recommendation 3: Expand TEF Workshops to Non-Student Youth Participants

While university students are an important group to target for civic and political engagement, they are also relatively privileged compared to youth with lower levels of access to education. Yet, we expect that less educated youth would also benefit, perhaps even more than student populations, from structured opportunities to become involved in civic and political activities while also aiming to increase tolerance and social cohesion. Since, typically, these kinds of engagement opportunities are less available to people without access to higher education, TEF workshops would very likely provide novel and useful information for non-university youth to act upon.

Recommendation 4: Commission/Conduct Additional Research

Relatedly, we also recommend the commission of additional research studies to understand the impact of the TEF outside of a capital city and university setting. These studies would be useful for confirming that the effects found in our study translate to other areas of Ethiopia and other countries where civic and political engagement may take different forms and be shaped by different factors and obstacles.

Lastly, future studies should further experiment with varying levels of workshop duration and treatment intensity. The relationship between treatment intensity and prejudice reduction remains unclear (Paluck et al 2021), so additional studies in similar environments would help to establish how changes in treatment intensity shape (or do not shape) responses in civic/political engagement and tolerance/cohesion. This would also allow for a precise cost-benefit analysis that estimates the size of returns to increases in treatment intensity.

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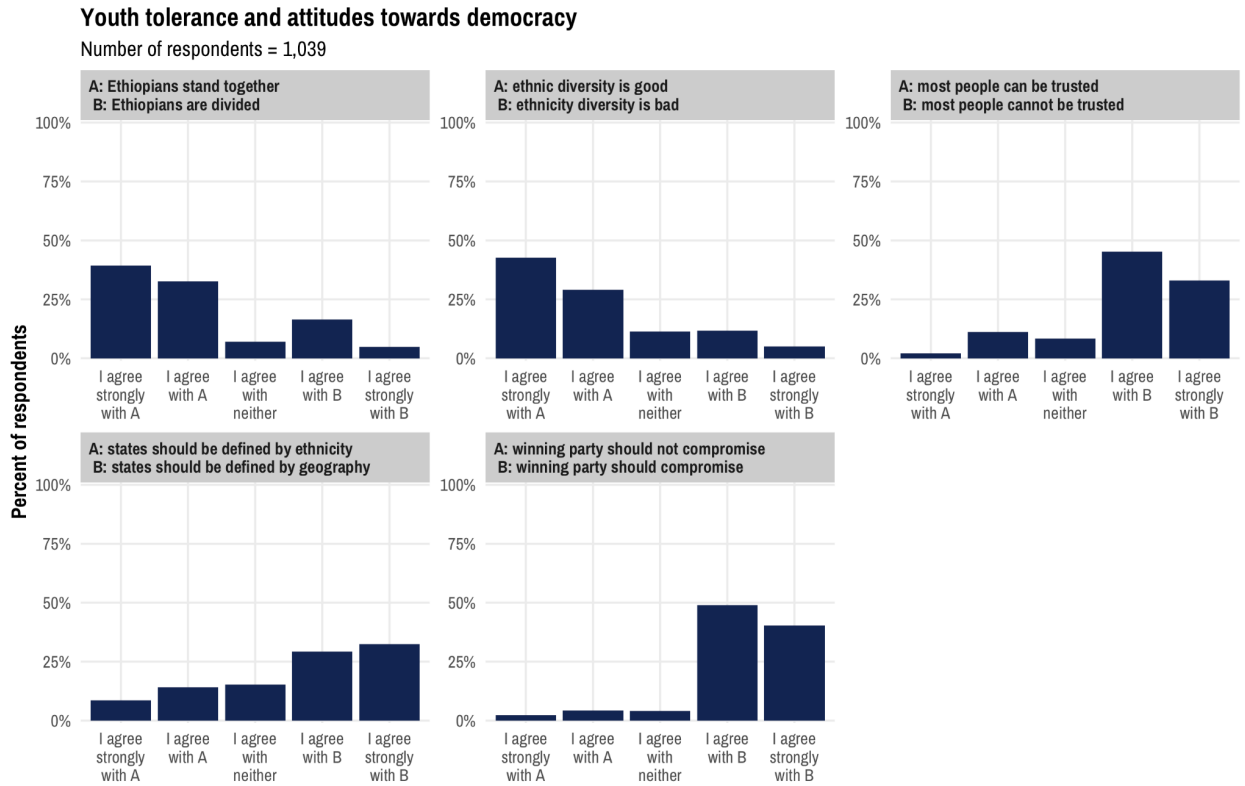
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Baseline Data



See paper for full question wording

Figure A1: Tolerance at Baseline Survey

Appendix 2: Primary and Secondary Indicators

Primary Measure 1: Political Engagement

First, we consider the impact of the TEF on political engagement, which we define as engagement with government institutions and political parties. The intervention aimed to increase political engagement by connecting participants with representatives of government agencies. However, given the sensitive political context, we expected increased engagement with government to be a more difficult objective than increased civic engagement.

We also include a behavioral measure of political engagement in our survey. To measure whether treated participants are more likely to engage in contact with formal political institutions, we partnered with several government agencies and provided students with an opportunity to write messages to officials at each agency. We assess whether treated respondents are more likely to send a message, more likely to send more messages, or more likely to write longer messages.

The main measure for this outcome family is a political engagement index constructed from survey responses on the following topics: 1) behavioral measures of messages to government ministries, 2) contacting a government official, 3) signing a petition and 4) intending to or becoming a member of a political party.

Primary Measure 2: Civic Engagement

Second, we consider the impact of the TEF on civic engagement, which we define as engagement with non-government institutions and organizations. The intervention aimed to increase civic engagement by connecting participants with representatives of civil society. The main outcome here is a civic engagement index comprised of survey responses on the following issues: 1) attending a community or student government meeting (count), 2) attending an NGO event, 3) contacting community/student government representative, 4) contacting an NGO, 5) intention of joining a voluntary organization, 6) becoming a member of a voluntary organization since the intervention, 7) participation in a protest and 8) volunteering for an NGO.

Secondary Measure 1: Sectarian Engagement

First, we test for whether the intervention specifically increases engagement through sectarian means rather than broader civic or political avenues. For this outcome, we use survey measures of 1) intention to join or become a member of an ethnic-based interest group and 2) intention to join or become a member of a religious group.

Secondary Measure 2: Efficacy and Obstacles

One mechanism through which contact with civil society and government employees and information about opportunities to participate may result in higher engagement is changes in perceived efficacy either of youth broadly or at the individual level. We measure efficacy via our respondents' perceptions on whether 1) youth are given adequate opportunities to engage, 2) youth participation can help bring positive change and 3) their personal participation can help bring positive change to the country.

The TEFs also focused on reducing barriers as a mechanism to increase engagement. For example, providing information about specific opportunities to participate, the intervention may reduce search costs or increase interest. Similarly, putting students in direct contact with politically active peers and elites may normalize participation and reduce concerns about potential risks. We measure this outcome using an index constructed from respondents' perceptions of following items as obstacles to engagement: 1) lack of time or economic resources, 2) lack of information, 3) lack of interest, 4) fear of other peoples' opinions and 5) fear of other consequences.

Secondary Measure 3: Future Plans

Finally, while the intervention was primarily designed to encourage immediate engagement with formal civic and political institutions, it may also encourage students' interest in or the legibility of careers in the public sector or civil society. To investigate this potential impact, we ask students several questions about their career plans after graduation including interest in working in civil society, politics, the public sector, running for political office, and starting an NGO.

Primary Measure 1: Political and Inter-group Tolerance

To measure the effect of the TEFs on political and inter-group tolerance, we draw on a module of questions that measures varying aspects of tolerance.¹⁰

Primary Measure 2: Social Cohesion and Trust

To measure the effect of the TEFs on social cohesion and trust we draw on a module of questions that measures varying aspects of cohesion. We will use the following variables to construct an index of social cohesion focusing on ethnic tolerance: 1) Ranking of Ethiopian identity compared to regional and ethnic identities, 2) Perceptions of diversity as strength (likert), 3) Perceptions of unity (likert), 4) Support for leaders from other ethnic groups (likert), and 5) Trust in students from other ethnic groups

We will also test the effects on two other outcomes that capture similar, though distinct, aspects of social cohesion and ethnic tolerance.

Secondary Measure 1: Perceptions of Discrimination

TEFs provide students with an opportunity to learn from inter-group discourse. We will examine the effect of this discourse on whether respondents believe that their own ethnic group discriminates against others (Q74). We expect that the TEF may cause students to become more aware of the discrimination faced by other groups.

Secondary Measure 2: Preferences for Ethnic Federalism

We also expect that dialogue will give students a chance to hear other perspectives and reflect on governance issues in Ethiopia. We will look at preferences for Ethiopia's states to be drawn according to

¹⁰ This module includes questions on Preference for one party rule (likert), Preference for political compromise (likert), Preference for political compromise for own party (likert), Preference for rule changes by own party (likert), Support for rule breaking by own ethnic group (likert), Support for rule change by own party (likert), Support for violence by own ethnic group (likert), Support for harassment by own ethnic group (likert), Support for harassment by own political party (likert), Support for leaders from other parties (likert), and Trust in students from other political parties (likert)

ethnic homeland boundaries or redrawn based on geographical features (Q23). We expect that the TEF may cause participants to prefer a non-ethnic arrangement for federal states.

Secondary Measure 3: Out-group Social Contact

Finally, we look at the impact of the TEF interventions on out-group social contact. If the TEFs created lasting social ties, inter-group dialogue may have provided opportunities to these ties to be forged between members of different ethnic and political groups. Specifically, we examine indicators of how frequently students report interacting with people from other ethnic groups and people from other political parties.

Appendix 3: Complier Average Causal Effects

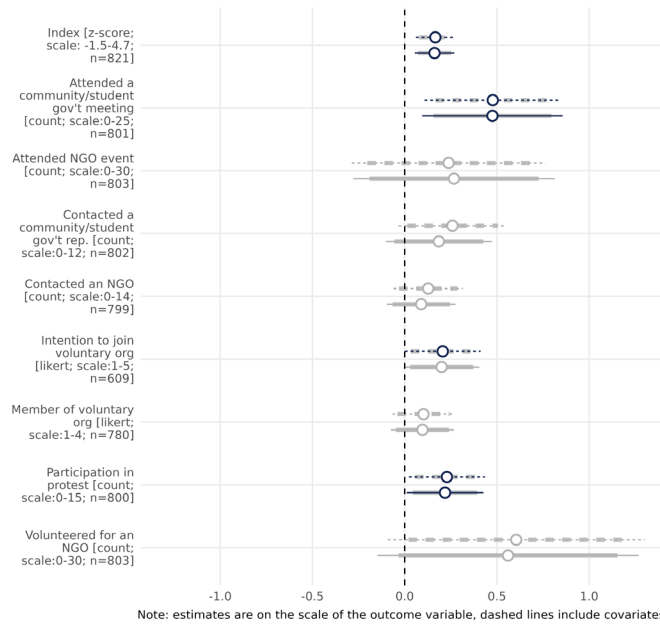


Figure A2: Complier Average Causal Effect on Civic Engagement

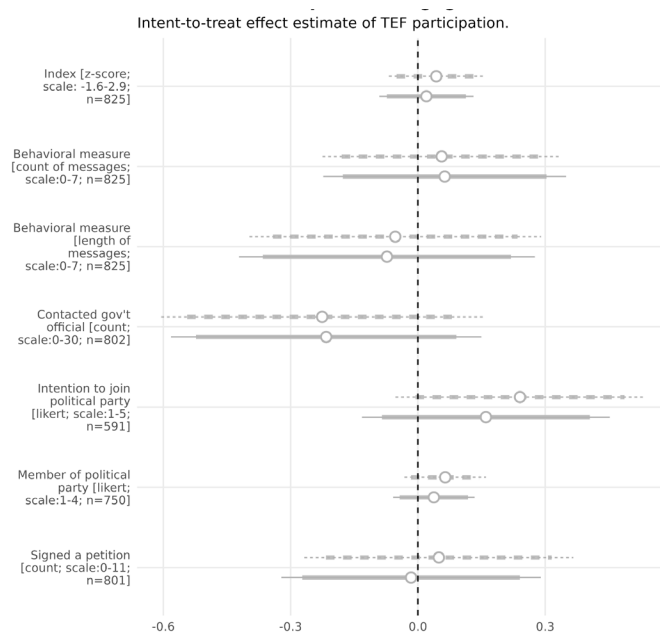


Figure A3: Complier Average Causal Effect on Political Engagement

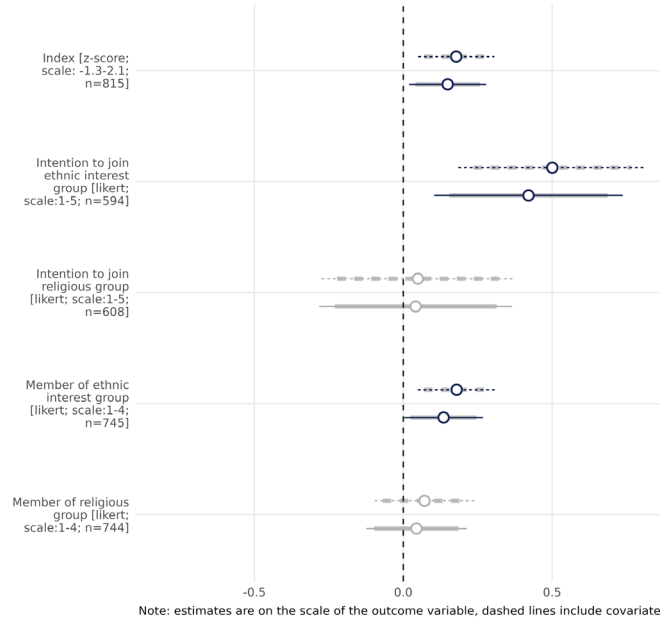


Figure A4: Complier Average Causal Effect on Sectarian Engagement

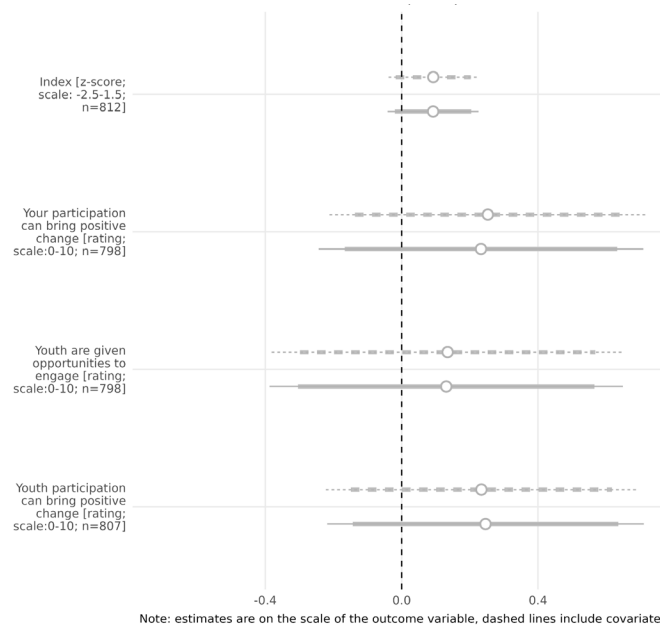


Figure A5: Complier Average Causal Effect on Efficacy

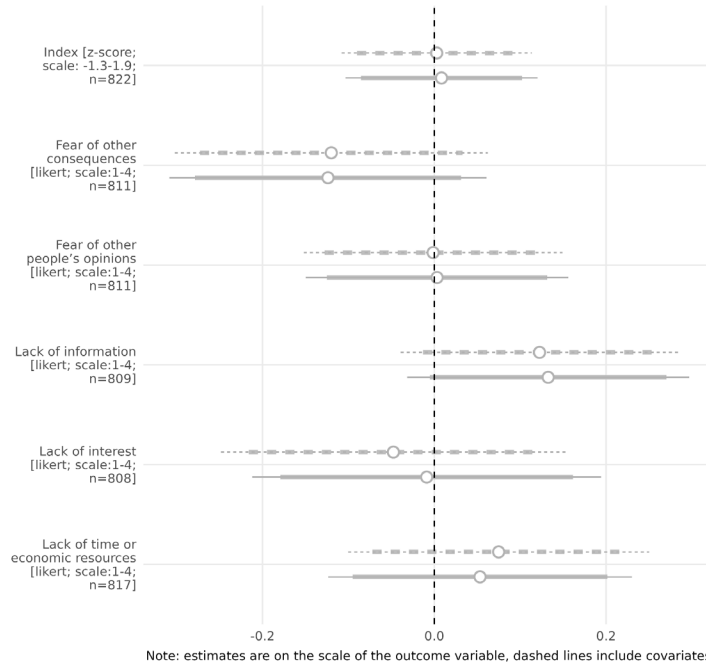


Figure A6: Complier Average Causal Effect on Obstacles to Engagement

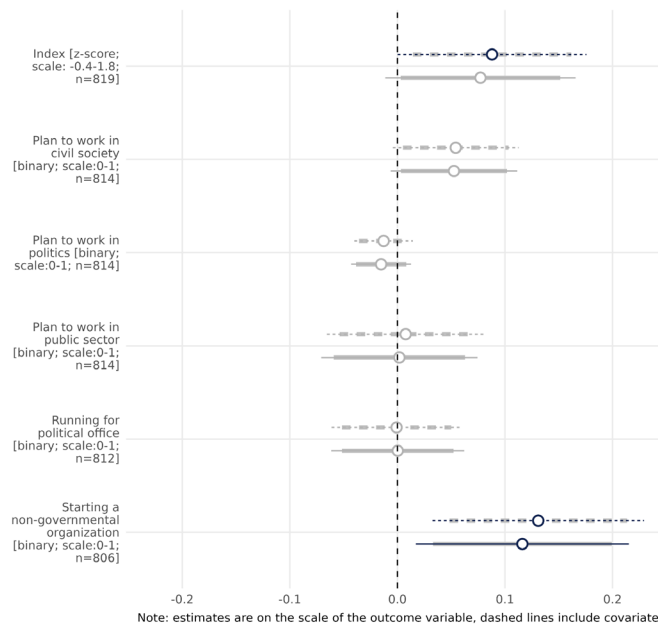


Figure A7: Complier Average Causal Effect on Future Plans

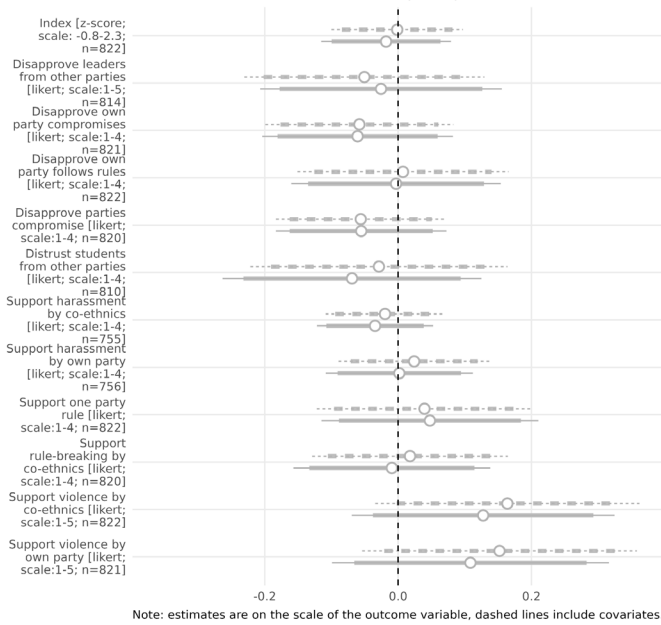


Figure A8: Complier Average Causal Effect on Tolerance

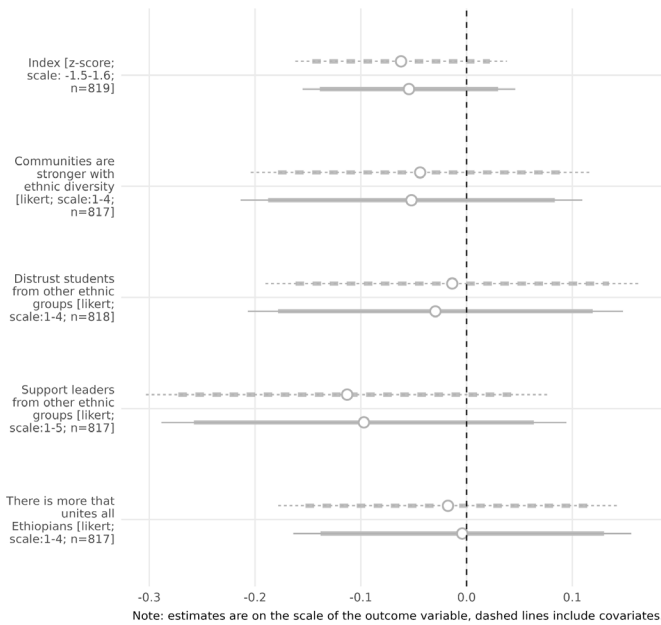


Figure A9: Complier Average Causal Effect on Social Cohesion

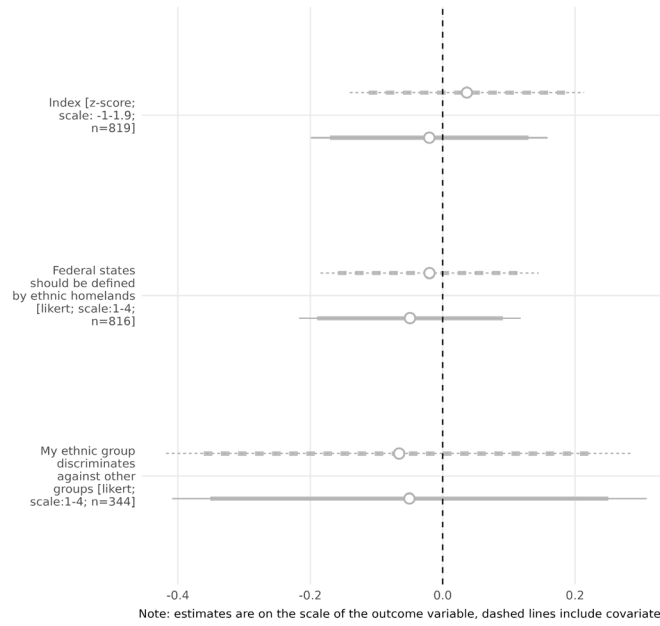


Figure A10: Complier Average Causal Effect on Discrimination and Federalism

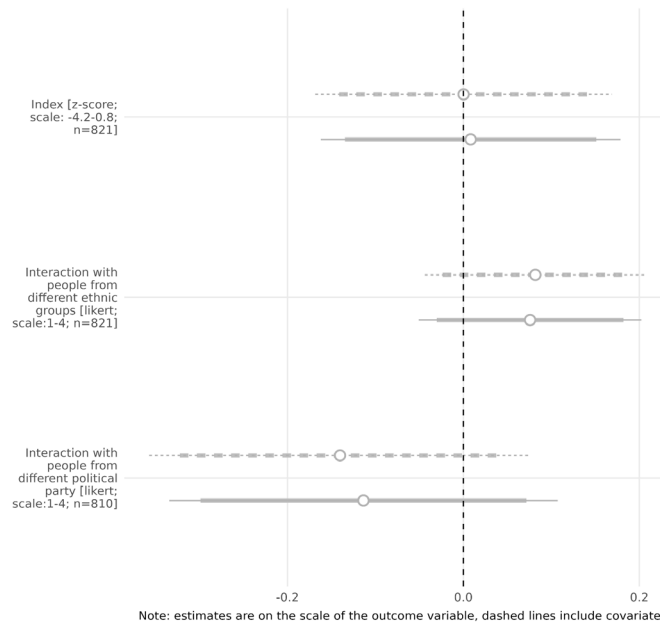


Figure A11: Complier Average Causal Effect on Outgroup Contact

Appendix 4: Focus Group Discussions

Background Overview of the AAU Student Clubs

The FGD participants were asked to provide a snapshot background about the student clubs to which they belong. The AAU Students Peace Club is one of the giant clubs operating in almost all public universities in Ethiopia being supported by the Federal Government. Since its establishment in 2002, the FGD participants claim that the AAU Peace Club has actively been engaged in and is profoundly contributing to the promotion of peace among students within the campuses, in particular, and outside of campuses in the communities with which the students interact, in general. Peace club works in collaboration with both internal and external partners and stakeholders with a view of sensitizing students about the concept and benefits of peace for themselves and accordingly bolstering its value for the larger community. With this framework, the club works utmost in collaboration previously with the Ministry of Federal Affairs and now with the Ministry of Peace and with other relevant partners, as well.

The participants say, as the name implies, the Peace Club works primarily on peacebuilding and peace related matters. According to the participants, the activities of the club had been disrupted for quite a while due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Apart from that, the club has cherished lots of accomplishments in the areas of organizing sustainable dialogue forms, skills development training and workshops, and interactive meetings, with and for the student community, and all these have unleashed a positively greater impact in peace development within Addis Ababa University.

Generally, in the context of Addis Ababa University, there are several student clubs including the 'Peace Club' (*Yeselam Kileb*), the 'Good Man Club' (*Yebego Sew Kileb*), and 'Anti-Corruption Club' (*Yetsere Musena Kileb*). According to the FGD participants, membership to these clubs is open and encouraging, and most of these clubs, reportedly, have more than 1000 members. Yet, as the participants pointed out, there is a long-way to go in terms of active engagement of students in the clubs' activities. The FGD participants added that there are many students who want to be counted as a 'member', but do not even attend the various meetings organized by the clubs. As a case in point, one of the FGD participants says:

"We had organized a meeting last year aimed at creating awareness on environmental safety and the importance of cleaning our surroundings. We were expecting more than 500 students to join the meeting, yet only about 100 appeared. Moreover, active engagement of students in the clubs' activities such as supporting the Persons with Disabilities is sometimes limited".

Understanding of Civic Engagement

An attempt was made in the FGD sessions to explore the students' conceptualization and understanding of civic engagement. In the understanding of the FGD participants, civic engagement/participation entails a wide range of formal and informal activities, which can take several forms that manifest at individual, organizational, community and societal levels. As the participants conceptualize, the level of civic engagement becomes light and highly fragmented as one keeps moving to the urban and relatively "modern" communities. The FGD participants see experiences associated with civic engagement in Ethiopia from two distinct perspectives. First they see it from the more traditional and rural community where they believe engaging in communal activities for either helping each other or assisting vulnerable factions of the population has long been embedded in the values and belief system of the society. The FGD participants added that the societal make up, the long entrenched culture of being together, and the sense of belongingness and helping each other have helped the Ethiopian people to take civic engagement as just an existing norm. According to the FGD participants, this is especially the case in rural areas where the social bondage remains intact and strong; and people help each other regardless of their social status and belief.

However, the culture of engagement for either helping each other or assisting others has quite recently been windswept from the values and belief systems of the society especially in the urban settings. They move on to add that civic participation in urban areas is becoming affected by the values of 'modernization' and a sense of 'individualism and self-centered' attitudes gaining momentum in quite recent decades. Such kinds of 'modern' thinking has been negatively affecting the urban dwellers in various ways as evidenced, for instance, by a relatively newly emerging loose connections among neighborhoods, declining engagements in civic activities, and fading participations in the long-existed forms of indigenous associations, such as '*Edir*' where members use it for providing each other with psychosocial, emotional, spiritual and economic supports especially during lose and in times of falling short. The participants further added that civic participation in urban areas, particularly, among the elites, is being affected by the advent of social media where civic engagements are posted and widely shared as a mechanism of personal promotion rather than the real intent of helping others and contributing to societal development. Besides, not all peoples are participating in civic activities for making a difference in the respective communities, rather, expecting something in return. Overall, the FGD participants concurred that civic engagement has been there and takes several forms in the Ethiopian context, yet it has to be nurtured for its consistency and sustainability.

Barriers of Participation

As indicated by the FGD participants, factors for inadequate participation of students in the club activities include: i) lower expectation of the students on the impact of the clubs; ii) poor culture of voluntarism and lack of awareness on the values sense serving others; iii) poor financial resource allocation for the club activities and consequently failure to cover the basic costs (such as per-diem, refreshment and expenses related to incentives for the participants) of the event organizations); and weak attention and support for students clubs by the management body of the university.

Ethnic tension as barriers of participation: The FGD participants utterly pronounced that ethnic tension in Ethiopia has been a major source of conflict and internal displacement especially since the last few years. Polarized views and ethnically motivated political movements have further galvanized the problem. Public universities have become a source of such tensions and violent conflicts giving a way for more disruptions of the regular teaching-learning process. According to the participants, those ethnic tensions triggered among students in the public universities sometimes go to the extent of resulting in vandal conflicts that claim dozens of lives and destroy private and public properties. This has consequently discouraged students' participation and engagement in various forms of their organizations. The FGD participants unanimously liken the lack of tolerance on the part of university students to be instruments of lethal conflicts to the failure of the education system, in general, and its offspring 'elites' as a major factor. In the participants' point of view, the ongoing ethnic based tensions and the concomitant distractions and casualties in Ethiopia are the conceptions and plots of the educated and political elites. The failure of the education system, as the participants indicated, has yielded the construction and preponderance of false narratives and wrong understanding of the past historical accounts of the country. In holding the education system accountable for the all-encompassing crisis Ethiopia has been experiencing, the FGD participants strongly underscore that the elites have ended their political journey by reframing history and crafting the wheel of the country as a bandwagon for internal conflict and chaos. They further elaborate that the elites involved in Ethiopian politics never understood the very purpose why history is written for. In the participants' explanation, the purpose of writing history is ultimately to know what has been done, to uphold and elevate good experiences, and to identify what has gone wrong in the past and then to correct it. So misconceptions of history, as suggested by the participants, can be rectified easily and it is not going to be a source of conflict. Notwithstanding this, the participants highlight, there are numerous erroneous historical narratives being reconstructed, which consequently have been leading the society to see each other with mistrust and fracturing. Akin to this, one of the participants narrates:

We have been taught in a curriculum that allows textbooks to provide false narratives that magnifies divisive outlooks along ethnic and religious lines. The textbooks were not prepared in a way to preach unity; and some of the narratives majorly portray the negative deeds rather.

Another participant adds:

What we see now is an obvious result of this education system that produces 'elites' who do not seem to be a source of solutions, if not the reasons, for peoples' misery. Universities have become a place where conflicts triggered by ethno-centric views and divisions based on various social and individual characteristics such as ethnicity, religious or political affiliations are entertained. I believe most of the textbooks developed in the last few decades give more focus on the negative parts of our history than the positive deeds. For example you may have heard of Emperor Haile Selassie as an oppressor of the Muslim community in Ethiopia; yet he played a key role in

expanding Islamic schools in the country about which our Muslim brothers and sisters may not be taught to applaud. We should teach history not to aggravate negative deeds and thoughts, but to learn from past mistakes, if any, and move to the future with a strong sense of brotherhood.

Apart from the education system and curriculum, the FGD participants further explained that conflicts are intact with the interest to own various resources. This is more evident with the frequent eruptions of conflicts between neighboring regions in the last few decades.