Assessing Leadership Opinion on Selected Issues of Federalism in Ethiopia

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Abstract

In political science, one approach to studying federalism is to examine the attitudes, opinions and value constructs of individual citizens as well as political leaders as these pertain to various issues of federalism. Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to assess the opinions of political leaders on selected issues of federalism in Ethiopia. The assessment employed a survey method to gather the opinions, as expressed on a five-point Likert scale, of selected political leaders in various spheres of government. A total of 164 leaders were purposely selected from a range of leaders working in different capacities, including low-, middle- and high-level leadership. The study examined their opinions on nine issues, doing so in order both to illuminate how leaders understand these issues and to gauge the functionality, stability and continuity of Ethiopia's multinational, multi-ethnic federation. The study utilized version 23 of the SPSS software to analyze the results of the opinion survey. The outcome shows that leaders 'understanding of the issues ranges from low (27.27 percent) to moderate (72.73 percent). Based on the finding of this preliminary survey, the article recommends that leaders in Ethiopia's multilevel system of government be provided with training on issues of federalism.

1 Introduction

In political science, one approach to studying federalism is to examine the attitudes, opinions and value constructs of individual citizens as well as political leaders as these pertain to various issues of federalism (Bergman, 1998). On the assumption that attitudes, opinions and values are dispositions that can shape and be shaped by human action, public opinion studies on selected issues of federalism have been conducted in most of the world's developed federations (see Kincaid, Parkin &Cole, 2002; Kincaid,

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Parkin, Cole &Rodriguez, 2003; Kincaid, 2004; Kincaid &Cole, 2005; Kincaid &Cole, 2007;Schneider, Jacoby &Lewis, 2010). However, there is a dearth of studies of this kind in the Ethiopian context. This study sets out to rectify the situation and conduct a preliminary public opinion survey on selected issues of federalism in Ethiopia.

In particular, it focuses on leaders in different capacities at different levels of government. They were purposely selected since they are key agents expected to have an adequate understanding of various aspects of federalism. As they have significant leverage in influencing public opinion, examining their views on particular issues can reveal how these issues are being understood and presented to the public via the country's leadership. In multinational, multi-ethnic federations such as the Ethiopian federation, where constituent units are designed largely on the basis of cultural markers (FDRE Constitution, Articles46(2)and39(3)) and where political parties are based on ethnicity, a survey of the opinions of governmental leaders on contentious issues to do with federalism is a worthwhile undertaking.

The study employs an opinion survey method and purposely selected 164 leaders in various *woreda*, zonal, regional and federal offices as participants. The leaders work in different capacities ranging from low or beginner levels to middle and higher levels. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher, with respondents having been asked to complete it during a leadership training programme held from 2016–2017. The leaders came from four regional states, namely Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), Tigray, Oromia and Amhara. The article contains four parts. The first part introduces the background of the study. The second sets out its theoretical and empirical framework. The third presents the results and discusses them. The last part summarizes the findings of the study and provides concluding remarks.

2. Federalism and Leadership

There is consensus among scholars of federalism that federalism encompasses a normative conception and manifested in different kinds of organization that exhibit a division of power in the form of shared and self-rule(Elazar, 1987; Erk, 2004; Burgess,

2006; Watts, 2008).The institutional expression of the federal idea may occur in the form of a federation, confederation, associated states, union or even decentralized unitary state (Watts, 2008). Accordingly, this study takes into account the organization of the Ethiopian polity as a federation and the leadership as the leadership of a federation. The FDRE Constitution is taken as the normative and institutional framework for the operation of the federal system. Thus, leaders in the Ethiopian federation are expected to understand how the self-rule and shared-rule matrix is institutionalized and operationalized. Moreover, federations are established not by institutions and rules alone but depend as well on opinions, attitudes and federal frame-of-mind in regard to the process of government (Erk, 2004).

So, whether the institutional expression of federalism in the form of a federation can have empirical significance depends upon (1) some measure of common opinion and understanding in regard to the defining characteristics of the federation, and (2) the capacity of the leaders to enforce relationships that are consistent with those defining characteristics of the federation. Thus, based on the assumption that opinions are the building blocks for understanding and enforcing the federation, and that federal issues are issues that relate to the self-rule and shared-rule aspects of the system, the study makes a preliminary descriptive assessment of leadership opinion on selected issues of federalism.

3. Leadership Opinion on Selected Issues of Federalism in Ethiopia

Respondents were asked to express their degree of agreement or disagreement with statements, presented to them on a five-point Likert scale, in regard to their current level of understanding of issues of federalism in Ethiopia. The result of the opinion survey on each issue, along with analysis thereof, is discussed in subsequent sections.

3.1 Basic Knowledge of How Federal Political Systems Work

In a federal dispensation, it is expected that its leadership should have a basic understanding of how it works. It is axiomatic that leaders of a federal system need a basic understanding of how they system they lead is designed and operationalized. Since a

federal system is a complex system of governance that seeks to balance shared rule with self-rule, interdependency with autonomy (Watts, 2008), understanding the operation of a federal system is required of the leadership of such a system; conversely, it is hard to lead a federal system without a proper and common understanding of its pillars and operation mechanisms.

Against this background, participants in the survey were asked to rate their level of agreement and disagreement with the statement, "Leaders in different spheres of government lack basic knowledge on how a federal system works." The response is presented in Table 1.

Table 1:Basic Knowledge of How a Federal Political System Works

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	14	8.5	8.6	8.6
	Disagree	15	9.1	9.2	17.8
	Undecided	12	7.3	7.4	25.2
	Agree	81	49.4	49.7	74.8
	Strongly agree	41	25.0	25.2	100.0
	Total	163	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.6		
Total		164	100.0		

As shown in Table 1, 49.7 percent of respondents expressed agreement with the statement and 25.2 percent expressed strong agreement .In aggregate terms,74.9 percent agreed and strongly agreed, whereas 17.8 percent disagreed and strongly disagreed, with 7.4 percent undecided. The data concerns the perceived gap in basic understanding of the operation of a federal system. On this basis, it is plausible to contend that in the emerging and multinational, multi-ethnic Ethiopian federation, most participants believe there is still a gap in understanding of the basics of how the federal system works.

By implication, for leaders to cope better with the system's dynamic nature and for the identified gap to be addressed, the current level of understanding needs to be improved through theory-driven and practice-oriented training and education on the operation mechanisms of a federal system, focusing on the Ethi-

opian context.

3.2 Creating Federal Values

In federal systems, especially those that are emerging and/or have a multinational, multi-ethnic character, the glue that joins the parts into a whole and infuses them with a sense of commonality are federal values (Kincaid,1995).Values facilitate stability by encapsulating past and future aspirations and motives; selectively channel attitudes, perceptions and experience; and suggest appropriate behavior (Bergman, 1998; Kincaid, 1995).Thus, federal values are those dispositions that underpin the attitudes and perceptions necessary for the proper functioning of the federal dispensation. In a country undergoing transformation from a unitary tradition to a federal mind-set, cultivating federal values is critical. The leadership, that is to say, is expected to cultivate federal values. Whether leaders are doing so is evaluated and presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Leaders' Creation of Federal Values

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	11	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Disagree	27	16.5	16.5	23.2
	Undecided	21	12.8	12.8	36.0
	Agree	61	37.2	37.2	73.2
	Strongly agree	44	26.8	26.8	100.0
	Total	164	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows that 23.2 percent of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed that leaders have well-established skills in creating federal values; 64 percent either agreed or strongly; and 12.8 per cent were undecided. Based on the above data, it is plausible to contend that participants in the study were of the opinion that leaders have a good understanding of how to create federal values.

Nevertheless, in the case of what is both an emerging federation as well as a multinational, multi-ethnic one, the creation of federal values is an issue that requires continual engagement by leadership from the federal to the local level. Given that there is no

single formula for federal governance, advocates of different federal arrangements emphasize different values (Kincaid, 1995). In the emerging multinational, multi-ethnic Ethiopian federation, creating and developing federal values focused on the accommodation of diversity, tolerance, equity, fairness, cooperation, negotiation and dialogue are essential These values might bring peace, prosperity, stability and continuity to the Ethiopian federal system, values which the leadership, as a key agent in federal society, is expected to develop continually.

3.3 The Nexus between Federalism and Democracy

The linkage between federalism and democracy by and large seems to be taken for granted as self-evident (Benz & Sonnicksen, 2016). Institutionalizing a federal system of governance – one that shares powers and responsibilities between different spheres of government, respects the autonomy of each sphere, and maintains mutual interdependencies between them is scarcely possible in the absence of democracy .Federal stability requires a well-functioning democratic process in the conduct of governance. States with properly institutionalized democratic systems are in a position to form resilient federal unions and sustain their federal constitutional arrangements not only in form but in political practice (Roust &Shvetsova, 2007). Federal arrangements enable citizens to hold accountable elected officers in different spheres of governments in that these arrangements create numerous contexts in which citizens can express their views: they provide citizens with multiple points of access to public power and thus multiple opportunities to appeal to other spheres of governments if one of them is unresponsive. There is a multiplicity of governments exercising checks and balances on each other, doing so in various ways, including through competition or cooperation.

Accordingly, a number of authors attribute the prosperity, stability and longevity of federations such as the United States (founded in 1789), Switzerland(in 1848), Canada (1867), and Australia (1901) to their democratic federal systems. The modern form of federalism forged in 1787 by the framers of the US Constitution made large-scale democracy possible for the first time in history (Kincaid, 1995), given that the US is the first continental-size polity to be governed in a reasonably democratic manner. Today, the territorially largest political societies with a claim to democracy

are formally federal: Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, and the US (Kincaid, 1995).

However, there are also a number of failed federations, including the West Indies (1962),Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1963), Yugoslavia (1991), the USSR (1991), and Czechoslovakia (1991) (Watts,2008).Watts (2008) regards democracy as one of the variables explaining the dissolution of federations, and correlates their dissolution with the undemocratic nature of their federal design and operation. From this perspective, democracy is a necessary factor in the stability and continuity of the Ethiopian federal system; as such, it is crucial that the leadership have an adequate understanding of the nexus between democracy and federalism. Table 3 presents respondents' opinions on this issue.

Table 3: Leaders' Opinion on the Nexus between Federalism and Democracy

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	14	8.5	8.5	8.5
	Disagree	26	15.9	15.9	24.4
	Undecided	27	16.5	16.5	40.9
	Agree	65	39.6	39.6	80.5
	Strongly agree	32	19.5	19.5	100.0
	Total	164	100.0	100.0	

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that "the nexus between federalism and democracy is well understood". Table 3 shows that 24.4 percent of them disagreed or strongly disagreed, 59.1 percent agreed or strongly agreed, and 16.5 percent were undecided. Most of the leaders participating in this survey thus believe that the link between federalism and democracy is well understood.

3.4 Considering "Federal Dimension" in Decision-Making

In a federal system, any issue decided upon by any sphere of government, whether it be within the jurisdiction of that sphere of government or not, will have a positive or negative effect on the other members of the federation. Thus, any decision taken by any sphere of government needs to consider the federal aspect of de-

cision-making inasmuch as every issue has a federal dimension. Two or more governments working in the same country, and having come to power by virtue of the country's citizens and hence having accountability to them, are required to take into account how their decisions affect the overall system.

Table 4: Leaders' Opinion on the "Federal Dimension" of Decision-Making

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Valid	1	.6	.6	.6
	Strongly disagree	18	11.0	11.0	11.7
	Disagree	19	11.6	11.7	23.3
	Undecided	30	18.3	18.4	41.7
	Agree	69	42.1	42.3	84.0
	Strongly agree	26	15.9	16.0	100.0
	Total	163	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.6		
Total		164	100.0		

Giving adequate consideration to the "federal dimension" of any issue in decision-making is one of the practical skills leaders of federal polities need to have. Respondents were asked for their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement that "the federal dimension is getting enough consideration in the decision-making of different spheres of government". Table 4 shows that 58.3 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while 22.7 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed and 18.4 percent were undecided. Thus, it is possible to contend that majority of participants of the study perceive that the federal dimension of any decision is considered. But, in view of the complex nature of maintaining the "federal dimension" in any decision-making in federations, further research on the issue is to be suggested.

3.5 Diversity Management and Federalism

One of the main reasons for adopting federalism in a multinational society is to accommodate and manage diversity (Assefa, 2007). In multicultural, multi-ethnic countries emerging from conflict, federalism is a preferred instrument for diversity management and conflict resolution (Tully,2001). Given that, more

often than not, questions of power are the source of contestation between different communities living in the same state, sharing power in a federal political system is one possible remedy to settle the conflict and enable coexistence in a unified state (Lijphart,2001). Consequently, it is essential that leaders understand the nexus between conflict management and federalism in a multinational, multi-ethnic federation and appreciate the need for effective management of diversity. Against this backdrop, this study ascertained the opinion of selected leaders on federalism and diversity management, with the results thereof presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Leaders' Opinion on Diversity Management and Federalism

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	13	7.9	8.0	8.0
	Disagree	23	14.0	14.2	22.2
	Undecided	19	11.6	11.7	34.0
	Agree	59	36.0	36.4	70.4
	Strongly agree	48	29.3	29.6	100.0
	Total	162	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.2		
Total		164	100.0		

Respondents were asked to express their view on the use of federalism as a device for the management of diversity. The statement in the survey reads: "The toolkits of diversity management are well integrated and operationalized in the day-to-day activities of the leaders." Sixty-six per cent of them agreed or strongly agreed, while 22.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed; 11.7 percent were undecided. On this basis, it is possible to contend that most of the respondents view diversity management as a well-integrated and operationalized issue in the Ethiopian federation. However, in the light of the country's recurrent challenges in accommodating diversity at subnational level, their opinion is questionable. The issue thus requires further case-based research examining each of the variables in the toolkits of diversity management.

3.6 Mechanisms for Nation-Building in a Federal Society

Federalism and federal political systems are strongly associated with the division of power ,responsibilities and resources between two or more spheres of government. Federalism is a normative concept entailing self-rule in regard to specific affairs and shared rule in regard to shared or common affairs concerning the federation at large (Elazar,1987; Burgess, 2006). Nation-building based on the nation-state model developed in Europe after the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), a model in which the nation and state are presumed to be congruent, rarely works in multi-national, multi-ethnic societies (Keating, 2001). As such, the nation-building strategy in a multinational, multi-ethnic context should take a different form suited to a federal political arrangement. The survey results for this aspect of the study are set out in Table 6.

Table 6: Leaders' Opinion on Mechanisms of Nation-Building in Multinational Federations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	39	23.8	23.8	23.8
	Disagree	35	21.3	21.3	45.1
	Undecided	22	13.4	13.4	58.5
	Agree	54	32.9	32.9	91.5
	Strongly agree	14	8.5	8.5	100.0
	Total	164	100.0	100.0	

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or not with the statement that "the mechanisms of nation-building in a federal society are not well-understood issues". The results were that 45.1 percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed,41.4 percent agreed or strongly agreed, and 13.4 percent were undecided. Given the close match between the proportions agreeing and disagreeing, it can be argued that the mechanisms of nation-building are not well understood in Ethiopia.

3.7 Sharing Revenue and Expenditure Responsibilities

The constitutional division of powers between spheres of government crucially involves the sharing of revenue and expendi-

ture responsibilities. Assignment of expenditure and revenue responsibilities between federal and regional states usually creates one degree or another of fiscal imbalance or disparity. More specifically, the imbalance in the assignment of expenditure responsibilities and revenue-generating capacity and taxation powers between the federal government and the constituent units, as well as between the constituent units themselves, leads to vertical and horizontal imbalances – which in turn necessitate some form or another of fiscal transfer effectuated through a system of intergovernmental relations (Oates, 1972; Brodway &Flatters, 1982; Boex &Martinez-Vazquez, 2006; Shah, 2007; Dafflon &Madies, 2009).

That being the case, balancing the imbalance and creating equity and efficiency in the provision of a comparable level of public service with a comparable level of taxation within constituent units in a federation is the main concern of the study of fiscal transfer and fiscal intergovernmental relations. Fiscal federalism, in short, is one of the critical issues in a federal political system, and thus needs to be understood and implemented by the system's leaders.

This study sought to ascertain the opinion of selected leaders on their level of understanding of issues of fiscal imbalance and the way fiscal imbalances could be bridged in Ethiopia's federal system. The results of the survey are presented in Table 7.

Table 7:Leaders' Opinion on Sharing Revenue and Expenditure Responsibilities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	18	11.0	11.0	11.0
	Disagree	34	20.7	20.7	31.7
	Undecided	21	12.8	12.8	44.5
	Agree	70	42.7	42.7	87.2
	Strongly agree	21	12.8	12.8	100.0
	Total	164	100.0	100.0	

Leaders were asked for their opinion of the statement, "Sharing revenue and expenditure responsibilities and balancing the fiscal imbalance in federations are well-known issues." As Table

7 indicates, 31.7 percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed; 55.5 percent agreed or strongly agreed; and 12.8 percent were undecided. Majority of the respondents contend that the issues are well-known issues. But, as revenue- and expenditure-sharing and finding the optimal mix of revenue and expenditure allocation to different spheres of governments are matters that call for detailed analysis of the merits and demerits of assigning particular revenue and expenditure responsibilities to particular spheres of government(Boadway &Shah, 2009). The issues may need continuous engagement by the leadership

3.8 Coordination and Harmonization of Policies

In the operation of federations, different spheres of government are interdependent in different policy areas; conversely, few policy areas are the exclusive responsibility of a single sphere of government at any stage of the policy process ranging from problem identification and policy formulation to implementation and monitoring and evaluation (Haileyesus, 2017). This policy interdependency stems from the nature of federations, which allow a constitutional distribution of powers both to the federal or national government as well as to the constituent units that deal directly with individual citizens.

Such interdependency necessitates development of robust mechanisms of intergovernmental relations (IGR)for the coordination and harmonization of policies (Haileyesus, 2017). That is to say, policy-oriented IGR facilitate the formulation and implementation of policy across a range of separate jurisdictions (Bolleyer, 2009).When looking at IGR from the perspective of policy, scholars usually consider how intergovernmental actors arrive at cross-jurisdictional policy harmonization ,or ask why such efforts fail in some policy areas but not in others. Since leaders situated at different spheres of governments are the main actors when it comes to policy harmonization and coordination via IGR mechanisms, it is necessary that they have a clear understanding of these mechanisms. Table 8 presents the results of the opinion survey in this regard.

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Table 8: Leaders' Opinion on Policy Coordination and Harmonization

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	19	11.6	11.7	11.7
	Disagree	36	22.0	22.1	33.7
	Undecided	19	11.6	11.7	45.4
	Agree	63	38.4	38.7	84.0
	Strongly agree	26	15.9	16.0	100.0
	Total	163	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.6		
Total		164	100.0		

Respondents were asked to express their views as to "whether coordination and harmonization of policies in the federal system of Ethiopia have been well taken". The responses show that 54.7 percent agreed or strongly agreed, 33.8 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 11.1 percent were undecided .On the basis of this data, it is possible to contend that the need for policy harmonization and coordination in the Ethiopian federation is an issue understood by more than half the respondents. Nevertheless, in view of the percentage of disagreed and undecided respondents, it is an issue in respect of which a subsection of respondents require clarity of understanding.

3.9 Building Consensus on the Country's Major Issues

Normatively speaking, the concept or ideal of federalism is associated with the notions of negotiation, dialogue, the sharing of power and responsibility, interdependence, and working simultaneously on what is peculiar and what is communal (Elazar,1987; Burgess, 2006). Moreover, in actuality, different forms of federal political arrangement exhibit one form or another of constitutional power-sharing and/or consensual framework governing the sharing of power and the parameters of its legitimate exercise. Table 9 sets out the corresponding survey results in this study.

Table 9: Leaders' Opinion on Consensus-Building on Key Issues in Ethiopia's Federation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	11	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Disagree	34	20.7	20.9	27.6
	Undecided	29	17.7	17.8	45.4
	Agree	59	36.0	36.2	81.6
	Strongly agree	30	18.3	18.4	100.0
	Total	163	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.6		
Total		164	100.0		

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or not with the statement, "Consensus-building on the major issues in the Ethiopian federation has been well developed." As per Table 9, 27.6 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, 54.6 percent agreed or strongly agreed, and 17.8 percent were undecided. Put differently, 54.6 percent of respondents were of the opinion that consensus-building on major issues of the Ethiopian federation is a well-developed skill. The disagreement of 27.6 percent respondents, along with17.8 percent of them being undecided, would suggest there is room for further engagement on this issue.

In multinational, multi-ethnic federations like the Ethiopian federation, what matters is how the practical political process can accommodate wide diversity yet reinforce national loyalties (Requejo, 2005;Marchildon,2009).Political processes that do not foster loyalty to common institutions can introduce divisive tendencies; by the same token, a centralized political process that cannot be shared by all constituents of the federation may alienate different groups in society and become a source of instability. These are the current challenges facing the Ethiopian polity, which needs skilled leadership to create consensus around them.

4. Conclusion

This study assessed the opinions of selected leaders on key issues in federalism in Ethiopia, doing so by means of a survey inviting

responses measurable on a Likert scale. In general, the results are that leaders' understanding of these issues ranges from low to moderate. However, when it comes to particular issues, the study assumes that understanding the basics of how the federal system works is critical and that the other issues are part and parcel of the operation of the system. Here, based on the survey, leaders' understanding of how the federal system works is very low – 74.9 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that" leaders in different spheres of government lack basic knowledge on how a federal system works". It is plausible to contend that this points to a gap in the leadership's understanding of how the federal system works.

When it comes to leaders' opinions on the other issues of federalism, the survey data reveal that only slightly more than half of the respondents have an understanding of how to create federal values; of the federal dimensions of their decisions; of the nexus of federalism and democracy; of the issues related to diversity management in federations; of mechanisms of nation-building in a federal society; of the mechanisms of sharing revenue and expenditure responsibilities; of coordination and harmonization of policies in federations; and of the mechanisms for building consensus on the major issues of the country.

A not negligible percentage of respondents' opinions still point to lack of proper understanding of the above mentioned issues in that they express disagreement or indecision. Thus, based on the findings of this preliminary survey, it appears that there is a need for leadership training on issues of federalism. As the assessment is only a preliminary one drawing on 164 leaders, it does not purport to offer a representative general picture of the state of affairs. Instead, it offers merely an indicative one to pave the way ideally for a comprehensive time-series assessment of leadership opinion that could assist the operation of the federal system in a systematic fashion.

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