The Ethiopian Voter: An Assessment of Economic and Ethnic Influences with Survey Data

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Did economic factors affect voter choices in Ethiopia's parliamentary elections? While most students of Ethiopian politics focus on sociological factors such as ethnic identity and political culture to explain the electoral outcomes of 15 May 2005, I show in this article that economic factors also influenced whether a voter decided to support the opposition or the ruling party. I use data from the country's first pre-election survey, undertaken by Initiative Africa, to assess the impact of economic, regional, ethnic, and demographic variables on voter choices between the opposition and the ruling party. I find a statistically significant relationship between a voter's individual economic conditions and his or her choices over parties: voters who believe their living standard declined over the previous five years and unemployed voters were more likely to vote for the opposition, regardless of ethnicity or region. This finding suggests that a more nuanced and complete analysis of voter behavior in Ethiopia must account for the influence of economic factors.

Introduction

Ethiopia's 2005 parliamentary elections are often examined in both journalistic and scholarly accounts as another instance of simple ethnic politics. The positions staked out by the main political parties during the 2005 campaign ostensibly lend themselves to a relatively straightforward ethnic interpretation: the Tigray-dominated Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) defended the system of ethnic federalism for its own divide-and-rule purposes, the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) proposed to overturn ethnic federalism as a means of restoring Amhara dominance, and the opposition United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) sought greater regional autonomy for the historically marginalized Oromo and other minority communities. Even statements made by government and opposition leaders drew attention to the significance of ethnic politics. Bereket Simon, former minister of information and the EPRDF's campaign director in 2005, asserted that "we do not have an opposition that acts in a civilized manner. Hate politics is the prime factor that moves them and this has been the case for the past ten years."[1] On his part, Berhanu

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Nega, the CUD's campaign director, wrote that the ruling party's "despicable attempt to play the ethnic card for political gain in Ethiopia succeeded only in further discrediting it."[2] Therefore, it is no surprise when a publication like *Africa Confidential* (2005), the newsletter of record for current events in the region, focuses its analysis of Ethiopia's elections on the "ethnic factor" or why a scholar like Samatar (2005) interprets the election results as showing that a "significant proportion of the estranged public took advantage of the opportunity to vent its displeasure by voting against TPLF and the most recent ethnic hierarchy, and for an opposition led by chauvinists who are wedded to the old oppressive order."

Much has been claimed about how ethnicity has determined voter support for the main parties in the 2005 elections, but the truth is that we know next to nothing about the motivations of individual voters in Ethiopia. There is no empirical record on which to make these claims. This was the country's first genuinely multiparty election and the main opposition parties were relatively new actors on the political scene, so there is no electoral record against which levels of party support can be assessed. Moreover, since the choices made by individuals in the voting booth are secret, aggregate vote totals cannot reveal whether certain types of voters were more likely to cast their vote for the ruling party or for one of the opposition coalitions. It thus remains an open question whether voter mobilization was solely driven by ethnic identity. This raises a series of related research questions: What factors influenced voter choices over parties in 2005? What types of voters were more likely to choose the opposition over the EPRDF? What do voting trends in 2005 signal for future partisan alignments in Ethiopia?

Consider the obvious example of Addis Ababa, where the CUD received about 80 percent of the vote in each of the capital's 24 electoral districts. The Ethiopian census estimates that only about half of Addis Ababa's population claim to be ethnic Amharas, so the only way that the CUD could have achieved such a high vote share would be by gaining a large number of votes from ethnic Oromos, which constitute at least one-fifth of the capital's population. The significant point here is that Oromo voters clearly did not turn their votes over to the EPRDF for fear that the CUD, often maligned by its rivals as an Amhara front, would win in their electoral districts. And they clearly did not give their votes to the UEDF, which gained only average 2.3 percent of the vote in each electoral district even though it was headed by an Oromo politician. How should such a scenario be interpreted? It would be facile to claim that the Oromos who voted for the CUD did not understand what that party represents. Probably the only assertion that could be made is that ethnicity alone did not determine how ethnic Oromos chose to cast their votes in Addis Ababa.

I argue that students of Ethiopian politics have neglected economic factors in their analysis of the 2005 elections, specifically, and in the development of partisan alignments more generally. Ethiopia has undergone considerable

economic changes since the fall of Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime in 1991, transitioning from a centralized economic system to a market-based system. Economic growth under the EPRDF has improved considerably when compared to the previous regime, but the benefits of this growth have not been evenly distributed across sectors and remain tenuous in many sectors (Alemayehu Geda 2001). Yet, while most commentators on Ethiopian politics have been concentrating on sociological explanations based on ethnic identity or political culture, almost no attention has been paid to the influence of these economic trends on party support among voters. My point is not that economic factors alone can explain how voters respond to the appeals made by different parties, but that a more nuanced and complete analysis of political behavior in Ethiopia must account for economic factors. Otherwise, their omission cannot but produce biased assessments of the complex political phenomenon that occurred on 15 May 2005.

In this article, I provide evidence that suggests economic factors cut across ethnic cleavages to significantly influence whether a voter preferred the opposition to the EPRDF in the 2005 parliamentary elections. Ethiopian voters appear to base their choices over political parties, in part, on their individual economic conditions: the unemployed and those whose perceived living standard declined over the previous five years were more likely to vote for the opposition, regardless of ethnicity or region. These findings are based on data collected by Initiative Africa (2005) as part of the first pre-election survey conducted in Ethiopia's urban areas. Using data from this survey, I assess the impact of demographic, ethnic, regional and economic variables on voter choices between the ruling party and the opposition.

In the following section, I outline the potential influences on Ethiopian voters' choices and further elaborate on the role of economic factors. I then turn to discussing the survey data and the methodology used in the quantitative analysis of the data. Next, I present the main findings from the analysis and explain the impact of the main explanatory variables. I conclude that economic factors have a significant, though misunderstood, effect on political mobilization in contemporary Ethiopian politics.

Explanations for Voter Choices

There has been considerable disagreement among students of Ethiopian politics over how to interpret the course of events surrounding the 2005 elections (Abbink 2006; Hagmann 2006; Clapham 2005; Henze 2005), but perhaps none would reject Clapham's description of the citizens who expressed their political preferences on election day: "the voters themselves refuted any claim that ordinary Ethiopians were not 'ready' for democracy, or were incapable of understanding the issues at stake." Indeed, a wide cross-section of Ethiopians

closely followed the campaign's developments, especially as opposition parties became increasingly organized and competitive between September 2004 and May 2005. Voters not only tuned in to the party debates broadcast on television and radio over such issues as poverty alleviation, education policy, and rural development, but they also turned out en masse for rallies organized by both the ruling party and the opposition. The degree of voter interest in the election was fully demonstrated on election day, as turnout averaged about 83 percent across most of the country's electoral districts (*mercha kilil*).[3] But despite such enthusiastic voter mobilization, political commentators can only hazard a guess as to the issues on which Ethiopian voters were basing their choices on that day. Were voters mainly motivated by an instrumental ethnic logic? Were they looking to use their vote as a protest against rule by the EPRDF? Or were voters making retrospective judgments of the ruling party's performance based on their own economic well-being?

Although ethnic voting in multi-ethnic countries is often understood as an expression of psychologically-rooted or primordially-driven allegiance to a group (Horowitz 2000), many political scientists have come to understand ethnic voting as being mainly driven by more pragmatic concerns (Ferree 2004; Posner 2004; Wantchekon 2003; Bates 1974). This view suggests that voters choose their politicians based on ethnicity because, lacking other sources of information, ethnic identity provides a cue as to what interests a politician might represent once in office and to which constituents he or she is more likely to provide services. In Ethiopian context, however, neither of these perspectives provides much insight on how voters chose their preferred parties in 2005. Ethnic voting is, to some extent, a moot point in Ethiopia. Even if the country were not organized as an ethnic federation, voters in most electoral districts would still be choosing members of parliament from among their co-ethnics. The country's electoral code structures competition in such a way that viable candidates will tend to come from the same ethnic background as most voters within an electoral district. Representation in the House of Peoples' Representatives is based on single-member districts drawn from relatively homogeneous administrative districts (*woredas*). Proclamation No. 111/1995 further stipulates that, among other criteria, candidates for office must be "versed in the vernacular" of the region they intend to represent.[4] And because winning candidates for parliament must secure a plurality of votes, the political parties themselves have an incentive to select candidates that come from the largest ethnic group within an electoral district. The CUD, for example, was obviously sensitive to this logic, using birthplace among its criteria for selecting parliamentary candidates.

It may be the case that ethnic voting is driven by the identity of party leaders, rather than the identity of parliamentary candidates, because as

potential prime ministers they ultimately will determine how state resources are distributed. In this case, both Amharas and Oromos would be expected to vote for opposition parties because Meles Zenawi, as the EPRDF's leader, is a Tigrayan. But again, this theory of ethnic voting does not provide much insight on the patterns of party support seen in the 2005 elections. Consider the undisputed results announced for 307 districts on 8 July 2005.[5] Among these 307 districts, the EPRDF won 159 seats, the CUD 93 seats, the UEDF 42 seats, OFDM 11 seats, and one seat each by the Sheko and Mezenger People's Democratic Unity Organization (SMPDUO) and an independent candidate. Ethnicity alone cannot explain why voters from the country's largest ethnic groups split their votes between the ruling party and the opposition: in Oromia the EPRDF won 65 seats to the UEDF's 37, while in Amhara the EPRDF managed to hold onto 20 seats to the CUD's 48.

Some commentators might suggest that Ethiopians were using their votes as a referendum on the EPRDF's long tenure (Lyons 2006). Voters did not care about the policy alternatives presented by the opposition parties so long as they could vote against the ruling party. However, the electoral record indicates that Ethiopians were more than simple protest voters. Ethiopians focused their votes on three coalitions – the EPRDF, the CUD, and the UEDF – even though they had a multiplicity of options in terms of minor parties and independent candidates. If Ethiopians were only using their vote to protest EPRDF rule, then votes would have been more randomly distribution among opposition parties. There certainly were other options: 35 parties registered to compete for the House of People's Representatives; 23 of the 35 competed in a single region. But parties unaffiliated with one of the three coalitions were uncompetitive in most districts, collecting only a combined five percent of the vote within each district on average. The Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) was the only unaffiliated party that gained more than one seat. Independent candidates competed in 175 districts, winning about two percent of the vote on average, but only Negaso Gedada, the former president, claimed a seat. Ethiopian voters thus demonstrated a surprising level of strategic voting in focusing on the three coalitions: they preferred to give their votes to parties with a serious chance of winning across several districts rather than wasting their votes on hopeless minor parties (Cox 1997).

Ethiopia's voting patterns may be explained by economic factors, though few students have explicitly focused on such variables. Political scientists have long posited a relationship between economic conditions and electoral outcomes. This view suggests that elections serve as an accountability mechanism which enables voters to retrospectively assess a government's economic management and to cast their votes accordingly (Powell and Whitten 1993; Fiorina 1981; Kramer 1971; Key 1966). Voters are thus thought to be rational and

sophisticated judges of economic conditions: those who are satisfied with the government's economic performance are more likely to reelect it, while those who are dissatisfied will vote for the opposition in hopes of getting better economic outcomes. Empirical studies of new democracies confirm that voters evaluate their government's economic performance, though the degree to which voters hold incumbents accountable for economic outcomes depends on such factors as economic instability, structural reforms, and type of political institutions (Magaloni 2006; Stokes 2001; Magaloni 1997). According to this view, the variation in the EPRDF's vote share across the country could be better explained by differences in localized economic conditions rather than by ethnic cleavages.

Economic and ethnic voting, of course, can be correlated. Most of Ethiopia's ethnic groups are geographically concentrated, so it could be the case that an entire community not only has the same ethnic background, but also experiences economic trends in the same way. For example, increasingly erratic rainfall has undermined the stability of year-to-year incomes for farmers in Amhara region. Mass support for the opposition in Amhara might be interpreted as straightforward ethnic voting, but its roots would remain economic. To be sure, any smart politician could manipulate this ethnic-economic convergence to appeal for more votes, claiming that it is for ethnic reasons that their region has been neglected economically by the government. This is the stuff of politics and it occurs in every country where multiple parties compete for power. Nevertheless, even when ethnicity and economics are correlated, the influence of each factor can be disentangled. Again, using the example of Amhara, if economic voting does occur, it could be shown that support for the ruling party would be higher in parts of the region where a larger proportion of voters felt satisfied with their economic conditions. And that would help to explain the variation in party support within that ethnically-defined region.

Throughout the 2005 campaign, EPRDF leaders certainly sought to capitalize on improved economic conditions by repeatedly citing gains attained since taking power. The ruling party's platform was a defense of the economic status quo based on agriculture-led industrialization and state-owned land policies. To the party's credit, annual GDP growth averaged over five percent during the previous ten years, which is more than double the annual average of 2.37 percent during the last ten years of Mengistu's regime. Opposition leaders countered by focusing their own campaigns on the country's persistent economic problems, criticizing the EPRDF's agricultural and industrialization policies for failing to alleviate poverty in the country. UN estimates indicate that some 42 million people consume less than the recommended minimum nutritional requirement, while some seven million are dependent on food aid.

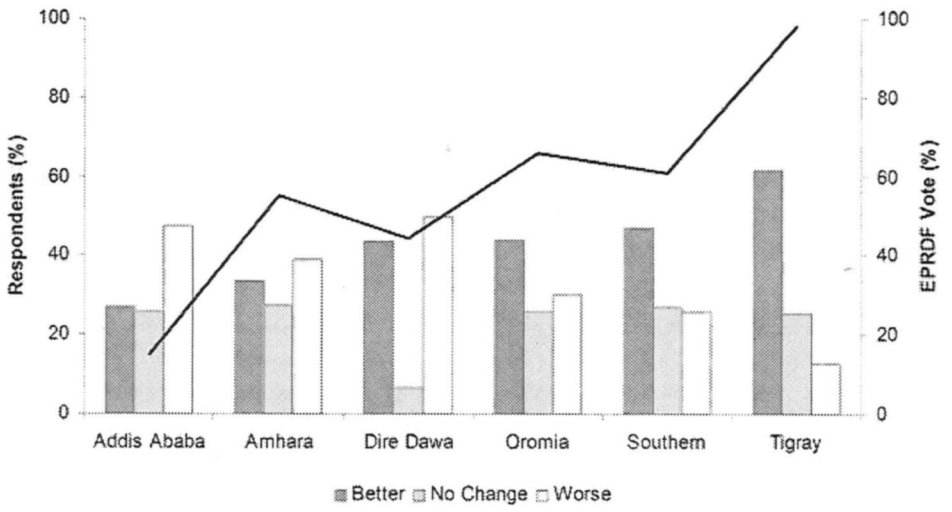
Both CUD and UEDF leaders argued that the ruling party had neglected the industrial sector, while failing to move the rural sector beyond its rain-fed subsistence.

While aggregate data suggest that both winners and losers are being produced by Ethiopia's uneven economic growth, it remains to be shown whether these trends are influencing the choices of individual voters. I have previously shown that economic conditions at the district level – the proportion of the population living below the poverty line, the proportion of the population receiving food aid, the type of cash crop grown, and access to land – significantly affected patterns of opposition support, cutting across ethnic and urban-rural cleavages (Arriola Forthcoming). However, the limitation to such district-level analysis is that cannot reveal what types of individuals were more likely to vote for the opposition over the ruling party. To overcome this problem of ecological inference, I examine survey data collected by Initiative Africa, an Ethiopian civil society organization, as part of the country's first pre-election survey.[9] The survey collected responses from 4,624 respondents in Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa, Harari, and the urban areas of Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations, and Tigray. Respondents were asked a battery of questions about their perceptions of political parties, political issues, and economic conditions.

The survey results provide suggestive evidence for the relationship between voter's economic perceptions and party preferences. Figure 1 shows that there is considerable variation across regions in the proportion of respondents who believe that their current standard of living is better, not changed, or worse when compared to five years ago, as measured on the graph's left-hand axis.[10] What is particularly interesting in this graph is the close relationship between the proportion of voters who perceive an improved standard of living, represented by the dark gray bar, and the actual percentage of the vote received by the EPRDF in that region, as illustrated by the black line and measured on the right-hand axis. Note that these two move in tandem, attaining their lowest levels in Addis Ababa and Amhara and steadily increasing across the regions until they reach their highest levels in Tigray.

The bivariate correlation (Pearsons's r) between the regional percentage of respondents claiming a better living standard and the EPRDF's regional vote share is .9079 and significant at .0123. In other words, the proportion of voters who claimed a better standard of living in February 2005, when the survey was administered, would have served as a relatively accurate predictor of the EPRDF's vote share in May 2005. The same is true of the proportion of respondents claiming a worse living standard, since the opposition performed best in those regions where survey respondents believed their living standard had declined over the previous five years – e.g., Addis Ababa, Amhara, and Dire Dawa.

Figure 1: Perceived Change in Living Standard and EPRDF Vote Share by Region



Note: Respondents were asked: "Is your current living standard better, not changed, or worse compared to five years ago?"

Source: Initiative Africa (2005) and National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (2005)

Data and Methods

To systematically test whether there is a relationship between economic perceptions and party preferences, I use Initiative Africa's survey data to assess the influence of economic, regional, ethnic, and demographic variables on a respondent's first-choice party. The sample contains 3,442 respondents from Addis Ababa, Amhara, Dire Dawa, Harari, Oromia, Southern Nations, and Tigray.[11] While this is a large and nationally representative sample, the analysis presented here is limited in two key respects. First, the survey was conducted in cities and town across a country where only some 15 percent of electoral districts are found in urban areas. This necessarily constrains the extent to which these findings may be generalized. However, this may not be as severe a limitation as it would appear to be. Bezunesh (2006) points out in her election analysis that the vote in many rural areas tended to follow the urban areas they encircled, explaining that the economic prospects of rural areas and the towns that serve as their administrative and market centers are tightly linked. Second, Ethiopia is a country with a history of political violence. Lingering fears of repression can surely bias the manner in which respondents choose to answer political questions on a survey. But since less than half of the respondents stated that the EPRDF was their first-choice party, it may still be possible to glean important insights from the survey data. If the estimates based on the

survey are biased in any direction, they most likely underestimate the level of opposition support. The findings discussed in the following section should therefore be taken as indicators of relative propensities rather than exact predictions.

The dependent variable in this analysis is whether a respondent prefers the opposition to the ruling party, or is undecided. The Initiative Africa survey asked respondents: "Which party would be your first choice in the upcoming election?" The available choices were the EPRDF, CUD, UEDF, other, or undecided. In the sample used here, while 44.89 percent of respondents chose the EPRDF as their first choice party, they seemed to underreport their preference for opposition parties when compared to the actual election results: the CUD and UEDF together were selected by 14.29 percent of respondents; 6.48 percent chose other opposition parties. Another 34.34 percent of respondents claimed to be undecided.[12] In the 2005 elections, the EPRDF received 64.1 percent of the vote versus a combined total of 33.46 percent for the CUD and UEDF. It is difficult to know a priori whether one-third of respondents were actually undecided when the survey was taken in February 2005 or whether they feared revealing their true preference for the opposition.[13] For the purposes of this analysis, I therefore collapse the dependent variable into three categories: the voter prefers the opposition, the voter prefers the EPRDF, or the voter is undecided.

The explanatory variables testing the main hypothesis about economic voting also comes from the Initiative Africa survey. The first is a trichotomous indicator of perceived change in personal living standard over the previous five years (which is equivalent to the parliament's term in office): better off, worse off, or no change. About 42 percent of respondents claim they are better off, 25 percent state they have experienced no change, and another 33 percent believe they are worse off. The second is a trichotomous indicator for employment status: state-sector employee, private-sector employee, or unemployed. Approximately 14 percent of respondents are state employees, 40 percent work in the private sector, and 46 percent are unemployed. Since there is no clear statement in the Africanist literature on how such factors should influence opposition support, I hypothesize that these variables should function in the same way as predicted in the broader political science literature on economic voting. Voters who perceived their economic status to have declined over time should use their vote to punish the incumbent, regardless of ethnic or regional affiliation.

Two other sets of explanatory variables are tested. I assess the potential impact of ethnic cleavages by controlling for a respondent's stated ethnic identity: Amhara, Gurage, Oromo, Tigrayan, and Wolayta.

Table 1. Multinomial Estimates of Opposition Support Relative to EPRDF

	Opposition	Undecided
Living Standard over Last 5 Years[1]		
Better Off	-0.49*** (0.13)	-0.32*** (0.11)
Worse Off	0.38*** (0.13)	0.37*** (0.11)
Employment[1]		
State Sector	-0.52*** (0.16)	-0.45*** (0.14)
Private Sector	-0.38*** (0.11)	-0.43*** (0.09)
Region[1]		
Amhara	0.07 (0.16)	0.20 (0.14)
Dire Dawa	0.73*** (0.23)	0.22 (0.22)
Oromia	0.06 (0.14)	0.21* (0.12)
Southern Nations	0.05 (0.18)	0.39*** (0.15)
Tigray	-2.73*** (0.64)	-2.05*** (0.34)
Ethnicity[1]		
Oromo	0.03 (0.14)	0.13 (0.12)
Tigray	-1.56*** (0.30)	-1.22*** (0.23)
Gurage	0.13 (0.17)	-0.18 (0.16)
Wolayta	-0.45** (0.20)	-0.31* (0.17)
Female	-0.30*** (0.11)	0.10 (0.09)
Age	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Years of Education	0.04*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
Intercept	-0.13 (0.28)	0.29 (0.24)
LR χ^2 vs. null model (d.f. = 32)	877.86***	

Source: Initiative Africa

Note: (1) Omitted categories are Living Standard (No Change), employment (Unemployed), Region (Addis Ababa), and Ethnicity (Amhara).

N=3,442. Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: * p<.10, ** p<.05, *** p<.01.

Forty-two percent of respondents claimed to be Amhara, ten percent Gurage, 24 percent Oromo, 16 percent Tigrayan, and nine percent Wolayta. I add indicator variables for a respondent's region of residence: Addis Ababa (18 percent of the sample), Amhara (20 percent), Dire Dawa (five percent), Oromia (29 percent), Southern Nations (12 percent), and Tigray (12 percent). Demographic controls for gender, age, and education are also included. Fifty-five percent of the sample is made up of women, the average age of respondents is 35, and respondents have an average of six years of education.

Because the dependent variable is categorical, I employ a multinomial logit model to gauge the effect of the economic, ethnic, regional, and demographic variables on the probability that a respondent prefers the opposition, prefers the EPRDF, or is undecided. A multinomial logit model estimates the probability that one categorical outcome is selected relative to a base category. In this case, I estimate the probability that a respondent would choose the opposition or claim to be undecided relative to choosing the EPRDF as their preferred party.

The estimates produced by a multinomial logit can be difficult to interpret because coefficients for explanatory variables are reported in the form of log-odds and the magnitude of their effects depend on the values of the other variables. In the discussion that follows, I provide substantively meaningful interpretations of a variable's estimated effect by showing how changes in its value, holding all else constant, affects the likelihood that a respondent prefers the opposition to the EPRDF. I specifically compute the predicted probability of a respondent choosing the opposition over the EPRDF by economic status, ethnicity, region, and demographic profile.

Voter Analysis

In assessing the impact of the explanatory variables on voter choice, I began by estimating three nested multinomial logit models in which the EPRDF serves as the reference category. The first model was restricted to the demographic variables for gender, age, and education and four indicators for ethnic identity. For the second model, I added five regional indicators. The third model included two indicators for employment status, whether employed in the state-sector or private-sector, and two indicators for better or worse perceived change in living standard. The chi-square test statistic indicates that the third model significantly improved upon the fit of the second model, so I report in Table 1 only the results from the third model.

The results in Table 1 show the main finding of this article: economic conditions significantly influence the choices made by Ethiopian voters, regardless of ethnicity or region. The estimated coefficients for perceived

change in living standard and employment status are statistically significant and influence voter choices in the hypothesized direction. These coefficients most likely underestimate the level of opposition support, yet they clearly show that economic conditions influence voter support for the opposition, as predicted in the established theoretical literature. Voters who believe their living standard has become worse over the previous five years as well as unemployed voters are more likely to support the opposition over the EPRDF, all else equal. Conversely, voters who believe their living standard is better and voters who are employed are more likely to support the ruling party, ceteris paribus. To assess the estimated effects implied by the coefficients on these variables, I report in Table 2 the predicted probabilities of a voter choosing the opposition over the EPRDF by perceived change in living standard, employment status, and ethnic identity. I generate these predicted probabilities by holding the other variables at the following values: the voter is a 35-year old male with six years of education who lives in Addis Ababa.

The patterns in the predicted probabilities suggest that differences in economic conditions may have as much of an impact, if not more, than ethnicity on the likelihood of supporting the opposition. The coefficients on the ethnic variables in Table 1 indicate that Oromos and Gurages have no greater likelihood of voting for the opposition over the EPRDF when compared to Amharas. Both Tigrayans and Wolaytas appear to be statistically less likely to support the opposition, though at different rates, when compared to Amharas. Nevertheless, setting aside the obvious case of the prime minister's Tigrayan co-ethnics, there appears to be less difference between voters of different ethnic backgrounds than between voters who hold different perceptions of changes in their living standards over the last five years. The difference between a state employee who believes he is better off versus an unemployed voter who sees himself as worse off ranges from ten to 19 percentage points, depending on ethnic background.

The predicted probability of supporting the opposition rises for individuals of all ethnic groups as their individual economic conditions deteriorate. Consider the case of a 35-year old male voter who happens to be Oromo, employed in the private sector, and thinks his standard of living has improved. He has an estimated 20 percent probability of choosing the opposition over the EPRDF, but that probability rises to 30 percent only by altering his perceived living standard from better to worse. These predicted probabilities are indicators of relative propensities rather than exact predictions, yet they strongly suggest that voters base their choices over parties on perceived economic changes. These findings also help to explain why the country's largest ethnic groups – Amhara and Oromo – did not vote en bloc for the opposition, as was often assumed. The country's uneven economic growth may have created cross-cutting cleavages in electoral politics.

A similar pattern holds when considering changes in employment status. As would be expected, state employees in Ethiopia are far less likely to support the opposition when compared to unemployed workers, their difference in predicted probabilities being as much as seven percentage points. There is also a small difference between state and private-sector employees, the latter being slightly more likely to choose the opposition over the EPRDF. For example, the predicted probability of the same voter used in the previous scenario would rise from 28 percent were he to be a government employee who felt economically worse off to 33 percent were he an unemployed worker who felt worse off.

The findings in Table 1 suggest that region has limited explanatory power in accounting for the likelihood of opposition support. Relative to respondents in Addis Ababa, the respondents living in Amhara, Oromia, and Southern Nations were no more likely to choose the opposition over the EPRDF. While respondents in Dire Dawa were more likely to support the opposition when compared to respondents in Addis Ababa, those living in Tigray were far less likely, as would be anticipated. Interestingly, respondents in Oromia and Southern Nations were somewhat more likely to claim they were undecided than their peers in Addis Ababa. Table 3 shows how the predicted probabilities vary by region for a typical 35-year old male voter with six years of education. Table 3 suggests that, once again, there is a greater range between economic conditions in the predicted probability of supporting the opposition than there is between different regions. The probabilities for the three large regions are practically identical, while those for Dire Dawa and Tigray are at opposite extremes.

Table 3. Predicted Probability of Opposition Support by Region and Economic Condition

Living Standard	Employment	Region				
		Amhara	Dire Dawa	Oromia	Southern	Tigray
Better Off						
	State-Sector	0.14	0.23	0.13	0.13	0.02
	Private-Sector	0.15	0.26	0.15	0.14	0.02
	Unemployed	0.18	0.30	0.18	0.17	0.03
Worse Off						
	State-Sector	0.22	0.35	0.22	0.20	0.04
	Private-Sector	0.24	0.38	0.24	0.22	0.04
	Unemployed	0.28	0.42	0.27	0.25	0.06

Note: Variables set as gender (male), age (35), and education (6 years).

Among the demographic variables, both gender and education have statistically significant effects. Interestingly, women are less likely to support the opposition when compared to men, though it is not immediately obvious why this would be the case. The predicted probability of choosing the opposition over the EPRDF is five percentage points lower, on average, for a woman than for a man, all else equal. Voters who are more educated are more likely to choose the opposition over the EPRDF, and they are also less likely to claim that they are undecided. Five additional years of education increases the predicted probability of voting for the opposition by 3.5 percentage points, all else equal. The exact mechanism for this relationship is unclear. Are more educated voters simply better informed, or are they judging the government on different criteria?

Conclusion

Voter mobilization in the 2005 elections has been commonly explained as the product of ethnically-motivated alignments. I have argued in this article that such superficial explanations are insufficient to account for the variation seen in voting patterns across electoral districts, regardless of whether we focus either on the subset of districts with undisputed results or on the entire, disputed set of results. My claim is not that ethnic and regional considerations do not influence voters, since both the ruling party and the opposition parties clearly have their respective ethno-regional bases. Instead, what I have sought to demonstrate is that Ethiopians are sophisticated voters who consider multiple factors, especially their own economic status, when deciding on which political party to support. This view of the Ethiopian voter as an economic voter allows for a more nuanced interpretation of how votes were cast on 15 May 2005. While the standard ethnic explanation would fail to account for why, for example, some Oromo-majority districts in Oromia voted for the ruling party while others voted for the opposition, the economic explanation would suggest the reason is found in their different economic positions. This is a falsifiable claim that can be proved or disproved by further empirical research.

The analysis of Initiative Africa's survey data provides important insights on how economic conditions influence the choices made by Ethiopian voters, regardless of ethnicity or region. Despite the fact that opposition support is underreported in the survey data, forcing us to take the predicted probabilities as indicators of relative propensities rather than exact predictions, the estimated coefficients of the multinomial logit model show that there is a statistically significant relationship between a respondent's party preference and economic variables such as a respondent's perceived change in living standard and employment status. Voters who believe their living standard declined over the

previous five years as well as unemployed voters are more likely to support the opposition over the EPRDF. Voters who believe their living standard improved and employed voters are more likely to support the ruling party. The multinomial logit analysis further shows that there is little difference among most regions or ethnic groups, with some obvious exceptions, in terms of their likelihood of supporting the opposition over the ruling party.

Although economic conditions may have played a key role in determining voting patterns in the 2005 elections, students of Ethiopian politics have paid little attention to how such factors are shaping the socioeconomic coalitions represented by the main political parties. It remains unclear whether economic divisions will affect the future development of party coalitions, encouraging parties to work across ethnic and regional boundaries. Moreover, since the Initiative Africa survey was limited to urban voters, more research is needed on how economic conditions affect the mobilization of rural voters. Are rural voters cued to the same economic indicators as urban voters? And given the vagaries of rain-fed agriculture, are rural voters more or less tolerant of a government's poor economic management? These are the types of questions researchers must answer if we are to understand the future development of multiparty politics and voter behavior in Ethiopia.

Notes

[1] "What Do the Winners and Losers Have to Say?" *Fortune*, 22 May 2005, 22.

[2] Berhanu Nega. "The Ruling Party Was Not Psychologically Prepared to Lose Power." *The Reporter*, 9 July 2005, 13.

[3] My estimate is based on data from the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia.

[4] This is not a point that opposition parties, or at least the UEDF, seemed to contest during their negotiations with the EPRDF over the electoral code. On 18 January 2005, the House of Peoples' Representatives adopted an amended electoral law which contained some opposition proposals, though in diluted form. This amended electoral law did away with the provision requiring endorsement signatures for party candidates, though the requirement was kept for private candidates. The residency requirement for candidates was reduced from five to two years, and the residency requirement for voters was reduced from two years to six months.

[5] The opposition did not challenge these July results because no party had as yet gained a parliamentary majority. The opposition parties later rejected the results issued on 9 August and 5 September 2005.

[6] These figures come from the World Bank's World Development Indicators.

[7] Abebe Tadesse and Fistum W/Giorgis. 2004. "Which and Whose Agricultural Policy Is Capable of Breaking the Deadlock?." *The Reporter*. 22 December 2004: 16.

[8] UN Integrated Regional Information Networks. 2005. "Poverty Outlook Reveals Yet Many Challenges." 21 February.

[9] The survey was conducted from 9 January to 8 February 2005, three months prior to the 15 May 2005 elections. Survey administrators used a two-stage probability sampling procedure to identify households. I thank Kebour Ghenna, Initiative Africa's director, for granting me access to the survey data.

[10] To facilitate the analysis, I dropped the respondents who claimed "don't know" on whether their living standard had changed. Only 3.6 percent gave such an answer in the original sample.

[11] Respondents with missing data on key variables were dropped for this analysis.

[12] I drop observations from respondents who claimed they had no preference over parties. In the original sample, these represented 8.83 percent of respondents.

[13] It seems more likely that the latter is the case. I cross-tabulate party choice with another question from the survey: Do you speak freely about politics? A chi-square test for equality of distributions indicates that the null hypothesis can be rejected at the .01 significance level.

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