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Abstract

Did the Ethiopian general election of 2020 play a role in stopping a three-year violent protest? Why? This research using data from interviews shows that many protestors in the regional state of Oromia believe the general election played a role, be it to a different level in a different group of people, in their decision to stop protesting. They mention the reform implemented by the new administration, the need to give time to the new administration, and influential individuals joining the mainstream political parties as reasons to prioritize the electoral process, away from protesting, so that they would vote for their candidate in the coming election. The research explains the findings using Horowitz's (1985, 2010, 2014) expressive theory together with exchange theory (Robert 1969, Nownes and Neely 1996). Horowitz theorizes that mobilization creates ethnic political parties and these parties attract the mobilized who believe their interest is best served by their ethnic political parties. Expressive theory (Robert 1969, Nownes and Neely 1996) explains how much influential individuals or political entrepreneurs matter in mobilization and demobilization.

Introduction

The demonstration that started in Ethiopia in 2015 calling for more political and economic power-sharing and cessation of marginalization has become a communal conflict in 2018 (Jillian Kestler-D'Amours 2018). Pressured by the protestors, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn

resigned (The Guardian 2018, Human Rights Watch 2019). Despite the new administration's many concessions to the demands of ethnic groups, the likes of appointing a new prime minister from the biggest ethnic group, releasing thousands of political prisoners, suspension of the controversial city plan and terrorism law (Yoseph and Jon 2018), the communal conflict continued to claim thousands of lives and millions of displaced people (Internal displacement monitoring center 2019, The Humanitarian data exchange 2020). Amid such violence was the fear that this may escalate and Ethiopia could be engulfed by a civil war (Itziar 2018). But that didn't happen. The three-year protest stopped suddenly with no clear reason. What influenced the protestors to stop their mobilization? One of would be explanations is the prospect of winning in an election.

As part of the reform measures taken by the new administration, those mentioned above, welcoming political parties and militant groups operating outside Ethiopia were important steps towards having a credible election where all parties participate (Yoseph and Jon 2018). These groups returned home with the pledge of participating peacefully in a democratic process, namely elections (Shaban 2018), and very influential parties and individuals are included in this (The Guardian 2018). The return of political parties and individuals who have big followers may have brought about protester's hope that they would see the change they want when these parties participate in the election and win. This research paper aims to find out if the 29 August 2020 planned election affected protestors' behavior and why if it did.

People have different reasons to vote for a particular party or candidate. Scholars have found that in post-independence Africa, religious belief, regionalism, personality, and patronage affected voter behavior (Naomi 1983, Fred 1987, Staffan 2003). In most African societies support for political parties is based on ethnicity (Pippa and Robert 2003, Eric 2008). The relatively recent

studies tend to reinforce the earlier theories that voters in Africa mainly look for their co-ethnic candidate or political party affiliated to their ethnic identity. Paul (2001) observes this trend in Ghana's election in 2000 and Michael and Mwagi (2008) find a similar case in Kenya's 2007 election. Debrah's study shows that voters were highly influenced by ethnicity in Ghana's 2008 general election (2016). As the reason why voters choose their co-ethnic candidates instead of others, the theory of instrumentalism explains it in terms of benefits; the voters believe that their co-ethnics would give them better economic and political goods (Ferree and Harowitz 2010, Philip 2010, Nahomi and Noah 2013).

The people in the ethnic regional state of Oromia protested against an economic and political marginalization of the ethnic Oromo people. Their call was to end this marginalization (Awol Allo 2016, BBC 2016). There were also protests in the ethnic Amhara regional state. The Amharas have been asking for the return of their ethnic land that they claim is taken from them by another ethnic regional state - Tigray. Tigray politicians control influential positions in the coalition governing party, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) (BBC 2016, Mamdani 2019). Ethnic Tigray is a minority representing only 6% of the total population. Oromo ethnic group represents 34%, Amhara 27%, Somali 6.2%, Sidama 4%, Gurage 2.5%, Walayta 2 and the rest 16.3% is represented by many other smaller ethnic groups (Ethiopia population census 2007). The two major ethnic groups' demand, ethnic mobilization, and protests against the minority group in the driving seat of the coalition government is for ethnic gains (Mamdani 2019). The benefit a particular ethnic group mobilized for can be land, more political or economic inclusion, or other interests (Fredrik 1969, Gunnar 1969, Leo 1975, Van den Berghe and Pierre 1981). This is what the protests aimed at; demanding what they think their ethnic group deserves (Mamdani 2019, Gedamu 2020).

There is also a possibility of having a particular individual affecting or influencing mobilization and protestors. This is what Robert Salisbury (1969) calls the group leader or entrepreneur in ‘exchange’ theory. Jawar Mohammed can be a person in the case. Jawar is a prominent ethnic Oromo activist, media mogul turned politician, announced after returning home from long years of exile that he would participate in the coming election and has joined an ethnic opposition party (Davison 2014, AlJazeera 2019). Jawar is believed to have hundreds of thousands of followers and has been influencing the protest greatly. His joining of the conventional political competition to control a public office could mean a lot in shifting protestors’ attitudes from the streets to a ballot box.

Suzan Booyesen uses the term ‘ballot and the brick’ or ‘dual-action repertoire’ to explain her theory of how a protestor becomes a voter (2007). Due to limited forms of formal channels, citizens use both protest and ballot to influence power relations and, importantly, to get more effective delivery of basic services (Booyesen 2007). Rampedi studies South African youths who participated in the 2013 protests and also in the 2014 national election (2014). He concludes that a high proportion of young people both protested and voted.

This research aims to study the role of the election on the behavior of mobilization and protest. Did the coming of the general election affect people’s motivation for mobilization and protest? While there are many assumptions why the much-feared protest that lasted for three years stopped, the electoral process is one of them. The measures that are taken by the government in the wake of the protests tend to direct everybody’s focus on the general election. These measures include welcoming opposition political parties which were banned in Ethiopia and operating from abroad, politicians and activists who were also banned in the country, who were on self-imposed exile, or who were sentenced from long prison time to death. All these parties and

individuals directly or indirectly involve in Ethiopia's politics and their intention to run for office were clear. This brought a lot of attention to the election and this situation convinced me to choose the electoral process's effect on protestors than other assumptions. What this research does is find out whether the assumption is true. The first possibility is that all or the great extent of the interviewees confirming the assumption that the coming of the general election played a major role in their decision to stop protesting. In this case, the research concludes that the electoral process plays a major role in demobilizing protesters. The second possibility is the opposite of the first where most of the interviewees mention other reasons than the electoral process in deciding to stop their protest. This simply tells us that the role of the general election in stopping protest was minimal. The third possibility is somewhere in between the first two. Here we could find interviewees with mixed feelings about the electoral process. For instance, while they believe the coming of the general election affected their decision, they also mention other reasons, be it in different degrees, to stop their protest. This can be proof that the general election played a role in winding down the protest.

The three-year intense protests and the violence that mostly followed it shook Ethiopia to its core. Millions displaced and thousands killed in a highly ethnicized violence (Jillian Kestler-D'Amours 2018, Internal displacement monitoring center 2019, The Humanitarian data exchange 2020). Such a regular and violent protest stopped in 2018 while many were expecting the worst; the disintegration of Ethiopia into different nations along ethnic lines (Itziar 2018). Why the protests stopped? In this puzzle, this thesis searches if the general election planned to be held in 2020 played a role in demobilizing the protesters.

The current debate around elections, in the particular electoral process in the African continent, is dominated by election-related violence (Straus and Taylor 2009, Beaulieu 2014, Kuhn 2015,

Angerbrandt 2018). This thesis has the potential to develop the current debate by providing a somewhat different case of the electoral process being a drive to demobilize protestors. Unlike much electoral-related violence in Africa, this case could be able to show that elections can stop the violence. This possibility makes this research interesting enough to study. This Ethiopian case study involves not only the electoral process but also the influence of ethnic divisions on the process which is the case in many African states (Paul 2001, Michael and Mwagi 2008, Debrah 2016). As such, the result of this research could add to the literature not only in Ethiopia but also in Africa and beyond where there exist ethnic divisions. For these reasons, it is important to look for whether the general election played a role in stopping the protests.

Theoretical framework on voting and mobilization

Why people vote the way they do? Classical theories on an electoral process explain that voting involves rational calculations and critical decision-making. Here voters are perceived as rational decision-makers; who make their calculations before casting a ballot (Anthony 1957, V.O. 1964, Fiorina 1981, Ray 1996, Kwame 1998). In this regard, for example, rationality in instrumental perspective makes sense if an action affects an outcome. So the voter calculates whether to vote or not depending on cost-benefit analysis. According to Anthony, the voter calculates what she benefits if she votes for the current government or the opposition against what the voting process costs her. If the benefit outweighs the cost, the voter casts her ballot (Anthony 1957).

The ethical voter approach stands in contrast with classical instrumental rationality. A voter in instrumental rationality asks what she/he benefits from going to the polling station and cast her/his vote. The center of attention is self-benefit. The ethical voter approach sees voters not basing their decisions only, selfishly, on their interest but voters think of their fellow citizens.

Such a voter thinks maybe his vote is what is needed to either bring a 'good' candidate to the public office or not. This becomes the case especially when the stakes are low (Goodin and Roberts 1975, Colin 2003). The stakes can be, for instance, spending hours on a working day waiting in a long queue at a polling station.

Anthony Down's theory has its critics. While the utility model provides a good explanation for why people vote or abstain it fails to adequately explain voter turnout. For instance, the voting process could be costly as it involves registration, collecting information about candidates, going to the polling station, the possibility of queuing for long hours to vote (Benjamin 2004, Philip 2006). These costs, according to the critics, may discourage the voters to cast their ballots which results in low voter turnouts.

The other theory in an electoral competition is the consumption benefits of voting democracy. According to this theory, people vote because they regard it as their civic duty or moral obligation to do so (Geoffrey and Alan 2000, Kamhon and Yang 2001).

This is criticized for not explaining enough the dilemma about voter turnout. Do voters look into past elections and be influenced by them? For instance, do protesters think of past elections and their results with the coming of a new election? If so, would they be influenced by it? To answers such scenarios, recently, psychological learning theory has been referred as a better tool to explain voting behavior (Debrah 2016). According to the proponents of this theory, voters learn from past experiences and repeat satisfactory actions while avoiding the unsatisfactory ones (ibid).

Resource mobilization theory has a good potential to explain mobilization and protest. The theory bases on the rationality of participation and purpose of social movements (Waterman 1981, Pichardo 1988). According to the theory, individuals make groups and participate in these

groups for a common benefit because each individual has self-interest and reason to do so (Fireman and Gamson 1979). Olson (1965) initiated this approach with a utilitarian perspective. He explains that an individual must have a personal benefit to participating in collective behavior. There is a cost in participating in a movement; like that of personal safety. If an individual can get the reward of his/her group without participation, 'free rider' problem, he/she would not participate.

In this regard, resource mobilization theory stands against the earlier theories based on the notion that social movements are the result of emotional and non-rational choices made by individuals with common grievances (Gustave 1896, Lang and Lang 1961).

Exchange theory comes as a critique to the above theories. Exchange theory believes that while mobilization theories deal with a great extent refereeing to individuals joining groups, they forget the main actor that is the group leader, entrepreneur (Robert 1969, Nownes and Neely 1996). Instead of individuals, who are for some reason motivated, who join a group, exchange theory focuses on the leader who designs and administers the content that motivates individuals to join the group (Nownes and Neely 1996).

Expressive theory of ethnic voting can be good reasoning why voting would be about an ethnic group or party loyalty not the rational weighing of alternatives (Ferree and Horowitz 2010). According to the expressive approach, voting is a way in which voters express their allegiance to their co-ethnic individual candidate or party (ibid). This is in line with instrumentalism theory which explains voters' co-ethnic choice as a reason that the voters believe a co-ethnic candidate or party would provide a better economic and political opportunity for his/her co-ethnic group (Keefer 2010, Ichino and Nathan 2013). Horowitz, in line with expressive theory, connects ethnic mobilization, conflict, and voting in his explanation of ethnic political parties. Ethnic

conflicts introduce or bolster ethnic-based political parties. And these parties serve the interest of a particular ethnic group (Horowitz 1985: 291, 2014). While such parties serve the interests of a particular ethnic group, members of the ethnic groups vote for these parties based on their ethnic affiliation as expressed in the expressive theory. The mobilized protesters influence the creation or development of an ethnic party and they also vote for it in a show of loyalty and affirmation of identity (Horowitz 1985: 291, Ferree and Horowitz 2010, Horowitz 2014). Horowitz calls this a 'reciprocal relation between party and society' (Horowitz 1985). A reciprocal relation is more common in ethnic politics than anywhere else.

The critical questions this study examines are if the coming of a general election affected the behavior of mobilization and protest and why it did or didn't. In doing so it uses some of the above-mentioned theories to help explain the situation. Horowitz (1985, 2010, 2014) is used especially to help explain ethnic-based mobilization and election. His expressive theory explains why voters vote for candidates from their ethnic groups. His term 'reciprocal relation between party and society' expresses how ethnic mobilization helps to create ethnic-based political parties and these parties serve mainly the interest of their ethnic base.

The other major theory that helps us to understand the case in question is exchange theory (Robert 1969, Nownes and Neely 1996). Interviewees mention in many cases the role played by individuals in organizing protest and mobilization in general. The same individuals are mentioned as a reason for the protest to die down. Exchange theory explains such influence by individuals. The existing literature on mobilization, particularly mobilization theory focuses on members joining a particular group and their role and importance. This study shows on the other hand how individuals could influence a whole group of people.

This study contributes also to move the literature argument forward by showing a different image of the electoral process in Africa. Many elections in Africa are mentioned together with violence; be it before or after election violence. This study shows that this is not always the case; In fact, elections could also play as a violence demobilization factor.

Method and Research Design

This is a case study of to what extent does the existence of an electoral process changes the motivation of protestors and why. Ethiopia experienced continuous protests from 2015 – 2018 which at times turned violent (Jillian Kestler-D'Amours 2018). Because of the violence that followed the protests and the ethnic nature of the protests, thousands were killed and millions displaced (Internal displacement monitoring center 2019, The Humanitarian data exchange 2020). The protests stopped while people feared for an outbreak of a civil war (Itziar Aguirre 2018). This is when opinions started about possible reasons why the protests stopped. The general election planned for 2020 was mentioned as one of the possible reasons. As shown in the introduction and theory section, protestors, especially in ethnically divided societies, can be highly affected by an electoral process. To address these questions the researcher conducts an interview. “Interviews are an appropriate method when there is a need to collect in-depth information on people’s opinions, thoughts, experiences, and feelings” (Easwaramoorth and Zarinpoush 2006:1). With the interview, the researcher aims to bring the necessary information, from the primary source, which is not available at the moment. Other than opinions and speculation there is not yet reliable data on why the protests stopped. The method has the potential to offer if the 2020 planned general election played a role in demobilizing the violent and the long run protest. The output necessarily tells if protestors were affected by the coming

election or not. The method also enables the interviewee to answer why he has been affected by the election and to what extent. From this, it could be calculated if the electoral process affected the motivation of protestors and to what extent.

The interviewees are those who participated in at least one protest during Ethiopia's unrest years of 2015-2018. Since the research seeks to find reasons to protest and the degree of protestors' motivation, it gives little sense to interview people who didn't participate in those protests. All interviewees are male as the vast majority of protestors were men. It is also very challenging, as very few female protestors participated, to find female interviewees who participated in the protests. As such any possible gender bias in the conclusion should be noted. And most of the protests were held in the ethnic Oromo region (BBC). As a reason, I am inclined to have more interviewees from this region. Other than the above two, gender and geography, specific selections the interview didn't experience any selection choice limitation. It involved 15 people of different life backgrounds, education level, age, marital status, and so on. I came in contact with the first two interviewees through my nephew who lived in Ethiopia's Oromia region. Then I managed to get the rest of the interviewees through the first two. At times interviewees could be acquaintances but also totally different people who happen to know someone who knows them both. The interviewees participated in multiple protests through the years. Some of them were detained, beaten at the protest, or tortured at a detention center or in prison. Some of them have lost loved ones during the protest years.

In this semi-structured interview, the interviewee is only directed in a certain way if the interview goes too far from the main subject. The interview questions, listed in the appendix section, are designed not to be asked in their entirety but just to keep the interviewee in the

subject area. The interviewee is asked a core question and left mostly uninterrupted to respond freely.

The first three interviews are conducted over the phone. The rest of the interviews had to be done in person in Ethiopia's Oromia region for better quality and result of the interview. Interviewees seemed not to enjoy a long interview over the phone and I also sensed from the first few interviews that interviewees were not confident enough to talk about very sensitive subject areas. Talking to someone they do not know over the phone may have played a part. A face-to-face interview solved many of these problems. Plus, being there with the interviewees, gave me the possibility to read the interviewees' other communication gestures. I would go with the interviewee where we could sit alone and have a detailed interview. After asking a question I let the interviewee talk as far as he likes to go. When I find it necessary, I would ask the interviewee questions from the topics he mentioned which are not in my original interview questions, listed in the appendix section.

Operationalization

The data collected from the interview is divided into categories. The three categories are:

- a. Highly influenced
- b. To some degree influenced
- c. A little or no influence

In a category of highly influenced, are those interviewees who respond directly or in a clear manner that they stopped protesting because of the coming of the general election as the main reason. In the second category of to some extent influenced, are those who mention the election

as one the reasons, together with other reasons. In the last category of a little or not influenced by the electoral process are those who explicitly respond that the election is not the reason or do not mention the election at all as a reason to stop protesting.

The response to why a protestor was a- influenced, b- to some degree influenced or c- not at all influenced are categorized according to the explanation given in the theory section.

This is important for the fact that the research seeks the data to check whether mobilization and protestors' motivation were affected by the electoral process. The data on why an interviewee influenced or not influenced support or refute the theories on voting behavior and mobilization. Horowitz's (1985, 2010, 2014) expressive theory explains ethnic groups' mobilization and election as 'reciprocal relation between party and society'. The ethnic group mobilization creates ethnic political parties. These political parties serve the interest of their ethnic constituencies. As a reason, elections could mean a lot to protestors and they may wait for its coming and its result with the cessation of their protest.

The data could also serve if the second major theory of this thesis, exchange theory (Robert 1969, Nownes and Neely 1996), could explain the situation. Exchange theory emphasizes the group leader, entrepreneur. According to the theory, the leader could influence to mobilize or demobilize groups.

A note on Ethiopia's ethnic federalism

Like many African countries, Ethiopia struggles to bring a better democracy while accommodating a very ethnically diverse population. Ethiopian peoples and nations' quest for autonomy or the struggle against domination is not new. It started with the famous student movements in the 1960s. Its first advocate was the renowned student leader Walleign

Mekonnen. He raised the “question of nationalities” to challenge the dominant culture, language, leadership which he believes grew at the expense of many other cultures in Ethiopia (Walleign 1969).

Then may I conclude that in Ethiopia there is the Oromo Nation, the Tigray Nation, the Amhara Nation, the Gurage Nation, the Sidama Nation, the Wellamo [Wolayta] Nation, the Adere [Harari] Nation, and however much you may not like it the Somali Nation. This is the true picture of Ethiopia. There is of course the fake Ethiopian Nationalism advanced by the ruling class and unwillingly accepted and even propagated by innocent fellow travelers. What is this fake Nationalism? Is it not simply Amhara and to a certain extent Amhara-Tigre supremacy? Ask anybody what Ethiopian culture is? Ask anybody what the Ethiopian language is? Ask anybody what Ethiopian music is? Ask anybody what the "national dress" is? It is either Amhara or Amhara-Tigre!!

Countries use federalism, regional devolution, or even union like Tanganyika and Zanzibar to deal with the challenge of ethnic differences in their population. Ethiopia went further and adopted federalism that is explicitly based on ethnicity. According to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution, ethnic groups in the country who are termed as nations, nationalities, and peoples have the right to self-determination including the right to succession. The ethnic federalism in Ethiopia further gives the right to land, representation in federal and local institutions, and government jobs not depending on Ethiopian citizenship but on being indigenous to the particular ethnic states.

The Constitution which is made by the victorious side of Ethiopia’s civil war that ended in 1991 divided Ethiopians along ethnic lines (Mamdani 2019). The ethnic Tigray party Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) was very influential in the ruling coalition party (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front) EPRDF (ibid). The minority TPLF used the same tactic as the British in utilizing ‘indirect rule’. The assignment of the country’s land solely belonging to ethnic groups made Ethiopians see each other in ethnic terms challenging the

feeling of being an Ethiopian (Aalen 2006, Mamdani 2019). The ethnic federalism adopted in Ethiopia is problematic as it diminishes the idea of common citizenship (ibid). The overarching image of a country minimized to the degree of small states with different ethnic groups. These groups aspire and work towards their ethnic interests that intensify narrow group goals and ethnic mobilizations.

According to Aalen 2006, two criteria need to be fulfilled for Ethiopia's ethnic federalism to work. Otherwise what ethnic federalism does is bring instability. The first criterion is Ethiopia to be democratic. This means in the sense that regional governments should have the power and autonomy as expressed in the FDRE constitution. With the EPRDF government controlling everything with its ideology of centralized party organization, regional governments won't have the power and resource they need to administer themselves. The EPRDF ruling coalition showed its most undemocratic move when it imprisoned its strong opponents after the 2005 election and charged them with treason. This government could be best described as semi-authoritarian.

The second criterion is common citizenship. "Self-determination for ethnic groups is likely turned into claims of secession and finally leads to the disintegration of federal states. To prevent ethnically based self-rule from leading to parochialism and fragmentation, space must also be given to the development of an overarching identity in addition to the ethnic one" (Aalen 2006).

Protestors who are influenced by the electoral process

There was no mention of the general election 2020 when the protest began in 2015 (Jillian Kestler-D'Amours 2018, The Guardian 2018, Human Rights Watch 2019). But the protest continued up until 2018 where the election became one of the talking points. In this research

seeking, if the coming of the general election played a role in stopping the three-year running protest, some of the interviewees confirm it did. They respond that the election would give them the chance to elect who they believe would work for their interest. As such it was not that meaningful to continue to protest. They welcome the reforms taken by the new administration that came to power in 2018 which include appointing a new prime minister from the biggest ethnic group, releasing thousands of political prisoners, suspension of the controversial city plan and terrorism law, inviting self-exiled political parties and politicians and pardoning activists and politicians who were sentenced from the death penalty to long years in prison while in absentia. The interviewees acknowledge these changes and feel hopeful to bring the important changes they want with their vote.

The protestors in this category seem to have a good understanding of the country's politics. They know the protest organizers, their agenda, who belong to which political party, what kinds of political parties there are, at least in their regional state of Oromia, advocate their agenda, what they agree and do not agree with the policies of these ethnic parties and so on. One of my interviewees who was a neighborhood-level protest organizer says 'The main actors behind the protest and political change were Jawar Mohammed from abroad and Lemma Megersa¹ from within the country'. When I ask will you vote in the coming general election? These are the interviewees who response 'of course, I will, I have to or I will not miss it'. Even though Ethiopia had very questionable elections about their freeness and fairness in the past, still these interviewees believe elections are very important to have. These are also people who would not hesitate to go out on the streets to protest if the coming election is anyway handled unfairly against them; 'If the election is not held soon, I do not doubt that the stopped protests will

¹ Lemma Megersa was the ministry of defense and president of the regional state of Oromia. Jawar Mohammed was an ethnic Oromo activist who latter founded Oromia Media Network and turned ethnic politician.

continue and the destruction will be even worse. If you go to the town of Ambo, you could see some signs of it. If it is not for the huge number of police and military presence there, there would have started a protest there. People are being silenced with force. If a free and fair election is held, it will stop the protest permanently’.

One of the major topics that connected the reform, the pardon, political parties, and politicians is the returning of the well-known political party and ‘liberation fighters’ Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in 2018. OLF used the reform and pardon for its politicians to return home from exile. While its base is far from the capital Addis Ababa, it was yet welcomed by tens of thousands of its supporters in the city showing the length of its popularity (AP 2018, Reuters 2018). In ethnically divided Ethiopia it is difficult to find non-ethnic-based political parties running for office in ethnic regional states. Especially in the regional state of Oromia where political parties are solely ethnic-based.

The interviewees mentioned their vote being stolen in the election of 2015 because, as an interviewee says ‘we know who we cast our votes for and the governing party said it has won 100 % of the vote’. The contest is highly along ethnic lines and voters believe parties like that of OLF would serve their interest better.

This is supported by expressive theory. People vote for a candidate from their co-ethnic group without rationally weighing alternatives. This is where voters show their loyalty to their ethnic political party (Ferree and Horowitz 2010). Instrumentalism theory adds an explanation to the expressive theory that voters believe co-ethnic candidates or parties would provide a better economic and political opportunity for his/hers co-ethnic groups (Keefer 2010, Ichino and Nathan 2013). Horowitz explains in much detail the connection between ethnic mobilization, conflict, and voting. Horowitz calls some of my interviewees’ choice as a ‘reciprocal relation

between party and society' (Horowitz 1985). A reciprocal relation is more common in ethnic politics than anywhere else. All my interviewees participated in at least one ethnic-centered protest. According to Horowitz the act of ethnic mobilization helps to create and develop ethnic parties. Ethnic political parties serve the interests of a particular ethnic group and the ethnic-based protestors vote for such parties in a show of their loyalty and affirmation of identity (Horowitz 1985: 291, Ferree and Horowitz 2010, Horowitz 2014). Ethnic conflicts have the same effect as mobilized ethnic groups in creating ethnic political parties. Some of my interviewees believe with high certainty that these ethnic political parties will serve first and for most their interest; the interest of ethnic voters. According to my interviewees and media, Jawar Mohammed made his name as an ethnic activist while in exile (Davison 2014, AlJazeera 2019). He turned to a politician and joined a political party after returning to his home country. Now his ethnic political party is expected to win a lot of votes from its ethnic base.

It is clear here how and why ethnic Oromo protesters are influenced by the coming general election. First, their grievance is ethnic-based because they believe they are politically and economically marginalized because of their ethnicity. Second, ethnic Oromo political parties, activists, and politicians are back home from exile and made their political intentions clear to run for office in the coming general election. The prospect of bringing their candidates to public office made the protestors in this first category more enthusiastic for the election and less interested in the protest.

In the second category of interviewees are those who are influenced by the electoral process to a lesser degree compared to the first category. These are one-time protestors who think, for instance, the reform taken by the government as a result of the protests is meaningful even though not enough; 'A lot of people of ethnic Oromo still go to prison for political reasons. For

example, there are a lot of prisoners in this municipality prison. They are held in horrific condition too. More than 80 prisoners are being kept in a 3 by 4-meter room'. So this group of interviewees, while having some reservations, would like to exercise their newly respected rights like that of the right of speech and wait for the election to vote for their candidate. As one interviewee has put it 'we would not have this interview before the reform because we would not be confident enough for our security; the police would simply arrest us for talking politics'. As the reform is taken as a way forward, these interviewees are willing to give time to the new administration while waiting for the 2020 election. The reason why they stopped protesting is not only because of the coming of the general election. The election is just one of the reasons. This group shares political party choice with the group who are highly influenced by the election to stop their protest. They are fond of ethnic political parties that helped them to organize, be it covertly or overtly, during years of protests. There seems to be little doubt about their political party choice or candidate. They protested against ethnic-centered marginalization (Awol Allo 2016, BBC 2016). They organized ethnically, helped by, and help to create ethnic political parties. Horowitz's explanation of 'reciprocal relation between party and society' fits the situation as these protestors and later voters vote for their co-ethnic candidates and parties (Horowitz 1985).

There is also mention of, in this category of interviewees, the role of influential politicians as organizers. One particular of such individuals is Jawar Mohammed. 'The main actors behind the protest and political change are Jawar Mohammed from abroad and Lemma Megersa from within the country. They have put their lives in danger for their people'. A well-known ethnic activist who later turned to a media mogul and ethnic politician, Jawar is believed to be famous and powerful enough to challenge the sitting prime minister for the public office come the

general election (Davison 2014, AlJazeera 2019). Jawar plays here in two aspects in the motivation of protestors and voters. First, he is not calling for protests or organize protestors as he used to be. As a result, his followers stay away from protesting. The second impact of Jawar on protestors and voters is that he has joined an ethnic political party to run for public office. This brings the election to center stage in the minds of protestors. Interviewees, who say the reason why they stopped protesting is the lack of organizers, mention examples like Jawar Mohammed. The same interviewees support Oromo People's Congress (OPC) party, the party that he has joined.

Exchange theory explains such types of group leaders or entrepreneurs (Robert 1969, Nownes and Neely 1996). In contrast with mobilization theories that focus on individuals who join ethnic groups, exchange theory emphasizes the group leader, like that of, Jawar who influences many followers and shapes their behavior.

Interviewees in this category, while having their reservations, cannot resist the influence of the election on their behavior. First, many low-level or neighborhood-level organizers are giving more emphasis to the election. Second, their political struggle idol like that of Jawar Mohammed is running for public office. As a result, while skeptical about the election, can't help but stop the protest and wait for the general election. This makes the total number of protestors higher who want to give the election a priority than the protest.

Protestors who are not influenced by the electoral process

In this category fell the interviewees who did not mention the general election as a reason to stop protesting while mentioning other reasons and those who said clearly the election was not their reason to stop their protest. One reason for not protesting anymore is the fear of measures taken

by the police. 'Look what is happening in the town of Ambo. There are probably as many policemen and military men as the residents there. The people are ready to protest but they are silenced with the use of force'. Interviewees fear being beaten, imprisoned and the chance of being killed by the police if found protesting. Such decisions of individuals stand against theories that theorize social movements are the result of emotional and non-rational choices made by individuals with common grievances (Gustave 1896, Lang and Lang 1961). 'The disadvantage of the protests we had outweighs the advantages. I lost a lot. So I do not want to protest anymore. You would not believe it if I show you the scars on my body. It's the result of torture. I do not want to protest. I just want to live peacefully like everybody else'. These interviewees are calculating their safety and staying away from the protest as a result. Resource mobilization theory explains this behavior based on the rationality of participation and purpose of social movements (Waterman 1981, Pichardo 1988). The individuals who make up groups have their interests in mind while forming and participating in these groups. This perspective is influenced by a utilitarian approach that believes that a person must have a personal benefit participating in groups (Olson 1965). There is a cost involved in participating in a collective behavior like that of safety. If the cost outweighs the benefit, the individual stays away; stays away from protesting in this case.

The other reason mentioned by the interviewees for not protesting anymore is the lack of protest organizers who were present in the earlier protests. Again the name Jawar Mohammed mentioned here. It is not a surprise as he was reportedly the main ethnic activist and a secret organizer of many of the protests that happened between 2015 and 2018 (Davison 2014, AlJazeera 2019). 'We used to get messages on Facebook, Whatsapp group or from friends. Some local individuals communicate about mobilization between us and leaders in the exile. So when

they tell us to go out to protest, we protest. They also prepare the banners or tell us to prepare and what to write on the banners. Now we don't have those guys. They are not doing these things. The role of organizers points us back to the explanation we used for group leaders or entrepreneurs in exchange theory (Robert 1969, Nownes and Neely 1996). Exchange theory acknowledges the role played by organizers and group leaders in shaping the behavior of collective action and the participants.

It seems the influence of the election even reached the interviewees in this category who say the reason for stopping their protest was not the election. It can be easily seen from their reasoning that one of the major reasons this time was not having the low level or neighborhood level protest organizers as before. As we have seen above in the first category these organizers are prioritizing the coming general election over the protests. And this influenced protestors who are not interested in the election. The same process can be seen in the case of Jawar Mohammed. As an individual with many followers, as the main driver of the protest, while he was in exile, his choice to run for public office in the coming election affected those who are not interested in the electoral process. The influence of the general election on the behavior of protestors is long and it is touching even those who do not want to have anything with it. The electoral process has influenced almost all of my interviewees directly or indirectly.

Conclusion

This thesis has set out to research if the planned Ethiopian general election of 2020 played any role in stopping the protest that has been going on from 2015-2018; at times with a devastating consequence. The research used interviews to collect data. The interviewees are conducted in the Oromia regional state where most of the protests happened. All the interviewees have participated in at least one of those protests between 2015-2018.

The research has revealed three categories of protestors who have different reasons to stop the protest. The first category is highly influenced by the planned election. These protestors believe there is a relatively better democracy now in the country to participate in the economy, social and political institutions. They believe the recent reform that followed the protest brought about some good changes. These interviewees have already in their mind which party to choose in the coming general election.

The second category is the group of interviewees who believe the election played a role in their decision to stop protesting together with other reasons. Interviewees in this group mention the factor of the reform that is taken by the government and the protest organizers joining the mainstream political parties as reasons, in addition to the election, to stop protesting.

In the third category are those who do not mention the election as a reason for them to stop the protest. Or these are interviewees who say clearly the election didn't play a role in their decision. They mentioned the fear of police measures and the lack of protest organizers.

This research shows that a significant number of interviewees believe the electoral process in general, the 2020 planned Ethiopian general election in particular, has played a role, directly or indirectly, in their decision to stop their protest. It can be seen also that even those interviewees who say the electoral process didn't play a role in their decision to stop protesting are affected by

it. The proof is found in their reasoning why they are not protesting anymore. The lack of protest organizers and influential individuals is part of their answer. As seen in the first category of interviewees who say the election is the reason why they stopped protesting, many were protest organizers at the grass-root or neighborhood level. A huge individual figure in the protest like that of Jawar Mohammed also came back from exile and joined a political party to run for public office in the coming election. People who still want to protest lost such individuals to the election.

Horowitz's (1985, 2010, 2014) expressive theory together with exchange theory (Robert 1969, Nownes and Neely 1996) used here to explain mobilization behaviors. Horowitz explains how mobilization creates ethnic political parties and these parties, in turn, serve the interest of their ethnic voters. This trade-off calls Horowitz a 'reciprocal relation between party and society'. We see in this research how the Oromo ethnic group mobilized to protest against political and economical marginalization. With the focus on the coming general election, the mobilization easily transformed to ethnic political parties. The protestors, protest organizers, and once influential activists joined ethnic political parties to serve their interests through the electoral process.

Expressive theory (Robert 1969, Nownes and Neely 1996) helps here to explain the group leader's role in shaping the behavior of protestors and mobilization in general. Jawar Mohammed used his influence to mobilize protestors while he was in exile. He used the same influence, maybe unknowingly, to demobilize the protestors when he returned from exile and joined a political party to run for public office. Some grass-roots protest organizers prioritizing the electoral process over the protest also affected the mobilization and protestors.

The findings have the potential to be a good input for studies in the continent of Africa that are focused on the electoral process. In sharp contrast to much of the literature painting a grim picture since many election time-related studies in Africa are filled with violence. This research showed that the case could be different in a way that the prospect of a general election could bring a violent protest to a halt; at least in certain cases.

The research could also be a good insight for the case study country, Ethiopia, that a lot is at stake in connection with the election. There are a lot of hopeful youngsters who participated in a violent protest who are waiting to have a free and fair election. If anything goes wrong concerning such an anticipated election, it could bring back those days of violent protest and even more.

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Appendix

- **To explore personal background about the interviewee**
 - What do you do? Are you a student, working or else ...?
 - How old are you?
 - What's your educational level?
 - Marital status?
- **To explore the motivation behind the interviewee participation in the protest**
 - How many times have you gone out to protest in the recent political unrest?
 - Do you have an interest in politics? Like, participate in political debates, be a member of a political party, volunteering for a political candidate during election seasons...
 - How important is ethnicity to you? For example, Some people in Ethiopia bring their group identity before their citizenship and say, for instance, 'I am an Oromo first', they participate in their cultural occasions and ceremonies, dress culturally, speak their local language instead of the official language, ... do you share such qualities?
 - What do you think about ethnicity in Ethiopian politics? In recent years ethnicity took a very bad turn becoming the source of conflict. Because of their ethnic identity, people lost their life, their family and property. In the face of this, do you think Ethiopians would be better off without ethnic mobilization? Is ethnic identity doing more bad than good?
 - Do you think you are excluded from state resources because of your ethnic identity?
 - Do you think the ethnic group that you are from deserves more state resources including political power?
 - What are the things you want to change?
 - What motivated you to go out in protest?

- Have you ever been arrested or mistreated for political reasons?
- Do you have any other reason you haven't mention so far?
- **To explore attitudes around the electoral process**
 - Do you vote?
 - What do you think about elections in general? In Ethiopia's history, there has never been a power transfer following a general election. Either there was no election at all, or no real competition to the incumbent leader, or, in the case of election 2005 where there was a real competitor, the government used its power to continue governing. And now more than ever election times are when we see deeper ethnic identity divisions. While this is the case do you think the election would bring change, a change what people like you want?
 - How important is the election to you? Do you think your vote matter, count, bring a change?
- **To explore if the interviewee achieved what he wanted from the protest**
 - How did it go with the protest in general? What's your memory of it when you think about it now?
 - Have you suffer in any way or lost anything because of it?
 - Do you know someone close to you who suffered because of the protest?
 - Have you benefited anything because of it?
 - Do you know anybody close to you who benefited from the protests?
 - Are you happy with your participation?
 - Do you think you would do it again for the same reasons?

- After considering the loss and gains how do you label the protests; Successful, failure, or something in between?
- **To explore the motivation why the protest stopped**
- Has your perception changed in any way because of the protests? You would probably have reasons to protest and after seeing what happened during the protest you might have a different feeling about the whole ethnic mobilization.
- Do you believe the demands of the protesters have been met?
- Do you fear what the police, security forces, or the military might do if you go out to protest again?
- Has your life changed in any meaningful way because of the protest?
- Do you have good hopes about the issues raised in the protests?
- Why do you think the protest stopped? I am assuming it has stopped because it has been some time now since we have seen those kinds of protests. But if you think it is just some sort of big pause, I would accept that and please if you can tell me the reason for the pause?
- Do you like to add anything on issues we have discussed so far or beyond those issues?