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The Administrative Autonomy of Local Governments in the Southern Region of Ethiopia: Case Study of the Hadiya and Kambata Tambro Zone Administrations

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The aim of decentralisation is to improve service delivery and to bring administration closer to the community in the developing countries in general; particularly in Ethiopia, the constitutional mandate of local governments is to provide effective public services to their citizens. Consequently, the effectiveness of local governments depends on the extent of autonomy the constitution grants them to provide effective services. Therefore, the main objective of the study is to assess the extent of local government administrative autonomy in southern Ethiopia. This study employed a quantitative research approach; we collected data by distributing a questionnaire to local government officials. The findings identify the significant gap between local government administrative autonomy and enshrined federal and regional legal frameworks in practice in Ethiopia. Therefore, the major findings revealed in this study are upper-level government interference, i.e. federal, regional, or zonal administration interference; ambiguous legal mandates; limited human resources autonomy; and a persistent bureaucratic system that consistently undermines the service delivery of local governments in Ethiopia. The study suggests that granting meaningful administrative autonomy for local governments improves service delivery to the community, particularly creating a convenient environment for them to exercise constitutional mandates and revising different local government-related legal issues, such as enhancing responsiveness to local needs. To conclude, the study's practical policy recommendation is to strengthen local governance effectiveness in southern Ethiopia.

Keywords: administration autonomy, local government, decentralisation, Ethiopia, decision-making powers

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Introduction

In many African countries, significant changes are taking place to reposition existing governance structures for efficient and effective service delivery. The most recent arguments in favour of decentralisation centre on the delivery of services in an effective manner. Many forms of decentralisation reforms have been recognised in the literature, encompassing political, administrative and financial dimensions, as well as types of decentralisation such as deconcentration, delegation and devolution. Likewise, the execution of these changes has consistently been partial, contingent upon the political circumstances of each country, and their implementation has been both selective and imperfect. The need for multi-party elections and local government reforms is central to Africa's emerging governance structure. Furthermore, as defined by other scholars, decentralisation refers to the further devolution of power within various states, provinces, districts, or urban areas. Therefore, more than 70 countries over the past few decades have actively engaged in political and administrative reforms aimed at decentralisation and municipal governments, many of them in parts of the world where elected governments were the only exception recently, such as in regions transitioning from authoritarian regimes to democratic governance. Evidence indicates that roughly 60% of decentralisation failures in emerging nations arise from insufficient local ability rather than defective policy design. This capacity gap manifests across three critical dimensions, each creating distinct governance. In some other countries, especially in third world countries, including Ethiopia, however, the political will to implement strong decentralisation measures lags behind the promulgation of constitutional amendments aimed at devolving government power to the local levels, which can hinder local governance and limit the effectiveness of public services in those countries.[2] This lack of political commitment often results in inadequate resource allocation and insufficient training for local officials, further exacerbating the challenges faced by local governance. A notable discrepancy exists in the definition of administrative discretion. This study largely examines decentralisation and administrative discretion, notwithstanding the substantial research on this subject. Administrative discretion denotes a public official's capacity to select from various potential actions and inactions.[3] Tummers and Bekkers (2014) define discretion as the disproportionate distribution of resources during policy execution and the ability to make independent decisions. A public entity's expanded latitude in making judgments connects discretion from a broad perspective. A micro perspective, by contrast, concentrates on the choices made by field workers on the front lines or street levels. One perspective asserts that administrative discretion empowers public servants to respond to residents' needs.[4] Administrative autonomy empowers local governments to alter outcomes and either reward or penalise consumers. This signifies

[2] Sisk 2001.
[3] Hupe–Hill 2007.
[4] Sowa – Coleman Selden 2003; Naqvi et al. 2024.

that public authorities are required to utilise their discretion in the execution of their responsibilities. Therefore, this article examines the major objective of the extent of local governments' administrative autonomy in Ethiopia. Particularly in the areas of human resources policy, procurement, employment, and autonomy to contract out services. Even though Article 50(4) of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's (hereinafter: FDRE) Constitution 1995 mandates that adequate powers be transferred to lower levels of government, this requirement is not always fulfilled. The transfer of "adequate powers" or the provision of a "full measure of self-government" requires the simultaneous transfer of adequate financial, political, legal, and administrative autonomy and decision-making powers for local governments to be taken seriously. In practice, however, control of the budgets and other forms of autonomy lies with the federal and regional levels. Governments in the developing world are also delegating management duties and authority from the central government to various local entities under the umbrella of "decentralisation".[5] These changes aim to foster more equitable and effective local management and development by increasing public participation. The dissolved entities are changing as a result of decentralisation across Africa. Thus, most decentralisation efforts have both explicit and implicit objectives. Those objectives that are likely to appeal to the general public, such as local empowerment and administrative efficiency, are generally explicitly stated, while less popular goals, such as strengthening central control and "passing the buck", are unlikely to be voiced.[6] Nevertheless, decentralisation has not yielded sufficient results in establishing a locally autonomous, responsive, transparent, accountable, efficient and participatory local government, which has the capability of addressing the problem of the country being constantly humiliated due to a lack of good governance,[7] leading to ongoing issues such as corruption, inadequate public services, and citizen disillusionment with the political system.

Thus, in most federal systems like Ethiopia, as it says under Article 52(1) of the 1995 FDRE Constitution, all powers not given expressly to the Federal Government alone, or concurrently to the Federal Government and the States are reserved to the States. Article 43, Section 2 explains that citizens have the right to participate in national development and in particular to be consulted with respect to policies and projects affecting their community. The regional government constitutions determine the powers and responsibilities of local governments that fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of the region. The power of the federal government primarily involves exclusive and concurrent powers, which do not extend to local governments. Local governments under such arrangements derive their power from the Constitution, which supposedly guarantees their powers. As far as fiscal autonomy is concerned, the regional constitution provides inadequate taxing power and a lack of adequate decision-making to woredas except by

[5] Dillinger 1994: 8; Crook–Manor 1998; UNCDF 2000: 5–11; World Bank 2000; Agrawal–Ribot 1999; Ribot et al. 2010.
[6] Conyers 1975; 2002.
[7] Ayenew 2002.

authorising woredas to collect rural land use and agricultural income tax, the rate of which is determined by the regional states.

Article 50(4) of the FDRE Constitution 1995 allows each regional state to decide on its local government structure. However, the regional government must adhere to the obligation of establishing an autonomous local government, which limits its authority to determine its local government structure (FDRE 1995).

Thus, local governments are largely dependent on the regional grant for discharging their responsibilities as far as fiscal decentralisation is concerned. Decentralised systems are those in which federal or regional entities play a lesser role in any or all of these dimensions, i.e. political, administrative and fiscal dimensions. In such systems, central governments possess a smaller share of fiscal resources, grant more administrative autonomy, and cede a higher degree of responsibility for political functions. So, a local government is merely an administrative extension of the central government without discretionary powers. Therefore, local governments in Ethiopia have no secure and adequate source of funding to carry out their responsibilities. So, they rely on transfer payments from federal or regional governments.

The process of ensuring democratisation and good governance under a decentralised system in southern Ethiopia, particularly within the Kambata Tembaro Zone and Hadiya Zone administrations, is ongoing. Thus, this study area is far from desirable, which is undermined by a lack of appropriate participation in the decision-making process, lack of adequate autonomy in mobilising, and inefficient use of resources. There is some form of local government in place in every single country in Africa. The autonomy and functioning of the local government are under question, nevertheless. Despite this, there are very few studies in Ethiopia on the challenges and prospects of local government autonomy. The majority of studies that are currently available also focus on the decentralisation process in specific areas as well as the broader federalism structure and fiscal decentralisation. Therefore, the aim of this study is to address these and other gaps suggested by different scholars, researchers and studies.

To make clear the structure of government in Ethiopia, regional government is the immediate layer under the federal government, zonal administration is below regional states, and above the elected district level are administrative units called zones, and under the zonal administration also there are different woredas/districts and municipalities/town administrations found established by regional governments, and the kebele administration is the lowest unit of local government in Ethiopia. Therefore, based on the findings, this study recommends specific measures to enhance effective governance by ensuring sufficient autonomy in administrative autonomy functions. The listed constraints have hindered local governments from fulfilling their constitutionally mandated functions. So, by considering all the above points, the researcher firmly believes in the need to research this area. This study is expected to present some valuable approaches and concepts that may explain the occurrence. The research question of this study is to what extent does local government enjoy administrative autonomy in two zones of

southern Ethiopia? And the objective of this study is to assess the extent of local government administrative autonomy in the southern region of Ethiopia.

Literature review

There is a wealth of literature available on the topic of decentralisation. Decentralisation can be conceptualised as the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and resource raising and allocation from the central government and its agencies to 1. field units of central government ministries or agencies; 2. subordinate units or levels of government; 3. semiautonomous public authorities or corporations; 4. areawide, regional, or functional authorities; and 5. non-governmental private or voluntary organisations.[8] Decentralisation is broad, its parts are many, and as a consequence, definitions and classifications are necessary. Decentralisation can be defined as the devolution by the central government of certain functions, with all of the administrative, political and economic characteristics that this entails, to local governments that are independent from the centre within a constitutionally determined geographic and functional domain.[9] Decentralisation tends to fail under four principal conditions. First, when implemented without corresponding fiscal autonomy, it creates what Rodden (2006) terms "unfunded mandates", a situation where subnational governments inherit responsibilities without adequate revenue sources, as occurred in Indonesia's early decentralisation phase where districts received 16% more functions but only 5% additional funding.[10]

Second, in contexts of weak local administrative capacity, where subnational governments lack the technical expertise needed to manage devolved functions, Uganda's health decentralisation serves as evidence, having initially reduced immunisation rates by 18% in poorly prepared districts.[11] Third, when political decentralisation outpaces accountability mechanisms, enabling elite capture, a phenomenon quantified in India, where villages with higher land inequality diverted 30% of anti-poverty funds to wealthy households.[12] Fourth, in policy areas that require strong coordination, decentralisation can create destructive competition, as evidenced by China's environmental decentralisation, which has led to 22% higher pollution in border regions due to regulatory arbitrage.[13] This situation emphasises the necessity of centralised policies to effectively manage environmental standards and prevent such negative outcomes.

8 Oikonomou 2020; Rondinelli et al. 1983.
9 Faguet 2004.
10 Hofman–Kaiser 2004; Cheema–Rondinelli 2007; Rondinelli et al. 1983.
11 Nabyonga-Orem et al. 2014; Chen et al. 2021.
12 Besley et al. 2012.
13 Cai et al. 2016.

Theoretical considerations of administrative autonomy of local governments

Administrative decentralisation emphasises the delegation of implementation responsibilities to either deconcentrated field offices or designated local administrators.[14] Various scholars define administrative decentralisation as the amount to which lower entities possess autonomy from a central authority and the degree to which this autonomy is contingent upon the capabilities of the subordinate organisation. Kaufmann et al. (2010) delineate these capacities using metrics such as "Government Efficiency (GE)", "Rule of Law (RW)" and "Control of Corruption (CC)". These indicators include the quality of public service delivery, the effectiveness of the bureaucracy, the resilience to political pressures of the civil service, and the government's dedication to policies.[15] Terms like "deconcentration", "delegation" and "devolution" are often employed to describe this spectrum.[16] This contradiction engenders intrinsic tensions as well as potential synergies that influence the efficacy of decentralisation initiatives in various circumstances.[17] Local governments require administrative autonomy to deliver services with flexibility and to be able to respond to local preferences. Administrative autonomy is the ability of a local government to regulate its staff, implement national standards for procurement, and formulate and enforce regulations.[18] For local governments to properly address local demands, they must be given administrative autonomy. Administrative arguments focus on the administrative effects of granting local jurisdictions autonomy from central control. This autonomy is constituted by general policymaking authority and personnel control, as well as control over public finances. The administrative aspect deals with the decentralisation of local government employees, their integration into local councils free from ministerial subordination, and the administrative reorganisation of local governments. Decentralisation of management of personnel enables local governments to hire, promote, develop and punish their own employees. Additionally, each local government reviews its organisation and duties to ensure that they correspond to the requirements and circumstances of the territories under their control. This is a change from the current setup, where all local governments have uniform structures and functions.[19]

Thus, it is clear that policymakers, decision-makers, and development partners in many developed and developing countries are increasingly embracing decentralisation, particularly administrative decentralisation, as a strategy for addressing a variety of critical governmental needs and meeting citizens' demands. Among these are increased transparency and accountability, as well as more effective and efficient production and delivery of quality public goods and services to the populace. It involves a more moderate

14 Rondinelli 1981.
15 Kaufmann et al. 2010; Kaufmann–Kraay 2008.
16 Rondinelli et al. 1983; Rondinelli 1990; Cheema–Rondinelli 2007; Park et al. 2023; Rondinelli–Nellis 1986.
17 Mahamoud Abdillahi 2025; Rondinelli–Nellis 1986.
18 Yilmaz–Varsha 2008.
19 Cheema–Rondinelli 2007; Kasim–Agbola 2017; Rondinelli et al. 1983; Rondinelli–Nellis 1986.

method of restructuring intergovernmental relationships. In this case, elected local councils do not receive autonomous decision-making competencies over the transferred functions. Although the local authorities can decide on the organisation and processes of execution, they function as "agents of the state" with respect to these policies. They continue to be subject to strict supervision and control of the state. Administration is seen as deconcentration and is regarded as an intermediary between centralised and decentralised organisations, being characterised by some independence of the local bodies, at the forefront of which there are local officials who are appointed by the central bodies. Unfortunately, as of today's available analytical frameworks, policies and guidelines on administrative decentralisation are not very much supporting the design of strategies and reforms aimed at promoting the principles of administrative decentralisation,[20] which may hinder effective governance and local autonomy in various regions, particularly in areas where local governments lack the necessary resources and authority to implement their policies effectively. Furthermore, various researchers measure the administrative autonomy of local government using different indicators. For instance, according to other scholars, the ability of local governments to hire and dismiss their own civil servants is frequently interpreted as a necessary condition for local government administrative autonomy, or the distribution of manpower across public administration can be used to measure the degree of administrative autonomy of local governments.[21]

Local governments need to be endowed with administrative autonomy to be able to respond to local needs effectively. In the administrative autonomy aspect,[22] local governments must have authority in four major areas of local public administration to be able to play a relevant role in local government administration and decision-making on local matters. Therefore, these major components include:

1. implementation of new procedures and enforcement of plans and regulations
2. administration and management of local government finances and procurements
3. local government personnel administration
4. efficient and equitable administration of local services

The aforementioned administrative autonomy-related areas are explained in detail accordingly.

Implementation of new procedures and enforcement of plans and regulations

As part of administrative decentralisation and autonomy, local governments need a minimum set of powers and capacities to initiate local laws and regulations on issues

[20] Fye 2016; Kuhlmann–Wayenberg 2016.
[21] Do Vale 2015; Malito 2015.
[22] Boex–Yilmaz 2010.

affecting their jurisdiction. In most circumstances, local governments are more effective managers of local physical space than regional or central government officials because local officials are better informed about local conditions and are better able to ascertain and aggregate their constituents' preferences. Local powers in this sphere usually cover local economic development, land use planning and management, zoning and construction permitting, and some aspects of public safety, such as traffic control.

Administration and management of local government finances and procurements

In this case, local governments should be granted the authority to manage their own finances and to contract and procure in order to effectively carry out administrative tasks.

Requiring local governments to manage their finances through the national treasury often imposes considerable constraints on local decision-making. Likewise, national procurement regulations often impose ceilings and restrictions on the ability of local authorities to procure capital goods. Procurement contracts can take many forms, including service or management contracts, leases, concessions, joint ventures and full or partial ownership arrangements. The ability of local governments to enter into these arrangements generally requires some degree of flexibility in national procurement laws and regulations. When the ability of local jurisdictions to procure capital infrastructure or engage in contracts is limited, procurement often has to be centred on behalf of the local government, which results in weaker oversight and accountability.

Local government personnel administration

Local public servants are a crucial element in bringing government closer to the people, as they are literally the public face of the local government. Local public servants include local administrators and garbage collectors but often also include teachers, local health workers, agriculture extension specialists, and so on. Local government political and administrative leadership must have some measure of control over local public employment decisions and human resource management; otherwise, they cannot exercise even the most basic control over the administration and delivery of local public services. Local government discretion over local human resource management and employment policies should ideally cover budget transparency (paying staff from one's own budget), establishment control (controlling staff numbers and authority to remove surplus staff), pay policy autonomy (setting overall wage rates as well as local hardship and remote allowances), recruitment autonomy (recognition as formal employer), career management control (vertical and horizontal mobility, including transfers to other

units within the local government system), and performance management (directing and supervising activities and tasks, conducting evaluations, and exercising the ability to discipline and dismiss). In most developing and transition countries, however, the central government continues to play a strong role over all aspects of local public service management.

Efficient and equitable administration of local services

The local ability to regulate and manage the delivery of local public services typically extends to some aspects of locally delivered national public services, such as public health, education, social protection and environmental protection. Citizens would face the inefficiencies of one-size-fits-all centralisation without local officials' flexibility in administering local government services. It should be noted, however, that in the local delivery of national public services, most regulatory authorities, such as the determination of school curricula, treatment guidelines for local health facilities, and similar sectoral policies and operational processes, remain at the central level.

Study methodology

This study aims to assess the administrative autonomy of local governments in southern Ethiopia, particularly in two zone administrations. To achieve its objectives and address the research question, the author adopted various research methodologies that align with the topic's nature. As a result, to answer the research questions, this methodology encompasses research design, research approaches, types and sources of data, sampling techniques, sample size and data analysis methods.

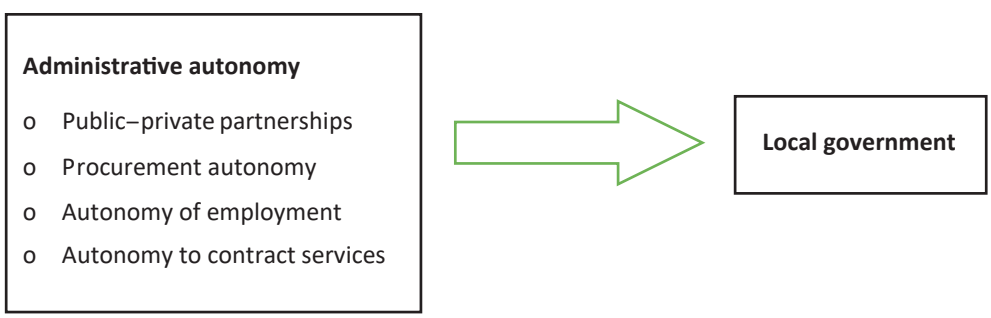


Figure 1: Conceptual framework
Source: compiled by the author

A quantitative research design was used to link the purpose and questions to the processes for empirical data collection and data analysis to make conclusions drawn from the data.[23]

Sample size determination

Thus, the sample size of the study was determined by adopting a sample size determining formula. Totally, there are 2,800 heads of Woreda sector offices in the regional government of southern nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia. Therefore, a Yamane formula was employed to determine the sample size of this study.

$$\mathrm{n} = \frac{N}{1+N\,(e)^2}$$

where *n* is the sample, *N* is the total population size, and *e* is the level of precision. When this formula is applied for the above sample

$$\frac{2800}{1 + 2800\,(0.05)^2} = 350$$

However, 256 were included in the worker's standing committee members and heads of sector departments as respondents.

Methods of data analysis

The data were collected using a quantitative method, processed and presented in order to answer research questions and meet the study's objectives.

Data that was collected through the questionnaire was fed into SPSS version 27 for further analysis. The study does not require complex and inferential statistical analysis due to the nature of the objectives. The objectives need only simple statistics, which can be easily addressed through mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, graphs, charts and diagrams. Therefore, descriptive statistics were employed in the quantitative part. This is made possible by quantitative analysis tools such as graphs, charts and statistics, which allow us to explore, present, explain and analyse linkages and patterns in our data.[24]

[23] Ponelis 2015.
[24] Saunders et al. 2009.

Ethical consideration

In addition to the importance of selecting an appropriate methodology and methods, ethical considerations in conducting research are a crucial issue. But it is vital to consider the basic ethical issues that arise when people participate in research. Therefore, the following guidelines were put in place during the research period:

1. Respect for participants: The dignity and well-being of the participants were always protected. Therefore, we avoided any behaviour that could harm participants physically and emotionally.
2. Confidentiality: The research data were kept confidential throughout the study, and the researcher obtained the participants' permission to use their real names in the research report.
3. Privacy: Participants should have the right to privacy, and their personal information were protected from unauthorised access.
4. Data handling: As researchers, we handled collected data from different sources in a responsible and ethical manner.
5. Result.

Demographic profile of the local government respondents

Among the 256 participants, the predominant group consisted of 217 males, accounting for 85.4%. Table 1 below indicates that 37 (14.6%) respondents identified as female, whereas 217 (84.8%) identified as male. The observed gender discrepancies indicate a possible imbalance in the demographic composition of the study area, which may affect the generalisability of the findings or conclusions derived from it.

Understanding the reasons behind this gender disparity could be critical for ensuring the inclusiveness and representativeness of the study results and implications. The respondents predominantly held a BA degree, 159 (62.1%), followed by a master's degree, 91 (35%). A small proportion of respondents (2.3%) reported having a diploma. The majority of the respondents held at least a bachelor's degree, with 62.1% reporting having achieved this level of education. Furthermore, 35.5% of the respondents reported having obtained a master's degree, indicating a significant portion of the sample had pursued higher education beyond the undergraduate level. Only a small proportion of the respondents indicated having a diploma as their highest educational qualification. These results suggest a relatively high level of educational attainment among the surveyed population, with an obvious emphasis on bachelor's and master's degrees.

According to Table 2 below, it is evident that the local government possesses a moderate level of local government autonomy in certain areas, namely the ability to contract out services and discharge office employees without guidance from the regional government. The mean scores of 2.9648 and 3.0078, respectively, reflect a relatively higher level than other aspects. However, in terms of autonomy to hire new employees at the local level

and establish public–private partnerships for development, the mean scores of 2.9414 and 3.2461, respectively, suggest a slightly lower level of local government autonomy. This could suggest that the local government faces more challenges or directions in these aspects of administrative autonomy. However, certain aspects show a discrepancy in the degree of autonomy granted. This suggests that the control or direction from higher-level authorities may be stricter in these specific aspects. Overall, the mean score of 3.0430 suggests that local governments have a moderate level of autonomy in providing various local government services, indicating a decent degree of independence in this area. The average scores for all statements hover around the midpoint of 3.000, demonstrating a strong central tendency. This reflects a general coherence in responses across the various facets of autonomy. There is some variation in opinions, with standard deviations ranging from moderate (0.83239) to slightly higher (1.05971) for each statement. Interestingly, there

Table 1: General characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	**Categories**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Gender	Female	37	14.6
	Male	217	85.4
	Total	254	100.0
Educational level	Diploma	6	2.3
	BA degree	159	62.1
	Master's degree	91	35.5
	Total	256	100.0

Source: Survey 2023/24

Table 2: Administrative autonomy of local governments in Kambata and Hadiya Zones, South Central Ethiopia

Major objectives of local government						
N = 256	Contract out services	Hiring new employees	Discharge local government office employees	Freedom to establish public–private partnerships	Overall autonomy over local government services	Procurement autonomy
Mean	2.96	2.94	2.65	3.00	3.25	3.04
Std. Standard deviation	.83	.95	1.06	.945	.90	.89

Source: Survey 2023/24

is less variability in responses to the autonomy to discharge local government office employees compared to other aspects. To summarise, the study findings indicate that the local government holds a moderate level of autonomy in specific realms. However, there are differences in the degree of freedom within various facets. These results offer necessary insights into the workings of local government administration and can support determining areas that may benefit from improvements.

Table 3 shows that a small portion of respondents, 20 (7.8%), feel that the local government does not have adequate autonomy to contract out services independently of upper-tier government. A slightly larger group of respondents, 33 (12.9%), also disagree with the statement, so less strongly, making up a cumulative 20.7% of respondents who do not believe in local governments' autonomy in contracting out services. The majority of respondents somewhat agree that local governments have adequate autonomy to contract out services. This brings the cumulative percentage of respondents who agree to some extent to 75%. Also, 64 (25%) of the respondents strongly agree that the local government has adequate autonomy to contract out services without direction from the regional government. The data indicates a significant agreement in favour of the local government's adequate autonomy to contract out services without direction from the regional government or zonal administration, with over half of the respondents expressing some degree of agreement.

Table 3: Adequate autonomy to contract out local services

Level of local autonomy	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly disagree	20	7.8
Somewhat disagree	33	12.9
Somewhat agree	139	54.3
Strongly agree	64	25.0
Total	256	100.0

Source: Survey 2023/24

Table 4: Local government autonomy to hire employees in the Woreda/town administration

Level of Woreda/town administration autonomy	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly disagree	28	10.9
Somewhat disagree	39	15.2
Somewhat agree	109	42.6
Strongly agree	80	31.3
Total	256	100.0

Source: Survey 2023/24

According to Table 4, a large proportion of participants, 189 (74.2%), agree, either strongly or somewhat, that the Woreda/town administration possesses the ability to hire new staff members. Roughly 67 (26.1%) of participants expressed disagreement, indicating that a significant portion believes hiring autonomy is lacking in their woredas or town administration. It appears that many respondents believe in the independence of the Woreda/town administration's ability to hire new employees, leading to an overall sentiment of agreement. It appears that a majority of participants have confidence in the Woreda/town administration's capability to recruit new staff, resulting in a consensus of concurrence.

According to Table 5 results, a significant 156 (60.9%) of participants share the belief that the local government holds the authority to terminate the employment of staff working in local government offices, regardless of any directives from the federal, regional and zonal governments. It is important to note that there exists a significant aspect of the relationship between local and regional governments. The feedback received from the survey shows that nearly 100 (40%) of the participants disagree that the local government has the autonomy to discharge local government office employees without upper-tier government direction, indicating that a large number of respondents feel the local government may not have complete control over dismissing employees without direction from the regional government. Based on the feedback collected from respondents, there seems to be a difference of opinion regarding the level of autonomy that local governments should have when it comes to terminating the employment of their employees. While most respondents agree that a local government should have this authority, a significant percentage disagrees, citing concerns about unity and the possibility of the higher government interfering. The majority of respondents showed some level of agreement, with "Somewhat Agree" being the most common response, which indicates a considerable degree of consensus. Interestingly, "Strongly Disagree" and "Somewhat Disagree" also hold a significant percentage of 100 (40%), highlighting a widespread belief that the higher-level government had some level of involvement in employee termination.

Table 6 shows that a large majority of the 193 people who answered (75.4%) feel, either firmly or to some degree, that their local government can establish public–private partnerships for local development. However, over 25% (about 63 respondents) indicated a degree of disagreement, implying potential concerns regarding the autonomy of local governments in establishing public–private partnerships within their jurisdiction. Most of the people who answered the survey had a very positive impression, which suggests that most people agree that the local government is empowered to make public–private partnerships to help the Woreda or town administration thrive. The study indicates that the participants predominantly viewed public–private partnerships favourably, with a significant percentage demonstrating strong support. The survey results show that most of the people who answered were in favour of public–private partnerships (PPPs). A lot of the people who took part demonstrated strong support for PPPs. All participants concurred that the local government possesses the authority to establish PPPs,

Table 5: Autonomy to discharge local government office employees

Level of autonomy to discharge local government office employees without regional government direction	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly disagree	52	20.3
Somewhat disagree	48	18.8
Somewhat agree	94	36.7
Strongly agree	62	24.2
Total	256	100.0

Source: Survey 2023/24

Table 6: Autonomy to establish public–private partnerships

Local government has the freedom to establish public–private partnerships	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly disagree	25	9.8
Somewhat disagree	38	14.8
Somewhat agree	103	40.2
Strongly agree	90	35.2
Total	256	100.0

Source: Survey 2023/24

Table 7: Local governments' overall autonomy of local services

The Woreda administration and town administration have overall autonomy	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly disagree	17	6.6
Somewhat disagree	29	11.3
Somewhat agree	84	32.8
Strongly agree	126	49.2
Total	256	100.0

Source: Survey 2023/24

enabling their own Woreda/town administration to flourish. The "Strongly Disagree" category, on the other hand, had the lowest percentage, which means that more people are at least somewhat sure that the local government can set up PPPs.

According to Table 7 results, out of the total number of participants, 210 (82.0%) believe that the Woreda or town administration has significant autonomy in providing local government services. However, 46 (17.9%) of the respondents disagree either strongly or somewhat with the local government's overall autonomy in providing local services. While a small number may hold differing opinions, they represent only a small

Table 8: Procurement autonomy of local governments

The Woreda, or town administrations have procurement autonomy in southern Ethiopia	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Strongly disagree	11	4.3
Somewhat disagree	62	24.2
Somewhat agree	88	34.4
Strongly agree	95	37.1
Total	256	100.0

Source: Survey 2023/24

portion of the respondents, indicating that the majority of people perceive a high level of autonomy in the Woreda or town administration's delivery of local government services. Therefore, the outcome of the survey reflects a positive sentiment, demonstrating that a significant number of respondents have confidence in the Woreda or town administration's ability to provide and manage local government services independently.

Table 8 shows that 71.5% of those who answered thought that the Woreda or town administrations have a say in some procurement decisions. A total of 88 (34.1%) of the respondents believe that the government should fully adopt independent procurement choices, while 34.4% agree with this. At the same time, 28.5% of those who answered said they were against the issue. A total of 62 individuals (24.2%) indicated that procurement is completely free from upper-tier intervention. A substantial contingent of respondents, specifically 11 (4.3%), strongly contest the claim that local governments in southern Ethiopia have procurement authority. According to the research, a large number of people in southern Ethiopia agree that woredas, or town administrations, may make their own decisions about purchasing certain things. Despite the predominant consensus among respondents, there exists a wide range of perspectives on the degree to which local governments can autonomously execute procurement decisions. A considerable proportion of respondents in Ethiopia reject the notion that the Woreda or local governments possess procurement authority. A significant number of participants provided diverse perspectives in their responses to the open-ended question on the topic of administrative autonomy. As a researcher, I have endeavoured to concisely encapsulate these reactions as follows: According to the respondents, before taking further steps, it is essential to examine the legislative framework in order to identify any impediments to local administration autonomy and to implement new legislation that confers administrative autonomy to local governments. Furthermore, local administrators should engage in capacity-building activities that instruct them on public service delivery, budgetary management, governance and planning. Modifications to resource allocation techniques may be required to ensure equitable distribution of resources. Localisation may serve as an effective technique for decentralising infrastructure development, healthcare and education.

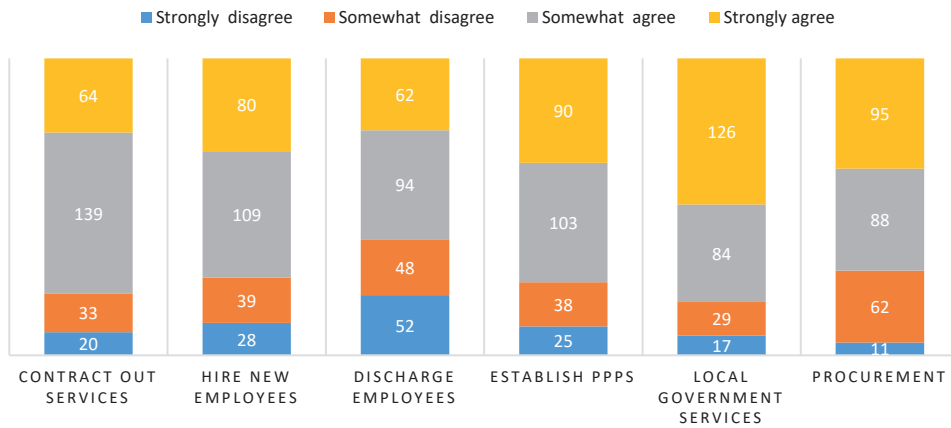


Figure 2: Administrative autonomy of local governments in southern Ethiopia
Source: Survey 2023/24

Monitoring and assessment, interagency collaboration, and citizen engagement are essential elements of municipal governance. Federal, regional and zonal political support is essential to guarantee that administrative autonomy serves the broader society and to overcome political obstacles. In Ethiopia, according to Federal Government Procurement and Property Administration Proclamation No. 649/2009, local governments possess limited procurement autonomy, while the Federal Public Procurement and Property Administration Agency retain predominant authority over the procurement of goods and services. Local governments have limited procurement authority. Nuwagaba (2013) affirmed that the primary impediments faced in the procurement process are delays that hinder nearly each phase of the procurement procedure. Cankwo et al. (2015) corroborated this, indicating significant inefficiencies in the local government procurement process, particularly between the initial phase and the award of the contract, which adversely impacted lead time and service delivery.[25]

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings indicate that regional oversight and ambiguous legal mandates significantly constrain administrative autonomy in the Ethiopian study zones. Although local governments have some discretion to recruit employees and contract out services and regulate local affairs through bylaws, such powers are often undermined by limited institutional capacity, heavy bureaucratic control and inadequate services. Especially in Kambata Tembaro and Hadiya zones, local governments in southern Ethiopia possess moderate administrative autonomy across functions such as service contracting, procurement,

[25] Engdaw 2022.

human resources management and public–private partnerships. The survey results show that autonomy measures above average, around 3.0 on a five-point scale, with greater latitude in contracting and service delivery, contrasted by tighter controls over hiring, firing and PPP initiatives. Key challenges arise from the administrative autonomy aspect: variability across functions occurs as regional governments retain influence, especially over human resource management and PPP; administrative capacity gaps arise from restructuring, skill shortages, inefficiencies, and patronage in civil service appointments. This continued dependence on procedural and strategic guidance from higher government tiers, such as federal, regional and zonal governments, limits local responsiveness and innovation. This implies that when hiring and firing are controlled by higher tiers or influenced by patronage (political appointments), merit-based systems fail. This leads to a cycle where skilled professionals leave, and inefficient processes remain, further justifying the "tighter controls" of regional governments. To address these challenges facing local governments, the scholarly policy recommendation is to strengthen the laws related to local requirements. The principal problem at the federal level is that Article 50(4) only indirectly mentions local governments, and it does not make it apparent that they are a different territory with certain important functions. This process has given regions a lot of authority, but it has also made local governments more likely to be seen as just administrative agents of the regions instead of democratically elected governments, which undermines their legitimacy and ability to effectively represent local interests. So, to make local governments in federal law clearer and more important, constitutional recognition of local government principles should be changed or clarified in Article 50(4) to make it clear that local governments should be set up as elected bodies with constitutionally protected minimum powers in core local functions (like basic service delivery, local planning and local economic development). This amendment would add to the current rules that say "adequate power" should be given to the lowest levels and give them a real institutional meaning.

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