



# Family Influence on Political Attitude of University Students in Ethiopia

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Received: 05.05.2025 | Accepted: 08.05.2025 | Published: 10.05.2025

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DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.15380578](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15380578)

## Abstract

## Original Research Article

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship among Family Interaction (FI), Family Socioeconomic Status (FSES) and Political Attitude (PA) of University Students. Data was collected from three Ethiopian universities: Addis Ababa University, Jimma University and Mizan Tepi University. A total of randomly selected 534 students participated in the study. Based on nature of the data, correlational research design was used. Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were used to analyze the data. The study found a statistically significant, positive and moderate relationship ( $r = .502$ ,  $p < .001$ ) between FI and students' PA. Likewise, the relation between FSES and FI was found to be statistically significant, positive and weak ( $r = .263$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Together, FSES ( $\beta = -.131$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and FI ( $\beta = .687$ ,  $p < .001$ ) explained 43.80% (Effect Size = .779) of the variance in PA. Although no statistically significant relationship was found between FSES and PA, the indirect effect of FSES ( $\beta = .035$ ,  $p < .05$ ) on PA via FI was found to be positive and statistically significant. Implications of these findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** Family Interaction (FI), Family Socioeconomic Status (FSES), Political Attitude.

**Citation:** Tebo, G. D., & Abdisa, M. H. (2025). *Family influence on political attitude of university students in Ethiopia*. *ISA Journal of Multidisciplinary (ISAJM)*, 2(3), May–June, 67-73.

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Human behavior is influenced by several factors external and internal to individuals. People's political attitude (PA) or behavior is not free of these influences. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2010) defines politics as issues related with the state or a particular set of principles concerned with governance. In Ethiopia, university students' political activities has long history starting from late 1960's (Bahiru, 1991). During the period of Emperor Haile Sillasie, university students' activism contributed major role for the end of the regime. According to Ahimed (2006), Addis Ababa University main Campus was a place where students engaged in activism and raising issues related with problems of peasants regarding land, and on the question aimed to self-determination. According to Berhe (2008), ethno-national mobilization was an aspect of ideological stance in the students' movement. The students' movement was to end deep rooted problems of nation and nationalities of the country. Of course, the question of

nationalities was to find answer for what a nation means. For instance, Walleign Mekonnen cited in Berhe (2008) argued that Ethiopia is not a nation but composed of many nations with different identities. Hence, the political movements of university students were generally fueled by different demands of which equality and equity of all people in all aspects were predominant. Students were struggling against dominations of people in Ethiopia and demanded the recognition of diversity of various languages and culture. Since then, it is common to see and hear political movement and violence in Ethiopian public universities.

In Ethiopian context, studying political attitude is important as political related violence and aggression is becoming prevalent in the country. The current political situations of the country are overwhelmed by interethnic conflict, damage to properties, death of civilians, and high rate of internal displacement. According to Svensson and Brounéus (2013), multi ethnic groups with various identities live in

Ethiopia. The country follows ethnic and language based federalism which may contribute to the ethnic conflicts among different groups (Frank, 2009). Recently, according to Human Rights Watch report (World Report, 2020), the figure of political related arrest, killings, abductions, displacement, and damage to life and properties are increasing at alarm rate especially after the assassination of popular singer Hachalu Hundessa.

Family is a primary socialization agent. Thus, family's roles on individual attitude and behavior is enormous. Children learn plethora of things from their families. According to Beck and Jennings (1991), early experience influence adults' political behavior. Children learn attitudes from parents during socialization as families transmit their values to their children. Hence, family environment may influence youth's political attitude to certain extent. In line with this, Richardson (2003) reported that frequent political discussions within a family could influence young people to participate in political activities.

Family influence on political attitude is again pointed out by Quintelier, Hooghe and Badescu (2007) in that discussion of politics within the family, and parents who are the role model exert a powerful effect on political behavior of adolescents. Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers (2009) indicated that family influence is more active when political issues are on board in the family. Here, children incline themselves with their family in terms of many political outlooks. In this regard, fathers take more initiative role in children's view.

Furthermore, Healy and Malhotra (2013) acknowledged that early young age experiences can play significant role in influencing people's political inclinations to be similar to that of their parents. Study by Dinas (2014) also shows that family member interactions in political party identification is facilitated by parental ideology. In line with this, Turan and Tiras (2017) concluded that "family is the most important institution in which all social and political processes are inherited since the birth of the individual" (p.104). Politically active parents are most likely to influence their adolescents to follow their route (Mehmood and Rauf, 2018).

In Ethiopia, family influence in different aspects of life is great and countless. For example, studies found out that parents have tremendous role in increasing their children academic achievement (Habtamu, 2016), and career choice (Daniel, 2015). But the extent of family impact on children's political attitude is not well investigated in Ethiopia though there is a lot of politically motivated violence in the country. As Matfes (2018) put it, political violence in Ethiopia seems persistent and fatalities with displacements are highly increased even after the reform in governance. Therefore, the present study was intended to fill this gap by examining the link between family interaction and political attitude in the Ethiopian context. Accordingly, the following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the nature of the relationship (i.e., strength, direction and statistical significance) among family socio economic status, family interaction, and political attitude?

2. What proportion of the variance in political attitude do family socio economic status and family interaction explain jointly and independently?
3. Does family interaction play statistically significant mediational role between family socio economic status and political attitude?

## Definitions of Constructs

- **Political attitude (PA)** –refers having interest in politics and attentively seeking and sharing information about political issues. PA was measured by items adapted from Political Behavior Scale (Pritzker, 2008).
- **Family Interaction (FI)**- refers to the extent to which the youth interact or discuss political issues with any member of the family. FI was measured using 10 items adapted from Political Socialization Survey (Quintelier, 2007).
- **Family Socio Economic Status (FSES):** In the present study, FSES is formed by combining educational levels of parents/guardians (i.e., fathers' and mothers') and family's overall monthly income as reported by the participants on the questionnaire.

## METHODS

This section presents the design, population and sampling technique, instrument of data collection and techniques of data analysis used in the study. This study employed a correlational research design which helped to describe the relationship among the variables. Accordingly, family interaction and family socioeconomic status were considered as predictors of the outcome variable (i.e., political attitude).

## Population and Sampling

The population of this study was public university students in Ethiopia. As students come from different ethnic, religions, and geographic backgrounds, it is believed that university students in Ethiopia are diverse in nature. Addis Ababa University, Jimma University and Mizan Tepi University main campuses were selected purposefully. Addis Ababa University, which is found in the capital city of the country, is the oldest university in Ethiopia and it is well known place where students' political movement started historically. One of the authors is a staff of Addis Ababa University; this facilitated the process of data collection at this university. Jimma and Mizan Tepi Universities, which were in the South Western part of Ethiopia, were selected because the other author is a staff of Mizan-Tepi University and had colleagues who could help access the participants from Jimma University. Then, from each university, respondents were selected using stratified random sampling technique to include students from different colleges. From Addis Ababa University four colleges namely College of Education and Behavioral studies, College of Social Science, College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication were represented in the

sample. From Jimma and Mizan Tepi Universities, College of Social Science and College of Education and Behavioral studies were selected. A stratified sample guarantees that members from each group were represented in the sample.

Based on the total number of regular students enrolled for regular program in College of Social Sciences (Male =273; Female=238), College of Education and Behavioral Studies (Male = 263; Female=175), and College of Humanities Language Studies Journalism and communication (Male =96; Female =102 ) at Addis Ababa University (Male =632; Female =515; Total =1147), College of Education and Behavioral Studies (Male = 127; Female=219), and College of Social Sciences (Male =757; Female=857), at Jimma University (Male =884; Female =1076; Total =1960), and Mizan Tepi University (Male =564; Female =600; Total =1164), in the 2019/20 academic year (Male =2080; Female =2191; Total =4271), sample size determination was made by applying Slovin Formula as cited in Israel (1992).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$
 where n= sample, N= total population, e= margin of error (0.05)

In the present study, N= 4271. Thus,  $n = \frac{4271}{1 + 4271(0.05)^2} \approx 366$ . Nonetheless, based on the principle that larger sample size is preferred for factor analysis and SEM, and anticipating missing values and inappropriate responses, data was collected from 540 respondents. Six of the participants responded to the items inappropriately; thus, only 534 respondents remained in the analysis.

## Measures

This study used questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire was composed of items measuring family interaction, political attitude and demographic questions. Family interaction was measured by adapting 10 relevant items from Political Socialization Survey used by Quintelier (2007). The scale point 0-4 (never to most of the time) was used for all items. *Never* means in this context, 'I have no any interaction with any member of my family with regard to political issues'. The internal consistency reliability was checked in pilot test. Family socioeconomic status was measured based on family's educational level and monthly income as reported by the students.

In a similar manner, 31 items adapted from Political Behavior Scale developed by Pritzker (2008) were used for measuring students' political attitude. The scale point was 1-5

(strongly disagree-to-strongly agree). All of these tools were adapted and necessary modifications were made to validate in the context of the study's culture. In a sample of 304 respondents, the pilot test results of the internal consistency reliability checked using Cronbach's alpha revealed that all of the instruments were of adequate quality for research purpose (Cronbach's alpha for FI =.860; Cronbach's alpha for PA=.919). In the main study, the internal consistency reliability coefficient of FI questionnaire was .874 while that of PA scale items have Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .924.

## Data Analysis

The present study generated quantitative data which were analyzed using IBM SPSS and AMOS version 23. Pearson Correlation was used to examine the degree of the relationship among the variables. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS software was employed to determine the overall fit of the model (see Figure 1).

## Ethical Considerations

The whole process of data collection and conclusions drawn based on the findings of this study are in line with the common ethical guidelines suggested by American Psychological Association for any psychological research. Consents were gained from officials and students to participate on the study. Here, the purpose of the study was disclosed to the participants and permission of their participation was confirmed. Nobody's name was identified in the study. Generally, basic ethical issues of psychological research were maintained consistently in data collection, analysis and final reflections of the findings of the study.

## Results

### *Nature of the Relationship among Family Interaction, Family Socio Economic Status and Political Attitude*

The first research question of the present study was intended to examine the degree and direction of the relationship among family interactions, family socioeconomic status and political attitude of university students. Table 1 depicts Pearson correlation coefficients among the variables. Table 1 reveals that there is a statistically significant, positive and moderate relationship ( $r = .502$ ,  $p < .001$ ) between family interaction and students' political attitude.

Table1: Zero order Correlation Coefficients among Family Socioeconomic Status (FSES), Family Interactions and Political Attitude (N= 534)

	FSES	Family Interaction	Political Attitude
Family Interaction	.263***	1	
Political Attitude	.013	.502***	1

\*\*\* $p < .001$

This implies that students who have had more discussion of political issues with their family members tend to have more political interest. Similarly, the study found that as FSES increases FI also increases and vice versa ( $r = .263, p < .001$ ). Nonetheless, no statistically significant relationship was found between FSES and Political Attitude.

#### Proportion of the Variance Explained in Political Attitude

The second major purpose of this study was to examine proportion of the variance in political attitude (PA) explained by FSES and family interaction (FI). Figure 1 shows a structural equation model of the three variables. Before examining the structural relations, fitness of the model to the data was examined. This is because unless fitness of the model is shown to be acceptable, structural coefficients may not be

dependable (Byrne, 2010). The analyses indicated that the fitness of the model to the data is acceptable [ $\chi^2 (88) = 257.052, p = .000$ ; CMIN/DF = 2.921; Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI) = .943; Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = .934; Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) = .921; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .934; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .060 (90% CI = (.052, .069), PCLOSE = .026)]. FSES ( $\beta = -.131, p < .01$ ) and FI ( $\beta = .687, p < .001$ ) explained 43.80% (Effect Size = .779) of the variance in PA. Separately, FI ( $R^2 = 42.30\%$ ; Effect Size = .733;  $\beta = .65, p < .001$ ) explained more variance in PA than FSES ( $R^2 = .3\%$ ; Effect Size = .003;  $\beta = .059$ ). FI contributed to PA more than FSES in both joint and separate models.

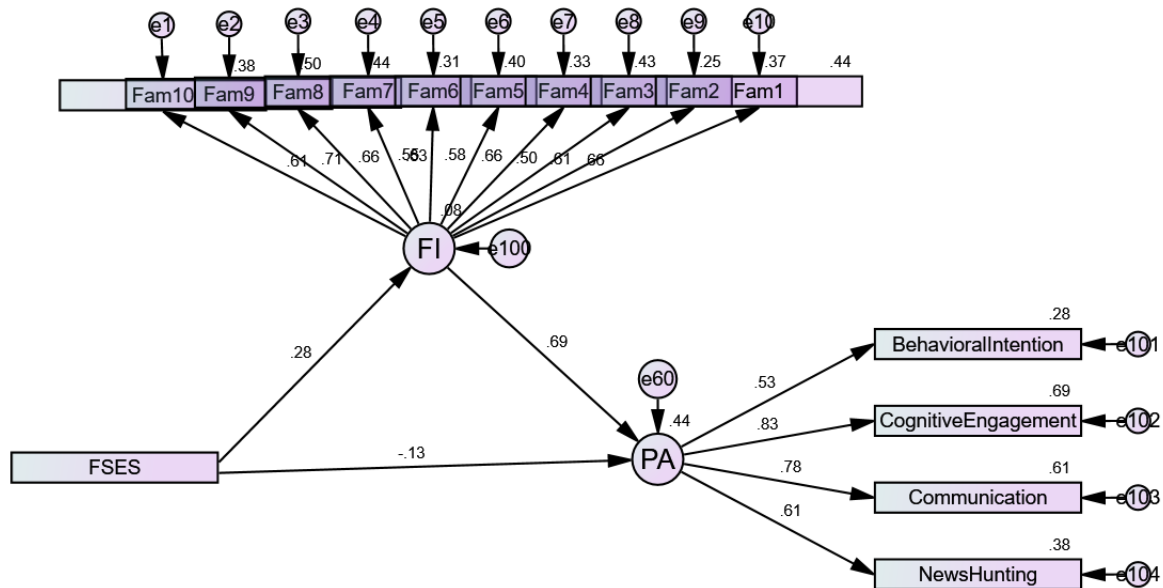


Figure 1: Structural Equation Model of Family Socio Economic Status (FSES), Family Interaction (FI) and Political Attitude (PA)

#### Mediational Role of Family Interaction Between Family Socio Economic Status and Political Attitude

The third major objective of the present study was examining mediational role of FI between FESE and PA. Table 2 illustrates the analyses of the direct, indirect and total regression effects of FSES on PA. The indirect effect of FSES ( $\beta = .035, p < .05$ ) on PA was found to be positive and statistically significant. This means, due to the indirect (or mediated) effect

of FSES on PA, when FSES goes up by 1 standard deviation unit, PA goes up by .035 standard deviations. However, examination of the direct effect indicated that due to the direct (unmediated) effect of FSES on PA, when FSES goes up by 1 standard deviation, P A goes down by 0.131 standard deviations. That means, in the absence of FI, FSES by itself may debilitate the students' political attitude.



Table 2: Summary of Results of Meditational Analysis

Relationship	Standardized Effects ( $\beta$ )
Direct (FSES→PA)	-.131**
Indirect (FSES→FI →PA)	.194**
Total (direct and indirect)	.063

\*\* $p < .01$ ; FI = Family Interaction; FSES = Family Socio Economic Status and PA = Political Attitude

## DISCUSSIONS

### *Relationship among Family Interaction, Family Socio Economic Status and Political Attitude*

Regarding the link between family interactions and political attitude, the study found moderate relationship implying that relatively high level of political interest, attentiveness, and discussion were reported by respondents who have frequent interactions and discussion with family members about political issues. That is, students who have certain level of family interactions about politics are more interested in political issues, they attentively follow political news and interested in political conversation with their family. Similar to the findings of this study, Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin and Keeter (2003) also explained that children in families who interact on political issues are more likely to engage in politics as compared to other where politics is not content of interaction in the family. Likewise, Quintelier, Hooghe, and Badescu (2007) pointed out that discussion of politics within the family, and parents who are the role model exert a powerful effect on political behavior of adolescents. When students interact with their family member, they learn different values and attitudes including the political affiliation ones. As agent of socialization, family plays vital role in equipping their children with values and attitudes. In line with this, Levinsen and Yndigegn (2015) reported that development of political interest and attentiveness in youth is due to family influence. Moreover, Rodrigues, Menezes and Ferreira (2018) described that a family member plays a significant role in young people political activities on media. As politically active family members influence the political interest and attentiveness level of their young member, politically passive family had less influence. Therefore, family member interactions about political issues directly affects the level of political interest, attentiveness and frequency of political discussion among university students. In the current context of Ethiopia, there are different factors that may contribute to the contents of discussion with family members as violence is rampant in the country, particularly politically motivated ones. Sometimes there are interethnic conflicts at universities where parents usually worry about what happened to their children at campus. Hence, the frequency of students' interaction with their family members about political issues may be relatively high.

The present study also found statistically significant

relationship between family socio economic status and family interaction. This implies that the higher the educational or income status of the family, the higher the rate of family interaction regarding political issues and vice versa. Consistent with finding of the present study, Lay (2006) found that children from lower family socioeconomic status have low level of political interest and understanding.

### *Proportion of the Variance Explained in Political Attitude*

Although there are several other variables that can explain the political attitude, family interaction and family socioeconomic status were found to contribute considerable roles ( $R^2 = 42.30\%$ ) in the present study. This implies high level of family influence on their children's political attitude. In support of this finding, Ivey and Yaktus (1996) argued that family is a basic institution in shaping the attitudes of their children. Interaction of political issues at home, considerably increases the level of political interest, attentiveness and discussion of political contents among young group. Young member of the family are socialized in different ways. For instance, Maruskin (2006) noted that the more family members interact on political related contents at home, the higher the frequency of young member engagements in political activities.

Overall, the role of family in shaping behavior is enormous. In line with this, German (2014) explained that it is through social interaction that political positions are influenced by different agents. Here, it can be argued that in collectivist cultures such as that of Ethiopia, family is crucial; as a result, family interaction may influence the political attitude of its members substantially.

### *Mediational Role of Family Interaction between Family Socio Economic Status and Political Attitude*

The present study found that magnitude of the direct influence of FSES ( $\beta = -.131$ ) on PA is relatively smaller than magnitude of its indirectly effect ( $\beta = .194$ ) via FI. That is, FSES transferred more of its effect to PA through FI. What is more interesting from this finding is that when the effect of FI is statistically controlled or partialled out, FSES significantly played a debilitating role in the students' PA. This finding may imply that, in the absence of FI, as FSES increases, their

children's PA decreases and vice versa. In other words, this finding indicates the crucial role of FI; unless the family members plan and take time to gather together to interact on political issues, the mere high or low level of FSES may not matter. This is different from the findings of study conducted by Portney, Eichenberg, and Niemi (2009) which found evidence that having well-educated parents affects political attitude of family members positively. One possible explanation for these inconsistent findings may be that the higher the FSES, the less the family members interact frequently probably because family members may be too busy in running businesses or engaging in their professional jobs. Several other explanations can be provided with regard to why students from poor family are characterized by high rate of engagement in political issues. First, they may believe that the lower income of their family is due to the unfair distribution of the countries resources in which only few groups are dominantly utilizing and most others are passing by. They feel that they are forgotten by the government policies which are the limitation of political decisions. The second argument is that university students believe that the economic conditions of their family and the poor Ethiopian population in general can be changed when they are actively participated in politics of the country. They may believe that raising economy of their country is possible when some change in political situations of the county is first done. In order to do that, university students from poor family socioeconomic background may be strongly interested in politics, communicate about political issues with their families, friends both on campus and off campus.

## CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions can be drawn from findings of the present study. First, family interactions and university students' political attitude are related moderately, implying that the high frequency of political discussion the students have, the more they engage in it. Second, the association between family socioeconomic status and political attitude is weak. Third, political attitude is explained more by family interactions than family socioeconomic status. Fourth, family interaction plays meditational role between family socio economic status and political attitude.

## Implications and Limitations

The present study found that FI contributes positively and significantly to PA. Enhancing FI regarding political issues starting from a family may also develop and strengthen communication and understanding for the peaceful coexistence of diverse group in a society. Families, politicians, policy makers and other relevant bodies should, therefore, pay particular attention to increase FI as a result of which they may positively influence the youth's PA. This study is limited to only public university students. Therefore, the next researcher is advised to compare the public university with private universities because the nature of students are different in that in public universities students live in the campus dormitories where as private universities' students are off campus residents. Besides, such populations

other than university students as secondary and even primary school students may be targeted for study to capture the earlier influence of a family on political attitude. Likewise, the present study is limited in that broader dimensions of a family environment (e.g., conflict, expressiveness, personal growth and system maintenance as conceptualized by Moos and Moos, 2009) were not delineated. Future studies should focus on these or other broader conceptualizations of the family environment.

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