

Women and Girls in Ethiopia

Disparity relative to men across violence, health, education and economic opportunity — what the evidence shows, what has changed, and what works

Evidence base: Ethiopia DHS 2000–2024 · World Bank WDI · peer-reviewed literature

All figures generated directly from primary survey and administrative data

The argument in one slide

Three claims this lecture will defend with data

- Ethiopia has achieved genuinely large gains for women in one generation — maternal deaths down 78%, female genital cutting down 22 points, child marriage among young women down 17 points (49% to 32%), women's parliamentary representation above the sub-Saharan average.
- Those gains are real but uneven and fragile. They are concentrated among the urban, the educated and the wealthy; they reverse under conflict; and the deepest inequality — violence against women — has barely moved.
- The binding constraint is no longer the law on paper. Ethiopia's statutory framework is comparatively strong. The constraint is enforcement, legal pluralism, and social norms — which is precisely where the international evidence tells us what works.
- Framing note: this is a lecture about a country making progress under severe constraint, not a country failing. Ethiopia is a low-income, largely rural society that has been at war somewhere within its borders for most of the last fifty years. The policy question is how to make the progress reach everyone, and survive the next shock.

Roadmap

Ten parts, roughly 80 minutes of material — designed to run as one long session or two

- Part 1 — Ethiopia in the world: how poor, how rural, how often at war
- Part 2 — The cost of war: fiscal diversion, lost human capital, and the cost of not working together — why GDP is the wrong ledger
- Part 3 — Historical and legal foundations: how the law built, then partly dismantled, women's subordinate status — and the Ethiopian women who forced the change
- Part 4 — Violence against women and girls: the spine of the argument
- Part 5 — Health: the clearest success story, and its limits
- Part 6 — Education: the master variable
- Part 7 — Economic opportunity: participation without power, and the Gulf labour corridor
- Part 8 — Barriers: legal pluralism, enforcement, religion, culture, conflict, climate
- Part 9 — What has worked elsewhere: Senegal, Bangladesh, Rwanda, Morocco — and inside Ethiopia
- Part 10 — What Ethiopia could do: a sequenced, evidence-based agenda

Evidence base and method

Every number in this deck traces to a named public source

- Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Ethiopia 2000, 2005, 2011, 2016, 2019 and 2024 — nationally representative household surveys with standardised questionnaires, enabling genuine comparison over time and across countries.
- World Bank World Development Indicators — modelled annual series for mortality, labour force, financial inclusion and political representation, used for cross-country comparison.
- Peer-reviewed literature and documented human-rights reporting for causal claims and for the conflict period, where survey data are absent.
- Consistency rule applied throughout: where DHS reports several recall windows, the survey's own preferred series is used, held constant across all six rounds.
- Comparison rule: the eleven pre-2020 regions are used for regional comparison, so that units are identical across survey rounds despite the 2020–2023 regional reorganisation.

What surveys can and cannot see

A caution that applies to every violence statistic in this lecture

- Violence is measured by self-report to an interviewer. Disclosure depends on stigma, on privacy at the time of interview, and on whether a woman names an experience as violence at all.
- Where a behaviour is normalised, it is under-reported. Ethiopia's own data show this directly: in 2000, 84% of women said wife-beating was justified — a society in which most women accept the practice is a society in which most women will not report it as a crime.
- This means prevalence figures for physical and sexual violence should be read as floors, not estimates.
- Conflict periods break survey coverage entirely. The 2020–2022 northern war is largely invisible in DHS 2024 and must be covered from documentary and clinical sources.
- Practical implication for this lecture: trends in attitudes are often more reliable than trends in reported prevalence, because attitudes are less shameful to disclose.

PART ONE

Ethiopia in the world

Before we can read the gender data, we need to know what kind of country produces it — how poor, how rural, how often at war

Ethiopia in five numbers

The context in which every gender statistic in this lecture was generated

135m

people — the second most populous country in Africa, and among the youngest populations on earth

\$3,095

GDP per capita at purchasing-power parity — about one seventh of the world average

38.6%

of the population live below \$2.15 a day — roughly 52 million people in extreme poverty

\$35

total health spending per person per year, from all sources combined

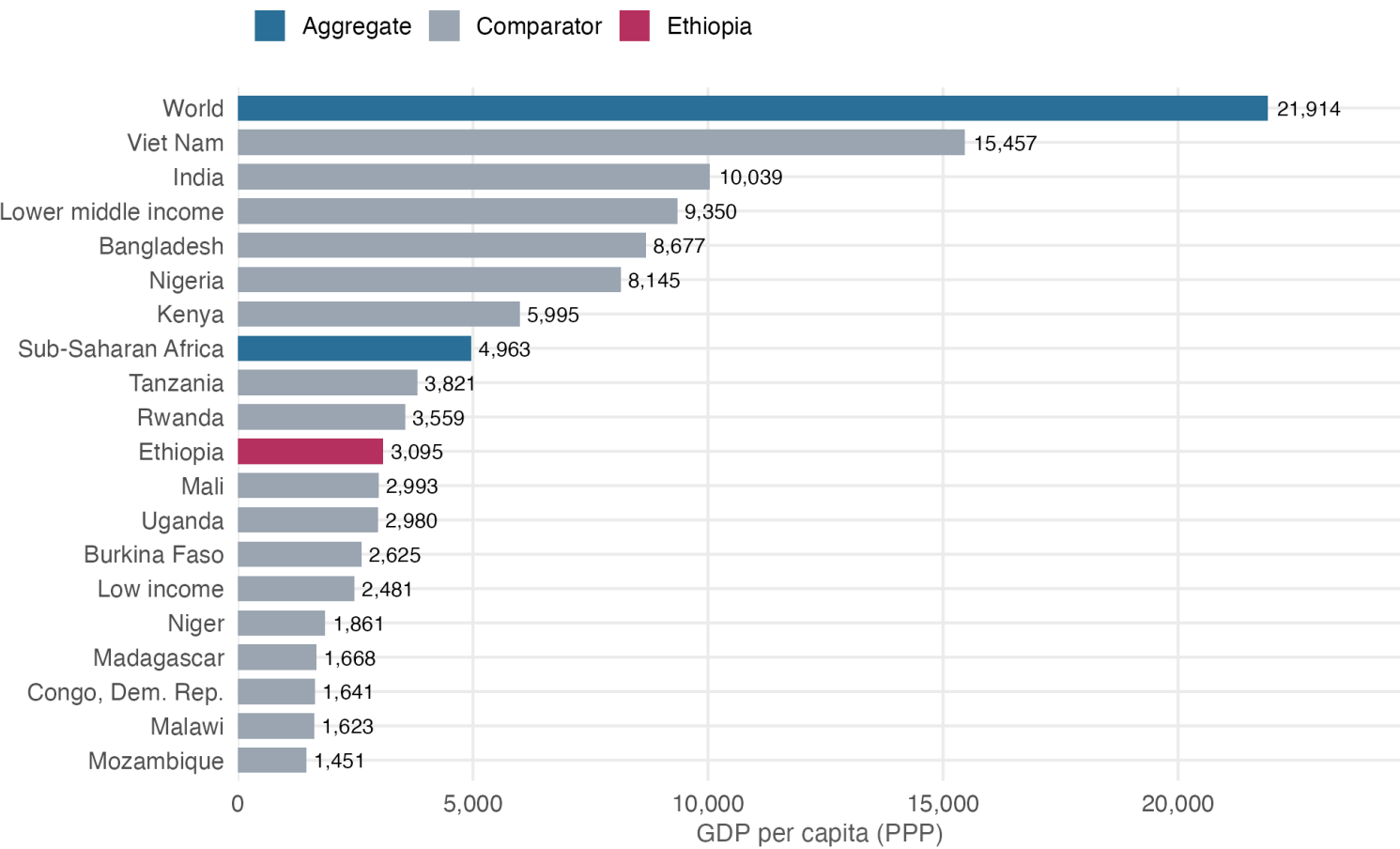
- A fifth number matters as much as these four: only 24% of Ethiopians live in urban areas, making Ethiopia one of the least urbanised countries in the world. Most Ethiopian women live in the countryside, far from the services and institutions that any of this lecture's recommendations must reach.



Where Ethiopia actually sits

Ethiopia remains one of the poorest countries in the world

GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2021 international \$), latest available year



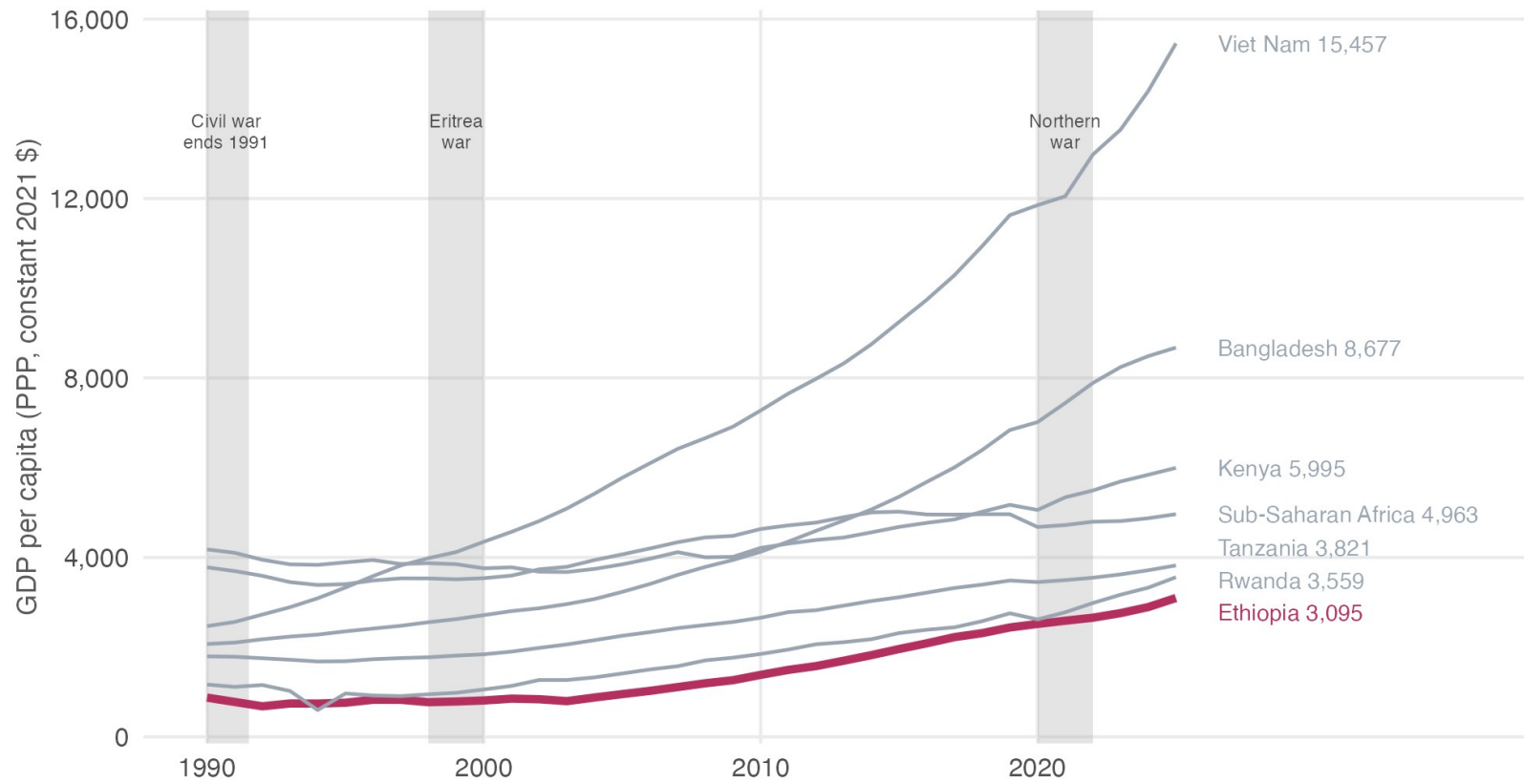
Source: World Bank World Development Indicators

Takeaway: Ethiopia is a low-income country by the World Bank's classification — poorer than Uganda or Tanzania, less than two thirds of the sub-Saharan African average, and about one seventh of the world average.

Rapid growth, from an extremely low base, repeatedly interrupted

Ethiopia grew fast from an extremely low base - and war interrupts the curve

GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2021 international \$)



Source: World Bank World Development Indicators

Takeaway: Ethiopia roughly tripled income per head since 2000 — one of the fastest sustained growth episodes in Africa — but started so low that it remains poorer today than Kenya was in 1990.

Half a century of conflict, famine and displacement

Almost no Ethiopian woman alive has lived an adult life free of war somewhere in the country

1974

Revolution deposes Haile Selassie; the Derg takes power. The Red Terror follows, alongside insurgencies in Tigray and Eritrea.

1983

Famine, worsened by conflict and by state policy, kills several hundred thousand people and displaces many more.

1991

Civil war ends; the EPRDF takes Addis Ababa. Eritrea becomes independent in 1993, leaving Ethiopia landlocked.

1998

Ethiopia–Eritrea border war. Roughly two years of conventional warfare with very heavy casualties on both sides.

2015

Sustained protest in Oromia and Amhara, repeated states of emergency, and a severe El Niño drought affecting more than ten million people.

2018

Political transition under Abiy Ahmed; rapid liberalisation, then rising ethnic and intercommunal conflict and mass internal displacement.

2020

War in northern Ethiopia. Mass displacement, famine conditions in Tigray, and documented conflict-related sexual violence by all parties. Cessation of hostilities agreed at Pretoria in Nov 2022.

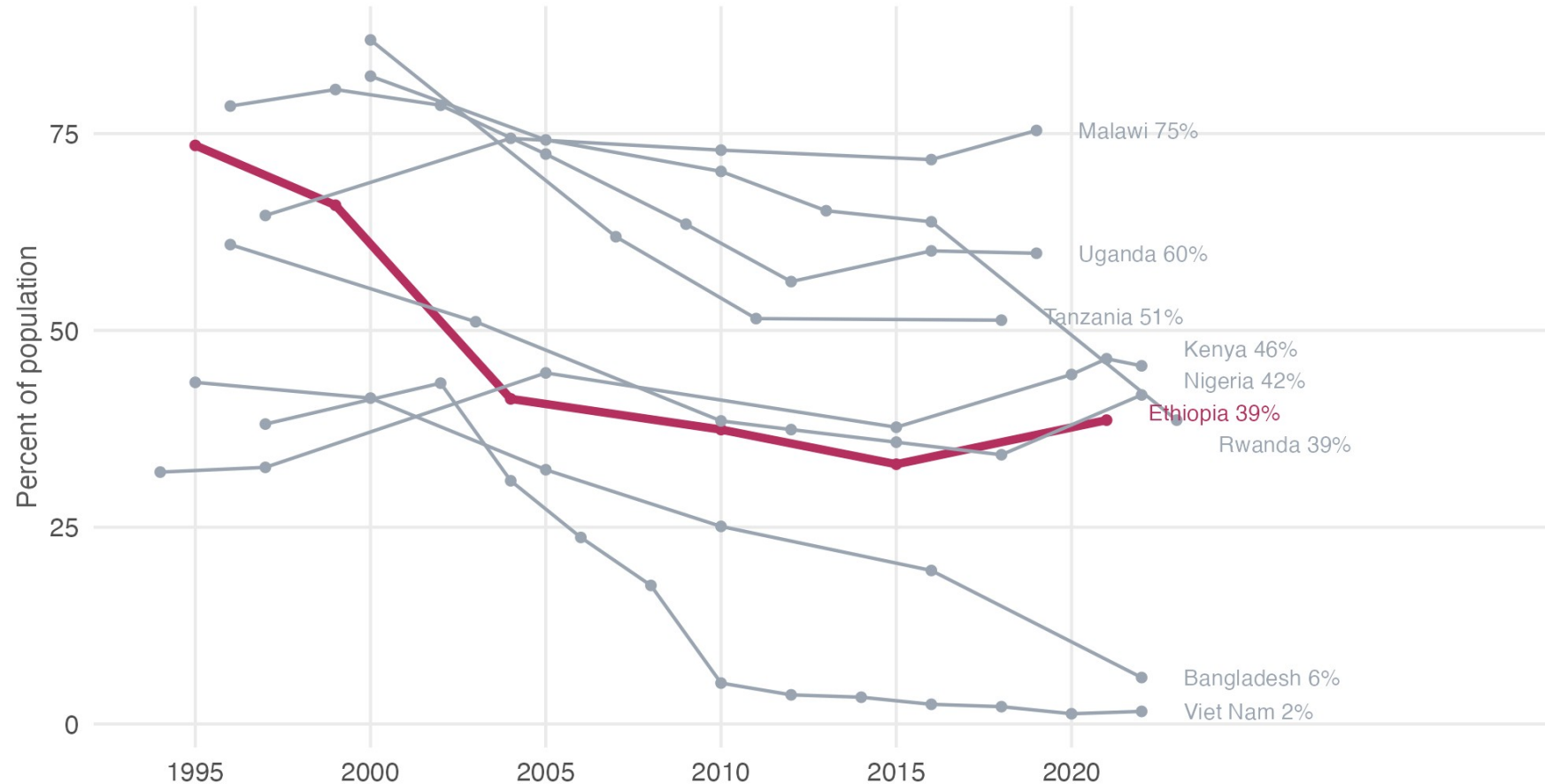
2023

Continuing armed conflict in Amhara and Oromia; drought in the south and east. Excess-death estimates for the northern war vary widely and remain contested.

Poverty: a real halving, and still four Ethiopians in ten

Extreme poverty fell by more than half - and still covers four Ethiopians in ten

Share of population living below \$2.15 a day (2017 PPP)



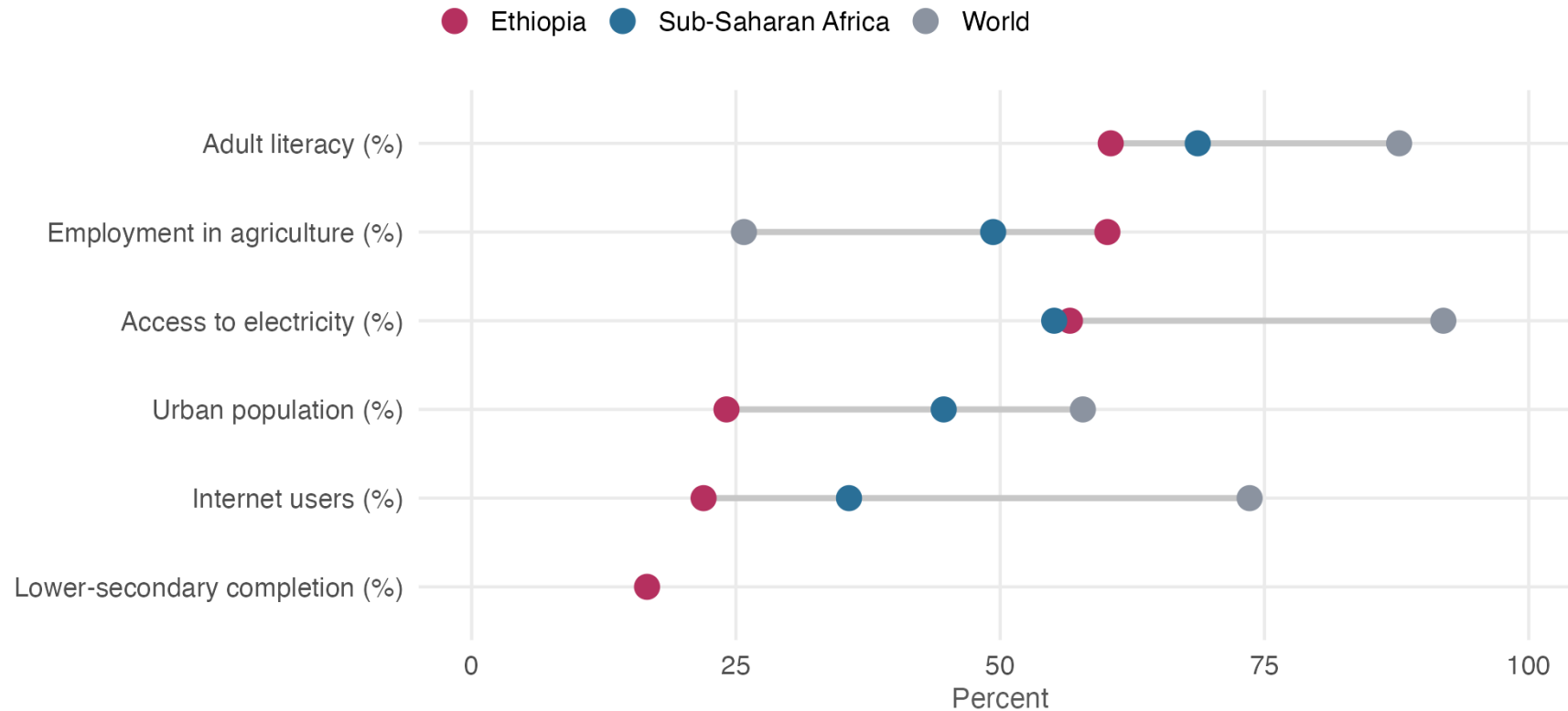
Source: World Bank World Development Indicators

Takeaway: Extreme poverty fell from roughly 73% in the mid-1990s to about 39% — but Bangladesh and Viet Nam, starting from similar positions, are now at 6% and 2%.

The structural profile that constrains every policy in this lecture

The structural profile: rural, unelectrified, offline, agrarian

Ethiopia against the sub-Saharan African and world averages, latest available year



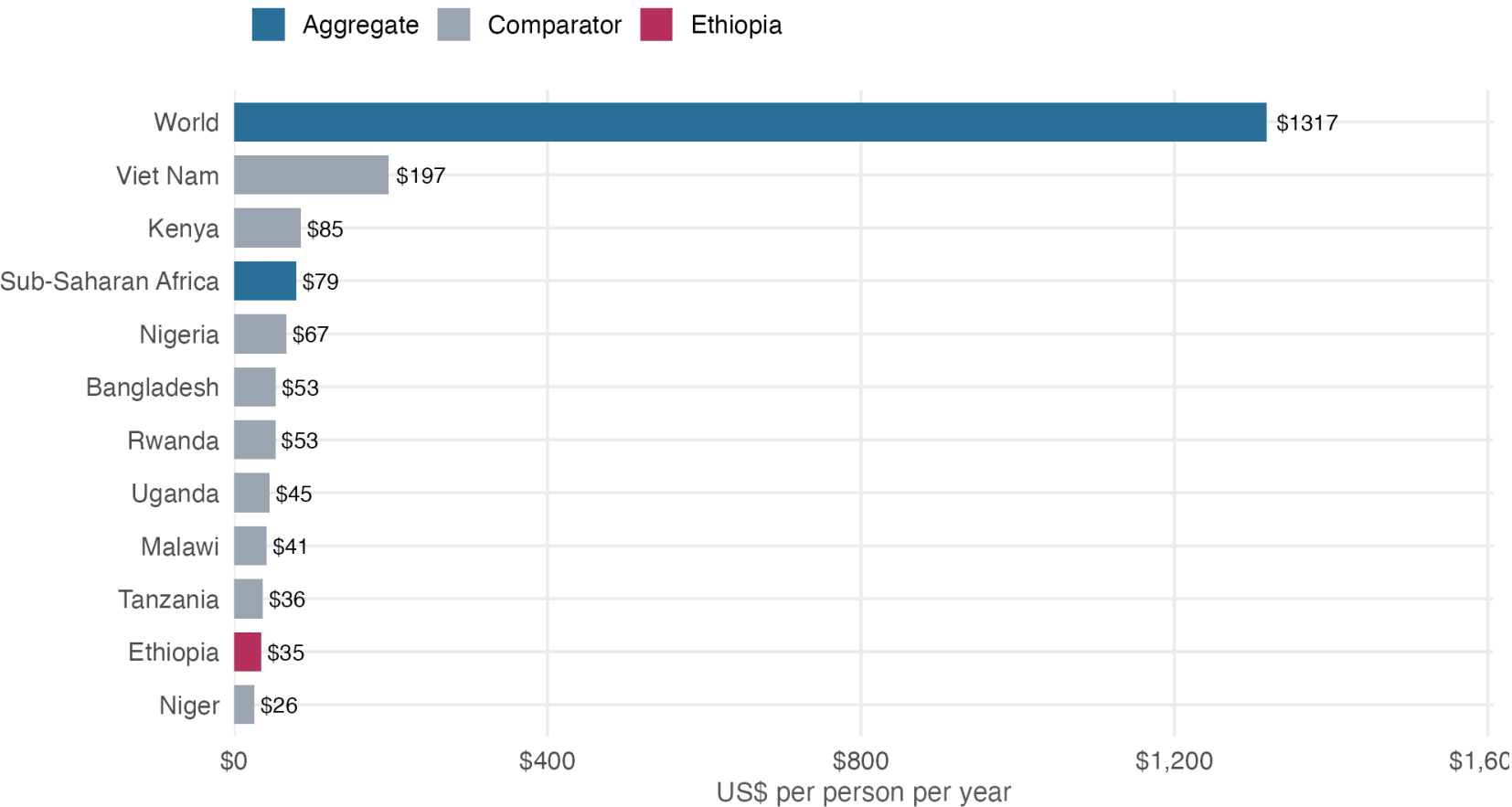
Source: World Bank World Development Indicators

Takeaway: Rural, largely unelectrified, mostly offline, and still overwhelmingly agrarian — with lower-secondary completion at about 17%, far below both the regional and world averages.

What \$35 a head buys

Ethiopia spends about \$35 per person per year on health, from all sources

Current health expenditure per capita, current US\$, latest available year



Source: World Bank World Development Indicators

Takeaway: Ethiopia achieved a 78% reduction in maternal deaths on roughly a fortieth of the world average health spend per person. That is the strongest argument in this deck that delivery design matters more than budget size.

Why the context changes how we read the gender data

The analytical move that structures the rest of this lecture

What is a poverty effect

- A woman in rural Ethiopia delivers without a skilled attendant partly because she is a woman — and partly because there is no road, no ambulance, no electricity at the health post, and \$35 a year of health spending.
- Her son is also less likely to complete lower secondary school than a child almost anywhere else in the world. Only 17% of the age cohort does.
- Poverty effects hit both sexes. They set the level of every indicator.
- The test for a poverty effect: does the male indicator move with the female one?

What is a gender effect

- Female genital cutting has no male analogue in this context. Neither does marriage before 18 at a rate five times the male rate, nor intimate-partner violence.
- Where Ethiopian men and women face the same national deprivation but women fare systematically worse — literacy 57% against 76%, no schooling 41% against 31% — that gap is the gender effect.
- Gender effects determine the distance between the male and female line, not the height of either.
- The policy consequence is direct: growth and general development will lift both lines. Only gender-specific action closes the distance between them.

PART TWO

The cost of war

What fifty years of conflict actually cost — why national income is the wrong ledger for the question, and what the right ledger shows

Three ways war imposes a cost

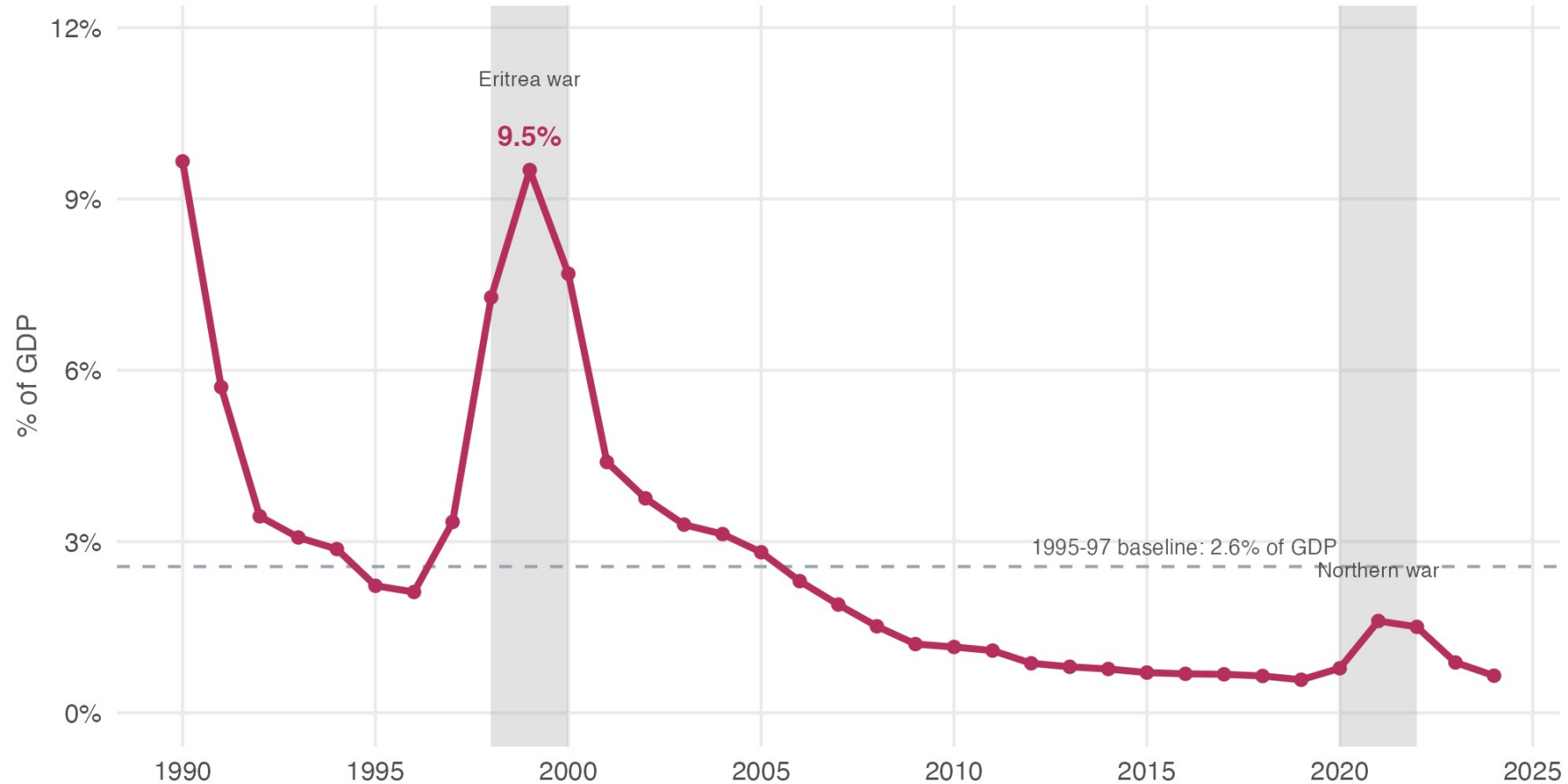
They are not equally measurable, and that distinction organises this section

- Direct destruction — lives lost, people displaced, infrastructure destroyed, institutions dismantled. Largest in human terms, and in Ethiopia's case the least reliably quantified: excess-death estimates for the 2020–22 war alone differ by an order of magnitude and remain contested.
- Diverted resources — money spent on soldiers and weapons that was not spent on clinics, schools and roads. This one is precisely measurable, and we will measure it.
- Forgone growth — the income the country would have had on a peaceful path. This is the number everyone wants and the hardest to defend. We will attempt it properly, and report honestly that the attempt fails.
- A fourth cost sits outside all three: Ethiopia lost its coastline in 1993 as a consequence of a war that began in 1961. That is permanent, structural, and compounds every year.

War has a fiscal signature

War has a fiscal signature: military spending quadrupled during the Eritrea war

Military expenditure as a share of GDP, Ethiopia



Source: World Bank World Development Indicators (MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS)

Takeaway: Military spending went from 2.1% of GDP in 1996 to 9.5% in 1999 — more than quadrupling during the Eritrea war — then fell to 0.58% by 2019, the year before the northern war.

The opportunity cost, in units Ethiopia can feel

Excess military spending during the Eritrea war, measured against the 1995–97 baseline of 2.6% of GDP

18.6

percentage-points of GDP of
excess military spending,
summed over 1998–2001

≈4 yrs

of Ethiopia's entire national
health spending, at the 4.4%
of GDP it spent on health in
2000

≈5 yrs

of Ethiopia's entire national
education spending, at the
3.9% of GDP it spent in 2000

\$9.8bn

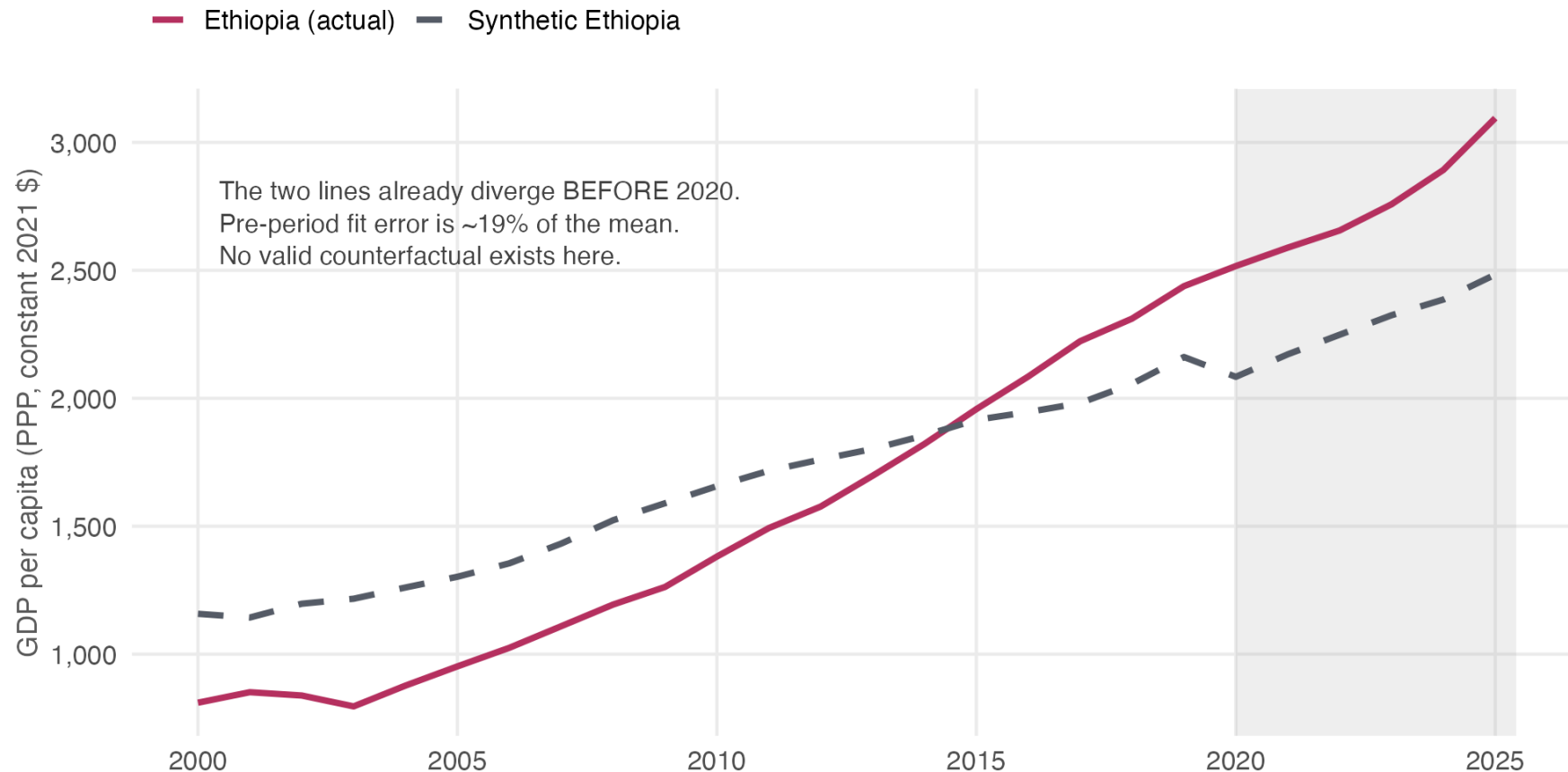
in PPP terms — the same
order as several years of the
priority package in Part 10

- This is arithmetic on reported expenditure, not a model. It says nothing about whether the war was avoidable — only what the money would otherwise have been available for.
- For scale: a Bangladesh-style secondary stipend for every out-of-school Ethiopian girl would cost a small fraction of this annually.

What the data will not support

What the data will NOT support: a credible GDP counterfactual

Synthetic control, 13 low-income donors, treatment year 2020. Shaded = post-treatment



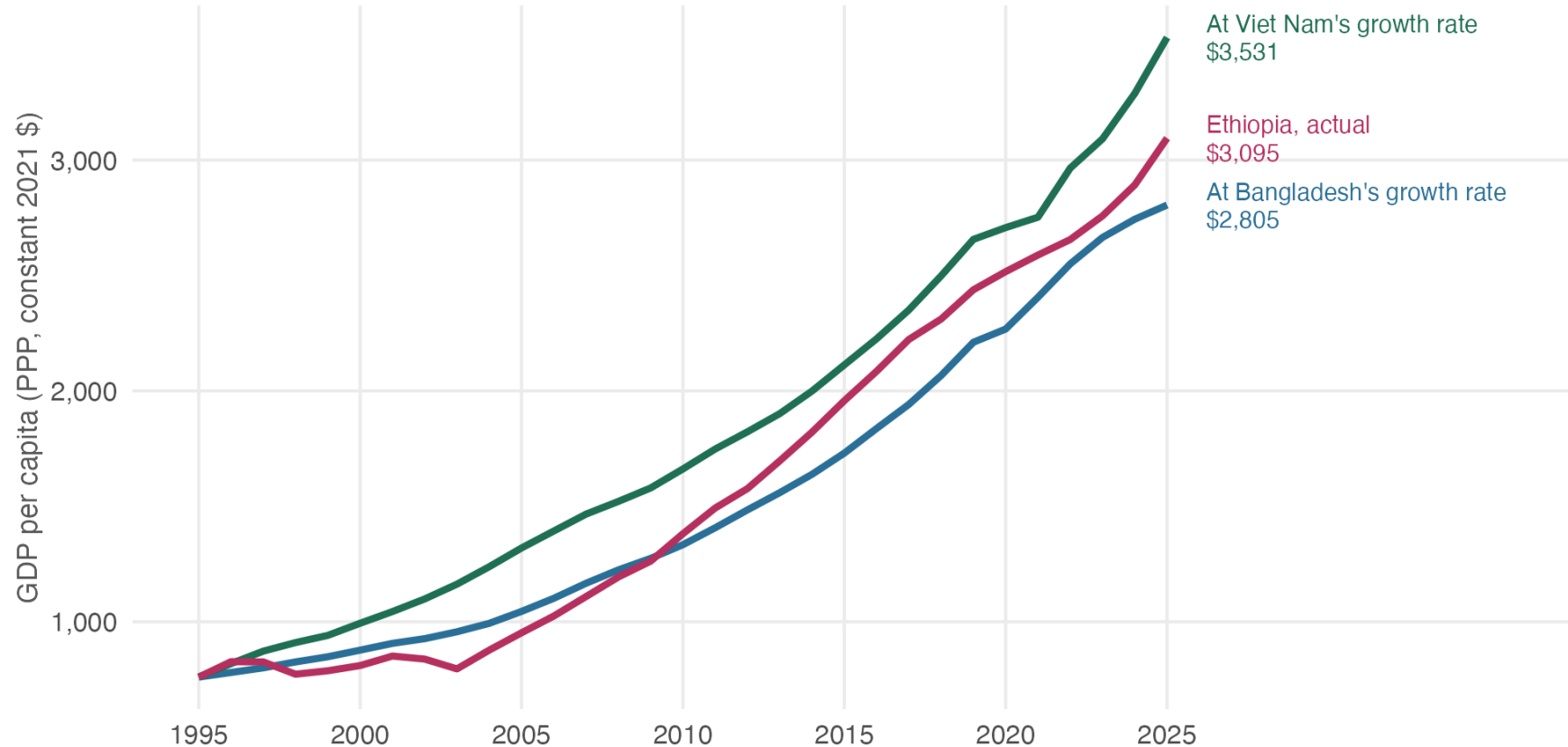
Method: Abadie synthetic control (tidysynth). Donor weights: Malawi 0.56, Rwanda 0.44. Ethiopia ranks 10th of 14 on MSPE ratio - not significant.

Takeaway: A synthetic control — the standard tool for exactly this question — cannot construct a credible Ethiopia. The method fails, and the honest move is to report that rather than quote the number it produces.

The hypothetical, and what it actually shows

A different path, not a counterfactual: Ethiopia at a peacetime peer's growth rate

Ethiopia's actual 1995 income per head, grown forward at Bangladesh's and Viet Nam's realised rates



ILLUSTRATIVE ARITHMETIC, NOT CAUSAL INFERENCE, among the comparators shown. Ethiopia's actual path runs ABOVE the Bangladesh rate and only slightly below Viet Nam's. Base-year sensitivity: indexed to 2000 instead of 1995, Ethiopia (382) leads every comparator shown, including Viet Nam (355). On aggregate growth alone, the peer comparison does not show a large war penalty.

Takeaway: Grow Ethiopia's 1995 income forward at Bangladesh's realised rate and you get a poorer Ethiopia than the one that exists. At Viet Nam's rate, only about 14% richer — among the comparators shown.

GDP is the wrong ledger

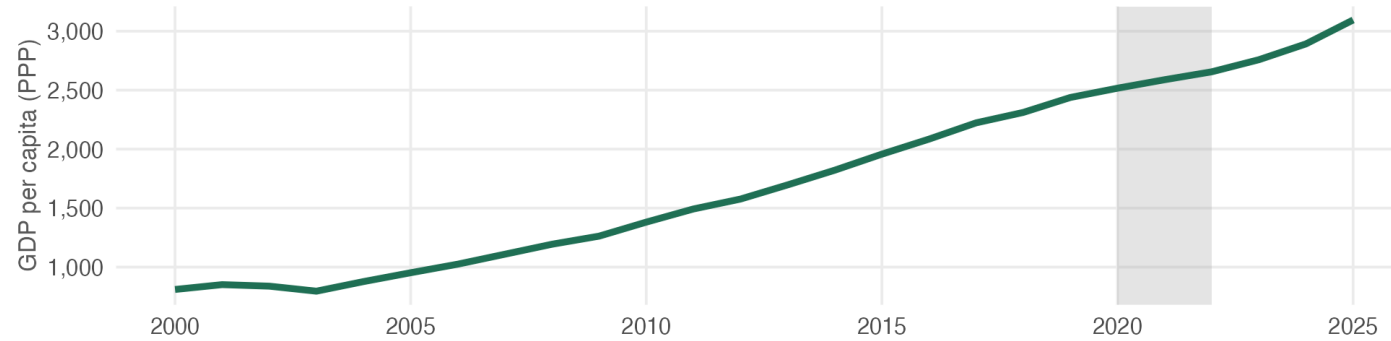
The previous four slides answered a question honestly. It may not be the right question

- National income measures what was produced in a year. It does not measure what was destroyed. A country can post rising output while its accumulated stock of human and physical capital is being consumed.
- Human capital: a child out of school for four years does not catch up. That loss appears in nobody's national accounts until it appears twenty years later as an adult who cannot read.
- Physical capital: a household's cattle, tools, stored grain and roof represent years of saved labour. Destroyed overnight, they register in GDP only as the absence of future output.
- Household earning capacity: a family that loses its breadwinner does not lose a wage — it loses a lifetime of wages, and reorganises around whoever is left, usually a woman.
- Supply chains and market access: roads closed, traders stopped, inputs unavailable. Output is recorded where it happens; the trade that did not happen is recorded nowhere.
- And the largest item of all is not a stock but a capability: the ability to agree on a national agenda and execute it. That is what the next three slides try to measure.

Two ledgers, one country

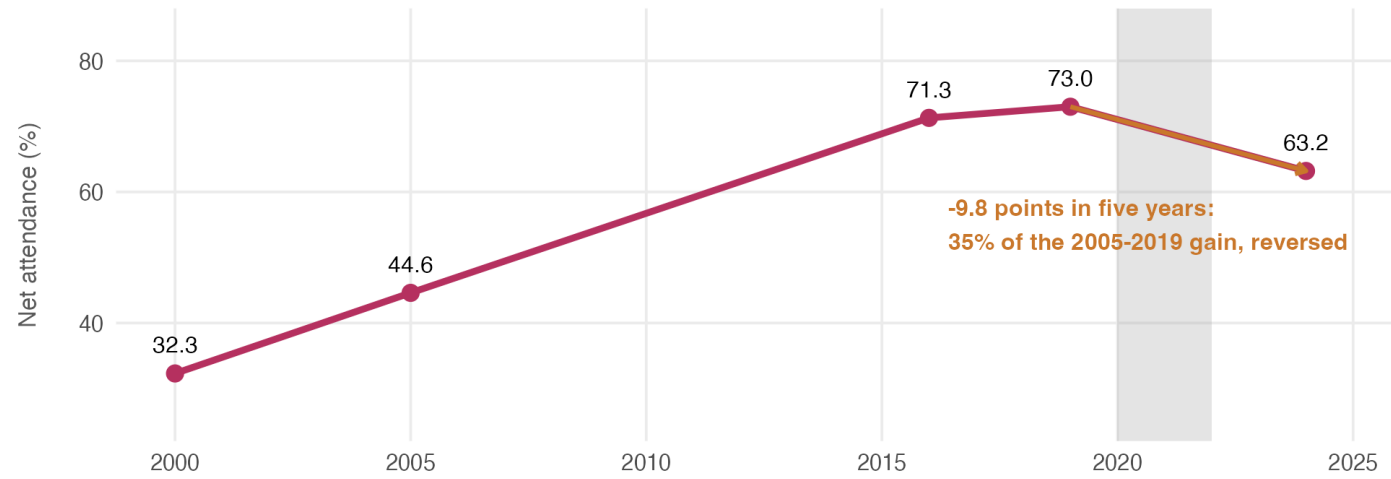
The ledger that rose

GDP per capita, PPP - up every single year, including through the war



The ledger that collapsed

Net primary school attendance, percent of primary-age children (DHS survey years)



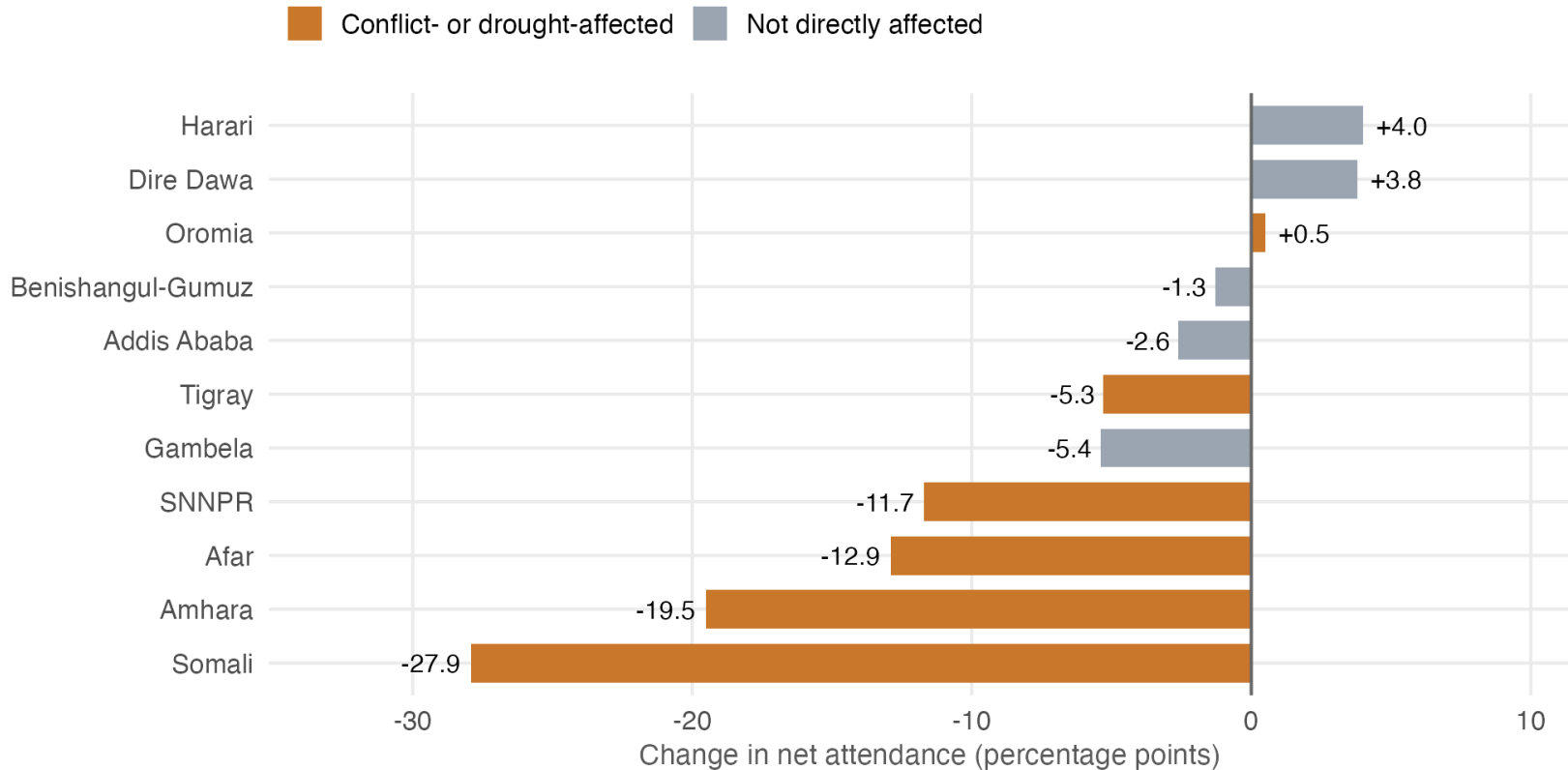
Sources: World Bank WDI (NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.KD); DHS Program API, Ethiopia 2000-2024. Shaded band = the 2020-22 northern war.

Takeaway: GDP per head rose every year from 2019 to 2025. Over the same period net primary school attendance fell 9.8 points — reversing about 35% of everything gained since 2005.

Why this is a real collapse and not a change of definition

Change in net primary attendance by region, 2016 to 2024

Regions classified by documented conflict or drought exposure BEFORE looking at the outcome.
Affected regions: mean -12.8 points. Not directly affected: mean -0.3 points



Source: DHS Program API, Ethiopia 2016 and 2024. Affected = northern-war regions (Tigray, Amhara, Afar), insurgency-affected Oromia, and drought-affected Somali and SNNPR. A redefinition of the primary age band would shift every region by a similar amount; the observed spread runs -28 to +4 (SD 10.0), concentrated in the affected group. Oromia (+0.5) is the exception within it.

Takeaway: Regional changes range from -27.9 to +4.0 points. A redefinition of the primary age band would move every region by roughly the same amount; conflict and drought move them differentially, and that is what the data show.

What a household loses that GDP never counts

The costs that fall on families, and how they land differently on women

What is destroyed

- Accumulated savings held as livestock, grain, tools and housing — years of labour, convertible to nothing once destroyed or looted, and uninsured.
- Health facilities, schools, water points and roads: the physical stock through which every intervention in this lecture would otherwise be delivered.
- Market access. When traders stop moving, a smallholder's surplus becomes worthless even though it exists — the crop is produced, so output is counted, but the income is not earned.
- Working-age adults, through death, injury, conscription and displacement — the most expensive form of capital a poor household holds, and the slowest to replace.

Why the incidence is gendered

- A household that loses a man is reorganised around a woman: female-headed households carry the same dependants on fewer earners and less land.
- Widows' inheritance and land claims are precisely the disputes most likely to be heard in customary or religious forums under Article 34(5) — the weakest point in the legal architecture.
- When household income collapses, the documented coping strategies include withdrawing girls from school and marrying daughters earlier. The shock is not gendered; the adjustment is.
- Honest caveat: national DHS data show no widowhood spike (2.7% in 2016, 2.4% in 2024). But the survey's coverage of the most affected areas is uncertain, and widows are among the least likely to be enumerated. Absence of a spike here is weak evidence of absence.

The largest cost: not working together

The capability that Ethiopia's own best achievements all depended on

- Every intervention this lecture will recommend, and every one Ethiopia has already succeeded with, is a national-coordination achievement. The Health Extension Programme put two trained women in every rural kebele. Land certification issued five million joint titles. Berhane Hewan was designed in Amhara and scaled nationally. None of these is a market outcome; each required a state able to act uniformly across every region at once.
- That is precisely the capability war destroys first — and it is invisible in national income, because coordination has no price.
- The evidence is in the data already shown. The same national programme that lifted skilled birth attendance in Amhara from 38% to 74% left Tigray below its 2016 level. And primary attendance fell in eight of eleven regions at once, which is not a local failure but a national one.
- The comparison that matters is therefore not Ethiopia's growth rate against Viet Nam's. It is that Viet Nam, Bangladesh and Rwanda each sustained a single national development agenda for three decades, while Ethiopia has changed its political settlement three times since 1974 and fought internal wars around each transition.
- Stated plainly: the cost of Ethiopia's wars is not primarily forgone output. It is forgone capacity to execute — decades of interrupted state-building, and human capital that takes a generation to rebuild.
- And that is the argument for treating conflict prevention as gender policy. Not because war lowers GDP, but because everything that has ever improved Ethiopian women's lives required a country able to act together.

The permanent cost: landlocked since 1993

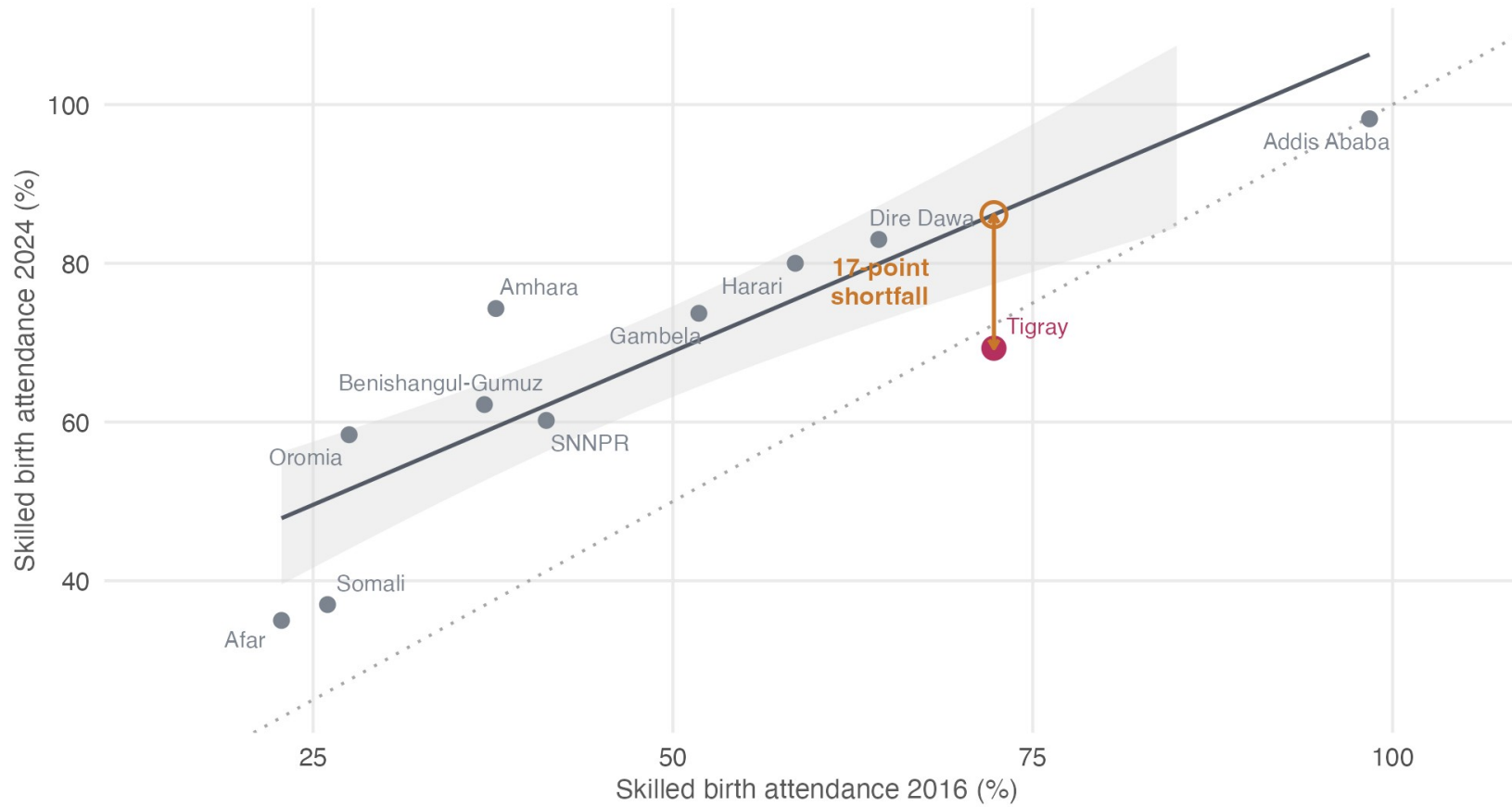
Categorically different from the flow costs — it does not end when the fighting stops

- Eritrea's independence in 1993, the settlement of a war that began in 1961, left Ethiopia the most populous landlocked country in the world.
- Essentially all Ethiopian trade now transits a foreign port, overwhelmingly Djibouti — with the port fees, corridor costs and single-point-of-failure risk that implies.
- The economic literature is consistent that landlocked status imposes a persistent penalty on trade volumes and growth. Ethiopia's trade-to-GDP ratio is low even for its income level.
- For this lecture's argument the relevance is specific: export manufacturing is the sector that absorbed women into paid work in Bangladesh and Viet Nam. Ethiopia's geography makes that path structurally harder — which is why its industrial-park strategy delivered less than hoped.
- This is the clearest sense in which war shaped the opportunities available to Ethiopian women: not through a growth rate, but by removing the coastline that the female-intensive export model depends on.

Where a counterfactual IS identified: Tigray

Where a counterfactual IS identified: Tigray against its own country

Skilled birth attendance, 2024 vs 2016, by region. Line fitted on the ten non-Tigray regions; the open circle is Tigray's predicted 2024 value given its 2016 starting point



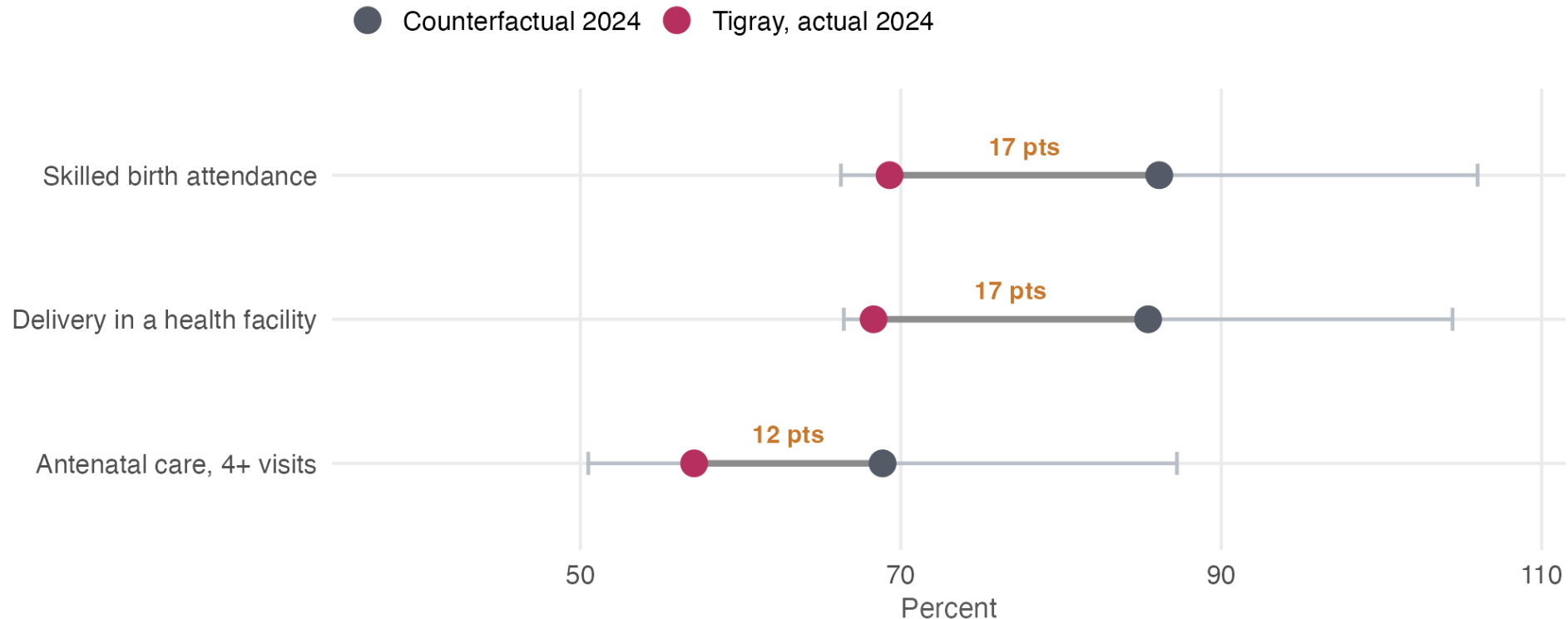
Source: DHS Ethiopia 2016 and 2024. Shaded band = 90% confidence interval of the fit. Dotted line = no change.

Takeaway: Comparing Tigray to the other ten regions — which shared the same national policy, the same programmes, the same period — gives the identification that cross-country comparison could not.

Three indicators, one direction, one magnitude

Tigray 2024 against the ten-region counterfactual

Grey bars are 90% prediction intervals - each individually includes zero. The evidence is the consistency of sign across three measures, and Tigray being the only region of 11 to decline on all three



Source: DHS Ethiopia 2016 and 2024. The three indicators come from the same survey and two are highly correlated ($r = 0.998$), so they are consistent, not independent, checks. Robustness: on the logit scale the shortfalls are 15/15/15 points; excluding Addis Ababa from the fit they are 26/27/11.

Takeaway: Skilled birth attendance 17 points below counterfactual, facility delivery 17 points, antenatal care 12 points — and Tigray is the only region in Ethiopia to decline on all three.

What the war cost women, specifically

Bringing the section back to the subject of the lecture

- A 17-point shortfall in skilled birth attendance in a region of roughly two hundred thousand births a year implies on the order of thirty-five thousand deliveries annually without a skilled attendant that the counterfactual says would have had one. Treat that as an order of magnitude: Tigray's post-war population is disputed, the birth rate is assumed, and it scales a point estimate whose 90% interval includes zero.
- That is the mechanism by which a war becomes a maternal-mortality statistic — not through the national growth rate, but through a health post that closed and a referral route that stopped working.
- Add the documented conflict-related sexual violence covered in Part 4, and the plausible re-legitimising of private violence visible in the post-2016 attitude data.
- And note the asymmetry: the fiscal cost of war is borne by everyone, but the collapse of maternal services is borne by women alone. War is not gender-neutral in its effects even when it is gender-neutral in its causes.
- The policy conclusion for Part 10: in a country with recurrent internal conflict, service continuity planning is a gender intervention. So, uncomfortably, is conflict prevention.

PART THREE

Historical and legal foundations

How Ethiopian law built women's subordinate status — and how, since 1995, it has been partly dismantled

Before codification: plural legal orders

Ethiopia never had a single body of family law, and still does not

- For most of Ethiopian history, family matters — marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody — were governed by customary law that varied by ethnic group and region, and by religious law: the Christian tradition drawing on the Fetha Nagast, and Islamic law in Muslim communities.
- Marriage was primarily an alliance between families rather than a contract between individuals. Bride-wealth, early betrothal and a wife's transfer into her husband's household were normal features, not aberrations.
- Land and productive assets passed through male lines in most communities, which meant a woman's economic security depended on her marriage rather than on her own holdings.
- This matters for today: the plural structure was never abolished. It was constitutionalised in 1995. Ethiopia's modern gender problem is legally continuous with this history.

The legal arc: 1960 to today

Ethiopian statutory law moved decisively toward formal gender equality — over four decades

1960

Civil Code codifies family law nationally. Minimum marriage age for girls set at 15; the husband is recognised as head of the family with authority over the common household.

1975

Derg land proclamation abolishes landlordism; women gain formal access to land in their own right for the first time, though customary allocation practice often persists.

1995

Federal Constitution, Article 35 — the Rights of Women: full equality, affirmative measures to remedy historic discrimination, protection from harmful customary practices.

1995

Article 34(5) — the carve-out: family and personal disputes may be adjudicated under religious or customary law where the parties consent.

2000

Revised Family Code: marriage age raised to 18 for both sexes, joint administration of marital property, judicial divorce, and removal of the husband's power to bar his wife from work.

2004

Revised Criminal Code criminalises female genital mutilation, abduction for marriage, trafficking, and expands sexual-offence provisions.

2005

Abortion law liberalised for specified grounds including rape, incest and risk to health.

The law did not reform itself

Ethiopian women, named, who forced the change — the part usually left out of the statistics

Aberash Bekele, 1996

- Fourteen years old, walking home from school in southern Ethiopia, abducted by horsemen and raped by a much older farmer — the practice known as telefa, marriage by abduction.
- Escaping, she shot and killed one of her captors. She was charged with murder and stood trial for two years.
- She was acquitted on the grounds of self-defence — the first Ethiopian woman to be acquitted of murder on that basis in such a case.
- The trial forced the first open public argument in Ethiopia about telefa, a practice that until then had been discussed only within families and communities.
- Her story reached a wider audience through the 2014 film Difret — over her objection: she sued the filmmakers for using her story without consent, briefly halting its premiere. Agency over one's own story is part of the point.

Meaza Ashenafi and EWLA

- Meaza Ashenafi, a young Ethiopian lawyer, took the case. She had co-founded the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association the previous year, in 1995.
- EWLA became the only national organisation doing sustained women's-rights legal advocacy: free legal aid, draft legislation, and research on law and gender.
- The provisions in the 2004 Criminal Code criminalising abduction — a man who abducts a minor now faces up to fifteen years — did not arrive from nowhere. They were argued for, case by case, by Ethiopian women lawyers.
- In 2018 Meaza Ashenafi became the first woman to lead Ethiopia's Federal Supreme Court as its President.
- The lesson for this lecture: the reforms charted on the previous slide are the output of Ethiopian women's organising, not of external pressure or governmental enlightenment.

The space to organise — and how quickly it closes

The single best predictor of whether women's rights advance in Ethiopia may be whether Ethiopian women are legally allowed to organise

- The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation restricted organisations receiving more than a tenth of their funding from foreign sources from working on human rights, women's rights, or conflict resolution — the exact fields in which EWLA worked.
- The effect was immediate and documented: EWLA cut roughly seventy per cent of its staff, and by 2010–11 had effectively ceased to function except for volunteers providing a small amount of free legal aid. Its bank accounts were frozen, along with those of the Human Rights Council.
- That is a decade of women's legal advocacy capacity removed by a single administrative instrument — during exactly the period when the 2000 and 2004 reforms most needed enforcement.
- The 2019 Organizations of Civil Societies Proclamation reopened the space after consultation with over a thousand organisations, though analysts note it retains intrusive supervisory powers.
- Reporting through 2025 indicates further amendments narrowing that space again. The trajectory is not a one-way ratchet, and this is the variable most within reach of external supporters.
- Connect this to Part 4: the justice cascade fails at reporting and legal aid. EWLA was the institution that addressed exactly those stages, and it was defunded by law for a decade.

The 2000 Family Code was not symbolic — it changed women's work

A natural experiment: the Code was adopted at different times across regions, which allows difference-in-differences estimation

The design

- Ethiopia's regions adopted the Revised Family Code at different dates, creating treated and not-yet-treated areas in the same country at the same time.
- Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo used nationally representative household surveys from just before the reform and five years after, comparing changes in reformed areas against changes elsewhere.
- That design nets out anything happening nationally — economic growth, donor programmes, secular attitude change — and isolates the effect of the law itself.
- It is among the cleanest causal estimates available anywhere on the economic effect of family-law reform.

The result

- Women in reformed areas became 15–24% more likely to work in occupations outside the home, in occupations employing more educated workers, and in paid and full-time jobs.
- The effect was strongest for young, single women — consistent with the change in the minimum marriage age, from 15 to 18, being the operative channel.
- The mechanisms are concrete: the Code removed the husband's power to bar his wife from working, and required both spouses' consent in administering marital property.
- The general lesson, which recurs throughout this lecture: family law is economic policy. Rules about who may work, who administers property, and when a girl may be married determine labour supply.

The equality promise and its escape clause

Two constitutional provisions that pull in opposite directions

Article 35 — Rights of Women

- Equal rights with men in marriage, and equality before the law.
- Entitlement to affirmative measures, with the Constitution explicitly acknowledging the legacy of historic inequality.
- The right to protection from harmful customs; laws and practices that oppress or cause bodily or mental harm are prohibited.
- Equal rights in property — to acquire, administer, control, use and transfer, including equal treatment in inheritance and in access to land.
- Rights to family planning education and access to information.

Article 34(5) — the carve-out

- Permits adjudication of personal and family disputes under religious or customary law, with the consent of the parties.
- Gives statutory footing to Sharia courts (consolidated in federal law in 1999) and to customary dispute resolution across the regions.
- The consent requirement is the safeguard — and is the weakest point in practice, because consent is exercised inside the same family power structure the law is meant to regulate.
- Result: a woman's effective rights on divorce, custody and inheritance can depend on which forum hears her case, not on what the Constitution says.

Why the historical frame matters for the rest of this lecture

- Ethiopia is not a country lacking women's-rights legislation. On paper, its framework is stronger than many of its neighbours' and was reformed earlier.
- Every major statutory barrier identified in 1960 has been formally removed: the marriage age is 18, the husband is no longer head of household in law, marital property is jointly administered, FGM and abduction are crimes.
- And yet: 58% of women are still cut, roughly a third of young women still marry before 18, and a quarter to a third report physical violence.
- That gap — between a reformed statute book and unchanged lived experience — is the subject of this lecture. Everything that follows is an attempt to explain it.

PART FOUR

Violence against women and girls

The domain where Ethiopian law changed most and lived experience changed least

The scale, in four numbers

57.8%

of women aged 15–49 have undergone female genital cutting (2024)

32%

of women aged 20–24 were married before 18 (2024) — the measure of current practice

24%

of women report ever experiencing physical violence since age 15 — rising to 40% among those aged 45–49 (2024)

63%

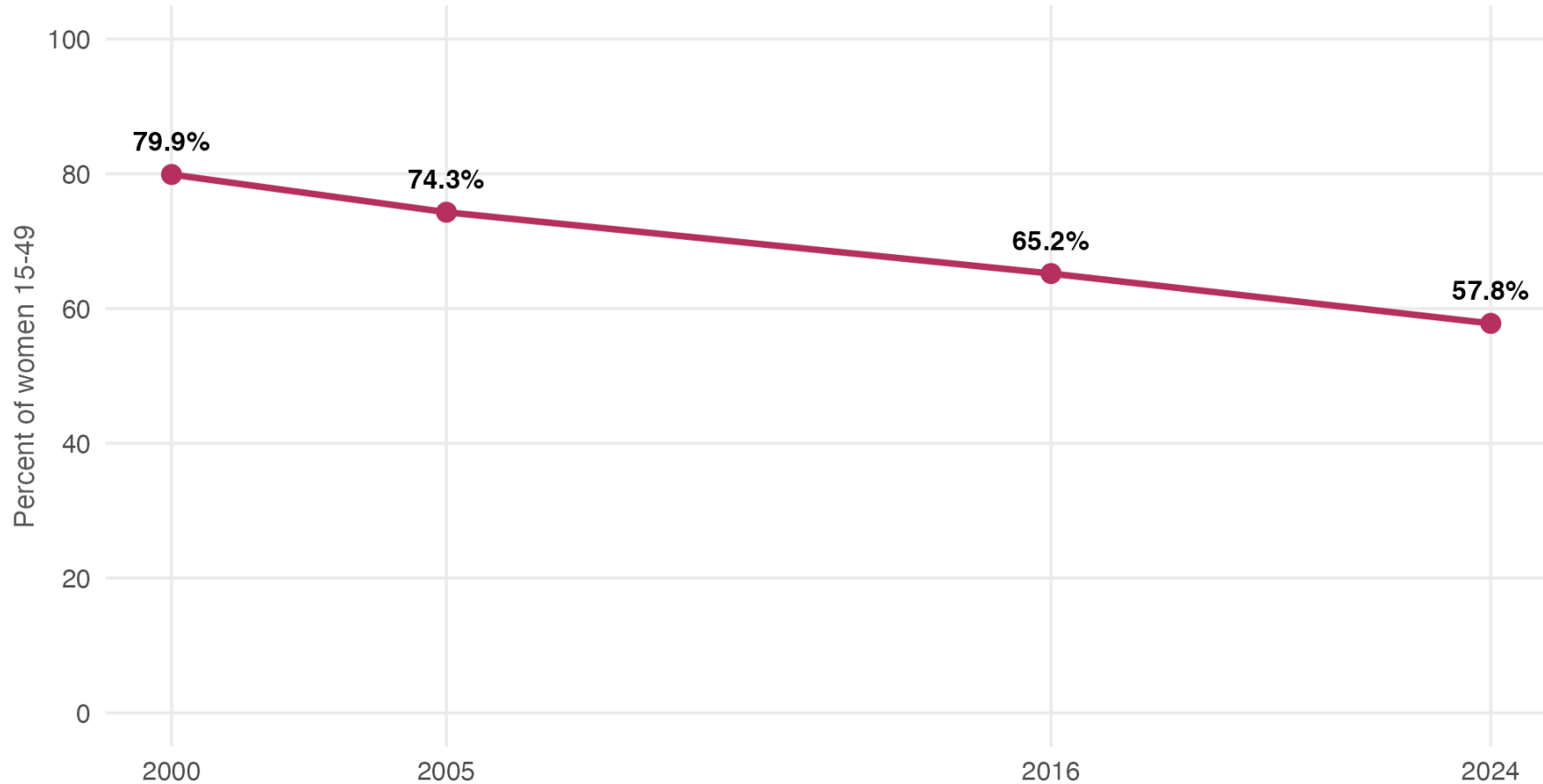
of Ethiopians say intimate-partner violence is a private matter for the family, not for the law

- The first two are declining. The fourth is the reason the third is not.

Female genital cutting: a real decline, and an unfinished one

Female genital cutting is falling — but still affects the majority of Ethiopian women

Women aged 15-49 who have been cut, Ethiopia, 2000-2024



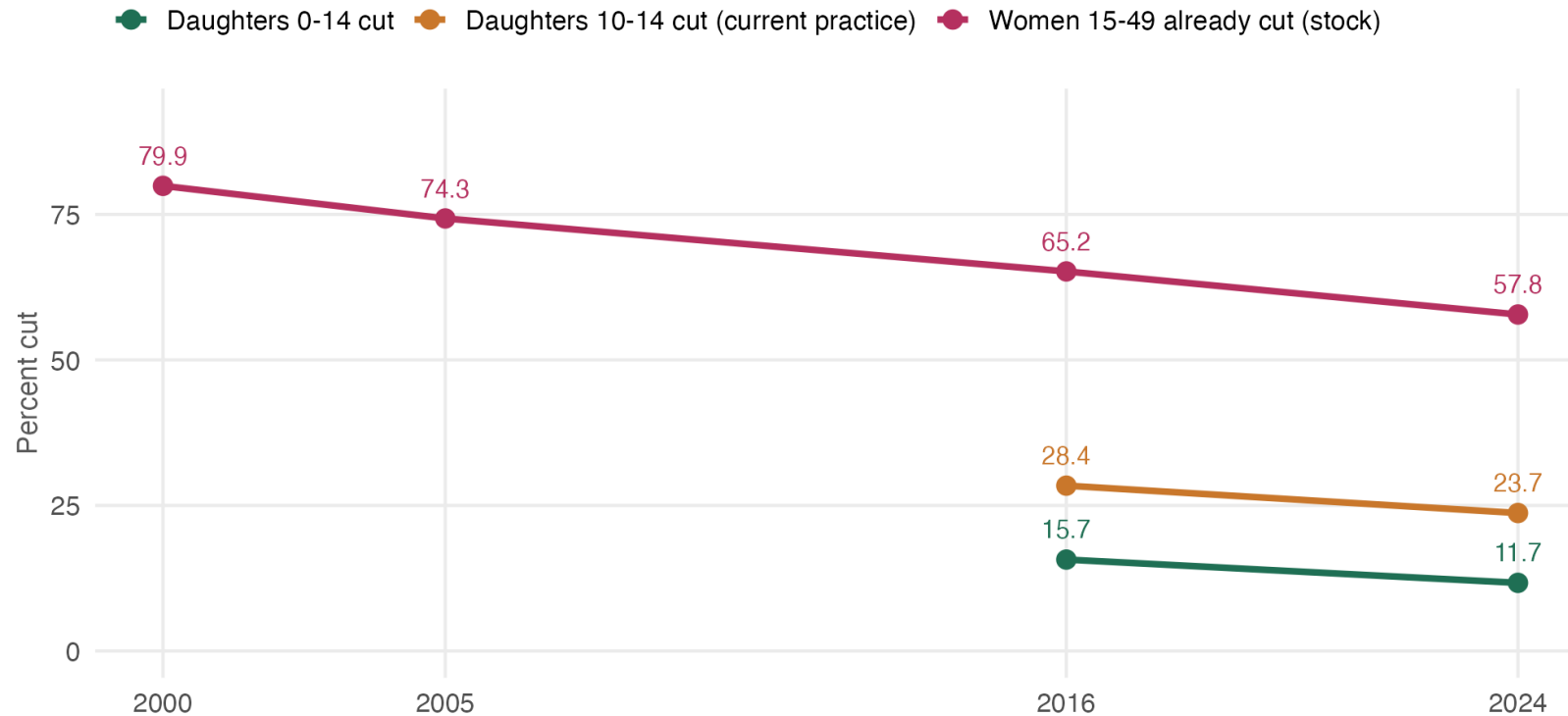
Source: DHS Program API (Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024)

Takeaway: A 22-point fall in 24 years is among the larger sustained declines recorded anywhere — yet the majority of Ethiopian women alive today have been cut.

Stock versus flow — the distinction that changes the conclusion

The single most hopeful number in this dataset

Prevalence among women aged 15-49 records cutting that happened decades ago. Prevalence among daughters records what is happening now - and it is a quarter of the historical level



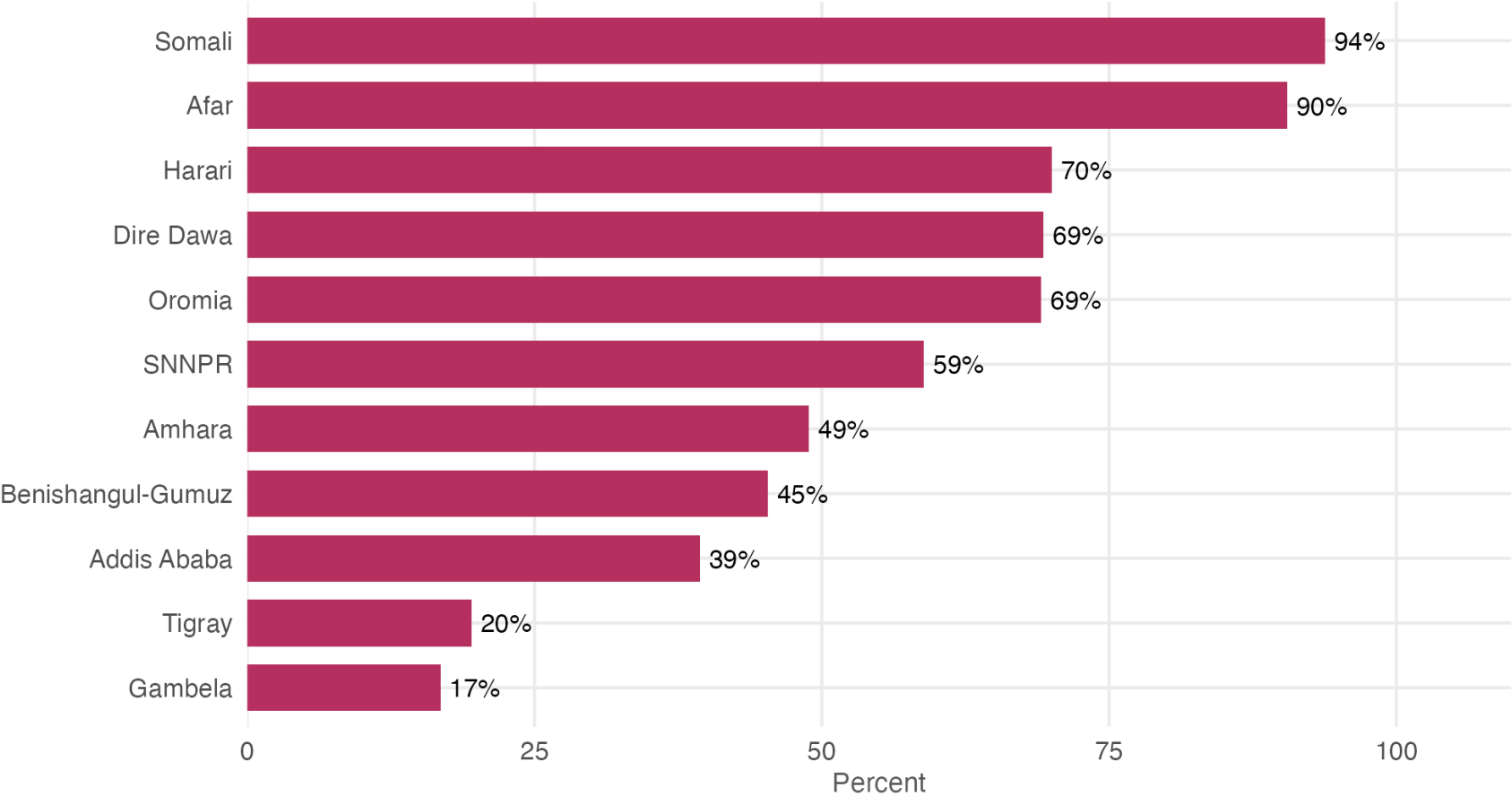
Source: DHS Program API - Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024. Daughters' data collected only in 2016 and 2024. The 0-4 age band is NOT shown as a trend because most girls in it have not yet reached the age at which cutting occurs - it measures censoring, not abandonment.

Takeaway: Among women 15–49, 57.8% have been cut. Among their daughters aged 0–14, 11.7%. The first number describes the past; the second describes the present.

Cutting varies enormously across Ethiopia's regions

Female genital cutting varies enormously by region (2024)

Women 15-49 who have been cut



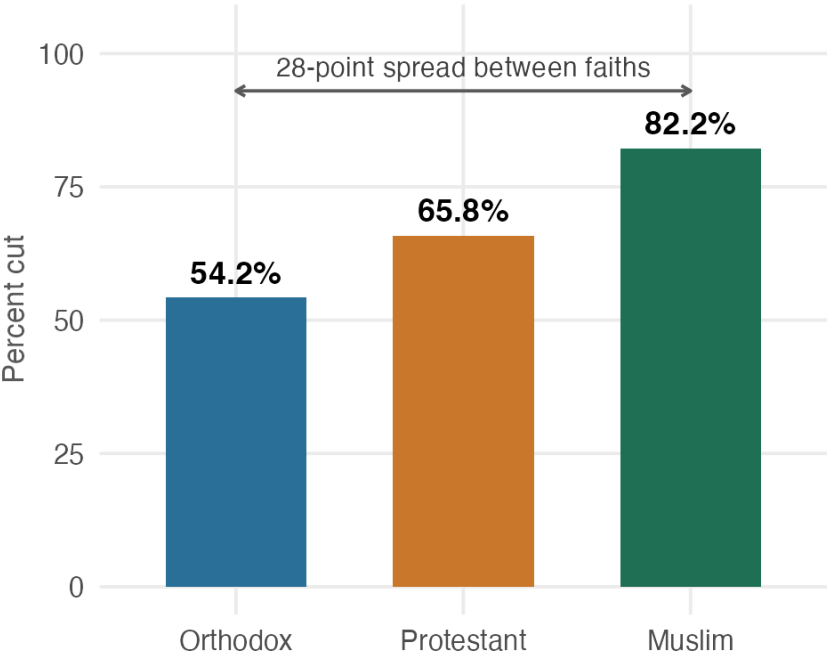
Source: DHS Program API (Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024)

Takeaway: A 77-point spread between Somali (94%) and Gambela (17%). National averages conceal the communities where the practice is near-universal.

The religion overlay

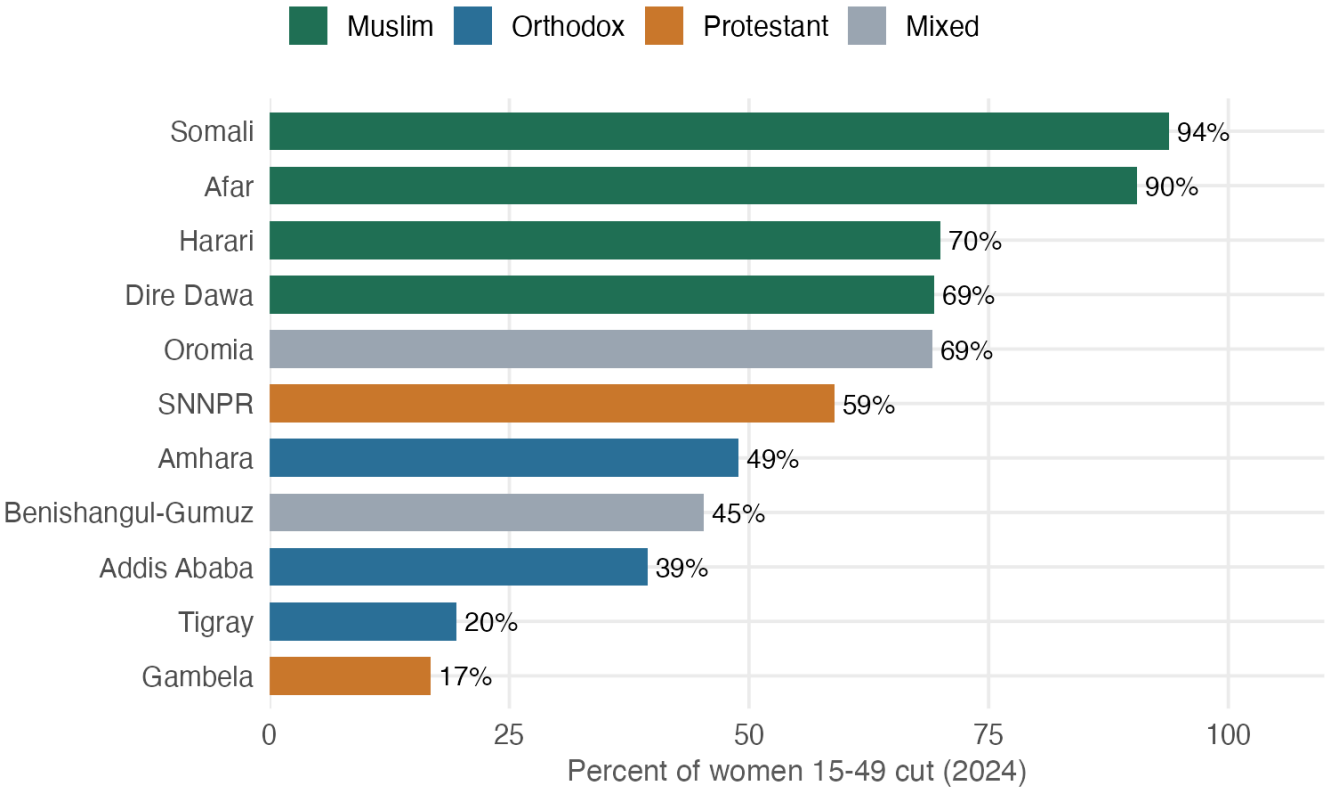
The naive read: by the woman's own religion

Women 15-49 cut, Ethiopia DHS 2016
(final report, Table 16.2)



The overlay: 2024 regional data, coloured by plurality faith

Within-faith spans: Muslim-majority 24 pts (69-94), Orthodox-majority 29 pts (20-49),
Protestant-majority 42 pts (17-59) — each rivals or exceeds the 28-point between-faith gap



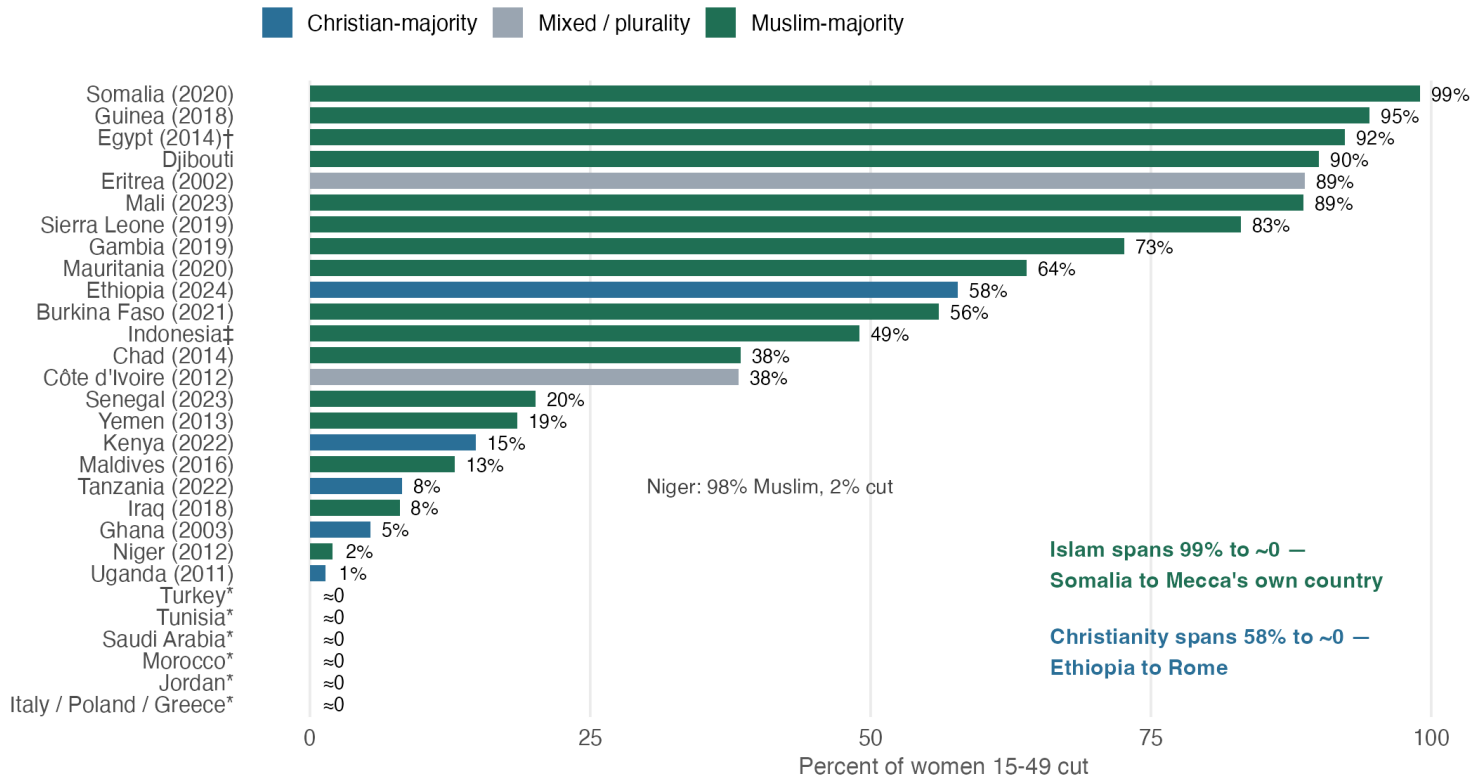
Sources: Ethiopia DHS 2016 final report, Table 16.2 (religion cross-tab; Catholic suppressed, n=66); DHS Program API, Ethiopia 2024 (regional prevalence); plurality faith per region from the 2007 census. The ethnicity cross-tab sharpens it further: ethnic Tigray women, overwhelmingly Orthodox, 23.0% cut; ethnic Amhara women, also overwhelmingly Orthodox, 60.5% (DHS 2016). Same faith, 38 points apart.

Takeaway: Between faiths, 28 points. Within Muslim-majority regions, 24; within Orthodox-majority, 29; within Protestant-majority, 42. The variation inside each faith rivals or exceeds the gap between them — doctrine cannot be what drives the practice.

The Vatican test

The Vatican test: if it were doctrine, the doctrinal heartlands would practise it

Women 15-49 cut, most recent national survey per country, coloured by majority faith. The practice maps to a contiguous belt from Senegal to Somalia plus Egypt, Sudan and Yemen - and to local custom beyond it - not to any faith



Sources: DHS Program API (latest survey per country); UNICEF 2024 global FGM database (Somalia, Djibouti, Iraq MICS 2018, Indonesia).

* Not practised at population level - the survey module is not even fielded; localized exceptions documented in Saudi Arabia and Iranian Kurdistan.

† Egypt DHS samples ever-married women. ‡ Indonesia: girls aged 0-11 (Risksdas 2013) - a different metric, mostly symbolic or Type I/IV forms.

Malaysia has no national survey; local studies find a symbolic Type IV form near-universal among Malay Muslim women (~94% in one survey) -

a Shafi'i-school regional custom, which is itself the point: where cutting is framed as religious, the framing follows regional school and custom.

Cutting predates both faiths - it is attested in pharaonic Egypt - and appears in neither the Quran nor the Bible.

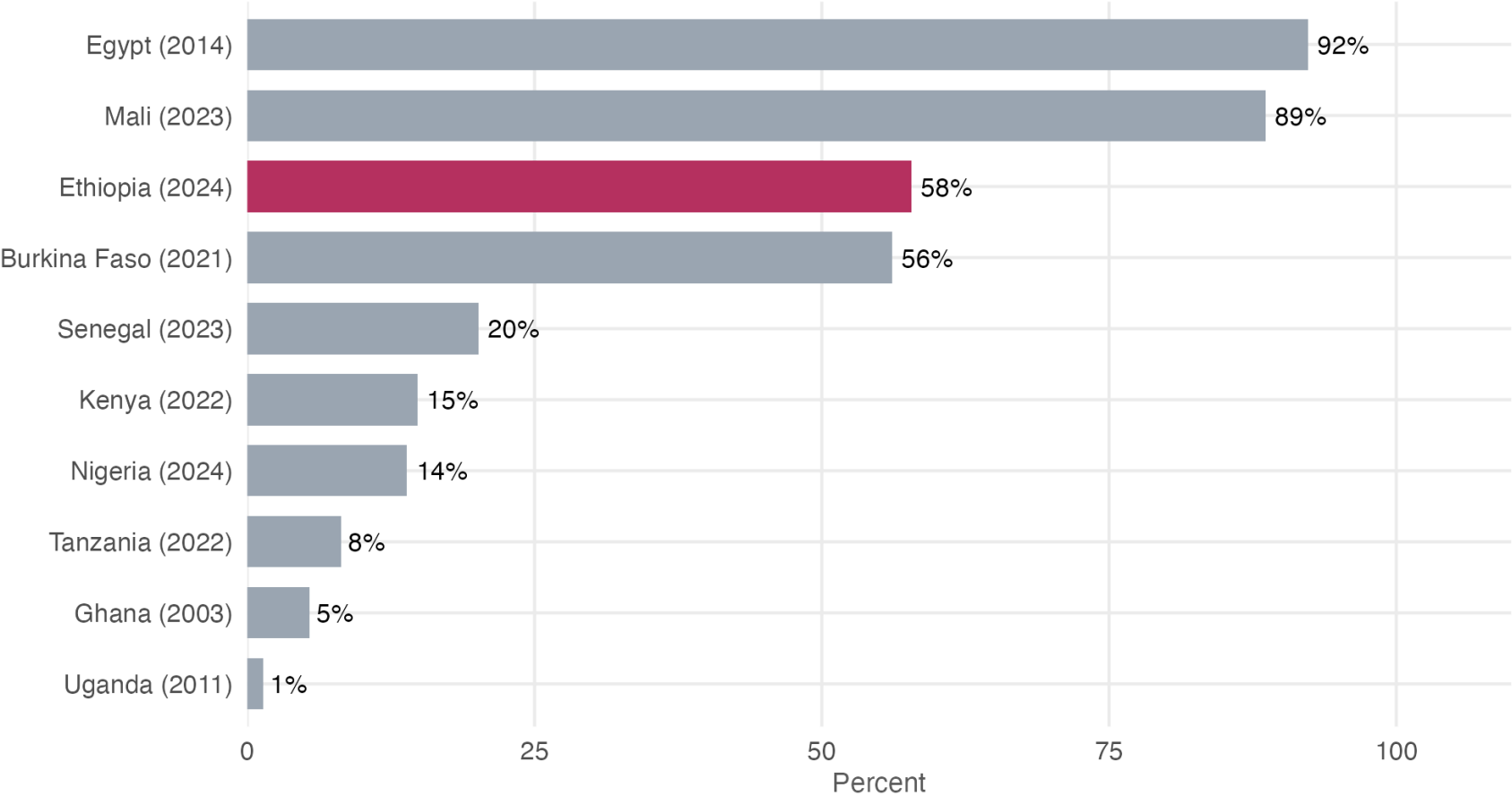
Takeaway: If cutting were Islamic doctrine, Mecca's own country would practise it — it does not. If it were Christian, Rome would — Europe does not. Islam spans 99% to zero; Christianity spans 58% to zero. The practice follows a geographic belt and local custom, not any faith.



Ethiopia in regional context

Ethiopia sits mid-range among high-prevalence countries

Women 15-49 who have been cut, most recent DHS in each country



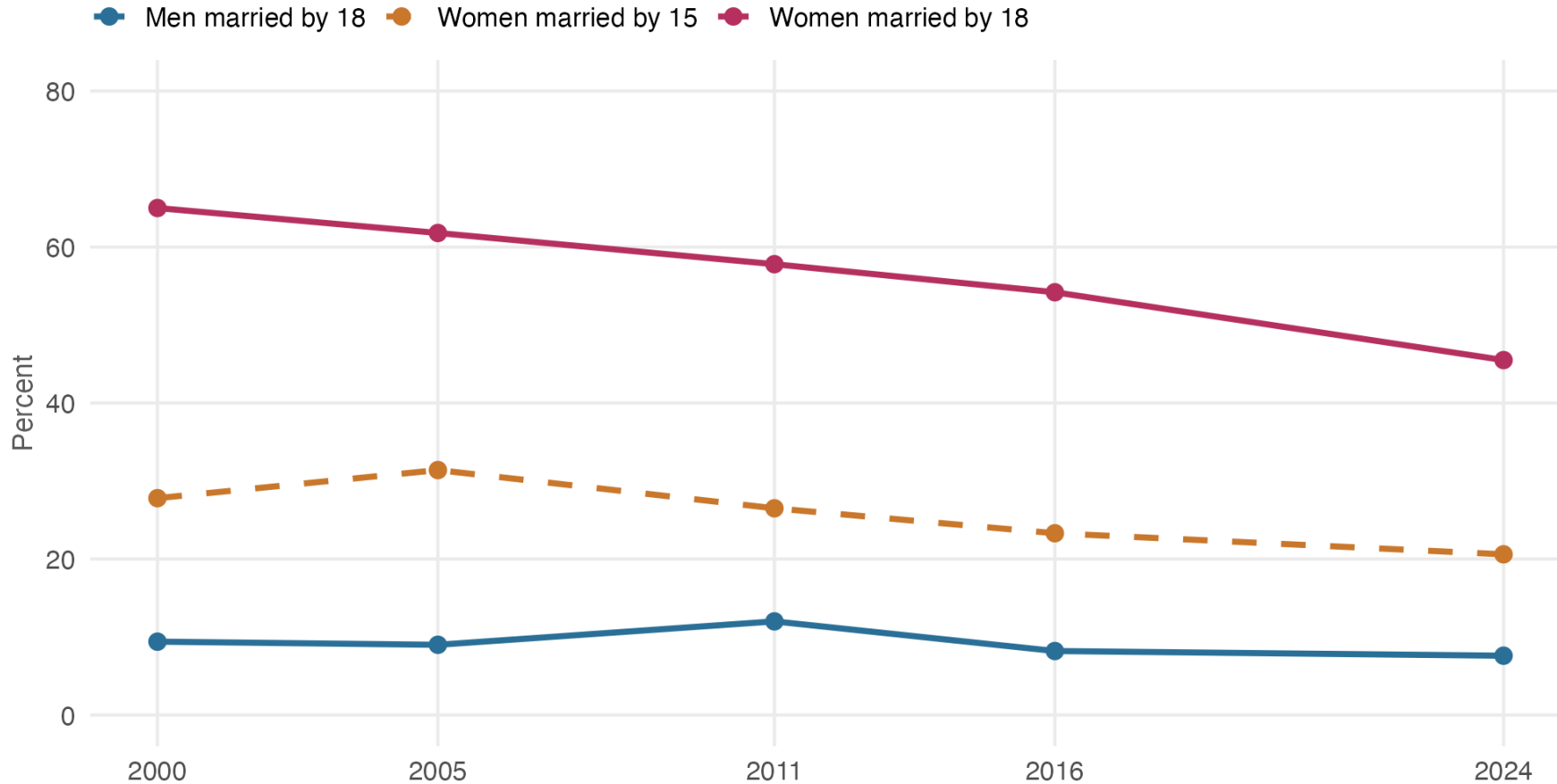
Source: DHS Program API, latest available survey per country

Takeaway: Ethiopia sits between the near-universal-practice countries and those that have largely abandoned cutting. Senegal, Kenya and Nigeria show the transition is achievable.

Child marriage is a girls' phenomenon, and it is falling

Child marriage is overwhelmingly a girls' phenomenon

Percent first married by exact age, women and men 20-49, Ethiopia



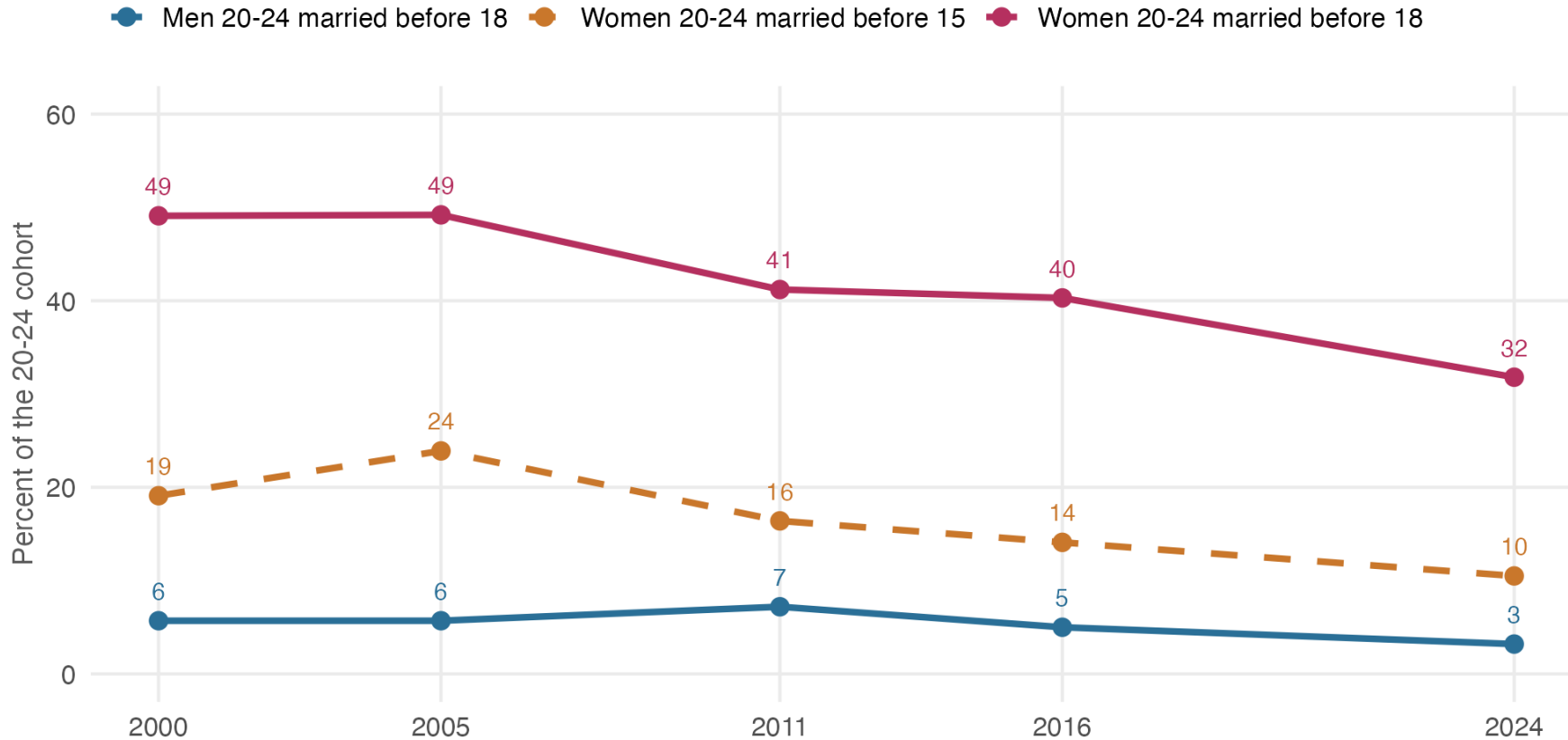
Source: DHS Program API (Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024)

Takeaway: The asymmetry is the point: fewer than one in ten men married before 18. But this is a lifetime stock reaching back to the 1980s — the next slide gives the measure of current practice.

Child marriage, measured the way the SDGs measure it

Child marriage measured properly: a third fewer girls than a generation ago

Women and men aged 20-24 married before the given age - the SDG indicator, because this cohort has completed the exposure period and reports recent practice rather than a lifetime stock



Source: DHS Program API - Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024

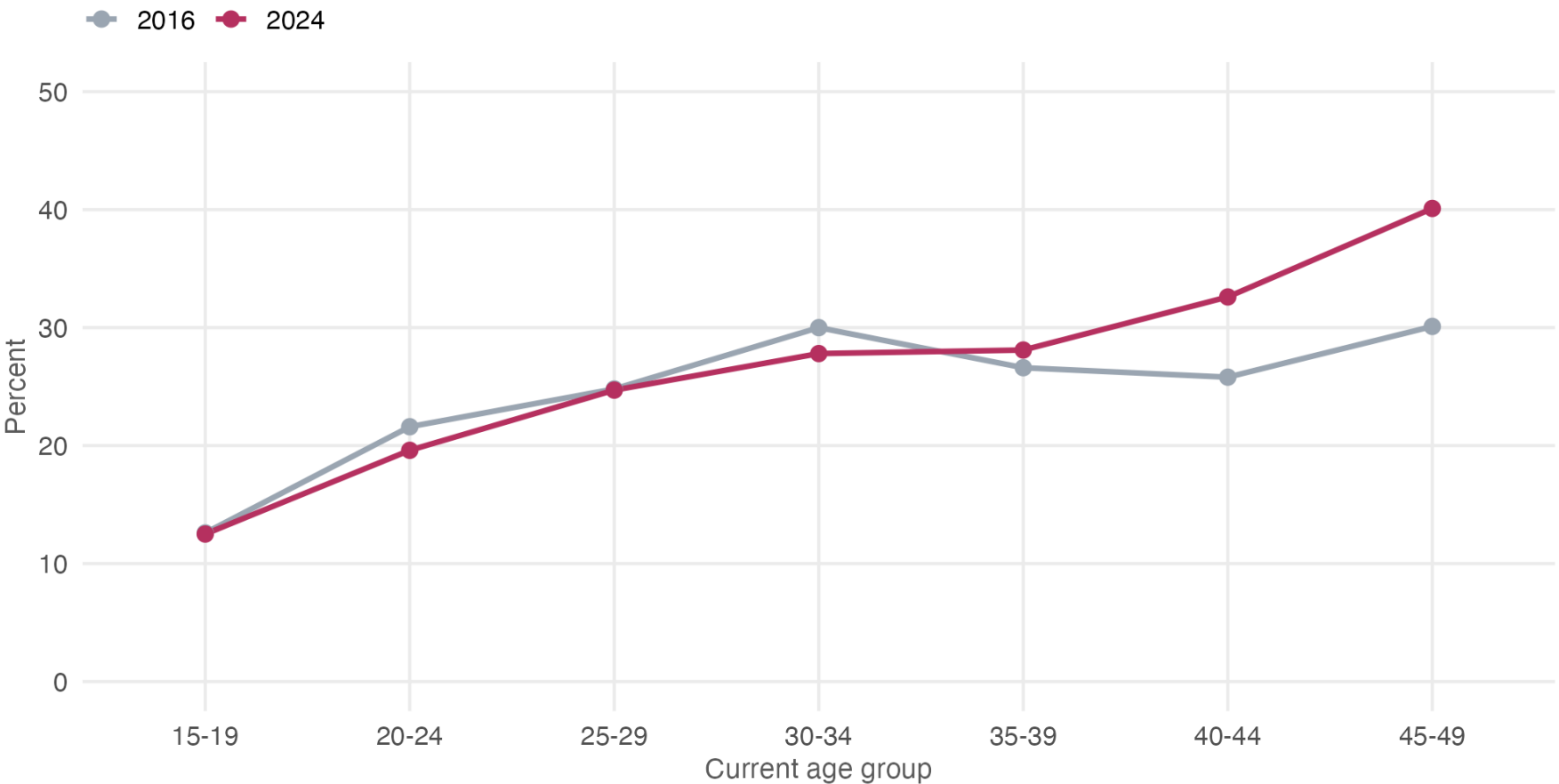
Takeaway: Among women aged 20–24 — the cohort that has completed the exposure period — marriage before 18 fell from 49% to 32%, and marriage before 15 from 19% to 11%.



Physical violence: the life-course pattern

Physical violence accumulates across a woman's life

Women who have ever experienced physical violence since age 15, by current age group



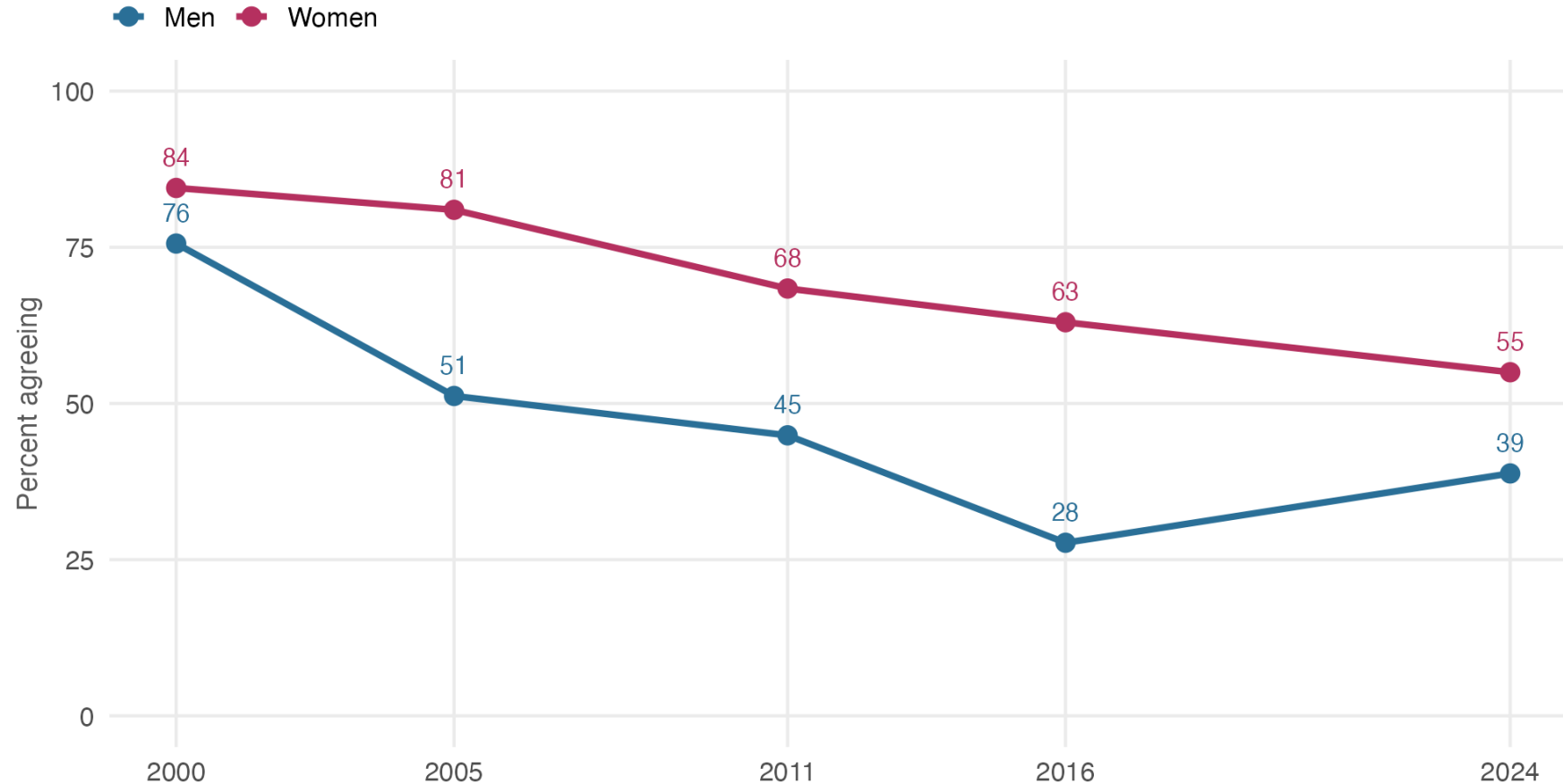
Source: DHS Program API (Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024)

Takeaway: Reported violence rises with age because it is cumulative exposure — and the 2024 rise among women over 40 is consistent with a cohort that lived through the conflict years.

The attitude shift — and the reversal that should worry us

Acceptance of wife-beating has fallen sharply - but men's approval rose after 2016

Percent agreeing a husband is justified in beating his wife for at least one reason



Source: DHS Program API (Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024)

Takeaway: Men's acceptance of wife-beating fell from 76% to 28% over sixteen years, then rose to 39% between 2016 and 2024. This is the single most concerning trend in the dataset.

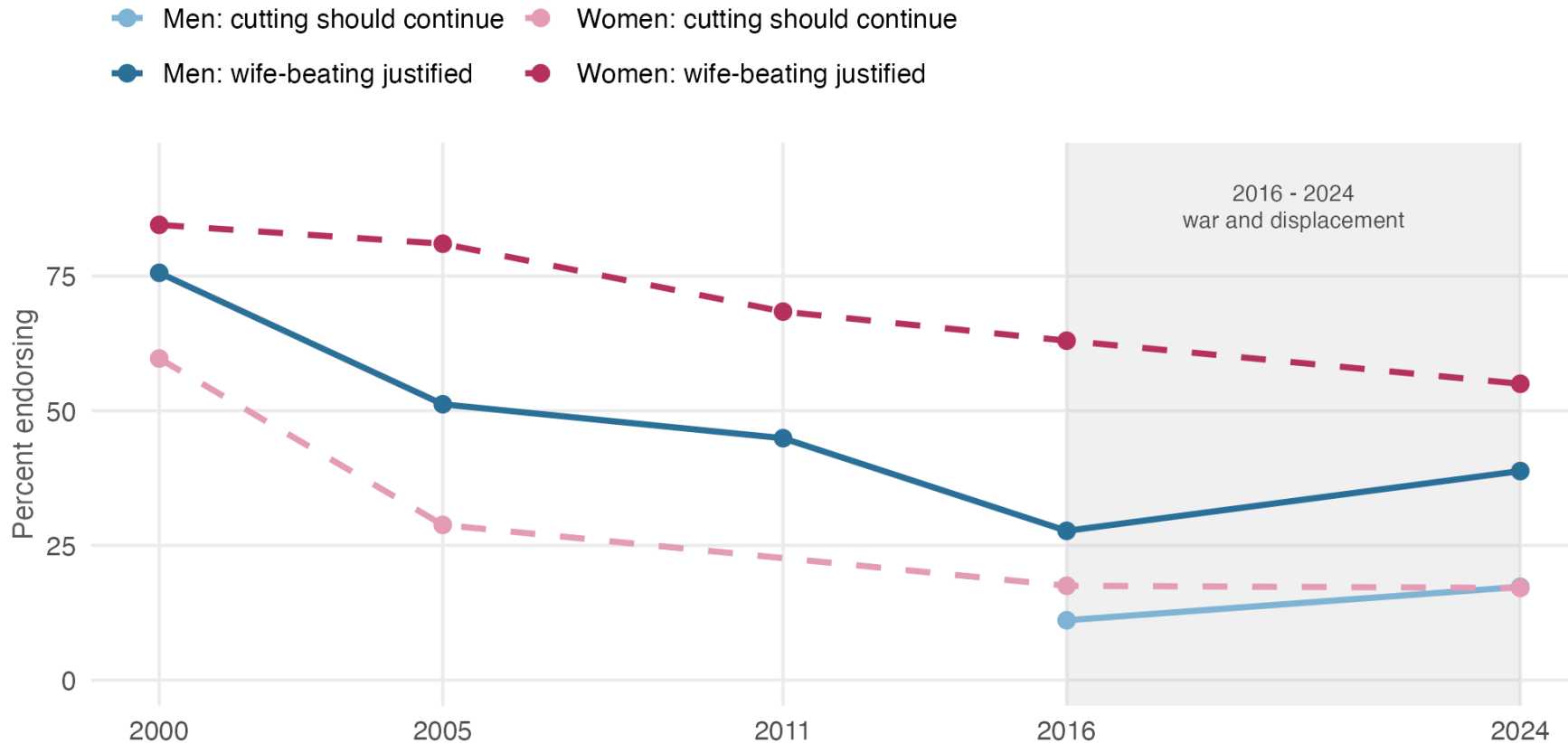
Why the men's reversal matters more than the women's decline

- Women's acceptance is falling steadily: 84% in 2000 to 55% in 2024. That is the norm eroding from the side of those who bear the cost.
- Men's acceptance fell faster and further — to 28% by 2016 — and then rose to 39%. Men are the perpetrating population; their norms are the operative constraint on behaviour.
- The 2016–2024 window spans the northern war, mass displacement, and a collapse in state presence across large areas. The best-supported interpretation is that armed conflict re-legitimises private violence.
- Two things follow. First, gains in gender norms are not ratchets — they can be undone. Second, post-conflict programming has to treat norm repair as a distinct objective, not a by-product of reconstruction.
- Methodological honesty: this specific reversal needs confirmation in the next DHS round before it is treated as settled. It is presented here as a signal, not a conclusion.

Not one reversal — two

Men's attitudes worsened on two independent norms in the same window

Percent endorsing each practice. Women's endorsement fell on one and held flat on the other.
Men's rose on both between 2016 and 2024



Source: DHS Program API - Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024. Men's series use the explicit 15-49 rows so both sexes are on the same age basis.

Takeaway: Between 2016 and 2024 men's acceptance of wife-beating rose from 28% to 39%, and men's support for continuing cutting rose from 11% to 17%. Women moved the other way on both.

A measurement caution the audience must hear

Why one number in this dataset should not be reported as good news

- Reported experience of sexual violence among women 15–49 fell from 10.1% in 2016 to 7.9% in 2024.
- That decline spans a period containing documented, large-scale conflict-related sexual violence. Taken at face value it would be an extraordinary claim.
- The far more likely explanation is a change in what women were willing or able to disclose — and in which areas the survey could reach. Prevalence measured by self-report is a measure of disclosure as much as of experience.
- This is the caution from the opening of the lecture, applied: violence figures are floors, and changes in floors can reflect changes in reporting rather than changes in reality.
- Stated as a rule for reading any violence statistic: a fall in reported violence during a period of state weakness and displacement should be treated as a measurement question first and a substantive finding only after that question is answered.

Conflict-related sexual violence in the northern war, 2020–2022

Where household surveys go blind, clinical and documentary evidence takes over. The Tigray data are the most systematic record — not the only one

43.3%

of women surveyed in Tigray reported at least one form of gender-based violence (2,241 of 5,171)

9.7%

reported sexual violence — 500 of 5,171 women of reproductive age

76%

of documented conflict-related rapes involved multiple perpetrators (median of three)

8–69

the age range of survivors in a review of 305 medical records

- Physicians for Human Rights reviewed 305 randomly selected medical records from Tigray health facilities, November 2020 to June 2023: 304 documented conflict-related sexual violence, and cases continued after the cessation-of-hostilities agreement. A 2025 survivor survey (n=528) documented bacterial sexually transmitted infections in 13.1%, HIV in 2.3% and hepatitis in 0.8% — alongside unquantified obstetric, psychiatric and social consequences.
- The violence was committed by all parties. The joint OHCHR–Ethiopian Human Rights Commission investigation documented sexual violence by every side, and Amnesty International documented gang rapes of Amhara women by Tigrayan fighters at Nifas Mewcha in August 2021 — more than 70 women reported rape to authorities from that one town in nine days.

The justice cascade: why almost no case reaches a courtroom

Each stage filters out survivors — the cumulative effect is near-total impunity

Where cases are lost

- Naming: where violence is normalised, the act is not classified as a crime by the survivor or her family.
- Disclosure: stigma, fear of divorce, and loss of economic support.
- Reporting: 63% of Ethiopians regard intimate-partner violence as a family matter — reporting is socially costly and often actively discouraged.
- Access: services are overwhelmingly urban. Rural survivors face transport cost, distance, and one-stop centres that are understaffed or absent.
- Adjudication: cases may be diverted to customary or religious forums that prioritise family reconciliation and compensation over prosecution.
- Sentencing: submissions to Ethiopia's 2024 Universal Periodic Review argue penalties are insufficient relative to the gravity of the offence, and often not imposed at all.

What this implies

- Prevalence measures a fraction of incidence; convictions a fraction of that. The two cannot be compared.
- Criminalising conduct — as Ethiopia did in 2004 — changes the law but not the cascade. Every stage above is downstream of the statute.
- Interventions that raise reporting will appear to increase violence. Programme evaluation must anticipate this or it will punish success.
- The highest-leverage stages are the earliest: naming and disclosure. These are norm problems, not capacity problems — which is why the community-norms interventions in Part 9 matter so much.
- Capacity investment still matters, but only after disclosure rises; otherwise one-stop centres sit empty and are then defunded as ineffective.

Consequences: violence is a health and development problem

Why this belongs in a public-health lecture and not only a human-rights one

- Obstetric injury: early marriage and early first birth in girls whose pelvises are not fully grown are a principal pathway to obstetric fistula, with lifelong incontinence and near-universal social exclusion.
- Infection: the Tigray clinical series documented sexually transmitted infections, HIV and hepatitis among survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.
- Mental health: depression, post-traumatic stress and suicidality are consistently elevated among survivors — and Ethiopia's mental-health workforce is among the smallest per capita in the world.
- Education: marriage and pregnancy remain leading proximate causes of girls' withdrawal from school, which transmits the disadvantage into the next generation.
- Economic: violence reduces labour supply, earnings and asset accumulation — the mechanism through which gender-based violence becomes a macroeconomic cost, not only a private tragedy.

INTERVAL

End of session one

Parts 1–4: the country, the cost of its wars, the law, and violence against women and girls.
Session two takes the three domains — health, education, economic opportunity — then barriers, evidence and what to do.

Session two — where we are

Ninety seconds of re-anchoring before the domains

- The claim being prosecuted: Ethiopia's gains for women are real and large, unevenly distributed, and reversible — and the binding constraint is enforcement and norms, not statute.
- Established so far: what kind of country produces these statistics; that the cost of war lives in human capital and coordination rather than GDP; how the law was built and partly dismantled by Ethiopian women; and that violence is where law changed most and life least.
- The three reversals to keep in view: Tigray's birth attendance, the post-2019 contraception decline, and men's attitudes worsening on two independent norms.
- Ahead: health, education and economic opportunity — then the barriers, what has worked elsewhere, and what Ethiopia could do.

PART FIVE

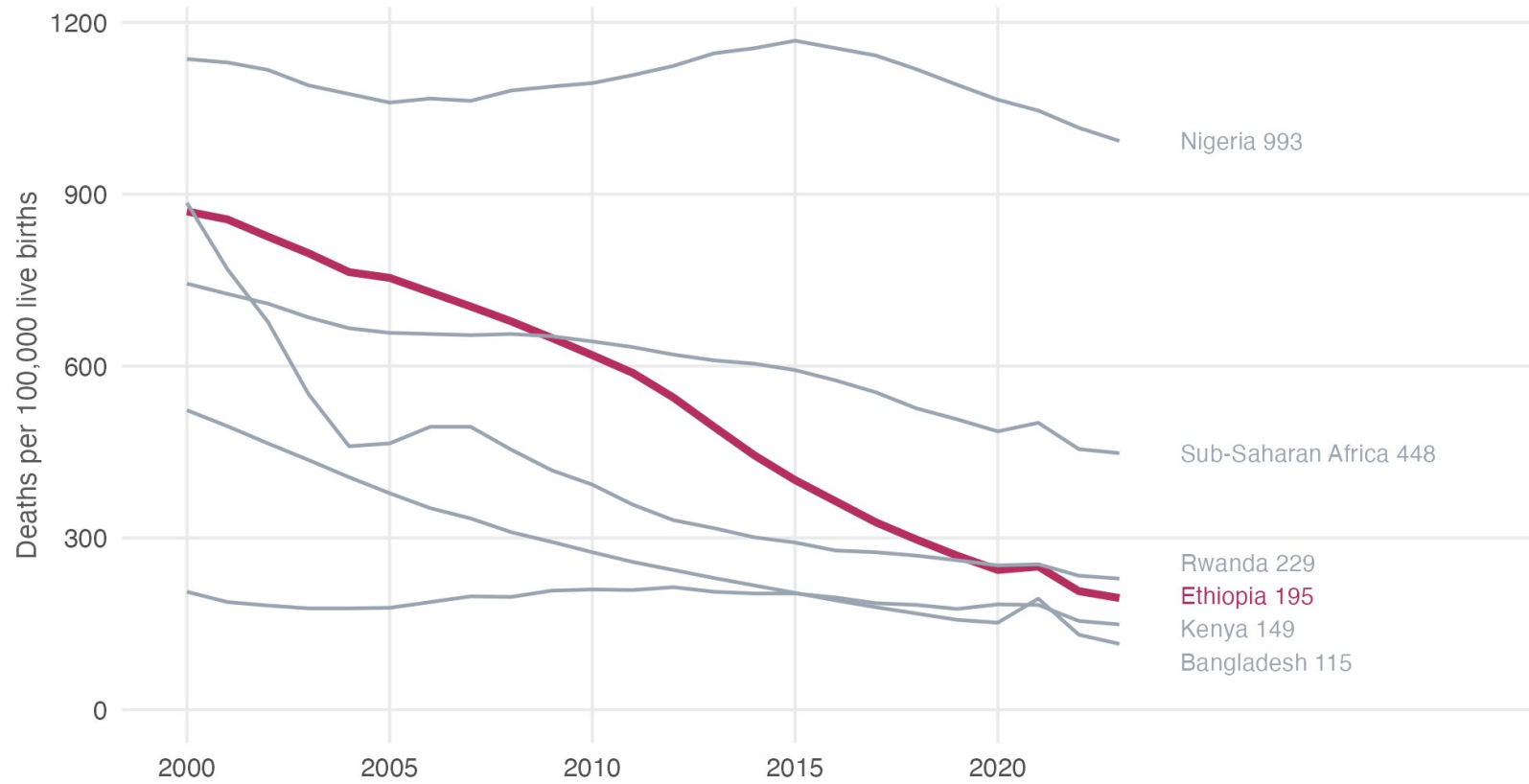
Health

Ethiopia's clearest success — and a case study in how gains distribute unequally

Maternal mortality: one of the fastest declines recorded anywhere

Ethiopia cut maternal deaths by more than three quarters since 2000

Maternal mortality ratio, deaths per 100,000 live births



Source: World Bank WDI (SH.STA.MMRT), modelled estimates

Takeaway: From 870 to 195 deaths per 100,000 live births between 2000 and 2023 — a 78% reduction, overtaking Rwanda and closing on Kenya from a far worse starting point.

What actually produced the maternal mortality decline

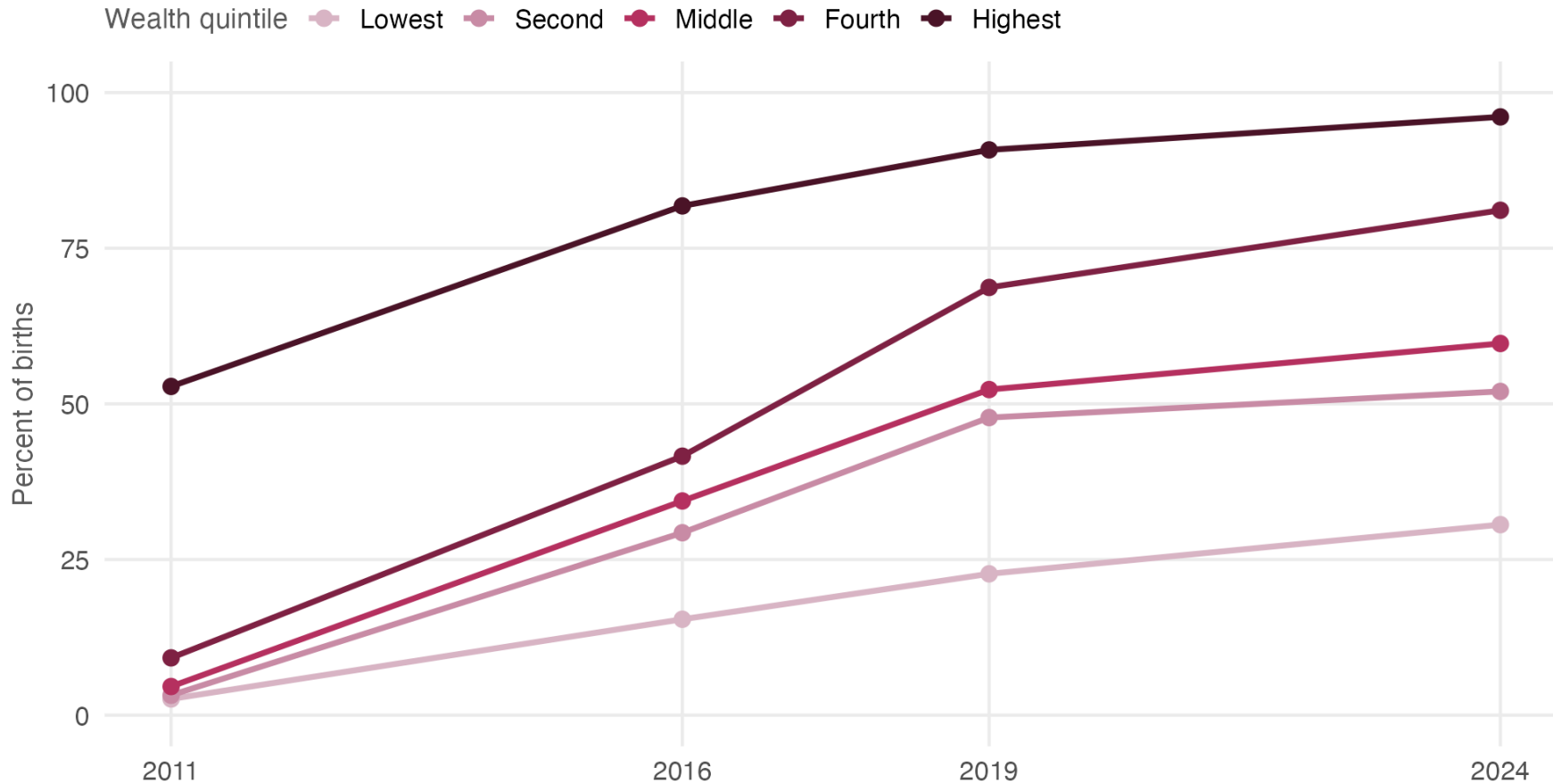
Attribution matters, because it determines what to protect

- The Health Extension Programme, launched in 2003, placed two salaried, trained female health extension workers in every rural kebele — a deliberate decision to make the front line of the health system female and community-embedded.
- Antenatal care with four or more visits rose from 9% of pregnancies in 2000 to 53% in 2024.
- Skilled birth attendance rose from 12% of births in 2011 to 64% in 2024 — a fivefold increase in thirteen years.
- Fertility fell from 5.5 to 4.0 births per woman, mechanically reducing lifetime exposure to the risk of maternal death.
- Note the composition: two of these four are service-delivery achievements, and two are demand-side and demographic. Both halves were necessary.

But the gains reached the rich first, and the poorest last

Skilled birth attendance rose everywhere - the poorest gained last and least

Percent of births attended by a skilled provider, by household wealth quintile



Source: DHS Program API (Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024)

Takeaway: In 2024 the richest fifth of Ethiopian women are near-universally attended at birth; the poorest fifth remain below one in three. The absolute gap has widened, not closed.

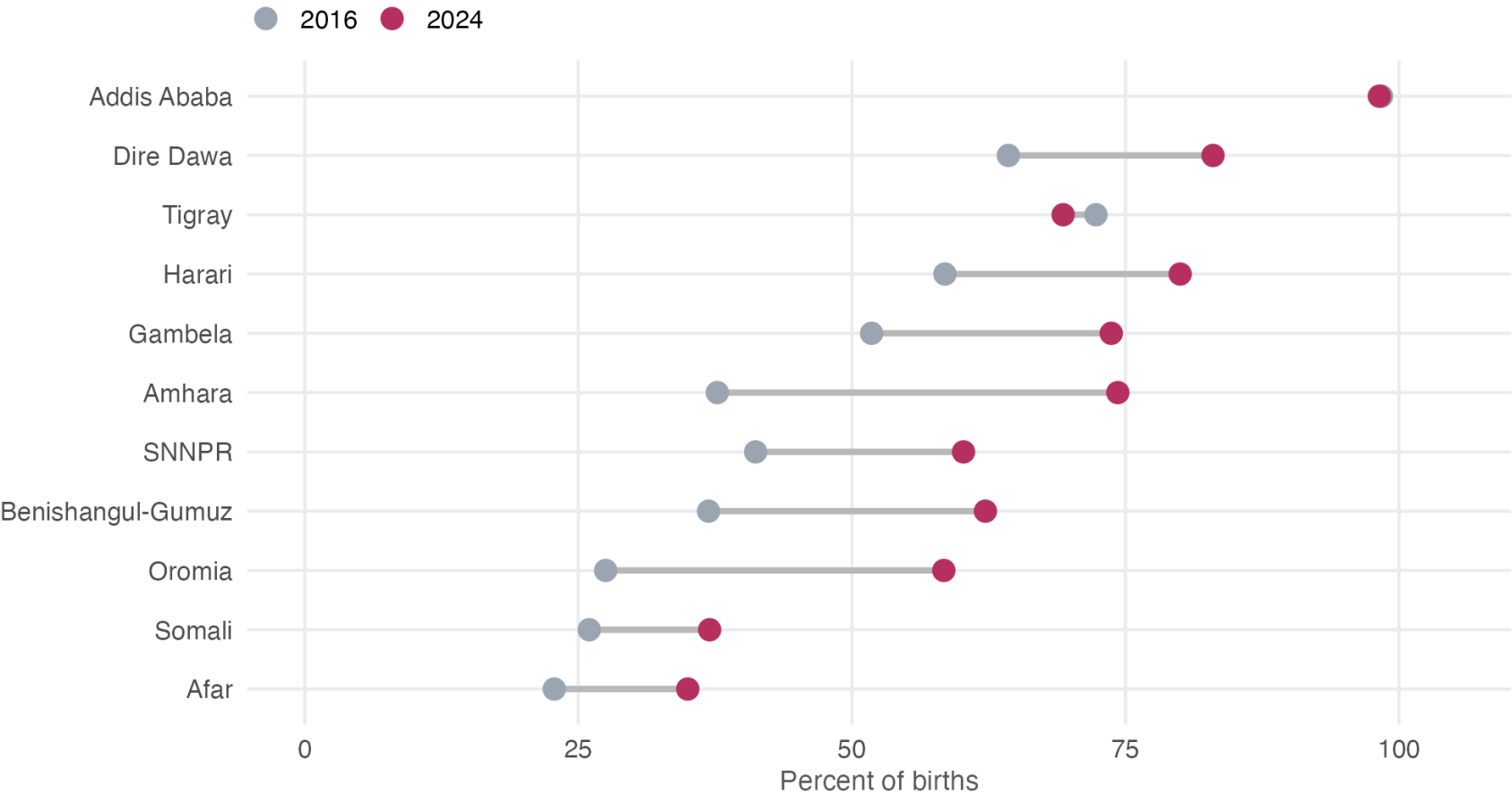
The inverse-equity pattern, and why it is not an argument against progress

- When a service is introduced, the wealthy and urban adopt it first. Coverage rises, and absolute inequality widens — even though no one is worse off.
- The gap narrows only when coverage approaches saturation among the advantaged, and effort shifts to the hardest-to-reach.
- Ethiopia is now at exactly that inflection point for skilled birth attendance: the top quintile has little room left to gain, so every further national percentage point must come from the bottom.
- That changes what the health system must do. Reaching the last 30% is not more of the same — it requires transport, road access, ambulance referral, and staffing in pastoralist regions where population is mobile and dispersed.
- Equity metric to watch: the ratio of richest-to-poorest coverage, tracked each survey round. A national average alone will conceal a stalled bottom quintile.

Conflict undoes health gains faster than programmes build them

Every region gained skilled birth attendance except Tigray

Percent of births with a skilled attendant, 2016 vs 2024. Tigray fell during the 2020-22 war



Source: DHS Program API (Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024)

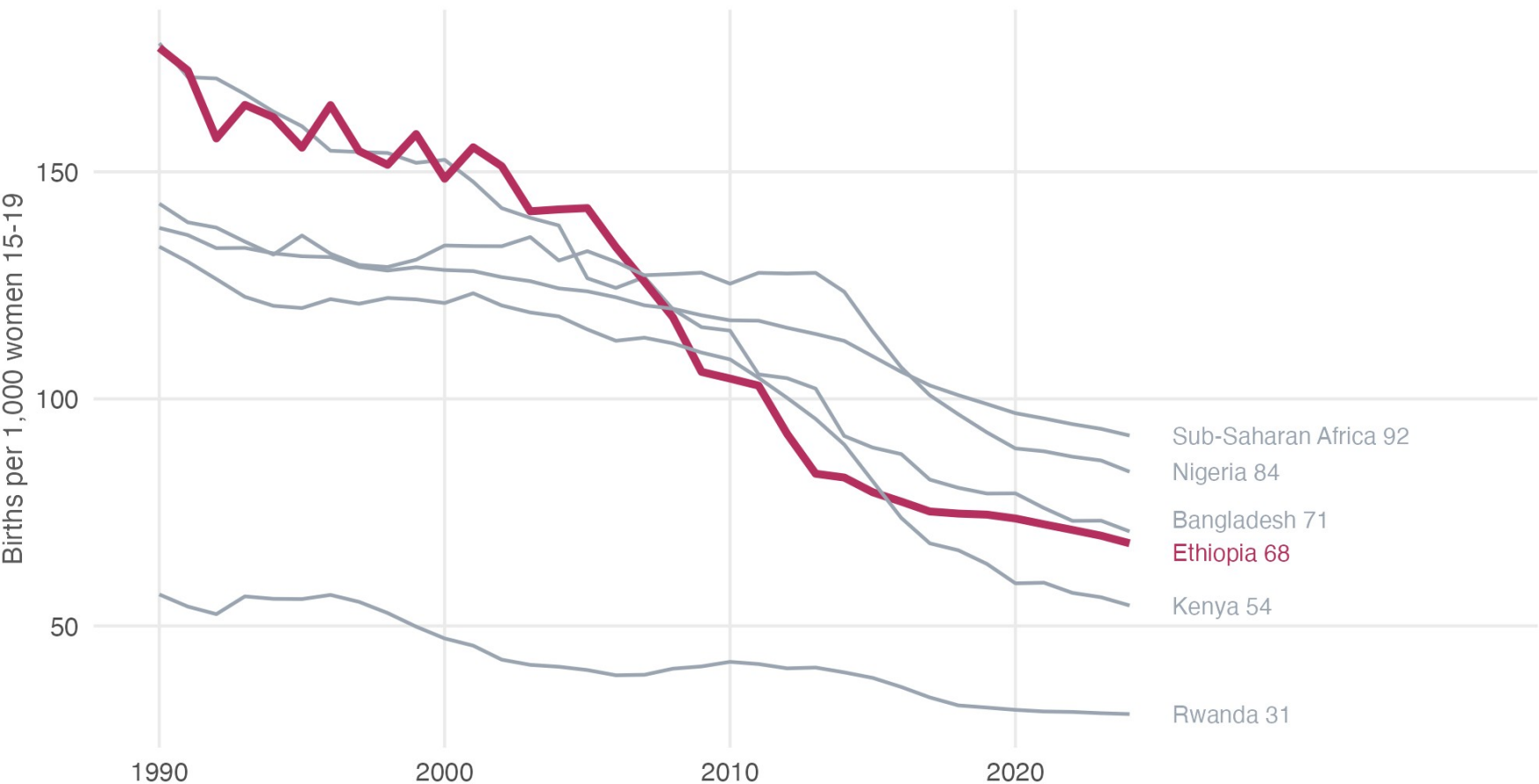
Takeaway: Every region improved between 2016 and 2024 except Tigray, which fell — the only meaningful reversal in the dataset (Addis Ababa, at 98%, was flat) — and the region that endured the war.



Adolescent childbearing has more than halved

Adolescent childbearing fell by more than half

Births per 1,000 women aged 15-19



Source: World Bank WDI (SP.ADO.TFRT)

Takeaway: From roughly 180 to 68 births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19 — the demographic signature of later marriage and rising school enrolment.

Family planning: strong gains, and a warning sign

6.3% → 40.5%

modern contraceptive use
among married women, 2000
to 2019

34.5%

the 2024 figure — a six-point
fall from the 2019 peak

5.5 → 4.0

total fertility rate, births per
woman, 2000 to 2024

53%

of pregnancies now receive
four or more antenatal visits,
up from 9%

- A six-point fall in contraceptive prevalence between 2019 and 2024 is a serious signal. Candidate explanations include conflict-related supply-chain and service disruption, the withdrawal of health extension workers from insecure areas, and shifts in donor financing.
- This should be treated as a priority question for verification rather than an established finding — but if real, it is the clearest evidence that Ethiopia's health gains for women are reversible.

The unfinished health agenda

- Facility delivery has risen far faster than the quality of care inside facilities. Getting a woman to a health post is necessary but not sufficient — she must find a skilled attendant, a functioning referral route for obstructed labour, and blood for haemorrhage.
- Neonatal mortality has fallen much more slowly than under-five mortality, which is the signature of a quality-of-care gap rather than an access gap.
- Abortion: the 2005 liberalisation for specified grounds, including rape and incest, is associated with substantial reductions in unsafe-abortion complications — an under-recognised contributor to the maternal mortality decline.
- Obstetric fistula remains concentrated among women who married and delivered as adolescents in regions with the weakest referral systems — the direct clinical endpoint of Part 4's argument.
- Mental health services for survivors of violence are effectively absent outside the largest cities.

PART SIX

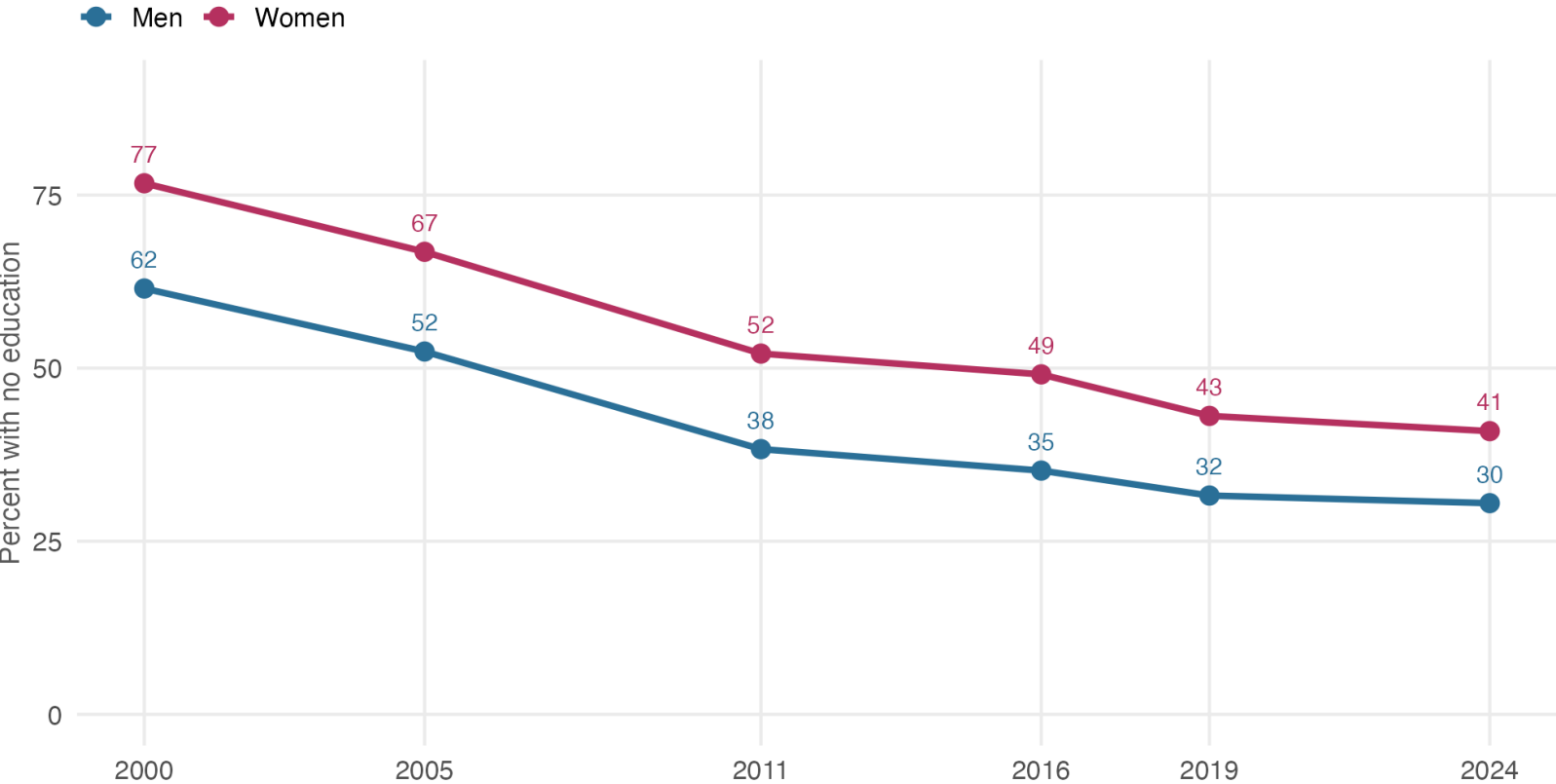
Education

The master variable — it moves marriage age, fertility, health-seeking, earnings and violence simultaneously

Both sexes gained schooling; the female deficit narrowed but never closed

Both sexes gained schooling - the female deficit never closed

Percent with no education, age 6+. Female-male gap: 15 pts in 2000, 10 pts in 2024



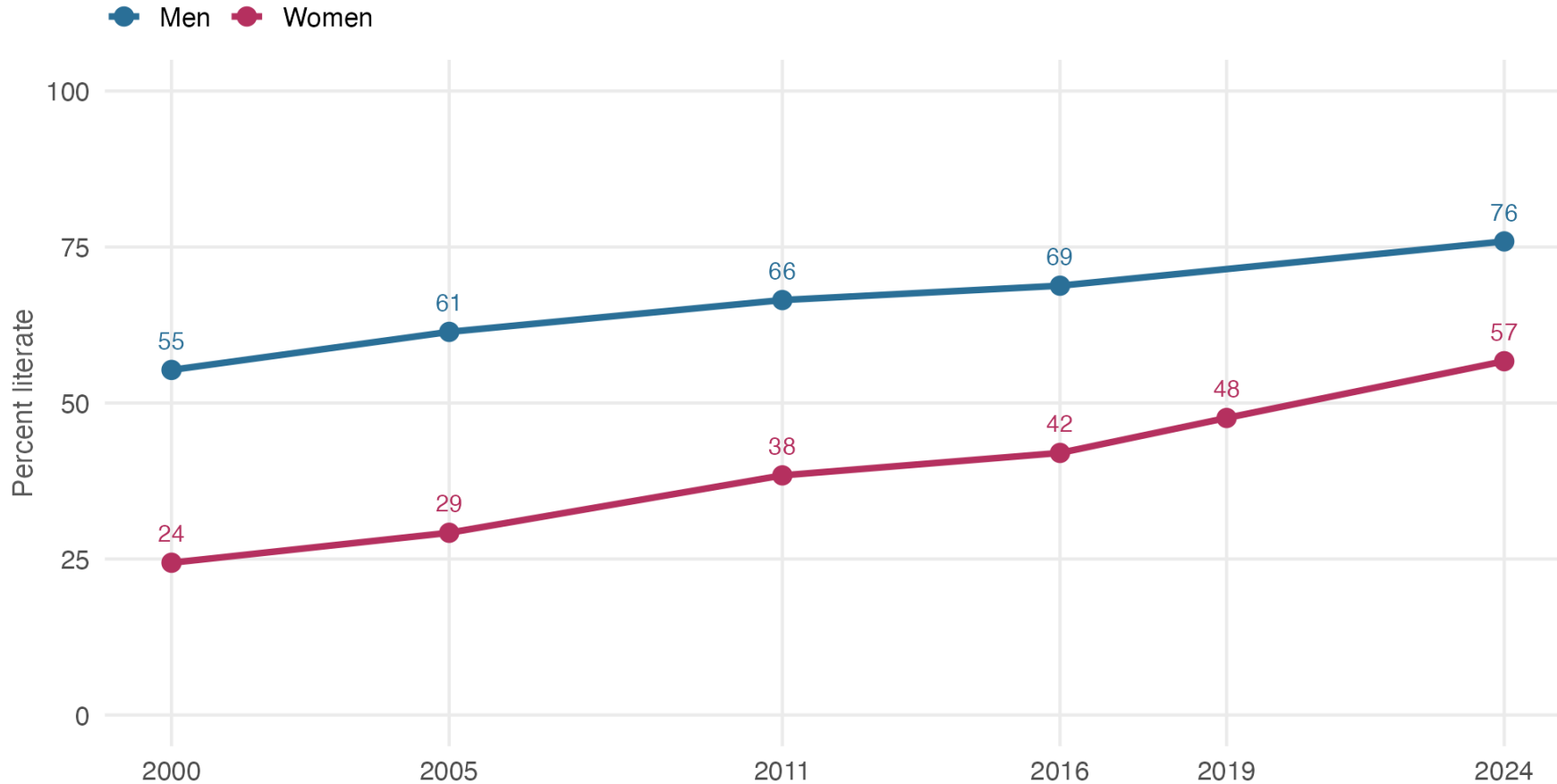
Source: DHS Program API (Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024)

Takeaway: Women with no education fell from 77% to 41% — an extraordinary gain. But the female-male gap only narrowed from 15 to 10 points in 24 years.

Literacy: the gap is wider than the schooling gap

Literacy: the female deficit is the widest single gender gap in the dataset

Percent literate, ages 15-49, both sexes. Gap: 31 points in 2000, 19 points in 2024



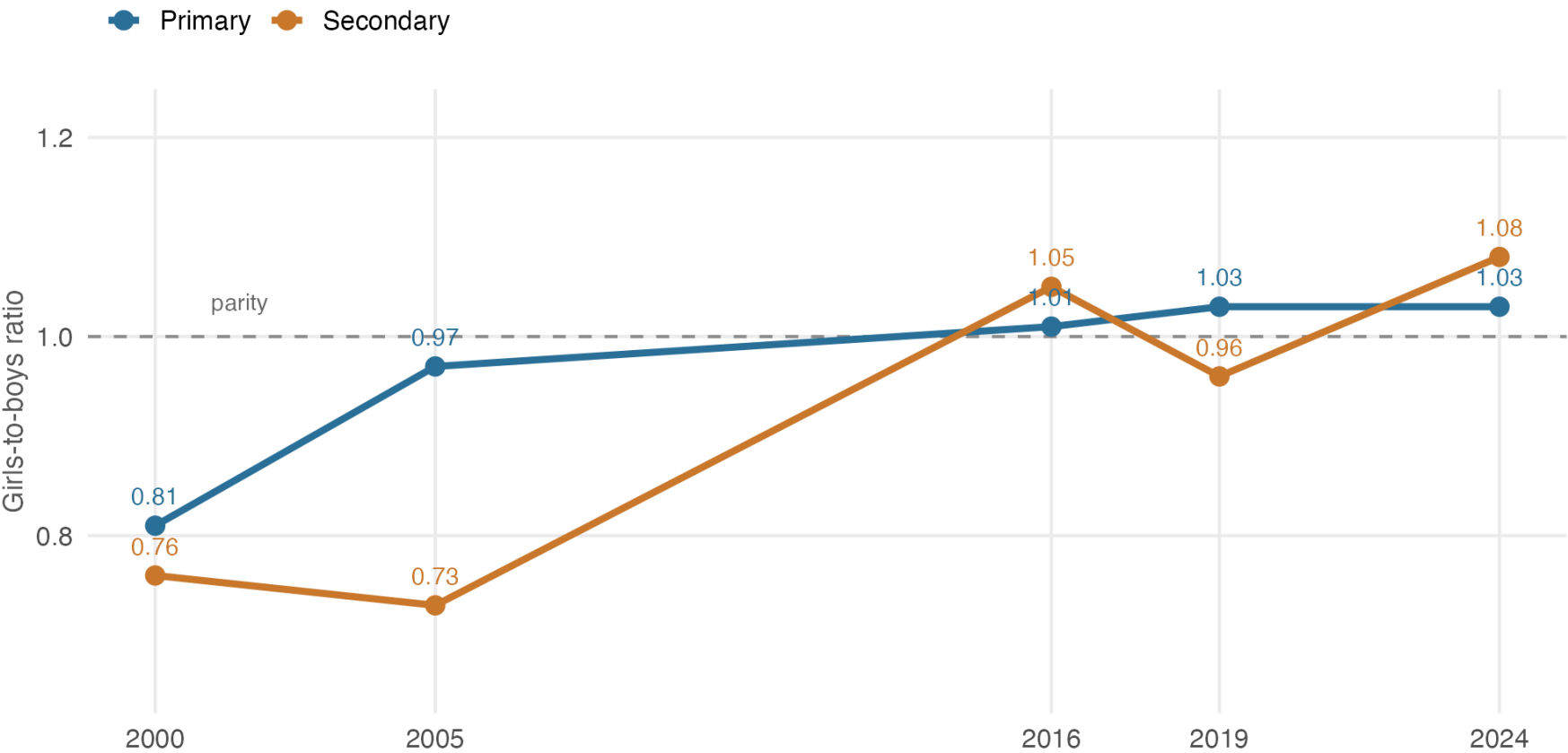
Source: DHS Program API (Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024)

Takeaway: 57% of women aged 15–49 are literate against 76% of men — a 19-point gap that translates directly into differential access to health information, legal rights and paid work.

One gap Ethiopia has genuinely closed

One gap Ethiopia has genuinely closed

Gender parity index for net school attendance - girls' rate divided by boys'. Above 1.00 means girls attend more



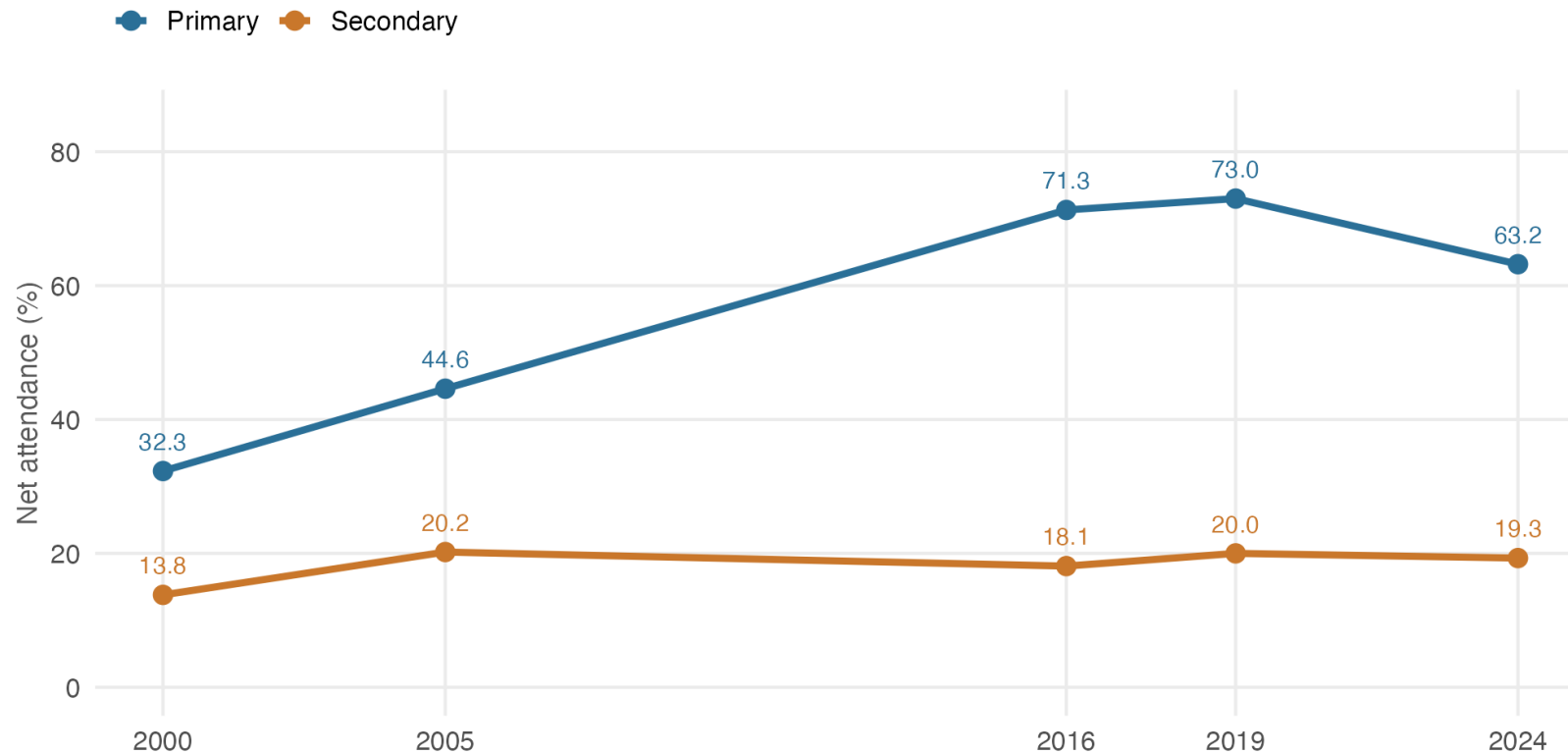
Source: DHS Program API, Ethiopia 2000-2024. Primary parity rose from 0.81 to 1.03; secondary from 0.76 to 1.08. The remaining education gap in Ethiopia is between generations, not between girls and boys now in school.

Takeaway: Girls now attend primary school at a slightly higher rate than boys (parity index 1.03), and secondary at 1.08. Among children currently in school, the gender gap is gone.

Primary access solved, then partly lost — secondary never started

Ethiopia solved primary access, then lost some of it - and never started on secondary

Net attendance ratio, percent of the official age group



Source: DHS Program API, Ethiopia 2000-2024. Secondary attendance has not moved materially since 2005, yet secondary - not primary - is the threshold at which schooling delays marriage and changes outcomes.

Takeaway: Secondary net attendance has not moved materially since 2005: 20.2% then, 19.3% now. Four in five Ethiopian adolescents are not in secondary school.

Why girls leave school

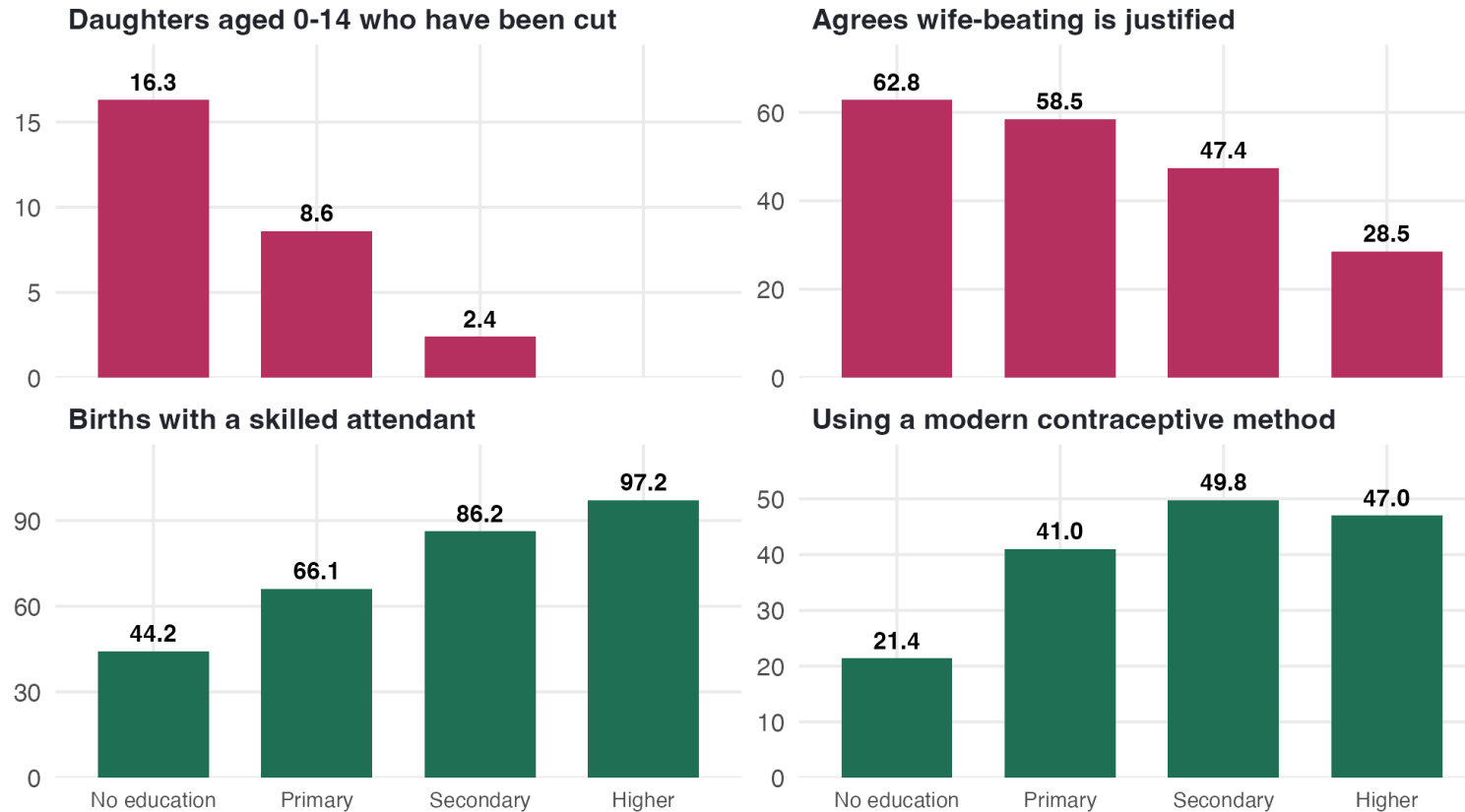
The proximate causes are well documented and individually addressable

- Marriage and pregnancy — the dominant reason for withdrawal at secondary age, and the direct link back to Part 4.
- Distance and safety — secondary schools are sparse in rural areas; the journey itself carries risk of harassment and assault, and parents rationally weigh that risk.
- Menstrual management — absent water, sanitation and private latrines, girls miss several days each month, accumulating into failure and withdrawal.
- Household labour — girls' unpaid work in water collection, fuel gathering and childcare competes directly with school hours in a way that boys' labour typically does not.
- Direct and indirect costs — where household resources are constrained, expenditure is preferentially allocated to boys, whose returns are assumed to stay in the natal family.
- Each of these has a tested policy instrument: conditional stipends, school siting and transport, WASH investment, and community norm change. None requires a technology that does not exist.

The master variable, shown rather than asserted

Education is the master variable - and here is the evidence, not the assertion

Each outcome by the woman's own level of schooling, Ethiopia 2024. Red = harm falling with education; green = protective behaviour rising with it



Source: DHS Program API - Ethiopia DHS 2024. A mother with secondary schooling is roughly seven times less likely to have a daughter cut than a mother with none. These are cross-sectional gradients, not causal estimates - but the causal evidence (Bangladesh stipends, Berhane Hewan) points the same way.

Takeaway: A mother with secondary schooling is roughly seven times less likely to have a daughter cut than a mother with none — 2.4% against 16.3%.

Why education is the single best-value line in a gender budget

One instrument, acting on every domain in this lecture at once

7×

less likely to have a daughter cut — mother with secondary schooling versus none

2.2×

more likely to deliver with a skilled attendant — 97% with higher education vs 44% with none; 86% with secondary

–34 pts

in acceptance of wife-beating across the gradient — 63% with no education to 29% with higher; 47% with secondary

19%

of Ethiopian adolescents are in secondary school — the threshold that produces all of the above

- No other single intervention in this deck acts simultaneously on violence, health, fertility and earnings. That is what 'master variable' means, and it is why Priority 2 in Part 10 is a stipend rather than a campaign.
- It is also the cheapest of the three top recommendations, and the one with direct Ethiopian evidence behind it — Berhane Hewan reported an odds ratio of 3.0 for staying in school and 0.1 for ever having married.

Education as the master variable

What the DHS shows when outcomes are cross-tabulated by a woman's schooling

- Across every DHS round, women with secondary or higher education marry later, have fewer children, are far more likely to deliver with a skilled attendant, and are less likely to have daughters cut.
- Education also predicts rejection of wife-beating as justified — the norm that Part 4 identified as the operative constraint on violence.
- The causal claim is defensible, not merely correlational: the Bangladesh stipend evaluations and Ethiopia's own Berhane Hewan trial both used designs that support causal interpretation, and both found schooling delayed marriage.
- This is why education spending is the highest-leverage single line item in a gender-equality budget — it acts on violence, health, fertility and earnings through one instrument.
- Caveat worth stating to a student audience: secondary schooling is the threshold that matters. Primary completion alone shows much weaker effects on marriage timing and autonomy.

PART SEVEN

Economic opportunity

Ethiopian women work as much as men — the inequality is in what the work is worth and who controls the proceeds

A statistical warning: Ethiopia's 3% unemployment rate is misleading

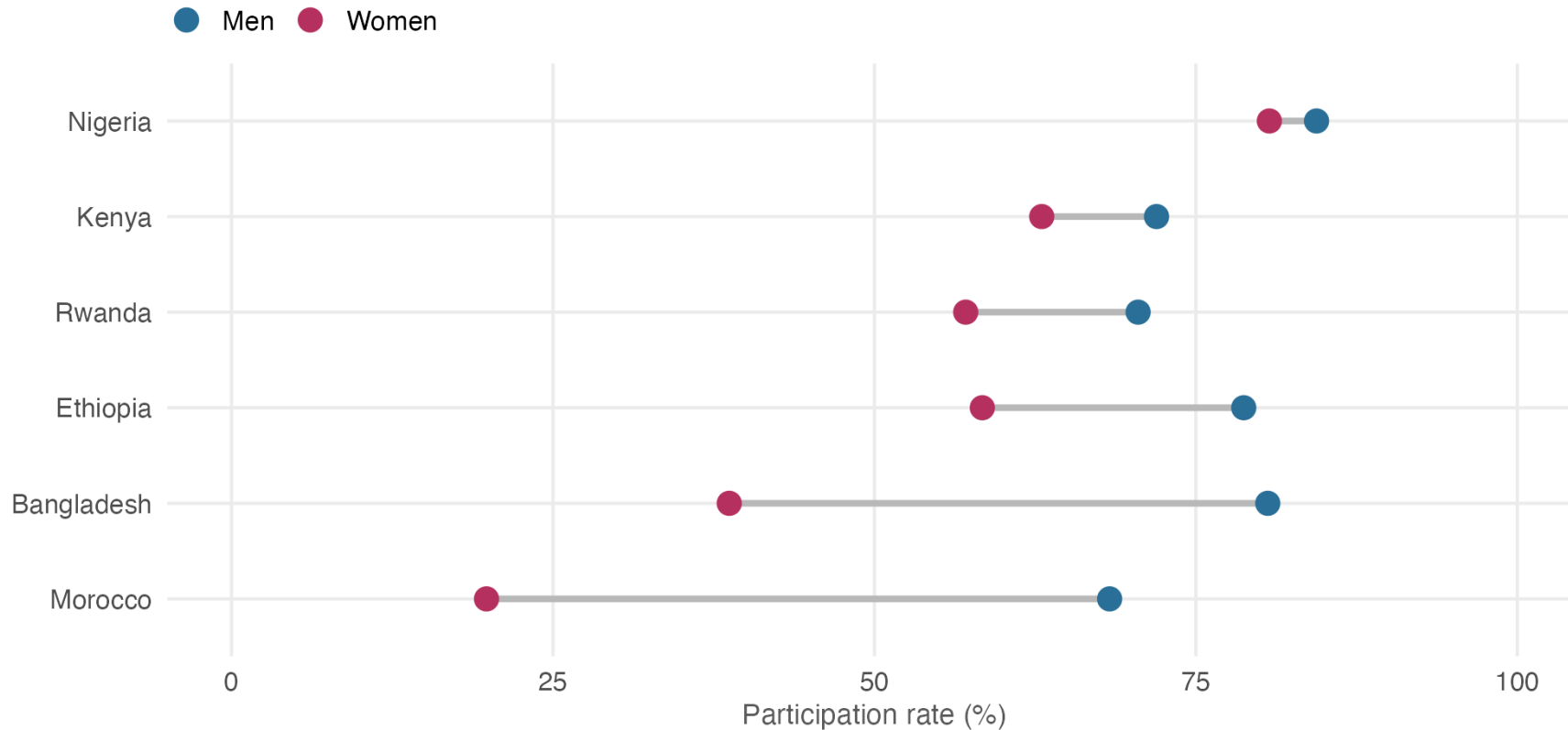
Read this before interpreting any labour statistic in Part 7

- Measured unemployment in Ethiopia is about 3%. This does not mean almost everyone has a good job. It means almost no one can afford to be without work of some kind.
- In an economy where 60% of employment is in agriculture and a third of GDP comes from it, most people are self-employed or unpaid family workers on smallholdings. That counts as employed.
- The meaningful concepts in this setting are underemployment, informality and the share of work that is unpaid — not the unemployment rate.
- This matters directly for the gender argument. Ethiopian women's high labour force participation reflects subsistence necessity, not opportunity, and the correct question is not whether women work but what their work is worth and who controls the proceeds.
- General principle for the audience: in low-income agrarian economies, headline labour statistics designed for industrial economies can invert the true picture.

Participation is high; the participation gap is not the problem

Ethiopian women work at high rates - the gap with men is comparatively small

Labour force participation rate, ages 15+, 2024 (ILO modelled estimates)



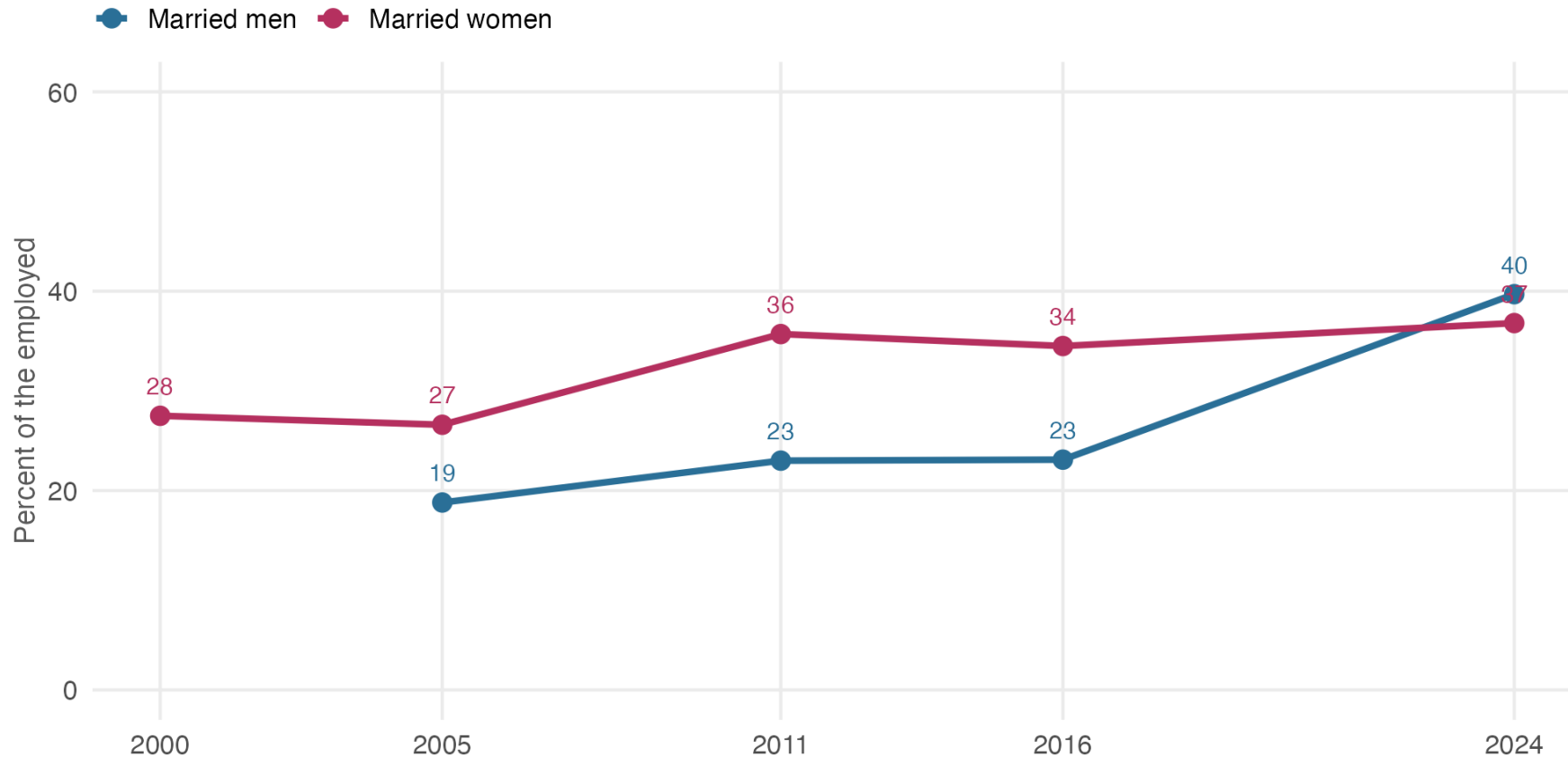
Source: World Bank WDI (SL.TLF.CACT.FE/MA.ZS)

Takeaway: Ethiopian women's labour force participation is high by regional standards and the gap with men is narrower than in Bangladesh or Morocco. Ethiopia's gender problem is not getting women into work.

The real gap is in the terms of work, not the fact of it

Cash payment is the exception for both sexes, and the gender gap is small

Employed married respondents paid in cash only, ages 15-49. The gender gap in Ethiopia is not who gets paid cash - it is how much, in what sector, and who controls the income once earned



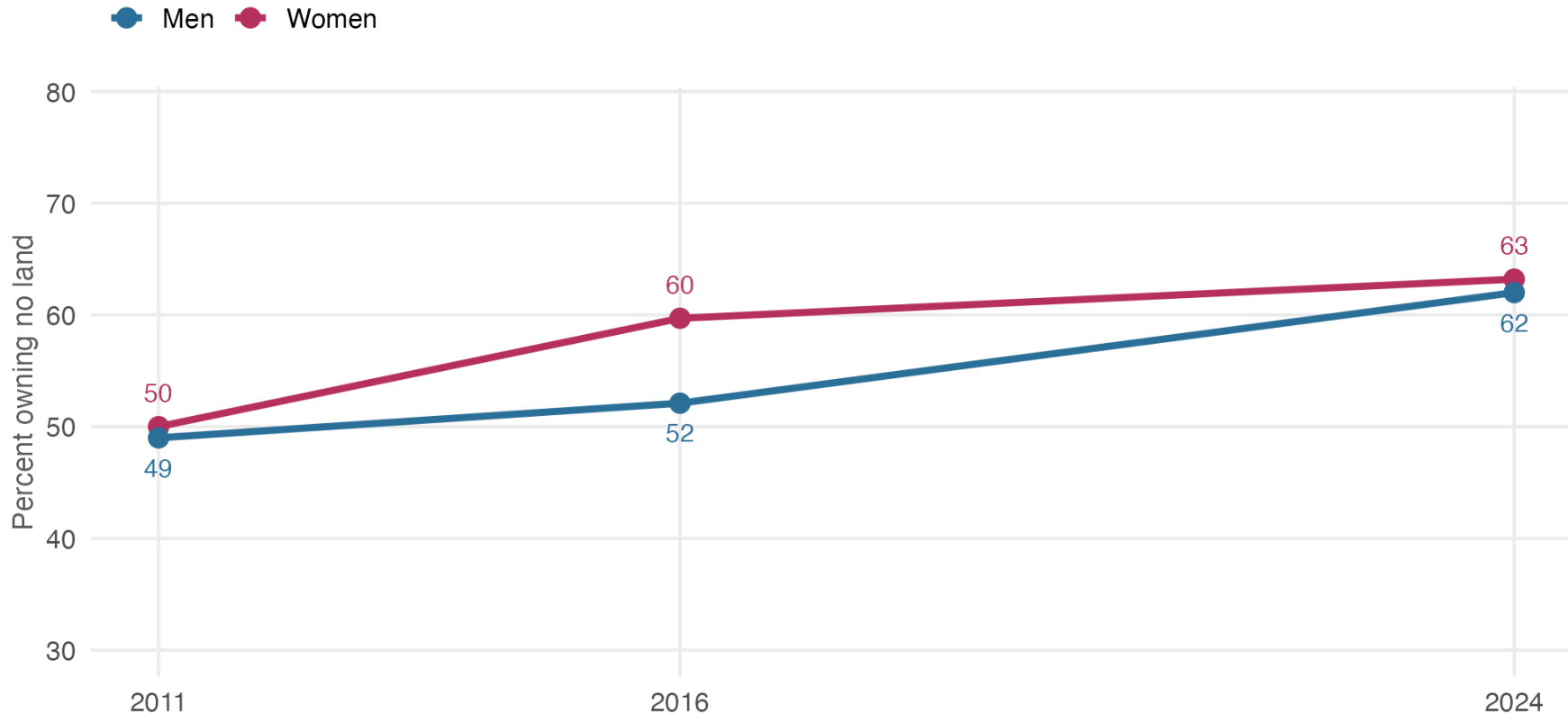
Source: DHS Program API (Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024)

Takeaway: Only about a third of employed married women are paid in cash — and notably, men are no better off on this measure. Both sexes are trapped in a largely non-monetised rural economy.

The poverty-versus-gender test, worked through

A worked example of the poverty-versus-gender test

Percent who own no land, ages 15-49. Both sexes worsened by about 13 points. The female-male gap ran 1, 8 and 1 points in 2011, 2016 and 2024 - it does not trend. This is a structural effect, not a gender one



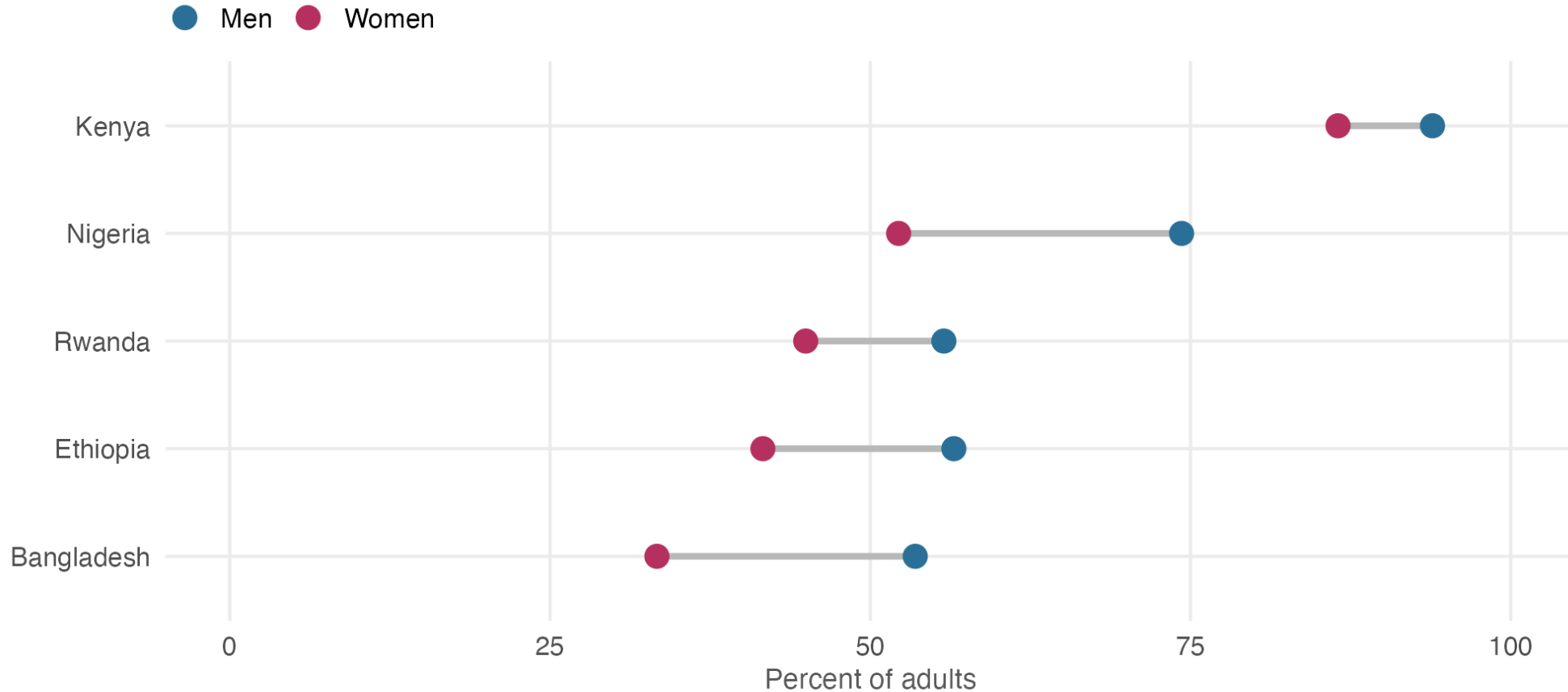
Source: DHS Program API - Ethiopia DHS 2000-2024. Likely drivers: the youth bulge, urbanisation and plot fragmentation - all of which reduce land ownership for everyone. It is NOT evidence that the joint-certification programme was reversed.

Takeaway: Land ownership collapsed for both sexes between 2011 and 2024, and the female–male gap does not trend. By the test set out in Part 1, this is a structural effect — not evidence that joint certification failed.

Financial inclusion: where the gender gap is unambiguous

Financial inclusion: Ethiopian women are the least banked in the comparison

Adults 15+ with an account at a financial institution or mobile-money provider, latest year



Source: World Bank Global Findex via WDI (FX.OWN.TOTL.FE/MA.ZS)

Takeaway: Ethiopian women are the least banked in the comparison group, and trail Ethiopian men by roughly 14 points. Kenya shows what mobile money can do — its gender gap has nearly closed.

Assets, land and time: the three invisible constraints

Land and assets

- Ethiopia's land certification programme has issued over five million certificates — the largest such delivery of non-freehold rights in sub-Saharan Africa in so short a period.
- Crucially, certification was designed to be joint: both spouses named, both photographed on the certificate.
- Evaluation using propensity-score matching found joint-titled women significantly more empowered than untitled women, particularly on participation outside the home.
- This is one of the strongest pieces of evidence that Ethiopian policy design can move women's status — and it was achieved through an administrative programme, not a consciousness-raising campaign.

Time and control

- Water collection, fuel gathering, food processing and childcare fall overwhelmingly on women and girls, and are excluded from national accounts entirely.
- Time poverty is the binding constraint on women taking paid work even where paid work exists — and it competes directly with girls' schooling.
- Earning income is not the same as controlling it. DHS measures of decision-making show large shares of married women who do not solely decide how their own earnings are used.
- Policy implication: infrastructure that saves women's time — water points, electrification, grain mills, roads — is gender policy, even when it is not labelled as such.

The other Ethiopian women's economy: labour migration to the Gulf

Largely invisible in the DHS, central to the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian women

~160k

Ethiopians deported from Saudi Arabia in the 2013–14 repatriation wave

70,000

the target of the repatriation programme launched in March 2024, over four months

88,800+

returned under the programme launched in September 2025, according to government figures

Kafala

the sponsorship system that ties a worker's legal status to one employer — the structural source of the abuse

- Ethiopian women migrate to the Gulf overwhelmingly as domestic workers. Passport confiscation on arrival, contract substitution, non-payment of wages and confinement inside private homes are documented features of the corridor, not aberrations.
- Because the work happens inside households, it is beyond the reach of labour inspection — the same structural invisibility that makes domestic violence hard to measure.
- The corridor is a direct consequence of Parts 1 and 7: a young population, few domestic wage jobs, and a landlocked economy that could not build the female-intensive export sector Bangladesh did. For many households, a migrating daughter's remittances become a major income source — which changes how families weigh a daughter's prospects, in ways at once protective and exploitative. The structural answer is domestic opportunity, so that migration is a choice.

PART EIGHT

Barriers to equality

Legal pluralism, enforcement capacity, religion, social norms, conflict — and climate

Barrier 1 — Legal pluralism

The most consequential structural barrier, and the least discussed

- Article 34(5) permits family and personal disputes to be resolved under religious or customary law where parties consent. Sharia courts have statutory footing; customary dispute resolution operates across most regions.
- The consent safeguard assumes a woman can freely decline the forum her family and community expect her to use. In practice, forum choice is exercised within the same power structure the law is meant to regulate.
- The practical result is that identical facts — a divorce, an inheritance, a custody dispute — can produce systematically different outcomes depending on which forum hears them.
- Scholarship on Afar and Somali regions documents how pluralism sustains practices, including polygamy, that federal statute restricts.
- This is not an argument for abolishing customary or religious adjudication, which would be neither feasible nor legitimate. It is an argument for a real, informed and revocable consent standard, and for a statutory floor of rights that no forum may go beneath.

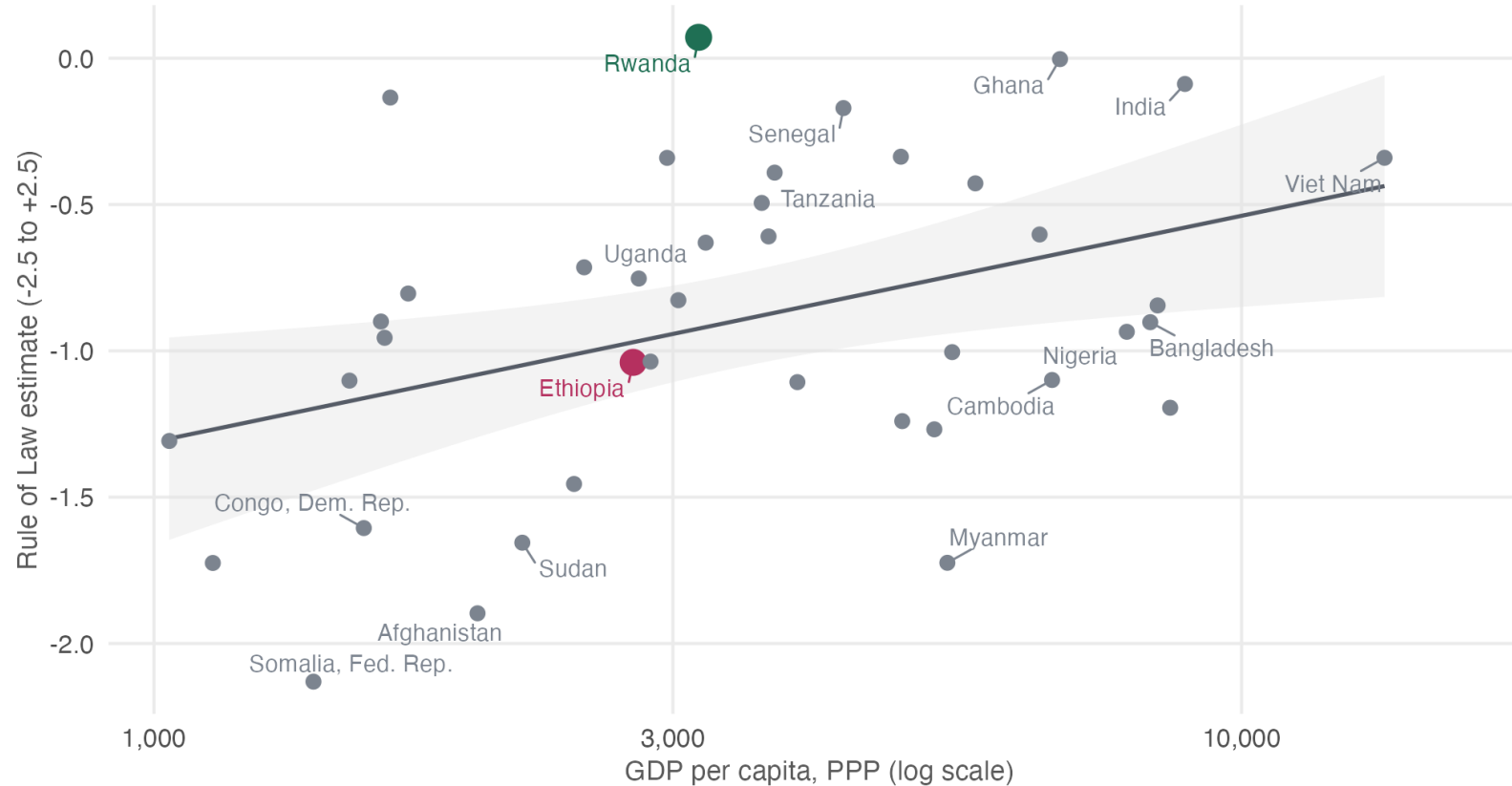
Barrier 2 — Enforcement capacity and the penalty gap

- Ethiopia criminalised cutting — the Criminal Code uses the term female genital mutilation — and marriage by abduction in 2004. Prosecutions have been rare relative to the scale of both practices.
- Submissions to Ethiopia's 2024 Universal Periodic Review argue that penalties for sexual violence are insufficient relative to the gravity of the offence, and frequently are not imposed at all.
- Survivor services — one-stop centres integrating medical, psychosocial, police and legal support — are concentrated in cities, leaving the rural majority without an accessible entry point.
- Police and prosecutorial capacity for forensic evidence collection is limited, which weakens cases that do reach court, further discouraging reporting.
- A law that is not enforced is worse than neutral: it creates the appearance of protection while leaving the underlying incentive structure intact.

Is weak enforcement simply a symptom of poverty?

Income shapes enforcement capacity less than the spread around it

Rule of Law (WGI, 2023) against GDP per capita, PPP, log scale - all 40 low- and lower-middle-income countries fetched. Income explains 16% of the variance; the vertical spread at any income is the story



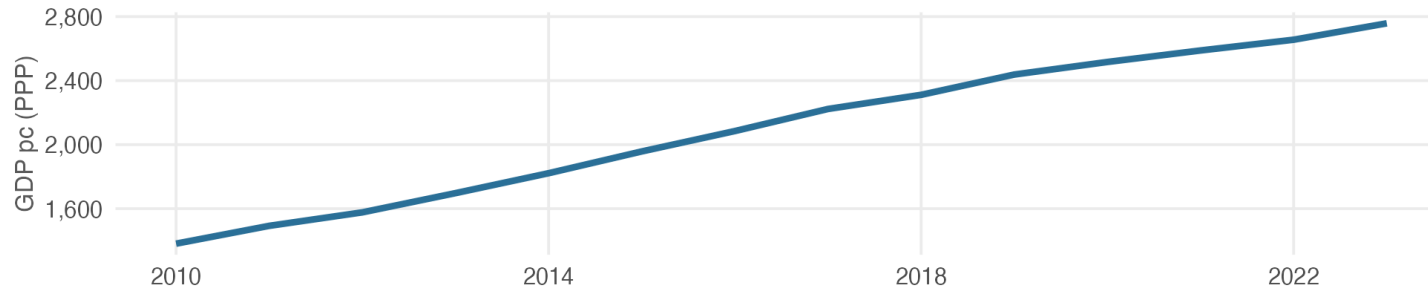
Sources: World Bank WGI (GOV_WGI_RL.EST); WDI. Ethiopia sits almost exactly where its income predicts (residual -0.07); Rwanda, at near-identical income, sits 1.1 points higher - more than two residual SDs (0.49). Part of the income-law correlation is carried by conflict states that are poor because their institutions collapsed - causation runs both ways.

Takeaway: Partly — but only partly. Across all 40 low- and lower-middle-income countries with data, income explains about 16% of the variance in rule of law, and the spread at any income is enormous: Rwanda, at Ethiopia's income, scores 1.1 points higher.

Ethiopia's own record points the same way

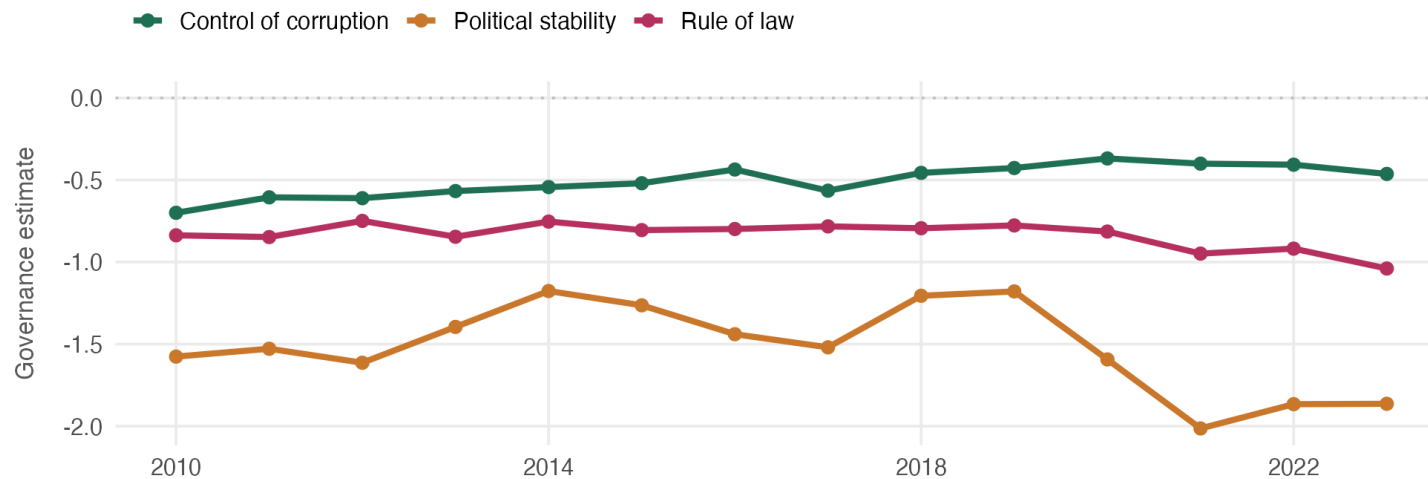
Income roughly doubled...

GDP per capita, PPP



...while the rule of law got worse

Worldwide Governance Indicators, Ethiopia. Higher is better



Sources: World Bank WGI and WDI. Control of corruption improved (-0.70 to -0.46). Rule of law deteriorated (-0.84 to -1.04). Political stability collapsed (-1.58 to -1.86, reaching -2.01 in 2021).

Takeaway: Between 2010 and 2023 Ethiopian income per head roughly doubled — while the rule of law score got worse, from -0.84 to -1.04. Money did not buy enforcement.

Where Ethiopia's enforcement failure actually comes from

Three sources, in descending order of what the evidence supports

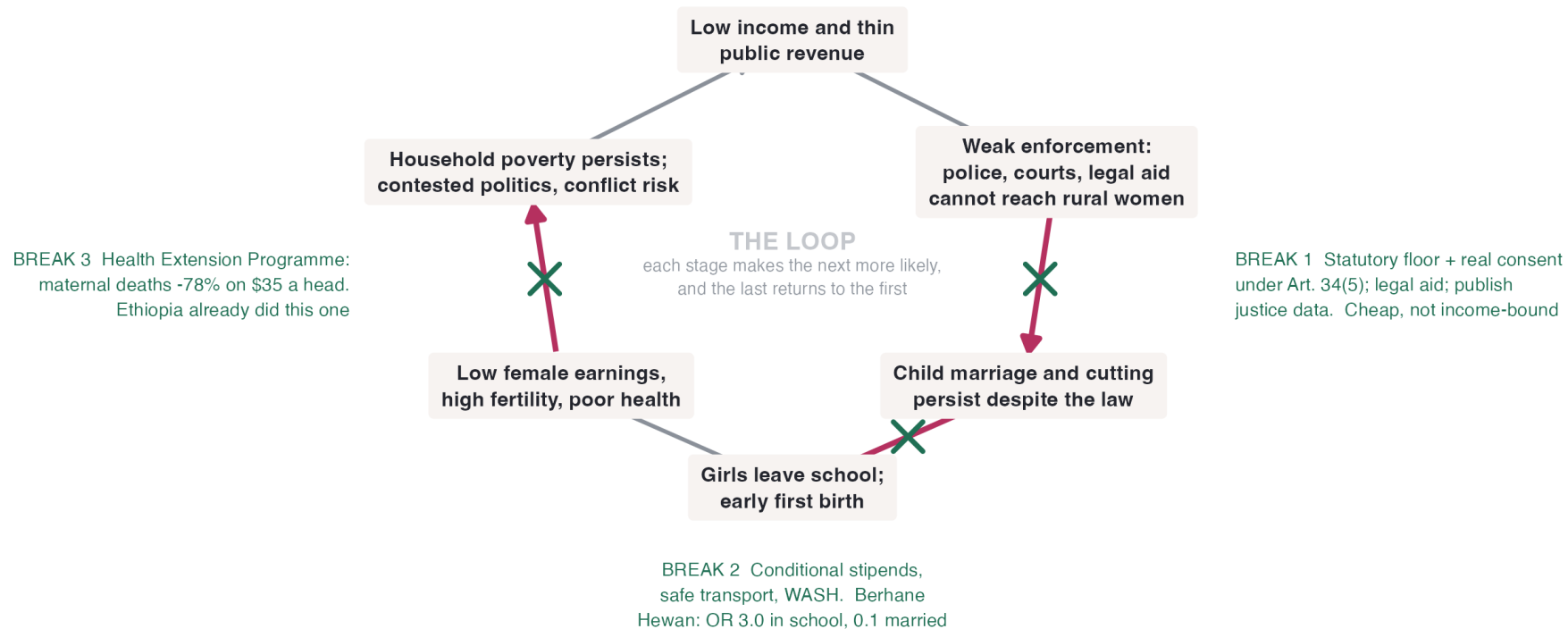
- Political instability and conflict, which destroy the capacity to act uniformly across the country. On the WGI scale Ethiopia scores -1.86 for political stability against -0.46 for control of corruption: instability is the far larger deficit, and it is the one that worsened.
- Legal architecture. Cases involving women are not mostly lost for want of a police officer; they are diverted, under Article 34(5), to forums that prioritise family reconciliation over prosecution. A richer Ethiopia with the same architecture would route a widow's inheritance claim to the same elder.
- Norms, which sit upstream of any institution. Sixty-three per cent of Ethiopians regard intimate-partner violence as a private family matter. Doubling the justice budget does not move that number, and the justice cascade fails first at naming and disclosure — before any official is involved.
- Resources do matter, and they matter most for the things money genuinely buys: forensic capacity, rural one-stop centres, legal aid, court reach. But they are the third constraint here, not the first.
- The practical consequence is encouraging. If the binding constraint were national income, nothing could be done until Ethiopia is rich. Because it is architecture and norms, the highest-value reforms — a statutory floor, a real consent standard, published justice data — are cheap.

Sources: World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2010–2023; Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 861, 2024

Is there a cycle of poverty in all this?

Is there a cycle? Yes — and Ethiopia has already broken part of it

The reinforcing loop between poverty, weak enforcement and women's disadvantage.
Green crosses mark links where evidence shows the loop can be cut, and at what cost



Loops are analytic, not estimated: the arrows represent documented mechanisms, not identified causal effects.
Break points are drawn from the evidence in this deck — Ethiopian and comparator programme evaluations.

Takeaway: Yes — the mechanisms are documented and they reinforce each other. But the loop is not closed: it licenses targeting, not fatalism, and Ethiopia has already cut one of its links on \$35 a head.

Barrier 3 — Religion, handled carefully

An honest treatment distinguishes doctrine, institutions, and local practice

What the evidence supports

- Religious institutions are the most trusted and widely present civil institutions in much of rural Ethiopia — Orthodox, Muslim and Protestant alike.
- Religious and customary forums have jurisdiction over exactly the matters where women's rights are most contested: marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody.
- Female genital cutting in Ethiopia crosses religious lines — it is practised in Muslim, Orthodox and other communities, and its distribution follows ethnicity and region far more closely than faith.
- That last point is decisive — and the overlay figure in Part 4 showed it: within-faith spans of 24 to 42 points, against 28 points between faiths. A practice that varies that much within the same faith cannot be explained by its doctrine.

What follows for policy

- Framing cutting or child marriage as inherently religious is empirically wrong and strategically counter-productive — it converts a norm problem into an identity conflict.
- The comparative evidence points the other way: religious leaders have been among the most effective agents of abandonment when engaged as partners rather than targets.
- Senegal's experience is the clearest demonstration — public abandonment declarations were led by communities and endorsed by religious authorities.
- Ethiopia's own religious authorities have said so themselves: the Islamic Affairs Supreme Council and the Orthodox Tewahedo Church have both stated publicly that cutting has no basis in scripture.
- The practical recommendation is engagement with religious institutions as delivery partners, combined with a firm statutory floor that applies in every forum.

Barrier 4 — Social norms and the marriage market

- Cutting and early marriage persist as coordinated social conventions, not individual preferences. Where a community expects cutting, an uncut daughter may be unmarriageable — so a parent who personally opposes the practice may still comply.
- This is the crucial analytic point: no individual family can safely defect first. That is why individual persuasion fails and coordinated, public, collective abandonment succeeds.
- It also explains the pattern in the Ethiopian data — practice is near-universal in some regions and near-absent in others, with little middle ground. Conventions are bistable.
- Honour and family reputation attach to girls' sexual conduct in ways they do not to boys'. Early marriage is often a risk-management strategy by parents operating rationally inside that norm.
- Design implication: interventions must change the expectations a family holds about what everyone else will do — not merely inform them of harms they frequently already know. This is the argument the Senegal case in Part 9 rests on.

Barrier 5 — Conflict, displacement and the fragility of gains

- The evidence is already on the table: Tigray is the only region where skilled birth attendance fell; primary attendance dropped in eight of eleven regions at once; and men's endorsement of violence rose on two independent norms in the war window.
- Displacement itself raises exposure — camp settings, loss of male household members, transactional survival strategies, and reduced community oversight all increase risk.
- Sexual violence in the northern war was documented on all sides; the Tigray data are the most systematic record, not the only one. Survivors of every community carry the same consequences into the same under-resourced services.
- Strategic conclusion: in a country with recurrent internal conflict, the durability of gender gains depends on conflict prevention as much as on gender programming. This is uncomfortable, but it is what the evidence shows.

Barrier 6 — Climate, water and the time burden

A constraint that is worsening rather than improving, and that falls almost entirely on women and girls

- In Ethiopian households without piped water, women and girls can spend on the order of an hour and a half to two hours a day collecting it — among the highest burdens recorded anywhere.
- Recent modelling in Nature Climate Change finds that historically each 1°C of warming added roughly four minutes to daily collection time, and projects increases of twenty to forty per cent for parts of eastern Africa by 2050 under a high-emissions scenario.
- That time comes out of school attendance, paid work and rest. It is the mechanism by which climate change becomes a girls' education problem.
- Drought also drives displacement and distress migration, both of which raise exposure to violence and to early marriage used as a household coping strategy — a documented response to livestock loss in pastoralist areas.
- Ethiopia's highest-prevalence regions for cutting and child marriage — Somali and Afar — are also the most drought-exposed. The constraints compound.
- Policy implication, and it is unglamorous: a water point is a gender intervention. So is a grain mill, an electrified household, and a road.

PART NINE

What has worked elsewhere

Five countries that moved indicators Ethiopia is still struggling with — and what actually drove the change

Senegal — collective abandonment of cutting

The single best-evidenced norm-change intervention in this field

- Tostan's Community Empowerment Programme delivered human-rights and health education in local languages to whole communities — not to individual mothers — over roughly three years.
- The mechanism was public, collective declaration. Because cutting is a coordinated convention, abandonment must also be coordinated: enough intermarrying families must commit simultaneously that no individual family bears the cost of defecting.
- In the published evaluation, cutting among daughters aged ten and under declined significantly in programme villages but not in comparison villages; at endline, 30% of programme-village women reported at least one daughter cut, against 69% in comparison villages.
- Scale reached: roughly 8,830 communities and an estimated 5.5 million people across West Africa have made public abandonment declarations.
- Senegal's national prevalence is now around 20%, against Ethiopia's 58%.
- Transferability to Ethiopia: high. The convention structure is the same, and Ethiopia already has the community delivery platform — the Health Extension Programme — that Senegal had to build.

Bangladesh — paying families to keep girls in school

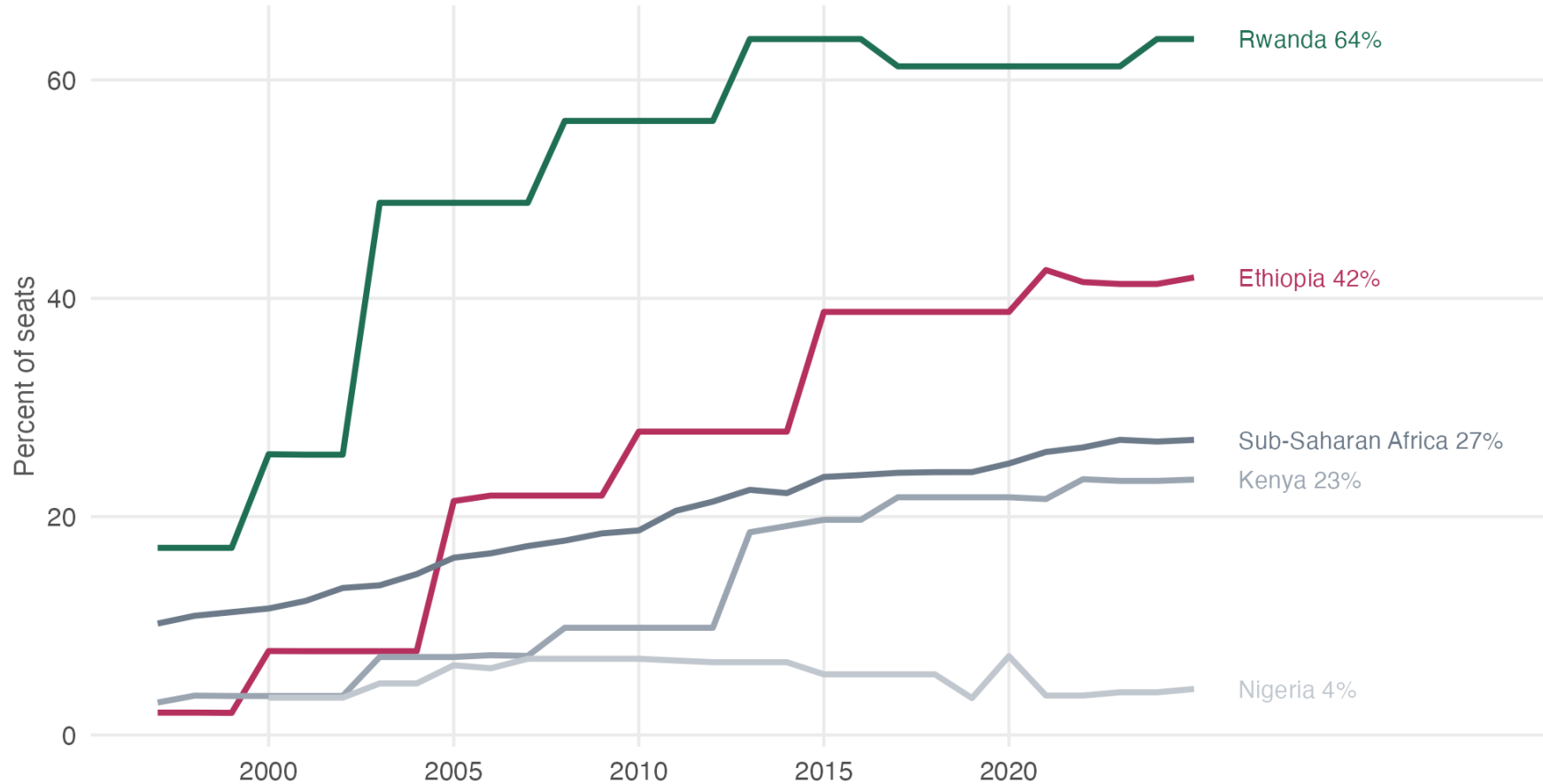
A cash instrument that moved marriage, fertility and labour-market outcomes together

- The Female Secondary School Stipend Programme, launched nationally in 1994, made secondary education effectively free for rural girls, with a cash stipend conditional on 75% attendance and a minimum test score.
- Long-term evaluation found the stipend raised girls' years of education by 14–25%, delayed marriage, and reduced completed fertility.
- Downstream effects included greater autonomy in household decisions, a shift into formal-sector rather than agricultural or informal work, and marriage to better-educated husbands closer in age.
- Critically, the stipend interacted with demand: the garment sector was simultaneously creating visible, paid jobs for educated young women, which changed what families believed schooling was for.
- Transferability to Ethiopia: moderate to high on the stipend; the demand-side condition is the harder half. Ethiopia's industrial parks were an attempt at the same complementarity, with mixed results on wages and retention.

Political representation: a genuine Ethiopian success

Political representation: Ethiopia rose fast, Rwanda set the world benchmark

Proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament



Source: World Bank WDI (SG.GEN.PARL.ZS)

Takeaway: Ethiopia moved from near-zero to roughly 40% of parliamentary seats held by women — well above the sub-Saharan African average, and achieved faster than most comparators.

Rwanda — constitutional quota plus land and labour law

The clearest demonstration that political representation can be engineered quickly

- The 2003 Constitution mandated a minimum 30% of decision-making positions for women. Rwanda now has the highest share of women in a national legislature in the world — 63.8% of the Chamber of Deputies in 2024 — and, for the first time, a female-majority Senate.
- The quota functioned as a floor, not a ceiling: women win a large share of directly elected seats too, and the number of women campaigning rose from 105 in 2008 to 199 in 2024.
- Representation translated into legislation: revision of the Civil Code for equal inheritance and succession, equal-pay provisions, and laws against gender-based violence and workplace harassment.
- Land tenure regularisation systematically recorded women's names on land titles — the same instrument Ethiopia used, deployed at national scale.
- Honest caveat for a seminar audience: Rwanda's political context is not replicable, and descriptive representation in a dominant-party state raises real questions about substantive influence. The transferable lesson is the sequencing — quota first, then legislative agenda, then implementation.

Morocco — family-code reform as the lever

The closest legal analogue to Ethiopia's 2000 Revised Family Code

- The 2004 Moudawana raised the marriage age from 15 to 18, established divorce by mutual consent under judicial supervision, granted women self-guardianship, restricted polygamy by requiring judicial authorisation, and made sexual harassment punishable.
- Over the following two decades adult literacy rose from 52% to 76%, with women reaching 67%; by 2023 women were more than half of all higher-education enrolment.
- Implementation lagged badly — judicial discretion allowed continued under-age marriage authorisations, and inheritance rules remained unequal.
- A further revision process began in 2023 and produced proposed amendments in December 2024, covering custody, recognition of domestic work, polygamy, marriage age, alimony and property.
- Transferability to Ethiopia: the lesson is cautionary rather than inspirational. Morocco shows that even a landmark family-code reform delivers only partially without judicial training, monitoring, and closure of the discretionary exceptions that reproduce the old rule.

Ethiopia's own proven interventions

The most transferable evidence is domestic — these worked here, under Ethiopian conditions

Berhane Hewan ('Light for Eve')

- Piloted in rural Amhara, 2004–2006, by the Population Council and Ethiopian partners.
- Components: girls grouped under female mentors; support to stay in school or non-formal education; community conversations on early marriage; and a conditional economic incentive to families who did not marry off a daughter.
- Among girls aged 10–14, programme exposure was associated with an odds ratio of 3.0 for being in school and 0.1 for ever having been married — a quasi-experimental design, not a randomised one, with effects strongest in that 10–14 group.
- One of the first rigorously evaluated interventions to delay marriage in sub-Saharan Africa — and it was Ethiopian.

Health Extension Programme and land certification

- From 2003, two salaried female health extension workers per rural kebele — a national cadre of community health workers who are themselves women.
- This is the delivery platform behind the antenatal, delivery and family-planning gains shown in Part 5, and it already reaches the communities where cutting is most prevalent.
- Land certification issued over five million joint certificates naming both spouses, the largest such delivery in the region.
- Evaluated impact on women's empowerment, particularly participation outside the home. Two national platforms already exist; the question is what is routed through them.

What transfers, and what does not

The analytic filter to apply before importing any of these

- Transfers well — coordinated public abandonment of cutting. The convention structure is the same in Ethiopia, and the community platform already exists.
- Transfers well — conditional stipends for girls' secondary schooling. Cheap, administratively simple, and already validated inside Ethiopia by Berhane Hewan.
- Transfers well — joint land and asset titling. Ethiopia has already proved this domestically at national scale.
- Transfers partially — legislated quotas. Ethiopia has already achieved high descriptive representation; the open question is substantive influence, not numbers.
- Transfers poorly — the Bangladesh garment demand shock, which depended on a specific global trade position, and Rwanda's post-genocide political settlement, which is not a model any country should wish to replicate.
- The general rule: import mechanisms, not programmes. What travels is the causal logic — coordinate the defection, pay the marginal family, title the asset — not the packaging.

PART TEN

What Ethiopia could do

A sequenced agenda: the constraint is enforcement and norms, so that is where the leverage is

Priority 1 — Close the gap between law and enforcement

Legal and judicial

- Establish a non-derogable statutory floor: a defined set of rights — marriage age, consent, marital property, protection from violence — that no customary or religious forum may go beneath, whatever the parties consent to.
- Make consent under Article 34(5) real: written, informed, individually given, revocable at any point, and recorded — with an automatic right to transfer to a statutory court.
- Review sentencing for sexual offences so that penalties are proportionate to gravity, and publish disposal data by court.
- Train judges, prosecutors and police on the Revised Family Code and Criminal Code provisions — Morocco's experience shows unreformed judicial discretion can neutralise a reformed statute.

Services

- Extend one-stop centres beyond major cities, co-located with existing health facilities rather than built as standalone institutions.
- Give health extension workers a defined GBV role: identification, first-line support, and referral — using a platform that already reaches every kebele.
- Build forensic capacity at zonal level so that cases which do reach court are evidentially survivable.
- Anticipate that successful programmes will raise reported violence, and write that into monitoring frameworks in advance so that success is not misread as failure.

Priority 2 — Girls' secondary education

Treated as violence prevention, not only as education spending

- Introduce or scale a conditional stipend for girls' secondary attendance, modelled on Bangladesh's programme and on Berhane Hewan's demonstrated effect inside Ethiopia.
- Target the regions where the marriage and cutting data are worst — Somali, Afar, and the lowest wealth quintile nationally — rather than spreading thinly.
- Invest in school proximity, safe transport and boarding options, because distance and journey risk are independent causes of withdrawal that a stipend alone does not solve.
- Fund water, sanitation and private latrines in secondary schools — an unglamorous intervention with a direct, measurable effect on girls' attendance.
- Frame it correctly for the budget process: this is not only education spending. It is the cheapest available instrument against child marriage, adolescent fertility, obstetric fistula and intimate-partner violence simultaneously.

Priority 3 — Norm change at community level

The unit of intervention is the intermarrying community, never the individual household

- Fund community-wide, publicly declared abandonment of cutting and child marriage on the Tostan model — the unit of intervention must be the intermarrying community, not the household.
- Deliver through the platforms that already exist and are already trusted: health extension workers, women's development groups, schools, and religious institutions engaged as partners.
- Engage religious leaders explicitly and early. The Ethiopian data show cutting tracks region and ethnicity rather than faith, which makes religious endorsement of abandonment both honest and achievable.
- Target men and boys directly. The post-2016 rise in men's acceptance of wife-beating is the clearest warning in the dataset, and men's norms are the operative constraint on violence.
- Measure norms, not just behaviour. Attitude questions are cheaper to collect, less subject to disclosure bias, and move earlier than prevalence.

Priority 3b — Work with men and boys, not only about them

The deck has measured men's attitudes twice and found them moving the wrong way. This is what the evidence says to do about it

What has been shown to work

- Rwanda's Bandebereho / MenCare+ couples programme — group sessions with men and their partners on power, gender roles and caregiving — reported around forty per cent less intimate-partner violence among participating men.
- The What Works to Prevent Violence programme concludes there is reasonable evidence for group-based couples interventions, for microfinance combined with gender-transformative content, and for community mobilisation that shifts norms.
- The common feature is that these are gender-transformative — they change what men believe about masculinity and power, rather than simply informing them that violence is illegal.
- Information alone has a poor record. Ethiopian men already know the law.

What it means for Ethiopia

- Ethiopia has the delivery platform — health extension workers, development groups, schools, religious institutions — but these overwhelmingly reach women.
- A men-and-boys track has to be built deliberately, with male facilitators and in spaces men already occupy.
- Target the post-conflict cohort specifically. The reversal in the data is concentrated in the window that contains the war, and demobilised and displaced men are the obvious priority group.
- Measure it. Men's attitude questions are already in the DHS; the next round will show whether the 2016–24 reversal was noise or a trend, and any programme should be judged against that.

Priorities 4 and 5 — Economic autonomy and health-system depth

Economic autonomy

- Continue and complete joint land and asset titling — Ethiopia's own best-evidenced empowerment instrument.
- Close the financial-inclusion gap. Kenya's near-parity came through mobile money; Ethiopia's late market liberalisation is an opportunity to design for women's access from the outset rather than retrofit it.
- Invest in time-saving infrastructure — water points, electrification, grain mills, rural roads. This is gender policy that does not carry a gender label, and is therefore often politically easier.
- Address control of income, not only earning of it: joint accounts, direct payment to women, and legal literacy about marital property rights.

Health system depth

- Shift the equity target explicitly to the bottom quintile and the pastoralist regions — the national average can no longer improve without them.
- Protect and investigate the 2019–2024 decline in modern contraceptive use as a priority question; if it is real, it is the leading indicator of reversal.
- Move from access to quality: referral for obstructed labour, blood availability, and neonatal care, which is where mortality has stopped falling.
- Build mental-health and fistula services for survivors, and integrate them with the GBV referral pathway rather than running them separately.

Priority 6 — Data, accountability and protecting gains from conflict

- Maintain the DHS series and publish disaggregated by region, wealth quintile and education. Without disaggregation, national averages will continue to conceal a stalled bottom quintile.
- Publish justice-system data: reports, charges, prosecutions, convictions and sentences for sexual and domestic offences. Impunity is currently invisible in official statistics, which makes it politically costless.
- Commission dedicated violence-prevalence surveys rather than relying solely on DHS modules, which were not designed as the primary instrument for measuring violence.
- Treat conflict prevention as gender policy. Tigray's reversal is the single clearest finding in this dataset about how quickly gains can be lost.
- Build service continuity plans for insecure areas in advance — supply chains, worker safety, and restart protocols — so that the next disruption costs less than the last.

If only three things could be funded

Ranked by evidence strength per unit of cost

1

Conditional stipends for girls' secondary schooling, targeted at the lowest wealth quintile and the highest-prevalence regions

2

Community-wide public abandonment programmes for cutting and child marriage, delivered through health extension workers

3

A statutory floor of women's rights binding in every forum, plus real, revocable, recorded consent under Article 34(5)

- Each has direct causal evidence behind it. Two have been demonstrated inside Ethiopia. All three act on violence, health, education and economic outcomes simultaneously rather than on one silo.

What the diaspora can actually do

Asked and answered specifically, because 'raise awareness' is not an answer

High leverage

- Fund Ethiopian women's legal organisations directly and unrestrictedly. EWLA-type legal aid addresses precisely the stages where the justice cascade fails, and it is the capacity most easily destroyed by regulation and most slowly rebuilt.
- Fund girls' secondary schooling at the margin — stipends, boarding, transport — in the specific regions the data identify: Somali, Afar, and the lowest wealth quintile.
- Support the community-abandonment model rather than message campaigns. The unit is the intermarrying community, and it needs three years, not a season.
- Pay for data. Independent violence-prevalence surveys and published justice statistics are cheap, and they are what makes impunity visible.

Lower leverage, or actively unhelpful

- Framing cutting or child marriage as religious. It is empirically wrong — the practice tracks region and ethnicity, not faith — and it converts a solvable norm problem into an identity conflict.
- Campaigns aimed at individual mothers. Where the practice is a coordinated convention, no individual family can defect alone, and the appeal simply generates guilt without change.
- Short funding cycles. Norm change is measured in survey rounds, not grant years.
- Speaking about Ethiopian women rather than resourcing Ethiopian women who are already doing the work. The organisations exist; what they lack is money and legal room.

The argument, restated

- Ethiopia has delivered real gains for women in a single generation — a 78% fall in maternal deaths, cutting down 22 points, child marriage among young women down 17 points (49% to 32%), adolescent childbearing more than halved, and women's parliamentary representation above the regional average.
- Those gains are distributed unequally — by wealth, by region, by education — and the poorest fifth and the pastoralist regions have been reached last and least.
- The gains are also reversible. Tigray's decline in skilled birth attendance, the fall in contraceptive use after 2019, and the rise in men's acceptance of wife-beating after 2016 all point the same way.
- Violence is the domain where law changed most and life changed least, because the binding constraint is norms and enforcement rather than statute.
- The interventions with the strongest evidence are affordable, and two of the three best were developed in Ethiopia. This is a solvable problem, and the country has already solved parts of it.

A note on what this deck does not cover

Stated explicitly, because an evidence-based talk should name its own gaps

- Disability. Women with disabilities face compounded exclusion across every domain here, and the survey data are too thin to characterise it.
- Sexual and gender minorities, whose situation in Ethiopia cannot be documented from these sources.
- Urban informal-sector work and domestic work inside Ethiopia. The Gulf labour corridor is treated in Part 7, but only in outline — it merits a study of its own.
- Refugee and internally displaced populations beyond what the conflict evidence supports.
- Regional detail for the four new regions created between 2020 and 2023, which have only one survey round and cannot yet be compared over time.

Sources

Primary data and key literature — full citations in the accompanying source document

- Primary data — The DHS Program API: Ethiopia DHS 2000, 2005, 2011, 2016, 2019 (Mini) and 2024; comparator surveys for Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Egypt. World Bank World Development Indicators and Global Findex.
- Law — FDRE Constitution 1995 (Arts. 34–35); Revised Family Code 2000; Revised Criminal Code 2004; Federal Courts of Sharia Consolidation Proclamation 188/1999.
- Causal evidence — Hallward-Driemeier & Gajigo, World Development 2015 (family law); Erulkar & Muthengi 2009 (Berhane Hewan); Melesse, Dabissa & Bulte, Journal of Development Studies 2018 (joint land certification); Diop & Askew and Population Council evaluations (Tostan, Senegal); Hahn et al., Economic Development and Cultural Change 2018 (Bangladesh stipend).
- Conflict — Physicians for Human Rights, 'Broken Promises', 2024; community-based SGBV study, Tigray, BMC Public Health 2025.
- Context — Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 861 (2024); ACAPS Ethiopia GBV secondary data review 2024; AfDB Ethiopia Country Gender Equality Profile 2024; UN Women Ethiopia gender pay gap brief 2024.



“The question is not whether Ethiopia can improve the lives of women and girls. The record of the last twenty-five years shows that it can, and has. The question is whether those gains can be made to reach the poorest, and to survive the next crisis.”

Closing proposition for discussion

Discussion questions

For seminar use

- Ethiopia's statutory framework is comparatively strong, yet outcomes lag. Under what conditions does legal reform change behaviour — and when is it purely symbolic?
- Article 34(5) protects legal pluralism and religious autonomy while enabling outcomes that violate Article 35. How would you resolve that conflict without delegitimising customary and religious institutions?
- Women hold roughly 40% of Ethiopian parliamentary seats. What evidence would you need to determine whether that representation is substantive rather than descriptive?
- Cutting is a coordinated convention: no family can safely defect alone. What does that imply about the design — and the evaluation — of interventions against it?
- If gender gains reverse under conflict, is conflict prevention a gender policy? What follows for how gender programmes should be budgeted and sequenced in fragile settings?
- Whose voices are missing from a lecture built primarily on survey data, and how would you go about including them?

Backup — anticipated objections

Not part of the talk. Sits behind the discussion questions for Q&A

- “Isn't the schooling collapse just COVID?” — Closures were national and time-limited. A uniform shock cannot produce a -28 to +4 regional spread (SD 10) concentrated in conflict and drought regions, and secondary attendance was flat throughout. COVID may contribute to the level; it cannot explain the pattern.
- “Your three Tigray indicators aren't independent.” — Correct: same survey, and two correlate at $r = 0.998$. The claim rests on Tigray being the only region of 11 to decline on all three, on robustness (logit scale 15/15/15; excluding Addis 26/27/11), and on survey under-coverage biasing the estimate downward, not upward.
- “The 4.2% figure for girls 0–4 proves abandonment.” — No: most girls that age have not yet reached the age at which their community cuts. Censoring, not abandonment. Use the band-matched 10–14 comparison: 28.4% to 23.7%.
- “WGI scores are relative, and the war confounds your trend.” — Both true, and conceded on the slide. The load-bearing fact is cross-sectional: Rwanda, at the same income, scores 1.1 points higher — more than two residual standard deviations.
- “The education gradient is selection.” — Partly, yes: cross-sectional, and stated as such. The causal warrant is Bangladesh's stipend evaluations and Berhane Hewan. The gradient is shown because it is Ethiopian, current, and survives the censoring-robust 10–14 band (roughly five-fold).