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CENTER FOR ADVANCEMENT OF
RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

MAKE DEMOCRACY THE ONLY RULE OF GAME!

ELECTION YEAR SOCIAL MEDIA REVIEW

Monitoring Digital Threats During the Ethiopian Elections

Prepared by: Brook Abdu

September 2021

Acknowledgment

This report was produced as part of the CARD Election Social Media Monitoring Project. The Project is supported by technical assistance and a sub-grant from the Digital Threats to Democracy Team at The Carter Center. Original funding for this work was granted by the Government of the United Kingdom.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACLED	The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
AEUP	All Ethiopian Democratic Party
Balderas	Balderas for True Democracy Party
Baytona	The National Congress of the Great Tigray
BBC	The British Broadcasting Corporation
CARD	The Center for the Advancement of Rights and Democracy
CCI	The Council of Constitutional Inquiry
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
EHRC	The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
EHRCO	The Ethiopian Human Rights Council
ENDF	The Ethiopian National Defense Forces
EPRDF	The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESDP	Ethiopian Social Democratic Party
EU	The European Union
Ezema	The Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party
FBC	Fana Broadcasting Corporate
FDRE	The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FEP	The Freedom and Equality Party
GPDO	The Gedeo Peoples Democratic Organization
HoF	The House of the Federation
MoFA	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NAMA	National Movement of the Amhara
NEBE	The National Election Board of Ethiopia
OFC	The Oromo Federalist Congress
OLA	The Oromo Liberation Army (aka Shene)
OLF	The Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	The Ogaden National Liberation Front
PMO	Prime Minister's Office

ACLED	The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
PP	Prosperity Party
SAWET	Salsay Weyane Tigray
SEEDS	Supporting Elections for Ethiopia's Democratic Strengthening
TDF	Tigray Defense Forces
TIP	The Tigray Independence Party
TPLF	The Tigray Peoples Liberation Front
UNDP	The United National Development Program's
UNHCR	The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WHO	The World Health Organization
WPDF	The Wolayita People's Democratic Front

OVERVIEW

The sixth general elections were conducted on June 21, 2021, in more than 400 constituencies in seven regions and two city administrations. Tigray and Somali regions were not able to vote because of war in the case of the former, and voter registration fraud and security issues in the case of the latter. Elections were later conducted on September 30, 2021, in three Somalia, Southern region, and Harari along with a statehood referendum in five zones and a special woreda in the Southern region. Because of alleged irregularities which the NEBE argues to have resolved, three political parties, viz. the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (Ezema) party, and the Freedom and Equality Party withdrew from the polls.

According to the Board, 11 civil society organizations (CSOs) have been issued IDs to deploy more than 3,700 observers, and 2569 observers were confirmed to have been stationed on September 30. Of these CSOs, 263 were observing the polling in Harar, 877 in Somali, 1424 in the SNNPR, and five observers made their observations in two poll stations in Dire Dawa on September 30, 2021.

This report on election-related social media activities monitoring and other political developments in the country covers the 2013 election year in the Ethiopian Calendar (2021 in the Gregorian Calendar). It presents the major social media activities which affected discourses linked to the election or other political changes in the country, such as the war in the northern part of the country, security concerns in different parts of the country as well as politicians in detention.

BACKGROUND

The sixth general elections that were conducted on June 21, 2021, were indeed at the center of attention both for the local and international interest groups and individuals. Since the appointment of Birtukan Midekssa to the chairmanship of the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), hopes were high that the country would witness a historic election that would give birth to the country's democratization. This was in part because of the background of the Chairwoman who used to be a judge at the federal court as well as an opposition figure during the embattled 2005 elections. On the other hand, hopes were high pertaining to the reformist excitements following the coming to power of PM Abiy Ahmed (PhD) in 2018, coupled with the promise from the NEBE that it would want to conduct elections that would restore the public's trust in elections.

The preparations for the elections were on a bumpy road since the start. While some political parties argued¹ that the country's political tensions won't enable free and fair elections, others such as the OLF and OFC called² for a transitional government based on a national dialogue. The national dialogue was believed to eventually lead to a national consensus³. But the government did not accept⁴ any calls for a transitional government or anything of sorts. These discussions continued until the extension of the elections from 2020 to 2021 because of the global corona virus pandemic. The TPLF, an outlaw now, also propagated the idea of an all-inclusive national dialogue⁵ along with the Coalition of Federalist Forces⁶ that it spearheaded. The Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), however, issued a stern warning⁷ that

- 1 DW Amharic
- 2 Addis Standard
- 3 OFC
- 4 France 24
- 5 TPLF Official
- 6 TPLF Official
- 7 The Ethiopian News Agency

it won't tolerate any such moves that aim at unconstitutional means of seeking power. On the other hand, the opposition and prominent individuals [argued](#)⁸ that the government should not carry on with a unilateral extension of the elections.

Even with the extension of the polls from the original August 29, 2020, schedule because of the coronavirus pandemic, the support from the local and international partners continued especially through the United National Development Program's (UNDP) Supporting Elections for Ethiopia's Democratic Strengthening (SEEDS) project. This project mobilized finance and technical support to the NEBE from various international partners.

However, the postponement of the sixth general elections, as well as the process of doing so, triggered a new wave of political development in Ethiopia, which in its part played a role in the war in Tigray. When the federal government decided to postpone the elections due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Tigray region government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) defied the decision and conducted an election at the regional level. The federal government immediately declared the elections [illegal](#)⁹ and cut its ties with the regional administration to eventually install an interim administration. The constitutional interpretation exercise which involved a televised hearing from multiple experts was on one hand appreciated for its openness while it was criticized on the other hand for the lack of dissenting views than those supporting the decision to postpone the polls.

Later, on September 17, 2020, the House of Peoples' Representatives [endorsed](#)¹⁰ a decision to hold the elections despite the health risk of the virus based on a report from the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health's justifications given for the conduct of the polls were a point of [contention](#)¹¹ as the Ministry itself admitted to the public health concerns of the virus. The Ministry said the elections could go ahead as the world has come to understand the nature of the coronavirus pandemic and

8 Reuters

9 House of the Federation

10 House of Peoples' Representatives

11 Addis Maleda

there is a better knowledge of prevention of contracting the virus. Many argued at the time this was not a sound argument to go ahead with the elections given the huge number of infected people in the country and the increasing rate of death as the result of the virus. To compound this dissatisfaction, the inability by multinational - multi-billion dollar pharmaceutical companies to produce vaccines for COVID was framed as a problem in green lighting the polls. Despite the public debates regarding the pandemic and the polls in Ethiopia, the House of Peoples' Representatives ordered the NEBE on September 18, 2020, to [launch preparations](#)¹² for the sixth general elections.

Since the decision by the House of Peoples' Representatives, the Board launched its preparations ranging from voter and candidates' registration to ballot paper printing. While some of these preparations, such as the electoral map concerning [30 polling stations](#)¹³ on the borderline of Somali and Afar regions as well as parliamentary seats increment [question](#)¹⁴ from the Somali region, was controversial among the political parties and netizens, the conduct of the polls also witnessed the spreading of fake news and disinformation campaigns.

It is in this context that the sixth general elections were conducted.

The security concerns in various parts of the country also overshadowed the preparations for the polls where more than five scores of constituencies went to the polls on September 30, 2021, three months after the rest of the country elected their representatives. This was in part because of security concerns. The unaddressed security conditions of the Benshangul Gumuz region which delayed polls during the first round of votes had indefinitely postponed elections in two zones - Metekel and Kamashi. Because elections were not conducted in the region even when many of the remainder constituencies went to polls, the regional government was unable to form a government which

12 Ethiopian Reporter

13 VOA News

14 Olad Mohammed/Twitter

led to a regional level constitutional crisis. This triggered questions of establishing a **transitional/interim administration**¹⁵ in the region from opposition parties in the region such as the Boro Democratic Party.

Marred in controversies, logistical challenges, social media misinformation and disinformation as well as fake news rampancy, and the war in the northern part of the country as well as conflicts in other parts of the country, the sixth general elections were concluded in a landslide victory of the Prosperity Party. With a state-sponsored narrative that it was a process that made “Ethiopia win”, mainly because of the absence of pre- and post-election violence, the number of opposition political parties that joined the federal House of Peoples’ Representatives is smaller compared to previous elections, save the 2010 polls. In 1995, four opposition members and eight private candidates joined the parliament; in 2000, 10 opposition members and 13 private candidates joined the parliament; in 2005, 236 opposition members and one private candidate joined the parliament and in 2010, only one from the opposition and one private candidate managed to secure seats at the federal parliament. No opposition entered the parliament in elections 2015. But the opposition managed to win seats at regional councils, especially in the Amhara and South regions.

However, because of the withdrawal of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) from the elections, there was no significant competition in the Oromia region, and the Prosperity Party is said to run **unchallenged**¹⁶ in the region. Later on, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (**ONLF**)¹⁷ joined the bloc of political parties that withdrew from the elections which were conducted in the Somali region on September 30, 2021.

This special report on the election year social media activities and related political developments in the country presents social media reviews and their links to the election and the political developments in the country. This report covers the one year through the Ethiopian 2013 year that extended from September 2020 to September 2021.

15 Boro Democratic Party

16 ISS Africa

17 Addis Standard

This report is a compilation and analysis of biweekly and special reports prepared by CARD at different times throughout the election year. It will be a presentation of major developments in the political realm in the country and their links to the elections. It will address issues linked to the Tigray war as it happened during the election year. Because the tensions between the federal government and the Tigray regional government also involve factors related to elections, it will address this conflict in this context.





A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE BI-WEEKLY REPORTS BY CARD

The bi-weekly reports were prepared by a team of experts who monitor social media and produce their reports every fortnight. These reports cover monitoring results aggregated from junk news sites, individuals, the mainstream media, political parties, influential actors, and politicians.

These contents are analyzed or flagged as:

- > **False information,**
- > **Ethnic hate,**
- > **Hate speech against believers,**
- > **Violence instigating messages, and**
- > **Gender-based hate.**

Apart from these regular reports, CARD also developed various special reports on timely issues such as the Tigray war and inflammatory speeches on social media.

The monitors used different tools to monitor and analyze contents. The major platform for monitoring is known as Aggie, which aggregates identified groups of social media content from Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and other forums based on a list of profiles, hashtags, keywords,

etc. In addition, Facebook's CrowdTangle has been used to root sources of different information and the magnitude of their circulations. Other social media listeners such as BrandWatch and Awario have been used to analyze trending hashtags.

The monitoring team was composed of monitors who spoke three local languages, Amharic, Afaan Oromo, and Tigrigna, as well as English. The monitors follow debates and investigate and fact-check major claims that create controversies and put them in context.



NARRATIVES DELEGITIMIZING THE ELECTIONS

The sixth general elections¹⁸ were conducted in two rounds on June 21, 2021, and September 20, 2021, in different parts of the country. Although the government as well as the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) declared the process was largely peaceful and credible, the elections witnessed various challenges. These challenges are linked to security, irregularities, and logistics that affected the pre- and post-election processes.

It is worth noting here that the NEBE maintained that the elections were “peaceful and credible” deviating from the previous descriptions used for elections – “free, fair and credible.”

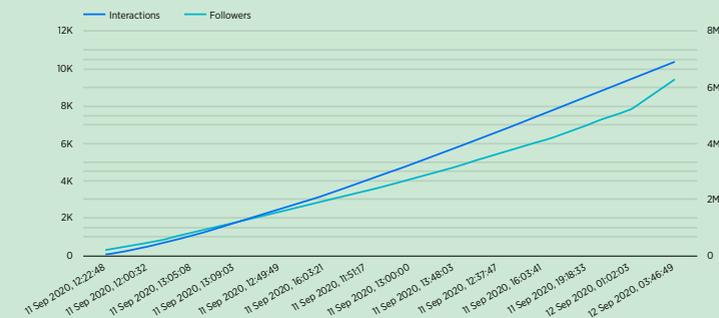
These developments have, one way or another, affected the process of delaying the election process. In this regard, social media played significant parts in terms of disseminating real/verified information, fake news, disinformation, and misinformation from different sources.

18 The general elections include election of representatives to the federal parliament as well as representatives of member states councils simultaneously.

While the National Election Board of Ethiopia had used social media for disseminating election-related information for the electorate as well as engaging with citizens, it was also a victim of social media content.

During the earlier days of the election in September 2020, the resignation¹⁹ of Birtukan Mideksa, Chairwoman of the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), started to rock social media platforms. Although this was the starting of election-related fake news circulating on social media, it was rather a precursor for future developments that would put their marks on the electoral process.

▶ Graph 1: Sum of followers of Facebook pages that shared the news from the primary source (ayyaantuu.org) and the sum of interactions it has received



19 Ayyaantuu.org

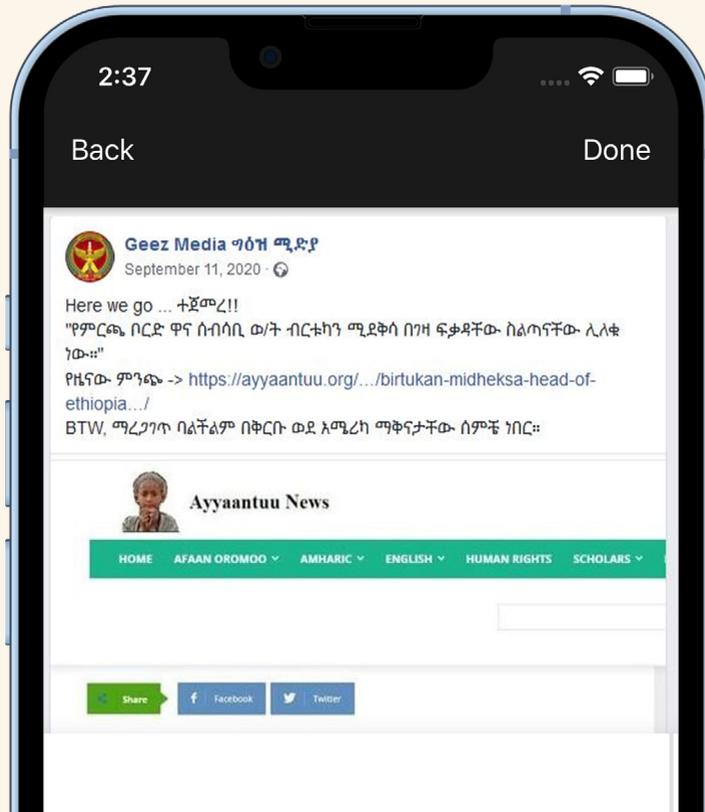


Figure 1: A screenshot of one of the fake news that reported Birtukan Mideksa's resignation citing the primary source

Immediately in the same month, the [resignation](#)²⁰ of Board member Getahun Kassa (PhD), as well as the narratives linked to his resignation showed that the elections would indeed create consternation. This incident was also used to recall the previous [claims](#)²¹ that the Chairper-

²⁰ Digital Woyin

²¹ Fango Hambo Tube

son of the Board, is resigning along with Getahun (a [false](#)²² link made between the two resignations) because she was not content with the political developments in the country.

This was characterized by huge debates concerning the security issues in the country as well as whether the country should carry on the preparation for the elections, especially in the Oromia region. This had also been linked to the detention of prominent political party members from the Oromia region.

Developments during the early days of the coronavirus pandemic as well as the House of Peoples' Representatives' (HoPR) decision to postpone the elections based on NEBE's recommendation inspired the idea that the government was [indefinitely](#)²³ extending its power as it was claimed that PM Abiy Ahmed wanted to stay in power. The resort for constitutional interpretation at the HoF led by the Council of Constitutional Inquiry (CCI) led to some arguments. Social media activists and platforms were instrumental in disseminating such kinds of information as was seen from the monitoring results done by CARD.

Tensions during the early times of the election such as the security concerns during the Irreecha celebrations in October 2020 which saw security checks in all entrances of Addis Ababa and strengthening of citywide security heightened fears that the panic would extend to the election.

But what had been at the center of attention during the early days of the election was the coronavirus pandemic and related extension of the terms of the House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) and the executive body. This led to claims that the government wouldn't have the legitimacy to lead after October 5, 2021, since the constitution provides that an elected government's term ends after five years and a new government shall be formed within a month of the expiry of the incumbent. Several hashtags such as #AbiyisExpired #Abiymustgo and #OromoProtest were used on various social media platforms to propagate such messages between October 5 and 7, 2020.

²² Ethiopia Check

²³ Arfasse Gamada/Twitter

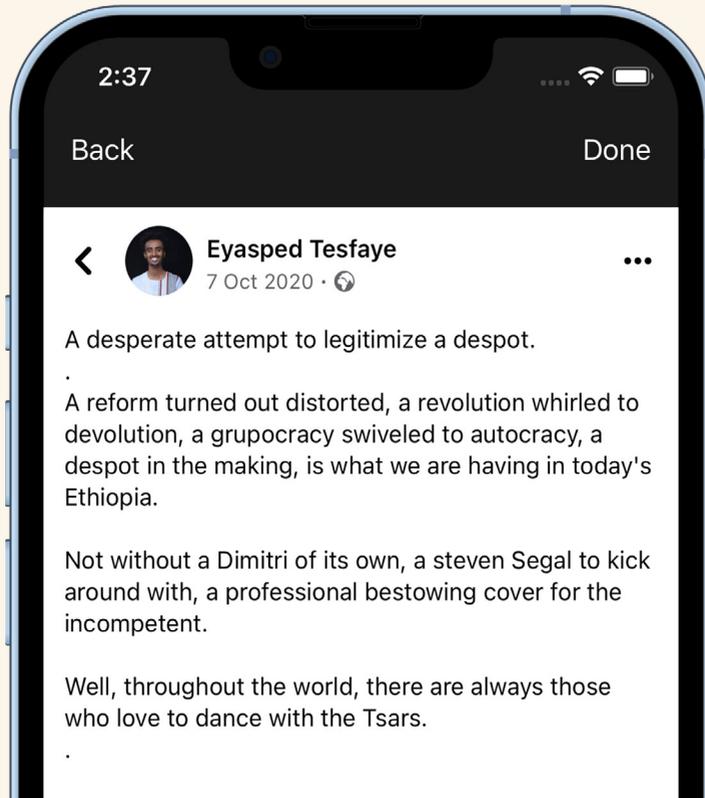


Figure 2: A screenshot of [one](#)²⁴ of the Facebook posts that carry the hashtag collection board

In addition to assertions that the administration had no legal ground to rule after October 5, 2020, social media activists also launched attacks on the Board who said elections were conducted while prominent politicians such as Jawar Mohammed and Bekele Gerba are in detention cannot be competitive enough. Some hashtags such as #Collection_Board started poking fingers at the Board saying the elections it is

preparing are meant to garner votes for the ruling prosperity party in the absence of prominent political parties and candidates that would be potential contenders in the process.

This was followed by boycotts at the parliament by Tigray region representatives who were told by the party to return to their regions. On October 21, 2021, the speaker of the HoPR Tagesse Chafo [vowed](#)²⁵ to take administrative measures against members who fail to attend sessions.

Additionally, security and political developments in various parts of the country raised concerns from political parties who sometimes exploited them to advance their interests such as mobilizing the public to demonstrate against the killings. Although this was the case, the Amhara PP condemned the move as it would pave a way for external forces to sabotage the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Intending to condemn the killings of Amharas across the country, especially in the West-Oromia, Benshangul-Gumuz Regional State, and Southern regions, the National Movement of the Amhara (NAMA) called for demonstrations in various cities on October 28, 2021. But the police allegedly prevented entrance or exit to the party headquarters. But, supporters of NAMA went out to rally in Bahirdar, the capital of Amhara to be dispersed by security forces in the region. In response to the demonstration, the ruling party in Amhara Prosperity Party (APP) said that any rally is not allowed at a time the region is dealing with desert locust invasions, encroachments by forces to destabilize the region as well as while the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is facing external dangers. This tit for tat also created uncertainties as to how parties would align their interests when running for the sixth general elections ahead of them.

On October 27, 2021, a day before NAMA's demonstrations, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) showed concern on the "Recent targeted Oromo youth killings are manifestations of the continued lack of peace and security in Oromia". According to the OLF, people died daily and it condemned the killings of people in South-Eastern Oromia in Bale

Robe, Eastern Oromia in Awaday and Machahara, and Western Oromia in Nekemte. According to the party, these kinds of killings by security forces clearly indicate the lack of peace and security in Oromia. The party also believed that such killings of the Oromo youths are orchestrated by those who are in government structure. Under this context, the party called for the establishment of a transitional government in Oromia to bring about peace in the region, overlooking the plans and preparations for the general elections.

On October 27, 2020, the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), in its part, called for the opening of schools closed for six months as a result of the pandemic. However, its main stress was lack of peace in higher education institutions where it said the safety of Oromo students assigned to study at universities out of the region is compromised. Asserting that students in the region are requesting to be assigned to universities in Oromia, it called schools and universities to protect students from COVID-19 as well as create a conducive environment for their safety. According to the OFC, students' fear originates from the fact the perpetrators of the crime were not held accountable in any region despite the killing of students.

Even though there were concerns of the global coronavirus pandemic were looming, the NEBE proposed on October 30, 2020, that the election be held either in the last two weeks of May or the first two weeks of June. Training for poll workers will be conducted from December to mid-January. Voters' registration was scheduled for mid-January to the third week of February. Candidates' registration was scheduled for early February and mid-February, and campaigns would be held from mid-February to election week. The board also stated that a task force will be set up to monitor the COVID - 19 pandemic in connection with the election execution.

In the early days of November, the use of derogatory or inflammatory statements by different social media activists was at its peak during this period following the start of the war in Tigray and attacks in different parts of the country. False information spreading on social media platforms is another feature of election year developments. For instance, the news of Muferyat Kamil defecting to Germany while on assignment was triggering.

A feud within the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) which finally led to the division of the party leadership started in early October 2021 but lasted until the elections were conducted. The OLF presented its concerns to the NEBE, and the latter formed a committee for the resolution of the differences between the disagreeing parties. The NEBE ordered²⁶ the committee to discuss with the chairperson of the party, Dawud Ibsa, and come up with recommendations. However, in late November 2020, Dawud Ibsa's side refused²⁷ to accept the decision of the NEBE.

While the Board was preparing for the elections, political parties such as the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) questioned the credibility of the process, setting conditions for its acceptability. The party said on October 6, 2021, that the general elections would be peaceful, democratic, and credible only if: "All the leaders and members of the party are released from jail; The closed political space is opened; The freedom of movement, assembly and demonstration are respected." OFC has also stressed that, without the fulfillment of these conditions, they would have difficulty taking part in the elections. This resentment from the party would finally lead to their withdrawal June 2021 elections.

In early December, in a gesture that seems to address the wider concerns raised by political parties, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed (PhD) held talks with political party leaders and civil society representatives on the upcoming elections in the presence of representatives from the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE).

In the meantime, to inform and help the election preparation process, members of the NEBE went on experience sharing trips to some parts of Africa on December 11, 2021, (the NEBE team led by Fikre Gebrehiwot observed Ghana's presidential election and held talks with the leadership of the Ghana Electoral Commission). The NEBE also invited civil society organizations who want to engage in election observation and civic education. But this period also saw election-related discussions recede, giving way to the war in the Northern part of the country.

26 NEBE

27 Addis Maleda

Later in November, the pressure from parties and politicians to call off the elections was strengthened by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) demands that conducting elections in the current turmoil would be impossible and it would be an election of one party with no significant opposition from other political associations as many candidates had been put in prison.

But, as the TPLF held its elections defying the decision by the federal government to postpone the elections, the tensions increased between the federal government and the Tigray regional government leading to a military confrontation on November 4, 2020. Therefore, Tigray was by default out of the election, later to be joined by other regions such as the Benshangul Gumuz, Somali, and Harari which were left out because of security and logistical concerns.

According to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) Communications advisor Soleyana Shimeles' December 22, 2020, [interview](#)²⁸ on the BBC Amharic, the establishment of 50,900 polling stations and about 50 million voters were expected to vote in the upcoming elections. She also added that there are two concerns ahead of the elections: the country's security situation and concerns from some political parties that said their offices had been closed and their members detained.

It was announced on May 15, 2020, that the NEBE [revoked](#)²⁹ licenses of registration for 27 political parties because they failed to fulfill requirements. The Board said that majority of these parties failed to provide the Board with signatures from their support base which is required by the law.

Meanwhile, on November 25, 2021, the NEBE [announced](#)³⁰ that the voting for the sixth general elections would be held on June 5, 2020, except for Tigray where war has already started. The referendum for the South West Region in the southern region had also been scheduled for the same day. Because of technical difficulties to conduct

28 BBC Amharic

29 Fana Broadcasting Corporate; NEBE

30 NEBE

parliamentary and regional council elections in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, the Board [decided](#)³¹ to hold the elections a week after the other parts of the country voted. The Board said the challenge would be making one person vote for the city council and parliamentary elections in different constituencies. It also added that poll workers will have difficulty in gathering results from different constituencies for the two types of elections before announcing the final results. However, this created concern among the public that it would pave a way for non-residents to come and cast their votes in the cities.

Despite concerns, the polls in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa city administrations were set to be held [a week after](#)³² the rest of the regions triggering a debate and protest by political parties who believed this is an effort to help non-eligible voters to cast votes so that the results in these constituencies would be skewed. But on December 25, 2021, the NEBE [explained](#)³³ that this decision is for operational simplicity because of a complex setup of constituencies in these cities.

Apart from the operational challenges of conducting elections during the heavy rain seasons, security concerns were also top of the agenda for election preparations. Accordingly, the federal and regional security agencies discussed the sixth general elections' national electoral security plan prepared by the national security council. They discussed how to make the election peaceful, fair, democratic, and credible with the participation of the Ministry of Defense, the Federal Police, the Attorney General, and National Intelligence and Security, and mayors of all regions and city administrations, regional police commissioners, and prosecutors.

In the interim, campaigns for the release of political prisoners, especially potential candidates in the elections, were intensified on various social media platforms.

31 NEBE

32 NEBE

33 NEBE

That month, the NEBE held frequent **discussions**³⁴ with political party representatives on draft directives on the conduct of the polls. These directives were prepared to enable the smooth conduct of the elections. But these sessions have also proved to be platforms for political parties to raise concerns on the election process, especially in relation to security concerns in various parts of the country.

Moreover, to the decisions of the NEBE that created debates on social media, statements, and remarks from the Board had also triggered party responses and condemnations. A statement by the Communications Advisor to the NEBE, Soleyana SHEMELES to the Voice of America concerning the split of the OLF was condemned by the party which said it was a **misrepresentation**³⁵ of facts. Soleyana said the Board intervened because the parties on both sides barred each other from the party and they couldn't resolve their differences internally. The party however said this is in contradiction to the principle of neutrality that the board should have pursued.

In January 2021, although optimism on the conduct of the elections and the potential positive outcomes was propagated by parties such as **Ezema**³⁶; others such as the **OFC**³⁷ said that their members in detention needed to be released as this would be a critical element to widen the political space leading to free, fair and democratic elections. A campaign had also been launched to release Balderal leaders who were detained in the aftermath of the killing of Hachalu Hundesa. The campaigns gathered petitions through a Global Taskforce to Free Balderas Leaders.

Currently, the question from Wolaitta had been gaining traction with a youth movement **threatening**³⁸ to take any measure it deemed appropriate on anyone who calls in the ENDF or unitary forces to suppress the question of the people.

34 NEBE

35 OLF

36 Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice/ Ezema/ Google Drive

37 OFC/ Facebook

38 ETHIOPIAN PROSPERITY PARTY SUPPORTERS UNIVERSAL GROUP/ Facebook

During the political parties registration and certification process in mid-January, the NEBE **announced**³⁹ that it revoked the political party license of the TPLF because of its involvement in armed conflicts. It also said only 52 political parties fulfill the criteria to register as a political party.

In January 2021, two coalitions targeting the upcoming elections developed; **Coalition for Democratic Federalism**⁴⁰ was formed between the Oromo Federal Congress (OFC), Oromo National Party (ONP), and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). **Another coalition**⁴¹ was also formed between the All Ethiopian Democratic Party (AEUP), the National Movement of Amhara (NAMA), and Balderas for True Democracy (Balderas). The latter, although it stayed in talks since the end of January 2021, it was officially communicated in March. But the NEBE **denied**⁴² its recognition. On the other hand, Ethiopian Social Democratic Party (ESDP) **left Medrek**⁴³, a prominent opposition coalition in the past two consecutive elections.

The lack of cooperation from regional governments to set up polling stations at regions was a concern for the NEBE. The Board issued a **statement**⁴⁴ calling for regional governments to cooperate to election preparations as cooperation is their obligation under the electoral laws, specifically the Ethiopian Electoral, Political Parties Registration and Electoral Code of Conduct **Proclamation No. 1162/2011**⁴⁵.

Although marred by such challenges, the Board's preparations to carry out the polls continued with collaboration with more **than 40 local and international partners**⁴⁶.

39 NEBE

40 Addis Standard

41 Ethiopian Monitor

42 The Reporter

43 Arts TV

44 NEBE

45 FEDERAL NEGARIT GAZETTE

46 NEBE

Following a call from the Board for political parties to submit electoral symbols, 45 parties submitted their symbols and received **approval**⁴⁷ from the Board. Because of non-compliance to a previously issued directive governing electoral symbols, six parties were told to revise their submissions and resubmit to the Board.

Meantime, the closure of OLF offices emerged as another major incident during the preparation for the polls. The party **statement**⁴⁸ said that the leaders were banned from entering the party headquarters but the Board did not react to it despite repeated notifications. The party also said this is hindering its preparations for the election. However, the Board argued it could not locate which offices were closed to help make decisions as it was **not given the exact address**⁴⁹ of the offices claimed to have been closed.

The Board's public engagement increased in February 2021 as the polls approached both via the mainstream and social media platforms. The Board's Chairwoman and the communications department frequently briefed the media about the electoral process. Apart from using social media to disseminate election-related information, the Board's Chair appeared on a **live**⁵⁰ chat with the public to respond to their questions on the election process. This is primarily done to secure the credibility of the elections and the processes. These sessions were used to provide explanations on the public's questions regarding political parties' grievances and operational procedures such as the polls in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa city council elections initially slated for a week after the general elections.

Frustrations, however, grew again within the Board because of a lack of cooperation from regional governments for the establishment of regional and zonal coordination offices ahead of candidate and voters' registration. Following the Board's complaint in a letter addressed to the concerned regions (especially Amhara, Somali, Sidama, Afar, and Southern regions), the federal government set up a national

47 NEBE
48 OLF
49 Addis Maleda
50 NEBE

coordination team which **worked**⁵¹ with the regional governments to facilitate the requested services as well as manage security concerns raised both by the Board and the Opposition.

The internal political differences that led to the splitting of the OLF had also been an arduous task for the NEBE in February 2021. The NEBE **stated**⁴⁷ the division of leadership of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) failed to resolve its differences internally. It recalled in detail that the Board had made repeated efforts to resolve the dispute between the OLF party leaders and that there are no further legal and administrative tools by which the Board could assist the party to solve its internal problems. Accordingly, the Board has strongly urged the various structures and members of the party to use any means possible to convene a general assembly as the party has not been able to resolve their differences.

Furthermore, the Board's efforts to hold peaceful and credible elections were challenged by demands from political parties that said their engagements with their members as well as electoral preparations are facing challenges putting the election's credibility into question. Although the Board conducted frequent discussions with political party representatives to address concerns they had regarding the electoral process, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) as well as the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) were adamant that the detention and killings of their members are hindering them from effectively participating in the elections. The OLF **said**⁵² mid-February that it would have difficulty registering candidates for the elections while the majority of its potential candidates are in jail. The party also blamed the ruling Prosperity Party (PP) for intervening in the party affairs and working to create disintegration within the party. Because of this unlawful intervention, the party officials were prevented from accessing party headquarters in Addis Ababa because of security forces deployed there.

51 Abiy Ahmed/Facebook
52 ETHIO FM 107.8

The OFC also voiced its concerns on the detention and killings of civilians across Oromia and **called**⁵³ for the government to take responsibility for the damages created. It also demanded the unconditional release of its members in detention.

Although Chair of the OFC, Merera Gudina (Prof.) **said**⁵⁴ that his party is set to run in the elections unless the government prevented it from doing so, the party did not participate in the elections because it demanded the NEBE to ensure the release of its members and level up the field dominated by the Prosperity Party.

Meanwhile, **the killing of Ezema's candidate**⁵⁵ in Bishoftu town in the Oromia region intensified the security concerns linked to the polls. Girma Moges, Ezema's leader of Ad'aa election constituency in the Bishoftu town of Oromia was shot dead, although details of the killing were not released. Later Ezema **said**⁵⁶ the killing was politically motivated despite the Oromia Police announcing that the matter is still under investigation. The party also **accused**⁵⁷ the government of the killing.

A directive issued by the NEBE for candidates' registration which obliges civil servants to take a leave for the period of the elections also caused controversy leading the Board to revoke this provision from the directive. Election officers at constituency offices that registered candidates took this as a primary criterion to register candidates and confirmation of leave started delaying candidates' registration. It also hindered interested candidates from registering. Hence, at the end of February, the NEBE **scrapped**⁵⁸ a directive requiring civil servants to take leave without pay for the period of elections if they want to run in the elections because this was misinterpreted affecting the candidates' registration process. Accordingly, because of such hindrances as well as

53 OFC

54 Al-Ain Amharic

55 Borkena.com

56 Ezema/Google Drive

57 The Reporter

58 NEBE

security and logistics limitations, coupled with lack of cooperation from regions governments, candidates' registration could not go as planned forcing the Board to **extend**⁵⁹ the registration by four days.

Although not much external agenda setting was seen during the electoral campaign, entities such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) urged political parties to commit to human rights protections and pledge to protect human rights when they win in the elections. In a **statement**⁶⁰ the EHRC issued, it called for political parties to adhere to and commit to human rights agenda points that need to be observed during the election process. Accordingly, the EHRC wanted all to pledge for concrete human rights actions, commitment for human rights, ensuring gender-responsiveness of the election process pledge for legal and policy reforms, protecting freedom of movement, association, expression, and access to information, as well as fully refrain from incitement, hate speech and violence. But this was welcomed by a very few political parties and the only party that appreciated the call was Ezema.

While the **OFC**⁶¹ demanded again for the release of all political prisoners including its members and for its offices to be allowed to operate, saying it won't take part in the elections unless met, the **OLF**⁶² declared in February that it won't be able to run in the elections because it could not register candidates because of pressures from the Prosperity Party.

In the meantime, political parties whose elections symbols were approved by the NEBE **started campaigning**⁶³ by the end of February began introducing their election symbols to the electorate along with their election manifesto.

But this was not a smooth process across the nation; it even became one of the concern areas of the Board as it needed direct engagement with security apparatus and administrative bodies at all levels. For instance, eleven members of Ezema who were campaigning in the

59 NEBE

60 The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

61 OFC

62 Deutsche Welle

63 BBC Amharic

Southern region were **detained**⁶⁴ by security forces since the start of the campaign. The security claimed they were not detained because of the elections, but they were displaying illegal flags and instigating violence. This detention campaigning continued through candidates' registration and election day where candidates, immune by law, were detained until the Board intervened.

Later, the NEBE announced that candidates' registration for the 2021 elections have been completed. Out of the 49 parties that managed to get approved election symbols, 47 registered candidates. The **OLF**⁶⁵ and **OFC**⁶⁶ withdrew from the elections for various reasons. OFC issued a **statement**⁶⁷ calling for the extension of the elections and the launching of a national dialogue because of the various security and other issues that it said would affect the poll's credibility.

As witnessed during candidates' registration, logistics was one of the challenges in the election process. And because of the logistical challenges observed during the candidates' registration process, in March, the NEBE **pushed**⁶⁸ the schedule for voter registration by two weeks. Unlike the candidates' registration that was carried out in almost 650 constituency offices, voters' registration needed to be carried out in about 49,000 polling stations which were yet to be fully established at the time.

In the meantime, complaints related to candidates' registration in different parts of the country started coming to the Board. For instance, Ezema complained that officials in the Oromia region created hurdles so that it could not register 52 of its candidates, in addition to its 201 already registered candidates. Ezema **said**⁶⁹ that its candidates were subjected to beating and detention in the region.

64 Deutsche Welle

65 OLF

66 Deutsche Welle

67 OFC

68 NEBE

69 Ezema

Following candidates' registration complaints from political parties, the Board held **meetings**⁷⁰ in early and mid-March with political parties to listen and address these complaints on the process.

Apart from harassment of candidates and logistical difficulties for the candidates' registration, security concerns for constituency offices in regions have also remained a challenge as the Board indicated in a statement. The Board **said** some constituency offices in Oromia, Somali, Amhara, and South regions lack protection by the security forces and called for the regional administrations to quickly resolve the problem⁷¹.

One peculiar feature of the sixth general elections was the active participation of prominent religious activists and preachers from different institutions including Ustaz Ahmedin Jebel (later **withdrew**⁷²), **Ustaz Kamil Shemsu**⁷³, and **Deacon Daniel Kibret**⁷⁴.

According to NEBE's final report on registered candidates, a total of 8,209 candidates were registered for the elections along with 125 independent candidates.

At the end of March, after providing **training**⁷⁵ for poll workers, the NEBE started registering voters for the elections. At the same time, the Board conducted various **discussions**⁷⁶ on ways of addressing more than 500 complaints political parties presented to the Board.

In the Afar region, voters' registration faced a new hurdle as people protested the establishment of polling stations in eight Kebeles (Gala'ito/Adaile, Adaitu, Tew'o/Alale, Gurmudali/Danlehelay, Undafo'o/Undufo, Gadamaytu/Garba'ise, Af'aso/Afu'ase, and Bala'iti Gona/Medeni) which they said the Board delimited within the Somali region. However, in late March the Board said it used the previous election's constituency

70 NEBE

71 NEBE

72 Ahmedin Jebel/Facebook

73 TIKVAH-ETH

74 Wazema Radio

75 NEBE

76 Walta

maps and **announced**⁷⁷ that it would cancel the 30 polling stations in various constituents and allow the electorate to register and vote in their preferred polling stations.

Meanwhile, the Somali region called for the Board to **reverse**⁷⁸ the decision, and unless the Board decided to reverse its decisions, it would be difficult for the regional government to participate in the elections. But the Board **declined**⁷⁹ the request from the regional president saying the board conducts elections for political parties and a regional government could not say it would withdraw from elections. NEBE also stressed the region to render the legally stipulated responsibility to cooperate.

Cognizant of concerns that the challenges during the candidates' registration would be carried to voters' registration too, the NEBE started registering voters in polling stations in various constituencies except in the Tigray region. However, the National Election Board of Ethiopia **announced**⁸⁰ in a public event that the voters' registration was not going as planned. Initially, 24,000 (49 percent) of the polling stations were not open for voters' registration across the country, and that where they are opened the turnout is very low. NEBE has blamed the lack of cooperation by the regional administrations for failure to open the polling stations. This led to the **extension**⁸¹ of voters' registration.

The total number of polling stations that are expected to carry out voters' registration was 49, 407. In addition, the Board stated that voters' registration turnout is very low. In Addis Ababa, where 89 percent of polling stations were opened, **only 200,000 voters registered**⁸² one week before the closing date of the registration; around 1.5 million people are believed to be eligible for voting in Addis Ababa.

77 NEBE
78 Somali Communication/Facebook
79 NEBE
80 NEBE
81 BBC Amharic
82 EBS TV

As the voters' registration was going on, in mid-April 2021, the NEBE declined to register Hararis voting for the Harari National Congress where the electorate residing in different parts of the country are entitled to casting votes for the Congress. The NEBE said the practice so far during the past five elections was not constitutional and it would set a precedent that other regions request similar treatments. The NEBE **responded**⁸³ to the request from the Harari region on whether the Harari people living outside of the region could vote to the National Council of Harari from their home base regardless of where they live; in a written statement, the board indicated that the participation of the community members living outside of the region in equal terms like the residents of the region is unconstitutional and such practices that have been undertaken for the Harari ethnic people in the past five general elections can cause inconsistencies for the Board in the future, for there might be similar demands that can be raised by others with the same status.

However, the Harari region **declined**⁸⁴ to accept the decision made by the NEBE after deliberating on the matter at a regional council assembly.

The region went to court to finally get the case decided in its favor. The region held its elections for both the federal parliament and the regional council on September 30 along with constituencies in the Somali and Southern regions.

Controversies in the voters' registration in Somalia started to arise at this time as three opposition political parties and independent candidates participating in the Somali Region of Ethiopia announced that they may be "suspending their election activities." **In a joint statement**,⁸⁵ the parties and individual candidates concluded that the ways things are proceeding in the Somali region will not result in a fair and free election.

83 NEBE
84 Addis Zeybe
85 ONLF/Twitter

The NEBE then decided to **suspend**⁸⁶ the registration process in Somali Regional State, in seven constituencies where complaints about voter registration have been blocked for voter registration fraud. The NEBE said, “the Board will establish a task force to investigate the voter registration process in these constituencies and will prepare a detailed technical paper about the roles of the political parties, the Board’s staff and independent experts in conducting the investigation process and proceed with implementation.”

Later, the NEBE introduced various procedures to investigate the alleged voter registration irregularities that have been taking place in eleven constituencies in the Somali Region. It also announced that its preparations for the Somali Region investigation were rounding up and that it had invited five CSOs to take part in the investigation. Elections in the Somali region were postponed to September 6, 2021, (conducted on September 30, 2021, due to another postponement) due to voter registration frauds which were under investigation.

During this time, one of the much-discussed issues on social and the mainstream media regarding the elections was the decision by the European Union to cancel its plans of sending observers for the sixth general elections. Although the EU said it wouldn’t send missions to observe the elections, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs **affirmed**⁸⁷ that the EU is sending experts to observe in the elections. The EU, on June 18, 2021, three days before the polls, announced that it **regrets**⁸⁸ its inability to send observers to Ethiopia’s elections.

As election preparations went on, in April 2021, party affairs such as the division within the OLF occupied the NEBE. Previously, although the OLF said it wouldn’t take part in the elections, a faction led by Ararso Bikila (later appointed as the Social Affairs Bureau Head in the Oromia region) **requested**⁸⁹ the Board to participate in the elections. However, the other side of the faction said this is not the official position of the party, which happen because of the internal division within the party.

86 NEBE

87 Ministry of Foreign Affairs

88 The European Union

89 ETHIO FM 107.8

Meanwhile, Balderas for True Democracy party said the elections would not be fair given voter identifications cards being issued based on ethnicity through party lines.

Again, long-standing litigation between the Board and Balderas culminated in a court ruling in favor of the **party**⁹⁰ as the court said Eskinder Nega, Sintayehu Chekol, Keleb Seyoum, and Askale Demele, members in detention, can **register**⁹¹ as candidates of the party in the elections. The court overruled the Federal High Court’s decision regarding the registration of the said candidates.

The NEBE, however, explained that it would have operational challenges to implement the court’s decision which it informed the court in a **lette**⁹². They stated that candidate registration had been closed on March 16 and that each candidate has taken their respected placement on the voting paper through the lottery system.

However, the court upheld its decision and the NEBE registered and **certified**⁹³ Balderas Party candidates in detention after the Board chairperson **explained**⁹⁴ the process to the Court that decided in favor of the party. The Board said it **incurred**⁹⁵ 3.5 million birr cost for changing the ballot papers to include the candidates.

Throughout this period, continued harassment and beating of political party members and candidates in different parts of the country threatened to derail the process. For instance, the Wolayita People’s Democratic Front (WPDF) warned that it may **withdraw**⁹⁶ from participating in the upcoming election, this came after the party along with Wolayita Tussa Federal Front (Tussa) members and supporters had been reportedly attacked and endured injury during their campaign.

90 Addis Standard

91 Ethiopian Insider

92 NEBE

93 Balderas for True Democracy

94 Balderas for True Democracy

95 NEBE

96 Tussa News

On top of this, just two weeks before the polls, ballot papers printed for 54 constituencies in different regions were found to have **defects**⁹⁷. Later, the NEBE **announced**⁹⁸ to the media on June 10, 2021, that the elections would be held on September 6, 2021, in these constituencies along with the other constituencies where the elections were postponed due to security issues. But other areas will vote on June 21, 2021. The Board said the number of constituencies that have been affected by ballot paper printing errors was adjusted from 54 to 27 because of corrective measures taken by the Board.

Meanwhile, political parties such as Balderas for True Democracy, the National Movement of Amhara (NAMA), Enat Party, All Ethiopia Unity Party, and Hibir Ethiopia Democratic Party questioned the electoral process and said it lacks the basic required **standards**⁹⁹ for a free and fair election.

The sixth general elections, which were postponed multiple times, had finally been conducted on June 21, 2021, regardless of the challenges faced due to the political instability and the COVID-19 pandemic. Though, there were areas set to vote on September 6, 2021, because of delays for security concerns. These constituencies include strongholds of the OLA in different parts of Oromia.

On June 21, 2021, the **National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)**¹⁰⁰ announced that the preliminary results of the sixth general elections will be released within 10 days. The board added that it has already received results from 378 electoral constituencies out of the 400 constituencies where polls were conducted.

Although the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission **said**¹⁰¹ gunmen in the Oromia region killed an election officer, political parties and their committees **said**¹⁰² that the elections were largely peaceful.

97 NEBE
 98 Fana BC
 99 Balderas for True Democracy
 100 NEBE
 101 Deutsche Welle
 102 Deutsche Welle

The **Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)**¹⁰³ issued “a call for the establishment of an interim arrangement in Ethiopia and start an all-inclusive political dialogue among stakeholders.” The statement claimed that the government pushed for the elections to maintain the status quo at any cost that potentially enables it to remain in power. The party dismissed the elections and said the process and the outcome of the election held on June 21, 2021, were unacceptable by “any standard”.

As per its promises, the NEBE **announced**¹⁰⁴ the results of the sixth general election on July 10, 2021. According to NEBE's **report**¹⁰⁵, the election was contested for 436 seats at the HoPR from which the Prosperity Party won 410 seats. Four seats went to the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (Ezema) party while the National Movement of the Amhara (NAMA) won five seats at the federal house. In addition, the Gedeo Peoples Democratic Organization (GPDO) won two seats at the HoPR along with four private

103 OLF
 104 Fana TV
 105 NEBE

Table 1: NEBE final Parliamentary results for the June 21 polls candidates.

No.	Region/City Administration where election was held	Number of registered voters	Percentage of the registered voters who voted	No. of seats the region has for House Representatives (HoPR)	No. of constituencies that conducted election on HoPR	Parties or independent candidates that won seats for HoPR	Number of seats the party or independent candidate won	Number of constituencies where re-counting will be held	Number of constituencies where re-election will be held	Remarks
1	Addis Ababa	1,819,343	99	23	23	Prosperity Party	22			
						Daeon Daniel Kibret (Independent Candidate)	1			
2	Afar	1,696,016	97	8	6	Prosperity Party	6			
3	Amhara	7,122,516	94	138	125	Prosperity Party	114	1	5	
						National Movement of Amhara (NAMA)	5			
4	Benishangul	162,609	55	9	3	Prosperity Party	3			
5	Dire Dawa	208,213	95	2	2	Prosperity Party	1	1		
6	Gambella	415,899	89	3	3	Prosperity Party	3			
7	Oromia	15,330,596	96	178	170	Prosperity Party	167			
						Dima Negawo (Independent Candidate)	1			
						Kamil Shemsu (Independent Candidate)	1			
						Galasa Dilbo (Independent Candidate)	1			
8	Sidama	1,886,248	88.7	19	19	Prosperity Party	19			
9	SNNPR	5,321,990	91	104	85	Prosperity Party	75	1	3	
						Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA)	4			
						Geddo People's Democratic Organization	2			
	Total no. of constituencies			436						

Table 2: NEBE final regional council results for the June 21 polls

No.	Region/City Administration where election was held	Number of registered voters	Percentage of the registered voters who voted	No. of seats the region has for Regional Council (RC)	No. of constituencies that conducted election on June 21 for RC	Parties/ independent candidates that won seats for RC	The no. of constituencies that the party or independent candidate won	The no. of seats that the party or independent candidate won	Number of constituencies where re-counting will be held	Number of constituencies where re-election will be held	Remarks
1	Addis Ababa	1,819,343	99	138	10	Prosperity Party	10	138	0	0	
2	Afar	1,696,016	97	96	25	Prosperity Party	17	51	5	1	
						Argoba People's Democratic Organization	1	3			
3	Amhara	7,122,516	94	294	125	Prosperity Party	114	128		5	
						National Movement of Amhara (NAMA)	6	13			
4	Benishangul	162,609	55	99	6	Prosperity Party	4	22	1	1	
5	Dire Dawa	208,213	95	189	47	Prosperity Party	47	189			
6	Gambella	415,899	89	156	14	Gambella Liberation Movement (GPNM)	2	7			GPNM and Prosperity Party share one
						Prosperity Party	13	149			Constituency
7	Oromia	15,330,596	96	537	171	Prosperity Party	171	513			
8	Sidama	1,886,248	88.7	190	19	Prosperity Party	19	190			
9	SNNPR	5,321,990	91	291	89	Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA)	4	10	3		Qucha
						Geddo People's Democratic Organization	2	6			Constituency results being recounted at
						Prosperity Party	81	245			The headquarters.

A few weeks after the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) announced the results of the sixth general elections, opposition parties that participated in the elections complained about the results and the irregularities they witnessed during the pre-elections and the elections period. With a conviction that the NEBE did not give them a proper response to the complaints the parties submitted, two prominent parties, the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Democracy (EZEMA)¹⁰⁶ and Balderas¹⁰⁷ took their cases to the judiciary demanding justice.

Although Balderas' case did not succeed at court, Ezema managed to get reelections in four constituencies in the Southern region which voted on September 20 along with Somali, and Harari regions.

In a [statement](#)¹⁰⁸, the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) said that elections were held on September 30, 2021, in various constituencies that did not vote on June 21 along with voter registration between September 1 and 10, 2021, in areas where voter registration had not been completed. Accordingly, 6,562,534 voters registered to vote in the September 30, 2021, polls. A total of 21,198 poll workers were said to have been deployed to conduct the voter registration and voting process; of the registered voters, 5,914,670 cast their ballots exhibiting 85 percent turnout. Polls were held for 47 House of Representatives and 106 Regional Councils constituencies in a total of 5,935 polling stations. A total of 2,569 civil society observers from 11 organizations observed the process.

However, various constituencies in the Benshangul Gumuz and Amhara regions still must go to the polls. After continued consultations with regional officials and the command post placed to restore peace in Benshangul Gumuz, the NEBE [announced](#)¹⁰⁹ on October 19, 2021, that it could hold elections in the region on December 30, 2021.

106 Ezema

107 Balderas for True Democracy

108 NEBE

109 NEBE



THE PROTRACTED TIGRAY WAR AND ITS NARRATIVES

Following the declaration that the federal government's term ends on October 5, 2021, members of the TPLF started boycotting sessions from the House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) which Tagesse Chafo, the Speaker, said¹¹⁰ the House "will take administrative measures if the members discontinue attending parliamentary sessions."

Immediately after this announcement, the federal government [declared](#)¹¹¹ that it would cut ties with the Tigray government including subsidy budgets to the Tigray government. However, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) [said](#)¹¹² it would establish legal frameworks to directly engage with the lower levels of administration in the Tigray region to distribute budget and safety-net handouts.

This posed both legal and operational challenges for the federal government to engage with the lower echelons of the regional administration. It also heightened the tension between the federal government and the Tigray government.

110 Fana BC

111 Ezega.com

112 Fana BC

Although things started to escalate following the Tigray government and TPLF's defiance to hold their regional council election on September 9, 2020, despite a decision by the federal government to postpone elections because of the coronavirus pandemic, delegitimization of each other by the federal and Tigray governments led to a military confrontation between the two sides. While the Tigray regional administration says the federal government exploited the legal and institutional frameworks to benefit itself to avoid the looming constitutional crises, the federal government said the administration and the party in Tigray went on holding an illegal regional election exercising power beyond the constitutional provision gives regions.

Later, Jamal Mohammed (Bir. Gen.), a newly appointed Deputy Commander of the Northern Command of the ENDF based in Mekelle, was **denied entry**¹¹³ into the Tigray by regional forces on arrival at Mekelle Alula Aba Nega Airport. He was then forced to return to Addis Ababa. The reason was that Tigray doesn't accept the legitimacy of PM Abiy's admin to make new appointments either in the military or civilian positions.

On the eve of the declaration of war on November 4, 2020, in the Tigray region, Debretsion Gebremichael (PhD), the president of the Tigray region said President Isaias Afeworki of Eritrea and Abiy Ahmed (PhD), are mobilizing forces to attack Tigray which he said all the youth of Tigray should stand against.

On November 4, 2020, after midnight, PM Abiy announced on a Facebook post and a televised declaration that he gave an order¹¹⁴ to the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) to engage with the TPLF following the alleged attack committed on the Northern Command as "they crossed the red line."

Then the House of Peoples' Representatives (HoPR) approved¹¹⁵ a six-month state of emergency in Tigray Regional State under the decision by the Council of Ministers on November 5, 2020.

113 BBC Tigrigna

114 Abiy Ahmed/Facebook

115 House of Peoples' Representatives

Subsequently, electric power, telecom, and banking services have been down all over Tigray since the night of the fourth of November. While electricity is on and off since the next day, telecom and banking services went into a complete blackout.

The ugly sides of the war, especially their impacts on civilians started to emerge from the war zone and the number of **civilians fleeing**¹¹⁶ the war started filling camps in Sudan. The UNHCR later **announced**¹¹⁷ that 31,000 refugees have arrived at camps in Sudan. End of November, over 45,000 Tigrayan refugees from Ethiopia have crossed into Sudan in search of safety, for which **UNHCR**¹¹⁸ chief Filippo Grandi calls for international support to manage the crisis. Humanitarian sources are telling **CNN**¹¹⁹ that the Ethiopian armies are trying to block its citizens from fleeing the conflict. On November 10, 2020, some social media figures posted on their pages that the TPLF troops have massacred non-Tigrayan civilians in Mai-Kadra. Then, on November 11, 2021, the Amhara Mass Media Agency **reported**¹²⁰ that the TPLF committed the mass murder with the help of an independent armed group called "Samri".

An earlier investigation by Amnesty International released a **report**¹²¹ on November 12, 2020, which indicates eyewitnesses of the massacre alleged to Amnesty that the Mai-Kadra attack was carried out by forces loyal to the TPLF and by members of the Tigray Special Police Force. However, the Tigray regional state **responded**¹²² the act has been instead committed by the Federal Government and called for an independent investigation.

The earlier days of the war also witnessed campaigns on social media that called for an end to the conflict in the northern part of the country.

116 Reuters

117 UNHCR

118 UNHCR

119 CNN

120 Amhara Mass Media Agency

121 Amnesty International

122 TPLF Official

▶ **Graph 2: Social media mentions of a campaign using #SayNoToWarEthiopia**



Campaigns began also stating that the TPLF is a terrorist group that surfaced on social media pages at the same period.

▶ **Graph 3: Mention volume trend of #TPLFisTerroristGroup**



On November 12, 2020, the House of People’s Representatives (HoPR) approved the motion by the Attorney General to **revoke the immunity**¹²³ of 38 TPLF members followed by the Federal Police Commission issuing an arrest warrant for the arrest of some of the TPLF members.

Table 3: List¹²⁴ of the members of the TPLF whose immunity was revoked by the HoPR

Debretsiion Gebremikael (PhD)	Lemlem Hadigo	Mamit Tesfay
Asmelash Woldesilassie	Gebregziabher Araya	Mana Abrha
Abaye Tsehaye	Halefom Gidey	Kalayu Gebrehiwot
Addisalem Balema (PhD)	Hadush Azanaw	Gedion Haileslassie
Getachew Reda	Mebrat Gebregiyorgis	Berhie Zigta
Atsibha Aregawi	Mulu Gebregziabher	Tadele Assefa
Tadesse Haile	Lielti Tsegaye	Nega Assefa
Mebratu Meles (PhD)	Mamit Tesfay	Nafekusg Dessie
Shishay H/Silassie	Kassa Gugsa	Aster Amare
Almaz Araya	Aberash Admasu	Dagnew Belete
Aselefech Bekele	Yohannes Bekele	Adhana Hayle (PhD)
Alemseged Wereta	Tsihab Tadesse	Kiros Woldemikael
Winta Teklu	Girmay Shadi	Shumye Gebrie

Residents in Gondar and Bahir Dar started writing on social media that they heard huge explosions and exchange of gun fire in their cities on social media. The next day through its Ethiopia State of Emergency Fact Check social media page, the government **said**¹²⁵ the TPLF fired rockets towards Gondar and Bahir Dar. On the other hand, The TPLF on

123 Fana BC

124 Amhara Media Corporation

125 Ethiopia State of Emergency Fact Check

its official Facebook page announced¹²⁶, as a response to the airstrikes in Tigray, their forces have launched missile attacks on Bahir Dar Airport and the ENDF air base in Gondar. Some netizens wrote rockets were launched to Asmara¹²⁷.



Figure 3: Screenshots from the Tigray governments on rockets launched by Tigrayan forces

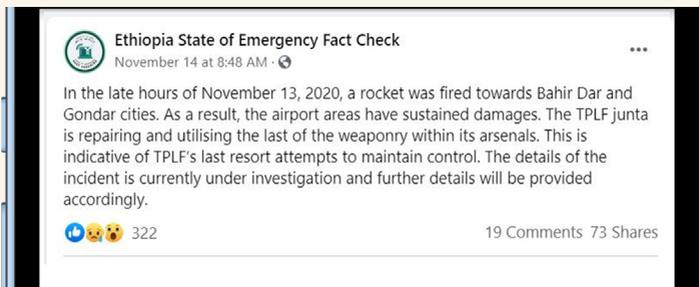


Figure 4: Screenshots from the federal governments on rockets launched by Tigrayan forces

126 TPLF Official
127 Eritrea Hub

During the early days of the war, reports¹²⁸ of Tigrayans being discriminated against and being detained surfaced in various social and mainstream media and some reported that security personnel at airports started to request ID cards apart from passports for boarding travelers targeting ethnic profiling¹²⁹ of Tigrayans.

Misinformation and disinformation concerning the war were rampant throughout, with the dissemination of unverified, fake, and distorted information to the public. Prosperity Party's verified Facebook page also disseminated fake news such as a destruction of a bridge in Tigray by the TPLF forces. However, the Prosperity Party later removed the social media post that claimed so.



Figure 5: A screenshot of a Facebook post claiming the attest of TPLF forces leader Tadesse Worede (Gen.)

128 Human Rights Watch
129 The New Humanitarian

▶ **Graph 4: Trends of the term Nefteгна (in Geez alphabets) on Twitter in the month of the war in Tigray**



In addition, the criticism¹³⁰ by Ethiopia's military¹³¹ and civil officials towards Tedros Adhanom (PhD), the Director-General for the World Health Organization (WHO) gained huge attention on social media and mainstream media. The Ethiopian military and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials criticized Tedros for his involvement in lobbying for the TPLF.

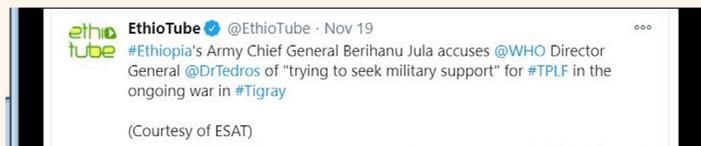


Figure 8: A screenshot of a news site that reported Berhanu Jula (Gen.), Chief of Staff of the ENDF accusing Tedros Adhanom (PhD)

130 The Washington Post

131 Ethio Tube/Twitter

Similarly, the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations Office to Geneva, Ambassador Zenebe Kebede, accused Tedros Adhanom (PhD), UNWHO's Director-General, of campaigning in support of the TPLF, against the Ethiopian government.

However, the WHO chief Tedros Adhanom issued a statement¹³² on Ethiopia refuting the accusations.

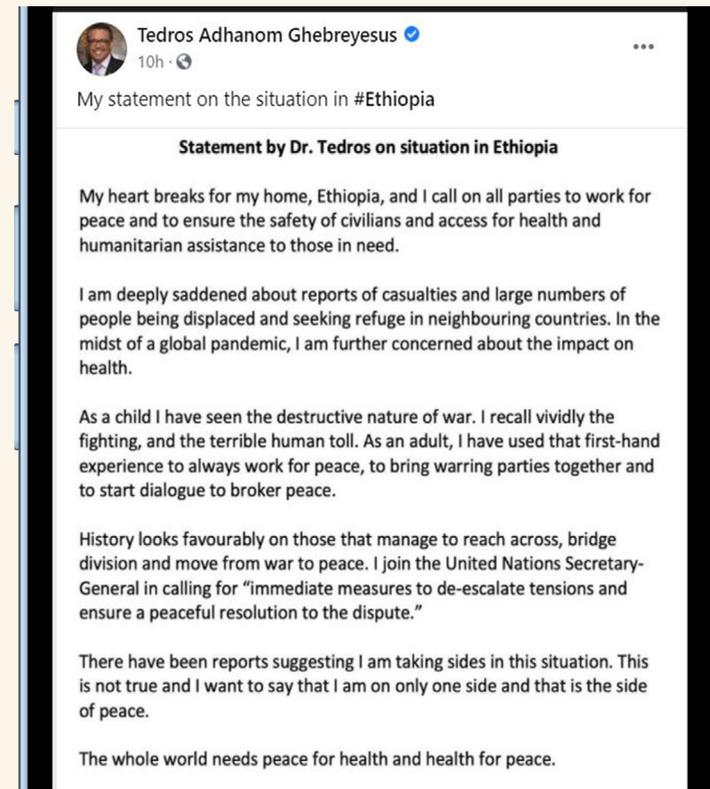


Figure 9: A screenshot of Tedros' Twitter where he posted his statement on the situation in Ethiopia

132 Tedros Adhanom/Facebook

Concerns and fears started to show when bank accounts opened in the Tigray region were all suspended, including businesspeople and civilians that happen to have an account from a branch in Tigray. Although the Ethiopian government says this was **disinformation**¹³³ at the time, Addis Fortune newspaper **reported**¹³⁴ that the National Bank of Ethiopia ordered banks to freeze these accounts. This measure by the government exposed the people to the suffering and challenges of feeding themselves.

As time pass the Tigray conflict was escalated with rockets launched to Bahir Dar, Asmara, and Gondar cities by Tigrayan forces. Tigrayan forces also claimed that the Ethiopian military forces used drones from a non-African nation to launch attacks in Tigray. Airstrikes on Mekelle were also one feature of the war in Tigray. But experts told news outlets that there is **no evidence**¹³⁵ to reach this conclusion.

While the war was ongoing in Tigray, November also saw demonstrations in different parts of the country in support and solidarity with the Ethiopian National Defense Forces.

As the TPLF mobilized ¹³⁶ forces to fight the ENDF forces that were advancing to Mekelle, the Ethiopian government gave a **72 hours ultimatum**¹³⁷ for the TPLF fighters to surrender, **which the TPLF rejected**¹³⁸. This ultimatum eventually ended and a final offensive on Mekelle started with the ENDF effectively taking control of Mekelle.

This period also saw various claims of atrocities committed by the TPLF. Fana Broadcasting Corporate quoted the State of Emergency Fact Check and **reported**¹³⁹ that Axum airport was damaged by the fleeing TPLF forces. Although the TPLF wanted to regionalize the conflict, official narratives had it that the government managed to prevent concerns from the international community that it will be regionalized.

133 Ethiopia State of Emergency Fact Check
 134 Addis Fortune
 135 VOA News
 136 Ethio Tube
 137 Abiy Ahmed/Twitter
 138 Africa News
 139 Ethiopia State of Emergency Fact Check

A **statement**¹⁴⁰ issued by the Prime Minister affirmed the country is engaged in a law enforcement operation and countries should pursue a path of non-interventionism and respect Ethiopia's sovereignty.

Social media also fueled the spreading of fake news linked to the war. According to the news website **Sudan Post**¹⁴¹ report, South Sudan diplomats in Ethiopia have been expelled by the Ethiopian government, hours after the Ethiopian ambassador to South Sudan, Fisseha Shawl left Juba in an abrupt decision. But this news was flagged as **fake news**¹⁴² by EthiopiaCheck that spoke to a spokesperson at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ethiopia and the South Sudan Embassy in Addis Ababa. Others such as the screenshots below also disseminated fake news.



Figure 10: Screenshots of fake reports claiming the heavy injury and death of Tsadkan Gebretensay (Let. Gen.)

140 Prime Minister's Office/Twitter
 141 Sudan Post
 142 Ethiopia Check

With continued airstrikes which escalated since the government took control of Mekele and other cities in Tigray, campaigns calling for an end to the bombing of Tigray, as well as an end to the war were prominent on social media. Others also campaigned their support for the defense forces condemning TPLF as a terrorist group. Campaigns for national dialogue also continued at the end of November.

Graph 5: Mention volume trend of #NationalDialogueNow on Twitter



Social media platforms were stormed by reports that TPLF officials started to surrender. The former speaker of the House of the Federation, Keriya Ibrahim's **surrender**¹⁴³ to the Ethiopian forces in early December 2020 instigated various social media reports that other prominent members of the TPLF were killed.

Humanitarian concerns in the Tigray region were also heightened because of a **shooting on humanitarian workers**¹⁴⁴ in the Tigray region because the government said they tried to breach a security checkpoint.

143 EBC
144 Deutsche Welle

The government was firm that if humanitarian agencies intend to continue working in Tigray, they should abide by the laws of the land. In early September 2021, Addis Standard **reported**¹⁴⁵ that the number of humanitarian workers killed in the Tigray conflict reached 22.

Support **rallies**¹⁴⁶ for the ENDF forces and the Amhara special forces were also held in Dansha town, one of the early battlefields in the Tigray war. These rallies propagated the territorial claims in the Wolkait and Raya areas apart from condemning the perpetrators of the Mai Kadra massacre.

In the meantime, the government announced that it has **arrested**¹⁴⁷ 38 members of the defense forces that were suspected of involvement in cutting communication lines of the defense forces leading to the November 4, 2020 attack on the Northern Command. This was earlier misleadingly reported by Ethio FM that the detainees are high-level TPLF leadership.



Figure 11: A screenshot of the Federal Police statement correcting the original news by Ethio FM and stating that the detainees are members of the Defense Forces that were suspected of involving in cutting communication links in the military.

145 Addis Standard
146 Amhara Prosperity Party
147 Ethiopian Federal Police Commission

The Tigray war also involved propaganda and false information flowing on various social media platforms. For instance, Sekota woreda Communications Affairs Office of the Amhara region **announced**¹⁴⁸ that Debretsion Gebremichael (PhD) had been arrested along with various TPLF officials. This was welcomed with huge fanfare in the town of Sekota. The Office later admitted that the information they provided was false and removed the post.

The ENDF forces also announced that they managed to free more than 1000 members of the army captured in Tigray. However, many **more prisoners**¹⁴⁹ of war captured from the Ethiopian army remained under the TPLF.

With a continued arrest of wanted TPLF personnel, Addis Alem Balema (PhD), former deputy president of the Tigray region, Frehiwot Berhe, the spouse of the deceased former foreign minister Seyoum Mesfin, and their son Ag'azi Seyoum were put in detention in early March.

With an official **declaration**¹⁵⁰ of the end of the “law enforcement operations” in Tigray Region by the Federal government of Ethiopia, electricity, banks (in Mekelle), aviation, governmental office, water, and phone services had been restored to most parts of the Regional State. Apart from enabling people to make calls to Tigray to talk to loved ones, this also led to the unmasking of human rights violations in the region committed by both the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces.

However, detaining high-brass TPLF officials in Tigray proved to be difficult and the **federal government put a bounty of 10 million birr**¹⁵¹ on the TPLF officials payable to anyone that discloses their whereabouts. While in Mekelle, the defense forces also **announced**¹⁵² that they recovered 13 oil tankers buried in Mekelle by the TPL containing 200,000 liters of fuel.

148 Sekota Ketema Communications Affairs Office

149 Africa News

150 Ministry of Foreign Affairs

151 EBC

152 Walta

Following widespread rumors that Getachew Reda, former Ethiopia's Minister of Communications and executive member of the TPLF was killed in engagements, he **tweeted**¹⁵³ three messages to downplay the rumors. Although his account hadn't been verified at the time, the same account received the blue badge from Twitter.

During the early days of the war, the rest of the country was going through **demonetization**¹⁵⁴ following the government's move of demonetization except for Tigray. The National Bank of Ethiopia later announced in March that the **replacement of old notes in Tigray**¹⁵⁵ will be carried out for two weeks since one week the federal government took control as the people in the region didn't have the chance to exchange their money earlier because of the conflict.

The prolonged war in Tigray has also led to the humanitarian catastrophe in the region. For instance, in December 2020, the former chief of UNOCHA Mark Lowcock **said**¹⁵⁶ that 350,000 more people are in need of food on top of the existing 950,000 people who already were identified as requiring aid.

Because of the grim humanitarian crisis as well as the protracted war resulting in human rights abuses in Tigray, international pressure mounted because of the Tigray war. The EU **delayed**¹⁵⁷ its initiative amounting to 90 million Euros in support for Ethiopia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs **downplayed**¹⁵⁸ this saying the requirements for the disbursement of the amount such as access to humanitarian agencies to provide aid in Tigray and the launching of investigations into alleged human rights abuses in the Tigray region are on the timeline to be met. And, as this is part of the 815 million Euros from the EU allocated for Ethiopia to be used between the years 2014 and 2020, 95 percent of this amount has already been disbursed. So, it is a misrepresentation

153 Getachew Reda/Twitter

154 Fana BC

155 The National Bank of Ethiopia (NBE)

156 France 24

157 Politico EU

158 Fana BC

of the fact on the ground to say that the EU had suspended its aid to Ethiopia, the Ministry said. This is one of the earlier pressures on Ethiopia linked to the Tigray war.

In the meantime, the arrest of Sebhat Nega, the prominent founding member of the TPLF, also attracted attention among netizens who were divided about whether he was arrested **at home or while on the run**¹⁵⁹.

During the first two weeks of January 2021, several TPLF leaders were either arrested or killed by the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF). The list includes, apart from veteran politician Sibaht Nega, former president of the Region Abay Woldu, Abraham Tekeste (PhD), and others. Additionally, ENDF **announced**¹⁶⁰, in January 2021 that former Foreign Affairs Minister Seyoum Mesfin, Abay Tsehaye, former government whip Asmelash G. Selassie, Abay Tsehaye, and other officials were killed when they engaged with the federal forces refusing surrender.

Also, extrajudicial killings and rape in the Tigray region by forces deployed in the region started to surface and became a center of attention. In a **meeting**¹⁶¹ with residents, military officials admitted the prevalence of rapes and condemned the acts. Many activists on social media called for the government to give due attention to these reports. Tigrayan activists on the other hand said this is an **admission**¹⁶² by the government that its forces committed the rapes. Online protests condemning the rampant rapes in the region were also observed.

Humanitarian agencies then began **voicing**¹⁶³ their concerns regarding limited access to reach Tigray region. Hence, most parts of North-Western, Eastern, and Central Tigray remain constrained due to the ongoing insecurity and bureaucratic hurdles. Amidst claims of the killing of civilians in the Tigray region, concerns about the use of

159 Yeha Media

160 FDRE Defense Force - የኢ.ፌ.ዴ.ሪ መከላከያ ሠራዊት/Facebook

161 Reuters

162 Haftu A./ Twitter (@haftu55)

163 Relief Web

hunger¹⁶⁴ as a weapon of war in Tigray started to surface. The Ethiopian government immediately **reacted**¹⁶⁵ to this claim and condemned the characterization.

In every aspect of it, the crisis in Tigray had been worsening two months into the war creating more **concerns**¹⁶⁶ both locally and internationally. In **audio**¹⁶⁷ released for the first time since Mekelle fell under the federal forces, Debretsion Gebremichael (PhD), President of Tigray region and Chair of the TPLF, said that the war had been costly in multiple aspects.

The destruction of property including health facilities in Tigray was the center of attention among various stakeholders including Ethiopia's President Sahele-Worq Zewude who **said**¹⁶⁸ that everyone should join hands in rebuilding the region. This led to a campaign by Ethiopia's diplomatic missions on social media calling on all to rebuild Tigray.

The involvement of the Eritrean forces in Tigray worsened concerns of destruction in Tigray. Three of the prominent parties in Tigray (Tigray Independence Party (TIP); Salsay Weyane Tigray (SAWET) and the National Congress of the Great Tigray (Baytona)) issued a **statement**¹⁶⁹ condemning the involvement of Eritrea in the conflict and the participation of mercenaries from Somalia and other non-African actors. They claimed in February 2021 that more than 52,000 civilians were killed by these joint forces since the starting of the conflict in November 2020. They also raised concerns on hindrances to humanitarian assistance to the 6.5 million people residing in the region which was taken up by the mainstream media such as the **AP**¹⁷⁰ and **France 24**¹⁷¹.

Later, the massacre in Mai Kadra attracted the attention of multiple interest groups both locally and internationally. A Facebook **post**¹⁷² by the Federal Police Commission indicated that Interpol had listed the

164 The Economist

165 Ethiopia State of Emergency Fact Check

166 The Guardian

167 Dimtsi Woyane

168 Fana BC

169 ብሄራዊ ባይቶ ኅብይት ጉግራይ - ባይቶና National Congress of Great Tigray

170 The Associated Press

171 France 24

172 Ethiopian Federal Police Commission

massacre in Mai Kadra as one of the main terrorist attacks registered in 2020, along with Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria. It was indicated that 600 civilians were killed by a group called Samri, the Commission reported. A preliminary investigation report released¹⁷³ by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission detailed the atrocities committed in Tigray including that 108 women were raped in the past two months alone according to information obtained from Mekelle, Ayder, Adigrat, and Wukro hospitals. The government also admitted¹⁷⁴ to the rapes and promised to dig deeper into the committed crimes and serve justice to the victims.

Following mounting criticisms that media access was denied in Tigray, some international media outlets were given access¹⁷⁵ to the Tigray region which coincided with Amnesty International's¹⁷⁶ report that Eritrean soldiers killed more than 100 civilians in Tigray's Axum region in two days.

Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs questioned¹⁷⁷ the methodology employed to gather data for the report as interviews were conducted with refugees in Sudan and phone interviews with residents of Axum, the EHRC said the report needs to be seriously taken¹⁷⁸ to inform the ongoing investigation it had been conducting in Tigray region.

Despite the control of the federal forces in the Tigray region for months, there were areas where the federal forces did not control. Apart from areas of TPLF's stronghold in the region, western Tigray had also been under the Amhara leadership depriving control of full administration of the region to the interim administration appointed by the Prime Minister.

173 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
 174 Filsan Hassan – Minister of Women, Children and Youth Affairs/Twitter
 175 Prime Minister's Office
 176 Amnesty International
 177 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 178 The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

Areas in west Tigray remained concerning¹⁷⁹ for the interim administration appointed for Tigray, from the outset as the Amhara forces took control of the area. Initially appointed by the interim administration to head the region's Social and Labor Affairs Bureau, Abraha Desta, head of the Tigray opposition Arena Party, said¹⁸⁰ in a Facebook post that the Tigray interim administration was set up to administer Tigray as it were in the pre-war conditions. He vowed to take arms to fight any attempt to take a square meter of the Tigray's land, triggering huge debates on social media. However, the Amhara region's Prosperity Party rejected¹⁸¹ the claims by Abraha Desta saying that Wolkait, Tsegede, Tselemt, and Raya areas used to be under the Tigray region are now under the Amhara region.



Figure 12: A screenshot of Abraha Desta's Facebook post on the borderline with Amhara



Figure 13: A screenshot of a Facebook post from Amhara Prosperity Party on Wolkait, Tegede, Telemt, and Raya quoting the former president of the region Aggegnehu Teshager

179 The Reporter
 180 Abraha Desta/Faceboook
 181 Amhara Prosperity Party

On the flip side, although the government declared the war had been completed since the government-controlled Mekelle and **said**¹⁸² it will seek after the wanted TPLF personnel, Getachew Reda gave a phone **interview**¹⁸³ with a US-based Tigray Media House saying that war is still going on in most parts of Tigray and it is a “myth that war is over.”

Pursuant to calls for negotiation from various sides including social media campaigners, the communications head of the Tigray regional government Liya Kassa **told**¹⁸⁴ Tigray Media House that the TPLF could engage in negotiations on certain conditions. These conditions included demands that Eritrea and Amhara militia shall leave Tigray immediately; the administrative territory and the territorial integrity of Tigray shall be secured and those ‘enemies’ controlling the land of Tigray to the South, North West, West, and East shall leave the areas; and the body that has been instituted by the ‘enemies’ as interim administration should be dismantled and the administration of Tigray, which has been elected by the people, should be returned to its place. She also said that an international independent investigation should be started into alleged genocide and war crimes committed in the Tigray region.

The international attention to the conflict in the northern part of the country was heightened with the **refusal**¹⁸⁵ of Tigrayan members of the Ethiopia Peace Keeping Mission in South Sudan. The Ethiopian National Defense Forces downplayed these reports **saying**¹⁸⁶ these were TPLF members who wanted to create chaos at the Juba Airport.

Since the start of the war in Tigray, campaigners on social media in support and against both parties to the conflict have been disseminating different content alleging wrongdoings by the other. One of these contents concerned aid workers which were allegedly helping the TPLF get help to **escape**¹⁸⁷.

182 Fana BC

183 Tigray Media House

184 Tigray Media House

185 BBC Amharic

186 FDRE Defense Force - የኢ.ፌ.ዴ.ሪ መከላከያ ሠራዊት

187 ኤርትራ- ERITREA/ Twitter (@thedrosg1)

Contrarily, a **video**¹⁸⁸ that received much international attention emerged from the Tigray region showing people in uniforms executing unarmed people and throwing bodies off a cliff somewhere in Tigray. The sound from the video shows the uniformed people saying those killed said TPLF would win.

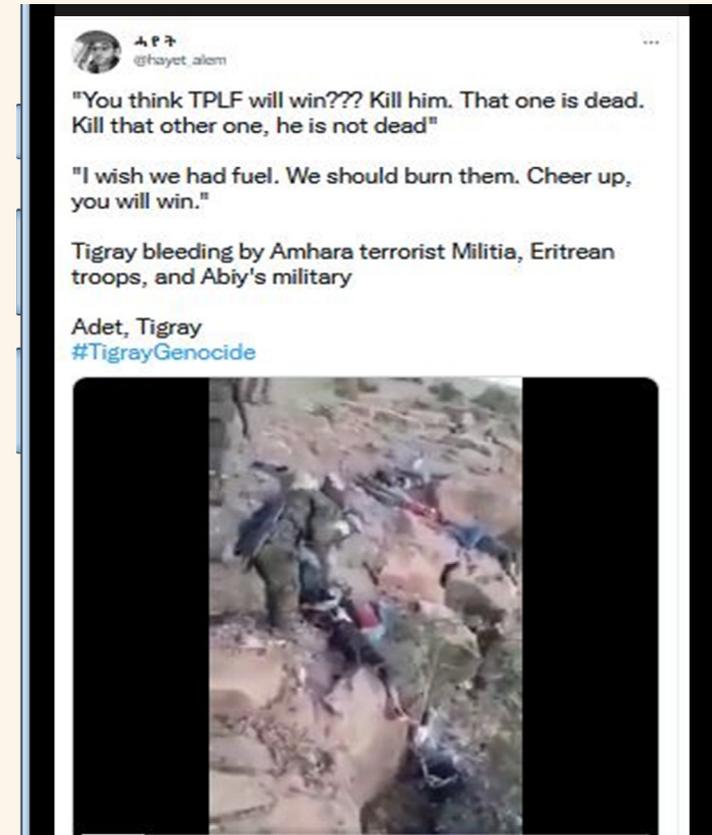


Figure 14: A screenshot of one of the **tweets**¹⁸⁹ condemning the killings of civilians in Tigray

188 ሓ የ ት/ Twitter (@hayet_alem)

189 ሓ የ ት/ Twitter (@hayet_alem)

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Abiy appeared before the Parliament on March 23, 2021, and stressed that members of the Ethiopian National Defense (ENDF) who took part in any act of violence against civilians will be held accountable. The Federal **Attorney-General**¹⁹⁰ later issued “A Summary of Efforts to Ensure Accountability Regarding Violations of International Humanitarian Law and Other Legal Norms in the Regional State of Tigray (May 21, 2021)” in which it indicated that “The military police and prosecutors have focused their investigation and law enforcement efforts particularly on cases of homicide/ murder of civilians and cases of rape/sexual assaults perpetrated by members of the ENDF.”

Abiy also admitted¹⁹¹ to the parliament for the first time the presence of Eritrean troops in the Tigray region on grounds of national security given TPLF’s provocative actions against Eritrea. He also told the parliament that he is dealing with the matter and within two days since the PM left for Eritrea for an official visit, he announced¹⁹² that President Isayas Afwerki agreed to withdraw the Eritrean army from the Tigray region.

During this time, atrocities in the course of the war were gaining traction internationally, and calls for an independent investigation into the crimes were loud enough to be heard at the UN. Later, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) **agreed**¹⁹³ to conduct a joint investigation on the alleged human rights abuses committed during the Tigray conflict. EHRC released a preliminary **report**¹⁹⁴ on grave human rights violations committed in Aksum town of the Tigray regional state during the conflict. The report blamed Eritrean forces for killing civilians in Axum town.

190 Ministry of Foreign Affairs

191 Al Jazeera

192 Abiy Ahmed/Facebook

193 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

194 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

Humanitarian assistance to the region was also at the top of the agenda for local and international media as well as humanitarian partners. Some even described the situation as a siege when the ceasefire was declared. Later, the Ministry of Peace and the National Disaster Management Commission jointly issued a **statement**¹⁹⁵ on the ongoing humanitarian activities in Tigray State. They said 86 percent of the food and non-food items in the Region will be covered by humanitarian partners and the remaining will be covered by the government. Moreover, the Office of the Prime Minister released an **update on**¹⁹⁶ the situation in the Tigray region, saying, the second round of humanitarian assistance, food, and non-food items have been delivered for 2.7 million beneficiaries.

However, humanitarian agencies operating in the country have been pressuring Ethiopia along with western superpowers because of the protracted conflicts as well as the humanitarian crisis it is creating. This led to campaigns by the government and pro-government activists online and offline. One of these campaigns that ran for months is the “Hands Off Ethiopia” campaign **launched**¹⁹⁷ with the motto “National Pride for Unity”

This was also linked with the country’s efforts to assure its sovereignty and become free of international pressures. The Prosperity Party Executive Committee **meeting**¹⁹⁸ highlighted these points the pressure Ethiopia has been enduring from the international community on other issues such as the “law enforcement operation” in Tigray Region, and the upcoming election, which it stated, “are points of non-negotiation.”

Apparently, the US placed¹⁹⁹ visa restrictions on Ethiopian and Eritrean officials who are said to have committed crimes in the war in Tigray.

195 Ministry of Peace

196 Prime Minister’s Office

197 EBC

198 EBC

199 US State Department

The presence of the Eritrean Army in the Tigray Region is claimed to still aggravate the atrocities in the region, as well as the [claims](#)²⁰⁰ of their presence in the Oromia and the Benishangul Gumuz regions took the center stage. Apart from this, humanitarian access in the Tigray Region had remained a [concern](#)²⁰¹ among the international community, and because of a threat of [cholera](#)²⁰² outbreak leading to emergency vaccination in the Tigray region.

Concerns of humanitarian crises in the region were aggravated by civilian casualties as the result of the war. For instance, an airstrike in the Togoga town in the Tigray region, 25 km from the region's capital, Mekelle had reportedly killed and injured civilians after the bombing of a busy market in the town. Accordingly, [wounded](#)²⁰³ victims were said to have been treated at Mekele's Ayder hospital although soldiers blocked medical teams from traveling to the scene. More than 64 people have [died](#)²⁰⁴ due to the airstrike and more than 100 other people were [wounded](#)²⁰⁵, while more than 50 of them sustained serious injury. In addition, at least 33 people were reported missing.

Late in June, reports of ENDF withdrawing from Mekelle, the capital of Tigray, and the Tigray forces entering the city widely circulated on various social media platforms. Later on, state media outlets like [Fana Broadcasting Corporation \(FBC\)](#)²⁰⁶ reported that the Interim Government of Tigray requested the federal government to declare a humanitarian ceasefire in Tigray. The request for a ceasefire was immediately accepted by the government and [Prime Minister's Office \(PMO\)](#)²⁰⁷ later announced a "unilateral humanitarian ceasefire" in Tigray effective immediately.

200 OLF

201 Relief Web

202 Fana BC

203 The Associated Press

204 The Washington Post

205 The Associated Press

206 Fana BC

207 Fana BC

At the same time, Tigrayan leaders rejected the ceasefire. The spokesperson of the TPLF, Getachew Reda, [said](#)²⁰⁸ that "we'll stop at nothing to liberate every square inch" of the Tigray region.

But the ceasefire was not welcomed by the international community who said it brought the closure of roads to Tigray and is a siege in effect. Ethiopia [rejected](#)²⁰⁹ the European Commission's warning that the unilateral ceasefire declared in the Tigray region is "siege" and the government is using starvation as a weapon of war by destroying infrastructure and closing routes

Locally, the ceasefire caused concerns about the well-being of civilians in the Tigray region. The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) [expressed](#)²¹⁰ deep concerns about the situation of civilians in the Tigray Region following the announcement of a humanitarian ceasefire by the federal government, and interruption of communication services in the region since then.

The Tigray war started to create a rift between the administration of PM Abiy Ahmed and the international community as the latter started criticizing the federal government for hindering humanitarian access to Tigray. Both [unilateral](#)²¹¹ and [multilateral](#)²¹² partners voiced concerns in this regard. The Ethiopian government, on the other hand, said this is a mischaracterization of the facts on the ground as it is taking care of the majority of humanitarian assistance to Tigray. It also blamed the international community for taking up the name Tigray Defense Forces (TDF). Later on, the government expressed its [disappointment](#)²¹³ with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) for disseminating inaccurate reports and statements regarding the situation in Tigray. The government also [said](#),²¹⁴ "the

208 The Associated Press

209 BBC Amharic

210 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

211 USAID

212 The New Humanitarian

213 Ethiopian State of Emergency Fact Check

214 Abiy Ahmed/Facebook

ceasefire could not bear desired fruits due to people who could not appreciate the sacrifices that the Government of Ethiopia has paid for the sake of the people of Tigray.”

Then the war in Tigray took a different turn in the next two weeks as the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) forces **began offensives**²¹⁵ towards the neighboring Afar and Amhara regions. Youth from many parts of the country and different regional security forces joined the war to push back the Tigrayan forces back into the Tigray Region. This came after a few weeks since the Ethiopian federal government announced a humanitarian ceasefire in the Tigray war leading to its subsequent withdrawal from the region. The Ethiopian government claims that it is being forced to continue the war because TPLF is “**encroaching**”²¹⁶ into other regions and causing instability.

Another issue that equally attracted the attention of the international community and netizens was the use of a chemical weapon on civilians in the war. Reports dealt with the **potential use**²¹⁷ of a chemical weapon in mid-April, in Central Tigray during the war citing some personal testimonies.

However, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) **warned**²¹⁸ about an article that was about to come out in an international media platform ‘falsely claiming’ the use of chemical weapons.

One of the controversial statements during this period came from Kibrom Berhe, Baytona Party member, one of the opposition parties active in the Tigray region. He **said**²¹⁹ that there was a use of chemical weapons in the Tigray war. Many on social media did not believe this to be true. On the other hand, some questioned Ethiopia’s capacity to purchase chemical weapons.

215 BBC News

216 Ethiopian Embassy UK

217 Telegraph

218 Ministry of Foreign Affairs

219 Ethio Tube



OTHER SECURITY CONCERNS

Apart from the Tigray war, the country has gone through various security challenges²²⁰ that tested its security apparatus at different levels. This has been the subject of interest for political parties, the NEBE, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, as well as governments at the center and regional levels.

Most social media campaigns condemned the killing of civilians which had been widely liked to the **ethnolinguistics-based**²²¹ federal system in the country. Other social media campaigners on the other hand defended ethnic federalism but blamed tyranny for the killings of civilians.

As a separate development, the continued failure to comply with court orders in the Oromia region as well as at the federal level created frustrations that the rule of law has been dwindling, creating fear that these would overshadow the election process. For instance, the failure of the Oromia regional police to release prisoners despite court orders was **criticized**²²² by the EHRC. The Commission said the police failed to release Mohammed Deksiso, a graduate of Jimma University who chanted “Free Jawar Mohammed” at commencement by snatching a microphone from a performer.

220 Rusi.org

221 Tamerat Negera/Facebook

222 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

Meanwhile, social media campaigns were rife for the release of Jawar Mohammed and co who were detained in relation to the protests and destructions in the aftermath of the killing of the prominent singer Hachalu Hundessa. Rep. Ilham Omar said in a statement that she is **alarmed**²²³ by the situation of Oromo “political prisoners” who are on hunger strike. Fetsum Arega, Ethiopia’s Ambassador to the US, however, **downplayed**²²⁴ her concerns and a fair and objective assessment of the facts would alleviate any related concerns. The prisoners’ health deteriorated during their hunger strike. This created uncertainties as to the possibility of these online campaigns would go to the ground to disrupt the election which could eventually create nationwide chaos.

Furthermore, armed conflicts and killings of civilians in different parts of the country triggered security concerns that would eventually result in the hindrance of the election process. The **Metekel**²²⁵ violence - targeted attack by armed groups as well as the killings of civilians in the Oromia region, especially in the Guji zone and Wollega zones- was at the center of the public’s attention. ACLED reported frequent attacks on civilians in **Guji**²²⁶ while Addis Standard online magazine and others reported on West Wollega violence including in **Guliso**²²⁷ where civilians were indiscriminately killed.

The attacks in the Metekel Zone of the Benshangul Gumuz region also overshadowed the electoral preparations. Another round of **killings**²²⁸ of civilians in the zone triggered another wave of displacements from the region. This coupled with the massacre of passengers on a bus traveling from Wonbera to Chagni created concerns on the safety and security of civilians and debates on the failure of the federal government in protecting civilians were widely circulating.

223 Ilhan Omar

224 Fetsum Arega, Ethiopia’s Ambassador to the US/Facebook

225 Addis Standard

226 The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

227 Addis Standard

228 ESAT

The continued violence in the Metekel zone of the Benshangul Gumuz region led Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to **discuss**²²⁹ the matter with the residents of the region in Asosa to find amicable and lasting solutions to the recurring conflicts. But, on an immediate day after this discussion, people were killed in the Metekel zone, Bulen Woreda, Kuji kebele of the region on December 23, 2020. The government repeatedly reported to have killed scores of the insurgents and confiscated their weapons.

Because of a widespread narrative that the killings targeted the Amhara residents of the zones, various **activists**²³⁰ called for the Amhara to arm themselves and defend their lives.

Reports of killings of ethnic Amharas in the Metekel Zone of the Benshangul-Gumuz regional state, particularly in Dabate Woreda created chaos within the Amhara region and concerned many at various parts of the country. Accordingly, citing eyewitnesses, VOA reported that more than 60 people have been **killed**²³¹ whereas some activists and online groups have **increased**²³² the number to 210. State media also reported the attack, the residents’ **call**²³³ to the government to provide emergency assistance, and that the government needs to **take action**²³⁴ against the perpetrators who are attacking civilians.

On its part, the EHRC stated that ‘the failure to ensure civilian safety calls for a reconsideration of full federal control of the Zone.’ Similarly, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), said that it has been monitoring the Region for the past five months, and **called**²³⁵ on social media users to press the government to take immediate action. According to the Council, more than 500 people have been killed and hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced in the past five months alone.

229 Fana BC

230 አለም ገናቢ ደምታ/Facebook

231 VOA Amharic

232 Habtamu Ayalew/Facebook

233 EBC

234 Ethiopian News Agency

235 Ethiopian Human Rights Council

The Benishangul-Gumuz Deputy Commissioner of Police, Misganaw Engifata, said militants had taken **control**²³⁶ of the Sedal woreda in the Kamashi zone of the region.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)²³⁷ report indicated that about 25,000 people residing in the Wereda were trapped in militant-controlled areas. The commission stated that many residents, district administration, and police had fled the area to various locations.

At the start of the electoral preparations, armed violence was witnessed at least in four regions. Gura Ferda in SNNPR, Nekemte in Oromia, and the borders of Somali and Afar regions saw armed conflicts that claimed the lives of civilians and displaced thousands of civilians. Twenty-seven people were reported to have been **killed**²³⁸ in the boundary between Somali and Afar regional states. Somali's government said that 27 people have been killed while the Afar government did not comment on the conflict. Similarly, in October 2020, two staff members of the Ministry of Education were **killed**²³⁹ by unknown armed people while on assignment in the Afar region.

The armed violence²⁴⁰ in Gura Ferda woreda of the Bench Sheko zone, in the Southern region, claimed hundreds of civilian lives allegedly perpetrated by unidentified assailants created a nationwide uproar in October 2020.

In November four people were killed²⁴¹ in the Guji Zone, Gumi Eldallo district while they were working on the construction of the Malka Guba bridge. According to the district's governor, the rebel group Shanne is behind the killing.

236 BBC Amharic

237 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

238 Addis Standard

239 Ministry of Education Ethiopia

240 TIKVAH-ETH

241 FBC Afaan Oromoo

In the volatile security situation in Oromia, several ethnic Amhara civilians were killed in Gulisso, a district of the Western Wollega zone of the Oromia region. Although the **news**²⁴² came out earlier, the **EHRC**²⁴³ later affirmed the number of casualties likely exceeded 32. Different activists on social media called for an independent investigation into these killings.

In the context of frequent violence on civilians, the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives **demanded**²⁴⁴ that TPLF and OLF-Shene be labeled as terrorist organizations.

Nonetheless, fake news circulating on various social media platforms, such as a church set ablaze in the Guliso woreda in West Wollega played their part in fueling concerns of security across the nation. Extrajudicial killings in the Oromia region, East Wollega have also been at the center of attention among netizens who condemned the killing of civilians. On the other hand, the government has been criticized for its failure to protect citizens from attacks by armed groups, especially following killings in the Oromia region's West Wollega.



Figure 15: Some screenshots of posts claiming the burning of a church in Wollega

242 Gobeze Sisay

243 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

244 Ethio Panorama

Recurring conflicts²⁴⁵ were also witnessed in the Dirashe and Segen districts of the Konso zone in the Southern region that erupted seasonally because of border disputes between ethnic groups in the south.

The aftermath of the killing of Hachalu Hundessa resulted in the death and injury of various people who went out to protest against the killing. A report by the EHRC²⁴⁶ on the human rights abuses in Oromia in the aftermath of the killing of Hachalu Hundesa received opposing reactions from social media users. The report found out that 123 people were killed, 500 injured and thousands displaced. While one side said it contradicted²⁴⁷ the findings of the Oromia region which said the majority of people killed were Oromos, others from the National Movement of the Amhara (NAMA) argued that this is evidence that the killing of Amharas in Oromia is a state-sponsored act.

In this context, the health situation of detained politicians, Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, and Hamza Borana attracted the attention of netizens who campaigned for the release of the detainees and their treatment at their preferred private health facilities²⁴⁸. Along with this, calls for a national dialogue and an end to the war in Tigray surfaced on social media.

Because of the huge support these detainees garnered on social media, their hearings in courtrooms were carried out in tight security. As a result of security concerns in the courtroom, journalists and human rights observers were expelled²⁴⁹ from the courtroom before the hearing of Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, and others started in early February 2021. Families were also among those who were prevented from attending the hearing. Those who managed to enter the courtroom were told to leave their mobile phones outside before entering the court.

245 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

246 Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

247 Henock Gabissa/Twitter

248 Ethiopian Insider

249 Addis Standard

These detainees went on a hunger strike protesting their handling and denial of fair treatment. However, Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, and Hamza Borana ended²⁵⁰ their hunger strike after the 40th day. They agreed to end their strike because elders begged them to do so. Because of their deteriorating situation as a result of the strike, they were granted to get medical treatment at a private hospital in Addis Ababa. This was, however, despite strong opposition from the Attorney General and the Police saying their transportation from prison to the hospital would pose security challenges.

In addition to the ongoing war in Tigray, armed violence, and attacks in Oromia's Wollega and Guji zones, and conflicts in the Southern region, new cases of the deteriorating situation started emerging in various parts of the country. One of such incidents was the Ataye attack. Starting on the night of March 19, 2021, an exchange of gunfire was reported in Ataye town of the Oromo Special zone in the Amhara region. According to the Amhara Mass Media Agency, several residents were forced²⁵¹ to leave town because of the heavy artillery attacks carried out by a militant group. This attack continued in Kemisse and Shewarobit, in the Northern Shewa zones of the Amhara region. Properties were looted and an unconfirmed number of people had been killed because of the attack. Though nobody claimed the responsibility, different social media activists and political parties have been accusing two militant groups in different contexts. For instance, the Amhara prosperity party said²⁵² the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) launched the attack using heavy artillery that mainly targeted the ethnic Amharas. Other Amhara activists and social media pages have also been sharing the same view on their pages.

At the same time, the Oromo Prosperity Party (OPP) admitted²⁵³ the occurrence of violence in the Oromo special zone and blamed the Amhara regional state for the attacks, condemned the attacks against the Oromo civilians, and demanded that the perpetrators who were 'identified' to be members of the Amhara regional state special forces

250 Addis Standard

251 Amhara Mass Media Agency

252 Amhara Prosperity Party

253 Oromia Prosperity Party

be brought to justice. Oromo social media activists also claimed that the Amhara special force took violent action against the Wollo Oromos who live in the aforementioned areas.

The conflict in the North Shewa Zone and South-Wollo Zones, especially Ataye town, continued resulting in an alleged direct attack on residents and their properties. According to the [VOA](#)²⁵⁴, More than a quarter of a million people have been displaced by the attacks in various towns in the North Shoa Zone of Amhara State.

Following these incidents, The Ministry of Defense established [command](#)²⁵⁵ posts in the Oromo National Administration and South Wollo Zones, including North Shoa, to ensure security in the area.

Following the hostilities and displacements in North-Shewa and South-Wollo Zones, people took the streets in cities all over the Amhara region to protest against the killings and displacements of Amhara communities in various parts of Ethiopia. The [BBC](#)²⁵⁶ on the other hand reported, citing Mr. Teferi Mekonen, president of the Bank, that an office of Oromia International Bank, Tana Branch in Bahirdar, was destroyed by protestors on the morning of April 22.

Deteriorating security situations remained untamed in the Oromia region throughout the election period. Dozens of civilians were massacred in the Babo Gambel district of the Western Wollega in the Oromia regional states in the same week. According to a [statement](#)²⁵⁷ from the Oromia Communication Bureau, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) committed the attack on civilians.

This violence in Wollega continued for months. Another armed attack in West Wollega, Babo Gembel Wereda, claimed the lives of 28 civilians, of which most of them were children and women. According to the government, the atrocities were committed by the “OLF Shane”; the name refers to the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) which is not

254 VOA Amharic

255 FDRE Defense Force - የኢ.ፌ.ዴ.ሪ መከላከያ ሠራዊት

256 BBC Afaan Oromoo

257 Oromia Communication Bureau

officially used by the army. The OLA in the area [denied](#)²⁵⁸ both the labeling as ‘OLF Shane’ and the civilians killing in many parts of Oromia that the government accuses to have the responsibility of atrocities in the region.

However, the federal and regional governments kept on calling out the OLF-Shane group for the attacks. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed issued a statement in which he [condemned](#)²⁵⁹ the attacks on civilians in Wollega on both his personal and his office’s Facebook pages. In the same statement, he stated that both the Federal and Regional Forces had started taking measures to avert the killings by the militant group he called ‘OLF Shane’

In what seemed to be an extension of the Tigray conflict, a number of civilians were killed, and several others were injured in an attack in the Waghmra zone of the Amhara region in mid-March. According to the [Amhara regional state communication](#)²⁶⁰, the TPLF militia has tried to attack innocent civilians. BBC Amharic [reported](#)²⁶¹ that 76 people have been killed by the attack.

In addition, suppressed without amicable solutions, the Somali-Afar border conflict has erupted now and then. Similarly, conflict [broke](#)²⁶² out in Haruka and Gala Elu areas where special forces from the two regions engaged in offensives attracting [attention](#)²⁶³ both from the mainstream and social media platforms.

The Afar People Party’s leader, Kontie Moussa (PhD), [blamed](#)²⁶⁴ the Somali forces for perpetrating the attacks.

Then after continuous blaming of the TPLF and the OLF-Shane (OLA) for months for nationwide killings of civilians and destruction of property, the government pondered on labeling the groups as terrorists.

258 Gadaa Bilisummaa

259 Abiy Ahmed/Facebook

260 Amhara Communications

261 BBC Amharic

262 Al Jazeera

263 Ethiopia Map/Telegram

264 Kontie Moussa_ኮንቲ ሙሳ/Twitter (@kontiem)

The **Council of Ministers**²⁶⁵ passed a resolution to declare the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Shane (a name used to refer to the Oromo Liberation Army) as terrorist organizations. The House of Peoples' Representatives **approved**²⁶⁶ the bill presented by the Council of Ministers to designate these groups as terrorist organizations on May 6 2021.

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) **opposed**²⁶⁷ the labeling saying "the Council of Ministers' proposal to designate 'Shene' as terrorist organization issued on May 1, is a deliberate move to exclude armed entities from the political dialogue and to sabotage political dialogue in general." The Federal Attorney General, Gedeon Timotheos (PhD), on the other hand, **told**²⁶⁸ the media that 'Shane' refers to the group that calls itself the "Oromo Liberation Army".

Similarly, three parties from the Tigray region, Salsay Weyane Tigray (SAWET), National Congress of Great Tigray, and Tigray Independence Party (TIP) jointly **condemned**²⁶⁹ this move by the federal government saying it would hinder any means of resolving the country's problems through a peaceful process.

Even though the Oromia Police Commission had **announced**²⁷⁰ that 295 members of the OLA have been killed in a joint operation by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and the Oromia Special Forces, fighting still has continued in different parts of the region, and the OLA has continued killing the government officials whom it brands as 'government machinery.'

On another development, the immediate death of Abere Adamu after his removal from office as Commissioner for the Amhara Police Commission created speculations as to his death. Some said he was **assassinated**²⁷¹, while official lines indicated he died of **heart failure**.

265 Prime Minister's Office
 266 House of Peoples' Representatives
 267 OLF
 268 Atnaf Brhane /Twitter (@AtnafB)
 269 Tigray Media House
 270 ethio12.com
 271 Ethio360 media

In addition, the isolated incidents of **killings**²⁷² of **civilians**²⁷³ in Oromia as well as the **arrest**²⁷⁴ of various people suspected of conspiring to disrupt the election process and **create chaos**²⁷⁵ heightened the tensions around the process.

The extension of the Tigray war across the nation has also been a concern for many people locally and internationally who said the Eritrean forces are committing human rights abuses in Tigray. Referencing anonymous sources, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) said a large number of **Eritrean soldiers**²⁷⁶ are invading and terrorizing civilians in the Borena Zone of the Oromia region. Six days earlier the party had released a press **statement**²⁷⁷ that claimed that Eritrean soldiers are persecuting civilians in Western Oromia. On June 10, the FDRE Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) told the media that they didn't have any **information**²⁷⁸ about the presence of Eritrean soldiers in the Oromia region.

Another security concern in the country was the boundary dispute between Ethiopia and Sudan in an area called Al Fashaga. The Sudanese military took control of an expanse of land in the traditionally Ethiopia-controlled area of the Al Fashage in western Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government characterized it as a rush by the enemies of Ethiopia to seize the opportunity created when Ethiopia engaged in law enforcement operations in the northern part of the country. The government also said this attack by the Sudanese side did not go with the longstanding principle of solidarity and fraternity that existed between the two countries.

The Ethiopian-Sudanese border conflict remains another interesting issue. In this regard, the MoF stated that 'Ethiopia's desire to resolve the crisis through diplomacy should not be seen as a matter of fear. The Sudanese army has encroached on Ethiopia's borders, seizing large

272 BBC Afaan Oromoo
 273 BBC Amharic
 274 EBC
 275 EBC
 276 OLF
 277 OLF
 278 Al-Ain Amharic

swathes of farmland, looting, and **torturing**²⁷⁹ farmers. Members of the Ethio-Sudan Boundary Commission added that Sudan has violated the agreement signed between Ethiopia and Sudan to find a common solution to the border issue.



CONCLUSION

The election year in the country has seen various developments that one way or another affected the electoral process. These developments ranged from armed conflicts, social media false information, logistical challenges, and other political and security developments linked to killings and detention of politicians.

The elections were either called off, delayed, engulfed with fraud, or led to controversies because of these developments. This report covered these developments into three sections: election-related issues, the Tigray war, and other security concerns in the country.

Based on the bi-weekly and special reports throughout the year, the report gives a highlight of events and happenings that directly or indirectly affected the electoral process or posed challenges to its credibility. These events, happenings, or developments are more or less linked to political parties, armed groups, the government, the election board, and social media influencers.

For More Info:

Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD)

Email – info@cardeth.org

P.O.Box- 30174

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Designed by: Armen +251 93 835 2532 | armonisolomon@gmail.com



CARD

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