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COI QUERY RESPONSE - ETHIOPIA

1. Latest political developments in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a federal parliamentary republic.¹ The country's coalition of ethnically based parties, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), has ruled the government since 1991, until its successor, the Ethiopian Prosperity Party (EPP), was formed on 1 December 2019.² In the 2015 general elections, the EPRDF won all 547 seats in the House of People's Representatives (parliament), however, the electoral procedure was highly contested by opposition parties and electoral observers.³

Large-scale anti-government protests beginning in 2014, centred in Oromia⁴ and, later, Amhara states⁵, prompted the declaration of a state of emergency on 8 October 2016⁶, under which thousands of people were arrested and 1 000 killed.⁷ Following the mass demonstrations, then prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn announced his resignation on 15 February 2018⁸, and on 2 April 2018, Abiy Ahmed took office, calling for ethnic unity and democratic reforms.⁹ During his first few months in office, he introduced a number of fundamental reforms including the lifting of the state of emergency, the de-proscription and return of exiled groups, namely the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), the pardoning and release of political prisoners, the halt of censorship and the replacement of several influential actors in the military and the intelligence service.¹⁰ On 8 July 2018, he visited Eritrea and signed a peace deal, ending the state of war between the two countries.¹¹

Despite the initial wave of reforms by Abiy, the country has entered a transition period and slow-down in the reform process. After an initial period where violence subsided, ethno-nationalism, inter-ethnic clashes, and associated displacement again increased.¹² Abiy's reform agenda has met some resistance, mainly due to the reforms in the military and intelligence services, and his government was the subject of a purported coup attempt in June 2019 in Amhara region, during

¹ Ethiopia, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Office of the Prime Minister, n.d, [url](#)

² BBC News, Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed gets a new ruling party, 22 November 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Why Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party is good news for Ethiopia, 18 December 2019, [url](#)

³ Freedom House: Freedom in the World 2018 - Ethiopia, January 2018, [url](#)

⁴ The protests concerned the government's plan to substantially expand the municipal boundaries of Addis Ababa (the Addis Ababa Master Plan). See: AI, 'Because I am Oromo', October 2014, [url](#), p. 27; HRW, Ethiopia: Brutal Crackdown on Protests, 5 May 2014, [url](#); Al Jazeera America, 'Protesters in Ethiopia reject authoritarian development model', 19 December 2015, [url](#); The Guardian, 'Stop the killing!: farmland development scheme sparks fatal clashes in Ethiopia', 18 December 2015, [url](#)

⁵ The protests erupted in July 2016, originally in reaction to the transfer of territories from Amhara federal state to Tigray. See: BBC News, What is behind Ethiopia's wave of protests?, 22 August 2016, [url](#); AI, Annual Report 2016/17 - Ethiopia, 22 February 2017, [url](#)

⁶ AfricaNews, Ethiopia declares 6 months state of emergency over Oromia protests, 9 October 2016, [url](#)

⁷ ACLED, Ethiopia- November 2016 Update, 14 November 2016, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2018 Country Report — Ethiopia, [url](#), p. 3

⁸ BBC News, Ethiopia PM Hailemariam Desalegn in surprise resignation, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

⁹ Reuters, Ethiopia's new PM pledges reforms to end violence, 2 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰ UNHRC, Visit to Ethiopia: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression [A/HRC/44/49/Add.1], 29 April 2020, [url](#), para. 5; AI, Human Rights in Africa: Review of 2019 - Ethiopia [AFR 01/1352/2020], 8 April 2020, [url](#); USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2018- Ethiopia, 13 March 2019, [url](#); Annette Weber, Abiy Superstar – Reformer or Revolutionary?, SWP Comment No. 26, July 2018, [url](#), p. 2

¹¹ BBC News, Ethiopia's Abiy and Eritrea's Afwerki declare end of war, 9 July 2018, [url](#); BBC, Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister, 11 October 2019, [url](#)

¹² Freedom House: Freedom in the World 2020 - Ethiopia, 4 March 2020, [url](#); USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2019 - Ethiopia, 11 March 2020, [url](#); 5 HRW, World Report 2020 – Ethiopia, 14 January 2020, [url](#)

which high profile officials of the government were assassinated.¹³ On 24 August 2019, the parliament unanimously passed the Ethiopian Election, Political Parties Registration, and Election Ethics law. Some opposition parties claimed that consultations process ahead of the bill's approval were inadequate, and that their suggestions had not been taken into consideration.¹⁴ The reforms and the easing of restrictions on political opposition enabled political parties to operate more freely and more than 100 political parties, mostly ethnically based, had declared their intention to contest the forthcoming national elections.¹⁵ The elections were scheduled to be held in August 2020.¹⁶

In November 2019, following the October mass protests and clashes across Oromia region¹⁷, and in an effort to move away from ethnic-based identity politics and toward a 'pan-Ethiopianism', Prime Minister Abiy announced the decision of three of the four ethnic-based parties in the ruling coalition to merge ahead of the 2020 elections.¹⁸ The new party, the Ethiopian Prosperity party, includes the Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP), the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) and South Peoples Democratic Movement (SPDM), as well as the Somali Democratic Party (SDP), the Harari National League (HNL), the Benishangul Gumuz People's Democratic Party (BGPDP), and the Gambella People's Unity Democratic Movement (GPUDM).¹⁹ The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the dominant party in the former EPRDF for 27 years, refused to join the new party, citing opposing political visions between the two parties.²⁰

On 6 December 2019, ten Ethiopian opposition political parties, namely the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), the Afar Peoples Liberation Party (APLP), the Sidama Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM), the Agew National Council (ANC), the Kafa Green Party (KGP), the Benishangul Gumuz Peoples Liberation Movement (BPLM), the Kimant Democratic Party (KDP), the Gambella Peoples Liberation Movement (GPLM) and Mocha Democratic Party, announced their decision to form a coalition ahead of elections scheduled for 2020.²¹ As of 6 December 2019, 170 political parties were registered to run for election.²²

On 31 March 2020, amid the worsening COVID-19 pandemic, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) announced the postponement of the upcoming elections, without providing a specific date for next elections.²³ The decision was contested by opposition parties, due to the fact that the five-year term of the parliament would end on 5 October 2020.²⁴ In order to avoid a showdown, the government proposed four options, namely the state of emergency, constitutional amendment, constitutional interpretation, and dissolving the parliament. The parliament voted for

¹³ NPR, Ethiopia Army Chief Killed In Attempted Coup, Government Says, 23 June 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Ethiopia security forces kill alleged coup leader, 24 June 2019, [url](#); France24, Dozens killed in foiled Ethiopia coup attempt, authorities say, 26 June 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴ Reuters, Ethiopia's opposition parties criticize election law changes, 24 August 2019, [url](#); Theafricareport, Ethiopia passes new laws ahead of 2020 elections, 29 August 2019, [url](#);

¹⁵ National Electoral Board of Ethiopia, Board Compliance Review, n.d., [url](#); Global Security, Ethiopia-Election 2020, n.d., [url](#); Africanews, Ethiopia parties sign pact ahead of 2020 polls, 15 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶ Reuters, Ethiopia sets tentative August date for elections, 15 January 2020, [url](#);

¹⁷ VOA, Protests in Ethiopia's Oromia Region Call Security Into Question, 24 October 2019, [url](#); HRW, Ethiopia: Justice Needed for Deadly October Violence, 1 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸ Reuters, Ethiopia's ruling coalition agrees to form single party ahead of 2020 vote, 21 November 2019, [url](#); BBC News, Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed gets a new ruling party, 22 November 2019, [url](#); International Crisis Group: Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹ New Business Ethiopia, Five regional parties joined Ethiopia's ruling coalition, 21 November 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, 'Why Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party is good news for Ethiopia', 18 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁰ Ezega News, No to Prosperity Party, Yes to More Autonomy: TPLF, 6 January 2020, [url](#); Africanews, Ethiopia's Tigray governing party, TPLF, accepts 'death' of EPRDF coalition, 7 January 2020, [url](#)

²¹ Africanews, Ten Ethiopian opposition parties agree to work together in 2020 polls, 7 December 2019, [url](#)

²² AA, Ethiopia: Merger, election and popular apprehension, 6 December 2019, [url](#)

²³ HRW, World Report 2021 - Ethiopia, 13 January 2021, [url](#); Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (London, UK), Press Statement by NEBE on the postponement of Ethiopia's 2020 elections 1 Apr 2020, [url](#)

²⁴ AA, Ethiopia: Delaying polls trigger constitutional crises, 12 May 2020, [url](#); Theafricareport, Ethiopia: Indefinite postponement of polls raising political tempers, 25 May 2020, [url](#)

constitutional interpretation as a legal option to deal with a constitutional crisis.²⁵ On 4 May 2020, the co-signing members of the Alliance for Democratic Federalism rejected all four options suggested by the government, calling for a national consensus among political parties.²⁶ The TPLF announced that it would proceed with elections in Tigray despite the nationwide postponement of voting and accused Abiy of 'using the coronavirus pandemic as an excuse to establish a one-man dictatorship'.²⁷ The Ethiopian Supreme Court interpreted three articles, namely Article 54 (1), 58, (2), and Article 93 of the Constitution, and submitted its decision to the House of Federation for approval.²⁸ On 10 June 2020, the House of Federation approved the extension of all assemblies' mandate 'until international health institutions have deemed the threat from coronavirus to be over'.²⁹

The June 29 assassination of popular Oromo singer Hachalu Hundessa triggered protests in several towns in the country, while the government responded with mass arrests, including high-profile opposition leaders, and internet shutdown.³⁰

On 9 September 2020, the Tigrayan Regional Council held regional elections, defying the decision to postpone all elections due to the pandemic.³¹ On 2 November 2020, the Tigray region's president, Debretsion Gebremichael, stated in a press conference that the federal government was planning to attack the Tigray Region, as a punishment for organising their own elections.³² On 4 November 2020, the deployment of federal troops into the Tigray Region after TPLF forces attacked the Ethiopian military's Northern Command.³³ On 28 November 2020, after three weeks of conflict, the governmental armed forces announced that 'they claimed complete control over the region's capital city, Mekelle'.³⁴

On 25 December 2020, NEBE announced that the parliamentary and regional elections will be held on 5 June 2021, while it also stated that 'the date for a Tigray vote would be set once the interim government, which was established during the conflict, opened election offices'.³⁵

2. Security situation in Tigray region

2.1 Overview of the conflict in Tigray

Following the end of the Ethiopian Civil War in 1991, the EPRDF became the dominant party in Ethiopia's politics, with TPLF, a Marxist-Leninist and Tigrayan ethno-nationalist liberation movement, being the most influential party within the coalition³⁶, and favouring Tigrayan ethnic interests in economic and political matters.³⁷ Since Abiy was elected as the chairman of EPDRF on 2 April 2018, the first Oromo to serve in that position, the TPLF's influence started waning.³⁸ The TPLF's disagreement with Abiy's nationalistic approach to Ethiopian politics and his reform agenda, led to its secession from the coalition, when Abiy called for the merge of EPRDF's parties into a unified

²⁵ ENA, House Approves Constitutional Interpretation as Alternative Remedy for 2020 Election, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁶ Ethiopia Inside, Opposition parties' statement on election postponement, 4 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁷ Reuters, Ethiopia's Tigray region eyes election in challenge to national unity, 5 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁸ Conversation (The), Ethiopia's poll has been pushed out by COVID-19. But there's much more at play, 18 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁹ Al Jazeera, Ethiopian parliament allows PM Abiy to stay in office beyond term, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

³⁰ HRW, World Report 2021 - Ethiopia, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

³¹ Al Jazeera, Ethiopia's Tigray region holds vote, defying Abiy's federal government, 9 September 2020, [url](#)

³² BBC News, Tigray crisis: Ethiopia orders military response after army base seized, 4 November 2020, [url](#)

³³ ACLED, Ethiopia- TPLF Overview, 8 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁴ BBC News, Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: PM claims capture of regional capital Mekelle, 29 November 2020, [url](#)

³⁵ France24, Ethiopia announces national election to be held in June, 26 December 2020, [url](#)

³⁶ International Crisis Group: Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

³⁷ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2017 - Ethiopia, 7 May 2017, [url](#)

³⁸ Jonathan Fisher, Meressa Tsehaye Gebrewahd, 'Game over'? Abiy Ahmed, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front and Ethiopia's political crisis, *African Affairs*, Volume 118, Issue 470, January 2019, Pages 194–206, [url](#), p. 204

one.³⁹ TPLF rejected the idea as 'illegal and reactionary'.⁴⁰ The TPLF's announcement to proceed with elections in Tigray region despite the government's prohibition due to Covid-19, raised concerns that the Tigrayan leaders might trigger the constitutional secession clauses and create a breakaway state.⁴¹ The TPLF held regional elections in Tigray in September 2020 and won 98.2 per cent of the vote.⁴² The federal government deemed the regional Tigray government unlawful, while the Tigray Regional Council responded by withdrawing recognition of the legislative and executive branches of the federal government.⁴³

On 4 November 2020, the Ethiopian government began military operations in Tigray, in what Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said was a response to an attack by TPLF forces trying to forcibly take over some of the units stationed in the region.⁴⁴ On the same day, the federal government declared a state of emergency in Tigray region.⁴⁵ Phone and internet communications were swiftly cut in the region, and the federal government soon after announced a round of airstrikes in areas around the regional capital, Mekelle.⁴⁶ Access into Tigray was blocked, including by road and air⁴⁷, and the border with Sudan was closed as well.⁴⁸ The movement restrictions hampered the activities of humanitarian organisations;⁴⁹ access was allowed only to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)⁵⁰, until 2 December 2020, when the United Nations (UN) reached an agreement with Ethiopia's government to allow unimpeded access for humanitarian personnel in Tigray region.⁵¹ On 7 November 2020, the House of Federation voted to establish a transitional government in Tigray state.⁵²

On 9 November 2020, during a military operation by the EDF and Amhara Special Forces against the Tigray Special Police and militia in the town of Maikadra, around 600 civilians, mostly from the minority Amhara and Wolkait ethnic groups, were killed.⁵³ The Ethiopian Commission for Human Rights and Amnesty International (AI) reported that witnesses blamed the TPLF for the attacks,⁵⁴ while Tigrayan refugees interviewed by Reuters' witnesses blamed Amhara militias for the 'massacre'.⁵⁵ On 19 November the Ethiopian forces, along with Eritrean troops, took control of

³⁹ Ethiopia's Tigray governing party, TPLF, accepts 'death' of EPRDF coalition, 7 January 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁰ Al Jazeera, Why Abiy Ahmed's Prosperity Party could be bad news for Ethiopia, 5 December 2019, [url](#)

⁴¹ International Crisis Group, Toward an End to Ethiopia's Federal-Tigray Feud, 14 August 2020, [url](#); BBC News, Why there are fears that Ethiopia could break up, 5 September 2020, [url](#)

⁴² Ethiopia Observer, Tigray's ruling party takes 98.2 percent of votes in the regional election, 11 September 2020, [url](#)

⁴³ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Office of the Prime Minister, TPLF attacks Ethiopian National Defence Forces Base in Tigray, 4 November 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁵ AA, Ethiopia declares state of emergency in defiant region, 4 November 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁶ BBC News, Tigray crisis: Ethiopia carries out airstrikes - Abiy Ahmed, 6 November 2020, [url](#); Wall Street Journal (The), Ethiopia: What We Know About the War in the Tigray Region, 10 December 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷ UNOCHA, Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update-Situation Report No. 1, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁸ AA, Sudan closes border with Ethiopia amid Tigray clashes, 6 November 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁹ UNOCHA, Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update-Situation Report No. 2, 11 November 2020, [url](#); ICRC, Ethiopia: ICRC Calls for respect of people's lives and property amidst escalating tensions in Tigray and other regions in the country, 6 November 2020, [url](#); AI, Demand full humanitarian access into Tigray, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁰ UNOCHA, Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report No. 5, 24 November 2020, [url](#); ICRC, Ethiopia: A dispatch from West Tigray and North Amhara, 27 November 2020, [url](#)

⁵¹ NPR, Ethiopia, U.N. Reach Deal to Allow 'Unimpeded' Access For Aid Groups In Tigray, 2 December 2020, [url](#)

⁵² AA, Ethiopia moves to set up interim government in Tigray, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

⁵³ Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings, 24 November 2020, [url](#); ⁵⁴ AI, Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state, 12 November 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Ethiopians fleeing to Sudan describe air strikes and machete killings in Tigray, 13 November 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁴ AI, Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state, 12 November 2020, [url](#); Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings, 24 November 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁵ Reuters, Ethiopians fleeing to Sudan describe air strikes and machete killings in Tigray, 13 November 2020, [url](#)

Axum, killing and displacing several hundreds of civilians with indiscriminate shelling and shooting.⁵⁶

After fighting commenced on 4 November 2020, the Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) quickly captured many of Tigray's main cities, including Humura's airport⁵⁷, Alamata⁵⁸, Shire and Raya.⁵⁹ The city of Adigrat⁶⁰ and Idaga Hamus⁶¹ had been captured before Abiy issued, on 21 November 2020, a three-day ultimatum to TPLF to surrender.⁶² The UN expressed its concerns about possible war crimes after a threat by the Ethiopian army to start an assault on the northern Tigray region's capital.⁶³

After the TPLF rejected the government's proposal⁶⁴, Abiy ordered federal military forces, on 26 November 2020, to launch an attack on Mekelle.⁶⁵ On 28 November 2020, Abiy confirmed that Mekelle had fully fallen under the control of the ENDF.⁶⁶

During the conflict, the federal government was supported by Amhara region's forces⁶⁷ and officials from Amhara Region took over the administration of the conquered parts of Western Tigray.⁶⁸ Amhara and Tigray regions have been involved in a long dispute over the districts Welkait, Humera, Tsegede and Tselemte in West Tigray and North West Tigray Zones, as well as the Raya-Akobo area in South Tigray Zone, which, according to the Amhara regional government and the Amhara people, were areas historically administered by ethnic Amharas and the TPLF annexed illegally to the Tigray region.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Amhara senior officials have also accused the TPLF for backing the Qimant people, an ethnic minority pursuing greater autonomy within the north-western Amhara, as 'part of the broader territorial dispute'.⁷⁰

Several sources indicated that the Eritrean military was also involved in the conflict.⁷¹ According to several analysts, the TPLF, whose region borders Eritrea, has been considered by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) as an 'enemy' and as 'an obstacle to improve relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea'.⁷² Both Addis Ababa and Asmara denied Eritrea's involvement, with the Ethiopian Defence Minister, Kenea Yadeta, stating that 'there is no reason for the army to request additional support from outside'⁷³, and Eritrea's Foreign Minister, Osman Saleh Mohammed, stating

⁵⁶ AI, Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity, 26 February 2021, [url](#); HRW, Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians, 5 March 2021, [url](#); CCN, Massacre in the mountains, 22 March 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁷ Al Jazeera, Ethiopian military seizes airport as fighting rages in Tigray, 10 November 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁸ CNN, Ethiopia says it has seized another Tigray town as conflict embroils Eritrea, 16 November 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁹ BBC News, Ethiopia crisis: Tigray leader vows to keep fighting as government advances, 18 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰ Reuters, Tigray rebels say nine civilians killed in Ethiopian attack, 21 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶¹ Arab News, Ethiopia army threatens 'no mercy' in assault on regional capital, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶² Reuters, Ethiopia PM gives Tigray forces 72 hours to surrender regional capital, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶³ UNOHCHR, Ethiopia: Threat of major hostilities in Mekelle seriously imperils civilian lives – Bachelet, 24 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁴ BBC News, Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: PM gives Tigray forces 72 hours to surrender, 22 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Guardian (The), Ethiopia's military to begin 'final offensive' against Tigray capital, 26 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁶ Reuters, Ethiopian military has taken 'full control' of Tigray capital, chief of staff says, 28 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁷ Africanews, Ethiopia: Amhara backs army campaign in Tigray, 9 November 2020, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Ethiopia: Amhara backs army campaign in Tigray, 25 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁸ Al Jazeera, In Pictures: Inside Humera, a town scarred by Ethiopia's war, 25 November 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁹ International Crisis Group, Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North, 12 June 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁰ New Humanitarian (The), Ethiopia's other conflicts, 23 November 2020, [url](#)

⁷¹ Al Jazeera, In Pictures: Inside Humera, a town scarred by Ethiopia's war, 25 November 2020, [url](#); Guardian (The), Diplomats back claims Eritrean troops have joined Ethiopia conflict, 8 December 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Ethiopian general says Eritrean troops entered Tigray - video clip, 7 January 2021, [url](#); Telegraph (The) Eritrea's brutal shadow war in Ethiopia laid bare, Eritrea's brutal shadow war in Ethiopia laid bare, 8 January 2021, [url](#); Theafricareport, Eritrea's involvement in Ethiopia's Tigray conflict 'is a tragic but explainable option', 21 January 2021, [url](#); Reuters, Fugitive ex-leader of Ethiopia's Tigray region vows 'extended resistance', 31 January 2021, [url](#)

⁷² Reuters, Ethiopian military operation in Tigray is complete, prime minister says, 28 November 2020, [url](#); DW, Once enemies, Ethiopia and Eritrea ally against Tigray, 29 November 2020, [url](#); African Arguments, Eritrea in the Tigray war: What we know and why it might backfire, 8 January 2021, [url](#)

⁷³ DW, Fact check: Are other nations involved in the war in Tigray?, 19 March 2021, [url](#)

that 'this is an internal conflict, we are not part of the conflict'.⁷⁴ However, Abiy has admitted that 'Eritrea had fed, clothed and armed retreating Ethiopian soldiers when the TPLF first attacked them and seized their bases in Tigray'.⁷⁵ At the time of drafting this query, UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock called on Eritrean troops to leave Tigray⁷⁶, while on 15 March 2021, Médecins San Frontiers (MSF) reported that Eritrean soldiers are still using the health facility in Mugulat in east Tigray, as their base.⁷⁷

During the three-weeks long conflict, hundreds have reportedly been killed⁷⁸, and thousands have fled their homes.⁷⁹ According to the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, there have been allegations of sexual violence in the Tigray region, including a high number of alleged rapes in Mekelle.⁸⁰ Following the conflict, there have been reports of targeted ethnic violence, hate speech and discrimination, in Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia.⁸¹

Despite the government's declaration of victory, fighting continued in Tigray region and the situation remained volatile, with serious human rights violations and increased humanitarian needs being reported during December⁸², January⁸³ and February.⁸⁴ Throughout January 2021, several top officials of TPLF were arrested⁸⁵ or killed⁸⁶ by Ethiopia's military. On 16 January 2021, NEBE announced its decision to deregister TPLF as a political party for 'destroying constitutional order by force'.⁸⁷

Following anti-government protests in Mekelle on 9 and 10 February 2021, several people were allegedly killed by security forces in Adigrat, Axum, Mekelle and Wukro.⁸⁸ On 19 February 2021, the TPLF expressed its wish for peace negotiations, declaring eight preconditions for the negotiations, however there was no response from the government's side, as of 28 February 2021.⁸⁹

⁷⁴ Reuters, Eritrea denies troop incursion into Ethiopia's Tigray, 10 November 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁵ BBC News, Tigray crisis: Eritrea's role in Ethiopian conflict, 28 December 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁶ AP News, UN aid chief calls for Eritrean forces to leave Tigray, 4 March 2021, [url](#)

⁷⁷ MSF, People left with few healthcare options in Tigray as facilities looted, destroyed, 15 March 2021,

⁷⁸ Alarabiya News, Thousands killed in Ethiopia's conflict, Tigray side asserts, 4 December 2020, [url](#); Al, Ethiopia: Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity, 26 February 2021, [url](#);

⁷⁹ Reuters, Over 2 million people displaced by conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region - local official, 12 December 2020, [url](#); BBC News, Tigray crisis: Ethiopia region at risk of huge 'humanitarian disaster', 2 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, UNHCR Ethiopia Operation: Tigray Situation Update, 8 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁰ OSRSG-SVC, United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, urges all parties to prohibit the use of sexual violence and cease hostilities in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, 21 January 2021, [url](#); Reuters, 'Choose - I kill you or rape you': abuse accusations surge in Ethiopia's war, 23 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸¹ New Humanitarian (The), Ethnic profiling of Tigrayans heightens tensions in Ethiopia, 16 December 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Former U.S. envoys alarmed by violence and hate speech in Ethiopia, 27 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸² UNOHCHR, Exceedingly worrying and volatile situation in Ethiopia – Bachelet, 9 December 2020, [url](#); UNOCHA, Ethiopia-Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Situation Report, 22 December 2020, [url](#), p. 1

⁸³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Ethiopia, Issue #2 (11 – 24 Jan. 2021), 30 January 2021, [url](#), p. 1; UNFPA, UNFPA Ethiopia Response to the Tigray Crisis - Situation report #1 (16–31 January 2021), 31 January 2021, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Ethiopia Issue #3 (22 Jan – 7 Feb. 2021), 11 February 2021, [url](#), p. 1

⁸⁴ UN Press Release, Statement by the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, on the situation in Ethiopia, 5 February 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Ethiopia- Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Situation Report, 12 February 2021, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Ethiopia- Tigray Region Humanitarian Update, Situation Report, 28 February 2021, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Ethiopia: Access Snapshot - Tigray Region, 28 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁵ ENA, National Defence Force Releases Names of Captured, Killed Members of TPLF, 1 January 2021, [url](#); AA, Ethiopia kills 4 core TPLF leaders, arrests 9, 8 January 2021, [url](#); ENA, Captured TPLF Junta Mastermind Sibhat, Eight Other Top Leaders Arrive in Addis Ababa, 9 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁶ ENA, National Defence Force Releases Names of Captured, Killed Members of TPLF, 1 January 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Tigray: Ethiopian army kills ex-Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁷ APA, Ethiopia's TPLF de-registered as a political party, 19 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁸ France24, 1 dead as soldiers fire on protest in Tigray capital: doctor, 9 February 2021, [url](#); UN OCHA – UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 28 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; Nation, 'Scores killed' in anti-government protests in Tigray, 14 February 2021, [url](#); UN News, Amidst 'conflict, blanket denials and finger-pointing', UN rights chief calls for probe in Ethiopia's Tigray, 4 March 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁹ Reuters, Ethiopia's regional Tigray forces name conditions for peace with government, 20 February 2021, [url](#)

2.2. Actors in the conflict

2.2.1 The Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF)

The Ethiopian National Defence Force comprises an army and air force of approximately 150 000 personnel combined.⁹⁰ A landlocked country, Ethiopia has no naval capacity, although Prime Minister Abiy has initiated steps to re-establish a naval force.⁹¹ The ENDF relies on voluntary military service of people over 18 years of age, although the ENDF retains the right to conduct call-ups and compliance is compulsory.⁹² There have been occasions when community security [regional police or local militia] was insufficient to maintain law and order and the military intervened to maintain internal security.⁹³ The Ministry of National Defence oversees the ground forces, air force, as well as the Defence Industry Sector, while the Prime Minister is the chair of the Council and the Commander-in-Chief of the National Armed Forces.⁹⁴ In 2018, as part of Abiy's reform agenda, the ENDF's regional commands had been cut down to four from six. The commands are the Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern Commands.⁹⁵

On 4 November 2020, the Northern Command of ENDF, a division stationed in the region for over two decades in Mekelle⁹⁶, under Commander Major General Belay Seyoum⁹⁷, was attacked by forces loyal to TPLF and the Northern Command Head Quarters were captured. According to Chief of Staff, General Birhanu Jula, 5 days after the attack, 'the 4th, 5th, 7th, and 8th mechanised units, as well as the 11th, 20th, 23rd, and 31st battalions had managed to regroup and launch counter attacks on different fronts'.⁹⁸ Al Jazeera, citing a regional security expert, reported that several ENDF soldiers remained in the Northern Command and did not participate in the conflict.⁹⁹ Within approximately 3 weeks, the ENDF captured several main cities in Tigray region (See [Overview of the conflict in Tigray](#)) and on 28 November 2020, Abiy stated that the ENDF had taken control of Mekelle and announced end of military operations in Tigray.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore he claimed that 'federal troops had also taken control of the airport, the regional administration office and other key facilities'.¹⁰¹

Throughout the conflict, the ENDF has been backed by Amhara region's official forces and paramilitaries, namely the Fano militia¹⁰², as well as by the Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF), although Eritrea has denied allegations of involvement.¹⁰³ Although Abiy denied any civilian casualties caused by the ENDF¹⁰⁴, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported indiscriminate shelling by the Ethiopian federal forces on urban areas such as Humera, Shire, and Mekelle in the Tigray region in November 2020¹⁰⁵, and several sources reported that the Ethiopian and Eritrean military forces killed several hundreds

⁹⁰ CIA, World Factbook- Ethiopia, 12 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹¹ Reuters, Landlocked Ethiopia plans new navy as part of military reforms, 3 June 2018, [url](#)

⁹² CIA, World Factbook- Ethiopia, 12 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹³ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2019 - Ethiopia, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Office of the Prime Minister, n.d, [url](#)

⁹⁵ Africanews, Ethiopia restructures military, set to revive naval force - State Media, 13 December 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶ Reuters, Ethiopian military operation in Tigray is complete, prime minister says, 28 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷ Addis Standard, 'We Don't Want It': North Command Chief On Eritrean Army In Tigray; Says Army Didn't Let Alien Forces In- Full Speech, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁸ Janes, Ethiopia says Northern Command is counterattacking Tigray rebels, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Al Jazeera, Ethiopia: The forces fighting in Tigray in 500 words, 18 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch- Ethiopia, November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Reuters, Ethiopian military operation in Tigray is complete, prime minister says, 28 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰² HRW, Interview: Uncovering Crimes Committed in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 23 December 2020, [url](#); Theafricareport, The war in Tigray: Abiy, Isaias, and the Amhara elite, 29 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰³ International Crisis Group, Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 11 February 2021, [url](#); Theafricareport, The war in Tigray: Abiy, Isaias, and the Amhara elite, 29 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ Reuters, Abiy says Ethiopia's federal forces have not killed civilians in Tigray, 30 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ HRW, Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

of civilian in Axum on 19 November 2020.¹⁰⁶

2.2.2 The Eritrean Army

The Eritrean Army is one of three branches of the Eritrean Defence Forces Eritrea (EDF), along with Air Forces and Navy. The EDF are comprised of an estimated 200 000 personnel, including about 2 000 in the naval and air forces.¹⁰⁷ All Eritreans between the age of 18 and 50, except for those who fought in the 'liberation struggle' and 'disabled, visually impaired, and mentally ill persons', are obliged to serve in the national service.¹⁰⁸ Conscripts are reported to face degrading punishments and torture.¹⁰⁹ Conscripts are included in the number of the EDF, but their number is not clear.¹¹⁰ The Commander-in-Chief of the EDF is the President of Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki.¹¹¹

Several sources reported that Eritrean armed forces massacred 'scores' of civilians in Axum.¹¹² There have been also witnesses of looting by Eritrean forces in Tigray,¹¹³ and the United States called all Eritrean troops to leave Tigray, 'given credible reports of looting, sexual violence, assaults in refugee camps and other human rights abuses'.¹¹⁴

2.2.3. The Amhara Regional Forces

Article 52 of the Constitution of Ethiopia provides that the powers and functions of the states include to 'establish and administer a state police force, and to maintain public order and peace within the State'.¹¹⁵ According to an article published by the British think tank Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in July 2019, 'the regional police forces already include some specially trained and equipped units used for the purposes of riot control and other threats'.¹¹⁶ According to the British Embassy in Addis Ababa, 'regional security forces vary hugely in size, training and how they see their role – whether truly to police or more as forces to defend against other armed actors, including from other regions'.¹¹⁷

Since the beginning of the conflict in November 2020, the Amhara region joined the federal army against the TPLF in the south and south-western Tigray.¹¹⁸ Witnesses of the attack in the town of Maikadra blamed the Amhara 'special forces' for the attacks to civilians and the looting of houses and hospitals.¹¹⁹ Amhara administrators and security forces have been utilised as interim directors in areas of Western Tigray.¹²⁰

¹⁰⁶ Al, Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity, 26 February 2021, [url](#); HRW, Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians, 5 March 2021, [url](#); CCN, Massacre in the mountains, 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ CIA, World Factbook- Eritrea, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ Eritrea, Proclamation on National Service No. 82/1995 of 1995, 23 October 1995, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ HRW, Eritrea – Events of 2019, 14 January 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ CIA, World Factbook- Eritrea, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹¹¹ Britannica, Isaias Afwerki, 29 January 2021, [url](#)

¹¹² Al, Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity, 26 February 2021, [url](#); HRW, Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians, 5 March 2021, [url](#); CCN, Massacre in the mountains, 22 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹³ Guardian (The), 'Slaughtered like chickens': Eritrea heavily involved in Tigray conflict, say eyewitnesses, 21 December 2020, [url](#); Abc news, Witnesses: Eritrean soldiers loot, kill in Ethiopia's Tigray, 26 January 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ AP News, US says Eritrean forces should leave Tigray immediately, 28 January 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ Ethiopia, Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 21 August 1995, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ RUSI - Royal United Services Institute: Ethiopia's Security Dilemmas, 18 July 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ UK Home Office, Report of a Home Office Fact-Finding Mission Ethiopia: The political situation [notes from British Embassy in Addis Ababa 18 September 2019], 10 February 2020, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ BBC News, Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: A rare view inside the conflict zone, 20 March 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ Reuters, Ethiopians fleeing to Sudan describe air strikes and machete killings in Tigray, 13 November 2020, [url](#); HRW, Interview: Uncovering Crimes Committed in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 23 December 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁰ Al Jazeera, In Pictures: Inside Humera, a town scarred by Ethiopia's war, 25 November 2020, [url](#)

2.2.4 Fano (Fanno) Militia

The Fano is an Amharan youth group in Ethiopia, perceived as either a protest group/nationalist movement or an armed militia.¹²¹ In March 2020, Ezega News reported that Solomon Atanaw is the chairman of Fano and that his group had demanded the return and annexation of the Welqait, Raya, Dera, and Metekel areas to the Amhara region.¹²² Fano units are accused of participating in the killing of 58 Qemant people in Metemma during 10–11 January 2019¹²³ and of the murder of a family in Azezo on 29 September 2019.¹²⁴ No information could be found on the exact number of Fano's members. The Guardian reported, citing Amhara's security officials, that thousands of Amhara militiamen headed towards Tigray to fight alongside federal forces.¹²⁵

According to witnesses interviewed by Reuters, Fano militiamen were involved in the mass killings in Mai-Kadra town in November 2020¹²⁶, while witnesses interviewed by the Director of Human Rights Watch's Horn of Africa, Laetitia Bader, reported additionally, that Fanos, along with Amharan special forces, detained civilians that had not fled Maikadra and that they looted houses and hospitals in the region.¹²⁷ A witness described to the Guardian that when federal forces captured his town, Humera, they beat him and then 'passed him over' to the Fano. According to the witness' account, Fano 'had been tasked with destroying the city and finishing Tigrayans'.¹²⁸ On 22 December 2020, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that she had received several reports of human rights abuses by Fano militia.¹²⁹

2.2.5 TPLF security forces and allied militia

The TPLF had been the ruling party in Tigray region since 1991, until 7 November 2020, when the House of Federation voted to establish a transitional government in Tigray state.¹³⁰ According to International Crisis Group analyst, William Davison, Tigray has 'a large paramilitary force and a well-drilled local militia, thought to number perhaps 250 000 troops combined'.¹³¹ On 29 November 2020, one day after the capture of Mekelle by the ENDF, the leader of TPLF announced that his forces had recaptured the northern town of Axum from the federal government forces.¹³² According to AI and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), witnesses said that a TPLF youth militia, called 'Samri', attacked members of the ethnic Amhara community in Maikadra on 9 November 2020.¹³³ EHRC reported with regards to the attack in Maikadra that 'while Samri, comprised of several groups consisting of 20 to 30 youth, each accompanied by an estimated 3 to 4 armed police and militia, carried out the massacre, police and militia - strategically posted at street junctions - aided and

¹²¹ New York Times (The), Fleeing Ethiopians Tell of Ethnic Massacres in Tigray War, 9 December 2020, [url](#); Lefort René, Preaching unity but flying solo, Abiy's ambition may stall Ethiopia's transition, 25 February 2020, [url](#)

¹²² Ezega News, Fano Will Not Lay Down Arms If Demands Are Not Met: Chairman, 28 March 2020, [url](#)

¹²³ AI, Beyond Law Enforcement Human Rights Violations By Ethiopian Security Forces In Amhara And Oromia, December 2020, [url](#), p.45

¹²⁴ AI, Beyond Law Enforcement Human Rights Violations By Ethiopian Security Forces In Amhara And Oromia, December 2020, [url](#), p. 6

¹²⁵ Guardian (The), Ethiopia: leaders of Tigray region admit they attacked neighbouring Amhara, 14 November 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁶ Reuters, Ethiopians fleeing to Sudan describe air strikes and machete killings in Tigray, 13 November 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁷ HRW, Interview: Uncovering Crimes Committed in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 23 December 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸ Guardian (The), 'I saw people dying on the road': Tigray's traumatised war refugees, 2 December 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁹ UNOHCHR, Provide unhindered access to whole of Tigray to protect civilians, Bachelet urges Ethiopia, 22 December 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁰ AA, Ethiopia moves to set up interim government in Tigray, 7 November 2020, [url](#)

¹³¹ International Crisis Group, Clashes over Ethiopia's Tigray Region: Getting to a Ceasefire and National Dialogue, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹³² Reuters, Tigray forces claim to have shot down Ethiopian plane, taken town, 29 November 2020, [url](#)

¹³³ Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings, 24 November 2020, [url](#); AI, Ethiopia: Investigation reveals evidence that scores of civilians were killed in massacre in Tigray state, 12 November 2020, [url](#)

directly participated in the carnage by shooting at those who attempted to escape'.¹³⁴

2.3 Impact of the conflict on the civilian population and main security incidents

2.3.1 Civilian casualties

Data on violent incidents reported in this query response is based on EASO analysis of data published by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and extracted on 8 January 2021. For the purpose of this query, only the following types of events were included as violent incidents in the analysis of the security situation in Ethiopia's Tigray region: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians.

Between 1 March 2020-8 January 2021, ACLED recorded 54 violent events, of which 37 were coded as battles, 5 were coded as explosions/remote violence, and 12 as incidents of violence against civilians. It should be noted that of the 54 events, just one was recorded between 1 March-31 October 2020, while the remaining 53 events were recorded between 1 November 2020-8 January 2021.¹³⁵

By *woreda* (district), the violent events were distributed as follows:

- Enderta: 14 events (8 battles, 4 explosions/remote violence; 2 incidents of violence against civilians);
- Kafta Humera: 10 events (5 battles, 1 explosion/remote violence, 4 incidents of violence against civilians);
- Tahtay Adiyabo: 5 events (3 battles; 2 incidents of violence against civilians);
- Raya Azebo: 4 events (3 battles; 1 incident of violence against civilians);
- Ganta Afeshum: 4 events (all battles);
- Aksum: 3 events (all battles)
- Tahtay Koraro: 3 events (2 battles; 1 incident of violence against civilians);
- Alamata: 2 events (all battles);
- Adwa: 2 events (1 battle; 1 incident of violence against civilians);
- Kelete Awelallo: 2 events (all battles);
- Saesi Tsadamba: 1 event (incident of violence against civilians)
- Hawzen: 1 event (1 battle);
- Asgeda-Tsimbla: 1 event (1 battle);
- Dubawi: 1 event (1 battle);
- Hintalo Wejirat: 1 event (1 battle).¹³⁶

With regards to the actors involved, the majority of the violent events (39, or some 72 %) were armed clashes between the Military Forces of Ethiopia and the TPLF. Other actors that were parties to the remaining violent events include: the Police Forces of Ethiopia; the Military Forces of Eritrea; the Samri Youth Militia; Local Tigrayan Militias; and Unidentified Ethiopian Armed Group.¹³⁷

With regards to the 12 incidents of violence against civilians, ACLED recorded the following perpetrators: Military Forces of Ethiopia (4 incidents); Unidentified Ethiopian Armed Group (2); TPLF

¹³⁴ Ethiopian Human Rights Commission Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings, 24 November 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁵ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Ethiopia, 1 March 2020 – 8 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Ethiopia, 1 March 2020 – 8 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Ethiopia, 1 March 2020 – 8 January 2021, [url](#)

(2); Military Forces of Eritrea (2); Samri Youth Militia (1); and Police Forces of Ethiopia (1).¹³⁸

Estimates of the number of civilian casualties vary widely. As the military operation in Tigray region was launched on 4 November 2020, internet connections and telephone lines were cut, while air and road access to Tigray region was blocked, and 'tight restrictions on access for aid agencies' were imposed.¹³⁹ This resulted not only in reduced humanitarian assistance to people in need, but also 'made it difficult for journalists and aid workers to document and confirm reports of the situation on the ground'.¹⁴⁰

According to ACLED, between 1 March 2020-8 January 2021 at least 719 civilians were killed during violent events in Tigray region.¹⁴¹ However, ACLED clarified that the figures reflect just a part of the overall number of civilian deaths, as details about particular events of violence against civilians only became available at a later stage.¹⁴²

Meanwhile, on 2 February 2021, three Tigrayan opposition parties - the Tigray Independence Party, National Congress of Great Tigray and Salsay Weyane Tigray - released a statement claiming that at least 52 000 civilians had been killed during conflict in the previous three months. Nevertheless, sources for the figures were not presented, and the number has been contested by the Ethiopian government, as well as by independent organizations such as International Crisis Group.¹⁴³

Some of the indicative events include:

- On 9 November 2020, Tigrayan local police, aided by a local militia and an 'informal Tigray youth group called "Samri"' killed at least 600 civilians 'pre-identified/profiled as Amharas and Wolkaites', all males, in Maikadra town, Kafta Humera woreda.¹⁴⁴
- Between 9-11 November 2020, Humera town was hit by artillery strikes, of which at least some were reportedly launched from Eritrea. According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, 'the shelling damaged residential areas in the Kebele 02 neighbourhood, and struck near a church and a school, near a mosque in Kebele 01, and hit areas near the town's main hospital'. The same source quoted a medical worker estimating that on 9 November 2020, the shelling had 'killed at least 46 people and wounded over 200' others.¹⁴⁵ According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR), 'the Ethiopian army and regional Amhara forces and militia' took control of Humera, and killed civilians.¹⁴⁶ On 26 November 2020, Deutsche Welle (DW) quoted an account of a Tigrayan refugee claiming that Amharic soldiers in Humera had shot people over 18 years of age who admitted to speaking Tigrinya.¹⁴⁷
- On 17 November 2020, Shire town was hit by shelling, and an unspecified number of civilians

¹³⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Ethiopia, 1 March 2020 – 8 January 2021, [url](#)

¹³⁹ UNOCHA, Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report No. 1, 7 November 2020, [url](#), p. 1; AI, Ethiopia: Authorities must ensure human rights are respected in Tigray military operation, 4 November 2020, [url](#); UN OHCHR, Ethiopia: Bachelet calls for de-escalation amid alarming developments in Tigray and Oromo regions, 6 November 2020, [url](#);

¹⁴⁰ HRW, Ethiopia: Protect People as Tigray Crisis Escalates, 13 November 2020, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021 Ethiopia, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Ethiopia, 1 March 2020 – 8 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴² ACLED, [Twitter], posted on: 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴³ AP, Tigray opposition parties assert 50,000-plus civilian deaths, February 3, 2021, [url](#); Bloomberg, Ethiopian Opposition Claims 52,000 Killed in Tigray Conflict, 2 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, Rapid Investigation into Grave Human Rights Violation in Maikadra Preliminary Findings, 24 November 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 2; GCR2P, Atrocity Alert No. 229: Ethiopia, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Global Landmine Report, 18 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵ UNOHCHR, Provide unhindered access to whole of Tigray to protect civilians, Bachelet urges Ethiopia, 22 December 2020, [url](#); HRW, Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ UNOHCHR, Provide unhindered access to whole of Tigray to protect civilians, Bachelet urges Ethiopia, 22 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ DW, Ethiopia: 'People in Tigray are terrified', 25 November 2020, [url](#)

were killed and injured.¹⁴⁸

- On 19 November 2020, 'Ethiopian and Eritrean forces indiscriminately shelled Axum town, killing and wounding civilians'. After taking control of the town, members of the two forces 'shot civilians and pillaged and destroyed property'. According to HRW, after being attacked on 28 November 2020 by 'Tigray militia and Axum residents', Eritrean soldiers 'in apparent retaliation, fatally shot and summarily executed several hundred residents, mostly men and boys', between 28-29 November 2020. Estimates of the fatalities are of several hundred civilian deaths, with Amnesty International (AI) reporting at least 240 deaths, while another source quoted by HRW states that around 800 people had been killed in Axum.¹⁴⁹
- In November 2020, four humanitarian workers were killed in Tigray region. One of the victims was reportedly killed in Hitsats refugee camp in Shire on 19 November 2020.¹⁵⁰
- Between 20-24 November 2020, 'many people' from Adigrat town were reportedly killed in the mountains, after being displaced from the town by artillery strikes in 'early November' 2020.¹⁵¹
- On 28 November 2020, civilian facilities in Mekelle were hit by 'heavy shelling', and at least 27 civilians were killed and another 100 were wounded, according to witness accounts quoted by HRW.¹⁵²
- On 30 November 2020, Eritrean soldiers opened fire on Maryam Dengelat church in Dengelat village, killing tens of civilians that had gathered for mass. According to witness accounts, some of the civilians who managed to flee were followed by soldiers into neighbouring villages and killed.¹⁵³
- Between November and 'early December' 2020, 'scores of young men' were reportedly killed in Wukro town by Eritrean soldiers, with one witness claiming at least 81 deaths, while an International Crisis Group report highlighted estimates of around 200 deaths.¹⁵⁴
- On 7 January 2021, the killing of another aid worker in Hitsats refugee camp was reported.¹⁵⁵
- Between 9-10 February 2021, at least eight people were killed by security forces during protests in Adigrat, Axum, Mekelle, Shire and Wukro.¹⁵⁶
- On or around 20 February 2021, 'Ethiopian government soldiers' reportedly killed 'more than 100 civilians' in Khisret village, in the area of Gijet, according to a report by non-governmental organization EEPA. Some days later after the alleged incidents, media outlets reported that, according to satellite image analysis, around 500 buildings and structures in and around Gijet town had been deliberately destroyed by fire.¹⁵⁷
- In 'late February' 2021, Eritrean soldiers reportedly 'opened fire on civilians' in Agula, some '12 kilometres south of Wukro [...] after pro-TPLF forces ambushed one of their positions in the town'.¹⁵⁸

¹⁴⁸ HRW, Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ GC2RP, 2.2 million people displaced by fighting in Tigray since 4 November 2020, 15 March 2021, [url](#); HRW, Ethiopia: Eritrean Forces Massacre Tigray Civilians, 5 March 2021, [url](#); AI, Ethiopia: Eritrean troops' massacre of hundreds of Axum civilians may amount to crime against humanity, 26 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ BBC, Ethiopia's Tigray crisis: Four aid workers killed, 11 December 2020, [url](#); 2

¹⁵¹ UNOHCHR, Provide unhindered access to whole of Tigray to protect civilians, Bachelet urges Ethiopia, 22 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵² HRW, Ethiopia: Unlawful Shelling of Tigray Urban Areas, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵³ CNN, Massacre in the mountains, 1 March 2021, [url](#); AI, Ethiopia: UN human rights chief underscores urgency of impartial, international investigation into Tigray atrocities, 4 March 2021, [url](#); GC2RP, 2.2 million people displaced by fighting in Tigray since 4 November 2020, 15 March 2021, [url](#)

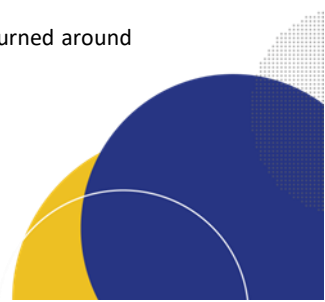
¹⁵⁴ MSN, 'The fighting continues': A Tigray town reels from drawn-out war, 16 March 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region, 11 February 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁵⁵ UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 7 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 28 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UN OHCHR, Ethiopia: Persistent, credible reports of grave violations in Tigray underscore urgent need for human rights access – Bachelet, 4 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ EEPA, Situation Report EEPA HORN No. 90, 23 February 2021, [url](#), p. 1; Reuters, Hundreds of buildings burned around Tigray town, research group says, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ MSN, 'The fighting continues': A Tigray town reels from drawn-out war, 16 March 2021, [url](#)



2.3.2 Other acts/forms of violence against civilians

Along with reports of civilian killings, reports of various other human rights abuses emerged soon after the start of the military operation in Tigray on 4 November 2020.¹⁵⁹

On 25 November 2020, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P) quoted reports highlighting that Tigrayans employed in United Nations and African Union peacekeeping missions were 'being removed from their posts and forcibly returned home where they face[d] the threat of arbitrary detention and persecution'.¹⁶⁰

On 9 December 2020, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) highlighted reports of 'gross human rights violations and abuses, including indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects, looting, abductions and sexual violence against women and girls', as well as 'reports of forced recruitment of Tigrayan youth to fight against their own communities'.¹⁶¹ In a subsequent report, the same source stated that, between December 2020-January 2021, at least 136 cases of rape had been reported in 'hospitals in Mekelle, Ayder, Adigrat and Wukro [...] with indications that there are many more such unreported cases'.¹⁶²

In January 2021, the GCR2P stated that 'Ethiopian refugees fleeing to Sudan continue to report violence, forced recruitment of men and boys to armed groups, and sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls in the Tigray region'.¹⁶³ On 21 January 2021, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict also highlighted 'serious allegations of sexual violence' in Tigray, 'including a high number of alleged rapes in the capital, Mekelle'.¹⁶⁴

On 26 January 2021, the New York Times quoted an internal US government report which accused Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers, as well as Amhara militia fighters, of 'leading a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing'. Moreover, 'whole villages were severely damaged or completely erased', according to the same source.¹⁶⁵ Meanwhile, on the same day, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported that movements outside main roads in Tigray were 'highly insecure', while 'incidents of ambushes and hit-and-run attacks also abound, including on humanitarian partners' vehicles'.¹⁶⁶

On 4 February 2021, UNOCHA reported a 'deteriorating' humanitarian situation, which included incidents of violence against civilians'.¹⁶⁷ The same source highlighted on 28 February 2021 accounts from 'residents and aid workers on the ground', who reported 'alarming levels of violence against civilians perpetuated by armed actors' including killings and gender-based violence. Furthermore, there were accounts of random house searches, widespread looting of private and public property and destruction of farming equipment, allegedly by various armed actors'.¹⁶⁸

¹⁵⁹ EU ECHO, Ethiopia - Conflict escalation and concern for civilians, 23 November 2020, [url](#); AI, Ethiopia: Protect civilians in Mekelle offensive, 23 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ GCR2P, Atrocity Alert No. 230: Ethiopia, Uganda and Democratic Republic of the Congo, 25 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ UNOHCHR, Exceedingly worrying and volatile situation in Ethiopia – Bachelet, 9 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶² UNOHCHR, Ethiopia: Persistent, credible reports of grave violations in Tigray underscore urgent need for human rights access – Bachelet, 4 March 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶³ GCR2P, Atrocity Alert No. 234: Ethiopia, China and Niger, 6 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ UN, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, urges all parties to prohibit the use of sexual violence and cease hostilities in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, 21 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ New York Times (The), Ethiopia's War Leads to Ethnic Cleansing in Tigray Region, U.S. Report Says, 26 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 26 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 28 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; UN OCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 8 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

2.3.3 Displacement

Internal displacement

According to data published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), as of March 2020 there were approximately 1 735 481 IDPs in Ethiopia, of which 99 602 (some 5.7 %) were in Tigray region. According to the source, all IDPs in Tigray had been displaced by previous episodes of conflict.¹⁶⁹ A subsequent assessment showed that, as of September 2020, there had been a slight increase in the number of IDPs in Tigray, up to 100 266 people.¹⁷⁰

Accurate figures regarding internal displacement after the commencement of the conflict on 4 November 2020 in Tigray are not available, and as of 28 February 2021, humanitarian access in Tigray was still impeded by insecurity in areas such as Southern and South Eastern Tigray, and Mekelle.¹⁷¹ Existing reports show that, between 4-20 November 2020, ‘several thousands’ of people had already been internally displaced in Tigray.¹⁷² Meanwhile, on 15 December 2020, UN OCHA reported that ‘thousands of people living along the Amhara-Tigray and Afar-Tigray border areas’ had been affected by fighting, while some 63 600 people had been displaced into Amhara and Afar region.¹⁷³ In January 2021, UN OCHA quoted figures released by the Tigray Emergency Coordination Center (ECC), of some 2.2 million people displaced by the conflict.¹⁷⁴ However, more recent estimates of 8 February 2021, were of around 521 200 IDPs ‘mainly concentrated in Northern Woredas of Western Tigray (493 300)’, while some 23 680 IDPs were recorded in Afar region, and 3 850 in Amhara region.¹⁷⁵

A United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) assessment between 4-7 February 2021 in Shire highlighted ‘dire conditions’ for IDPs, particularly for the unaccompanied or separated children among the displaced. Severe acute malnutrition was detected among the IDPs, while ‘many families reported deep psychosocial distress’ due to the conflict.¹⁷⁶ On 28 February 2021, UN OCHA reported that IDPs in Western Tigray and in Mae-Tsebri, North Western Tigray, were sleeping in open spaces due to the lack of shelter.¹⁷⁷

Ethiopian refugees

Along with internal displacement, the conflict that began on 4 November 2020 in Tigray region caused significant numbers of people to flee across the border into Sudan, using three border points: Hamdayet in Kassala State, and Lugdi and Aderafi in Gedaref State.¹⁷⁸ As of 28 February 2021, approximately 62 200 Ethiopian refugees from Tigray had arrived in Kassala and Gedaref states of Sudan, settling in Um Rakuba camp, Tunaydbah and Hamdayet settlements, and in Village 8.¹⁷⁹

A February 2021 report by MSF highlighted that many of the Ethiopian refugees in Sudan were lacking adequate humanitarian aid. For instance, according to MSF, around 10 000-12 000 refugees ‘scattered in and around Hamdayet’ had not been ‘provided with proper shelter, and their basic needs such as water, food, blankets and sanitation’ were ‘barely met’.¹⁸⁰ A UNFPA assessment found

¹⁶⁹ IOM DTM, Ethiopia National Displacement Report 4 Round 21: February — March 2020, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 2, 13

¹⁷⁰ UNHCR, Ethiopia Operation Tigray Humanitarian Snapshot, October 2020, [url](#); UNHCR, Ethiopia Operation Humanitarian Population Figures, October 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 28 Feb 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁷² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Ethiopia Issue #19 2 Nov. – 20 Nov. 2020, 20 November 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁷³ UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Access Snapshot - Tigray region, 15 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 6 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁵ UNHCR, Tigray Situation Update, 8 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁶ UN News, Ethiopia: ‘Incomplete but troubling picture’ reveals impact of Tigray crisis on children, 12 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ UNOCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 28 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁸ UNFPA, Sudan Response to the Ethiopian Refugees Situation, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁹ UNHCR, Ethiopia Situation (Tigray Region) 15- 28 February, 28 February 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁸⁰ MSF, For refugees in Hamdayet, Sudan, “everyone is hungry, and everyone is tired”, 19 February 2021, [url](#)

acute respiratory infections, malaria and dysentery, among others, across all refugee sites, as well as the presence of the COVID-19 virus in Village 8.¹⁸¹

Eritrean refugees in Tigray

A 10 November 2020 UNHCR report highlighted that, at the beginning of the conflict, of the 178 315 Eritrean refugees present at that time in Ethiopia, some 96 223 were living in Tigray region. The vast majority were 'sheltered mainly in four refugee camps in the western part' of Tigray: 32 167 people were living in Adi-Harush, 25 248 in Hitsats, 21 682 in Mai-Aini, and 8 702 in Shimelba. Another 8 424 Eritrean refugees were living in host communities in Tigray.¹⁸²

On 20 November 2020, UNOCHA highlighted reports of fighting 'around Shire, where thousands of refugees live, and where humanitarian actors have their main operational bases for the refugee operation'.¹⁸³ A subsequent UNHCR report focusing on the period 4-8 December 2020 pointed out the fact that, at that time, humanitarian access to the four refugee camps was blocked due to insecurity, while highlighting 'reports of attacks, abductions and forced recruitment at the Eritrean [refugee] camps' that could not be independently verified due to the active conflict.¹⁸⁴ Meanwhile, on 11 December 2020, a report quoting the UNHCR stated that hundreds of Eritrean refugees that had fled to Addis Ababa were sent back to Tigray region, while also highlighting reports of Eritrean refugees in the Tigray camps being forcibly returned to Eritrea.¹⁸⁵

By the first week of January 2021, 'access to most parts of North Western, Eastern and Central Tigray' was hampered because of 'ongoing insecurity and bureaucratic hurdles', while Hitsats and Shimelba camps remained inaccessible to aid workers.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, UNHCR highlighted 'reports of ongoing insecurity and additional destruction at the camps in the first week of January 2021'.¹⁸⁷

A subsequent UNHCR report of 13 January 2021 stated that an estimated 4 000 Eritrean refugees were 'in and around Shire town at that time, 'including recent arrivals from Hitsats and Shimelba camps', who were in 'need of shelter, food and essential services'. According to the source, many were 'sleeping on the street or in open fields'.¹⁸⁸

On 9 January 2021, Bloomberg published results of satellite image analysis showing destruction of infrastructure that had reportedly taken place between 5-8 January 2021 in Tigray. This included damage to Hitsats and Shimelba camps. According to the source, analysis of images from Shimelba camp showed 'scorched earth' and the destruction humanitarian facilities, while images from Hitsats camp also revealed destroyed or burning structures'.¹⁸⁹

By the first week of February 2021, Shimelba and Hitsats camps remained inaccessible to aid workers, and several sources reported that between 15 000-20 000 of Eritrean refugees that had been residing in the camps were at that time dispersed to 'inaccessible areas in Tigray', while another 4 000 had 'fled to other camps in southern Tigray'. A 6 February 2021 AFP report quoted Eritrean refugees from Hitsats claiming abuses, first from 'pro-TPLF militiamen', who 'targeted refugees in reprisal killings after suffering battlefield setbacks against Eritrean troops' in late November, then at the hands of Eritrean soldiers, who abducted some of the refugees in the camp.¹⁹⁰

On 10 February 2021, reports of new satellite image analysis showed more 'extensive damage' to

¹⁸¹ UNFPA, Sudan Response to the Ethiopian Refugees Situation, 1 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸² UNHCR, Tigray Situation Update #1, 10 November 2020, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁸³ UNOCHA, Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report No. 4, 20 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ UNHCR Regional Update #6: Ethiopia Situation (Tigray Region), 4-8 December 2020, 10 December 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁵ Al Jazeera, 'Overwhelming' reports of killings of Eritreans in Tigray: UN, 11 December 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Ethiopia: Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 7 January 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁸⁷ UNCHR, Ethiopia Situation (Tigray Region) Regional Update #9, 13 January 2021, [url](#), p.1

¹⁸⁸ UNCHR, Ethiopia Situation (Tigray Region) Regional Update #9, 13 January 2021, [url](#), p.2

¹⁸⁹ GCR2P, Atrocity Alert No. 235: Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Cameroon, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ VOA, Eritrean Refugees Caught in Crossfire of Ethiopia's Tigray War, 3 February 2021, [url](#)



the two camps than previously thought. During the same day, the Ethiopian government announced the closure of the two camps.¹⁹¹

In February 2021, several sources quoted Eritrean refugees stating that ‘armed actors infiltrated the camps, killed, raped and abducted people’, while Eritrean troops that entered Ethiopian territory had ‘forced some of the refugees back to Eritrea’.¹⁹² Similarly, on 24 February 2021, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights situation in Eritrea quoted ‘first-hand accounts of allegations of grave human rights and humanitarian law violations, including extra judicial killings, targeted abductions and forced return of Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers to Eritrea, allegedly by Eritrean forces’.¹⁹³ On 26 February 2021, HRW highlighted ‘the use by Eritrean forces of Eritrean refugee camps in Ethiopia for military purposes and arrests of Eritrean refugees’.¹⁹⁴

By 24 February 2021, UNHCR reported that some 5 474 Eritrean refugees displaced from Hitsats and Shimelba camps had been relocated from ‘Shire and surrounding areas’ to Mai-Aini and Adi-Harush camps. The same source highlighted the ‘lack of adequate shelter and communal facilities’.¹⁹⁵ Meanwhile, some 20 000 Eritrean refugees remained unaccounted for.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ GC2RP, Atrocity Alert No. 239: Ethiopia, China and Iraq, 10 February 2021, [url](#); USAID, Ethiopia – Ethiopia – Tigray Conflict Fact Sheet #2 Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, 18 February 2021, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁹² UNHCR, Ethiopia Situation (Tigray Region) Regional update #10, 8 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2; USCRI, Statement Calling for an Independent United Nations Investigation into the Disappearance of Refugees from the Tigray Region of Ethiopia, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹³ UNOHCHR, Statement of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights situation in Eritrea, Mr Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, 24 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ HRW, African Union Shouldn’t Endorse Eritrea for UN Rights Body, 26 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ UNHCR, Ethiopia COVID-19 and Operational Update, 24 February 2021, [url](#), p. 3; UN OCHA, Ethiopia - Tigray Region Humanitarian Update Situation Report, 8 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁶ USAID, Ethiopia – Ethiopia – Tigray Conflict Fact Sheet #2 Fiscal Year (FY) 2021, 18 February 2021, [url](#), p. 3

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