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Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Ethiopia: Oromos, the Oromo Liberation Front and the Oromo Liberation Army

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March 2022

Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into 2 parts: (1) an assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note - that is information in the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw - by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- that the general humanitarian situation is so severe that there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of serious harm because conditions amount to inhuman or degrading treatment as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iii\) of the Immigration Rules](#) / Article 3 of the [European Convention on Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#)
- that the security situation is such that there are substantial grounds for believing there is a real risk of serious harm because there exists a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict as within [paragraphs 339C and 339CA\(iv\) of the Immigration Rules](#)
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate and balanced, which is compared and contrasted where appropriate so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture is provided of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote. Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the bibliography.

Feedback

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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Assessment

Section 1 updated: 14 March 2022

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution and/or serious harm by the state due to a person's actual or perceived association with the Oromo Liberation Front, Oromo Liberation Army and/or their Oromo ethnicity.

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1.2 Points to note

- 1.2.1 In this note, the Oromo Liberation Front political party is referred to as OLF and the breakaway Oromo Liberation Front armed group is referred to as the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) or OLF-Shene.

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Section 2 updated: 14 March 2022

2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 In July 2018, the Ethiopian government removed the OLF from its list of designated terrorist organisations. After this date, a faction of the OLF refused to lay down arms and the organisation split. The splinter group, known as the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) or OLF-Shene or Shene, was re-designated as a terrorist group by the Ethiopian government in May 2021 (see [Terrorist designation](#)).
- 2.2.2 Although the UK has not proscribed the OLA as a terrorist group, the organisation has been connected to human rights violations, including attacks on civilians, and decision makers should consider whether to exclude the claimant from recognition as a refugee or from humanitarian protection (see [Activities and capability](#)).
- 2.2.3 The country guidance case of [AAR \(OLF - MB confirmed\) Ethiopia CG \[2022\] UKUT 00001 \(IAC\)](#), heard 24 February 2021, promulgated 29 December 2021, considered that 'Whether any such persons are to be excluded from recognition as refugees or from the grant of humanitarian protection by reason of armed activities may need to be addressed in particular cases.' (paragraph 103)
- 2.2.4 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.5 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 2.2.6 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 Actual or imputed political opinion and/or race or nationality.
- 2.3.2 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.4 Risk

a. Overview

- 2.4.1 The relationship between the OLF and the OLA, and the relationship between these 2 organisations and successive Ethiopian governments, is complex and spans several decades. For a summary of the main events and their significance see [OLF and OLA: timeline](#).
- 2.4.2 Ethiopia is home to over 80 ethnic groups and is made up of 11 federal states, organised along ethnic lines. When Abiy Ahmed became Prime Minister in 2018, promising political reform and reconciliation, it was anticipated that this would help to resolve the country's long-standing political and ethnic divisions (see [Ethnic context](#) and [Political context](#)).
- 2.4.3 Prior to Abiy's election, the dominant party in the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition, which governed for almost 3 decades, was the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). After a year in power, Abiy dissolved the EPRDF coalition and created a new party, the Prosperity Party, which the TPLF refused to join, resulting in its marginalisation. Rising tensions between the TPLF and Abiy's government contributed to the outbreak of civil war in the Tigray region in November 2020. The war affected neighbouring regions such as Afar and Amhara, with the loss of thousands of lives and evidence of human rights violations committed by all parties (see [Ethiopia-wide political context](#), [Ruling party](#) and [Tigray conflict](#)).
- 2.4.4 Reliable coverage of the conflict has been hindered by online misinformation campaigns, the arrest of journalists and limited access for international organisations to the conflict areas. By December 2021, the conflict had been largely contained within Tigray (see [Tigray conflict](#) and [Reliability of information](#)).
- 2.4.5 Some members of the Oromo ethnic group expected Abiy (an Oromo) to bring positive change for their community. While Abiy was quick to make well-received reforms – such as the release of political prisoners – his attempts to move away from a federal to a unitary system of governance (with a strong central government) have met with resistance from Oromo opposition parties and from other ethno-regional groups, such as the TPLF, with opponents fearing that their autonomy was under threat (see [Ethiopia-wide ethnic context](#), [Ethiopia-wide political context](#) and [Background to Oromo grievances](#)).
- 2.4.6 Prior to 2018, the OLF was designated a terrorist organisation and its members lived in exile. Under Abiy, the terrorist designation was lifted in July 2018 and the OLF were welcomed back to Ethiopia. Disagreements over disarmament in October 2018 resulted in the OLF splitting into a political wing and an armed wing (the OLA). Since the OLF-OLA split, other factions have formed within the OLF with members disagreeing over issues such as cooperation with the Prosperity Party and participation in the June 2021 national elections. The 'main' OLF has used statements on its website to distance itself from members in other factions, including Kejella Merdassa, who accepted a seat on Abiy's cabinet following the June 2021 elections (see [Background to Oromo grievances](#), and [Internal divisions](#)).

- 2.4.7 The murder in June 2020 of a popular Oromo musician and government critic, Hachalu Hundessa, was the catalyst for days of violent protests and unrest across Oromia. While estimates vary, more than 100 people are reported to have been killed in the ensuing mob violence and government crackdown. Thousands were arrested, including members of the OLF and the other main Oromo opposition party, the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), both of which the government accused of inciting the violence (see [Oromo parties](#), [Background to Oromo grievances](#), [Protests and unrest in Oromia during 2020 and 2021: other sources](#) and [State treatment of OLF members and supporters](#)).
- 2.4.8 While the OLF was recognised as a political party in November 2019, its ability to participate in the political sphere has been limited by various factors, including the widespread closure of offices and the arrest of its leaders, members and supporters in the run-up to the postponed national elections which eventually took place in June 2021. The party withdrew from the elections, alleging the arrests had left it unable to effectively organise. The election campaign was dominated by Abiy's ruling Prosperity Party, which ran in 103 out of 170 constituencies in Oromia uncontested (see [June 2021 elections](#), [Ability to function as a political group](#) and [State treatment of OLF members and supporters](#)).
- 2.4.9 Since the return of the OLF to Ethiopia in 2018, the OLA has continued its armed opposition to the government. The OLA was designated as a terrorist organisation in May 2021, and in August 2021 the group formed an alliance with the TPLF against the government (see [Who are the OLA?](#), [Terrorist designation](#) and [Alliances](#)).
- 2.4.10 The OLA is most active in the West and South of Oromia state. There was an increase in OLA activity in 2021 and while the majority of the group's activity has involved clashes with the state, the group has also been linked to attacks on civilians, including Oromia-based civilians of Amharan ethnicity (see [Reach of the OLA](#) and [Activities and capability](#)).
- 2.4.11 The exact nature of the relationship and/or separation between the OLF and the OLA is uncertain, with some sources suggesting that the OLF and OLA continue to be closely linked. The difficulty of distinguishing between the OLF, the OLA and civilians who have no connection to either, is also apparent in the actions of the state. While the Ethiopian government has publicly attempted to separate the OLF (registered political party) from the OLA (designated terrorist organisation), there have been reports of arrests and extrajudicial killings of people who have been accused of having links to the OLA but who deny any involvement (see [Distinction between OLF and OLA \(OLF-Shene\)](#) and [State treatment of OLA fighters, supporters and suspected supporters](#)).
- 2.4.12 A state of emergency was declared in November 2021 when the alliance between the OLA and Tigrayan Defence Forces (TDF) made gains in Oromia. The state of emergency permitted the arrest of any person suspected of collaborating with a 'terrorist group' and resulted in the detention of an estimated minimum 1,000 people, mostly of Tigrayan origin. Due to improved security conditions, following a retreat of Tigrayan forces

back into Tigray, the state of emergency was lifted in February 2022 (see [State of emergency](#)).

b. OLF and OLA

2.4.13 In general, a person with a significant history of membership or support for the OLF, or perceived by the authorities to have a significant history of membership or support, is likely to be at risk of persecution or serious harm. Whether an individual's association with the OLF is 'significant' is fact sensitive and each case must be considered on its individual merits, with the onus on the claimant to demonstrate that they face a risk of persecution. The meaning of 'significant' in this context is set out by the caselaw, below.

2.4.14 The country guidance case of [AAR \(OLF - MB confirmed\) Ethiopia CG \[2022\] UKUT 00001 \(IAC\)](#), heard 24 February 2021, promulgated 29 December 2021 applies. In [AAR](#) the Upper Tribunal held that:

'In broad terms, [MB \(OLF and MTA – risk\) Ethiopia CG \[2007\] UKAIT 00030](#) still accurately reflects the situation facing members and supporters of the OLF if returned to Ethiopia. However, in material respects, it is appropriate to clarify and supplement the existing guidance.

- 1) 'OLF members and supporters and those specifically perceived by the authorities to be such members or supporters will in general be at real risk if they have been previously arrested or detained on suspicion of OLF involvement.
- 2) 'Those who have a significant history, known to the authorities, of OLF membership or support, or are perceived by the authorities to have such significant history will in general be at real risk of persecution by the authorities.
- 3) "Significant" should not be read as denoting a very high level of involvement or support. Rather, it relates to suspicion being established that a person is perceived by the authorities as possessing an anti-government agenda. This is a fact sensitive assessment.' (para 103)

2.4.15 While the UT in [AAR](#) did not explicitly provide country guidance on the treatment of members or supporters of the OLA, its assessment of risk faced by OLF supporters and members applies to those perceived to be or actually associated with the OLA too. The UT also held, which appears to be particularly relevant to persons linked with the OLA, that: 'Whether any such persons are to be excluded from recognition as refugees or from the grant of humanitarian protection by reason of armed activities may need to be addressed in particular cases.' (paragraph 103) (see [Exclusion](#))

c. Oromo ethnic group

2.4.16 Approximately 38 million people of Oromo ethnicity live in Ethiopia, around a third of the overall population (see [Demographics](#)).

2.4.17 While there have been a number of incidents involving the state and the Oromo community in 2020 and 2021, resulting in violence and arrests, these were largely linked to either an association or suspected association with the OLF or OLA, participation in protests against the detention of Oromo

opposition party members, or as a consequence of the aftermath of Hachalu's death (see [Violence in Oromia region](#)).

- 2.4.18 Not all protests have an anti-government agenda. Rallies have also taken place in Addis Ababa and other towns in Oromia in support of Abiy and in opposition to the TPLF-OLA alliance (see [Protests and riots in Oromia during 2020 and 2021: ACLED](#) and [Protests and unrest in Oromia during 2020 and 2021: other sources](#)).
- 2.4.19 As such, in general the treatment of Oromos (by virtue of ethnicity alone) is not sufficiently serious by its nature and/or repetition, or by an accumulation of various measures, to amount to persecution or serious harm. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise, based on their past experiences, including any arrests, and their individual circumstances, for example, suspected links to the OLA or OLF.

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2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they will not, in general, be able to obtain protection from the authorities.
- 2.5.2 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.6.2 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 14 March 2022

3. Observations on sources and information

3.1 Reliability of information

3.1.1 Following an April 2021 assessment of fake news and misinformation in Ethiopia, the European Institute of Peace, a Brussels-based foundation, concluded: 'Fake news, misinformation, and hate speech have thrived in the Ethiopian media ecosystem, and particularly online. This is strongly correlated with significant, tragic, real-world consequences, exacerbated pre-existing tensions, and contributed to violence and conflict.'¹

3.1.1 In July 2021, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) commented:

'Both Ethiopian and foreign journalists are finding it extremely hard to cover the war, in which thousands have been killed and millions displaced. A dozen journalists were arrested just over two weeks ago for alleged complicity with the TPLF, as RSF reported at the time. In May, New York Times correspondent Simon Marks was expelled because of his coverage of the Tigray conflict, in a move without precedent since Abiy became prime minister in 2018.

'Ethiopia is ranked 101st out of 180 countries in RSF's 2021 World Press Freedom Index.'²

3.1.2 A broadcast by Al Jazeera on 13 November 2021 (transcribed by CPIT) reported:

'There is an accompanying information war that feeds off division and hate speech playing out online. By blocking communications as well as access to the Tigray region the government has helped to create the kinds of conditions in which disinformation can thrive. Platforms like Facebook have made things worse by failing to get a grip on the proliferation of hate and now international news outlets especially those who reported on atrocities committed in Tigray are feeling the heat over their coverage. It is a combustible mix in one of the most ethnically-diverse countries on the continent.'³

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3.2 Use of datasets

3.2.1 In order to understand the level and nature of human rights violations in Ethiopia, and also to identify trends over time, this CPIN has drawn upon data collected by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED).

3.2.2 [ACLED](#) is a non-profit organisation which collects information on political violence and protest events. ACLED researchers assess 4 types of sources when compiling the database: traditional media, reports by international

¹ European Institute of Peace, '[Fake news misinformation and hate speech...](#)' (page 3), 12 April 2021

² RSF, '[Popular news site suspended arbitrarily in Ethiopia](#)', 16 July 2021

³ Al Jazeera, '[The Listening Post: Hate speech and misinformation in Ethiopia's war](#)', 13 Nov 2021

institutions and NGOs, local partner data and new media (for example, Twitter and WhatsApp).⁴

3.2.3 ACLED provided the following information about its data collection process:

‘Ethiopia’s current media landscape is distorted by biased sources and disinformation. In an effort to overcome these obstacles, the [ACLED’s Ethiopia Peace Observatory] EPO examines and triangulates the details of all reported conflict events around the country. Data and analysis produced by the EPO are reviewed through a rigorous internal system to ensure that they represent the most accurate, confirmed information available at the time. ACLED is a living dataset, and data collected as part of the EPO project are continuously updated with the latest reports as they emerge. To minimize the spread of mis- or disinformation around contentious events, the EPO requires multiple sources that specify relevant dates, places, and perpetrators in order to meet the standards for inclusion in the dataset.’⁵

3.2.4 The ACLED database will not include all events which take place (due to the occurrence of both unreported incidents and the exclusion of incidents that don’t meet the standards of its data collection process). However it has 2 aspects which makes its data particularly useful:

- its information is publicly available, subject to checking and triangulation, and easily accessible
- it provides a systematic log of violations and events on a daily basis over a continuous time period

3.2.5 This means that the information collected is more quantifiable than other pieces of evidence, such as NGO reports and media articles, whose coverage focuses on a limited number of incidents and whose reporting or focus may be influenced by editorial or advocacy agenda. ACLED data therefore provides a clearer picture of the scale and frequency of events, and therefore patterns in human rights violations.

3.2.6 This CPIN uses the ACLED database alongside qualitative evidence to describe the current situation and to understand how the situation has changed over time.

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Section 4 updated: 14 March 2022

4. Ethnic context

4.1 Ethiopia-wide ethnic context

4.1.1 In November 2021, a joint report by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) noted:

‘The country is home to over 80 ethnic groups which makes it a mosaic of cultures and languages. According to the last national census (2007), the Oromo constitute the single largest ethnic group at 34.5 percent of the population, followed by the Amhara (26.9 percent), Somali (6.2%), Tigrayan

⁴ ACLED, ‘[FAQs: ACLED sourcing methodology](#)’ (page 1), no date

⁵ ACLED, ‘[EPO: about](#)’, no date

(6.1%), Sidama (4 %), Gurage (2.5%), Welaita (2.3%), Hadiya (1.7%), Afar (1.7%) and Gamo (1.5%). The remaining over seventy (70) ethnic groups make up 19.8 percent of the total population.⁶

4.1.2 In April 2021, Al Jazeera reported:

‘Ethiopia is made up of 10 semi-autonomous federal states organised along ethnic lines, and ethnic violence has soared in recent years.

‘Africa’s second most populous country is struggling to control several flashpoints where ethnic rivalries over land, power and resources have ignited ahead of national elections scheduled for June [2021].

‘Civilians from ethnic groups living on both sides of the border between Amhara and Oromia have both been subject to attacks in recent months.

‘Conflicts have been largely fuelled by groups demanding more land and power, with attempts to drive out people they regard as outsiders.’⁷

4.1.3 Following a referendum in September 2021, the number of federal states increased from 10 to 11. The new South West regional state was created following a split from the the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Regional State (SNNPR)⁸.

4.1.4 In November 2021, German news group Deutsche Welle (DW) reported: ‘As Ethiopia is home to more than 80 nationalities and ethnic groups, the political landscape is dominated by tribal allegiances. Since Abiy came to power [in 2018] and ushered in reforms...[these reforms] have reignited long-simmering ethnic conflicts.’⁹

4.1.5 See also [Ethiopia-wide political context](#).

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4.2 Maps

4.2.1 A detailed [map of Ethiopia's regions](#) (states) and zones (sub-divisions within regions) is available from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)¹⁰.

4.2.2 A detailed [map of Oromia region's zones](#) is also available from OCHA¹¹.

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Section 5 updated: 14 March 2022

5. Political context

5.1 Ethiopia-wide political context

5.1.1 International Crisis Group assessed Ethiopia’s situation in an undated post on its website:

⁶ EHRC and OHCHR, ‘[Report of the EHRC and OHCHR joint investigation...](#)’ (page 19), 3 Nov 2021

⁷ Al Jazeera, ‘[Why is ethnic violence surging in Ethiopia?](#)’, 19 April 2021

⁸ Addis Standard, ‘[Ethiopia gets eleventh state...](#)’, 9 October 2021

⁹ DW, ‘[Ethiopian PM 'at war' with Tigray](#)’, 10 November 2020

¹⁰ UN OCHA, ‘[Ethiopia: administrative map](#)’, 23 October 2020

¹¹ UN OCHA, ‘[Ethiopia: Oromia region administrative map](#)’, 15 August 2017

'Africa's second most populous country is in the midst of an increasingly rocky political transition that began in 2018, with the ascent of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. At first, the change seemed to hold great promise, but fissures have grown, partly between and among the country's numerous ethnic groups. At stake is the state's stability and the post-1991 ethno-federalist system, which many Ethiopians support as guaranteeing local autonomy, and many others oppose as sowing division and undermining effective central government. War between the federal and Tigray governments broke out in the northern region in late 2020 as these tensions came to the fore.'¹²

5.1.2 In July 2021, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) Report, an initiative of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), noted:

'Abiy's administration came to power on the back of prolonged widespread protests across the country, mainly in the populous Oromia and Amhara regions. These protests were driven by deep-seated grievances with the then ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). People were vocal in their dissatisfaction with the party's authoritarian developmentalism and hegemonic "dominant party-ism" and accused it of land grabbing and marginalising the masses...

'Abiy was quick to liberalise the political space and signal his administration's commitment to democratise Ethiopia through institutional reform. Stifling laws were revised, political prisoners released and exiled opposition leaders invited to return. Thus, for perhaps the first time in the post-1991 Ethiopian state, the first year of his administration saw no organised armed resistance against the state. However, his "unionist" political projects started to encounter resistance from both within his party and the ethno-nationalist opposition camp.'¹³

5.1.3 In November 2021, CNN reported:

'[Ethiopia] is made up of 10 regions -- and two cities -- that have a substantial amount of autonomy, including regional police and militia... Regional governments are largely divided along entrenched ethnic lines.

'Before Abiy Ahmed came to power, the [Tigrayan People's Liberation Front] TPLF [as the dominant group within the EPRDF] had governed Ethiopia with an iron grip for decades, overseeing a period of stability and economic growth at the cost of basic civil and political rights. The party's authoritarian rule provoked a popular uprising that ultimately forced Abiy's predecessor, Hailemariam Desalegn, to resign.

'In 2018, Abiy was appointed by the ruling class to quell tensions and bring change, without upending the old political order. But almost as soon as he became prime minister, Abiy announced the rearrangement of the ruling coalition that the TPLF had founded -- the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front, or EPRDF, which was composed of four parties -- into a single, new Prosperity Party, ostracizing the TPLF in the process.

'In his drive for a new pan-Ethiopian political party, Abiy sparked fears in some regions that the country's federal system -- which guarantees

¹² International Crisis Group, '[Ethiopia](#)', no date

¹³ PSC Report, '[Can Ethiopia's election help overcome age-old structural divisions?](#)', 30 July 2021

significant autonomy to ethnically-defined states such as Tigray -- was under threat.¹⁴

5.1.4 In a November 2021 video report about the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) by the BBC's Africa correspondent (transcribed by CPIT) Catherine Byaruhanga stated: 'Ethiopia is an increasingly fractured nation. All groups involved in its countless conflicts stand accused of gross human rights violations. All deny they are the ones to blame.'¹⁵

5.1.5 DW reported in December 2021:

'Ethiopian lawmakers on Wednesday [29 December] voted overwhelmingly in favor of establishing a commission for national dialogue [to address political and ethnic conflicts].

'Western powers had recently stepped up pressure on Ethiopia to de-escalate violence as horrific reports of human rights abuses came to light.

'The commission, whose creation was promised by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government, is meant to establish common ground on contentious issues.'¹⁶

5.1.6 According to a BBC Monitoring report on 27 January 2022: 'The much-awaited national dialogue is expected to end the political and ethnic conflicts that have affected the country of over 100 million people.

'However, the government has said no armed group will take part in the dialogue, effectively leaving out the two active rebel groups, Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA-Shene) which were designated terrorist groups by parliament in May 2021.'¹⁷

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5.2 Ruling party

5.2.1 The Prosperity Party (PP) is the ruling party and was formed on 1 December 2019 from a merger of 3 out of the 4 parties which were original members of the EPRDF (excluding the TPLF), together with new regional members:

- Afar National Democratic Party (ANDP)
- Benishangul-Gumuz People's Democratic Unity Front ((BGPDUF)
- Democratic Party (BDP)
- Oromo Democratic Party (ODP) [formerly known as the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organisation (OPDO)]
- Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) [formerly known as the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM)]
- Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) [formerly known as Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (SEPDF)]

¹⁴ CNN, '[Ethiopia is at war with itself. Here's what you need to know about the conflict](#)', 5 Nov 2021

¹⁵ BBC, '[Oromo Liberation Army: On the ground with Ethiopian fighters](#)', 1 November 2021

¹⁶ DW, '[Ethiopia to create national dialogue commission](#)', 30 December 2021

¹⁷ BBC Monitoring, '[Ethiopia shortlists candidates to oversee national dialogue](#)', 27 Jan 2022

- Somali Democratic Party (SDP) [formerly known as Ethiopian-Somali People's Democratic Party]
 - Gambela Peoples Democratic Movement (GPDM)
 - Harari National League (HNL)¹⁸
- 5.2.2 According to pro-government broadcaster Fana Broadcasting Corporate (and reported by privately-owned Ethiopian website Borkena in January 2021) the PP claimed to have 10 million members¹⁹.
- 5.2.3 In a biography updated in November 2021, BBC Monitoring stated:
 'Abiy Ahmed Ali was sworn in for a second term as prime minister of Ethiopia on 4 October 2021, following a landslide win by his Prosperity Party (PP) in the June 2021 election, which was boycotted by some opposition parties in the Oromia region... Born into a mixed Muslim and Christian family from the Oromo community, Abiy is also the chairman of the Oromo Democratic Party (ODP). He is Ethiopia's first Oromo prime minister despite Oromo being the largest ethnic group in the country.'²⁰

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5.3 Oromo parties

- 5.3.1 In May 2020, the Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) at Addis Ababa University identified the 3 most influential Oromo parties as:
- Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) [a coalition of the Oromo People's Congress (OPC) and the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM)]
 - Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)
 - Oromo National Party (ONP) (established following a split from the OLF)²¹
- 5.3.2 A December 2020 article in the Addis Standard, a privately-owned Ethiopian news website, listed the following Oromo parties which engaged with the registration process run by the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE):
- Oromo Unity and Democracy Federal Peace and Change Party
 - Oromo Abo Liberation Front
 - Oromo Independence Unity Front
 - United Oromo Liberation Front
 - Oromo Liberation Democratic Front (OLDF)
 - Oromia Liberation Democratic Party
 - Oromo Democratic Union
 - Oromo National Congress

¹⁸ BBC Monitoring, '[Prosperity Party \(PP\)](#)', 12 July 2021

¹⁹ Borkena, '[The ruling party claims ten million members amid criticism...](#)', 15 January 2021

²⁰ BBC Monitoring, '[Biography: Abiy Ahmed Ali](#)', 10 November 2021

²¹ IPSS, '[Peace and security report: Ethiopia conflict insight](#)' (page 8), May 2020

- Oromia Liberation National Party
- All Oromo People's Democratic Party
- Oromo Liberation Movement²²

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5.4 June 2021 elections

5.4.1 A national election, which was scheduled for August 2020, was postponed due to COVID-19. The election eventually took place in 2 phases, with the majority of regions (including Oromia) voting in June 2021 and the remaining regions voting in September 2021.

5.4.2 The International Republican Institute (IRI) and National Democratic Institute's (NDI) August 2021 report on the first phase of the elections noted:

'The country faced, and continues to face, multiple security crises related to long-standing ethnic tensions and the distribution of power that resulted in instability or open conflict in many parts of Ethiopia. Due to open conflict no elections were scheduled for Tigray state, which has 38 HoPR [House of Peoples' Representatives] constituencies, while insecurity and logistical difficulties resulted in elections being postponed in approximately 82 other HoPR constituencies. The arrest of several prominent Oromo political leaders and other problems resulted in political party boycotts and a significant number of HoPR elections featuring only one candidate in Ethiopia's most populous state. Intimidation and harassment of opposition party candidates and their supporters limited their ability to participate in the electoral process. Though the NEBE introduced new measures regarding campaign finance, disparities in access to funding remained problematic, and the advantages of incumbency and use of government resources gave disproportionate advantage to the ruling party. As a result, the campaign was relatively subdued and dominated by the ruling party.'²³

5.4.3 And:

'Based on political parties' reports, complaints, press conferences, and [civil society organisation] CSO reports, the [Limited Election Observation Mission for Ethiopia] LEOME collected more than 230 allegations of election-related violence perpetrated by affiliates of subnational state actors/ regional and local authorities, including approximately 150 during the voter registration process, which included targeting of opposition party candidates, agents, members, supporters and family members, voters, and election officials. Cases included harassment, intimidation, coercion, administrative delays, undue arrest and detention, unwarranted home searches, physical assault, assassination attempts, and murder. Many reports implied collusion between the local kebele administration, local police forces, and rural militias, especially on election day. These violent incidents reportedly occurred mostly in Amhara, Oromia, and [Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region] SNNPR regions and in specific areas of Somali and Afar regions.'²⁴

²² Addis Standard, '[Following purge of political parties...](#)', 25 December 2020

²³ IRI and NDI, '[Ethiopia June 21, 2021 national elections report](#)' (page 3), 5 August 2021

²⁴ IRI and NDI, '[Ethiopia June 21, 2021 national elections report](#)' (page 17), 5 August 2021

5.4.4 And: 'Regional level turnout for Addis Ababa was 99 percent, 97 percent for Afar, 96 percent for Oromia and 95 percent for Dire Dawa. All other regions had turnout of 90 percent or greater except for Benishangul-Gumuz where turnout was only 55 percent. These are extremely high turnout rates, even for countries that conduct voter registration in advance of election day, raising questions about the genuineness of the vote.'²⁵

5.4.5 Ethiopia Insight reported in August 2021:

'On 21 June, in Oromia, the PP put up candidates for all of the 170 constituencies in which voting took place.

'Aside from the PP, there were 11 independent candidates in nine constituencies, and eight opposition parties in 58 constituencies produced 84 candidates: Ezema (46), National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) (6), 12 New Generation Party (NGP) (12), Freedom and Equality Party (FEP) (8), Enat party (5), Ethiopia Social Democratic Party (ESDP) (5), All Ethiopian Unity Organization (AEUO) (3), and the only Oromo opposition party, OLM [Oromo Liberation Movement] (1)—the sole supporter of multinational federalism.

'Of the 170 contested constituencies, the ruling party ran in 103 without any opposition...

'Abiy won the election by what many in the media have deemed a "landslide"; Prosperity Party landed 410 seats out of 436 in the federal parliament. Joining PP in parliament are five NaMA candidates from Amhara region, four candidates from Ezema, two from Gedeo People's Democratic Party, and four independents.

'In Oromia, PP won 167 parliament seats out of the 170 contested seats, while the remaining seats were won by independent candidates. Those independents include two ex-members of OLF factions—Galasa Dilbo, the former head of an OLF faction called OLF-Transition Authority (OLF-TA) and Dima Negewo, former deputy chairman of the OLF faction Oromo Democratic Front (ODF)—and Ustaz Kamil Shemsu, a popular Oromo and Muslim activist. The ruling party also won all 513 contested seats in the Oromia regional council...

'Suffice to say that, in Oromia, Ethiopia's largest regional state with around 40 million people, or 35 percent of the total population (the largest share), freedom to vote for any party that was not PP was constrained. For many, it was a far fall from the "fair" process that Abiy had promised in 2018...'²⁶

5.4.6 Africa Confidential reported in October 2021:

'Any legitimacy from the electoral landslide has been undermined by questions over the election...

'Substantial irregularities marked the polling, with voting postponed in constituencies across six of the regional states. The major opposition party in the Somali region, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), withdrew after claiming the polls were unfair.

²⁵ IRI and NDI, '[Ethiopia June 21, 2021 national elections report](#)' (page 26), 5 August 2021

²⁶ Ethiopia Insight, '[Prosperity Party's win is a loss for Oromia - and Ethiopia](#)', 19 August 2021

‘There was no voting in Tigray because of the conflict and in Oromia leaders of the opposition Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Oromo Federal Congress (OFC) were arrested. Hundreds of party offices were closed and thousands of supporters detained. Opposition leaders were also arrested in Addis Ababa. The United States judged the election neither free nor fair and called for “inclusive political participation to move the country forward”.’²⁷

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5.5 Tigray conflict

- 5.5.1 In a September 2021 report for the US Congressional Research Service, Lauren Ploch Blanchard, a specialist in African affairs explained the background to the Tigray conflict:

‘Repression and abuses of power under the EPRDF [Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front], which some Ethiopians attribute specifically to the TPLF [Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front], fueled grievances and spurred a mass protest movement that brought Prime Minister Abiy to power. Abiy, a member of the EPRDF, pledged to open the country politically and economically, and commenced reforms. His efforts to mend ties with neighboring Eritrea, long strained by a border conflict and an antagonistic relationship between the TPLF and the Eritrean regime, won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. Later that year, Abiy merged the EPRDF coalition into a new Prosperity Party. The TPLF opposed the party’s creation, viewing it as part of an agenda to shift Ethiopia from a federal to a unitary state. Tensions between the TPLF and Abiy’s government rose, and an election dispute in 2020 led federal and Tigray regional authorities to challenge each other’s legitimacy. On November 4, 2020, Abiy announced military operations in Tigray, following an attack by Tigrayan forces on a military base in the region. The federal government described the attack as unprovoked and constituting treason, while the Tigray government asserted that its forces were acting in self-defense against a planned federal assault. Federal authorities have since accused the TPLF of orchestrating ethnic violence across Ethiopia to make it ungovernable. In May 2021, the Ethiopian government designated the party as a terrorist group.

‘The conflict has evolved into an apparent civil war in northern Ethiopia. It pits an array of armed groups aligned with the federal government—including the militaries of Ethiopia and Eritrea, paramilitary forces from Ethiopia’s regional states, and informal militia—against an ethnic insurgent force led by a former head of Ethiopia’s military and composed of former soldiers, Tigray regional security forces, militia, and civilian recruits.’²⁸

- 5.5.2 Al Jazeera online news site reported on 4 November 2021:

‘On November 4, 2020, the Ethiopian military was deployed to Tigray to squash forces loyal to the northern region’s governing party, the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), in response to what the government said was an attack on federal army camps.

²⁷ Africa Confidential, [‘Abiy’s war party digs in’](#), 21 October 2021

²⁸ US CRS, [‘Ethiopia’s transition and the Tigray conflict’](#), 9 September 2021

'The operation was meant to be swift but a year later, the conflict has expanded beyond the region's frontiers, causing a full-blown humanitarian crisis and leaving the country in a seemingly inescapable quagmire as the rebels claim to have made advances towards the capital, Addis Ababa.

'Since hostilities began, there have been mass rapes and massacres of civilians on a large scale. As far back as January [2021], aid agencies were sounding alarms about how much worse the situation could get. Continued fighting, bureaucratic hurdles and aid blockades have since led to a continuing famine affecting hundreds of thousands of people. More than two million people have been displaced from their homes and tens of thousands more have died...

'Meanwhile, widespread brutality and inciteful rhetoric on broadcast and social media have worsened ethnic tensions, with war also bringing about economic devastation, including skyrocketing inflation and high living costs.'²⁹

5.5.3 On 5 November 2021, CNN reported:

'Thousands of people have died in the fighting, by many estimates, with reports of razed refugee camps, looting, sexual violence, massacres and extrajudicial killings. Many more have fled to Sudan, in what the United Nations has called the worst exodus of refugees from Ethiopia seen in two decades. They describe a disastrous conflict that's given rise to ethnic violence.

'Ethiopia's government has severely restricted access to journalists, and a state-enforced communications blackout concealed events in the region, making it challenging to gauge the extent of the crisis or verify survivors' accounts.

'But evidence of atrocities began to leak out earlier this year...

'All actors in the conflict have been accused of carrying out atrocities, but Eritrean forces have been linked to some of the most gruesome. In addition to perpetrating mass killings and rape, Eritrean soldiers have also been found blocking and looting food relief in multiple parts of Tigray...

'Since the conflict began, ethnically-driven violence has broken out into other parts of the country, including in Abiy's home region, Oromia, the country's most populous region. In May, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), an armed group, vowed to wage "total war" against Abiy's government.'³⁰

5.5.4 On 17 November 2021, Al Jazeera reported: 'The TPLF, which used to dominate Ethiopian politics, accuses the federal government of centralising power. The government accuses the TPLF of trying to return to its previous dominance. Both are accused of violations that may amount to war crimes, the UN has said.'³¹

5.5.5 The UN reported on 26 November 2021:

²⁹ Al Jazeera, '[A year on, Ethiopia decimated by civil war](#)', 4 November 2021

³⁰ CNN, '[Ethiopia is at war with itself. Here's what you need to know about the conflict](#)', 5 Nov 2021

³¹ Al Jazeera, '[At least 1,000 arrested since Ethiopia state of emergency: UN](#)', 17 November 2021

‘[T]he Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, reiterated her grave concerns regarding the deterioration of the situation.

‘For Ms. Nderitu, several threats are “spiralling the country down to a path where the risk of commission of atrocity crimes, including genocide, is real and must be addressed as a matter of utmost urgency.”

‘She pointed to calls to arms and hate speech, militarization of society, ethnic profiling, denial of humanitarian access and blockage of food to areas under fighting inhabited by specific ethnic communities.’³²

- 5.5.6 On 29 November 2021, the pro-government Fana Broadcasting Corporate reported:

‘The Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has setup an Inter-Ministerial Taskforce to oversee redress and accountability measures in response to human rights violations committed in the context of the conflict in northern Ethiopia.

‘The Taskforce officially commenced its work on 29 November 2021 by adopting a comprehensive strategy and action plan for the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Joint Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).’³³

- 5.5.7 A joint statement issued on 6 December 2021, signed by the governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States, read:

‘Reports by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and Amnesty International describe widespread arrests of ethnic Tigrayans, including Orthodox priests, older people, and mothers with children. Individuals are being arrested and detained without charges or a court hearing and are reportedly being held in inhumane conditions...

‘We reiterate our grave concern at the human rights abuses and violations, such as those involving conflict related sexual violence, identified in the joint investigation report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the EHRC, and at ongoing reports of atrocities being committed by all parties to the conflicts.’³⁴

- 5.5.8 Following a withdrawal by Tigrayan Defence Forces into Tigray in December 2021 the conflict – which at the time of publication is unresolved – was largely contained within the Tigray region³⁵.

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5.6 State of emergency

- 5.6.1 Reuters reported on 2 November 2021:

³² UN News, ‘[9.4 million people are “living their worst nightmare” in northern Ethiopia...](#)’, 26 Nov 2021

³³ Fana Broadcasting Corporate, ‘[Inter-ministerial taskforce unveils action plan...](#)’, 29 Nov 2021

³⁴ USSD, ‘[Joint statement on detentions in Ethiopia](#)’, 6 December 2021

³⁵ Reuters, ‘[Ethiopia frees opposition leaders from prison, announces political dialogue](#)’, 8 Jan 2022

'Ethiopia declared a six-month state of emergency on Tuesday [2 November] after forces from the northern region of Tigray said they were gaining territory and considering marching on the capital Addis Ababa...

"Our country is facing a grave danger to its existence, sovereignty and unity. And we can't dispel this danger through the usual law enforcement systems and procedures," Justice Minister Gedion Timothewos told a state media briefing.

'He said anyone violating the emergency would face three to 10 years in prison, for offences such as providing financial, material or moral support to "terrorist groups"...

'The Addis Ababa city administration said people should register their weapons and gather in their neighbourhoods. House-to-house searches were being conducted and troublemakers arrested, a statement said.'³⁶

5.6.2 On the same day, abc News reported:

'The state of emergency takes effect immediately and will last for six months. The government can impose a curfew, order citizens into military training, disrupt transport services and travel, suspend licenses of media outlets and detain indefinitely anyone suspected of having links with a terrorist group.

'Local administrations in some areas could be disbanded and a military leadership could be installed. Unauthorized public gatherings and any expression of opposition to the state of emergency are banned.'³⁷

5.6.3 In an update the following day, Reuters reported:

'Abiy's government imposed a six-month state of emergency on Monday with immediate effect, which allows it to order citizens of military age to undergo training and accept military duties.

'It also allows authorities to arbitrarily arrest anyone suspected of collaborating with "terrorist groups" with a court order and detain them while the state of emergency lasts.'³⁸

5.6.4 Privately-owned, pro-government, Fana TV news reported on 15 November 2021 (summarised by BBC Monitoring): 'The State of Emergency Command Post has issued a directive banning the issuance of regular ID cards and replacing them with new state of emergency ID card for people who do not have ID cards. People who do not have ID cards must register with their local authorities within the next two weeks. People receiving the new cards must renew them every month.'³⁹

5.6.5 In a press briefing on 16 November 2021, the UN commented:

'We are concerned that arrests have been continuing over the last couple of weeks in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, as well as in Gondar, Bahir Dar and other locations, as police invoke the excessively wide provisions of the

³⁶ Reuters, '[Ethiopia declares state of emergency as Tigrayan forces gain ground](#)', 2 November 2021

³⁷ abc News, '[Ethiopia orders emergency as Tigray forces threaten capital](#)', 2 November 2021

³⁸ Reuters, '[Ethiopian leader, marking year of war, says he will bury foes "with our blood"](#)', 3 Nov 2021

³⁹ BBC Monitoring, '[Programme summary of Ethiopia's Fana TV news...](#)', 15 Nov 2021

state of emergency declared on 2 November to arrest, search and detain people.

‘These developments are all the more disturbing given that most of those detained are reported to be people of Tigrayan origin, arrested often on suspicion of being affiliated to or supporting the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF).

‘According to reports, at least 1,000 individuals are believed to have been detained over the past week or so – with some reports putting the figure much higher...

‘The state of emergency in force in Ethiopia risks compounding an already very serious human rights and humanitarian situation in the country. Its provisions are extremely broad, with vague prohibitions going as far as encompassing “indirect moral” support for what the government has labelled “terrorist groups”.

‘Under the state of emergency, judicial review of enforcement of its the provisions is explicitly suspended, and there are sweeping powers of arrest and potentially indefinite administrative detention for the duration of the emergency measure, raising serious concerns of risks of arbitrary detention.’⁴⁰

5.6.6 State-owned Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) reported on 26 January 2022:

‘The Council of Ministers proposed today the termination of the state of emergency that has been in force since November 2, 2021 as the danger that threatened the existence and sovereignty of the country is repulsed...

‘However, the situation in the country has now changed it has become necessary to shorten the state of emergency, according to the press release of the council.

‘The threat has reached a stage where law enforcement could be implemented regularly, it added.’⁴¹

5.6.7 BBC Monitoring provided up update from an article on the website of pro-government Fana Broadcasting Corporate: “Parliament lifted the state of emergency in its session today [15 February 2022] with a majority vote,” Fana reported.’⁴²

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Section 6 updated: 14 March 2022

6. OLF and OLA: timeline

6.1.1 The timeline is a non-exhaustive list of significant events relevant to understanding the formation, actions and situation of the OLF and OLA at

⁴⁰ OHCHR, ‘[Press briefing notes on Ethiopia](#)’, 16 November 2021

⁴¹ ENA, ‘[Council of Ministers Submits Proposal that Terminates State of Emergency](#)’, 26 Jan 2022

⁴² BBC Monitoring, ‘[Ethiopian parliament lifts state of emergency](#)’, 15 February 2022

the time of writing based on a variety of sources^{43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63}

- 1973: OLF is founded
- 1980s: The OLF fights alongside other ethnic-based groups (including the TPLF) against the ruling Derg (military junta) regime
- 1991: The Derg is toppled. The EPRDF (a coalition of ethnic-based groups which fought against the Derg) comes to power
- 1992: Relations sour between the EPRDF and the OLF when the EPRDF insists that the OLF abandons its aim of secession. OLF members are exiled to Eritrea and begin an armed struggle against the EPRDF
- 1991 to 2019: The EPRDF remains in power for almost 3 decades, during which period it becomes increasingly intolerant of dissent. The EPRDF is dominated by the TPLF, with members of the Tigrayan ethnic group holding a disproportionate number of government and security posts. The TPLF's dominance and abuses of power create resentment among other ethnic groups
- 1994: A new Constitution results in the division of Ethiopia into ethnically-based regions. The Constitution sets out a federal system structured mainly on language in which the country's diverse ethnic groups are granted the right of self-rule as well as representation at the federal level. Critics of the ethnic-federal system see it as hardening ethnic identity and divisions, and thereby weakening national unity
- 2011: The OLF is designated as a terrorist organisation by the Ethiopian government (EPRDF)
- 2015 elections: EPRDF wins 100% of the seats in parliament
- 2016 to 2018: Two years of anti-government protests by the country's 2 largest ethnic groups (Oromo and Amhara) puts increasing pressure on

⁴³ US CRS, '[Ethiopia's transition and the Tigray conflict](#)', 9 September 2021

⁴⁴ BBC, '[Ethiopia's Oromia conflict: Why a teacher was killed "execution-style"](#)', 16 January 2021

⁴⁵ BBC, '[Ethiopia profile – timeline](#)', 12 October 2020

⁴⁶ BBC Monitoring, '[Tigray People's Liberation Front \(TPLF\)](#)', 11 November 2021

⁴⁷ BBC Monitoring, '[Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#)', 16 March 2021

⁴⁸ abc News, '[Tigray, other groups form alliance against Ethiopia's leader](#)', 5 November 2021

⁴⁹ Ethiopia Insight, '[Prosperity Party's win is a loss for Oromia - and Ethiopia](#)', 19 August 2021

⁵⁰ IRI and NDI, '[Ethiopia June 21, 2021 national elections report](#)', 5 August 2021

⁵¹ France 24, '[Leader of Ethiopia's Oromo rebels predicts victory "very soon"](#)', 8 November 2021

⁵² EHRC and OHCHR, '[Report of the EHRC and OHCHR joint investigation...](#)', 3 Nov 2021

⁵³ EHRC, '[Violence and human rights violations following musician Hachalu...](#)', 1 January 2021

⁵⁴ IPSS, '[Peace and security report: Ethiopia conflict insight](#)', May 2020

⁵⁵ International Crisis Group, '[Ethiopia votes, but balloting will not ease...](#)', 17 June 2021

⁵⁶ Reuters, '[Ethiopia frees opposition leaders from prison, announces political dialogue](#)', 8 Jan 2022

⁵⁷ Council on Foreign Relations, '[Ethiopia conflict dynamics shift as new US envoy...](#)', 10 Jan 2022

⁵⁸ DW, '[Ethiopia to create national dialogue commission](#)', 30 December 2021

⁵⁹ ENA, '[Council of Ministers Submits Proposal that Terminates State of Emergency](#)', 26 Jan 2022

⁶⁰ Addis Standard, '[OFC, ONLF say Dialogue Commission process unrepresentative...](#)', 4 Feb 2022

⁶¹ BBC Monitoring, '[Ethiopian parliament lifts state of emergency](#)', 15 February 2022

⁶² BBC Monitoring, '[Ethiopian opposition leader "under house arrest"](#)', 9 March 2022

⁶³ BBC Monitoring, '[Ethiopia shortlists candidates to oversee national dialogue](#)', 27 Jan 2022

the EPRDF and leads to the resignation of Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn

- March and April 2018: Abiy Ahmed is chosen as the EPRDF's new leader (and first Oromo leader) and is sworn in as the new Prime Minister. Abiy promises reforms, including a transition to multiparty democracy and resolution to the country's ethnic and political divisions. Abiy's premiership is particularly welcomed in Oromia
- May to June 2018: As part of the reforms, thousands of political prisoners are released
- 5 July 2018: Parliament removes the OLF from the list of terrorist organisations along with the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and Ginbot 7
- August 2018: The exiled leaders of the OLF sign a peace deal with Abiy's government and return to Ethiopia. Abiy's election, together with the return of the OLF, raises hopes among ethnic Oromo for greater regional autonomy
- October 2018: The OLF begins to disarm the soldiers of its armed wing (the Oromo Liberation Army, OLA). One of the OLF's commanders, Kumsa Diriba (also known as Jaal Maro), fails to reach a deal with the government over the disarmament of fighters. Diriba's faction splits from the OLF and continues to fight against the government for the 'liberation' of Oromia under the name, OLA. The faction is referred to by the government as OLF-Shene or Shene
- January 2019: Attempts to mediate to resolve issues over the disarmament of the OLA fail
- April 2019: The OLA announces that it has established its own High Command and officially separates from the OLF
- May 2019: The OLF dissociates itself from the OLA and states that it will pursue peaceful politics and no longer have an armed group
- October 2019: Abiy Ahmed wins the Nobel Peace Prize for agreeing peace with Eritrea
- November 2019: The OLF is officially recognised as a legally registered political party
- November and December 2019: In an attempt to tackle the divisions created by ethno-regional politics, Abiy Ahmed dissolves the EPRDF coalition and merges 3 of the constituent parties (the ODP, ADP and SEPDM) into a single entity, the Prosperity Party. The TPLF refuses to join, claiming that the unification will divide the country. Some members of Abiy's ODP also object to the merge and some Oromo are concerned about a return to centralised rule

Among supporters of Ethiopia's ethnic-based federal system, Abiy's decision to create a new merged party is interpreted as a move away from regional autonomy and towards a centralised state. Abiy is accused of wanting to consolidate his power

- January 2020: The OLF form a coalition with the OFC and the ONP, the Coalition for Democratic Federalism, which aims to form a regional coalition government
- Conflict between different ethnic groups increases during Abiy Ahmed's tenure, with Abiy criticised for insufficiently addressing the problem
- March 2020: The NEBE announces the suspension of general elections (scheduled for August 2020) due to COVID-19. The TPLF claims that this is unconstitutional
- June 2020: The murder of Hachalu Hundessa, an Oromo musician and activist who had been critical of Abiy, triggers protests and unrest in Addis Ababa and parts of Oromia. Over 100 people die as a result of mob violence and the subsequent crackdown by government security forces during which thousands are arrested
- July 2020: In response to the protests, members of opposition parties are arrested for alleged connection with the violence. OLF chairman, Dawud Ibsa, is placed under house arrest
- September 2020: Election dispute escalates when the TPLF-led regional government proceeds with regional elections in Tigray, despite warnings from Abiy's government. The TPLF is declared the winner of all seats while the federal government declares the results null and void
- October 2020: TPLF recalls all of its representatives from the federal parliament and other federal government institutions, and states that it no longer accepts the legitimacy of the federal government
- 4 November 2020: Following an attack by Tigrayan forces on a federal military base, Abiy announces military operations in Tigray. The Ethiopian government impedes the delivery of humanitarian aid to Tigray during the ensuing conflict
- March 2021: OLF states that it will not participate in the June 2021 national elections due to the closure of some of its offices and the detention of some of its members and leaders, including Dawud Ibsa. The OFC also choose to boycott the elections
- May 2021: the Ethiopian government designates the TPLF as a terrorist group, alongside the OLA (OLF-Shene)
- June 2021: Postponed national elections take place, with a win for Abiy's ruling PP, although there is no voting in 3 regions (Tigray, Somali and Harari) due to security and logistical issues. There are reports of interference in opposition parties' campaigns and detention of opposition politicians
- June/July 2021: Following a successful offensive by the Tigray Defense Forces (TDF) the conflict spills outside of Tigray into the neighbouring regions of Afar and Amhara. Reinforcements arrive from other parts of Ethiopia to fight against the TDF and regional authorities in Amhara, Oromia and Afar call for civilians to take up arms

- 11 August 2021: Despite historic grievances, the OLA forms a military alliance with the TPLF to fight against a common enemy (Abiy's government). The TPLF and OLA are both supporters of regional self-determination
- September 2021: Second phase of belated June election takes place
- October 2021: Abiy forms a new government and appoints Kejella Merdassa of the OLF to his Cabinet as Minister of Culture and Sport
- 2 November 2021: Following territorial gains by the TDF and OLA, Abiy's government declares a state of emergency
- 5 November 2021: The anti-government TPLF-OLA alliance expands to include 7 other groups
- December 2021: The federal forces supported by various militias push the TDF back into Tigray. Sporadic fighting and airstrikes continue in parts of Tigray
- December 2021: A Commission for National Dialogue is established to address political and ethnic grievances
- January 2022: A number of opposition leaders are freed from prison including senior members of the TPLF and leaders from Oromia, including Bekele Gerba of the OFC and Jawar Mohammed, founder of the Oromia Media Network. As at 9 March 2022, OLF Chairman Dawud Ibsa remained under house arrest
- January 2022: The Council of Ministers submits a proposal to end the state of emergency – which has been in place since November 2021 – due to a reduction in threat from rebel groups
- January 2022: The government confirms no armed group will take part in the National Dialogue, thereby excluding the TPLF and OLA
- February 2022: The OLF and OFC confirm non-participation in the National Dialogue process
- February 2022: State of emergency is lifted.

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Section 7 updated: 14 March 2022

7. Background to Oromo grievances

7.1.1 In November 2020, a week after the outbreak of war in Tigray, DW reported on violence in other regions, including Oromia:

'Troubling developments are also seen in the Oromia region, where the prime minister is now facing strong opposition from the same groups that propelled him to power.

'Oromo opposition groups became part of the political scene in 2018 after years in exile. They believe Abiy, who portrayed himself as the country's unifier, is not giving sufficient priority to the interests of their group.

'Thus, within Oromia, different political factions are now fighting against each other. Some are also targeting non-Oromo residents. The Oromo Liberation

Army, which broke off from the Oromo Liberation Front... has caused widespread damage in the region.

'The faction is being held responsible for the murder in June 2020 of a prominent Oromo singer, Hachalu Hundessa. Protests following the assassination killed at least 150 people. The group is also accused of the recent killing of over 50 ethnic Amharas in the western part of Oromia.

'Ethiopian security have also been accused of grave human rights violations against Amhara and Oromia, including extrajudicial executions and arbitrary detentions carried out during operations aimed at responding to attacks by armed groups and inter-communal clashes.'⁶⁴

7.1.2 In June 2021, the BBC assessed the impact on the Oromo community of Abiy's election:

'When Abiy Ahmed became prime minister of Ethiopia three years ago, the Oromo community felt their shackles had finally been broken.

'He was one of them - he understood the anger of the country's largest ethnic group who had led mass demonstrations leading to his predecessor's resignation...

'For Oromos have felt like second-class citizens in their own country - once referred to even in official circles by a derogatory slur known as the G-word, the equivalent of the N-word, and made to feel ashamed of their cultural identity...

'Amid the euphoria that greeted Mr Abiy as Ethiopia's first Oromo prime minister, things did change.

'Oromo fashion shows were held in Addis Ababa, the Oromo's Irreecha thanksgiving festival took place in the capital for the first time in a century, investment came to the region, political prisoners were released, and opposition figures, including the hugely popular Oromo media mogul Jawar Mohammed, were welcomed back from exile.

'There was a little unease about some of Mr Abiy's other political reforms, but last year things deteriorated fast when [musician and activist] Hachalu [Hundessa], who had said he was getting death threats, was killed - the motive is still unclear.

'For the alphabet generation [a reference to the introduction of Afaan Oromoo into schools from the early 1990s] their hero was dead - it led to a wave of ethnic unrest, leaving more than 160 people dead and the arrest of opposition figures like Mr Jawar, who now faces charges of terrorism and incitement to violence... [Mr Jawar was released from detention in January 2022]

'Mr Abiy's idea [when establishing the Prosperity Party] was to have a more ethnically diverse party - the country has more than 80 ethnic groups - but with a unity of purpose to resolve ethnic differences which often boil over to violence...

⁶⁴ DW, '[Ethiopian PM 'at war' with Tigray](#)', 10 November 2020

‘However, Mr Abiy has been Machiavellian in his determination to set up the PP, says Mr Faisal [from the Institute for Horn of Africa Studies and Affairs], ditching Oromo allies who disagreed with him like Lemma Megersa. Mr Lemma had nominated him for prime minister, but was sacked last year as defence minister for criticising the PP's creation.

‘Mr Faisal agrees that the PP has opened its doors to more groups, but says it could be a way to impose "autocratic rule" - something Oromo politicians who favour a more decentralised federal system fear.’⁶⁵

7.1.3 In January 2021, the BBC noted:

‘In Oromia, the security forces have also arrested almost the entire leadership of the two main opposition parties, the OLF and Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), accusing them of fuelling violence [following the death of Hachalu Hundessa] to advance their cause for greater autonomy. They deny instigating violence.

‘Their detention has led to many opposition supporters concluding that the political space Mr Abiy opened in 2018 had now closed. This has resulted in sympathy, if not support, for the OLA growing, especially among youths impatient for change.’⁶⁶

7.1.4 Africa Confidential reported in June 2021:

‘After Abiy set up the PP in December 2019, moving from support for a federal structure to a more unitary government, his relations with leading Oromo political figures, including Jawar Mohammed, the owner of the influential Oromo Media Network that helped bring Abiy to power, deteriorated.

‘After the killing of the popular Oromo singer Hachalu Hundessa in June 2020, Abiy used the chaos to arrest the region's leaders such as Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Garba, and Hamza Borena, from the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC); and Gemechu Ayana, Michael Boran and Dawud Ibsa, under house arrest since April this year, from the OLF.

‘This crackdown included the detention of hundreds of members of the OFC and its supporters and the closure of over 200 OFC offices. After that, the two main Oromo opposition parties, the OLF and the OFC, boycotted the election, scuppering its credibility. Voting was largely peaceful in Oromia, although the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA-Shane), now classified as a terrorist organisation by Addis, was accused of attacking a couple of polling stations near Ambo, 120 kilometres west of Addis Ababa.’⁶⁷

7.1.5 In August 2021, online news site Ethiopia Insight provided a review of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's time in power:

‘Despite his focus on unity, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has failed to reconcile Ethiopian and Oromo political identities, and so failed to live up to his own promises...

⁶⁵ BBC, [‘Why Ethiopia's “alphabet generation” feel betrayed by Abiy’](#), 19 June 2021

⁶⁶ BBC, [‘Ethiopia's Oromia conflict: Why a teacher was killed “execution-style”](#)’, 16 January 2021

⁶⁷ Africa Confidential, [‘War casts shadow over Abiy's election plan’](#), 24 June 2021

‘...In an address in June 2018, a little over a month after taking office, he denounced the EPRDF government’s approach, and apologized for past atrocities, even calling them acts of “terrorism” ...

‘Although divisive, it was the type of approach that led many Oromos to feel that the sacrifices they had made were finally bearing fruit, bringing an end to an era of tyranny, and paving the way for Oromo people to gain equal treatment and have their demands addressed at the national level.

‘Abiy pledged to revise controversial laws, open up the political landscape, respect human rights, and hold free and fair elections. The enthusiasm in Oromia was palpable. But, the euphoria did not last long...

‘For example, less than three weeks after becoming prime minister, at a meeting with Amhara academics in Bahir Dar on 21 April 2018, he said that “Oromo nationalism reduced this great nation to a local community”.

‘Ever since, a campaign against Oromo nationalism has proliferated with devastating effects for many Oromo people, and with disastrous implications for the country...

‘In December 2019, Abiy merged all EPRDF parties besides TPLF under the Prosperity Party, along with five allied regional ruling parties. The Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), the Oromo EPRDF party, was absorbed by PP...

‘As it became apparent that opening the political space in Oromia - giving room for Oromo nationalism and allowing democratic activity by opposition parties - all risked PP’s power, new restrictions were introduced.

‘The NEBE amended the country’s election law and devised regulations and directives for registering political parties...

‘Both the OLF and the OFC concluded that Abiy’s aim in restructuring the NEBE was in order to help him win.’⁶⁸

- 7.1.6 Also in October 2021, the Independent reported: ‘The Oromos have historically expressed frustration at their perceived economic and political marginalisation. Abiy is the country’s first Oromo leader, but he faces growing criticism by some Oromo that he hasn’t done enough for them.’⁶⁹

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Section 8 updated: 14 March 2022

8. Distinction between OLF and OLA (OLF-Shene)

- 8.1.1 According to the HO Ethiopia fact-finding mission report conducted between 16 September 2019 and 20 September 2019, published on 10 February 2020 : ‘The Horn of Africa Researcher observed that ‘OLF’ and the ‘OLA’ are sometimes used interchangeably. However, “...the OLA refers more to the fighters, and the OLF more to the political body that used to be mostly in the diaspora, who had control of the OLA. The extent to which OLF controls the OLA or more precisely the fighters who used to be connected to OLF/OLA is open to debate.”’⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ethiopia Insight, [‘Prosperity Party’s win is a loss for Oromia - and Ethiopia’](#), 19 August 2021

⁶⁹ Independent, [‘Ethiopia’s Oromo protest, demand freedom for jailed leaders’](#), 2 October 2021

⁷⁰ Home Office, [‘Report of a Home Office fact-finding mission, Ethiopia’](#) (page 29), 10 February 2020

8.1.2 Based upon articles by The Economist and Amnesty International in March and May 2020, together with information from a confidential source, the Netherlands Government COI service reported in February 2021: 'The OLF leadership under Dawud Ibsa officially distanced itself from the armed wing [the OLA], but both public and confidential sources believe that the two sides are still maintaining covert contact.'⁷¹

8.1.3 A May 2021 article by The Reporter stated:

'The House of Peoples' Representatives (HPR) endorsed a resolution passed to it by the council of Ministers designating the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Shene [OLA] as terrorist organizations...

'During the meeting, MPs urged officials to establish a strong controlling mechanism to implement the designation as per the law and avoid the persecution of innocent citizens by linking them improperly with these organizations.

'MPs also questioned the use of the name "Shene" as the group has been called "OLF Shene" all along. Responding to the question, Attorney General Gideon Timothewos (PhD) explained that the government didn't want to use the name they use to glorify themselves and instead opted to use just "Shene". He also noted that there is another organization called "OLF" that is recognized by the National Election Board of Ethiopia. He explained that Shene refers to the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA).

'To this effect, the Attorney General told lawmakers that ordinary citizens would not be affected and that there is an ongoing capacity building training for security personnel.'⁷²

8.1.4 In a September 2021 response, the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (CIRB) cited a translation of a Landinfo (Norwegian government COI provider) report:

'According to Norway Landinfo's correspondence with a professor and director at Oslo Analytica (Norway 6 Jan. 2021, 32), who conducted fieldwork in Oromia in the spring and summer of 2020, the distinction between OLF members and the [translation] "ordinary" population in Oromia region "has been more or less erased, and, potentially, anybody can be branded as OLF," leading to a "growing degree" of "collective punishment of the population" (Norway 6 Jan. 2021, 23). The same source adds that accusations of OLA affiliation have been deployed by the authorities to [translation] "strike" against all forms of political opposition, "regardless of whether individuals or groups" have ties to the OLA "in reality" (Norway 6 Jan. 2021, 23).'⁷³

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⁷¹ Government of the Netherlands, '[General COI information report: Ethiopia](#)' (page 17), Feb 2021

⁷² The Reporter, '[House endorses designation of TPLF, Shene as Terrorist groups](#)', 8 May 2021

⁷³ CIRB, '[Ethiopia: Treatment of members of opposition parties...](#)' (section 3.1), 29 September 2021

9. Oromo Liberation Front (political party)

9.1 Political stance and objectives

9.1.1 OLF officers interviewed during a Home Office (HO) fact-finding mission to Ethiopia in September 2019 stated:

“...our goal is for liberty, equality, democracy and social justice. What we want is different to the reforms that are taking place, we expect what we want will not be respected until fair, free and reliable election will be conducted that should lead to real self-determination.... the reforms are very far from what were demanded and not in agreement with the wish and ultimate goals of our party.” They also listed the making of Afan Oromo a federal working language, the right for self-rule, and the respect for rule of law.⁷⁴

9.1.2 In a press release on its website, dated 25 August 2021, the OLF stated: ‘The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) as a leading Oromo political organization has relentlessly directed and coordinated the Oromo People’s struggle for self-determination for almost half a century. The OLF from its inception has been providing a comprehensive leadership to various forms of Oromo struggle for freedom and democracy including armed resistance, political engagement, and diplomatic endeavors.’⁷⁵

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9.2 Internal divisions

9.2.1 In addition to its breakaway armed wing (the OLA), the OLF has undergone other internal splits. This section describes some of the reasons for these splits, including disagreements over cooperation with the ruling Prosperity Party and whether or not to participate in the June 2021 elections.

9.2.2 On 17 March 2021, the Addis Standard reported:

‘The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) has been making headlines related to divisions within the leadership. In a recent development, the faction led by the deputy chairman Ararso Biqila has held a general assembly and elected a new chairman. The chairman of the party, Dawud Ibsa has put out several statements explaining the illegitimacy of the general assembly held by the splinter group...

‘In an interview with BBC Afaan Oromo the deputy chairman of the splinter group, Qejela Merdasa said, “The decision to withdraw from the election is not unanimously agreed upon” Qejela Merdasa who was head of the party’s public relations bureau before the split, expressed intentions by the splinter group to participate in the upcoming elections by requesting to be given more time to register candidates.’⁷⁶

9.2.3 In a press release dated 25 August 2021, the OLF stated on its website:

‘In the course of the last three years, a clandestine group that camouflaged itself as part of the OLF leadership... eventually allied itself with the newly formed ruling prosperity Party (PP) and took off its mask around 2019, while

⁷⁴ Home Office, ‘[Report of a Home Office fact-finding mission, Ethiopia](#)’ (page 25), 10 February 2020

⁷⁵ OLF, ‘[A brief note on current situation of Oromo liberation struggle](#)’, 25 August 2021

⁷⁶ Addis Standard, ‘[Dawud Ibsa’s OLF slams Electoral Board for participation...](#)’, 17 March 2021

still attempting, though in vain, to disguise themselves as part of the legitimate leadership. Ever since, they came to be known, to Oromos and other Ethiopians alike, as OLF-Hilton/OLF-PP because their founding meetings used to be conducted at Hilton Addis Ababa aided by the ruling PP with all the necessary logistics for its missions.

‘... OLF-Hilton/PP has played vital roles in the incarceration and jailing of almost all the OLF leaders at different levels for the purpose of executing the group’s very mission of debilitating or destroying the strong foothold OLF has commanded within the Oromo populace. The OLF-Hilton/PP group, primarily composed of such gullible souls as Ararso Bikila, Ibsaa Nagawo, Tolera Adaba, Qajeela Mardaasaa, and Atoomsa Kumsaa openly embarked on the mission of smear campaign and misleading propaganda press releases against the Oromo people’s struggle led by the OLF, only in exchange for some handouts from the ruling PP discharged to them in the forms of petty cash par-dime including food & beverages.’⁷⁷

9.2.4 In October 2021, Africa Confidential reported details of a Cabinet reshuffle by Prime Minister Abiy which included the appointment of Kejella Merdassa (of the OLF) as Minister of Culture and Sport⁷⁸.

9.2.5 Also in October 2021, Yeroo, a privately-owned Oromo news site, reported: ‘Top Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) official Kejella Merdassa has joined Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s new cabinet, which includes a prominent Tigrayan as Defense Minister.

‘Kejella was nominated for Minister of Culture as part of a historic three opposition party figures gaining ministerial positions in the executive branch of the Ethiopian government. Since the 2018 reform, several high level OLF officials have been selected to serve in Ethiopian government. OLF’s Brig. Gen. Kemal Gelchu was previously appointed as chief of Oromia Security while OLF former spokesman Lencho Bati remains a Senior Advisor to Abiy.’⁷⁹

9.2.6 Pro-government Fana TV news reported on 17 Nov 2021 (summarised by BBC Monitoring): ‘Lencho Latta, a former leader of the Oromo Liberation Front, said that Shene’s [OLA] collabroation with the TPLF showed that it was interested in returning the TPLF subjugation of the Oromo people... He said the Shene-TPLF collaboration was a surprising historical phenomenon. If the TPLF returned to power, it will definitely be harsher on the Oromo people whose protests forced the TPLF out.’⁸⁰

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9.3 Size and membership of the OLF

9.3.1 A Home Office fact-finding mission to Ethiopia in September 2019, published in February 2020, stated: ‘The OLF officers noted that members are recruited from the community and given training, including on the party’s

⁷⁷ OLF, ‘[Bogus claims and press releases in the name of our vanguard organization...](#)’, 25 Aug 2021

⁷⁸ Africa Confidential, ‘[After his inauguration, Prime Minister Abiy reshuffles...](#)’, 19 October 2021

⁷⁹ Yeroo, ‘[OLF leader joins Abiy cabinet, as Tigrayan picked for Defense Minister](#)’, 6 October 2021

⁸⁰ BBC Monitoring, ‘[Programme Summary of Ethiopia’s Fana TV news...](#)’, 20 November 2021

political manifesto. They receive official membership cards. Duties of members include attracting supporters and opening offices.⁸¹

9.3.2 And: 'The OLF officers stated they had approximately 6 million supporters on their return to Addis Ababa from exile and they have a lot of support in Oromia.'⁸²

9.3.3 The IPSS reported in May 2020: 'Despite its internal divisions, the OLF continues to garner wide support from Oromo community, particularly in the Western Oromia, Borana, Guji, and Eastern part of Ethiopia.'⁸³

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9.4 Ability to function as a political group

9.4.1 Addis Standard reported on 10 March 2021:

'The opposition party Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) has officially announced that it has withdrawn from the upcoming election. In an interview with Addis Standard the party's interim public relations head, Batte Urgessa, a staggering number of names of the party's leadership and members who are currently jailed, as well as list of its offices which are forcibly shut down either by the federal or Oromia regional state security forces, which Batte said has depopulated the party of its key personnel, and deprived it of the ability to organize for election.'⁸⁴

9.4.2 Africa Confidential reported in June 2021: 'Abiy's ruling PP faced no opposition in Oromo region, the country's largest, providing 178 out of the 547 federal parliamentary seats, as the opposition parties [including the OLF] boycotted the election.'⁸⁵

9.4.3 The IRI and NDI's August 2021 report on Ethiopia's national elections noted:

'Several political parties, including major opposition parties in Oromia regional state, the OLF and the OFC, announced in March [2021] that they would not participate in the elections. They stated that their participation was conditional on the freeing of all political prisoners, restoring of their party offices, all-inclusive negotiations, and political dialogue. It was also said that the OLF was affected by internal developments. Consequently, elections were contested by only a single candidate in 104 of the 170 HoPR constituencies in Oromia in which elections took place on June 21.'⁸⁶

9.4.4 Ethiopia Insight reported in September 2021:

'Complaints against NEBE's revised registration regulations, which were seen by some opposition actors as prohibitively complex, were issued by multiple opposition parties in Oromia. In total, the NEBE denied accreditation to a dozen parties in the region for not meeting registration requirements, half of whom filed charges. Court proceedings took months. In April, the

⁸¹ Home Office, '[Report of a Home Office fact-finding mission, Ethiopia](#)' (page 26), 10 February 2020

⁸² Home Office, '[Report of a Home Office fact-finding mission, Ethiopia](#)' (page 26), 10 February 2020

⁸³ IPSS, '[Peace and security report: Ethiopia conflict insight](#)' (page 9), May 2020

⁸⁴ Addis Standard, '[OLF officially out from upcoming election...](#)', 10 March 2021

⁸⁵ Africa Confidential, '[War casts shadow over Abiy's election plan](#)', 24 June 2021

⁸⁶ IRI and NDI, '[Ethiopia June 21, 2021 national elections report](#)' (page 13), 5 August 2021

Supreme Court ordered the board to re-register certificates for two parties, but it was too late for them to campaign effectively.

‘Of the parties that the NEBE certified, reports of harassment, arbitrary arrests, and office shutdowns were common. The OFC alone claimed that more than 300 of its senior officials and party members had been arrested, and over 200 of its offices closed down. The OLF alleged that over 100 of its offices were shut down in five regions and that more than 880 of its members had been arrested since 2020, including more than 100 senior officials arrested at the party’s headquarters.

‘In March, both the OFC and OLF announced they would be unable to participate in the election. The parties accused the incumbent of suppression and accused NEBE of working in cahoots with PP.’⁸⁷

- 9.4.5 On 4 February 2022, Addis Standard provided an update on the establishment of the National Dialogue Commission: ‘Lemi Gemechu, Public Relations head of the OLF, told Addis Standard today that the party doesn’t know “what the dialogue is about. We were not invited.” Although members of the OFC are released from detention, [the] majority of OLF’s senior leadership remain either detained or missing. Many were set free on court bail but were rearrested by the police.’⁸⁸

- 9.4.6 See [June 2021 elections](#).

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Section 10 updated: 14 March 2022

10. State treatment of OLF members and supporters

- 10.1.1 CPIT has used data downloaded from ACLED to produce the table below. The table gives details of arrests linked to involvement with the OLF. The table covers incidents between 1 January 2020 and 19 November 2021, which took place in Addis Ababa or Oromia region and which have been classified by ACLED as event type ‘Strategic developments’ and sub-event type ‘Arrests’.

Date	Location	Notes on arrests
27 Jan 2020	Oromia	Authorities conducted mass arrests of OLF political supporters in Finchawa, and Shambu town of Horo-Guduru Wallaga Zone.
3 July 2020	Addis Ababa	Several high-ranking OLF leaders were arrested by federal police in the capital Addis Ababa following wide-spread unrest in Oromo region. Over a thousand additional people were arrested in connection with the unrest, including various political and traditional leaders.
27 Nov 2020	Oromia, North Shewa	Federal police announced the arrest of 469 persons accused of supporting the OLF in North Shewa, Oromia.

⁸⁷ Ethiopia Insight, ‘[Lust for power trumped reformist zeal in Ethiopia’s election](#)’, 21 September 2021

⁸⁸ Addis Standard, ‘[OFC, ONLF say Dialogue Commission process unrepresentative...](#)’, 4 Feb 2022

17 Jan 2021	Oromia, East Shewa	'Measures' were taken against around 1,000 Oromia state police officers who had allegedly worked with the OLF. 'Measures' usually refer to arrests in this context.
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10.1.2 Amnesty International reported in January 2020:

'Amnesty International has confirmed that at least 75 supporters of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) were arrested over the weekend from various places in different parts of Oromia Regional State, as Ethiopian authorities intensify the crackdown on dissenting political views ahead of the general elections...

'Arrests took place across the state including in Finchawa town in West Guji Zone of Oromia, and Shambu town in Horo-Guduru Wallaga Zone of Oromia.'⁹⁰

10.1.3 The Addis Standard reported on 21 December 2020:

'Opposition party Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), said yesterday that ten of its members, including two journalists working for its broadcast, Sagaallee Billiisummaa Oromo (SBO), were arrested by government security forces over the weekend.

'In a separate statement it issued today, OLF said it doesn't know the whereabouts of the ten people who it said were arrested over the weekend. They are: Mohamed Regassa, member of the Central Committee and spokesperson; Murata Saba (Malkaa Danu), member of the Central Committee; Dr. Gada Olijira, administrator of OLF chairman's office; Yerosan Ayuu, OLF Addis Abeba surrounding office organizational affairs head; Tumassa (Assefa Fikadu), member of organizational affairs office; Gurumu Ayanna, OLF cadre; Gessisa Kussa, OLF organizational affairs Mandi area office and Lidiya Alli Mansissa, OLF women's league member. In addition[,]two journalists working for SBO: Ayatuu Bulcha and Ibssa Gadissa, were in the list of names released by the OLF.'⁹¹

10.1.4 In a March 2021 press release, the Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA), an Ethiopia-focused human rights organisation based in Canada, commented:

'[In a letter to the NEBE, dated 7 December 2020] OLF has provided 39 pages of detailed data (evidences) [sic] comprising 20 arrested higher officials arrested from the Head Quarter; 119 senior members and officers of the party arrested from different places; and 103 offices closed in Oromia, Finfinne (capital Addis Ababa), Dire Dawa, Wollo and Benishangul-Gumuz Region.

'According to the latest data HRLHA was able to access from the party [OLF], a total of about 884 higher officials, senior members and officers of the party have been detained all over Oromia and other places where the party operates...

⁸⁹ ACLED, '[Data export tool](#)', data downloaded 23 November 2021

⁹⁰ AI, '[Ethiopia: Authorities crack down on opposition supporters with mass arrests](#)', 27 January 2020

⁹¹ Addis Standard, '[OLF accuses gov't of fresh crackdown on its members...](#)', 21 December 2020

For the past six months, in addition to series of consultations made with the parties [OLF and OFC] and other neutral sources, HRLHA has been able to gather data consisting both material and documentary evidences [sic] in order to verify allegations of the parties in line with the truth on the ground.’⁹²

- 10.1.5 Also in March 2021, the Addis Standard interviewed an OLF official, Batte Urgessa, who described the arrests of OLF members in the run-up to the June election:

‘According to Batte many of the members are under police custody despite courts “repeatedly” granting bail and dismissing their cases for lack of sufficient evidence. Most of the members were taken and arrested either from their workplaces or homes. Some were arrested while they were visiting other jailed members. Twenty four members of the party were arrested from the headquarters alone in August last year [2020] and the headquarters remained inaccessible to party members, guarded by Addis Abeba police. More than 108 offices are closed by Oromia police across the regional state, according to him.

‘Bette spoke of several arbitrary arrests and haphazard legal proceedings that featured rearrests, delayed trials, dishonor of court orders and transfer of detainees to different detention centers without adequate reason and family’s knowledge. Addis Standard had received a list of more than 200 jailed members and 15 offices closed across several zones in Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz regional states as well as Addis Abeba city administration.’⁹³

- 10.1.6 On 15 June 2021, Amnesty International (AI) announced: ‘Dawud Ibsa, the chairman of the Oromo Liberation Front, an Ethiopian oppositional political party, has been placed under house arrest in his home in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, since 3 May 2021. This was done after the police conducted an illegal search of his home and seized electronic equipment.’⁹⁴

- 10.1.7 The Addis Standard reported in June 2021:

‘Abdi Regassa, a senior member of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was reportedly taken by security forces after the court ordered his release. His lawyer Tuli Bayisa told *Addis Standard* that the Oromia Supreme court acquitted Abdi of terrosim [sic] charges on June 24, 2021. Abdi was taken to an undisclosed location after he was arrested, Tuli said...

‘Abdi Regassa is a former Commander of Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) who then became a member of OLF’s Executive Committee. He was among the senior OLF officials whose house was raided and were arbitrarily arrested at the end of February, 2020. The police denied holding him for days while Mikael Gobena, Dr. Shugit Geleta, Kenessa Ayana, Muhe Raya, Tesfaye Meko, Selemon Teshome, Gamtessa Boru and Abdulkarim Abdurehaman were released shortly after. Abdi has been presented at different district

⁹² HRLHA, ‘[The two vanguard Oromo political organisations, OLF and OFC...](#)’, 24 March 2021

⁹³ Addis Standard, ‘[OLF officially out from upcoming election...](#)’, 10 March 2021

⁹⁴ AI, ‘[Ethiopia: Opposition politician under house arrest: Dawud Ibsa](#)’, 15 June 2021

courts in the Oromia region facing different charges and judges have ordered his release multiple times.’⁹⁵

10.1.8 The Addis Standard reported on 11 January 2022:

‘Colonel Gemechu Ayana, a senior leader of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was yesterday arraigned at court alongside four other defendants to continue the hearing after the prosecutor filed an appeal against the charges the court dropped about seven months ago...

‘Colonel Gemechu is a member of OLF’s political officer [sic] who was arrested in July 2020. Over the course of 18 months, he remained jailed after he was repeatedly granted bail and acquitted at last. He was re-arrested multiple times and transferred to several detention camps without the knowledge of his family and lawyers.’⁹⁶

10.1.9 In a press release on its website dated 10 February 2022, the OLF wrote:

‘The Ethiopian government, led by the Prosperity party (PP), has continued cracking down on political dissent, particularly on members and supporters of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The PP security apparatus has been torturing senior OLF leaders and members by unlawfully detaining and keeping them in prisons without any due court trial process. They have been kept in different police stations and detention centers away from families and relatives...

‘Of the many senior OLF leaders and members kept in prison by the PP government, about 30 of them are detained at Sebeta police station. And recent reports unveiled that several of these political prisoners are being deprived of food, water, and other basic humanitarian needs.’⁹⁷

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Section 11 updated: 14 March 2022

11. Oromo Liberation Army (or OLF-Shene)

11.1 Who are the OLA?

11.1.1 An 8 November 2021 article on online news site Africa News reported ‘The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), is an ethnic Oromo armed group fighting the Ethiopian government alongside Tigrayan rebels. They (OLA) are based in Oromia, the largest region in the Ethiopia that encloses Addis Ababa.’⁹⁸

11.1.2 On 8 November 2021, France 24 reported that the commander of the OLA is Jaal Marroo (real name, Kumsa Diriba)⁹⁹.

11.1.3 According to a 11 November 2021 article by The Africa Report:

‘Since the creation of the OLF in 1973, the OLA has been the armed wing of the Oromo movement that has sought self-determination for its people in the Oromia region. In 2018, a peace agreement between the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ethiopian government, under a newly elected Abiy

⁹⁵ Addis Standard, ‘[OLF’s Abdi Ragassa re-arrested shortly after release...](#)’, 28 June 2021

⁹⁶ Addis Standard, ‘[Judges no show at Colonel Gemechu Ayana’s hearing](#)’, 11 January 2022

⁹⁷ OLF, ‘[The Prosperity Party government must stop Physically and...](#)’, 10 February 2022

⁹⁸ Africa News, ‘[Ethiopia: OLA, the other group fighting federal forces](#)’, 8 November 2021

⁹⁹ France 24, ‘[Leader of Ethiopia’s Oromo rebels predicts victory “very soon”](#)’, 8 November 2021

Ahmed, effectively put an end to the 45-year Oromo conflict, and allowed for the return of the OLF opposition group. This culminated in a ceremony at Meskel Square in Addis Ababa, with longtime leader Dawud Ibsa and other OLF leaders being formally welcomed home, after having lived in exile.

‘However, Marroo [Jaal Marroo, the military leader of the OLA] was wary of Abiy’s new “reformed” government and refused to disarm. He saw the return of the OLF as merely a symbolic victory of the Oromo people and thus declared that without an armed force, the Oromos would never have leverage should the government go back on its promises. Subsequently, the OLF and OLA went their separate ways, with the latter vowing to continue with armed attacks in Oromia.’¹⁰⁰

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11.2 Terrorist designation

11.2.1 Al Jazeera reported in May 2021:

‘The council of ministers approved a resolution on Saturday to designate the TPLF as a “terrorist” organisation, along with the OLF-Shene [OLA], after several attacks in different parts of the country targeting civilians and public infrastructure over the past couple of years.

‘The move, endorsed by a meeting of cabinet members chaired by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, could lead to further prosecution and the arrest of the groups’ members and supporters...

‘It added the decision would apply to organisations and individuals who collaborate, have links with or relate to the ideas and actions of the designated “terrorist” organisations.’¹⁰¹

11.2.2 On 8 May 2021, the Ethiopian privately-owned online news site The Reporter noted:

‘It has been a year since the House endorsed proclamation no. 1176/2020 entitled: A proclamation to provide for the prevention and suppression of terrorism crimes.

‘According to this law, whosoever commits any acts of terrorism will be punished rigorously. It further stipulates that anyone caught planning to commit any terrorist acts will face three to seven years of imprisonment, and a conspiracy to carry out terrorist acts would be met with a rigorous imprisonment ranging from five to twelve years.’¹⁰²

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11.3 Aims and objectives

11.3.1 An undated profile of the OLA by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) stated: ‘The main objective of the group is to establish an independent Oromia.’¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ The Africa Report, ‘[Ethiopia: Who is Jaal Marroo, the military leader...](#)’, 12 November 2021

¹⁰¹ Al Jazeera, ‘[Ethiopia to designate TPLF, OLF-Shene as “terror” groups](#)’, 1 May 2021

¹⁰² The Reporter, ‘[House endorses designation of TPLF, Shene as Terrorist groups](#)’, 8 May 2021

¹⁰³ ACLED, ‘[Actor profiles: OLF \(shane splinter faction\)](#)’, no date

- 11.3.2 The BBC commented in January 2021: ‘While it is unclear what exactly the OLA means by the “liberation” of Oromia, the main opposition parties in Oromia are demanding greater regional autonomy, believing it to be the best way to guarantee the political, cultural and language rights of different ethnic groups.’¹⁰⁴

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11.4 Size and support

- 11.4.1 ACLED’s undated profile stated: ‘In 2018, it was estimated that OLF-Shane had around 2,800 fighters (Xinhua, 11 October 2018), although it is likely this number has increased substantially since 2020. The group is mainly active in the Oromia region and conducts regular attacks against government officials, military forces, and police.’¹⁰⁵
- 11.4.2 The Guardian reported in November 2020: ‘The OLA, believed to number in the low thousands, broke off from the Oromo Liberation Front, an opposition party that spent years in exile but was allowed to return to Ethiopia after Abiy took office in 2018.’¹⁰⁶
- 11.4.3 Based upon articles by New Business Ethiopia and The Economist in February 2019 and March 2020, respectively, together with information from a confidential source, the Netherlands Government COI service reported in February 2021: ‘It is not known how many fighters the OLA/Shene has. There are estimates ranging from 1,500 to several thousand fighters. This also raises the question of whether this involves an orchestrated rebellion or of a mishmash of groups.’¹⁰⁷
- 11.4.4 On 19 August 2021, online news site Ethiopia Insight reported:
- ‘...[M]ore and more Oromos are joining the rebel group as security and human rights protections in the region crumble, military crackdowns against civilians become routine, and the space for political freedom and party opposition tighten to a chokehold.
- ‘For many in Oromia, the OLA is seen now as the best option for achieving self-determination.’¹⁰⁸

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11.5 Alliances

- 11.5.1 Online news site Africa News reported on 8 November 2021: ‘In August [2021], the [OLA] armed group announced they had formed an alliance with the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), which has been fighting government forces in the north of the country since November 2020.’¹⁰⁹
- 11.5.2 On 5 November 2021, abc News reported an expansion of the OLA-TPLF alliance opposing Abiy’s government:

¹⁰⁴ BBC, ‘[Ethiopia's Oromia conflict: Why a teacher was killed “execution-style”](#)’, 16 January 2021

¹⁰⁵ ACLED, ‘[Actor profiles: OLF \(shane splinter faction\)](#)’, no date

¹⁰⁶ The Guardian, ‘[At least 54 killed in Ethiopia massacre, says Amnesty](#)’, 2 November 2020

¹⁰⁷ Government of the Netherlands, ‘[General COI information report: Ethiopia](#)’ (page 22), Feb 2021

¹⁰⁸ Ethiopia Insight, ‘[Prosperity Party's win is a loss for Oromia - and Ethiopia](#)’, 19 August 2021

¹⁰⁹ Africa News, ‘[Ethiopia: OLA, the other group fighting federal forces](#)’, 8 November 2021

‘Ethiopia’s Tigray forces on Friday joined with other armed and opposition groups around the country in an alliance against Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to seek a political transition after a year of devastating war, and they left the possibility open for his exit by force...

‘The alliance includes the Tigray forces who are fighting Ethiopian and allied forces, as well as the Oromo Liberation Army fighting alongside Tigray forces and seven other groups...

‘The new United Front of Ethiopian Federalist and Confederalist Forces said time was running out for Ethiopia’s government to act...

‘Ethiopia’s government called the alliance “a publicity stunt, asserting that some of the groups involved ”are not really organizations that have any traction.” ...

‘Other groups in the alliance include the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front, Agaw Democratic Movement, Benishangul People’s Liberation Movement, Gambella Peoples Liberation Army, Global Kimant People Right and Justice Movement/ Kimant Democratic Party, Sidama National Liberation Front and Somali State Resistance.

‘It is not clear whether all the groups are armed. But there’s interest in protecting the 1995 constitution that enshrines ethnic federalism and includes the right to self-determination. Under the constitution, critics have accused regional leaders of asserting the rights of majority ethnic groups at the expense of minorities.’¹¹⁰

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11.6 Reach of the OLA

11.6.1 CPIT has used ACLED data to produce the table below. The table shows the number of violent events recorded in different parts of Oromia state between 1 January 2021 and 19 November 2021, which involved the OLA. The ACLED category of ‘Violent events’ includes: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians¹¹¹. The table splits the events in each area by the identity of the other actor involved in the incident: civilian, state and militia group.

Area of Oromia	Second actor in conflict with the OLA			
	Civilian	State	Militia group	Total events
Addis Ababa, East Bale, East Hararge, East Shewa, West Arsi	0	0	0	0
Arsi	0	2	0	2
Bale	0	1	0	1
Borena	0	4	0	4
East Wellega	8	4	4	16

¹¹⁰ abc News, ‘[Tigray, other groups form alliance against Ethiopia’s leader](#)’, 5 November 2021

¹¹¹ ACLED, ‘[Codebook](#)’ (page 8), no date

Guji	0	15	0	15
Horo Gudru Wellega	10	9	2	21
Jimma	1	2	0	3
Kellem Wollega	4	4	0	8
North Shewa	0	10	2	12
West Guji	1	2	1	4
West Hararge	0	2	0	2
West Shewa	7	7	0	14
West Wellega	5	5	1	11
Total	36	67	10	113

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11.6.2 For locations in Oromia see [Maps](#).

11.6.3 A CPIT review of the table indicates:

- 59% of the events linked to the OLA involved conflicts with the state, 32% involved conflicts with civilians
- 5 areas in Oromia recorded no violent events linked to the OLA: Addis Ababa, East Bale, East Hararge, East Shewa, West Arsi
- an additional 6 areas in Oromia recorded less than 5 violent events linked to the OLA: Arsi, Bale, Borena, Jimma, West Guji and West Hararge.
- of the 36 events involving conflict between the OLA and civilians, 34 (94%) took place in one of 5 areas: East Wellega, Horo Gudru Wellega, Kellem Wollega, West Shewa and West Wellega.
- of the 67 events involving conflict between the OLA and the state, 69% took place in one of 5 areas: Guji, Horo Gudru Wellega, North Shewa, West Shewa and West Wellega.
- the areas identified above, with higher levels of OLA activity, were in the west of Oromia state bordering the Benishangul Gumuz or Amhara regions (Horo Gudru Wellega, Kellem Wollega, North Shewa, West Shewa, East Wellega and West Wellega) and in the South of Oromia state (Guji)¹¹³

11.6.4 In May 2020, IPSS noted: '[The OLA] is mainly operating in Kelem Wollega (West), East Guji and West Guji Zone of Oromia region.'¹¹⁴

11.6.5 The BBC reported on 16 January 2021:

'The OLA has mainly attacked government officials and police officers - including commanders - in small towns and villages as part of a strategy to make them ungovernable for Mr Abiy.

¹¹² ACLED, '[Data export tool](#)', data downloaded 23 November 2021

¹¹³ UN OCHA, '[Ethiopia: administrative map](#)', 23 October 2020

¹¹⁴ IPSS, '[Peace and security report: Ethiopia conflict insight](#)' (page 9), May 2020

‘However, it has also created a culture of fear among Oromos. Armed men raided two banks in Hagamsaa village in December and set ablaze an ambulance, which was taking a pregnant woman to a medical facility to deliver her baby, and a private vehicle in nearby Shambu town. Locals suspect that the rebels were trying to obtain money and vehicles for their insurgency.

‘The OLA is strongest in southern Oromia, which borders Kenya. The group suffered a major blow there in December [2020] when a powerful traditional leader in the region, Kura Jarso, denounced it as an "enemy of the people" after accusing its fighters of killing civilians, raping women and stealing cattle.

‘The conflict has also spilled into Kenya, where tens of thousands of Oromos live and are loyal to Mr Kura. In November, residents in the Kenyan town of Moyale said Ethiopian troops had crossed the border ransacking neighbourhoods and taking away 10 people they accused of sheltering members of the OLA, also referred to as OLF-Shane.’¹¹⁵

11.6.6 In June 2021, DW reported:

‘As the [June 2021] elections approach, there has been increased activity by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), the armed faction that split from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), one of the main opposition parties in the region. The OLA, which considers the current government illegitimate, has been accused of fomenting violence, including targeted killings and kidnappings.

‘On May 6, Ethiopia's Parliament designated the OLA — along with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which is now battling government forces in the north — as a terrorist organization. But the group still seems to enjoy broad popular support, particularly in rural areas in western Oromia. This has led to several clashes between the OLA and government forces, reinforcing exacerbating the insecurity.

“The OLA is intent on causing maximum disruption to this election as it believes that the government is illegitimate and therefore the vote is illegitimate,” said William Davison, the senior Ethiopia analyst at the International Crisis Group. “The group's intention is therefore to use armed struggle to try and prevent polling taking place in as much of Oromia as possible. This has led to an increasingly ruthless counterinsurgency response from the authorities, which are dedicated to holding this election as planned.”¹¹⁶

11.6.7 Also in June 2021, International Crisis Group stated: ‘While it is hard to authoritatively assess the OLA’s capabilities, the insurgency has spread from western and southern Oromia strongholds in recent months, including a reported deadly 10 June ambush on security forces in a district around 300km to the west of Addis Ababa.’¹¹⁷

11.6.8 In a January 2022 update, International Crisis Group reported:

¹¹⁵ BBC, ‘[Ethiopia's Oromia conflict: Why a teacher was killed “execution-style”](#)’, 16 January 2021

¹¹⁶ DW, ‘[Ethiopia's Oromia region is volatile ahead of elections](#)’, 17 June 2021

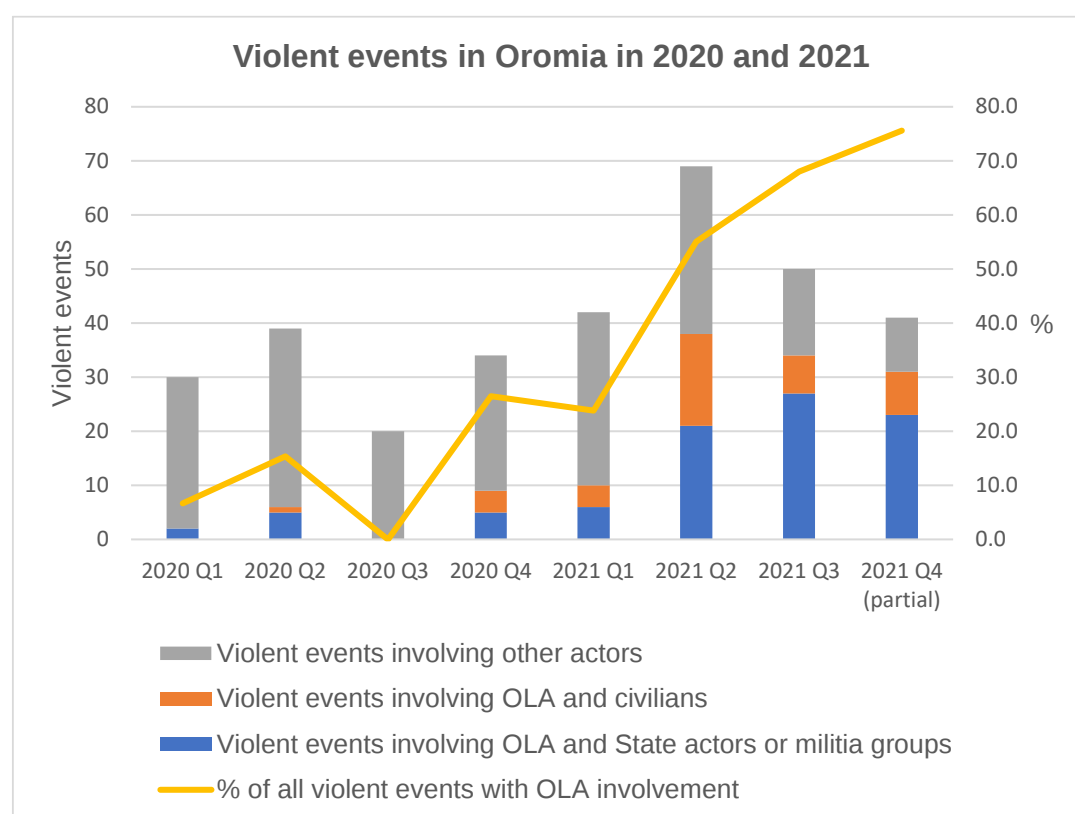
¹¹⁷ International Crisis Group, ‘[Ethiopia votes, but balloting will not ease...](#)’, 17 June 2021

‘Security forces intensified offensive against Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) in Oromia region, with fighting early to mid-Jan expanding to West and East Hararghe Zones, Jimma Zone, Kellem Wollega Zone and all zones of Shewa surrounding capital Addis Ababa; OLA also reported aerial attacks in East Wollega Zone. Clashes late-Jan intensified in West Gujji Zone, with OLA forces reportedly taking control of Torre and Shamole towns.’¹¹⁸

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11.7 Activities and capability

11.7.1 CPIT has used ACLED data to produce the graph below. The graph shows the number of violent events recorded in Oromia state and Addis Ababa per quarter during 2020 and 2021, together with the proportion of these events which involved the OLA. The ACLED category of ‘Violent events’ includes: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians¹¹⁹. Data for quarter 4 of 2021 only covers events up to and including 19 November 2021.



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11.7.2 A CPIT review of the graph indicates:

- a large increase in recorded OLA violent events in Oromia in 2021 as compared with 2020. In 2020, OLA had a recorded involvement in 17 violent events, whereas in 2021 this figure had risen to 113

¹¹⁸ International Crisis Group, ‘[Crisis Watch: tracking conflict worldwide. Ethiopia](#)’, January 2022

¹¹⁹ ACLED, ‘[Codebook](#)’ (page 8), no date

¹²⁰ ACLED, ‘[Data export tool](#)’, data downloaded 23 November 2021

- the majority of violent incidents which involved the OLA were clashes between the OLA and state actors or militia groups (68% in 2021), with 32% of events involving the OLA and civilians

11.7.3 In April 2021, Reuters reported:

‘Gunmen killed at least 20 people last week in western Ethiopia, a regional government official said on Thursday, in what he and two residents described as an attack on civilians from the Amhara ethnic group.

‘The incident occurred in the district of Limmu Kosa, in the Jimma zone of the Oromiya region.

‘At least 20 civilians were killed in the attack, the Oromiya regional government's spokesman Getachew Balcha told Reuters. He said the attackers were from OLF-Shane or Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)...

‘The Amhara and Oromiya regions share a border and attacks between the two ethnic groups in border areas have been rising in recent months...

‘A spokesman for the OLA, Odaa Tarbii, denied the accusation in an emailed comment, and accused the regional forces from the Oromiya region of being responsible for the attack.’¹²¹

11.7.4 In August 2021, Reuters reported:

‘Gunmen killed at least 150 people last week in western Ethiopia in an attack by an armed group against local residents, the state-appointed Ethiopian Human Rights Commission said on Thursday.

‘The commission said residents in Gida Kiremu district in the Oromiya region of Eastern Wollega told investigators the gunmen were from the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), which splintered from the formerly banned opposition Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)...

‘The OLA attacked residents on Aug. 18 "based on their ethnic identity", the commission said in a statement, saying 150 people were killed in that incident.

‘The OLA denied it had killed civilians in incidents as described by the commission, saying the incident in Gida Kiremu involved clashes between OLA fighters and Amhara militias.

“When our forces arrived... it was these Amhara fighters that began engaging them in a firefight," the OLA said in a statement.

‘The OLA says it is fighting for the rights of the Oromo people, the Horn of Africa country's largest ethnic group. There have frequently been deadly clashes this year between the Oromo and the Amhara, another major ethnic group.

‘An Amhara resident told Reuters that Amhara people had tried to fight off the OLA attackers. "As soon as they came they opened fire. We tried to defend ourselves and fire back," the resident said.’

¹²¹ Reuters, ‘[Attackers kill at least 20 in attack in Ethiopia's Oromiya region...](#)’, 29 April 2021

'The commission said there were several attacks in the days after the Aug. 18 incident, killing 60 people.

"We are still trying to assess the number of people who died, those who committed the attack and what exactly happened," Zelalem Sori, the Eastern Wollega government spokesperson, told Reuters.¹²²

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Section 12 updated: 14 March 2022

12. State treatment of OLA fighters, supporters and suspected supporters

12.1 Arrests

12.1.1 CPIT has used data downloaded from ACLED to produce the table below. The table gives details of arrests linked to involvement with the OLA. The table covers incidents between 1 January 2020 and 19 November 2021, in Addis Ababa or Oromia region which have been classified by ACLED as event type 'Strategic developments' and sub-event type 'Arrests'.

Date	Location	Notes on arrests
19 Dec 2020	Oromia, West Wellega	Around 19 December 2020 (as reported), 782 suspected OLF/Shane members were reportedly arrested in Guliso woreda of West Wellega zone by regional security forces during a crackdown operation.
10 Feb 2021	Oromia, East Shewa	33 OLF/Shane militants were reportedly arrested in East Shewa zone, Oromia region.
3 April 2021	Oromia, Jimma	Around 3 April 2021 (between 2 - 4 April), ten staff members at Jimma university were arrested on the grounds of attempting a coup and supporting the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA).
25 Oct 2021	Oromia, East Shewa	Around 25 October 2021 (week of), the regional security forces detained 88 people in Adama town, (East Shewa, Oromia), allegedly over providing financial and information support to OLF-Shane and TPLF. The police also claim to have 'seized' large amounts of illegal personal and battle firearms.
16 Nov 2021	Oromia, West Arsi	Oromia regional police arrested 52 people in Arsi Negele Town, West Arsi zone (Oromia), after accusing them of possessing illegal weapons and in suspicion of having connection with the TPLF and/or OLF Shane rebels. This round of arrests is part of the nationwide state of emergency.
17 Nov 2021	Oromia, Arsi	Around 17 November 2021 (week of), Oromia regional police arrested over 400 students in Munessa, Munessa wereda (Arsi zone, Oromia) on suspicion of having connection with the OLF Shane rebels. This

¹²² Reuters, '[Ethiopia rights commission says 150 killed in attack in Oromiya](#)', 26 August 2021

		round of arrests is part of the nationwide state of emergency.
17 Nov 2021	Oromia, West Shewa	Around 17 November 2021 (week of), Oromia regional police arrested around 195 people in Inchini, Adda berga woreda (West Shewa, Oromia), on suspicion of having connection with the TPLF and/or OLF Shane rebels. This round of arrests is part of the nationwide state of emergency.

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12.1.2 BBC Monitoring reported an article published on the website of pro-government Fana Broadcasting Corporate on 18 November 2020:

‘The Oromia Special Force has said it has killed 142 OLF [Oromo Liberation Front]-Shene militants in West Welega Zone, according to the regional state’s police commission.

‘Some 112 members of the militant group were also arrested during the operation, said Ararsa Merdasa, the commissioner of the Oromia Police Commission.

‘During the past two weeks, the police arrested a total of 1,341 individuals accused of providing support to OLF-Shene militants. Of the total, 104 are members of TPLF [Tigray People's Liberation Front], he said.’¹²⁴

12.1.3 Pro-government Fana Broadcasting Corporate reported on 10 December 2020: ‘The Oromia special police force has taken measures against 370 members of the OLF-Shene group during a month-long operation.

‘Some 176 members of the group were captured during the operation, in addition to 154 arrested by the public, according to office of the Oromia Prosperity Party.’¹²⁵

12.1.4 The Addis Standard reported on 21 December 2020:

‘On December 16, a statement Getachew [Getachew Balcha, Head of Oromia regional state Communication Affairs Bureau] issued said that in recent weeks security measures were taken on 782 individuals who are suspected of being members of OLA. Out of these 385 individuals were killed in combat while 287 have surrendered to government security forces. A further 170 individuals who he said were operating within the community were arrested with community help.

‘Getachew puts the number of individuals recently arrested at 1,900 and said they were suspected of recruiting and helping the leadership of OLA. they were brought to court in their respective districts.’¹²⁶

12.1.5 Pro-government Fana Broadcasting Corporate reported on 20 October 2021:

¹²³ ACLED, ‘[Data export tool](#)’, data downloaded 23 November 2021

¹²⁴ BBC Monitoring, ‘[Over 100 arrested in Ethiopia's Oromia for links to Tigray](#)’, 18 Nov 2020

¹²⁵ Fana Broadcasting Corporate, ‘[Oromia Special Police Force takes measures...](#)’, 10 Dec 2020

¹²⁶ Addis Standard, ‘[OLF accuses gov't of fresh crackdown on its members...](#)’, 21 December 2020

'Oromia Police stated that it arrested six members of the terrorist group Shene members over alleged terrorist attacks in Oda Bultum Woreda, West Harerge Zone in the region.

'Out of the suspects, five are said to have been recruited and trained for a planned attack by their leader named Jafar Mohammed Sani who is also arrested with them, Police said.

'Police said the suspects were allegedly plotting to kill innocent civilians and members of security forces.'¹²⁷

12.1.6 Pro-Abiy satellite station, ESAT TV news, reported on 17 Nov 21 (summarised by BBC Monitoring): 'Eyasu Alemu, a long time member of the Shene rebel group, has been arrested. He was trained in political science in the UK, after which he returned to train the rebels. He was arrested in Bule Hora, Oromia, while he was trying to withdraw money from a bank. Three other members of the rebel group have been arrested along with him.'¹²⁸

12.1.7 On 20 December 2021, Kenya-based news site The Star reported:

'[An] Ethiopian tycoon who owns Rift Valley University is decrying harassment from the Ethiopian government amidst the Tigray conflict.

'Dinku Deyasa, a prominent businessman and an Oromo nationalist, says his business interests are being targeted by the PM Abiy Ahmed-led government, and that some 140 of his employees were recently arrested...

"Such a respected institution like Rift Valley University has continued to be under surveillance. The dean, lecturers and employees have repeatedly been arrested without being presented in a court of law. The government claims RVU is an OLA training camp. That does not even make sense. They are questioning the hundreds of scholarships given to security personnel," a relative of Deyasa said.

'Deyasa also owns Sodere Resort Hotel, the oldest and largest resort in Ethiopia.

"Last Friday the Oromia police forces stormed the high-end hotel and arrested 140 employees. They confiscated 34 AK 47 rifles used by the hotel security. All employees totaling [sic] 140 were arrested, including the security guards. They claim the security guards were members of the OLA rebel group," the aide added...

'Deyasa has denied supporting the Oromo Liberation Army through training...

"The Ethiopian government always categorised the rich and prominent Oromo people who do not want to join the ruling party as anti-government.'¹²⁹

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¹²⁷ Fana Broadcasting Corporate, '[Police arrests terrorist shene members...](#)', 20 Oct 2021

¹²⁸ BBC Monitoring, '[Programme Summary of Ethiopia's ESAT TV news...](#)', 20 November 2021

¹²⁹ The Star, '[Ethiopian tycoon from Oromo decries harassment by state](#)', 20 December 2021

12.2 Extrajudicial killings

12.2.1 Human Rights Watch's 2022 annual report, covering events in 2021, stated: 'In Oromia, reports of arrests, detention, and summary executions of Oromo civilians accused of supporting the armed rebel group, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), continued.'¹³⁰

12.2.2 On 16 January 2021, the BBC reported:

'The shooting dead of Kitilaa Guddata has left his family in shock.

'The 32-year-old high school teacher was among the latest casualties in the conflict between government forces and rebels in Ethiopia's Oromia region.

'The violence centres around demands by an insurgent group for the "liberation" of Oromia - a vast swathe of land that is home to Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, the Oromo - and the subsequent security crackdown.

'It has led to civilians being caught in the crossfire - including Mr Kitilaa. His family allege that he was killed after about 10 police officers took him from his home in Sekela town on the night of 19 November...

'Attempts to obtain comment from the Oromia Special Police Force were unsuccessful, but Oromia regional government spokesman Getachew Balcha said he was unaware of the security forces falsely accusing people of being allied with the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA).

'"Measures are taken only against those whose crimes are known and exposed by the people," he told BBC Afaan Oromoo.

'"But anyone found to have committed a crime, including police members and government officials, would be held accountable," he added...

'Meanwhile, reports of civilian casualties mount. Another case is that of Galana Imana, a father of two.

'In a BBC Afaan Oromoo interview, his younger sister Chaltu Imana said he was arrested by nearly 20 armed officers at his home in Ambo town, about 100km (60 miles) west of Addis Ababa, in November.

'Ms Chaltu said she desperately searched for him for four days until she received news that police had found a body by a river...

'"We only know about his arrest. We don't know what his crime was, we don't know why they preferred to kill him rather than take him to court," Ms Chaltu said.

'Her brother had only been politically active in the OLF, having served on a committee to welcome leaders who had returned from exile in 2018, she said.'¹³¹

12.2.3 The Addis Standard reported on 12 March 2021:

'As the Oromia regional state government renewed its vows to wipe out the rebel group Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), an intensified crackdown continued to claim the lives of civilians. In the latest such crackdown, members of Oromia special forces killed Tadele Belay, a highschool student

¹³⁰ HRW, [World Report 2022 Ethiopia](#), 13 January 2022

¹³¹ BBC, [Ethiopia's Oromia conflict: Why a teacher was killed "execution-style"](#), 16 January 2021

at Alibo Preparatory school in Jardaga Jarte woreda of Horogudru Wollega zone...

'Tadele had been arrested in the past at different times, according to his friend, the reason being, suspected of having relations with the OLA. His last arrest that ended his life was no different. Kenna recalled previous incidents where his brother was accused of supporting "OLF/Shanne" and the harassment his family suffered. Kenna said "They used to hunt him down, they would give him names", Kenna said. His friend said that the family did not reach out to authorities for fear of further retaliation. Kenna said "Who do we tell? We have no one to talk to."...

'Extrajudicial killings in the Oromia region have been a common occurrence in recent months, although the regional government insists that they are law enforcement measures taken against armed rebel groups.'¹³²

12.2.4 On 10 June 2021, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported:

'Ethiopian government forces summarily executed a 17-year-old boy in Ethiopia's Oromia region in broad daylight, Human Rights Watch said today. The public execution of Amanuel Wondimu Kebede underscores the lack of accountability for security force abuses in the country...

'[A video seen by HRW] shows Amanuel being paraded down a street, visibly limping on his right side, and surrounded by security forces, including Oromia special forces and local police. Amanuel is forced to repeat: "I am a member of Abba Torbee [[HRW added] an armed group in Oromia and with unclear links to the OLA]. Don't do what I did. Learn from me."...

'Journalists asked Tesema Wariyo, the Kellem Wellega security head, why Amanuel was not taken before a court. He replied: "Amanuel was not a suspect, but clearly an enemy, an OLF-Shene member who came from the bush."¹³³

12.2.5 The Addis Standard reported on 17 December 2021:

'In Addis Standard's earlier report [dated 3 December 2021], an eye witness said that government forces abducted a total of 14 men including Abba Gadaas, Abba Boku, prominent community members and young men from the seat of the Gadaa leadership, Karra, where a prayer ceremony, Waaq Kadhaa was taking place on Wednesday December 1, 2021. The Oromia regional government however refuted the allegations and blamed the attacks on Shanee [OLA]...

'Roba [an interviewee] concluded his testimony by underlining the need for the withdrawal of government forces deployed to the woreda in search of OLA combatants. "An entire community can not be labelled 'Shanee'. Intensifying crackdown on innocent civilians will only create a bigger rift between the government and the community," he said.'¹³⁴

¹³² Addis Standard, '[Oromia special forces in East Wollega kill a high-school student...](#)', 12 Mar 2021

¹³³ HRW, '[Ethiopia: boy publicly executed in Oromia](#)', 10 June 2021

¹³⁴ Addis Standard, '[Abba Gadaa Union says missing member of Karrayyu...](#)', 17 December 2021

- 12.2.6 On 2 February 2022, the EHRC released the results of an investigation into the above incident. BBC Monitoring provided a summary of the EHRC's findings, as reported by the Addis Standard:

"The commission [EHRC] said that there's 'reasonable ground to believe' that the killing of 14 members of the [Kereyu] Gada [Oromo traditional governance system] leaders constitutes 'extrajudicial killing' by security forces," said Addis Standard...

'The commission's report said the incident happened after 11 regional police officers were killed and 11 others wounded in an attack by unidentified gunmen on 30 November 2021.

"After a group of 16 people [was] taken to Chebi Anole Forest, they were told to lay in a row. Finally, they were told that the hour for their killing was approaching. But before they died, those who had money on them were asked to hand it over. At the same time, killers were assigned for each. They were given orders to execute them," Addis Standard quoted the EHRC as saying.¹³⁵

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Section 13 updated: 14 March 2022

13. Violence in Oromia region

13.1 Demographics

- 13.1.1 The CIA estimated the population of Ethiopia (as at July 2021) as 110,871,031 and identified the largest ethnic group as Oromo (35.8%)¹³⁶.
- 13.1.2 The number of people of Oromo ethnicity living in Ethiopia can therefore be approximated as 39.7 million and the majority of Oromos live in the Oromia region¹³⁷.
- 13.1.3 The largest city in the Oromo region is the federally-administered capital city of Addis Ababa, with a population of approximately 5 million in 2021¹³⁸.

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13.2 Violent events in Oromia during 2021 by area: ACLED

- 13.2.1 ACLED recorded 202 violent events in the Oromia region and Addis Ababa in the period between 1 January 2021 and 19 November 2021. The ACLED category of 'Violent events' includes: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians¹³⁹. Of these 202 events, 3 took place in Addis Ababa and 199 were recorded in the region's zones. The relative levels of violence in the 17 zones categorised by ACLED is shown in the table below.

Number of events per zone	Zone	Total events	% of events
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¹³⁵ BBC Monitoring, '[Ethiopia rights body accuses troops of 'extrajudicial killing'](#)', 3 February 2022

¹³⁶ CIA, '[The world factbook: Ethiopia](#)', no date

¹³⁷ BBC, '[Why Ethiopia's "alphabet generation" feel betrayed by Abiy](#)', 19 June 2021

¹³⁸ CIA, '[The world factbook: Ethiopia](#)', no date

¹³⁹ ACLED, '[Codebook](#)' (page 8), no date

1 to 5	Arsi, Bale, Borena, East Bale, Jimma, West Arsi	20	9.9
6 to 10	East Hararge, East Shewa, West Guji, West Hararge	30	14.9
11 to 15	North Shewa	14	6.9
16 to 20	Guji, Kellem Wollega, West Shewa	53	26.2
21 and over	East Wellega, Horo Gudru Wellega, West Wellega	82	40.6

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13.2.2 A CPIT review of the ACLED data indicates that recorded incidents of violence were not evenly distributed across Oromia.

- recorded incidents in Addis Ababa were very low (3 out of 202 events, equal to 1.5%)
- 6 zones (East Wellega, Horo Gudru Wellega, West Wellega, Guji, Kellem Wollega and West Shewa) collectively accounted for 67% of violent incidents recorded, whereas a different 6 zones (Arsi, Bale, Borena, East Bale, Jimma, West Arsi) collectively accounted for 10% of violent events recorded

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13.3 Civilian-state interactions in Oromia during 2020 and 2021: ACLED

13.3.1 CPIT has filtered ACLED data for 2020 and 2021 (up to 19 November) to identify all events in the Oromia region which involved an interaction between civilians and the state (military and police). The identified events range from destruction of property to assault, arrest and killing. The analysis does not include data on protests and riots as ACLED categorises ‘civilians’, ‘protesters’ and ‘rioters’ separately. Interactions between protesters and rioters and the state are covered in [Protests and riots in Oromia during 2020 and 2021: ACLED](#).

13.3.2 The table below gives the breakdown of all recorded interactions between civilians and the state in the Oromia region (including Addis Ababa). The ACLED notes – which provided details of each event – have been used to divide the events by circumstance.

Circumstances of each event (from ACLED notes)	2020	2021 (up to 19 Nov)
Link/suspected link with OLF	10	0
Link/suspected link with OLA	11	22
Link/suspected link with TPLF	1	4
Link/suspected link with OLA and/or TPLF	0	3

¹⁴⁰ ACLED, [Data export tool](#), data downloaded 23 November 2021

Link to participation/organisation of protests/riots	3	2
Other reason	3	1
Unknown reason	36	19
Total number of recorded civilian-state events in Oromia and Addis Ababa	64	51

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13.3.3 A CPIT review of the table indicates:

- for around 48% of the events during 2020 and part-year 2021 (55 out of 115) the circumstances which led to an interaction between civilian and state is unknown
- of the 52% of events (60 out of 115) where the circumstances of the interaction can be identified from the ACLED notes, just over half (33) were associated with links or suspected links to the OLA and 10 were due to links or suspected links with the OLF
- between 2020 and the year up to November 2021 the number of civilian-state interactions involving a link or suspected link with the OLF fell from 10 to 0, whereas the number of events involving a link or suspected link to the OLA increased from 11 to between 22 and 25

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13.4 Protests and riots in Oromia during 2020 and 2021: ACLED

13.4.1 CPIT has used ACLED data to produce the graph below¹⁴². The graph shows the number of protests and riots recorded in Oromia state and Addis Ababa, per quarter, during 2020 and 2021, together with details of the outcome of the protest (see ACLED definitions below). Data for quarter 4 of 2021 only covers events up to and including 19 November 2021.

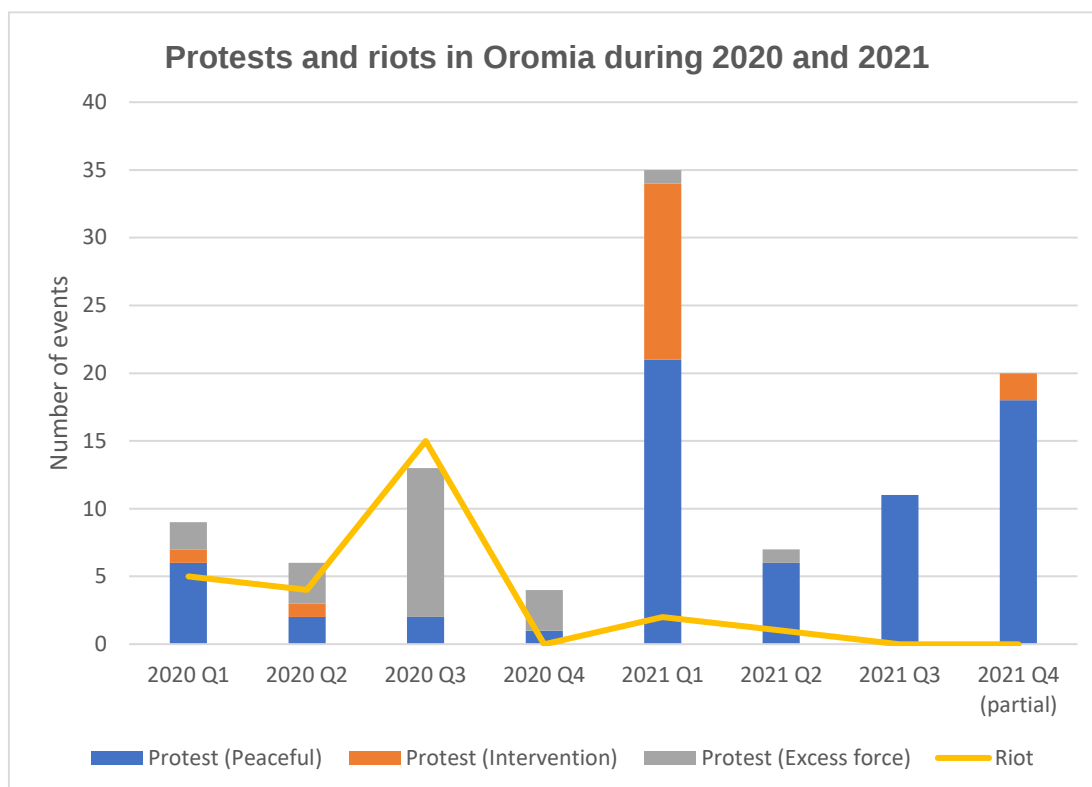
13.4.2 ACLED defines a protest as: 'A public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them'. It categorises protests into 3 types:

- peaceful protest (no intervention)
- protest with intervention (an attempt is made to disperse or suppress the protest but no serious or lethal injuries occur)
- excessive force used against protesters (intervention leads to serious or lethal injuries)¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ ACLED, '[Data export tool](#)', data downloaded 23 November 2021

¹⁴² ACLED, '[Data export tool](#)', data downloaded 23 November 2021

¹⁴³ ACLED, '[Codebook](#)' (pages 13 and 14), no date



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13.4.3 A CPIT review of the graph, plus a review of the ACLED notes which provide details of each event, indicates:

- 3 spikes in protests over the 2-year period:
 - 2020, quarter 3, spike in both protests and riots linked to unrest following the death of Hachalu Hundessa and subsequent arrests of prominent Oromo opposition members
 - 2021, quarter 1, spike in protests linked to demands for the release of detained Oromo opposition officials
 - 2021 quarter 4, spike linked to protests held in November in opposition to the TPLF-OLA alliance¹⁴⁵
- Of the 32 protests recorded in 2020, excessive force was used against protesters in 19 (59%) of events. In 2021, 73 protests were recorded (up to 19 November) and excessive force used in 2 events (3%)

13.4.4 ACLED data has been used to compile the table below, showing the location of protests and riots during 2020 and 2021 (up to 19 November). Estimated fatalities are given in square brackets although ACLED advises: 'Fatality data are typically the most biased, and least accurate, component of any conflict data.'¹⁴⁶

	Addis Ababa	Oromia (excluding Addis)
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¹⁴⁴ ACLED, '[Data export tool](#)', data downloaded 23 November 2021

¹⁴⁵ ACLED, '[Data export tool](#)', data downloaded 23 November 2021

¹⁴⁶ ACLED, '[Codebook](#)' (page 32), no date

2020: Protests	5 [2]	27 [48]
2020: Riots	5 [10]	19 [120]
2021: Protests	14 [0]	59 [0]
2021: Riots	0	3 [5]

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13.5 Protests and unrest in Oromia during 2020 and 2021: other sources

a) Death of Hachalu Hundessa

- 13.5.1 The state-run Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) found that the unrest following the death of Oromo musician Hachalu Hundessa on 29 June 2020 was: ‘...[P]art of a widespread and systematic attack against civilian population that extended to at least 40 different localities and over three days from the early hours of June 30th to July 2nd, 2020.’¹⁴⁸
- 13.5.2 And: ‘A large number of people, organized in groups for the most part, moved from place to place to kill, bodily and mentally injure and displace people; destroy property.’¹⁴⁹
- 13.5.3 Sources differ on the number of people killed following Hachalu’s death, with estimates varying from 123¹⁵⁰ to 166¹⁵¹ to 239¹⁵². These estimates are broadly consistent with the 177 fatalities recorded by ACLED, across all events in Oromia and Addis Ababa, during the period 29 June 2020 to 3 July 2020 (inclusive).¹⁵³
- 13.5.4 Reports of the number of arrests following Hachalu’s death also vary. In July 2020, DW reported 3,500 arrests¹⁵⁴. By contrast, in August 2020, Reuters gave a figure of more than 9,000 (based upon information obtained from the EHRC)¹⁵⁵.
- 13.5.5 The same Reuters article reported: ‘Getachew Balcha, a regional government spokesman, confirmed 7,126 people had been arrested in Oromiya alone. He said [he] did not know how many had been charged but said “files were being prepared” on 500 of them.’¹⁵⁶
- 13.5.6 A follow-up article by Reuters in September 2020, reported:
‘About 2,000 people in Ethiopia have been charged over deadly violence that followed the killing of a popular singer in June and charges against more prisoners are likely to follow, the attorney general said on Thursday...

¹⁴⁷ ACLED, ‘[Data export tool](#)’, data downloaded 23 November 2021

¹⁴⁸ EHRC, ‘[Violence and human rights violations following musician...](#)’ (page 2), 1 January 2021

¹⁴⁹ EHRC, ‘[Violence and human rights violations following musician...](#)’ (page 2), 1 January 2021

¹⁵⁰ EHRC, ‘[Violence and human rights violations following musician...](#)’ (page 1), 1 January 2021

¹⁵¹ Reuters, ‘[Ethiopia charges 2,000 over violence after singer’s killing...](#)’, 25 September 2020

¹⁵² DW.com, ‘[Ethiopia: Death toll rises in violent protests...](#)’, 8 July 2020

¹⁵³ ACLED, ‘[Data export tool](#)’, data downloaded 23 November 2021

¹⁵⁴ DW.com, ‘[Ethiopia: Death toll rises in violent protests...](#)’, 8 July 2020

¹⁵⁵ Reuters, ‘[Mass arrests in Ethiopia raise spectre of repressive past](#)’, 13 August 2020

¹⁵⁶ Reuters, ‘[Mass arrests in Ethiopia raise spectre of repressive past](#)’, 13 August 2020

“Some [of] the suspects and some of the accused complained that they are being charged for their political activity,” Attorney General Gideon Timothewos told a news conference.

“They are not,” he said. “They are being charged for their conduct that has resulted in the death of hundreds of citizens.”

‘He did not give details on the charges or on whether any prisoners had been released without charge.’¹⁵⁷

13.5.7 In October 2021, International Crisis Group summarised the fallout from the death of musician Hachalu Hundessa:

‘Although authorities blamed OLF elements [for Hachalu’s death], many Oromo opposition supporters believe he was assassinated for criticising the government. His killing triggered deadly unrest in Oromia and Addis Ababa, including attacks by Oromo mobs on Amhara civilians...

‘As the violence has escalated, historically rooted tensions between Ethiopia’s two largest communities, the Oromo and Amhara, have continued to flare. In late August [2020], locals and officials said OLA fighters killed more than 100 Amhara civilians in East Wollega Zone. The insurgents said all those killed in fighting were government-affiliated militiamen from Amhara. The turmoil relates to a broader political dispute that involves Oromo nationalists classing Amhara settlers as their main oppressor during an imperial era that ended in 1974. Amhara activists argue that innocent civilians are persecuted by Oromo nationalists and other ethno-nationalists as a result.’¹⁵⁸

b) Anti OLA-TPLF

13.5.8 On 18 August 2021, pro-government Fana Broadcasting Corporate reported:

‘Thousands of residents of towns of Oromia Region have taken to streets to denounce terrorist OLF-Shene.

‘Demonstrators in Jimma town and Adama City and surroundings condemned the OLF-Shene and TPLF terrorist organizations and reaffirmed support to the government in protecting sovereignty of the nation.

‘Participants of the rallies carried placards with slogans such as “TPLF and OLF-Shene are Enemies of the Oromo People”, “We March to Save Ethiopia”, “We are Guardinas [sic] of Our Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity”, among others.

‘Residents of Shashemene, Sebeta, Legetafo, Sululta, West Guji and Robe towns have also staged massive rallies to denounce the terrorist groups OLF-Shene and TPLF.’¹⁵⁹

13.5.9 Al Jazeera reported on 7 November 2021:

‘Tens of thousands of Ethiopians have pledged to defend the capital from advancing rebels during a pro-military rally where attendees dismissed diplomatic efforts to end the year-long war.

¹⁵⁷ Reuters, ‘[Ethiopia charges 2,000 over violence after singer’s killing...](#)’, 25 September 2020

¹⁵⁸ International Crisis Group, ‘[Ethiopia’s civil war: cutting a deal to stop the bloodshed](#)’, 26 Oct 2021

¹⁵⁹ Fana Broadcasting Corporate, ‘[Thousands in several parts of Oromia...](#)’, 18 Aug 2021

'The rally in central Addis Ababa on Sunday was the government's latest attempt to shore up public support for the conflict against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and allied groups...

'Ethiopian journalist Samuel Getachew, speaking from Addis Ababa, told Al Jazeera the rally was designed to show that a large number of people still support the government's military operations against the rebels.

"This is [also] to show to the world, that Ethiopians want a local solution to the problem," he said, referring to the anti-Western rhetoric among the crowd.

'Al Jazeera's Mohammed Adow, reporting from Addis Ababa, said the rally was representative of popular sentiment on the streets of the capital.

"Most people here support the Ethiopian Defense Forces and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed," Adow said.¹⁶⁰

c) Support for Oromo opposition officials

13.5.10 See [June 2021 elections](#), [Background to Oromo grievances](#) and [Ability to function as a political group](#)

13.5.11 Addis Standard reported on 8 February 2021:

'Protests broke out in different parts of Oromia regional state since February 5, 2021. Protestors who took to the streets in Ambo last Friday raised several demands, including the release of Oromo politicians including Jawar Mohammad, Bekele Gerba and Hamza Borana of the opposition Oromo federalist Congress (OFC), a resident of the city told *Addis standard*. Many students were arrested and beaten by police according to eyewitnesses...

'Since Friday February 05, protests are being held mostly by by [sic] high school students in different cities in Oromia, including Ambo and Dire Dawa. Today the protests spread to cities including Woliso, Yabbelo, Gimbii, Nekemte, Dembi Dolo, Shashamane, and Asebot demanding the release of political prisoners and an end to political instability in Oromia region. However, the protesters were met with excessive use of force that has resulted in unconfirmed number of injuries and one confirmed death...

'Similarly, another protest that took place in Gimbii by Gimbi secondary high school students demanded justice for Hachalu Hundessa, a prominent [sic] Oromo artist who was assassinated on June 29 last year, and the release of political prisoners; they have also carried banners asking an end to extrajudicial killings in Oromia. The organizers of the protest along with some teachers were arrested, according to a resident of the city who spoke with *Addis Standard* on the phone on conditions of anonymity.¹⁶¹

13.5.12 AP News reported in October 2021:

'Members of Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, the Oromo, protested Saturday against the government and called for the release of jailed opposition figures as they gathered in the capital for their annual Thanksgiving festival of Irreecha.

¹⁶⁰ Al Jazeera, '[Ethiopian government rallies protesters against Tigrayan rebels](#)', 7 November 2021

¹⁶¹ Addis Standard, '[As Jawar et al continue hunger strike Oromia region...](#)', 8 February 2021

‘Scores of people in the center of Addis Ababa chanted slogans such as “Down, down Abiy!” a reference to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, after performing ritual ceremonies to mark the end of the rainy season and the beginning of the harvest in Oromia state.

‘They also chanted support for Oromo opposition politician Jawar Mohammed [of the OFC], who was arrested last year following an outbreak of deadly violence sparked by the death of a popular Oromo singer. He remains behind bars along with several others, accused of terrorism. Activists claim their detention is politically motivated. [Mr Jawar was released from detention in January 2022]

‘Hundreds of thousands of people attended Saturday’s celebrations, which proceeded peacefully despite the protests and amid a heavy security presence. A police spokesman would not comment on any arrests of protesters.’¹⁶²

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¹⁶² AP News, [‘Ethiopia’s Oromo protest, demand freedom for jailed leaders’](#), 2 October 2021

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- **Context**
 - summary of current political situation
 - historical relationship between the OLF and authorities
 - key events, including civil war
- **OLF**
 - size, structure, aims and activities
 - divisions, including the OLA
- **OLA**
 - size, structure, aims and activities
- **Treatment of OLF by state actors**
 - registration, operation and participation in elections
 - harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention
 - profile of individuals subject to discrimination or human rights violations – senior leaders, members and/or supporters
- **Treatment of OLA by state actors**
 - Terrorist designation
 - Arrests
 - Extrajudicial killings
- **General levels of violence in Oromia**
 - perpetrators and victims
 - protests and riots

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- version **1.0**
- valid from 14 March 2022

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