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Country Policy and Information Note

Ethiopia: Opposition to the government

Version 3.0

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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 basis of claim](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and 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 – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment on whether, **in general**:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- 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
- Claims are 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 \(COI\)](#), dated 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, and is from generally reliable sources. 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, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

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

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, 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

Updated: 12 August 2019

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by the state due to a person's actual or perceived opposition to the government.

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1.2 Points to note

- 1.2.1 For the purposes of this note, opposition to the government means political parties and armed groups opposed to the ruling government. It also includes those perceived to be opponents of the state such as protesters, journalists, bloggers, human rights activists and civil society members.

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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 Refugee convention reason

- 2.2.1 Claims based on actual or perceived opposition to the government will fall under the Convention reason of actual or imputed political opinion.
- 2.2.2 Establishing a convention reason alone is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed in each case is whether the particular person will face a real risk of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.
- 2.2.3 For guidance on Convention reasons including particular social groups, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.3 Exclusion

- 2.3.1 In July 2018, the Ethiopian government removed the June 2011 designation as terrorist organisations for 3 armed opposition groups: the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF); and Ginbot 7 (now frequently known as Arbegnoch Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement – AGUDM) (see [Designated terrorist organisations](#)).

- 2.3.2 Although the United Kingdom, the European Union and the United States have not designated these groups as terrorist organisations, they are known to have armed wings, or at least not to renounce violence. The situation in relation to arms and renouncing violence by these groups is, however, evolving (see [Former designated terrorist organisations](#)).
- 2.3.3 In the country guidance case of [MB \(OLF and MTA – risk\) Ethiopia CG \[2007\] UKAIT 00030 \(29 March 2007\)](#), heard 19 February 2007, promulgated 29 March 2007, the Upper Tribunal recognised the OLF has been responsible for human rights violations and decision makers should consider whether to exclude OLF members and sympathisers from recognition as refugees or from humanitarian protection (para 66).
- 2.3.4 If there are serious reasons to consider that the person has been involved in terrorist activities, decision makers must consider whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.
- 2.3.5 If the person is excluded from the Refugee convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.
- 2.3.6 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instruction on Exclusion: Article 1F of the Refugee Convention](#) and the [Asylum Instruction on Restricted Leave](#).

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2.4 Assessment of risk

a. Non-armed opposition groups

- 2.4.1 The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is the ruling coalition party. It has ruled for over 20 years and won all 547 seats in the May 2015 general election (see [Ruling party - Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front \(EPRDF\)](#)).
- 2.4.2 Political parties have existed since 1991. However, there are currently no opposition parties represented in the House of Representatives. Although the 2015 election was generally peaceful, sources expressed concerns over constraints placed on opposition parties and supporters including censorship and imprisonment and exile, which prevented them from gaining momentum and obtaining any seats (see Political system - [Overview](#) and [Ruling party - Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front \(EPRDF\)](#)).
- 2.4.3 In February 2018, the then prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned. He was replaced by Abiy Ahmed on 2 April 2018. Changes brought by Abiy Ahmed include:
- a dramatic shift in the government's stance towards the political opposition, freedom of speech and the state's relationship with Eritrea;
 - the release of thousands of political prisoners, including high profile and prominent party members and critics of the government,
 - a decrease in arrests and confrontation with party members and protestors,
 - a generally increased tolerance for political dissidents, and;

- an end to the State of Emergency (SOE).

This has widened the political space and enabled dialogue between the government and opposition groups. There are however, tensions within the ruling coalition and security forces, in part due to the vast changes that have been implemented, as the assassinations in Amhara in June 2019 demonstrate (see [Political landscape](#), and [Designated terrorist organisations](#)).

- 2.4.4 The next regional and nationwide elections are scheduled for 2020. Sources agree that the changes made under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, along with his asserted commitment to democratic polls, should allow opposition groups to prepare more freely for these elections. Over 100 competing political parties were signatories to a code of conduct with the government to work towards Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's aim of free, fair and credible elections. (see [Political landscape](#) and [Political system](#)).
- 2.4.5 Historically, Opposition political party leaders and members have been subject to surveillance, intimidation and harassment and some have faced discrimination in employment. This continues now, but to a much lesser extent. Registered political parties are required to obtain permission from regional governments to open and occupy local offices, and in the past applications were often refused or simply left unapproved. However, in 2018 at least one major opposition party reported it was able to open many offices in advance of the 2020 national election (See [Discrimination and harassment](#)).
- 2.4.6 The government used the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP), particularly in the period before PM Abiy Ahmed was appointed, to suppress criticism by detaining and prosecuting opposition figures, including prominent leaders of opposition political parties (see [Anti-terrorism legislation](#)).
- 2.4.7 Prominent opposition party members and activists have been subject to arbitrary arrest and detention and have been subjected to ill treatment, torture and extrajudicial killings. In July 2018 Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed admitted the use of torture and unlawful interrogation techniques on those detained and the end of 2018, over 60 high level government officials had been arrested on charges of torture and corruption. Since Abiy Ahmed became Prime Minister in April 2018 approximately 10,000 political prisoners have been released and / or granted pardons, including prominent politicians, journalists and human rights activists. There were no high-profile political prisoners by the end of 2018 and sources consulted in this CPIN do not indicate this situation has changed in 2019 (see [Political landscape](#), [Arbitrary arrest and detention](#), [Treatment of detainees / prison conditions](#)).
- 2.4.8 In the country guidance case of [HB \(Ethiopia EDP/UEDP members\) Ethiopia CG \[2004\] UKAIT 00235](#), heard 12 July 2004, promulgated 25 August 2005, the Tribunal held that the country evidence did not support the claim that the United Ethiopian Democratic Party (UEDP), formerly Ethiopian Democratic Party, members were subject to 'routine persecution' (para 31).
- 2.4.9 The UEDP was renamed as 'the Ethiopian Democratic Party' (EDP) in 2009. Following the 2015 election the EDP has been largely inactive. However, in May 2019 EDP, along with 6 other opposition parties dissolved to form a

new party Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (ECSJ) (see Non-armed opposition groups – [Ethiopian Democratic Party \(EDP\)](#) and [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ\)](#)).

- 2.4.10 Since HB was promulgated, particularly since April 2018, the political space has opened up and the government has shown increased tolerance and acceptance of opposition groups. The release of high profile political prisoners and government engagement with senior members of opposition groups in 2018 and 2019 indicates, that generally, the overall situation for opposition parties, including the former EDP, has improved significantly. In general, the available information indicates that members of non-armed political groups are not subject to treatment amounting to persecution.
- 2.4.11 Ethiopia is transitioning through a period of significant and fundamental reform. The onus is on the person to demonstrate that, based on their profile, political activities, past experiences including any arrests (and the timing of those arrests), they will be at risk of persecution or serious harm on return. Each case must be considered on its own facts.

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b. Former designated terrorist organisations

- 2.4.12 Members, or perceived members, of one of the three opposition groups designated as terrorist organisations in 2011 (the OLF, ONLF or Ginbot 7/AGUDM) have historically been subjected to surveillance, harassment, arrest and imprisonment, torture and ill-treatment – including during the most recent State of Emergency (February – June 2018). This treatment also sometimes extended to supporters and family members of supporters or those perceived to be affiliated with OLF, ONLF or Ginbot 7/AGUDM (see [State of emergency](#) and [Treatment of opposition groups](#)).
- 2.4.13 The paramilitary group, the Liyu police, has operated with apparent impunity in the Somali and eastern Oromia regions and have been accused of human rights abuses against civilians who are viewed as supportive of the ONLF. There have also been reports that where the Liyu police have a presence in detention facilities in the Somali region there is an increased risk of torture for persons who are or are perceived ONLF members or someone perceived to be affiliated with the ONLF (see [The Liyu Police and their treatment of people in the Ogaden \(Somali\) and eastern Oromia regions](#) and [Treatment of detainees / prison conditions](#)).
- 2.4.14 In the country guidance case of [MB \(OLF and MTA – risk\) Ethiopia CG \[2007\] UKAIT 00030 \(29 March 2007\)](#), heard 19 February 2007, the Upper Tribunal held that OLF members and sympathisers, and those specifically perceived by the authorities to be such members or sympathisers, will in general be at real risk of persecution if they have been previously arrested or detained on suspicion of OLF involvement. So too will those who have a significant history, , of OLF membership or sympathy which is known to the authorities (para 66).
- 2.4.15 Since the country guidance determination in [MB](#), the country situation has improved. During 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed removed the designation of the OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7/AGUDM as terrorist organisations and welcomed high profile leaders back to Ethiopia, where they can register as

political parties (although there is no indication this has yet happened). Hundreds of thousands of people gathered in Addis Ababa to welcome back OLF leaders which is reported to have passed without incident. A number of high profile prisoners have also been released and /or pardoned, including deputy leader of Ginbot 7 who had been detained since 2014 (See [Former designated terrorist organisations](#)).

- 2.4.16 Armed members of the OLF, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), returned to Ethiopia and committed to laying down arms, with sources indicating that up to 1000 members had entered government rehabilitation camps. However, there were reports of attacks in early 2019, including airstrikes, by the authorities on OLA training camps (see [OLF militants / Oromo Liberation Army \(OLA\)](#) and [Former designated terrorist organisations](#)).
- 2.4.17 The situation for high profile leaders of the former designated terrorist organisation has, generally, improved. Besides allegations made by the OLF website of a number of arrests and by other sources of airstrikes on OLA positions in early 2019, there have been no further recent reports in the sources consulted of targeting of members, sympathisers or family members of the previously terrorist-designated groups (see [OLF militants / Oromo Liberation Army \(OLA\)](#) and [Former designated terrorist organisations](#)).
- 2.4.18 In general, the country information indicates that there has been cogent and durable change in regard to the opposition generally and former and current armed groups in particular. Therefore there are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from UT's findings in [MB](#).
- 2.4.19 In the context of the significant and fundamental reform that has occurred since April 2018, the onus is on the person to demonstrate that, based on their profile, political activities, past experiences including any arrests (and the timing of those arrests), they will be at risk of persecution or serious harm on return.

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c. Journalists and bloggers

- 2.4.20 The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech and the press. However, historically journalists and bloggers have been subject to restriction and harassment including government interference in publications, disrupted access to the internet and blocked social media sites. Prior to 2018, journalists and bloggers have been subject to arrest and detention including convictions on terrorism charges and detentions under State of Emergency provisions. Journalists and bloggers have faced ill-treatment in prison.
- 2.4.21 Since Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took office, there has been a marked improvement in press and media freedom. Following the end of the State of Emergency in June 2018, the government unblocked websites, blogs, radio and TV-stations, and allowed access to internet and mobile applications which were previously unavailable. Political prisoners have been released, including prominent journalists and members of blogging groups. At the end of 2018, for the first time in over 15 years, there were no journalists imprisoned (see [Treatment of journalists and bloggers](#) and [Treatment of detainees / prison conditions](#)).

- 2.4.22 In general, the available information indicates that freedom of expression has increased and journalists and bloggers are not likely to be at risk of treatment amounting to persecution or serious harm.
- 2.4.23 Whilst there is no general risk of persecution for persons claiming to be journalists or bloggers, each case must be considered on its facts with the following factors to be taken into account:
- The subject matter of the published or material posted online in question
 - Whether the material refers specifically to a high-level government official or political leader
 - The language and tone used
 - The reach (circulation) and influence of the publication or other medium
 - The publicity attracted in other media or on the internet
 - The frequency of such articles or posts
 - Any past adverse interest in the person by the authorities
 - Any previous physical attacks which are reasonably likely to continue.
- 2.4.24 The work or publications of those persons claiming to be journalists or bloggers, in the context of recent changes in media freedom, should be taken into account and each case must be considered on its own facts. The onus is on the person to show that their profile, work or their activities are such that the authorities are likely to view them adversely and subject them to treatment amounting to persecution or serious harm.

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d. Protestors

- 2.4.25 The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly. However, under State of Emergency regulations (SOE) (at the time of publication, the most recent being February–June 2018) demonstrations were prohibited. Protesters have been subjected to harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention. The SOE was lifted in June 2018 and, although one source indicated a rise in protests at this time (as the restriction was lifted), it also noted a decline in confrontations between state forces and protestors. The government has shown increased restraint with protestors and police have provided security to large peaceful demonstrations (see [Treatment of protestors](#), [Treatment of detainees / prison conditions](#) and [State of emergency](#)).
- 2.4.26 A person who was simply a participant in a protest is unlikely to be of interest to the authorities. The onus is on the person to show that their profile, activities and / or past treatment at the hands of the state are such that the authorities are likely to view them adversely and subject them to treatment amounting to persecution or serious harm.
- 2.4.27 For assessment in relation to the Oromo protests see the country policy and information note on [Ethiopia: Oromos](#)

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e. Human rights activists and / or members of civil society

- 2.4.28 Historically human rights activists have been viewed as opponents of the government and have been subject to harassment, arrest and detention. The large-scale release of prisoners in 2018 and 2019 included the release of human rights activists. The government has since announced all human rights activists previously detained in Ethiopia have been released (see [Political landscape](#) and [Human rights activists and Civil society](#)).
- 2.4.29 Legislation including the 2009 CSO Proclamation on Charities and Societies has restricted the work of civil society organisations and NGOs. In 2019 the proclamation was revised providing greater freedom to civil society and NGOs to operate (see [Human rights activists and Civil society](#)).
- 2.4.30 The change in the government's approach to human rights activists, in the context of the increased tolerance towards political opponents, is seen by sources as positive. In general, the country information indicates that human rights activists are not likely to be at risk of persecution or serious harm. Each case must therefore be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that their profile, activities and / or past treatment at the hands of the state are such that the authorities are likely to view them adversely and subject them to treatment amounting to persecution or serious harm.
- 2.4.31 Although civil society members and NGOs have faced restriction and harassment, their treatment is unlikely to be serious enough by its nature and repetition to amount to persecution or serious harm. The onus is on the person to show that their profile, activities and/or past treatment at the hands of the state are such that the authorities are likely to view them adversely and subject them to treatment amounting to persecution or serious harm.

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2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, they are unlikely to be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.5.2 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Decision makers must carefully consider the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person. However, where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, it is unlikely to be reasonable to expect them to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.6.2 For further guidance on internal relocation and factors to consider, see the [Asylum 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 the [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: 10 July 2019

3. Political landscape

3.1 Change of prime minister

- 3.1.1 The Addis Standard, a privately-owned magazine, in the article ‘Ethiopia pm Hailemariam Desalegn resigns’, 15 February 2018, stated: ‘Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn said he has submitted a letter requesting to resign from his role as Prime Minister and Chairman of Ethiopia’s ruling party EPRDF. In a televised address to the nation this afternoon, PM Hailemariam said he decided to resign from his post in order to help facilitate the ruling party’s reform agenda to manage the current crisis in the country.’¹
- 3.1.2 The United States Department of State (USSD) ‘Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Ethiopia’ (USSD report 2018) published 13 March 2019 covering events in 2018 noted: ‘On February 14 [2018], Hailemariam announced his resignation as prime minister, and on March 27 [2018], the EPRDF elected Abiy Ahmed as the new chairperson of the party and candidate for federal prime minister. After an acclamation vote in the HPR [House of People’s Representatives], Abiy Ahmed assumed the prime minister position on April 2 [2018].’²
- 3.1.3 The Washington Post in the article ‘Ethiopia’s prime minister resigns amid political turmoil’ dated 15 February 2018 noted:

‘Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn submitted his resignation Thursday in an apparent bid to ease political turmoil... According to the state-run Ethiopian News Agency, Desalegn resigned both as prime minister and chairman of the ruling party “to be part of the efforts to provide a lasting solution to the current situation.”

‘In his speech, Desalegn noted that people were displaced and injured, and property was damaged in the recent unrest. He said he believed that his resignation was necessary to carry out democratic reforms that are underway.

‘Desalegn was seen as a caretaker and consensus figure without a great deal of power, implementing the orders of more influential figures in the army and the ruling Ethiopia People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front... The

¹ Addis Standard, Ethiopia pm Hailemariam Desalegn resigns, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

² USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 3), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

ruling party, of which Desalegn was once chairman, has also faced internal divisions as parties representing the other ethnic regions, particularly the Oromo and the Amhara, jockey for position.’³

- 3.1.4 The Freedom House ‘Freedom in the World 2019’ report, published 4 February 2019 and covering events in 2018, noted:

‘Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed—a 42-year-old former military officer from Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group, the Oromo, and a member of the ruling EPRDF—was sworn in as prime minister in April 2018, succeeding Hailemariam Desalegn, who resigned in February amid growing protests at which demonstrators demanded greater political rights. Abiy was reconfirmed at the EPRDF party congress in October.’⁴

- 3.1.5 For background information and a timeline in relation to prime minister Dr Abiy Ahmed Ali, known as Abiy Ahmed see the BBC article ‘[Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia's prime minister](#)’⁵, [Congressional Research Service publication ‘In Focus’](#)⁶

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3.2 Abiy Ahmed’s agenda and early actions

- 3.2.1 The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) noted in ‘Change and Continuity in Protests and Political Violence in PM Abiy’s Ethiopia’, published 13 October 2018, covering trends since April 2018 that:

‘The swearing in of Abiy Ahmed as Ethiopia’s Prime Minister on April 2, 2018 has been regarded as a watershed moment in the country’s political development; Abiy took power after his predecessor, Hailemariam Desalegn— who had been in office since 2012— unexpectedly left office. Hailemariam’s time in office was marked by states of emergency and widespread protests. PM Abiy’s brief tenure thus far has been marked by a dramatic shift in the country’s rhetoric, an increased tolerance for political dissidents, and a thawing of tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea over a long-standing border dispute.’⁷

- 3.2.2 The Danish Immigration Service (DIS) in its September 2018 report ‘Ethiopia Political situation and treatment of opposition’ (DIS report 2018), based on interviews in Ethiopia noted: ‘It was commonly agreed that the incoming Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had sharply broken with the policy of the past by reaching out to the opposition and shown signs of reformist policy.’⁸

- 3.2.3 The same report noted ‘The overall situation for opposition groups has improved following the nomination of Prime Minister Abiy, according to the majority of the interviewed sources [The report lists the following sources in the respective footnote: International researcher, national researcher, British Embassy, EU, Danish Refugee Council, the Fortune, blogger]’.⁹

³ The Washington Post, Ethiopia’s prime minister resigns amid political turmoil, 15 February 2018, [url](#)

⁴ Freedom House, Freedom House report 2019 (section A), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

⁵ BBC, Abiy Ahmed: Ethiopia’s prime minister, 14 September 2018, [url](#)

⁶ Congressional Research Service, In Focus, 27 November 2018, [url](#)

⁷ ACLED, Change and Continuity..., 13 October 2018, [url](#)

⁸ DIS, DIS report 2018 (Executive summary), September 2018, [url](#)

⁹ DIS, DIS report 2018 (para 5.1.1), September 2018, [url](#)

3.2.4 The USSD report 2018 noted:

‘Abiy’s assumption of office was followed by positive changes in the human rights climate. The government decriminalized political movements that had been accused of treason in the past, invited opposition leaders to return to the country and resume political activities, allowed peaceful rallies and demonstrations, enabled the formation and unfettered operation of new political parties and media outlets, continued steps to release thousands of political prisoners, and undertook revisions of repressive laws. On June 5 [2018], the parliament voted to lift the SOE [State of Emergency].’¹⁰

3.2.5 The Guardian noted on 8 July 2018:

3.2.6 ‘Abiy Ahmed, the prime minister of Ethiopia, has accelerated a radical reform programme that is overturning politics in the vast, strategically significant African country...

‘The 42-year-old – who took power following the surprise resignation of his predecessor, Haile Mmariam Dessalegn – has so far reshuffled his cabinet, fired a series of controversial and hitherto untouchable civil servants, reached out to hostile neighbours and rivals, lifted bans on websites and other media, freed thousands of political prisoners, ordered the partial privatisation of massive state-owned companies and ended a state of emergency imposed to quell widespread unrest.

‘In recent days, Abiy fired the head of Ethiopia’s prison service after repeated allegations of widespread torture, and removed three opposition groups from its lists of “terrorist” organisations.

‘On Sunday [8 July 2018], the former soldier met president Isaiiah Afwerki of Eritrea in a bid to end one of Africa’s longest running conflicts. The two men hugged and laughed in scenes unthinkable just months ago.’¹¹

3.2.7 International Crisis Group (ICG) in its report ‘Managing Ethiopia’s Unsettled Transition’, published 21 February 2019 noted:

‘Changes during Abiy’s first months in office have been fast-paced.... he has sent long-serving politicians and security officials into overdue retirement and detained others. He has assembled a media-savvy team to disseminate an inclusive message, condemning the EPRDF’s past abuses and promising free and fair elections and a more legitimate and inclusive political system.

‘...With the 2020 elections fast approaching (and local elections due in mid-2019), the administration has precious little time to prepare, and the same is true of a raft of political parties that have never before had the opportunity to participate in a credible election... Abiy should reach out to the opposition to agree on a dispute resolution framework ahead of the vote. This step might minimise the temptation of those unhappy with the outcome to resort to violence.’¹²

3.2.8 The National Report submitted by the Federal Attorney General for Ethiopia to the Human Rights Council’s working group for the UN’s Universal Periodic

¹⁰ USSD, USSD report 2018 (Executive summary), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹ The Guardian, These changes are unprecedented...8 July 2018, [url](#)

¹² ICG, Managing Ethiopia’s Unsettled Transition (Executive Summary), 21 February 2019, [url](#)

Review (UPR) of Ethiopia in February 2019 stated that: ‘Since the deep-rooted political reforms began, large numbers of journalists, bloggers, members and leaders of opposition or formerly banned political groups have been released from prison through pardon, dropping of charges and amnesty. Members and leadership of opposition political parties now have complete freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.’¹³

- 3.2.9 The Fund for Peace in the Fragile States Index (FSI) Annual Report 2019, published 7 April 2019 (FSI report 2019) explained that the FSI is an annual ranking of 178 countries based on the different pressures they face that impact their levels of fragility. The 2019 FSI, comprised data collected between 1 January 2018 and 31 December 2018¹⁴ and noted:

‘After having ranked as the most-worsened country in the 2017 FSI, Ethiopia has staged a remarkable turn-around this year, ranking as the most-improved country [on the 2019 FSI] in the wake of the ambitious reform agenda of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed that has led to more political and social inclusiveness, breaking down the previous ethno-centric system that the country endured for decades.’¹⁵

- 3.2.10 The Freedom House report 2019 provided the following assessment:

‘Abiy’s administration has pledged reforms that will ease the legal and practical requirements for opposition parties to operate, though substantial changes are necessary before political parties can carry out activities freely.

‘Score Change: The score improved from 0 to 1 [out of 4, 0 being the least free] because the government took a number of steps that allowed political groupings greater freedom to operate, including releasing political prisoners, pardoning opposition leaders, and enacting an amnesty for thousands of people charged with crimes against the state.’¹⁶

- 3.2.11 The Amnesty International article, ‘Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition’, dated 26 April 2019, noted:

‘Months after his entrance on to Ethiopia’s political scene, it became evident that he was serious about fundamentally changing Ethiopia’s political and economic direction. He welcomed back exiled opposition groups Ginbot 7, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) that had been attempting, through violent means, to overthrow Ethiopia’s governing coalition, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). They were based in arch enemy Eritrea, a country with whom the Prime Minister was able to end a twenty-year conflict, seemingly overnight... Within months of his appointment, there was an opening of political space, many prisoners of conscience were released, cabinet was reshuffled and representation of women in government increased.’¹⁷

¹³ UN Human Rights Council, National report (para 52), 25 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴ The Fund for Peace, FSI Annual Report 2019 (p.33), 7 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵ The Fund for Peace, FSI Annual Report 2019 (p.11), 7 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶ Freedom House, Freedom House report 2019 (section B.2), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷ Amnesty International, Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition, 26 April 2019, [url](#).

3.2.12 The same article stated ‘Importantly, over 60 high level government officials got arrested on charges of torture and corruption by the end of 2018, and Ethiopia’s Legal Advisory Council announced the redrafting of some of the more draconian pieces of legislation as a part of judicial reforms.’¹⁸

3.2.13 See also [House of Commons Library ‘Ethiopia charts a new course under Abiy Ahmed – but challenges remain’](#)¹⁹

See also [Treatment of opposition groups](#)

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3.3 Assassinations and attempted coup

3.3.1 Foreign Policy, a global affairs media organisation, in its article entitled ‘Ethiopia Is at a ‘Very Critical Juncture’ published on 24 June 2019 stated:

‘Ethiopia marked a national day of mourning on Monday after four government officials, including the governor of the Amhara region and the chief of the army, were assassinated over the weekend in dual attacks in Addis Ababa and Amhara’s capital city, Bahir Dar. State forces shot and killed Brig. Gen. Asaminew Tsige, a former political prisoner, who is allegedly responsible for the attacks, in Amhara state on Monday. Tsige was said to be resentful of perceived maltreatment by the central government, but there remains some confusion about the nature and precise planning of the attacks.’²⁰

3.3.2 The same article, in analysis provided by Human Rights Watch (HRW), noted:

‘Under Abiy’s leadership there’s been a lot of very positive human rights reforms, but one of the ongoing concerns has been the breakdown in security across wide parts of the country. And I think so far that insecurity has manifested itself in a lot of ethnic violence....Over this weekend, we saw a slightly different manifestation of that breakdown. While Abiy has earned a lot of praise for his human rights reforms, I think it’s clear that some of those actors that are not supportive of the regime have made their mark.’²¹

3.3.3 France 24, a French state-owned international news and current affairs television network, in the article ‘Dozens killed in foiled Ethiopia coup attempt, authorities say’ dated 26 June 2019 noted:

‘Dozens of people were killed in fighting during a foiled coup by a rogue state militia in Ethiopia’s Amhara region at the weekend, the regional government spokesman said.., the first official report of significant clashes.

‘The militia attacked the police headquarters, ruling party headquarters and president’s office where they executed three top officials in Amhara’s regional capital of Bahir Dar on Saturday...

‘The militia was a recently formed unit of the region’s security services...The fact that the militia were state forces rather than independent raises the

¹⁸ Amnesty International, Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition, 26 April 2019, [url](#).

¹⁹ House of Commons Library, Ethiopia charts a new course under Abiy Ahmed – but challenges remain, 26 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁰ Foreign Policy, ‘Ethiopia Is at a ‘Very Critical Juncture’’, 24 June 2019, [url](#)

²¹ Foreign Policy, ‘Ethiopia Is at a ‘Very Critical Juncture’’, 24 June 2019, [url](#)

stakes for the government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who has rolled out a package of economic and political reforms since taking office in April last year.

'He has lifted a ban on political parties, released journalists, rebels and prisoners, and prosecuted officials accused of abuses. But his shake-up of the military and intelligence services has earned him powerful enemies.

'His government is also struggling to contain discontent from Ethiopia's myriad ethnic groups fighting the federal government and each other for greater influence and resources.'²²

3.3.4 Voice of America (VOA), the US state funded international news agency, in the article 'Assassinations, Arrests Test Ethiopia's Fragile Push Toward Democracy', 5 July 2019 stated:

'The attacks [22 June 2019], Abiy said, are only the latest attempt to disrupt his agenda through violence, the most recent in a chain of incidents that, together, constitute an existential threat to [Ethiopia]....

'He characterized instigators of violence as illogical and heartless. But William Davison, International Crisis Group's senior analyst for Ethiopia, told VOA Brigadier General Asaminew Tsige, who government officials say masterminded the attacks, and who soon after died in a firefight with federal security forces, was a popular figure in the Amhara region...In his remarks Monday, Abiy hinted at other, unreported attempts to grab power through violence since he took office...

'Abiy enjoys widespread support, both at home, toward the middle of the Ethiopian political spectrum, and within the international community, Henok G. Gabisa, a professor of practice at Washington and Lee University's School of Law, in Virginia, told VOA. Religious leaders and civic society groups share Abiy's vision, Gabisa added.

'But some say Abiy's reforms don't go far enough and fear that mass arrests and internet shutdowns signal a backslide on promises to open space for opposition groups and competing political parties. The government arrested hundreds following last month's attacks. And the internet shutoff is just the latest attempt to control the flow of information...

'Some Ethiopians, especially those who feel left out of reforms and on the margins of the country's political sphere, share Abiy's commitment to the country's unique brand of ethnic federalism, a tenuous agglomeration of some of the country's more than 80 ethnic groups. That ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, dominates the political space, but may be on its last legs.

"The political elites within the EPRDF are divided, and they have yet to learn to work together during such an experimental time," Gabisa said. "I think Abiy is the last and remaining chance for the EPRDF to repair itself," he added.'²³

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²² France 24, 'Dozens killed in foiled Ethiopia coup attempt,...' 26 June 2019, [url](#)

²³ VOA, 'Assassinations, Arrests Test Ethiopia's Fragile Push Toward Democracy', 5 July 2019, [url](#)

3.4 State of emergency

3.4.1 The USSD report 2018 noted ‘On February 15 [2018], the government declared a State of Emergency (SOE) in response to growing unrest and political uncertainty. During the SOE a Command Post under the direction of the minister of defense held broad powers that, while constitutionally granted, infringed upon human rights by expanding authorities to detain individuals, restrict speech, and restrict movement.’²⁴

3.4.2 The same report stated: ‘The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention; however, SOE [State of Emergency] regulations allowed law enforcement officers to arrest and detain individuals without a court warrant and hold detainees for longer than prescribed under normal, non-SOE legal precedent.

‘There were reports of hundreds of arbitrary arrests and detentions related to the SOE targeting protesters, professors, university students, musicians, businesspersons, health workers, journalists, children, and others.’²⁵

3.4.3 And:

‘The SOE [State of Emergency] regulations contained several prohibitions that restricted freedom of speech and expression and subsequently resulted in the temporary detention of some independent voices. The regulations, interpreted broadly, prohibited any covert or overt agitation and communication that could incite violence and unrest. Restricted activities also included any communication with designated terrorist groups or antipeace forces, storing and disseminating texts, storing and promoting emblems of terrorist groups, incitement in sermons and teaching in religious institutions to induce fear or incite conflict, and speech that could incite attacks based on identity or ethnicity.’²⁶

3.4.4 The DIS report 2018 noted:

‘In February 2018 the Government of Ethiopia proclaimed a six months State of Emergency; only six months after the previous one had ended. This State of Emergency was supposed to remain in force until mid August but was lifted in June 2018 at the initiative of the newly elected Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Whereas the previous State of Emergency was characterised by civil unrest in the regional states of Oromia, Amhara and Somali and by the arrest of numerous civilians, there were fewer violent riots and security incidents across the country during the last State of Emergency. It was imposed with less use of violence although there still had been instances where the authorities had shown force in the handling of protesters.’²⁷

3.4.5 The same report noted:

‘The majority of the interlocutors agreed that the State of Emergency, which had been imposed across Ethiopia in February 2018 had been implemented with “a softer hand” than the previous State of Emergency...

²⁴ USSD, USSD report 2018 (Executive summary), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁵ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.c), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁶ USSD, USSD report 2018 (2.a), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁷ DIS, DIS report 2018 (Executive summary and para 3.3.1), September 2018, [url](#)

‘All of those interlocutors, who commented on the situation after the delegation had left Ethiopia, confirmed that the State of Emergency had been lifted and that this constituted a significant development...Whereas some observers noted that the lifting of the State of emergency could lead to an improvement in the human rights situation, the well informed diplomatic source representing the British Embassy called for caution by stating that the premature lifting of the State of Emergency did not per se have any clear impact (neither negative nor positive) on the current human rights situation, including for members of the opposition. A recurrent expression to describe the situation even before the State of Emergency was lifted was that of “cautious optimism” and hope.’²⁸

- 3.4.6 The UN Human Rights Council, in its Compilation on Ethiopia dated 1 March 2019 noted: ‘In June 2018, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that it was encouraged by the lifting of the state of emergency decree, three months ahead of its expiration date...’²⁹For information on the state of emergency declared in October 2016, see the [Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade](#) report on Ethiopia published in 2017.

See also [Treatment of opposition groups](#) and [Protestors](#)

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Section 4 updated: 8 May 2019

4. Political system

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 The USSD report 2018 noted: ‘Ethiopia is a federal republic. The ruling Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of four ethnically based parties, controls the government. In the 2015 general elections, the EPRDF and affiliated parties won all 547 House of People’s Representatives (HPR - parliament) seats to remain in power for a fifth consecutive five-year term.’³⁰
- 4.1.2 The Freedom House report, Freedom in the World 2019 Ethiopia (Freedom House report 2019), covering events of 2018 noted:
- ‘The president is the head of state and is indirectly elected to a six-year term by both chambers of Parliament. The prime minister is head of government, and is selected by the largest party in Parliament after elections, or in the case of a resignation...The last parliamentary elections, which led to the selection of Desalegn as prime minister in 2015, were not held in accordance with democratic standards...
- ‘The bicameral Parliament includes the 153-seat House of Federation, whose members are elected by state assemblies to five-year terms, and the House of People’s Representatives, with 547 members directly elected to five-year terms.

²⁸ DIS, DIS report 2018 (Section 2), September 2018, [url](#)

²⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Compilation on Ethiopia (para 33), 1 March 2019 [url](#)

³⁰ USSD, USSD report 2018 (Executive summary), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

'The 2015 parliamentary and regional elections were tightly controlled by the EPRDF, with reports of voter coercion, intimidation, and registration barriers. The opposition lost its sole parliamentary seat, as the EPRDF and its allies took all 547 seats in the House of People's Representatives.'³¹

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4.2 Ruling party - Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)

4.2.1 Four major parties make up the ruling party. The Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM), and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF)³².

4.2.2 Global Security provided further information on the background and composition of the EPRDF coalition:

'The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is a coalition of ethnically based parties.

'The ruling coalition was composed of four political parties delineated along ethnic lines: the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organisation (OPDO), the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM). The TPLF is the dominant group within the ruling coalition, even though Tigrayans make up only six percent of the country's population. Members of the group also hold influential positions in the security forces and other sectors.

'The EPRDF was founded by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in 1989 to unite insurgent groups fighting against the military government. The TPLF was and remains the dominant member, and since 1991 it has provided most of Ethiopia's military and political leadership. The TPLF's most important partners are the Amhara National Democratic Movement and the Oromo People's Democratic Organization. A large number of other parties, sponsored by the TPLF and often labeled "democratic organizations," are allied with the EPRDF and hold seats in parliament.'³³

4.2.3 The Guardian in its article, 'These changes are unprecedented: how Abiy is upending Ethiopian politics', published 8 July 2018, provided background on the EPRDF and Abiy Ahmed's role within the party:

'The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the rebel coalition that ousted the Derg military regime in 1991, is split by factional battles between four ethnically based parties as well as fierce competition between institutions and individuals.

'Tigrayans, an ethnic community centred in the north of Ethiopia, make up about 6% of the population but are generally considered to dominate the political and business elite.

'Abiy was seen as a relative political outsider before being picked for the top job by the EPRDF council. He is the first leader from Ethiopia's largest ethnic

³¹ Freedom House, Freedom House report 2019 (section A), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

³² Addis Standard, Dr. Abiy Ahmed elected new chairman of EPRDF, 27 March 2018, [url](#)

³³ Global Security, Ethiopian Political Parties, 27 July 2018, [url](#)

community, the Oromo, who have complained for decades of economic, cultural and political marginalisation.

'Born in western Ethiopia, Abiy joined the resistance against the regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam as a teenager before enlisting in the armed forces, reaching the rank of lieutenant-colonel. He has a doctorate in peace and security studies. After a stint running Ethiopia's cyberintelligence service, he entered politics eight years ago and rose rapidly up the ranks of the Oromo faction of the EPRDF, which has historically been at odds with the Tigrayans.'³⁴

4.2.4 Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment dated 9 May 2019 noted:

'The previously dominant Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has been progressively marginalised within the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and will probably exit coalition before 2020 legislative elections. This is motivated by Prime Minister Ahmed stating in February 2019 that the coalition will be merged into a single party - a strategy indicated on 18 April by the elevation of regional power brokers into central government. The EPRDF will probably retain a majority because Ahmed's Oromo Democratic Party is co-operating with the Amhara Democratic Party; together controlling 58% of parliamentary seats.'³⁵

See also [Political System Overview](#)

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4.3 Participation in the political process

4.3.1 The USSD report 2018 repeated its assessment from previous years^{36 37 38} that 'The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The ruling party's electoral advantages, however, limited this ability.'³⁹

4.3.2 The Freedom House report 2019 noted:

'The EPRDF still maintains numerous formal and informal advantages over opposition parties, and there are no opposition parties represented in Parliament. However, the changes Prime Minister Abiy's government began to implement in 2018 improved conditions for opposition groupings, which may now prepare more openly for the 2020 parliamentary elections. Abiy in August 2018 expressed a commitment to democratic polls, and pledged that he would not allow his reforms to delay the vote.'⁴⁰

4.3.3 The same report noted 'Opponents of the EPRDF have found it nearly impossible to operate inside Ethiopia and were subject to prosecution under restrictive antiterrorism and other legislation. However, in 2018, authorities

³⁴ The Guardian, These changes are unprecedented...8 July 2018, [url](#)

³⁵ Jane's (subscription source), Sentinel Security Assessment (Executive Summary), 9 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁶ USSD, USSD report 2016 (section 3), 3 March 2017, [url](#)

³⁷ USSD, USSD report 2015 (section 3), 13 April 2016, [url](#)

³⁸ USSD, USSD report 2017 (section 3), 20 April 2018, [url](#)

³⁹ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 3), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰ Freedom House, Freedom House report 2019 (section B.2), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

took a number of actions that gave political groupings more freedom to operate.’⁴¹

- 4.3.4 In a January 2019 article summarising political events in Ethiopia in 2018, the Addis Standard (a privately-owned magazine) stated:

‘...on November 22 [2018] Parliament convenes for yet another historic session and approves Birtukan Mideksa, a former opposition leader and political prisoner, to chair the Ethiopian National Electoral Board (ENEB)...

‘Before November comes to an end, representatives from 81 opposition parties meet PM Abiy in his office and discussed among other, the highly anticipated general elections in 2020.’⁴²

- 4.3.5 The UN Human Rights Council’s Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions on Ethiopia, dated 4 March 2019, in a joint response from Transparency Ethiopia and the Consortium of Ethiopian Rights Organizations noted:

‘...recent reforms of the electoral system could improve the fairness of the electoral system and increase the participation of different political parties and their representation in the national parliament.... almost all exiled political parties had been invited to participate in the democratic process and the elections in 2020.’⁴³

- 4.3.6 The National Report submitted by the Federal Attorney General for Ethiopia to the Human Rights Council’s working group for the UN’s Universal Periodic Review of Ethiopia dated February 2019 stated that:

‘The current national electoral laws are being amended through consultations between the ruling and opposition parties. The revised laws are expected to shift Ethiopia’s electoral system from first-past-the-post to a mix between proportional and first-past-the-post systems and redefine the composition and functions of the National Electoral Board thereby opening up opportunities for diverse voices to join the national parliament. The on-going revision of the media law, the charities and societies legislation and the electoral laws will create more room for civil society engagement in civic and voter education as well as election monitoring and improve public and commercial media access to opposition political parties to ensure more inclusive electoral debates.

‘To enhance the independence and credibility of the National Electoral board, a new Chairperson has been sworn in by the House of People’s Representatives after consultation with opposition political parties. The Board’s new leadership is taking a series of measures to enhance its capacity to hold free and fair national elections in 2020 and beyond.’⁴⁴

- 4.3.7 Africanews, an independent news organisation, in their report dated 15 March 2019, stated:

‘Competing political parties in Ethiopia on Thursday [14 March 2019] signed a peace pact as part of democratic efforts as the country gears towards crucial polls slated for 2020. Reports indicate that over 100 parties were

⁴¹ Freedom House, Freedom House report 2019 (section B), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

⁴² Addis Standard, 2018: From nervous January to historic July..., 2 January 2019, [url](#)

⁴³ UN Human Rights Council, Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions...(para 39), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁴ UN Human Rights Council, National report (para 62-63), 25 February 2019, [url](#)

signatories to the code of conduct document at an event held in the capital Addis Ababa.

'Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed signed the document on behalf of the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF. He described the occasion as a democratic milestone.

"Describing the day as a historic and unique one that has bound more than 100 parties in common understanding, he called upon all to treat the document as one that guides the actions of all. He also called upon law and security enforcement entities to serve all parties equally. In concluding, PM Abiy Ahmed called upon all to be custodians of peace and unity in our current moment," the PM's office said in social media posts....

'Abiy has in the past held talks with opposition parties and spoken about his determination to ensure the polls are free, fair and credible. He has stated explicitly that he will respect the will of the people after the vote.'⁴⁵

4.3.8 Jane's, in its Sentinel Security Assessment dated 2 April 2019, stated:

'Political parties have only existed legally since 1991 and official opposition to the ruling Ethiopian Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) secured no seats in the House of Representatives (parliament) at the 2015 elections. The opposition previously faced censorship, imprisonment and exile, which prevented it from gaining momentum. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has begun normalising opposition movements...

'The existing first-past-the-post electoral system exacerbates the under-representation of opposition parties, whereby Ethiopia's ethnic federacy offers equal representation of ethnicities, despite this not being representative of the population's ethnic mix. The former prime minister pledged a mixed-member proportional representation system. Prime Minister Ahmed is likely to reform the election system towards this model, but the voting system would most likely seek to preserve the EPRDF's dominance.'⁴⁶

4.3.9 Ethiopia Insight in their article published 1 March 2019 noted:

'OLF is still not registered with the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE)...

'Dawud [OLF leader] told Ethiopia Insight in January that OLF was asked by NEBE to submit a document signed by founders. This is impossible as OLF was established in 1973 and the founders have left or are dead, Dawud said. He added that the recently approved Administrative Boundaries and Identity Issues and Reconciliation and Peace commissions excluded OLF, while its ideological opponents are present, as is Leenco.'⁴⁷

4.3.10 The next general election is due in 2020⁴⁸. The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) outlines its objectives, powers and duties⁴⁹. At the time of writing, there was no list of political parties registered for the 2020 election

⁴⁵ Africanews, Ethiopia parties sign pact ahead of 2020 polls, 15 March 2019, [url](#).

⁴⁶ Jane's, Sentinel Security Assessment, Ethiopia (section Internal Affairs), 2 April 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Ethiopia Insight, OLF integration underway...(OLF still not registered), 1 March 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Reuters, Ethiopia's 2020 vote will be free, won't be delayed by reforms: PM, 25 August 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹ NEBE, Website (About), undated, [url](#)

on the NEBE website⁵⁰. However, about 107 political parties have signed a code of conduct with the prime minister ahead of the polls⁵¹.

See also [Political landscape](#) and [Treatment of opposition groups](#)

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Section 5 updated: 29 May 2019

5. Armed opposition groups

5.1 Designated terrorist organisations

5.1.1 Five groups were designated by the Ethiopian parliament as terrorist organizations in 2011:

- Patriotic Ginbot-7
- the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)
- the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)
- al-Qa'ida
- Al Shabaab⁵²

5.1.2 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Country Information Report – Ethiopia (The DFAT report 2017) noted, ‘Armed opposition groups, including the ONLF and the OLF, have...been accused of carrying out abuses and violent attacks on government forces and civilians.’⁵³

5.1.3 Fitsum Arega, the Ethiopian prime minister’s chief of staff announced on Twitter on 30 June 2018:

‘Pursuant to Proc. 652/2009, Cabinet has submitted a resolution to Parliament for ratification that will rescind the designation of OLF, ONLF & Ginbot 7 as terrorist groups. The decision will encourage groups to use peaceful political discourse to achieve political ends.’⁵⁴

‘As part of reconciliation Cabinet has approved an Amnesty Law to be sent to Parliament that grants amnesty for individuals & groups, either under investigation or convicted on treason, crime against the Const’l order, armed struggle. Details & conditions are in the law.’⁵⁵

5.1.4 The DIS report 2018 noted ‘...Parliament voted in favour of a law, which removed three important opposition groups – OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 – from the national list of terrorist organisations, and that was confirmed by sources.’⁵⁶

5.1.5 An Africanews report, ‘Ethiopia pardons over 13,000 political prisoners’, dated 23 January 2019, stated: ‘In addition to the release of political prisoners, parliament in June [2018] legalised two secessionist groups – the

⁵⁰ NEBE, Webiste (Political parties), undated, [url](#)

⁵¹ Ethiopian Embassy, Ethiopia parties sign pact ahead of 2020 polls..., 15 March 2019, [url](#)

⁵² USSD, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016, African overview, 19 July 2017, [url](#)

⁵³ DFAT, DFAT report 2017 (para 3.31), 28 September 2017, [url](#)

⁵⁴ Twitter, Fitsum Arega, 30 June 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁵ Twitter, Fitsum Arega, 30 June 2018, [url](#)

⁵⁶ DIS, DIS report 2018 (para 5.1.1), September 2018, [url](#)

Oromo Liberation Front and the Ogaden National Liberation Front – and the exiled opposition movement ‘Ginbot 7’, all previously considered terrorist groups.’⁵⁷

5.1.6 Jane’s in its Sentinel Security Assessment dated 2 April 2019 stated:

‘... parliament in July 2018 remov[ed] the three major opposition groups from the anti-terrorism law: Patriotic Ginbot-7 (PG-7), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). These groups can now register as official political parties and the government would probably allow them to participate in the legislative elections, probably delayed at least until December 2020. A key reason for this change is that the OLF rivals Ahmed’s own Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), both of which draw support from the Oromia region. The OLF would gain support if the ODP does not advance its reform agenda, including on issues such as Oromia’s constitutional status, land acquisition, and reducing youth unemployment. However, the OLF lacks well-organised local party structures, so is unlikely to mobilise voters in sufficient numbers to be a credible threat.’⁵⁸

5.1.7 See also [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#), [Ogaden National Liberation Front \(ONLF\)](#), [Ginbot 7 \(G7\) / Arbegnoch \(Patriot\) Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement \(AGUDM\)](#) and [Treatment of opposition groups](#)

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Section 6 updated: 29 May 2019

6. Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)

6.1 Purpose of the OLF

6.1.1 AlJazeera in the article Ethiopia removes OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 from terror list, published 5 July 2018 summarised: ‘The OLF seeks self-determination for the Oromo people against what they see as Amhara colonial rule. Amharas are an ethnic group in the northern and central highlands of Ethiopia.’⁵⁹

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6.2 History of the OLF

6.2.1 The OLF website (undated) stated: ‘The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is a political organization established in 1973 by Oromo nationalists to lead the national liberation struggle of the Oromo people against the Abyssinian colonial rule. The emergence of the OLF was a culmination of a century old yearn of the Oromo people to have a strong and unified national organization to lead the struggle.’⁶⁰

6.2.2 Amnesty International reported in October 2014 that when Mengistu Hailemariam was overthrown in 1991, the OLF was briefly part of a transitional government led by the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary

⁵⁷ Africanews, Ethiopia pardons over 13,000 political prisoners, 23 January 2019, [url](#).

⁵⁸ Jane’s, Sentinel Security Assessment, Ethiopia (section Internal Affairs), 2 April 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁹ AlJazeera, Ethiopia removes OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 from terror list, 5 July 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁰ OLF, webpage (mission), undated, [url](#)

Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition. However, the OLF always had an uneasy relationship with the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) – the strongest political party in the EPRDF coalition. These tensions led to the OLF leaving the transitional government in 1992⁶¹.

- 6.2.3 Human Rights Watch (HRW), from a 2005 report, stated, 'In fact, the OLF's exact origins are a matter of some controversy, but some trace the organization's roots back to a long armed struggle waged against Imperial rule throughout the Bale region of Oromia from roughly 1963-68. The Bale revolt remains a potent symbol of Oromo nationalism and the struggle for self determination.'⁶²
- 6.2.4 Online media outlet, Gadaa.com, provides a chronology detailing the [Birth of the Oromo Liberation Front](#) (1970-1995)⁶³.

For information on the Oromo, see also the country policy and information note on [Ethiopia: Oromos](#)

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6.3 Founders and leaders of the OLF

- 6.3.1 The Sahan journal stated, in an article of March 2013, that Leenco (Lencho) Lata and Dr. Dima Noggo Sarbo were among the OLF's founders, and Dr Sarbo was briefly the first chairman of OLF⁶⁴.
- 6.3.2 Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - North Africa in its Ethiopia section on Non-State Armed groups, dated 19 March 2018 stated the leader of OLF was Dawud Ibsa⁶⁵. The Reporter (a privately owned Ethiopian newspaper), in October 2018, stated the OLF was headed by Dawed Ibsa⁶⁶.

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6.4 Aims of the OLF

- 6.4.1 The OLF describes its aim as being 'to lead the national liberation struggle of the Oromo people against the Abyssinian colonial rule.'⁶⁷
- 6.4.2 In order to achieve its aims, the OLF has stated that it is 'ready to go an extra mile in search of peaceful resolution of the political crisis in Ethiopia. The OLF is ready to contribute towards any meaningful peace effort, as it did in the past, to reach at a comprehensive settlement to bring peace to all peoples of the empire.'⁶⁸
- 6.4.3 However, it also stated that 'The protracted armed resistance under the leadership of the Front is an act of self-defense exercised by the Oromo people against successive Ethiopian governments, including the current one,

⁶¹ Amnesty International, Ethiopia: Because I am Oromo... (P.19) 28 October 2014, [url](#)

⁶² HRW, Suppressing Dissent... (p.9, footnote 12), May 2005, [url](#)

⁶³ Gadaa.com, Birth of the Oromo Liberation Front (undated), [url](#)

⁶⁴ Sahan, Oromo Activists Launch New Political Party, 29 March 2013, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Janes's (subscription source), Security Sentinel (section OLF), 19 March 2018, [url](#)

⁶⁶ The Reporter, OLF, ULFO sign agreement..., 6 October 2018, [url \(see bibliography for access\)](#)

⁶⁷ OLF, webpage (mission), undated, [url](#)

⁶⁸ OLF, webpage (Policies, On Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts in Ethiopia), undated, [url](#)

who forcibly deny their right to self-determination. The OLF armed resistance targets the government's coercive machinery, not innocent civilians.’⁶⁹

- 6.4.4 Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - North Africa in its Ethiopia section on Non-State Armed groups, dated 19 March 2018 stated:

‘The OLF has never been able to articulate a consistent political objective. Officially, the group pursues the self-determination of the Oromo people, and the advancement of the political, economic, social, and cultural interests of the Oromo, which they believe are subjugated by the federal government. However, factions within the OLF have argued for complete secession from the federal system. In April 2006, the OLF defined its objectives as the "right to self-determination ... release of all political prisoners, reinstatement of the Mecha Tulama Self-help Association, and addressing the political grievances of the Oromo people through peaceful political means and more.”’⁷⁰

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6.5 Size and membership of the OLF

- 6.4.4 It is difficult to determine who is a “member” of the OLF or who is a “fighter”. For example, Amnesty International in their report of October 2014, ‘Because I am Oromo’, in a text box headed ‘The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)’, referred to ‘the OLF (and its armed wing the Oromo Liberation Army, OLA)’ but later stated, ‘The OLF has been riven by leadership divisions and relatively inactive in recent years. Estimates put the number of fighters now at a few thousand.’⁷¹
- 6.5.1 A New Business Ethiopia report, ‘Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 Oromo Liberation Front Soldiers’, dated 13 February 2019 noted that it is estimated that the OLF has ‘a few thousand soldiers’.⁷²
- 6.5.2 The Reporter noted the return of OLF leadership and 1,500 members of their army from Eritrea to Ethiopia in September 2018⁷³.

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6.6 The OLF's areas of influence

- 6.6.1 The OLF operates in the South and South West of Ethiopia.⁷⁴ HRW noted that the borderlands between Kenya and Ethiopia are believed to be a base for OLF fighters⁷⁵.
- 6.6.2 Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - North Africa in its Ethiopia section on Non-State Armed groups, dated 19 March 2018 stated:
- ‘The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) has only a low capacity to stage attacks in Oromia, although historically it has been responsible for IED attacks against government targets and was blamed for a series of minor bomb

⁶⁹ OLF, webpage (Policies, On Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts in Ethiopia), undated, [url](#)

⁷⁰ Janes's (subscription source), Security Sentinel (section OLF), 19 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷¹ Amnesty, Because I am Oromo... (p.19), 28 October 2014, [url](#)

⁷² New Business Ethiopia, Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 OLF Soldiers, 13 February 2019, [url](#).

⁷³ The Reporter, OLF politics, military splits, 6 April 2019, [url \(see bibliography for access\)](#)

⁷⁴ Dutch Council for Refugees, Country of Origin Information Report Ethiopia, 18 May 2016, [url](#)

⁷⁵ HRW, They know everything we do, (p.15) 24 May 2014, [url](#)

attacks including on the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway. In January 2012, an OLF faction dropped its secessionist demands to prioritise regime change. However, the move was rejected by radicalised youth groups and some OLF military wings.⁷⁶

6.6.3 The DIS report 2018 noted:

‘The OLF is active in the struggle for the liberation of Oromia region, the most populous region of Ethiopia with approximately 35 percent of the population. Two sources stated that the OLF was not active as a political party any more in Ethiopia: over the past three years people had distanced themselves from the party out of fear of repercussions and that the leadership of the party had exiled to Eritrea. In the same time period, the report also noted the party had lost military influence and had been weakened.’⁷⁷

6.6.4 US news agency Bloomberg, in the article ‘Returned Ethiopia Rebels Say Army Targets Them With Gunships’, published 14 January 2019, stated ‘Leaders of the OLF, formerly listed as a terrorist group by the government, returned to Ethiopia in September and the organization commands considerable influence in western Oromia. An OLF spokesman had previously said it reached an understanding with Ethiopia’s government during talks in Eritrea that its armed wing wouldn’t be dispersed.’⁷⁸

6.6.5 An opinion piece for AlJazeera by US Political Science lecturer, Yohannes Gedamu, entitled ‘Abiy’s year one: Ethiopia faces the threat of ethnic conflict’, published 2 April 2019, noted:

‘The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which had been active in the region, made a deal with the federal government to lay down arms last year, but there have been reports that certain factions are still armed and in control of certain parts of Guji. The government for months has tried to downplay the power OLF still holds in certain parts of the country but locals continue to report attacks.

‘OLF members were also allowed to return from exile in Eritrea last year, which caused major unrest in Addis Ababa’s suburbs. Violence unleashed on minorities there killed 23 people in September [2018]. Today many people in the area live in fear of ethnic mob attacks.’⁷⁹

6.6.6 Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment - North Africa, 19 April 2019, stated:

‘... Several anti-government militant groups pose sporadic, low-capacity small-arms attack risks, particularly armed Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) elements (despite formal reconciliation with the government) in Oromia’s Welega, Illubabor, Guji, and Borena zones, and Benishangul-Gumuz militants in areas bordering western Oromia. Their most likely targets are security forces, state-owned assets, local civilians, and (infrequently) road travellers (including vehicles carrying expatriate staff in remote areas).

⁷⁶ Janes’s (subscription source), Security Sentinel (section OLF), 19 March 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁷ DIS, DIS report 2018 (5.2.1) September 2018, [url](#)

⁷⁸ Bloomberg, Returned Ethiopia Rebels... 14 January 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁹ Al Jazeera, Abiy’s year one: Ethiopia faces the threat of ethnic conflict, 2 April 2019, [url](#)

Armed robberies targeting cash-intensive operations (e.g. banks) and road travellers and cargo are also likely. Full integration of the armed OLF wing into the security forces would decrease this risk, and attempts to disarm un-integrated OLF elements would increase it.⁸⁰

- 6.6.7 The Addis Standard in a May 2019 article ‘News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups, agrees to support government peace efforts’ noted:

‘Several reports indicate that armed groups who are often accused of being members of Oromo Liberation Army, the armed wing of OLF-SG, are still active in parts of Western Oromia and Guji areas in southern Ethiopia...

‘The signing of today’s [29 May 2019] agreement [to support government peace efforts] means the federal government is likely to step up efforts to militarily deal with armed groups still active in western and southern parts of the country and are largely accused of being OLA members.’⁸¹

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6.7 OLF splinter groups and mergers

- 6.7.1 The Reporter, a privately owned Ethiopian newspaper in its article ‘OLF, ULFO sign agreement of unity’, published 6 October 2018, noted:

‘Following the call and invitation to all political parties to engage in the national political agendas of the country, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), headed by Dawed Ibsa, and the United Liberation Forces of Oromia (ULFO), headed by Abdejelil Abdela, recently decided to work together as of September 26, 2018, Ibsa Negewo, Member of the Executive Committee of OLF, told The Reporter.

‘The two fronts signed the MoU on September 14, 2018 following a consecutive meeting and discussions between the leadership of the two organizations on how to chart their common agendas, Ibsa added.

‘...delegates representing the two organizations have agreed that “the two organizations be merged as per the signing of this agreement; and that the name of the newly merged front be the OLF in due course but within a fairly short period of time, the leadership and the organizational structure of both fronts be unified and, members at all levels of both organizations could embark on working collaboratively on common organizational affairs until the fronts are fully integrated,” reads the statement.

‘The two organizations also call upon all Oromo political organizations to work together to respond to the demands of the Oromo people, and further stated that “issue of struggling for Oromo national interests be our core objective; and that we endeavor to promote the unity that the Oromo people have for so long aspired; and we call upon all Oromo political organizations to equally respond to the demand of our people”.’⁸²

- 6.7.2 The same organisation in its article, ‘OLF politics, military splits’, published 6 April 2019, noted:

⁸⁰ Janes’s (subscription source), Security Sentinel (section Terrorism hotspots...), 19 April 2019, [url](#)

⁸¹ Addis Standard, News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups..., 29 May 2019, [url](#)

⁸² The Reporter, OLF, ULFO sign agreement..., 6 October 2018, [url \(see bibliography for access\)](#)

‘The army of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) has officially separated from the party, OLF, which is basd [sic] in Addis Ababa...

‘In an official statement released by OLF’s army a.k.a. Waraana Bilisummaa Oromoo (WBO), the army said it no longer has any relationship with the party as well as the party’s leadership in Addis Ababa.

“Even if we had previously agreed to a ceasefire and settle our difference with the government, the government has continued to arrest our members and wage war on us,” reads the statement.

“Since the agreement in Asmara, Eritrea, we have been expressing our commitments for the implementation of the agreement. However, the government was not showing similar gestures.”⁸³

- 6.7.3 ACLED, noted: ‘In Ethiopia, the split formalised on April 1st between Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) fighters and political party members highlights the failure of the peace agreement reached between the government and the OLF in August 2018 to address grievances within the Front holistically. This could lead to more fighting in the coming weeks in various regions.’⁸⁴

- 6.7.4 The Addis Standard in the article ‘News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups, agrees to support government peace efforts’, dated 29 May 2019 noted:

‘In a fresh agreement signed today OLF-SG, led by Dawud Ibssa, disavowed links with all armed groups operating in its name and agreed to support peace efforts by the federal government and Oromia regional state.

‘The agreement was signed this afternoon in the presence of Oromia vice president Shimelis Abdissa, General Berhanu Jula, Military Operations Division Chief of the National Defense Force (ENDF), Addisu Arega, ODP secretariat, as well as three members of a civic committee formed to oversee broker a peace deal that oversaw the encampment of Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) members, including opposition politician Bekele Gerba and OMN executive Director and activist Jawar Mohammed.

‘Dawud Ibssa, leader of OLF-SG, said that his party will from now on disown any armed groups operating in its name in the country and that it will cooperate with the government in securing peace in areas where armed groups are still operating...’⁸⁵

- 6.7.5 Ethiopia Insight in their article published 1 March 2019 noted:

‘If integration is successful, then the focus should move to peaceful politics. OLF could potentially challenge ODP in elections next year, if it is able to exploit the current opening to become an organized electoral force. However, former OLF leaders like Leenco Lata and Kemal Gelchu have allied with the ruling party...

‘OLF has agreed with the Oromo Federalist Congress, an opposition party led by Merera Gudina, that they will not field candidates against each other.

⁸³ The Reporter, OLF politics, military splits, 6 April 2019, [url \(see bibliography for access\)](#)

⁸⁴ ACLED, Regional Overview – Africa, 9 April 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁵ Addis Standard, News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups..., 29 May 2019, [url](#)

Merera said in an interview last month that splitting the vote would disadvantage both parties.’⁸⁶

See also [Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia \(Medrek\)](#)

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6.8 OLF militants / Oromo Liberation Army (OLA)

6.8.1 AlJazeera in the article ‘Ethiopia removes OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 from terror list’, published 5 July 2018, noted:

‘Several hundred Oromo Liberation Front fighters have come out of the bush to begin integration into the regional security forces in line with a January [2019] peace pact, although there are still reports of political disagreement and insecurity.

‘The former rebels went to temporary camps and most will be transported to Tollay, a military base. The encampment process scheduled for February 19 to 21 was extended to February 26 [2019]. The western and southern Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) commanders, two key figures, said they distrusted mediators and so have not participated so far.’⁸⁷

6.8.2 A New Business Ethiopia report, ‘Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 Oromo Liberation Front Soldiers’, dated 13 February 2019, stated:

‘Over 1,000 soldiers of the armed Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in Ethiopia brought in to government camps for rehabilitation. The decision came following the latest agreement the former rebel group leaders have reached with the federal government and the regional state of Oromia.

‘The team organized from both sides have brought in the soldiers from selected 12 zones and 22 weredas (districts) in Oromia Region, according to the peace mediators who briefed journalists last night along with representatives from both sides...

‘...reports from West Wellega in Oromia Region of Ethiopia have been indicating that armed gangs who claim to be members of the OLF have been engaged in killing and abducting officials and burning some villages.

‘To calm the growing tension between the federal government and the OLF, a few weeks ago elders and respected Oromo leaders such as, Abba Geddas have mediated the two sides. The decision of OLF fighters to put their arms down and enter government camp has come as a result of the mediation.’⁸⁸

6.8.3 Jane’s reported that local residents stated that OLF militants allegedly killed 15 civilians in Majete, Kemise, and Ataye in North Shewa Administration, Amahara region⁸⁹. The OLF subsequently denied having any military

⁸⁶ Ethiopia Insight, OLF integration underway...(OLF still not registered), 1 March 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁷ Ethiopia Insight, OLF integration underway..., 1 March 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁸ New Business Ethiopia, Ethiopia To Rehabilitate 1,000 OLF Soldiers,13 February 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁹ Jane’s (subscription source), OLF militants reportedly kill 15 civilians..., 6 April 2019, [url](#)

presence in Amhara Regional State following the accusation of civilian attacks between 5 and 7 April 2019⁹⁰.

- 6.8.4 The same organisation noted on 19 March 2019: 'Near Nedjo Woreda, West Wellega zone, Oromia region, suspected Oromo Liberation front (OLF) militants opened fire on a vehicle travelling from Mendi to Tolla Waqo, killing five people - including one Indian and one Japan national - employed by a copper mining company.'⁹¹

- 6.8.5 The Reporter in its article, 'OLF politics, military splits' published 6 April 2019, noted:

'The agreement [in August 2018] made between the two sides was not made official to the public. However, in general terms, they have reached an agreement whereby the OLF lays down its arms and commit for peaceful political struggle. Yet, the terms of the agreements ...has been a point of contention for months.

'In September 2018, the leadership of OLF along with 1,500 members of their army based in Eritrea arrived in Addis Ababa, welcomed by regional and federal government officials and thousands of supporters...

'OLF's party leaders had also gave full responsibility of the army to the committee and agreed not to interfere in the process of disarming the army. Since then, only 800 army members of OLF have agreed to lay their arms.'⁹²

- 6.8.6 The Addis Standard in the article 'News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups, agrees to support government peace efforts', dated 29 May 2019 stated:

'...reports of the killing of six people On Monday this week in western Oromia by a hand grande [sic] thrown at members of Ethiopian defense forces, according to a report on BBC Afaan Oromo.

'As is the case form most incidents in the past the exact circumstances of the death of the six people are not established. Local authorities tell the BBC Afaan Oromo that the deceased were community members who were caught in a crossfire when OLA members attacked the federal defense forces by throwing the hand grenade whereas residents said the six people died when the federal army took a counterattack measure against OLA.'⁹³

See also [Former designated terrorist organisations](#)

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Section 7 updated: 24 April 2019

7. Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)

- 7.1.1 Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - North Africa in its Ethiopia section on Non-State Armed groups dated 19 March 2018, noted that the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) is a National Separatist group founded in

⁹⁰ Jane's (subscription source), OLF denies having presence in Ethiopia's Amhara, 9 April 2019, [url](#)

⁹¹ Jane's (subscription source), Suspected OLF militants kill five people..., 19 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹² The Reporter, OLF politics, military splits, 6 April 2019, [url \(see bibliography for access\)](#)

⁹³ Addis Standard, News: OLF-SG disavows link with all armed groups..., 29 May 2019, [url](#)

1984 and its leader is Admiral Muhammad Omar Osman⁹⁴. The same report noted that it is:

‘...based and operating in the Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia - an area of the country with a large population of ethnic Somalis from the Ogaden clan. The stated aims of the ONLF have varied over time, but centre around defending the human and civil rights of the Ogadeni people, protecting the region's natural resources from perceived exploitation by the state, and ultimately the fulfilment of the Ogadeni people's right to national self-determination. Since 1994 the armed wing of the ONLF, the Ogaden National Liberation Army (ONLA), has conducted a low-level guerrilla campaign targeting Ethiopian military and government personnel, as well as perceived government collaborators...

‘The ONLF campaign has witnessed a steady increase in operational tempo since 2007, and November 2009 saw the group launch a multi-front offensive that demonstrated the ONLF's ability to operate freely throughout much of the region... However, in October 2010 a self-professed breakaway faction of the ONLF, led by Salahudin Maow, signed a peace deal with the government.While the government claimed the deal would help bring stability to the Ogaden, a resumption of attacks in mid to late November 2010 indicated that the ONLF remains an ongoing regional threat to state and foreign commercial assets. In May 2017, leaders of the ONLF and the Patriotic Ginbot7 Movement for Unity and Democracy (PG7) signed an agreement aimed at working together to fight the ruling parties, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front and Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front.’⁹⁵

7.1.2 AlJazeera in the article ‘Ethiopia removes OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 from terror list’, published 5 July 2018 summarised: ‘The ONLF is a separatist rebel group fighting for self-determination for Somalis in the Somali Region of Ethiopia. The group demands autonomy of this region and has claimed several attacks since 1994 aimed at Ethiopian forces in the area.’⁹⁶

7.1.3 The DIS report 2018 noted:

‘The ONLF has since the mid-1990s been engaged in conflicts against Ethiopian troops in the Somali Region located in the periphery of Ethiopia. As a political entity, the ONLF has been weakened over the past years although not to the same extent as the OLF according to the national researcher. He further elaborated that in terms of military power, ONLF has also been weakened lately in that its military outreach capacity has diminished.’⁹⁷

7.1.4 HRW in the report “We are Like the Dead” dated July 2018 noted that ‘While the ONLF still exists as an armed group, the frequency of attacks by ONLF has decreased greatly in recent years.’⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Janes's (subscription source), Security Sentinel (section ONLF), 19 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁵ Janes's (subscription source), Security Sentinel (section ONLF), 19 March 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁶ AlJazeera, Ethiopia removes OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 from terror list, 5 July 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁷ DIS, DIS report 2018 (5.3.1) September 2018, [url](#)

⁹⁸ HRW, “We are like the dead”...(p.21), July 2018, [url](#)

- 7.1.5 Jane's in its Sentinel Security Assessment - North Africa, Ethiopia dated 2 April 2019 stated:

'...the ONLF based in the Somali region, which comprises an armed wing of around 1,500 members, agreed in August 2018 to a ceasefire with the government. This has facilitated ongoing peace negotiations since 18 September 2018. Confidence-building measures, including the release of ONLF commanders, are supporting progress. The ONLF's aim is self-determination, but the EPRDF rejects this and strongly supports the federal system of government. This requires the ONLF accepts the constitution without a referendum. Even if a compromise is not reached, the ONLF is unlikely to re-engage in armed struggle.'⁹⁹

- 7.1.6 Jane's, in its Sentinel Security Assessment, dated 19 April 2019 stated:

'The Somali region-based Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), which previously posed moderate attack risks, signed a peace deal with the government in October 2018. ONLF attack risks – primarily against security forces and non-Somali civilians – would rise again if the ONLF called for a self-determination referendum for the Somali region and the government frustrated this, as would attack risks by disgruntled members of the region's paramilitary Liyu police and "Hego" youth militias if the state attempted to demobilise or redeploy the Liyu elsewhere or sought to crack down on the smuggling networks in which they are involved.'¹⁰⁰

See also [The Liyu Police and their treatment of people in the Ogaden \(Somali\) and eastern Oromia regions](#)

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Section 8 updated: 15 May 2019

8. **Ginbot 7 (G7) / Arbegnoch (Patriot) Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement (AGUDM)**

- 8.1.1 The official site for Ginbot 7 (undated, but the latest publications are dated 2012) stated that their primary mission was: 'the realization of a national political system in which government power and political authority is assumed through peaceful and democratic process based on the free will and choice of citizens of the country.'¹⁰¹

- 8.1.2 ACLED, in its June 2017 Ethiopian update stated 'So far in 2017, AGUDM has represented the most active rebel front in the country. The group significantly stepped up its attacks in June 2017, confronting government forces on several fronts in the Amhara region's Gonder zone, and claiming a rare attack in Addis Ababa on a government ammunition depot. The movement's leader recently announced that AGUDM's attacks would not subside.'¹⁰²

- 8.1.3 Africanews noted that Andargachew Tsige

⁹⁹ Jane's, Sentinel Security Assessment, Ethiopia (section Internal Affairs), 2 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ Janes's (subscription source), Security Sentinel (section Terrorism hotspots...), 19 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Ginbot7, About Us, Mission, undated, [url](#)

¹⁰² ACLED, Ethiopia, June 2017 update, [url](#)

‘...was sentenced to death in absentia in 2009 over his role in the opposition group Ginbot 7. He was subsequently arrested in Yemen five years later and extradited to Ethiopia. There has been a series of diplomatic and online appeals calling for his release over the period of his incarceration.

‘.... Andargachew served as secretary-general of the group which describes itself as a reform movement.’¹⁰³

- 8.1.4 The USSD report 2018 noted ‘On May 29 [2018], authorities released Ethiopian-born British citizen Andargachew Tsige, second in command of Patriotic Ginbot 7 (PG7), a former government-designated terror organization delisted in June, on a “pardon under special circumstances.” Detained in 2014, Andargachew was serving two life sentences and was sentenced to the death penalty.’¹⁰⁴

- 8.1.5 An Al-Jazeera report, ‘Ethiopian armed opposition group Ginbot 7 suspends attacks’, dated 22 June 2018, stated:

‘Ethiopian opposition group Ginbot 7 has said that it will cease armed attacks in the country following reforms announced by the new government. In a statement released on Friday on their Facebook page and confirmed by Ethiopian state media, Ginbot 7 said it would call off assaults in order to support the agenda of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who took office in April.

“Our forces have received strict orders to refrain from any sort of armed resistance,” the statement said.’¹⁰⁵

- 8.1.6 Jane’s, in its Sentinel Security Assessment, dated 2 April 2019 stated: ‘PG-7 faces leadership disputes and is largely based outside of Ethiopia, so is highly unlikely to become a major opposition party.’¹⁰⁶

- 8.1.7 Africanews, an independent news organisation, reported on 10 May 2019:

‘The Patriotic Ginbot 7 (PG7) party in Ethiopia does not exi[s]t [sic] less than a year after its activities were regularized by the Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed-led administration...

‘The state-run FBC reported on Thursday that PG7’s General Assembly had disbanded it for the sole purpose of forming a new party. The FBC report said its senior members in the persons of Andargachew Tsige and Ephrem Madebo, had quit their positions because they held foreign passports...

‘The new party to which PG7 is allied is the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice. The privately-owned Addis Standard said it was formed out of 7 parties including PG7. The other six have also dissolved their parties, the Addis Standard added.

‘Earlier in June 2018, PG7 announced a unilateral ceasefire – suspended all armed operations – with the view to engage in peaceful struggle. They returned to Ethiopia from their base in Eritrea in September 2018.’¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Africanews, Ethiopia govt confirms release of Andargachew Tsige..., 29 May 2018 [url](#)

¹⁰⁴ USSD, USSD report 2018 section (1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ Al-Jazeera, Ethiopian armed opposition group Ginbot 7 suspends attacks, 22 June 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ Jane’s, Sentinel Security Assessment, Ethiopia (section Internal Affairs), 2 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ Africanews, Ethiopia’s Ginbot 7 dissolves, transforms into new ‘united’ party, 10 May 2019, [url](#)

See also [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ\)](#) and [Treatment of opposition groups](#)

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Section 9 updated: 20 May 2019

9. Non-armed opposition groups

9.1 Main opposition parties

- 9.1.1 In April 2019, Jane's stated the main opposition force in Ethiopia was Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia (Medrek), the Oromo Liberation Front, and the Semayawi party however, it noted that the opposition was considered weak and un-coordinated¹⁰⁸.

See also [Political system](#)

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9.2 Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (ECSJ)

- 9.2.1 The Africa Report noted the emergence of a new political party in a report dated 14 May 2019:

'Seven opposition parties dissolved themselves last week to create a new entity called Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice (ECSJ). The new party's leader is Professor Berhanu Nega, an economics professor who has been involved in Ethiopia's opposition since the late '70s.

The seven parties are:

- Patriotic Genbot 7,
- Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP),
- All Ethiopian Democratic Party (AEDP),
- Semayawi Party,
- New Generation Party (NGP),
- Gambella Regional Movement (GRM),
- Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) party.'¹⁰⁹

- 9.2.2 Borkena, a news and media website, in the article 'Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party elected leaders', dated 13 May 2019, stated:

'Seven opposition parties in Ethiopia had merged to form a new party Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party which was unveiled during the founding meeting on May 9,2019...

'It means that these parties, and they are all national parties except Gambella Regional Movement which is in a way ethnic and regional as implied in the name, will no longer have their own separate existence...

'On May 10, the founding congress elected Dr. Berhanu Nega as leader of the party. He won 912 votes. Andualem Arage is elected as deputy leader.

¹⁰⁸ Jane's, Sentinel Security Assessment, Ethiopia (section Opposition Profile), 2 April 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ The Africa Report, Ethiopia opposition leader Berhanu Nega leads new party, 14 May 2019, [url](#)

As well, Yeshiwas Assefa and Chane Kebede are named as chairperson and deputy chairperson of the party respectively.

'The party's priority, as stated by the leader Berhanu Nega who was also leader of Patriotic Genbot 7, is stability and democratization of the country.'¹¹⁰

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9.3 Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia (Medrek)

9.3.1 Jane's noted in November 2017 that Medrek was an opposition coalition bringing together:

- Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ or Andnet)
- Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM)
- Oromo People Congress (OPC)
- United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF)
- AARENA Tigray
- Ethiopian Social Democratic Party
- Southern Ethiopia People's Democratic Union (SEPDU)
- Coalition of Somali Democratic Forces¹¹¹

9.3.2 The same report noted 'Medrek has a largely urban support. Of the eight member parties, the UDJ is the one that is currently most active.'¹¹²

9.3.3 Since the publication of that report in 2017, The Reporter Ethiopia noted in January 2019 that Medrek is the coalition of four parties; the Ethiopian Socialist Democratic Party (ESDP), Arena for Sovereignty and Democracy (Arena), Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) and Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)¹¹³.

9.3.4 Janes' noted:

'Medrek also contains a number of renowned opposition figures, such as former president Negasso Gidada, former defence minister Siye Abraha, and Gebru Asrat, the former president of the Tigray region.

'...Medrek, which was formed in 2008, is the only opposition party that has presence in the Ethiopian parliament after one of its candidates won a seat during the May 2010 general election. Like other opposition parties, Medrek members did not secure any seat during the 2015 general elections which saw Ethiopia's ruling party, the EPRFD, winning the majority of the seats.'¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Borkena, Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party elected leaders, 13 May 2019, [url](#)

¹¹¹ Jane's (subscription source), Security Sentinel (Internal Affairs), 15 November 2017, [url](#)

¹¹² Jane's (subscription source), Security Sentinel (Internal Affairs), 15 November 2017, [url](#)

¹¹³ The Reporter, Medrek calls for ..., 12 January 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ Jane's (subscription source), Security Sentinel (Internal Affairs), November 2017, [url](#)

9.3.5 Merera Gudina is the chairman of OFC¹¹⁵. On 11 September 2018 the OFC and (the formerly banned) Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) announced an agreement to work together¹¹⁶.

9.3.6 The USSD report 2018 noted:

‘Authorities released Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) chairperson Merera Gudina on January 17 [2018], following a decision by the attorney general to discontinue the multiple criminal charges against him. In 2017 the attorney general brought multiple criminal charges against Merera...

‘Officials also released Bekele Gerba, OFC deputy chair, on February 13, after prosecutors dropped charges against him and his codefendants for leading protests against plans to expand the city of Addis Ababa.’¹¹⁷

9.3.7 For further details on the aims and objectives of the organisations that comprise the Medrek coalition, see the Ethiopian Socialist Democratic Party (ESDP) website available [here](#), The Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM) website available [here](#) and the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) website (mixed language) [here](#). Amongst sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)), a website for Arena for Sovereignty and Democracy (Arena) could not be found.

See also [Release of prisoners](#) and [Oromo Liberation Front \(OLF\)](#)

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9.4 Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ)/Andinet

9.4.1 The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada in a response of July 2012, quoting several sources, noted that the UDJ is commonly known as Andinet (also spelt Andnet and Andenet) and was formed in Addis Ababa in June 2008. It was formed after the dissolution of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD, also known as Kinijit), which had been the main opposition alliance in Ethiopia. Many UDJ members were former members of the CUD¹¹⁸.

9.4.2 Various sources indicate that the party has split into factions and each electing its own leader¹¹⁹: Tigistu Awelu¹²⁰ and Belay Fekadu¹²¹.

9.4.3 The Addis Standard in the article ‘News: Ethiopia court acquits a journalist, opposition party member from charges under defunct state of emergency’, published 8 November 2017 stated:

‘The Federal High Court Bole Branch, ...has today acquitted journalist Elias Gebru & opposition party member Daniel Shibeshi from criminal charges brought against both under Ethiopia’s defunct State of Emergency (SoE).

¹¹⁵ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Africanews, Major Oromia parties agree merger for Ethiopia’s 2020 polls, 11 September 2018, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁸ IRBC, Ethiopia: UDJ...23 July 2012, [url](#)

¹¹⁹ Horn Affairs English, Ethiopia: Police disbands a rally...25 January 2015, [url](#)

¹²⁰ The Reporter (via AllAfrica), Ethiopia: UDJ May Face Another Internal Strife, 25 July 2015, [url](#)

¹²¹ Addis Standard, Ethiopia’s Electoral board decides ..., 29 January 2015, [url](#)

‘Both Elias and Daniel were first detained ... on Nov. 18, 2016 for “violating” a section under the SoE, which prohibited displaying crossed arms held above head, a symbol of the Oromo protests that led to the declaration of the emergency rule in October 2016. Both Elias & Daniel were released only in Aug 2017 after spending months without charges and plenty of confusions.

‘Daniel Shibeshi was former senior member of the opposition UDJ/Andinet. Several UDJ members including Daniel Shibeshi have recently joined the opposition Semayawi (Blue) party.’¹²²

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9.5 Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP)

9.5.1 The United Ethiopian Democratic Party – Medhin was renamed the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) in September 2009¹²³.

9.5.2 BBC Monitoring, in its publication dated 23 December 2018 stated that the EDP was formed in 1999 and the Chairman is Kebede Chane. The same report noted the party agreed to work with the Semayawi (Blue), Ginbot 7 and the former Unity Party on 22 December 2018¹²⁴.

See also [Ethiopia Citizens for Social Justice \(ECSJ\)](#)

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9.6 All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP)

9.6.1 The Political Handbook of the World, 2015, noted that ‘the AEUP is an outgrowth of factionalization within the All-Amhara People’s Organisation (AAPO) which initially supported the EPRDF but went into opposition over the issues of ethnic marginalization.’¹²⁵

9.6.2 The USSD report 2018 noted ‘On February 14 [2018], authorities released Mamushet Amare, former leader of the All Ethiopian Unity Party, whom authorities had detained on terrorism-related charges since March 2017.’¹²⁶

9.6.3 The Ethiopia Reporter in the article, ‘AEUP elects Mamushet Amare as chairman’, dated 13 April 2019 stated:

‘The All Ethiopian Union Party (AEUP), which was conducting its general assembly in the presence of 459 members last weekend, elected Mamushet Amare as the new chairman of the party while Abraham Getu was elected as the deputy chairman....

‘The party announced the change of the leadership at a press conference held on Thursday April 11, 2019...recently, the executive committee of the party has unanimously decided to reunite the elected president, Mamushet and other members of the party who were in an internal rift with the former president, Abebaw Mehari. Following the agreement to reunite the leadership, the two sides agreed to work together and intensify the struggle to address the questions and demands of the public.

¹²² Addis Standard, News: Ethiopia court acquits...8 November 2017, [url](#)

¹²³ Nazret.com, Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) limits term of office, 2 September 2009, [url](#)

¹²⁴ BBC Monitoring (subscription source), Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP), 23 December 2018, [url](#)

¹²⁵ Political Handbook of the World 2015, (Ethiopia), 2015, [url](#)

¹²⁶ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 3), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

'The new leadership, ... was asked about the priority of tasks and its plan regarding their future political move and strategy. "Since we were busy in the send off of our general assembly members who came from different parts of the country to attend the general assembly; I cannot disclose the priority tasks and future political moves. However, I will disclose it shortly," the elected chairman Mamushet replied.

'In addition, the party has also disclosed that the new leadership is committed to cooperate and work together with other like-minded opposition political parties to address the demands of the questions of the party.'¹²⁷

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9.7 Semayawi (Blue) Party

9.7.1 Jane's, in the Security Sentinel updated 15 November 2017 stated:

'The party claims to be the voice of young Ethiopians – the "new generation" – and advocates liberal policies without holding any ethnic agendas, although it remains in favour of the current federal system of governance.

'The party claims to have more than 20,000 members, with almost all being urban dwellers and young, below the age of 35.

'The party was officially formed in January 2012, but it did not gain any national or international prominence until it organised a protest march in June 2013.

'The party was led by Yilkal Getnet until the election of Yeshiwas Assefa in 2017. Yilkal accused the Ethiopian government of putting in place Yeshiwas to split the party and deter any political opposition.'¹²⁸

9.7.2 BBC Monitoring, in its publication dated 23 December 2018 stated that the Semayawi (Blue) Party was formed in January 2012 by former leaders of the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party (UDJ) and the Andinet Party¹²⁹.

9.7.3 Al Jazeera reported that opposition politician Yonatan Tesfaye, former spokesman for the Blue party, was sentenced to six and a half years in prison on 25 May 2017. The report noted that Mr Tesfaye was found guilty of encouraging 'terrorism'. He was arrested in December 2015 after accusing the government in Facebook posts of using disproportionate force against demonstrators. The Blue party have said they will appeal¹³⁰.

9.7.4 Africanews reported on 5 March 2018 that:

'After the Supreme Court in Ethiopia reduced his jail rem [sic] in November last year, reports indicate that a top opposition official, Yonatan Tesfaye, has been released. Journalists and activists confirmed that he had been released from the Zeway prison located in the Oromia State.

'According to blogger Befeqadu Hailu, his release was delayed after he refused to sign a 'pardon' statement'Tesfaye spokesperson for Semayawi (Blue Party) was arrested in 2015 over Facebook posts deemed as incitive

¹²⁷ The Reporter, AEUP elects Mamushet Amare as chairman, 13 April 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁸ Jane's (subscription source), Security Sentinel (Internal Affairs), 15 November 2017, [url](#)

¹²⁹ BBC Monitoring (subscription source), Semayawi Party, 23 December 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁰ Aljazeera, Ethiopia jails opposition politician Yonatan Tesfaye, 26 May 2017, [url](#)

[sic] by the state. He was subsequently charged and convicted of “associating with a terrorist organization” after criticizing the government on his Facebook account.

‘The apex court slashed his six years and six months sentence to three years in November 2017 after his lawyer argued that his client had to be tried under common law and not the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP).’¹³¹

See also [Anti-terrorism legislation](#) and [Discrimination and harassment](#)

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Section 10 updated: 18 June 2019

10. Treatment of opposition groups

10.1 Discrimination and harassment

10.1.1 The USSD report 2018 noted:

‘Opposition political party leaders and journalists reported suspicions of telephone tapping, other electronic eavesdropping, and surveillance, and they stated government agents attempted to lure them into illegal acts by calling and pretending to be representatives of previously designated terrorist groups.

‘The government used a widespread system of paid informants to report on the activities of individuals. Opposition members, journalists, and athletes reported ruling party operatives and militia members made intimidating and unwelcome visits to their homes and offices. These intimidating contacts included entry and searches of homes without a warrant.

‘There were reports that authorities dismissed opposition members from their jobs and that those not affiliated with the EPRDF sometimes had trouble receiving the “support letters” from their kebeles (neighborhoods or wards) necessary to obtain employment.’¹³²

10.1.2 The same report noted ‘...the government monitored and interfered in activities of political opposition groups.’¹³³

10.1.3 And:

‘Constituent parties of the EPRDF conferred advantages upon their members; the party directly owned many businesses and allegedly awarded jobs and business contracts to loyal supporters. Opposition parties reported they rented offices and meeting halls in the Amhara and Oromia Regions without difficulty. There were reports unemployed youths not affiliated with the ruling coalition sometimes had trouble receiving the “support letters” from their wards necessary to obtain jobs.

‘Registered political parties must receive permission from regional governments to open and occupy local offices, with at least one major opposition party reporting it was able to open many offices during the year in

¹³¹ Africanews, Ethiopia frees politician jailed over 2015 Facebook posts, 5 March 2018, [url](#)

¹³² USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³³ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 2.a), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

advance of the 2020 national election. Laws requiring parties to report “public meetings” and obtain permission for public rallies inhibited opposition activities.’¹³⁴

- 10.1.4 An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRBC) response covering information from 2017-December 2018, dated 17 December 2018, using information from a Senior Researcher from HRW, noted:

‘There is “not a lot of harassment” of Blue Party or OFC members. However, although the new government has begun to reform the security and intelligence structure at the higher levels, on the local level, in some parts, “the same abusive people” are still in place, making it possible that “intimidations and harassment still occur toward local members.” Regarding the treatment of OFL members, the situation is “more complicated,” even if there is no “obvious harassment or violation of their rights.” However, within the OFL, there are currently various factions in different parts of Ethiopia, and in some places, the local population accepts them while in others, they do not (Senior Researcher 6 Dec. 2018). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.’¹³⁵

- 10.1.5 The UN Human Rights Council’s Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions on Ethiopia dated 4 March 2019 in a submission from Cultural Survival, US noted ‘...surveillance of the general population had been conducted at the grassroots level and that EPRDF, had several informants and enforcers in the remote regions of the country. Surveillance had been conducted through a “one-to-five” system, where one party member had been assigned to monitor five people.’¹³⁶ The time frame and profile of those subject to surveillance was not noted in this report. The submission refers to the New York Times article from November 2017¹³⁷.

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10.2 Anti-terrorism legislation

- 10.2.1 See [the 2009 Anti-terrorism proclamation](#)

- 10.2.2 The USSD Country Reports on Terrorism 2017, published September 2018 noted:

‘The Government of Ethiopia uses the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP) to prosecute crimes associated with terrorist activity...Ethiopia also continued to use the ATP to suppress criticism by detaining and prosecuting journalists, opposition figures – including members of religious groups protesting government interference in religious affairs – and other activists. The Ethiopian government released some, but arrested several others during the year. These arrests peaked under the State of Emergency the Ethiopian government imposed in October 2016 in the wake of anti-government protests and violence that resulted in tens of thousands of arrests and several hundred deaths.

¹³⁴ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 3), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁵ IRBC, Ethiopia: Treatment of members of opposition parties, 17 December 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions...(para 46), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁷ NY Times, ‘We Are Everywhere’: How Ethiopia Became a Land of Prying Eye, 5 Nov 2017, [url](#)

'In late August, the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law conducted a workshop in Addis Ababa for judges handling ATP cases. Ethiopian judges are often overwhelmed with hundreds of ATP-related cases because Ethiopian prosecutors often seek to bring the highest charges for cases that they cannot resolve with plea agreements.'¹³⁸

10.2.3 The Addis Standard in a news article dated 2 January 2018, stated:

'The federal high court 19th and 4th criminal benches here in the capital Addis Abeba have today sentenced a total of nineteen Ethiopians who were accused of terrorism related offenses to jail terms ranging from three years and ten months to 16 years and six months.

'All the nineteen defendants were accused of having ties with Patriotic G7, a rebel group designated by the ruling party's dominated parliament as a terrorist organization.'¹³⁹

10.2.4 In sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)) CPIT could not find information on the situation for the defendants in the above case (Getahun Beyene et.al) after sentence.

10.2.5 Amnesty International in their report 'State of the World's Human Rights 2017/2018', published in February 2018 noted:

'Hundreds of political activists, dissenters and peaceful protesters faced unfair trials on charges brought under the ATP law. The trials were marked by prolonged pre-trial detention, undue delays and persistent complaints of torture and other ill-treatment.

'Prominent leaders of opposition political parties such as Merera Gudina, Chairman of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), and Begele Gerba, Deputy Chairman of the OFC, were tried on charges under the ATP for their alleged role in organizing the November 2015 Oromia protest. Begele Gerba's trial was repeatedly adjourned. Finally the court dismissed the terrorism charges against him. However, it ruled that his trial should proceed on charges of provocation and preparation for outrages against the Constitution or the Constitutional Order as per the Criminal Code.'¹⁴⁰

10.2.6 Reuters, in the article 'Ethiopian government and opposition start talks on amending anti-terrorism law', dated 30 May 2018 stated:

'Ethiopia's ruling coalition started talks with opposition groups on Wednesday on amending provisions of an anti-terrorism law that critics say has criminalised dissent, state-affiliated media said.

'Watchdog groups say the 2009 law's broad definitions have been used indiscriminately against anyone who opposes government policy. Among its provisions, it makes anyone publishing information deemed to encourage terrorism liable to a jail term of up to 20 years.

'The discussions follow the release on Tuesday of opposition leader Andargachew Tsige, who was sentenced to death under the law in 2009

¹³⁸ USSD, Terrorism report 2017 (p.22-23), September 2018, [url](#)

¹³⁹ Addis Standard, News: Two benches at federal high court..., 2 January 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ Amnesty International, State of the World's Human Rights 2017/2018, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

over his role in the opposition group Ginbot 7, which the government has labelled a terrorist organisation.

'The Fana Broadcasting Corporation said 14 political parties, including the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, were taking part in talks having "agreed to amend" unspecified articles of the legislation.'¹⁴¹

10.2.7 HRW noted on 27 October 2018:

'For a decade, Ethiopia's government has relied on repressive laws to silence dissenting voices and throw journalists and activists behind bars. The laws helped make Ethiopia into one of the most inhospitable places in the world for people speaking out against government policies, as well as for any human rights research and advocacy. Finally, it appears those laws... [including] the Anti-Terrorism proclamation... may change...

'The government used the...repressive 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation's broad provisions as the basis to arrest, detain, and prosecute scores of journalists and political opposition members, making it impossible to criticize government policies or actions without fear.'¹⁴²

10.2.8 The UN Human Rights Council noted in their 'Compilation on Ethiopia' dated 19 March 2019: 'The United Nations country team expressed concern that the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation 652/2009 was incompatible with international human rights standards.'¹⁴³

10.2.9 In respect of trial procedures for government critics, Freedom Now's response in the UN Human Rights Council's, Summary of Stakeholders' submissions, 4 March 2019 noted that 'the lack of judicial independence had led to the trials of Government critics being riddled with due process violations and with conviction effectively pre-ordained. Due process violations had been particularly egregious for individuals charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation.'¹⁴⁴

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10.3 Arbitrary arrest and detention

10.3.1 The USSD report 2018 noted 'Authorities regularly detained persons arbitrarily, including protesters, journalists, and opposition party members. There were hundreds of reports of arbitrary arrest by security forces.'¹⁴⁵

10.3.2 And:

'Human rights issues included reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings by security forces and between citizens; forced disappearances by some government forces; torture; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention by security forces; political prisoners... Both the number and severity of these human rights issues diminished

¹⁴¹ Reuters, Ethiopian government and opposition start talks...30 May 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴² HRW, Hope for Revision of Ethiopia's Draconian Laws?, 27 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴³ UN Human Rights Council, Compilation on Ethiopia (para 16), 1 March 2019 [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Summary of Stakeholders' submissions...(para 24), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

significantly under Abiy's administration, and in some cases they were no longer an issue by the end of the year'¹⁴⁶

- 10.3.3 The same report stated that after Abiy Ahmed took office: 'NGOs subsequently reported that practices such as arrests, detention, abuse, and harassment of persons for criticizing the government dramatically diminished.'¹⁴⁷

- 10.3.4 HRW stated on 20 October 2018:

'This week, the Ethiopian government released over 1,000 youth from "rehabilitation camps" following a month-long detention. They were among some 3,000 youth from the capital, Addis Ababa, whom the federal police commissioner, Zeynu Jemal, said had been arrested in September. Most were arrested at bars, shisha cafes, and khat dens. The police chief said the arrests were to address "rising criminality and disturbance" in the city, but smoking shisha (a flavored tobacco) and chewing khat (a mild stimulant) are not criminal offenses in Ethiopia.

'The arrests came after several days of violence and tension in Addis, fueled in part by the return of some exiled, previously banned, politicians. At least 23 people were killed in the violence and security forces killed several more during a subsequent demonstration.

'On October 16, the police commissioner said with a straight face that the youth would be released because "brainwashing" was complete. It is an apt term to describe a longstanding detention practice in Ethiopia, used most recently during the 2017 state of emergency. The authorities take people arrested to military camps, indoctrinate them in government policies and perspectives, and often force them to do strenuous physical exercise. The detainees are not charged with a crime.

'These camps have no legal basis, and their recent use signals a worrying return to a period when the security forces frequently carried out arbitrary arrests...'¹⁴⁸

- 10.3.5 Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, Ethiopia dated 22 March 2019 stated:

'...In July [2018], Ethiopian state media reported that the parliament had approved an amnesty for a number of "individuals and groups either under investigation or convicted on treason, crime against the constitutional order and armed struggle". However, authorities responded to inter-ethnic mob violence in Addis Ababa and its fringes in September 2018 by detaining nearly 1,200 youths, most of whom were released in October after "rehabilitation education". Mass detentions were a staple tactic of the pre-Ahmed governments.'¹⁴⁹

See also [Treatment of detainees / prison conditions](#)

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¹⁴⁶ USSD, USSD report 2018 (Executive summary), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ USSD, USSD report 2018 (2.a), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ HRW, Mass Arrests, 'Brainwashing' Threaten Ethiopia's Reform Agenda, 20 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ Jane's, Sentinel Security Assessment, Ethiopia (section Security), 22 March 2019, [url](#)

10.4 Treatment of detainees / prison conditions

10.4.1 The USSD report 2018 noted:

'In July Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report¹⁵⁰ documenting torture, rape, long-term arbitrary detention, and inhuman detention conditions in Jijiga Central Prison between 2011 and early this year. ...The cycle of abuse, humiliating treatment, overcrowding, inadequate food, sleep deprivation, and lack of health care in Jijiga Central Prison, also referred to as Jail Ogaden, was consistent with the government's long-standing collective punishment of persons who were perceived to support the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), previously designated by the government as a terrorist organization, a designation removed in June [2018].'¹⁵¹

10.4.2 The DIS report 2018 noted 'Conditions in prisons in the Somali Region were particularly dangerous for the detainees who were at risk of being submitted to torture...Both sources – one with first-hand experience of torture in the Makelawi centre – underlined the risk of being exposed to torture by the police if the authorities suspected one of being a terrorist.'¹⁵²

10.4.3 HRW report 2019 stated 'Earlier this year, Ethiopia closed Makaelawi detention center, known for torture and mistreatment of political prisoners...Many detention centers run by regional administrations, some well-known for ill-treatment, rape, torture, and lack of access to medical and legal aid, remain unaffected by the reform efforts.'¹⁵³

10.4.4 The same report noted: 'In Jail Ogden, a regional detention facility administered in part by Liyu police, prisoners were tortured, with no access to adequate medical care, family, lawyers, or even, at times, food. After...July [2018]...many prisoners were released from Jail Ogaden. The prison was closed in August [2018].'¹⁵⁴

10.4.5 And that 'Government officials often dismissed allegations of torture, contrary to credible evidence. But in a July speech to parliament, Abiy admitted that the government used torture and other unlawful techniques on suspects, acknowledging that such techniques amounted to terrorism by the state.'¹⁵⁵

10.4.6 The UN Human Rights Council in the Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Ethiopia dated 4 March 2019 noted

'AI [Amnesty International] stated that torture and other ill-treatment was a routine interrogation tool, especially for people suspected of terrorism. While the principal aim of torture was to extract "confessions", cases had been documented where torture was being used to force people to testify falsely against others suspected of terrorism. Allegations of torture and other illtreatment by accused in terrorism trials were rarely investigated. Additionally, objections by the defence to the admissibility of forced

¹⁵⁰ HRW, "We are like the dead"...(p.20), July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵² DIS, DIS report 2018 (5.3.2), September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵³ HRW, HRW report 2019 (Impunity, Torture...), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ HRW, HRW report 2019 (Impunity, Torture...), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵ HRW, HRW report 2019 (Impunity, Torture...), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

“confessions” as evidence, had mostly been rejected and judges have received the confession as admissible evidence irrespective of how they may have been obtained.’¹⁵⁶

- 10.4.7 The same report, in a submission complied by contributions from various human rights and legal organisations stated: ‘...the judicial response to complaints of torture and ill treatment during police or prison custody had been unacceptably inadequate and inconsistent, raising serious questions as to the independence and capacity of the judiciary. On many occasions, the judiciary had refrained from its responsibility of protecting the rights of detained accused.’¹⁵⁷

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10.5 Former designated terrorist organisations

- 10.5.1 Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - North Africa in its Ethiopia section on Non-State Armed groups, dated 19 March 2018 stated, ‘In March 2017, 16 alleged members of the OLF were convicted at the Federal High Court of terrorism and attempting to create a separate state in the Oromia region.’¹⁵⁸

- 10.5.2 The DIS report 2018 noted, in its executive summary:

‘The oppositions groups OLF, ONLF and Ginbot 7 had been removed from the national list of terrorist organisations and their leadership had been invited to return to participate in political discussions. OLF and Ginbot 7 leaders had accepted the invitation and returned to Ethiopia. Both the OLF and the ONLF had been weakened over the past three years and lost political and military influence.’¹⁵⁹

- 10.5.3 The same report noted ‘According to the British Embassy, it is indicative of a new political climate that the Prime Minister, in addition to having lifted terrorism charges against opposition groups, also has invited them to return to Ethiopia to participate in political discussions’¹⁶⁰

- 10.5.4 The same report, based on a variety of sources assessed the risk faced in being affiliated with or perceived to be affiliated with the OLF:

‘Previously, several sources concurred, it was connected to great risk for a person to be affiliated with the OLF, perceived or real affiliation, and this risk would also extend to family members of any person perceived to be an OLF activist. ‘Involvement’ could be as little as receiving a suspicious email or phone call. During the previous State of Emergency which was declared in February 2018, the authorities arrested ‘a very high amount of people’ suspected of being involved with activities of one of the organisations on the national list of terrorist organisations. The goal seemed to be to enforce the law through the arrest of ‘as many as possible’ and therefore it has historically been impossible to determine whether a detainee was in reality member of an opposition group, a sympathiser or without any connection

¹⁵⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions...(para 27), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions...(para 26), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ Janes’s (subscription source), Security Sentinel (section OLF), 19 March 2018, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹ DIS, DIS report 2018 (5.2.1) September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ DIS, DIS report 2018 (para 5.1.1), September 2018, [url](#)

according to the representative of the British Embassy. With the arrival of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, the situation seemed to have changed in that he had expressed a desire to include dissenting voices in politics...¹⁶¹

- 10.5.5 The USSD report 2018 stated 'The government, controlled by the EPRDF, called on all diaspora-based opposition groups, including those in armed struggle, to return and pursue nonviolent struggle. Virtually all major opposition groups, including OLF, Oromo Democratic Front, ONLF, and PG7, welcomed the request and returned to the country.'¹⁶²
- 10.5.6 The Freedom House report 2019 noted 'In June [2018], Parliament removed Ginbot 7 and two other groups—the OLF, and the ONLF—from its list of terrorist organizations as a first step toward fostering peaceful and constructive political dialogue... These changes have paved the way for many high-profile opposition figures to return from exile, including Birhanu Nega of Ginbot 7, who returned in September after 11 years in exile.'¹⁶³
- 10.5.7 Human Rights Watch (HRW) in the 'World Report 2019' on its section on Ethiopia (HRW report 2019), covering events in 2018, noted: 'Parliament lifted the ban on three opposition groups, Ginbot 7, Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in June. The government had used the proscription as a pretext for brutal crackdowns on opposition members, activists, and journalists suspected of affiliation with the groups. Many members of these and other groups are now returning to Ethiopia from exile.'¹⁶⁴
- 10.5.8 AlJazeera in its article Thousands of Ethiopians hail return of once-banned Oromo group, dated 15 September 2018 stated:
- 'Hundreds of thousands of people have gathered in the capital of Ethiopia to welcome leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the latest members of a formerly-banned rebel group to return home following a string of political reforms in the country.
- 'The jubilant crowd waving OLF flags gathered at Addis Ababa's Meskel Square on Saturday, where a large concert was held to welcome the group's leader Dawud Ibsa and others, while similar events were held in Ethiopia's Oromia region...
- 'Earlier on Saturday, nearly 1,500 OLF fighters returned from neighbouring Eritrea.'¹⁶⁵
- 10.5.9 The UN Human Rights Council in the Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Ethiopia dated 4 March 2019 noted 'JS2 [The Advocates for Human Rights, Minneapolis, United States of America; and United Oromo Voices] stated that in September 2018, Oromo Liberation Front had been removed from the list of terrorist groups which had resulted in a number of

¹⁶¹ DIS, DIS report 2018 (Executive summary), September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁶² USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 3), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶³ Freedom House, Freedom House report 2019, (section B), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ HRW, HRW report 2019 (introduction), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ AlJazeera, Thousands of Ethiopians hail return...15 September 2018, [url](#)

fighters returning from a neighbouring country. It was unclear whether there will be accountability for previous alleged human rights violations.’¹⁶⁶

10.5.10 The OLF website in a press release dated 19 January 2019 stated:

‘... January 18, 2019, the Ethiopian government security has arrested Mr. Jabessa Gabbissa, member of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) Executive Committee and head of the OLF political affair. Similarly, Mr. Aman File, Dr. Buli Ejeta, Mr. Dambi Tashome, Mr. Galgalo Wariyo, Mr. Edosa Tadesse and several other members and supporters of the OLF were detained by the Ethiopian government security agent. A day earlier, on January 17, 2019, Colonel Gemechu Ayana and his friend Mr. Fakada were also arrested in similar fashion, and they are still held in the EPRDF detention center. Furthermore, the Ethiopian government is now conducting a mass arrest of hundreds of the Oromo people whom they suspect as the members and supporters of the OLF across Oromia.’¹⁶⁷

10.5.11 In sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)) no further information or reports on the specific arrests noted above could be found.

10.5.12 An Africanews report, ‘OLF rebels in Ethiopia give up arms: Oromo officials’, dated 16 February 2019, stated:

‘Authorities in Ethiopia’s [sic] Oromia state say up to 1,000 fighters with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) rebel group have given up arms and entered rehabilitation camps.

‘... The deal between the government and OLF has run into trouble recently, with Addis Ababa deploying soldiers against armed members of the group it claimed were robbing banks and attacking residents in the remote west of the country.

‘The OLF denied this, and has accused the government of failing to meet its promise of integrating its combatants into the armed forces.’¹⁶⁸

10.5.13 US news agency Bloomberg, in the article ‘Returned Ethiopia Rebels Say Army Targets Them With Gunships’, published 14 January 2019 stated:

‘Rebels who returned to Ethiopia last year accused the army of targeting them with airstrikes after they called for the renegotiation of a peace deal with the government.

‘The Oromo Liberation Front, led by Dawud Ibsa, condemned the alleged attacks in a western part of Ethiopia by “airstrike and other methods.” The helicopter raids at the weekend damaged buildings and forced people to flee to nearby forests, said Falmata Jamal, a resident in Oromia state’s Gidami district.

“The government has to stop the killing of innocent people without any precondition,” the OLF said in a statement on its Facebook page, without giving a death toll. A spokesman for the Oromia regional government

¹⁶⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions... (para 16), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁷ OLF, The Intimidation and Imprisonment of the OLF... 19 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ Africanews, OLF rebels in Ethiopia give up arms: Oromo officials, 16 February 2019, [url](#).

dismissed the claims as “propaganda” and said the federal army was in the area “to work on rule of law.”

‘The local Addis Standard website reported Sunday that the army had conducted airstrikes targeting OLF training camps in the region, citing an unidentified member of the military. An army spokesman, Mohammed Tessema, declined to comment.’¹⁶⁹

10.5.14 Ethiopia Insight, an online organisation which focuses on publishing news analysis, in an article dated 1 March 2019 stated:

‘After peace efforts in November [2018], there was hope an August agreement between OLF and the government would be implemented. But the military announced a new operation in December and deployed soldiers to where OLA was thought to be active. The Command Post formed to secure the Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia border zone stretched throughout western Oromia and reportedly pursued OLA and OLF members and sympathizers.

‘In total, more than 1,000 people have been arrested for OLF links. The situation worsened on January 12 and 13 with airstrikes in Kellem Wollega, which the government denied...’¹⁷⁰

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10.6 The Liyu Police and their treatment of people in the Ogaden (Somali) and eastern Oromia regions

10.6.1 HRW in their ‘World Report 2018’ (HRW report 2018), covering events of 2017 noted:

‘Serious abuses continue to be committed by the Somali Region’s notoriously abusive Liyu police. Throughout 2017, communities in the neighboring Oromia regional state reported frequent armed attacks on their homes by individuals believed to be from the Somali Region’s Liyu police. Residents reported killings, assaults, looting of property, and displacement. Several Somali communities reported reprisal attacks carried out by unknown Oromo individuals. Human Rights Watch is not aware of any efforts by the federal government to stop these incursions...

‘The Liyu police were formed in 2008 and have a murky legal mandate but in practice report to Abdi Mahmoud Omar (also known as “Abdi Illey”) the president of the Somali Regional State, and have been implicated in numerous alleged extrajudicial killings as well as incidents of torture, rape, and attacks on civilians accused of proving support to the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). No meaningful investigations have been undertaken into any of these alleged abuses in the Somali Regional State.’¹⁷¹

10.6.2 Amnesty International in their report ‘State of the World’s Human Rights 2017/2018’, published in February 2018 noted:

¹⁶⁹ Bloomberg, Returned Ethiopia Rebels... 14 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ Ethiopia Insight, OLF integration underway...(political games), 1 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ HRW, HRW report 2019 (introduction) 18 January 2018, [url](#)

'The Ethiopian Somali Liyu Police (Liyu Police), a special force in Somali Regional State in eastern Ethiopia, and local Ethiopian militia, extrajudicially executed hundreds of Oromos living in the Somali Region. Among those killed were infants as young as six months. The Liyu Police also evicted at least 50,000 Oromos living in the Somali Region between September and October [2017]. It attacked the neighbouring Oromia Regional Districts and displaced thousands of residents in February, March, August, September and October [2017].'¹⁷²

10.6.3 The USSD report 2018 noted:

'On August 12 [2018], a heavily armed group of Somali Region's special police force, sometimes referred to as the Liyu, attacked residents in Mayu Muluke District in East Hararghe Zone, Oromia, killing 40 persons and injuring 40. Oromia Region's government spokesperson told local media that the attackers took orders from individuals opposing the federal government.

'...According to a July 31 HRCO report, nine adult residents of West Hararghe Zone, Oromia Region, disappeared following attacks by Somali Region's special police force. Liyu officers abducted these individuals from their homes or the street.'¹⁷³

10.6.4 HRW in the report 'We are Like the Dead' dated July 2018 noted:

'Liyu police have also been more active outside of Ethiopia's Somali Region, including inside both Somalia and Ethiopia's Oromia region. In late 2017 over one million people were displaced from their homes along the border between Somali Region and Oromia, after a wave of attacks that communities attributed to the Liyu police. In the meantime, sources inside Somali Region described to Human Rights Watch increased recruitment of Liyu police, including children, in the last six months.'¹⁷⁴

10.6.5 The same report noted:

'The Liyu police continued the EDF strategy of collective punishment of civilians who may support the ONLF and committed the same kinds of horrific abuses. Human Rights Watch has received consistent reports since 2009 of very serious crimes allegedly committed by Liyu police, including deliberate massacres of people in villages, extrajudicial killings, torture, rape, and property destruction. These alleged abuses have been focused in the areas where the ONLF are popular or were engaged in attacks on military targets. Targets of abuse have included relatives of ONLF members, or those the Liyu police perceive to have provided food, water, shelter or information to the ONLF.'¹⁷⁵

10.6.6 HRW report 2019 noted:

'Liyu police continued to commit abuses in the region and, at times, killings in neighboring Oromia regional state.

¹⁷² Amnesty International, State of the World's Human Rights 2017/2018, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷³ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.a), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ HRW, "We are like the dead"... (p.20), July 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ HRW, "We are like the dead"... (p.20), July 2018, [url](#)

‘Abdi Illey resigned and was arrested in August, two weeks after Liyu police and youth loyal to him attacked residents and burned property in the regional capital, Jijiga. He remains in government custody but has not been charged. Police head Abdirahman Abdillahi Burale (known as Abdirahman Labagole) resigned in August, but despite evidence of his involvement in committing human rights abuses, Abdirahman Labagole and other members of the Ethiopian army or Liyu police implicated in abuses against civilians have not faced any charges.’¹⁷⁶

- 10.6.7 ACLED noted in ‘Change and Continuity in Protests and Political Violence in PM Abiy’s Ethiopia’, published 13 October 2018, covering trends since April 2018 that:

‘Violence in the Somali region has often involved the Liyu Police (‘Special Police’) a paramilitary force, both engaging in violence against civilians and in a high-profile clash with the federal military in August, which are closely tied to the former president of the Somali region, Abdi Illey... there has been an increase in the number of violent events associated with the Liyu Police paramilitary forces in the months following Prime Minister Abiy’s swearing in, as well as a shift towards their use of violence against civilians. The Liyu Police have been accused of a number of human rights abuses and have faced criticism from groups like Amnesty International for engaging in violence against civilians... Since Abdi Illey’s arrest in late August [2018], the activities of the Liyu Police have dropped dramatically.

‘The instability associated with the “Liyu Police” allude to the existence of subregional power-brokers in Ethiopia that are seeking to consolidate their power and advance their own interests in this period of political flux.’¹⁷⁷

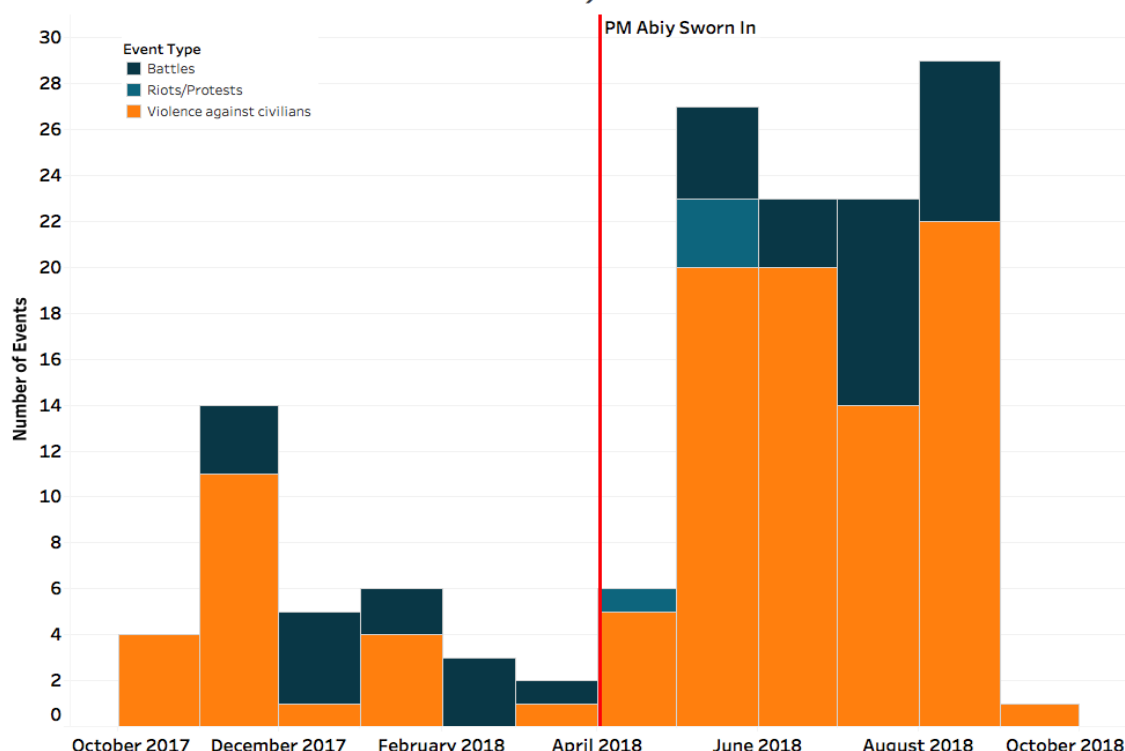
- 10.6.8 ACLED produced the following graph¹⁷⁸ showing violent events and protests involving the Liyu police prior to and after Abiy Ahmed becoming prime minister:

¹⁷⁶ HRW, HRW report 2019 (Impunity, Torture...), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ ACLED, Change and Continuity... (Geographic Shifts in Violence), 13 October 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ ACLED, Change and Continuity... (Geographic Shifts in Violence), 13 October 2018, [url](#)

Violent Events and Protests Involving the Liyu Police (1 October 2017 - 30 September 2018)



See also [Treatment of detainees / prison conditions](#)

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10.7 Release of prisoners

10.7.1 The UN Human Rights Council stated that ‘...the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ...welcomed the release on 26 May 2018 of a number of political detainees, bloggers and other individuals who had been detained following their participation in protests in recent years. It noted that the Attorney General had indicated that those releases had been made with the intention of widening the political space.’¹⁷⁹

10.7.2 The USSD report noted that in 2018:

‘The federal and regional governments released 9,702 prisoners in the six weeks following the former prime minister’s announcement of prisoner releases on January 3. During these weeks the government released the vast majority of imprisoned high-profile opposition politicians, journalists, and activists.

‘The federal attorney general dropped charges and/or granted pardons to 744 individuals charged with or convicted of crimes of terrorism and corruption. Of that number, 576 were convicted and serving prison terms, while 168 were still on trial. The majority, more than 500, walked out of prisons on May 29. The justifications provided by the government for the releases included remorse by the convicts, abatement of the threat to

¹⁷⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Compilation on Ethiopia (para 33), 1 March 2019 [url](#)

society, and ability to contribute to the continued widening of political space. Senior opposition politicians, journalists, activists, and government officials charged with terrorism and corruption were included in those released.’¹⁸⁰

- 10.7.3 The same report stated: ‘There were no high-profile political prisoners at year’s end, because the government dropped charges and/or granted pardons to more than ten thousand individuals charged and convicted with crimes of terrorism and corruption.’¹⁸¹

- 10.7.4 The DIS report 2018 noted:

‘Prime Minister Abiy had soon after his nomination announced the release of people who had been arbitrarily detained in prison. The majority of the interlocutors confirmed that an unspecified number – but at least several thousands and up to 10,000 according to Amnesty International – had been released from prison after Prime Minister Abiy’s entry into office. The released include journalists, human rights activists and prominent politicians. The EU source estimated the number of people being detained to approximately 30,000 out of which approximately 10,000 had been released by the new administration. The US Embassy emphasised that the new administration had still not lived up to its promise of liberating all political prisoners and opposition leaders and the national researcher explained that a number of detainees had simply “been forgotten” and remained in prison...

‘The EU representative underlined the contradictory elements of the new situation: whereas 10,000 of political prisoners had been released, others were still arrested by the police on political grounds. As another example, the source referred to an incident where one opposition leader was released from prison and was going to address his people in his home town. He was subsequently detained by the federal police, who stated that he was not allowed to address his people. However, the regional police did not agree with the federal position, which resulted in a stand-off between federal and regional police.’¹⁸²

- 10.7.5 The Freedom House report 2019 noted ‘...in July [2018] , Parliament approved a widespread amnesty for thousands of individuals charged with treason and other crimes against the state, most of whom had been released earlier in the year.’¹⁸³

- 10.7.6 An Africanews report, Ethiopia pardons over 13,000 political prisoners, dated 23 January 2019, stated:

‘Ethiopia’s determination to reform has seen up to 13,000 people who were previously charged with or convicted of terrorism and/or treason, pardoned over the past six months, state media said.

‘Parliament in July passed a law allowing people convicted or facing charges of “treason, crime against the constitutional order and armed struggle” to apply for pardons. “More than [13,200] individuals took advantage of the law

¹⁸⁰ USSD, USSD report 2018 (1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸² DIS, DIS report 2018 (section 4.1, 4.3), September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸³ Freedom House, Freedom House report 2019 (section B), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

in the past six months,” state-affiliated Fana Broadcasting Corporate said on Tuesday, citing Ethiopia’s attorney general.

‘The previous government had said around 30,000 people including students, opposition leaders, journalists and bloggers were in detention following widespread protests that broke out in 2015...’¹⁸⁴

10.7.7 Jane’s Sentinel Security Assessment, Ethiopia dated 22 March 2019 stated: ‘New Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has pursued a more conciliatory approach towards the opposition and protest movements, including pardoning and dropping charges against prominent activists and leaders, releasing thousands of prisoners....’¹⁸⁵

10.7.8 For details of individuals released see [Former designated terrorist organisations](#) and [Non-armed opposition groups](#). See also [Treatment of journalists and bloggers](#) and [Treatment of protestors](#)

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10.8 Students and youth organisations

10.8.1 The DIS report 2018 noted:

‘According to the Danish Refugee Council, youth organisations of the opposition parties seem to be very well organised and very well controlled. The Danish Refugee Council representative further explained that a member of a political youth opposition group would be at risk of detainment depending on the specific situation. It is violence and violent actions, which are criminalised rather than membership by itself. However, it is the authorities who have the ultimate power to define what would be perceived as violence and thereby of politicising collective and individual actions. This assessment was shared by other sources and the representative of the British Embassy added that the Prime Minister had said that “everybody” from the opposition now had a seat at the table as long as they are not engaged in terrorist or other violent activities.’¹⁸⁶

10.8.2 The same report noted:

‘Ethiopia has a history of political agitation at the university and student protests across regions are not uncommon. According to both NGO and diplomatic sources the security forces have at repeated occasions had recourse to rough violence against participants in student demonstrations ...many had been arrested and detained without being charged with any crime.

‘Several sources concurred that during that State of Emergency, which was declared in February 2018, the general situation for students had improved. The national researcher assessed that the risk of university students for being victims of harassment by the authorities, seemed to have decreased

¹⁸⁴ Africanews, Ethiopia pardons over 13,000 political prisoners, 23 January 2019, [url](#).

¹⁸⁵ Jane’s, Sentinel Security Assessment, Ethiopia (section Security), 22 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ DIS, DIS report 2018 (6.1.1), September 2018, [url](#)

since January 2018. Many of the 20,000 prisoners who have been released by the Government over the past years were probably student activists.’¹⁸⁷

- 10.8.3 And, in its executive summary the same report noted: ‘The overall situation for opposition parties has improved following the nomination of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. This relative improvement also included the youth branches of those opposition parties.’¹⁸⁸

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Section 11 updated: 10 July 2019

11. Freedom of expression and assembly

11.1 General

- 11.1.1 The USSD report 2018 stated ‘Authorities arrested and detained persons who made public or private statements deemed critical of the government under a provision of the law pertaining to inciting the public through false rumors.’¹⁸⁹
- 11.1.2 The same report noted ‘Human rights issues included... substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, such as overly restrictive nongovernmental organization laws; and significant restrictions on freedom of movement...the number and severity of these human rights issues diminished significantly under Abiy’s administration, and in some cases they were no longer an issue by the end of the year’¹⁹⁰
- 11.1.3 And that ‘Upon taking office Prime Minister Abiy stated that freedom of speech is essential to the country’s future.’¹⁹¹
- 11.1.4 Amnesty International in their report State of the World’s Human Rights 2017/2018 (Amnesty report 2018), published in February 2018 noted ‘Yonatan Tesfaye was convicted of encouraging terrorism in his Facebook posts and sentenced to six-and-a-half years in prison. Getachew Shiferaw was sentenced to 18 months in prison for sending emails to leaders of a banned opposition political party based abroad. The court convicted him on charges including expressing appreciation of someone who, in 2012, publicly denounced the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.’¹⁹²
- 11.1.5 The Freedom House report 2019 noted:
- ‘Wide-reaching surveillance programs and the presence of the EPRDF at all levels of society have inhibited private discussion. However, broad political changes in 2018, including the release of political prisoners and lifting of bans against prominent government critics in the media and other sectors has fostered a more open atmosphere for private discussion. And unlike in

¹⁸⁷ DIS, DIS report 2018 (7.1, 7.2), September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ DIS, DIS report 2018 (5.2.1) September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁸⁹ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 2.a), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ USSD, USSD report 2018 (Executive summary), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹¹ USSD, USSD report 2018 (2.a), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹² Amnesty International, State of the World’s Human Rights 2017/2018, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

some previous years, in 2018 there were no reported arrests of private citizens in connection with antigovernment remarks.¹⁹³

- 11.1.6 HRW report 2019 noted ‘Many of Ethiopia’s repressive laws used to silence dissent and restrict citizens’ meaningful engagement—including the Charities and Societies Proclamation, the Media Law, and the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation—were being revised at time of writing.’¹⁹⁴

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11.2 Media freedom to operate

11.2.1 The USSD report 2018 noted:

‘The constitution and law provide for freedom of speech and press; however, SOE [State of Emergency] regulations included restrictions on these rights, giving legal cover for continued efforts to harass and intimidate journalists that predated the SOE. Upon the end of the SOE and with the encouragement of Prime Minister Abiy, a number of new and returned diaspora media outlets were able to register and begin operations in the country.’¹⁹⁵

11.2.2 The same report noted:

‘Many private newspapers reported informal editorial control by the government. Examples of government interference included requests regarding specific stories and calls from government officials concerning articles perceived as critical of the government...

‘Under the SOE [State of Emergency] --February 15 to June 5--the government used the SOE laws to suppress criticism. On July 5, the parliament legally removed the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), ONLF, and PG7 from the list of terrorist organizations. Journalists, both state and private, were less afraid of reporting on these groups following their delisting....

‘Prime Minister Abiy invited diaspora media outlets to return as part of broader reforms to open up political dialogue. Major outlets and bloggers returned and began operations without incident. Media outlets were careful in testing the limits of their new freedoms. Several outfits printed hard-hitting and carefully investigated pieces exposing problems without repercussions.’¹⁹⁶

11.2.3 Freedom House in the ‘Freedom on the Net 2018 Ethiopia’ report noted:

‘Since his appointment in April, new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has projected the image of a reformer, easing restrictions on the media and promising democratic reforms in his inaugural address. Under his short tenure, the internet has become more accessible, as networks were less disrupted and content became less censored. Citizens have flocked to social media to participate in conversations about their country’s transition from

¹⁹³ Freedom House, Freedom House report 2019 (section D), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ HRW, HRW report 2019 (Freedom of Expression), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 2.a), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 2.a), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

authoritarianism and to hold the new government accountable to promised reforms, resulting in a palpable decline in self-censorship online and off.¹⁹⁷

11.2.4 The USSD report 2018 noted:

‘The government periodically restricted and disrupted access to the internet and blocked various social media sites. The government shut down mobile internet in towns outside of Addis Ababa, especially in Oromia and Amhara between February and April [2018], when the SOE was in force. Authorities restored internet connectivity in April while unblocking more than 260 websites that were previously unavailable inside the country. These included blogs, opposition websites, websites of PG7, the OLF, and the ONLF, and news sites such as al-Jazeera, the BBC, and RealClearPolitics.’¹⁹⁸

11.2.5 The same report stated ‘On May 29 [2018], the attorney general withdrew charges against diaspora-based Ginbot 7 leader Berhanu Nega and Oromo activist Jawar Mohammed, as well as their respective media organizations Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio and Oromo Media Network.’¹⁹⁹

11.2.6 The DIS report 2018 noted:

‘Following the lifting of the State of Emergency in June 2018, the Government decided to unblock a number of websites, blogs and radio and TV-stations, which were previously unavailable to the population, at least through legal channels. According to the national researcher, this included the two diaspora based TV stations ESAT and OMN41. This decision was seen as important. Both researchers found that the political space in Ethiopia had been widened as a consequence of this decision.’²⁰⁰

11.2.7 HRW report 2019 noted: ‘OMN and ESAT television stations reopened in Addis Ababa in June, following calls by Prime Minister Abiy for diaspora-based television stations to return. Additionally, the government lifted obstructions to access to more than 250 websites. The restriction on access to the internet and mobile applications introduced during the 2015 protests was also lifted.’²⁰¹

11.2.8 In a contribution to the UN Human Rights Council’s Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions on Ethiopia dated 4 March 2019 a consortium of organisations noted ‘...the Government had continued to use restrictive legislation to impede the work of human rights defenders and journalists.’²⁰²

11.2.9 An opinion piece for ‘AlJazeera, Abiy's year one: Ethiopia's best hope for stability’, published 2 April 2019 noted ‘He [Abiy Ahmed] has significantly expanded political space. Today there are more private newspapers than at any time over the past 15 years.... Freedom of speech and the press have blossomed in ways never seen before - so much that many are now openly

¹⁹⁷ Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2018 (Prosecutions...), 1 November 2018 [url](#)

¹⁹⁸ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 2.a), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ DIS, DIS report 2018 (para 3.3.1), September 2018, [url](#)

²⁰¹ HRW, HRW report 2019 (Freedom of Expression), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

²⁰² UN Human Rights Council, Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions...(para 37), 4 March 2019, [url](#)

calling for placing some limits, including regulation on hate or inciting speech.’²⁰³

11.2.10 Reporters Without Borders in the article ‘New era for Ethiopia’s journalists’, published 2 April 2019, noted:

‘By releasing imprisoned journalists, unblocking access to news websites and lifting bans on media outlets that had been imposed by the previous regime, Abiy’s government has moved in a swift and spectacular manner in the 12 months since it took office on 2 April 2018.

‘... A total of 264 previously banned websites and blogs have been given permission to operate. Leading Ethiopian TV channels that had been forced to operate from bases outside the country, such as OMN and ESAT, can now operate in Ethiopia. In all, 23 publications and six TV channels have been approved in recent months.’²⁰⁴

11.2.11 Amnesty, in their news report dated 3 May 2019 stated:

‘...there has been marked progress in press freedom because of the authorities’ decision to loosen their stranglehold on media operations. In July 2018, the Open Observatory of Network Interference confirmed 264 previously blocked websites had become accessible, including diaspora media outlets.

‘Since April 2018, at least eight new privately-owned newspapers and magazines have been established, compared to only four before then. There has also been a radical and bold shift in coverage of previously off-limit topics like politics and human rights.’²⁰⁵

11.2.12 Reporters Without Borders, published the ‘2019 World Press Freedom Index’ in April 2019. The Index ranks 180 countries and regions according to the level of freedom available to journalists. It is a snapshot of the media freedom situation based on an evaluation of pluralism, independence of the media, quality of legislative framework and safety of journalists in each country and region²⁰⁶. It placed Ethiopia at 110, up from 150 in 2018 (1 being the most free)²⁰⁷.

11.2.13 VOA, in its article ‘Internet Restored in Ethiopia 10 days after Assassinations’ dated 2 July 2019, noted ‘Ethiopia has begun restoring internet access Tuesday, 10 days after it was cut following the assassinations of six top government officials [on 22 June 2019]...The internet shutdown affected the entire country but in recent days a few locations were able to function... Ethio Telecom, the country’s state-owned monopoly of telecommunications services, also cut internet access two weeks ago during national school exams.’²⁰⁸

See also [Treatment of journalists and bloggers](#) and [Political landscape](#)

²⁰³ Al Jazeera, Abiy’s year one: Ethiopia’s best hope for stability, 2 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁴ Reporters Without Borders, New era for Ethiopia’s journalists, 2 April 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁵ Amnesty International, OPED Ethiopia: Fragile new-found press freedom..., 3 May 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ Reporters Without Borders, The World Press Freedom Index, April 2019 [url](#)

²⁰⁷ Reporters Without Borders, The World Press Freedom Index, April 2019 [url](#)

²⁰⁸ VOA, ‘Internet Restored in Ethiopia 10 days after Assassinations’, 2 July 2019, [url](#)

11.3 Treatment of journalists and bloggers

11.3.1 The Amnesty report 2018, covering events in 2017, noted 'The Federal High Court convicted journalists, bloggers and other activists on terrorism charges and handed down prison sentences.'²⁰⁹

11.3.2 Freedom House in its publication 'Freedom on the Net 2018 – Ethiopia', covering the period 31 May 2017 – 1 June 2018 noted:

'Following years of arresting antigovernment protesters and handing out long prison sentences to critical bloggers and journalists, the ruling EPRDF party stunned observers in January and February 2018 by releasing thousands of political prisoners, including blogger Eskinder Nega, who had been serving an 18-year sentence since 2012. Imprisoned bloggers convicted on terrorism charges—Zelalem Workagegnehu, Yonatan Wolde, and Bahiru Degu, among others—were also eventually released, while outstanding charges against the critical Zone 9 bloggers were dropped.

'Despite the progress, authorities made new arrests under the state of emergency imposed in February 2018. On March 8, 2018, police arrested Seyoum Teshome, a well-known academic and blogger, for criticizing the state of emergency on his blog. He was released on April 16 without charges. Separately, several bloggers and journalists were rearrested on March 26 while at a social gathering, which were prohibited without prior authorization under the state of emergency. Those arrested included recently released Eskinder Nega, though they were all released after twelve days in prison.'²¹⁰

11.3.3 The USSD report 2018 noted:

'On March 25 [2018], government security forces arrested journalists Eskinder Nega and Temesgen Desalegn; bloggers Mahlet Fantahun, Befekadu Hailu, Zelalem Workagegnehu, and Fekadu Mahetemework; and activists Andualem Arage, Addisu Getaneh, Yidnekachew Addis, Tefera Tesfaye, and Woynshet Molla while they gathered at the residence of journalist Temesgen Desalegn in Addis Ababa for the improper display of the national flag. Police first took the 11 to a police station in Addis' Jemo District but transferred them to another station in Gotera-Pepsi area during the night. On April 5 [2018], authorities released the 11 detainees in Addis Ababa without formal charges.'²¹¹

11.3.4 The same report noted: 'In February [2018] the federal attorney general dropped pending charges against remaining members of the Zone 9 blogging group Natnael Feleke, Atnaf Berhane, and Befekadu Hailu. In 2017 the Supreme Court downgraded the charges against the three bloggers from terrorism to criminal provocation of the public....'²¹²

11.3.5 HRW report 2019 noted:

²⁰⁹ Amnesty International, State of the World's Human Rights 2017/2018, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁰ Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2018 (Introduction), 1 November 2018 [url](#)

²¹¹ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²¹² USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 1.d), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

'Ethiopia released journalists who had been wrongfully detained or convicted on politically motivated charges, including prominent writers such as Eskinder Nega and Woubshet Taye, after more than six years in jail. The federal Attorney General's Office dropped all pending charges against bloggers, journalists and diaspora-based media organizations, including the Zone 9 bloggers, Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT), and Oromia Media Network (OMN), which had previously faced charges of violence inciting for criticizing the government.'²¹³

- 11.3.6 In relation to the treatment of journalists the USSD report 2018 stated: 'The government's arrest, harassment, and prosecution of journalists sharply declined and imprisoned journalists were released. As of April [2018] no high-profile journalist remained in detention. On January 9 and 10, the Federal Prison Administration released 14 Muslim activists and journalists... from prison.'²¹⁴
- 11.3.7 CNN in the article 'Ethiopians abroad eye return as reforms kick in back home', published 3 August 2018, stated:

'Eskinder Nega is a renowned journalist and activist who was sentenced to 18 years in prison in 2012. After being among the roughly 6,000 prisoners freed at the start of 2018 to quell unrest, Nega flew to the US to see his wife and child for the first time in over four years. But the new hope prompted by Abiy's election drew him back to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital.

"I opened an office on Friday. Incredibly, I actually found landlords who were not frightened to rent me office space," Nega told CNN. But he too acknowledges that the country has a long way to go.'²¹⁵
- 11.3.8 The Guardian, in an article published 8 July 2018 noted 'Befeqadu Hailu, a 37-year-old blogger jailed repeatedly for his pro-democracy writings [said]... "I have always lived in fear but I feel less threatened when I write than I did before...It's not only his word ... the moment he [Abiy Ahmed] spoke those words the security personnel down to the local levels have changed."²¹⁶
- 11.3.9 An opinion piece for AlJazeera, Abiy's year one: Ethiopia's best hope for stability, published 2 April 2019 noted 'For the first time in more than two decades, no journalist is behind bars in Ethiopia'²¹⁷
- 11.3.10 Reporters Without Borders in the article 'New era for Ethiopia's journalists', published 2 April 2019, noted 'For the first time in more than 15 years, no journalists are being held in connection with their work.'²¹⁸
- 11.3.11 Amnesty provided their opinion on progress made in a news report dated 3 May 2019: 'The current gains in press freedom and the right to freedom of expression are outcomes of years of resistance against repression... While

²¹³ HRW, HRW report 2019 (Freedom of Expression), 17 January 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁴ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 2.a), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁵ CNN, Ethiopians abroad eye return as reforms kick in back home, 3 August 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁶ The Guardian, 'These changes are unprecedented...', 8 July 2018, [url](#)

²¹⁷ Al Jazeera, Abiy's year one: Ethiopia's best hope for stability, 2 April 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁸ Reporters Without Borders, New era for Ethiopia's journalists, 2 April 2019, [url](#)

2018 was generally a good year for journalists in Ethiopia, their work is not yet entirely free from harassment and intimidation.^{'219}

See also [Media freedom to operate](#)

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11.4 Treatment of protestors

11.4.1 The USSD report 2018 noted:

'The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly; SOE [State of Emergency] regulations, however, prohibited demonstrations and town hall meetings that did not have approval from the Command Posts... After the lifting of the SOE [State of Emergency regulations], security forces' response to protests showed signs of increasing restraint. In July and August [2018] Federal Police and Addis Ababa police provided security to at least three large peaceful demonstrations staged without prior notification to the authorities in Addis Ababa.'²²⁰

11.4.2 The same report stated: 'The protests and demands for change were driven by the EPRDF's attempts to impede criticism through intimidation, including continued detention of journalists, those who express critical opinions online, and opposition figures...'²²¹

11.4.3 The DIS report 2018 noted: 'The national researcher stated that the Government had shown "relative tolerance and restraint in its use of force against peaceful demonstrators". The number of violent riots and security incidents across the country had been reduced although both NGO representatives underlined that there still had been instances where the authorities had "shown force" in the handling of protesters.'²²²

11.4.4 BBC, in their report published on 16 December 2018 stated: 'A military court in Ethiopia has sentenced 66 soldiers to between five and 14 years in prison for marching on the residence of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in October [2018]. The government said the soldiers were asking for a pay rise but Mr Abiy later insisted they had wanted to kill him.'²²³

11.4.5 The Amnesty report 2018 noted, in its concluding paragraph: 'Prime Minister Abiy has overseen a period of rapid political reform in Ethiopia; the pattern of violence in the country suggests that leadership changes in the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) have resulted in, for now, a more placid Oromia and a less lethal response to peaceful protest. The durability of this arrangement remains to be seen.'²²⁴

11.4.6 The Freedom House report 2019 noted:

'Severe restrictions on freedom of assembly imposed by the EPRDF government in the past eased somewhat in 2018, as demonstrations were more frequently allowed to occur without interference. However, protests

²¹⁹ Amnesty International, OPED Ethiopia: Fragile new-found press freedom..., 3 May 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰ USSD, USSD report 2018 (section 2.b), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²²¹ USSD, USSD report 2018 (2.a), 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²²² DIS, DIS report 2018 (para 2.2), September 2018, [url](#)

²²³ BBC, Protesting Ethiopian soldiers given jail terms, 16 December 2018, [url](#)

²²⁴ ACLED, Change and Continuity...(Geographic Shifts in Violence), 13 October 2018, [url](#)

were still sometimes violently dispersed by security forces. In August, for example, police opened fire on a group of demonstrators protesting the looting of property owned by ethnic minorities in the Somali Region, killing four people.

‘A government-imposed state of emergency, which was announced in February in response to the escalating ethnic violence and the resignation of former prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn, effectively banned public protests until it was lifted in June, two months earlier than planned.’²²⁵

- 11.4.7 ACLED noted in ‘Change and Continuity in Protests and Political Violence in PM Abiy’s Ethiopia’, published 13 October 2018, covering trends since April 2018 that:

‘Though Abiy’s tenure has been heralded as a pacifying influence, the number of violent events and protests have actually increased by over 8% in the 6 months since he has taken office, relative to the 6 months prior (from 388 to 420 events). This has corresponded to an increase of over 48% in the number of reported fatalities from 644 fatalities in the 6 months before Abiy took office to 954 fatalities from April to October...

‘In April (as Abiy was being sworn in), 33 protests were reported, while March experienced 6; but riots have been declining (27 riots are recorded between October 2017 and April 2018, but only 7 in the six months since Abiy was sworn in).

‘The surge in protest activity in June 2018 is a result of the lifting of the State of Emergency which included a ban on public protests. Perhaps most strikingly, there has been a remarkable decline in the the [sic] number of confrontations between demonstrations and state forces — a decline of over 56% in confrontations between rioters and state forces and a decline of over 82% in confrontations between protesters and state forces. A decline in reported fatalities has followed: since Abiy took office, there have been 6 reported fatalities associated with military-rioter confrontations, down from 137 in the 6 months prior to Abiy’s swearing in (an over 95% decline) and 27 reported fatalities from military-protester interactions (a 67% decline).

‘This sharp decline suggests a shift in government policy away from using lethal force against peaceful protesters — though the total proportion of incidents in which peaceful protests are shut down violently (roughly ⅓) has remained unchanged.’²²⁶

- 11.4.8 The UN Human Rights Council noted in March 2019 ‘The United Nations country team expressed concern about reports that people participating in nationwide protests and demonstrations had been injured or killed by law enforcement and security forces. It was concerned by the lack of concrete measures to hold law enforcement and security forces accountable for those acts.’²²⁷

See also [State of emergency, Treatment of detainees / prison conditions](#)

²²⁵ Freedom House, Freedom House report 2019 (section E), 4 February 2019, [url](#)

²²⁶ ACLED, Change and Continuity... (Government Tolerance of Protest), 13 October 2018, [url](#)

²²⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Compilation on Ethiopia (para 18), 1 March 2019 [url](#)

12. Human rights activists and civil society

12.1.1 Amnesty International noted on 22 May 2018:

‘...human rights lawyer Henok Aklilu and his friend Michael Melak were released without charge on Saturday after spending three days in jail...Henok Aklilu - a lawyer renowned for representing people accused of terrorism-related offences - was arrested at his office in Addis Ababa together with a friend, Michael Melak, with whom he intends to form an association of Addis-born Ethiopians.

‘The arrest of Henok and Michael highlight the difficulties human rights defenders continue to face despite the Ethiopian government’s stated commitment to open up space for dissenting voices.’²²⁸

12.1.2 The UN Human Rights Council noted:

‘The Committee deeply regretted information on the interference of the Government in the work of the Charities and Societies Agency, the heavy restrictions imposed on non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations in accessing conflict-affected regions, detention centres and alternative care institutions, and the cases of harassment, arrest and prosecution of human rights activists.

‘The United Nations country team expressed concern that the Charities and Societies Proclamation had a negative impact on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression and association.’²²⁹

12.1.3 The National Report submitted by the Federal Attorney General for Ethiopia to The Human Rights Council’s working group for the UN’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR), during the May 2019 meeting stated that:

‘The Government believes engagement with civil society is vital to better the promotion and protection of human rights. To widen the civic space, the Federal Attorney General assisted by its Justice and Legal Affairs Advisory Council composed of renowned independent legal professionals have completed a new draft legislation to replace the existing Charities and Societies Proclamation No. 621/2009, which placed restrictions on the participation of CSOs in human rights work. The Government also works in close collaboration with grass-roots, member-based and members-driven CSOs such as youth and women’s associations. Moreover, CSOs are also active in efforts to amend the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation 652/2009 and the Freedom of Information and Mass Media Proclamation No. 590/2008...’²³⁰

12.1.4 The same report, in relation to HRDs noted: ‘The Government is committed to protecting human rights defenders. All human rights defenders that had been detained or imprisoned in Ethiopia have been released. Ethiopian

²²⁸ Amnesty, Ethiopia: Release of human rights defender welcome ..., 22 May 2019, [url](#)

²²⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Compilation on Ethiopia (paras 31-32), 1 March 2019 [url](#)

²³⁰ UN Human Rights Council, National report (para 30-31), 25 February 2019, [url](#)

human rights defenders who had been based abroad have also returned in large numbers to Ethiopia and resumed their activities.’²³¹

- 12.1.5 The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, in their briefing note dated April 2019 stated:

‘The 2009 CSO Proclamation on Charities and Societies was the first text comprehensively regulating CSOs in the country, and amended the Civil Code provisions on the matter.

‘The 2009 law imposed serious restrictions on the principle of freedom of association in the country, by extending the definition of “foreign NGOs” and imposing further limitations on this category; as well as by giving extensive and abusive powers to the Charities and Societies Agency in charge of the registration, functioning and dissolution of NGOs.’²³²

- 12.1.6 An Amnesty International article, ‘Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition’, dated 26 April 2019, stated ‘Human rights defenders were particularly encouraged by the rewriting of the problematic Charities and Societies Proclamation, a law that had been used to restrict the work of civil society organizations and to nearly eradicate forms of traditional groups in Ethiopia, and the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation that abused the definition of terrorism as a justification to shut down opposition to government.’²³³

- 12.1.7 The same organisation noted:

‘February 5, 2019 marked a very important and historical day for civil society organisations in Ethiopia, which cheered the adoption of the revised Civil Society Proclamation 1113/2019, repealing the repressive 2009 legislation.

‘The new text, which was gazetted on March 7, 2019, was adopted by the House of Peoples Representatives after an inclusive process of consultation which took into consideration CSOs’ inputs on the previous versions. Overall, the new CSO Proclamation was positively welcomed by the local and international community, as it offers greater freedom to CSOs that wish to freely associate and freely express themselves. Nonetheless, some challenges still remain.’²³⁴

- 12.1.8 The UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (UN OHCHR), in the publication ‘Ethiopia: UN experts commend civil society law reforms, but concerns remain’ dated 4 April 2019, noted:

“We acknowledge the positive steps which the Government has taken in order to reform its laws on civil society organisations...”

‘The new Civil Societies Proclamation introduces a number of positive changes, including clear recognition of the right to operational freedom, the lifting of restrictions on finances considered “foreign”, particularly for those working on human rights, and expansion of fund-raising capabilities.

²³¹ UN Human Rights Council, National report (para 133), 25 February 2019, [url](#)

²³² The Observatory, The 2019 CSO Law... (section 3), April 2019, [url](#)

²³³ Amnesty International, Make Justice a Priority in Ethiopia’s Transition, 26 April 2019, [url](#).

²³⁴ The Observatory, The 2019 CSO Law... (section 4), April 2019, [url](#)

‘It also encourages civil society groups to play a more active part in policy and law, improving the living conditions of women, children, people with disabilities, the elderly and others at risk.

“‘However, a number of worrying provisions were added to the text during its revision by Ethiopia’s Council of Ministers, including changes to the Civil Society Agency Board, compromising its independence and granting it additional powers to dissolve organisations. ...The investigative powers of the Civil Society Agency are also too broad, permitting invasive Governmental supervision of civil society organisations and the Proclamation includes restrictive provisions requiring mandatory registration and burdensome auditing obligations.’”²³⁵

See [Civil Society Proclamation 1113/2019](#) dated 12 March 2019

See also [Media freedom to operate](#) and [Release of prisoners](#)

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Section 13 updated: 10 June 2019

13. Diaspora

13.1.1 HRW report 2018, covering events in 2017, noted:

‘Abdi Illey’s intolerance for dissent extends beyond Ethiopia, and family members of Ethiopian Somalis living outside of the country are frequently targeted in the Somali Region. Family members of diaspora have been arbitrarily detained, harassed, and had their property confiscated after their relatives in the diaspora attended protests or were critical of Abdi Illey in social media posts.’²³⁶

13.1.2 The DIS report 2018 noted:

‘The Ethiopian diaspora’s activities are monitored by the authorities. This includes their activities on Facebook, YouTube and personal blogs. Ethiopian citizen who participate in anti-government demonstrations in Europe or in the US were likely to be video-taped and thereby having their participation in such events documented; this surveillance would also extend to Ethiopians who had obtained a new nationality. After the nomination of the new Prime Minister, the situation for the diaspora is less threatening. Members of the diaspora who decide to return to Ethiopia are allowed to reintegrate into society as citizens, and open private businesses.’²³⁷

13.1.3 The DIS report 2018 noted:

‘According to the national researcher, the parliament passed a Bill of Amnesty in June 2018 that annuls the charges against all individuals, at home and abroad, except those who are charged with murder and rape. Effective immediately, the Bill requires these individuals to report to the Attorney General within six months to be eligible for the “certificate of amnesty”, which will serve as a guarantee for their freedom upon their return

²³⁵ UN OHCHR, UN human rights experts welcome legal reforms..., 4 April 2019, [url](#)

²³⁶ HRW, HRW report 2019 (introduction) 18 January 2018, [url](#)

²³⁷ DIS, DIS report 2018 (Executive summary), September 2018, [url](#)

to the community. This bill has far reaching significance as it literally frees many of those who fled the country since the mid-1970s until 8 June 2018.²³⁸

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²³⁸ DIS, DIS report 2018 (section 4.2), September 2018, [url](#)

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 ToRs, 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:

- The political system
 - Overview
 - Participation in the political process
 - Ruling party - Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
 - Resignation of Hailemariam Desalegn and replacement with Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister
 - Dialogue with opposition parties
- Armed opposition groups
 - Designated terrorist organisations
 - De-proscription July 2018
- Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)
 - History
 - Founders and leaders
 - Aims
 - Size, membership and leadership
 - Areas of influence
 - Funding
 - Splinter groups
 - OLA
- Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)
- Ginbot 7 (G7) / Arbegnoch (Patriot) Ginbot 7 for Unity and Democratic Movement (AGUDM)
- Non-armed opposition groups
 - Main opposition parties
 - New parties
 - Forum for Democratic Dialogue in Ethiopia (Medrek)
 - Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ)/Andinet
 - Ethiopian Democratic Party
 - All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP)

- Semayawi (Blue) Party
- Treatment of opposition groups
 - Students / youth organisations
 - Discrimination and harassment
 - Arbitrary arrest, detention and abuse
 - Anti-terrorism legislation
 - Former designated terrorist organisations
 - The Liyu Police and their treatment of people in the Ogaden (Somali) and eastern Oromia regions
- Freedom of expression and assembly
 - Media freedom
 - Treatment of journalists / bloggers
 - Protestors
- Human rights activists / Civil society / NGOs
- Diaspora

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **3.0**
- valid from **12 August 2019**

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment.

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