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Ethiopia

*Political opposition parties –
recent developments*



Ministry of Immigration
and Integration

The Danish
Immigration Service

newtodenmark.dk

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The Danish Immigration Service
Farimagsgade 51A
4700 Næstved
Denmark

Phone: +45 35 36 66 00
newtodenmark.dk

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Executive summary

Since Ethiopia's leadership transition in 2018, the country has continued to experience political and ethnic violence. Elections were postponed from 29 August 2020 to 5 June 2021 due to COVID-19. The ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition has merged into a single, national party, the Prosperity Party (PP). The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a former member of the EPRDF coalition, did not join the PP and held regional elections in Tigray in September 2020. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed subsequently ordered a military intervention in Tigray targeting the TPLF in November 2020. Eritrean forces are taking part in the fighting in Tigray and engage in forced repatriation of Eritrean refugees in the region. The initial, positive changes following the leadership transition in 2018 have not continued, and the authorities have reverted to repressive methods to maintain law and order and curb political opposition.

TPLF's license as a political party has been cancelled. Mid- or top-level officials within the TPLF would have reason to fear politically motivated prosecution by the Ethiopian government for their political membership. Family members to a TPLF leader could be at risk if the government specifically was looking for that leader.

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) has been among the main targets. There are reports of arrests of OLF leaders as well as of OLF members and supporters. OLF officials have also complained of not being issued permission to organise meetings and of other attempts at obstruction.

Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) is also among the main targets. The OFC have complained that they cannot get access to their offices and that they are being arrested on fabricated charges. Many OFC members can move freely without any problems, and persecution mainly targets active political leaders.

Sources assessed in September 2020 that members or associates of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) were not at risk of persecution by the authorities. Since then, there have been reports of arrests of ONLF leaders and of closure of ONLF offices.

Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA) has experienced challenges operating in Amhara. In some parts of Oromia, its party members are at risk or unable to leave their homes. EZEMA has been less vulnerable than other political opposition parties because of its shared ideology with the ruling party. A chairman of one of the party's constituency offices in Oromia was shot dead in February 2020.

Members of National Movement of Amhara (NaMA) were arrested following a number of assassinations in Amhara and Addis Ababa in June 2019.

The Ethiopian authorities arrested the leader and four leading officials of Balderas in July 2020 and charged them with involvement in the unrest that followed the assassination of Oromo activist and singer Hachalu Hundessa in June 2020.

The registration of Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) as a political party was cancelled in December 2020. Lidetu Ayalew, the founder of EDP, was arrested in July 2020.

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Introduction

The aim of this brief report is to provide an overview of the political situation in Ethiopia, with a specific focus on the following political opposition parties: Tigray People's Liberation Party (TPLF), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA), National Movement of Amhara (NaMA), Balderas and Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP). The report builds upon and expands The Danish Immigration Service's (DIS') report on opposition groups from March 2020.¹

The report was written in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology.² It is based on written public sources supplemented with information collected through e-mail and Skype interviews with two sources with expertise on the topic.

The sources consulted were briefed about the purpose of the report and that their statements would be included in a publicly available report. Minutes were written for each interview. These were forwarded to the source for approval, giving them the possibility to amend, comment or correct their statement. Both sources approved their statements, which can be found in Annex 1.

Given the changeable political situation in Ethiopia, the information provided may quickly become outdated.

The research and editing of this report was finalised in March 2021.

The report is available on the website of DIS www.newtodenmark.dk and thus is available to all stakeholders in the refugee status determination process as well as to the general public.

¹ Denmark, DIS, Ethiopia: *Opposition groups – Recent developments*, 13 March 2020, [url](#)

² EASO, *EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, June 2019, [url](#)

Abbreviations

AI	Amnesty International
COI	Country of Origin Information
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EDP	Ethiopian Democratic Party
EPRDF	Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front
EZEMA	Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
NaMA	National Movement of Amhara
NEBE	National Electoral Board of Ethiopia
OFC	Oromo Federalist Congress
OLA	Oromo Liberation Army
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OMN	Oromia Media Network
PP	Prosperity Party
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region
TPLF	Tigray People’s Liberation Front
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization

Map of Ethiopia



Source: www.atlasmapmakers.nl

1. Background

1.1 Continued political and ethnic violence

Since Ethiopia's leadership transition in 2018, the country has continued to experience political and ethnic violence.

The political violence includes the assassination of the regional president of Amhara and two of his advisors, as well as the chief of staff of Ethiopia's military and a retired officer in Addis Ababa, on 22 June 2019.³ Many low-level officials – including mayors, security chiefs and opposition politicians – have also been killed since September 2018.⁴

The assassination of Hachalu Hundessa, an Oromo singer and activist, on 29 June 2020 resulted in week-long protests, as well as destruction of property and violence by civilian assailants that targeted minority communities in Oromia. According to Amnesty International (AI), at least 177 were killed and hundreds were injured.⁵ The attacks further heightened existing social and political tensions in Addis Ababa and Oromia.⁶

The widespread ethnic violence noted in the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) report on Ethiopia from March 2020⁷ has continued. A non-exhaustive overview from December 2020 mentions conflicts spanning at least seven of Ethiopia's ten regional states.⁸

1.2 General elections; EPRDF merger into PP

Within months of coming to power, Prime Minister Abiy announced his commitment to ensuring multiparty democracy, and free and fair elections. If honoured, this would end almost 30 years of de facto single-party rule by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition.⁹ A number of legislative actions followed, including the appointment of a prominent former opposition leader as Chair of the Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) in November 2018, and the parliamentary approval of a new election law in August 2019.¹⁰ However, the next general elections, originally set for 29 August 2020, were postponed to 5 June 2021, officially due to the threat of COVID-19.¹¹

Prime Minister Abiy has transformed the EPRDF's four ruling coalition parties, and the ruling parties from the five regions not governed by EPRDF parties, into a single national party, the Prosperity Party (PP). This marks a shift away from an ethnic-based to a pan-Ethiopian political organisation.¹² According to journalist Tom Gardner, those who believe that Ethiopia's system of ethnic federalism has contributed to, rather than curtailed, ethnic conflict, have welcomed the merger, while critics see it as an attempt to centralise power and to erode the country's constitutional principle of regional autonomy and ethnic self-rule.¹³

³ ICG, *Restoring Calm in Ethiopia after High-profile Assassinations*, 25 June 2019, [url](#)

⁴ FP, *Political Violence Could Derail Ethiopia's Democratic Transition*, 20 September 2020, [url](#)

⁵ AI, *Ethiopia, Account for all people arrested after Hachalu Hundesa's killing*, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

⁶ HRW, *World Report 2021 – Ethiopia*, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

⁷ Denmark, DIS, *Ethiopia: Opposition groups – Recent developments*, 13 March 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁸ TNH, *Ethiopia's other conflicts*, 23 November 2020, [url](#)

⁹ ICG, *Managing Ethiopia's Unsettled Transition*, Africa Report No 269, 21 February 2019, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁰ Freedom House: *Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia*, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹¹ HRW, *World Report 2021 – Ethiopia*, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

¹² Freedom House: *Freedom in the World 2020 – Ethiopia*, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹³ FP, *Will Abiy Ahmed's Bet on Ethiopia's Political Future Pay Off?*, 21 January 2020, [url](#)

1.3 Armed conflict in Tigray

The Tigray Political Liberation Front (TPLF) did not join the PP. TPLF's power had been reduced after Prime Minister Abiy took office and removed many TPLF ministers and security heads.¹⁴ Tensions rose further as Tigray state defied the government postponement of elections and held regional elections in September 2020. On 4 November 2020, Prime Minister Abiy announced that he had ordered the military to take action against the TPLF in retaliation for an attack on a federal military base in Tigray.¹⁵

Military operations officially ended on 28 November 2020, and an interim regional government has been established, but federal forces are still fighting in Tigray. Information has been limited due to a communication shutdown and restricted media access. A House of Commons Library briefing paper sums up the information as follows: Between 2.3 and 4.5 million people are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance; more than two million people are displaced inside Tigray and over 60,000 in Sudan; there are reports of killings, sexual violence and serious human rights abuses against civilians; Eritrean forces are taking part in the fighting and are involved in human rights violations, including forced repatriation of Eritrean refugees living in Tigray.¹⁶ There have been reports that Eritrean refugees who fled to Addis Ababa have been returned to Tigray;¹⁷ of ethnic cleansing of Tigrayans in Tigray,¹⁸ and of ethnic profiling of Tigrayans elsewhere in Ethiopia.¹⁹

1.4 Tightening of democratic space

The initial, positive changes following Prime Minister Abiy's rise to power have not continued, and the authorities have reverted to repressive methods in order to maintain law and order.²⁰ Hundreds of people were arrested following the assassinations in June 2019 ([see Section 1.1](#)),²¹ and more than 9,000 people were detained across Oromia in July 2020 amid and after the violence following the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa ([see Section 1.1](#)), with more than 4,000 people being prosecuted, according to Ethiopia Insight.²² There are reports of police brutality and arrests in connection with demonstrations²³ and a number of journalists have been arrested.²⁴

The repressive methods used by the authorities include attempts to curb political opposition.²⁵ After the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa, the government arrested opposition leaders and members in Oromia,

¹⁴ ICG, *Keeping Ethiopia's Transition on the Rails*, Africa Report No 283, 16 December 2019, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁵ ICG, *Clashes over Ethiopia's Tigray Region: Getting to a Ceasefire and National Dialogue*, 5 November 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶ House of Commons Library, *Ethiopia: situation in Tigray*, Briefing Paper Number 09147, 25 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁷ UNHCR: *Statement attributable to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi on the situation of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia's Tigray region*, 14 January 2021, [url](#)

¹⁸ Vice: *"They Started Burning the Homes": Ethiopians Say Their Towns are Being Razed In Ethnic Cleansing Campaign*, 27 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁹ NYT, *They Once Ruled Ethiopia. Now They Are Fighting Its Government*, 15 November 2020, [url](#);

²⁰ Norway, Landinfo, *Etiopia, Politisk utvikling og menneskerettighetssituation i 2019-2020, med fokus på Oromia-regionen*, 6 January 2021, [url](#), p. 4

²¹ AI, *Human Rights in Africa: Review of 2019 – Ethiopia*, 8 April 2020, [url](#)

²² Ethiopia Insight, *Chaos in the Rift – a microcosm of Ethiopia's brutal polarization*, 5 January 2021, [url](#)

²³ Al Jazeera, *Ethiopia's Tigray conflict and the battle to control information*, 16 February 2021, [url](#); Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2021 – Ethiopia*, 3 March 2021, [url](#)

²⁴ Norway, Landinfo, *Etiopia, Politisk utvikling og menneskerettighetssituation i 2019-2020, med fokus på Oromia-regionen*, 6 January 2021, [url](#), p. 20

²⁵ Norway, Landinfo, *Etiopia, Politisk utvikling og menneskerettighetssituation i 2019-2020, med fokus på Oromia-regionen*, 6 January 2021, [url](#), p. 7

accusing them of orchestrating or enacting the violence.²⁶ Terrence Lyons, an American researcher consulted by DIS in February 2021, stated in connection to these arrests that the PP is using the judicial system as a way of weakening its political opponents, just as the EPRDF did in the past.²⁷ The authorities have also arrested and charged non-Oromo politicians after the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa.²⁸ The Ethiopian researcher explained that accusations by political opposition parties against the PP include arrests, legal obstruction, banning of lawful rallies, demonstrations and party meetings, attempts at creating internal party destabilisation, and one case of assassination.²⁹

2. Political opposition parties

2.1 TPLF

Formed in 1975, the TPLF controlled the EPRDF from its inception in 1989 and maintained disproportionate federal influence on Ethiopian politics for more than 25 years.³⁰ It governed Tigray Regional State until the November 2020 federal military intervention in the region,³¹ an intervention described by Prime Minister Abiy as a law enforcement operation to quash a TPLF revolt.³² NEBE has now cancelled the TPLF's license as a political party.³³

The TPLF leadership has fled Mekelle, Tigray's capital.³⁴ On 22 January 2021, the New York Times wrote that there is a most-wanted list of 167 senior leaders of the TPLF, of which the Ethiopian military has killed or captured at least 47.³⁵ Terrence Lyons stated that some TPLF leadership members have fled to Sudan or other countries. In his assessment, mid- or top-level officials within the TPLF would have reason to fear politically motivated prosecution by the Ethiopian government for their political membership. It is also possible that family members to a TPLF leader could be at risk if the government specifically was looking for that particular leader. However, he did not believe that ordinary TPLF party members are in danger of politically motivated prosecution for their political membership.³⁶

2.2 OLF

As described in DIS' March 2020 report on Ethiopia,³⁷ the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is not a homogenous whole, and the organisation has been characterised by factionalism. The most recent split within the OLF came after the peace agreement with the government in 2018. One faction subsequently registered as a

²⁶ Ethiopia Insight, *Chaos in the Rift – a microcosm of Ethiopia's brutal polarization*, 5 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁷ Terrence Lyons: 8

²⁸ Ethiopia Insight, *Chaos in the Rift – a microcosm of Ethiopia's brutal polarization*, 5 January 2021, [url](#)

²⁹ Researcher: 23

³⁰ ICG, *Bridging the Divide in Ethiopia's North*, Africa Briefing No 156, 12 June 2020, [url](#), p. 2, 7; BBC Monitoring, *Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)*, [url](#)

³¹ BBC Monitoring, *the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) – Ethiopia*, [url](#)

³² TNH, *Relief for Tigray stalled as Ethiopian government curbs access*, 11 February 2021, [url](#)

³³ ICG *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021, [url](#), p. 10

³⁴ ICG *Finding a Path to Peace in Ethiopia's Tigray Region*, 11 February 2021, [url](#), p. 2

³⁵ NYT, *On 'Rooftop of Africa,' Ethiopia's Troops Hunt Fugitive Former Rulers*, 22 January 2021 [url](#)

³⁶ Terrence Lyons: 1-2

³⁷ Denmark, DIS, *Ethiopia: Opposition groups – Recent developments*, 13 March 2020, [url](#), p. 11

political party under the name OLF on 15 November 2019. It is based in Addis Ababa and led by Dawud Ibsa.³⁸ The party is dedicated to Oromo self-determination.³⁹ Other OLF factions in Oromia include factions of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), which did not accept the peace agreement. These OLA factions are still engaged in the armed struggle with federal and national security forces in western and southern Oromia,⁴⁰ mentioned in DIS' March 2020 report.⁴¹

One source wrote in February 2021 that the opposition parties in Oromia, including the OLF, are experiencing the most repression from the authorities because these political parties pose the greatest threat to the current government.⁴² The Ethiopian researcher stated that OLF has been among the main targets.⁴³

An OLF official stated in October 2019 that local and regional authorities were not issuing permissions to OLF to organise meetings.⁴⁴ The closure of OLF offices that DIS mentioned in its previous report has also continued: in January 2021, Dawud Ibsa stated that, in addition to the closure of its branch offices, the police had seized the OLF headquarters since August 2020.⁴⁵ Ibsa had previously stated that the government has obstructed OLF's work since its return to Ethiopia, citing the delay of obtaining its party registration as one example.⁴⁶ OLF members also have accused the government security forces of trying to obstruct OLF's registration for the election and of contributing to internal party divisions.⁴⁷ On 8 March 2021, OLF officially announced its withdrawal from the election.⁴⁸

There are several reports of arrests of members of the OLF leadership since DIS' previous report. Five senior OLF members were arrested on 29 February 2020.⁴⁹ One of them remained in detention as of 4 February 2021 without any charges having been brought against him.⁵⁰ At least five key OLF officials were arrested following the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa in June 2020 ([see Section 1.1](#)).⁵¹ Ten OLF officials/senior members were arrested on 20 December 2020.⁵²

Addis Standard reported on 20 March 2020 that state security forces had arrested, beaten and threatened OLF supporters on the campaign trail during the past few months.⁵³ Ordinary OLF members were also among

³⁸ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 28-29; UK Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Ethiopia: Opposition to the government*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 79

³⁹ Australia, *DFAT Country Information Report Ethiopia*, 12 August 2020, [url](#), p. 22

⁴⁰ Netherlands, *Algemeen Ambtsbericht, Etiopie*, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 37; Norway, Landinfo, *Etiopia; Politisk utvikling og menneskerettighetssituasjon i 2019- 2020*, med fokus på Oromia-regionen, 6 January 2021, [url](#), p. 19

⁴¹ Denmark, DIS, *Ethiopia: Opposition groups – Recent developments*, 13 March 2020, [url](#), p. 11

⁴² Netherlands, *Algemeen Ambtsbericht, Etiopie*, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 82

⁴³ Ethiopian researcher: 22

⁴⁴ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 30; Netherlands, *Algemeen Ambtsbericht, Etiopie*, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 30

⁴⁵ Addis Standard: *OLF says electoral board's failure to address its repeated complaints on gov't crackdown restricting its ability to participate in election*, 23 January 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁶ Blankspot Project, *Rebellerna som laddar för val*, 20 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Ethiopian researcher: 23

⁴⁸ Addis Standard, *OLF officially out from upcoming election, continues call for release of its jailed leadership, members*, 10 March 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁹ AI, *Ethiopia: Police must account for missing Oromo opposition leader*, 3 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁰ Netherlands, *Algemeen Ambtsbericht, Etiopie*, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 75

⁵¹ AI, *Ethiopia: Account for all people arrested after Hachalu Hundessa's killing*, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

⁵² Addis Standard: *OLF accuses gov't of fresh crackdown on its members; Oromia region says measures taken on several dozen rebel members, thousands arrested across region*, 21 December 2020, [url](#)

⁵³ Addis Standard: *Failed politics and deception: behind the crisis in Western and Southern Oromia*, 20 March 2021, [url](#)

those arrested following the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa: On 5 August 2020, the OLF knew of 103 arrested officers and members.⁵⁴ According to a statement published by Unrepresented Nationals and Peoples Organization (UNPO), Oromo intellectuals, business owners, and members of the government's police force and the army were being imprisoned for their alleged support to the OLF.⁵⁵

As mentioned above, OLA factions are still engaged in the armed struggle with federal and national security forces in western and southern Oromia, particularly in Guji and Wellega.⁵⁶ The security forces have committed extensive violations of human rights, including arbitrary arrests, against suspected OLA sympathisers.⁵⁷ In an article from 16 January 2021, BBC described the killing of Oromo civilians suspected of being allied with the OLA, suggesting that in one case the victim's OLF membership was what led the authorities to suspect him.⁵⁸

OLF supporters, "with or without weapons", were described in May 2020 as likely to be ill-treated or arrested by Ethiopian authorities. Some OLF members were arrested because of their involvement in the fighting, and not everyone arrested from the OLF could be said to be a political prisoner. Lower-level OLF members felt relatively safe in Addis Ababa.⁵⁹

In February 2021, the situation in Oromia was described as having deteriorated recently, and practices such as arbitrary arrest of (alleged) supporters of the OLF were again the rule rather than the exception. These practices varied geographically, and arrests happened less quickly in Addis Ababa than for example in Guji and Wellega. Several OLF members could carry out political activities undisturbed.⁶⁰

2.3 OFC

The Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) was established in 2009 by Merera Gudina,⁶¹ the party's current leader. It is an ethnically organised party.⁶² One source wrote in February 2021 that the opposition parties in Oromia, including the OFC, are experiencing the most repression from the authorities because these political parties posed the greatest threat to the current government.⁶³ The Ethiopian researcher also stated that OFC has been among the main targets so far.⁶⁴

In October 2019, members of the OFC claimed they had been arrested by the authorities for their suspected affiliation with the warring breakaway groups of the OLF.⁶⁵ Jawar Mohammed and Bekele Gerba of the OFC

⁵⁴ Ethiopia Insight, Aftershocks of an assassination, 5 August 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁵ UNPO, Oromo: Chairman Dawud Ibsa under House Arrest, 30 July 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁶ Netherlands, Algemeen Ambtsbericht, *Etiopie*, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 37; Norway, Landinfo: *Etiopia; Politisk utvikling og menneskerettighetssituasjon i 2019- 2020*, med fokus på Oromia-regionen, 6 January 2021, [url](#), p. 19

⁵⁷ AI, *Beyond Law Enforcement: Human Rights Violations by Ethiopian Security forces in Amhara and Oromia*, 29 May 2020, [url](#), p. 20

⁵⁸ BBC, *Ethiopia's Oromia conflict: Why a teacher was killed 'execution-style'*, 16 January 2021, [url](#)

⁵⁹ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 30

⁶⁰ Netherlands, Algemeen Ambtsbericht, *Etiopie*, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 72-73

⁶¹ International Crisis Group, *Ethiopia: Ethnic federalism and its discontents*, Africa Report No 153, 4 September 2009, [url](#), p. 14

⁶² Yusuf, S., *Constitutional design options for Ethiopia: Managing ethnic divisions*, Institute for Security Studies Monograph Series 204, September 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁶³ Netherlands, Algemeen Ambtsbericht, *Etiopie*, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 82

⁶⁴ Ethiopian researcher: 22

⁶⁵ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 31

leadership were arrested following the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa ([see Section 1.1](#)).⁶⁶ They are currently on trial on terrorism and criminal charges.⁶⁷ Terrence Lyons stated that the OFC leaders are arrested because they are seen as a threat to the PP and the prime minister.⁶⁸

The OFC stated on 9 December 2020 that the majority of the OFC members from federal to district level who were competing, coordinating and observing elections were in prison, and that a majority of its offices were closed.⁶⁹ Terrence Lyons explained that the OFC leadership are experiencing harassment: they could get access to their offices, and they are getting arrested on fabricated charges.⁷⁰ The OFC has reported that government officials on several occasions have instructed venue managers not to give permission to the OFC to run their meetings.⁷¹ In March 2021, OFC pulled out of the election.⁷²

Terrence Lyons stated that while some members of OFC risk arrest, there are plenty who can move freely without any problems. He doubted that many ordinary OFC members are imprisoned, or that an ordinary OFC member experience politically motivated prosecution. A high-level OFC member (e.g. a head of a party in a region) might have experienced visits by security forces at his home. Politically motivated prosecution is also probably mainly targeting active political leaders rather than extended family.⁷³

Terrence Lyons stated that the OFC might be seen as queerroo⁷⁴ and vice versa. For this reason, an OFC member could be prosecuted, but because of his queerroo activities. Reversely, someone could be perceived as OFC because of his queerroo activities.⁷⁵

2.4 ONLF

The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) was formerly a separatist ethnic Somali rebel group fighting the government.⁷⁶ It signed a peace agreement with the Ethiopian government in December 2019 and subsequently began the process of transforming itself into a political party.⁷⁷ NEBE registered the ONLF as a political party in November 2019.⁷⁸ The chairman of ONLF is Abdirhman Mahdi.⁷⁹ By September 2020, ONLF had established party offices in Addis Ababa, Dire Dawa and 11 locations across Somali Regional State.⁸⁰ ONLF

⁶⁶ HRW, Ethiopia: Opposition Figures Held Without Charge, 15 August 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁷ Addis Standard, *Jawar, Bekele et. Al protests with hunger after police detain dozens of supporters from court premises*, 29 January 2021, [url](#)

⁶⁸ Terrence Lyons: 8

⁶⁹ Addis Standard, *Opposition party Oromo Federalist Congress says it will find it "extremely hard" to take part in coming elections under existing conditions*, 9 December 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁰ Terrence Lyons: 8

⁷¹ Ethiopian researcher: 23

⁷² Addis Standard [Facebook], posted on 3 March 2021, [url](#)

⁷³ Terrence Lyons: 9

⁷⁴ The queerroo are an ethnonationalist youth movement. See e.g. Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 38-39

⁷⁵ Terrence Lyons: 10

⁷⁶ ICG, *Managing Ethiopia's Unsettled Transition*, [url](#), p. 22

⁷⁷ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 26

⁷⁸ Netherlands, *Algemeen Ambtsbericht, Etiopie*, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 18

⁷⁹ Addis Standard, *Electoral board invalidates ONLF's emergency meeting that suspends chairman Abdirahman Mahdi, party members*, 17 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸⁰ Hagmann, T., *Fast politics, slow justice: Ethiopia's Somali region two years after Abdi Iley*, 11 September 2020, [url](#), p. 6

has previously expressed its intentions to register and operate as a national party.⁸¹ However, a recent overview lists the party as a regional party.⁸² An ONLF representative stated in October 2019 that its number of members was unclear.⁸³

In September 2019, an ONLF official stated that the ONLF was able to operate with few difficulties, although a few people had been arrested for carrying an ONLF flag and trying to open an office.⁸⁴

In May 2020, ONLF members were generally not harassed, arrested or threatened, neither at the federal nor at the regional level. Members and supporters may be at risk of ill-treatment from local militias and the Liyu police, and at the local level ONLF sympathisers were still exposed to violence and harassment.⁸⁵ According to Ethiopia Insight, “with direction from Jigjiga” (i.e. the regional state capital), “zonal and district administrations and local militias conduct low level but persistent activities against ONLF”.⁸⁶

In September 2020, ONLF members or people associated with ONLF were assessed as not at risk of being persecuted by the authorities.⁸⁷

On 21 October 2020, Addis Standard reported that three ONLF officials had been arrested in Somali Regional State for vandalism and assault.⁸⁸ In January 2021, ONLF offices had been closed in more than ten villages in Somali.⁸⁹ From 6-14 February 2021, the ONLF published at least four statements on its Twitter account accusing the Somali authorities of preventing ONLF election teams from travelling, of detaining ONLF election committee members for political reasons, and of police and armed district militia attacking an ONLF election team.⁹⁰

Terrence Lyons explained that until mid-January 2021, there seemed to be political space for ONLF’s participation in politics. Since then, he had seen information – mainly from social media – that ONLF members were now getting arrested and their offices are being closed. He assessed that it is the ruling PP in the Somali region that is limiting the political space. He also noted that he had not seen information that anyone was getting shot, or that there were large-scale arrests or violence.⁹¹

⁸¹ Addis Standard, *ONLF wants election 2020 on time, says if postponed there should be a “mechanism to integration opposition, liberation forces into the federal structure”*, 21 August 2020, [url](#)

⁸² Ethiopia Insight, *Ethiopia’s 2021 elections: rules, actors and mechanisms*, 26 February 2021, [url](#)

⁸³ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 27

⁸⁴ UK Home Office, *Report of a Home Office Fact-Finding Mission Ethiopia: The political situation*, 10 February 2020, [url](#), p. 17, 18

⁸⁵ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 27

⁸⁶ Ethiopia Insight, *An Ogadeni feud and Somali folktale*, 10 May 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁷ Netherlands, Algemeen Ambtsbericht, *Etiopie*, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 77

⁸⁸ Addis Standard, *Police in Somali region arrest three senior ONLF regional officials, one official served with warrant*, 21 October 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopia’s Somali region closes former rebel group offices*, 27 January 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁰ ONLF, [Twitter], posted on: 6 February 2021, [url](#); ONLF, [Twitter], posted on: 7 February 2021, [url](#); ONLF, [Twitter], posted on: 13 February 2021, [url](#); ONLF, [Twitter], posted on: 14 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹¹ Terrence Lyons: 11

2.5. EZEMA

As described in DIS' March 2020 report, Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA) was founded in May 2019 through the merger of seven opposition parties, including Ginbot 7.⁹² It is a pan-Ethiopian party.⁹³ EZEMA is close to the PP.⁹⁴ Berhanu Nega, the formerly exiled founding leader of Patriotic Ginbot 7, leads the party. EZEMA is the only opposition party that will field candidates in most of the electoral districts.⁹⁵ The party was active in 400 electoral districts across all regional states in October 2019 and had an estimated 6,000 -7,000 members.⁹⁶ Its main support may be in urban areas.⁹⁷

EZEMA was conducting its party activities in Addis Ababa, the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), and Tigray without significant challenges in October 2019. In Amhara, members had been arrested in connection with the assassinations in June 2019 ([see Section 1.1](#)). Support for EZEMA in Amhara could lead to the supporter being driven away by NaMA.⁹⁸ The Ethiopian researcher stated that EZEMA had experienced difficulties operating in Amhara in 2020 as NaMA supporters had overrun their rallies.⁹⁹

The Swedish Migration Agency described the situation for EZEMA in Oromia in October 2019 as challenging, with party members' lives "being at risk" in the Wellega zones and members in Arsi zone "in principle" being unable to leave their homes. The threat came from informal groups, armed OLF members and lower-level government representatives.¹⁰⁰ Terrence Lyons also mentioned massive demonstrations when EZEMA tried to rally in the region in 2020. He described EZEMA as a "lightning rod" for Oromo nationalist attention because of its pan-Ethiopian platform.¹⁰¹ The Ethiopian researcher stated that EZEMA had been prevented from opening offices in Oromia by queerroo members.¹⁰²

In May 2020, EZEMA was assessed as less vulnerable than other opposition groups because of its shared political ideology with the ruling party. Government authorities at the federal level, and sometimes also at the regional level, had been helpful on several occasions when EZEMA members had been arrested. Those arrested had been released relatively quickly.¹⁰³

Two EZEMA press briefings were halted in August 2020.¹⁰⁴

⁹² Denmark, DIS, *Ethiopia: Opposition groups – Recent developments*, 13 March 2020, [url](#), p. 15

⁹³ Borkena, *Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party accuses ruling party of election activity irregularities*, 9 March 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Terrence Lyons: 14

⁹⁵ Ethiopia Insight, *Election 2021: Ethiopia's transition from a dominant coalition to a dominant party*, 5 February, 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁶ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 33-34

⁹⁷ African Business, *Analysis: Abiy's crown cracks ahead of Ethiopia election*, 1 February 2021, [url](#)

⁹⁸ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 33-34

⁹⁹ Ethiopian researcher: 24

¹⁰⁰ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 34

¹⁰¹ Terrence Lyons: 15

¹⁰² Ethiopian researcher: 24

¹⁰³ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 34

¹⁰⁴ Norway, Landinfo, *Etiopia; Politisk utvikling og menneskerettighetssituasjon i 2019-2020, med fokus på Oromia-regionen*, [url](#), p. 26

An EZEMA executive committee member was arrested following the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa ([see Section 1.1](#)) and charged with coordinating violence in Addis Ababa. She was released on bail in August 2020.¹⁰⁵

On 14 February 2021, the chairman of one of EZEMA's constituency offices in Oromia was shot dead. EZEMA published a statement saying it believes the assassination was politically motivated.¹⁰⁶ The Ethiopian researcher stated that EZEMA has accused government officials or security agents of being behind the assassination or at least having a role in it.¹⁰⁷ It is possible that the queerroo are behind the assassination, and that political violence against EZEMA might be by local militants and not the state.¹⁰⁸

2.6. NaMA

NaMA is an ethno-nationalist party that was founded in June 2018.¹⁰⁹ It elected Beleta Molla as its chairperson in February 2020.¹¹⁰ According to a NaMA source, the party has hundreds of thousands of members. There is limited information about where NaMA will field candidates, but it seems to be operating in Amhara, Addis Ababa, Benishangul-Gumuz, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), and Oromia.¹¹¹

NaMA members were arrested following the assassinations in Amhara in June 2019. Sources consulted by the Swedish Migration Agency put the number at 200 and 500, respectively.¹¹² Terrence Lyons stated that some NaMA members were close to radical Amhara nationalist armed groups that were implicated in the assassination.¹¹³

NaMA members made accusations in October 2019 of their meetings being banned and members being arrested and beaten in Amhara, Addis Ababa, Benishangul-Gumuz and SNNPR. These episodes seem to have happened primarily in connection with the assassinations in Amhara in June 2019 ([see Section 1.1](#)). The perpetrators were the authorities as well as the queerroo.¹¹⁴ The Ethiopian researcher also knew of two instances where NaMA had called for demonstrations but the federal police did not allow them to be held.¹¹⁵

Terrence Lyons stated that since the assassinations in Amhara in June 2019, the PP in Amhara Regional State has adopted political views that were very similar to – and possibly even more militant and Amhara nationalist than – those of NaMA and other Amhara nationalists. He did therefore not assess NaMA members – neither party leadership nor ordinary members – as having been at risk since June 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Civicus, *Hundreds dead after protests, fears over Covid-19 restrictions' impact on free speech*, 20 August 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ EZEMA [Facebook], posted on 17 February 2021, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ Ethiopian researcher: 23

¹⁰⁸ Terrence Lyons: 15

¹⁰⁹ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 34

¹¹⁰ Borkena, *National Movement of Amhara elects new chairperson*, 24 February 2020, [url](#)

¹¹¹ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 35; UK Home Office, *Report of a Home Office Fact-Finding Mission Ethiopia: The political situation*, 10 February 2020, [url](#), p. 107

¹¹² Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 35

¹¹³ Terrence Lyons: 12; Netherlands, *Algemeen Ambtsbericht, Ethiopie*, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 18

¹¹⁴ Sweden, Lifos, *Etiopien – Säkerhetsläget, politisk utveckling och utsatta grupper*, 14 May 2020, [url](#), p. 35

¹¹⁵ Ethiopian researcher: 23

2.7. Balderas

Balderas for True Democracy registered as a political party in early 2020. Its leader is Eskinder Nega. It is not clear if Balderas has a proper party machinery.¹¹⁶ The party believes that the PP does not protect the interests of non-Oromo residents in Addis Ababa.¹¹⁷ Terrence Lyons stated that people have said that Nega engages in hate speech against the Oromo.¹¹⁸

Between March and June 2019, Balderas cancelled four meetings after intervention from the police. A protest schedule for October 2019 was cancelled and the police temporarily detained the protest's coordinators.¹¹⁹ Police banned another Balderas rally scheduled for 31 January 2021.¹²⁰

Eskinder Nega was arrested following the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa ([see Section 1.1](#)). The authorities charged Nega and four Balderas officials for involvement in the unrest following the assassination.¹²¹ It is possible that Eskinder Nega violated laws and that this is the reason for his current prosecution, but it is difficult to determine since the trial has not been transparent.¹²² Eskinder Nega claims that he has beaten during arrest and detention.¹²³

2.8. EDP

The Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) was founded by Lidetu Ayalew in 2000.¹²⁴ Its current leader is Adane Tadesse.¹²⁵ It is an “Ethiopianist-leaning” party.¹²⁶ It has previously been reported that EDP was one of the political parties that merged into EZEMA in 2019.¹²⁷ However, the Ethiopian researcher stated that EDP was not part of the EZEMA merger.¹²⁸

Lidetu Ayalew was arrested in July 2020 following the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa¹²⁹ and charged with preparing regime change, and possession of an illegal firearm. He was released on bail in December 2020.¹³⁰

NEBE cancelled EDP's registration as a political party in December 2020.¹³¹ This was one of the examples provided by the Ethiopian researcher of persecution in the form of disqualifying parties from running for elections.¹³²

¹¹⁶ Terrence Lyons: 16

¹¹⁷ Netherlands, Algemeen Ambtsbericht, *Etiopie*, 4 February 2021, [url](#), p. 19, 41

¹¹⁸ Terrence Lyons: 16

¹¹⁹ USDOS, *Country Report on Human Rights Practice 2019 – Ethiopia*, 11 March 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Ethiopian police ban opposition rally in Addis Ababa*, 29 January 2021, [url](#)

¹²¹ Ethiopia Insight, *Prosecution appeal delays witness hearings in Eskinder's trial*, 9 February, 2021, [url](#), HRW, *World Report 2021 – Ethiopia*, 13 January 2021, [url](#)

¹²² Terrence Lyons: 16

¹²³ AI, *Ethiopia: Account for all people arrested after Hachalu Hundesa's killing*, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴ UK Home Office, *Country Assessment – October 2001*, October 2001, [url](#), p. 12

¹²⁵ The Reporter, *Oromia police arrest Lidetu Ayalew*, 25 July 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁶ Yusuf, Semir, *Constitutional design options for Ethiopia: Managing ethnic divisions*, Institute for Security Studies, Monograph 204, September 2020, [url](#), p. 26, 30

¹²⁷ E.g. Austria, ACCORD, *Ethiopia: COI compilation*, November 2019, [url](#), p. 41

¹²⁸ Ethiopian researcher, e-mail 9 March 2021

¹²⁹ BBC, *Tigray crisis viewpoint: Why Ethiopia is spiralling out of control*, 15 November 2020, [url](#)

¹³⁰ Ethiopia Insight, *Lidetu bailed after charges of trying to topple state by penning transition plan*, 14 December 2020, [url](#)

¹³¹ Addis Standard, *Following purge of political parties for “failing to meet requirements” and amid complaints of opposition crackdown electoral board to unveil election draft timetable*, 25 December 2020, [url](#)

¹³² Ethiopian researcher: 23

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- Addis Standard, *Failed politics and deception: behind the crisis in Western and Southern Oromia*, 20 March 2021, <https://addisstandard.com/special-edition-failed-politics-and-deception-behind-the-crisis-in-western-and-southern-oromia/>, accessed 12 March 2021
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Annex 1: Meeting minutes

Terrence Lyons

Skype interview February 17, 2021

Terrence Lyons is Associate Professor at The Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School of Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. He has carried out research in Ethiopia for more than 35 years. His latest book is The Puzzle of Ethiopian Politics (2019). His latest visit to Ethiopia was in January 2020, but he follows the political situation in Ethiopia via online newspapers and through his professional network of scholars and policy-makers both in and outside Ethiopia.

TPLF

1. The source explained that since the onset of the armed conflict in Tigray in November 2020 TPLF, the founding member of EPRDF, have been declared illegal for being engaged in insurrection. The top TPLF leadership has withdrawn to the mountains in Tigray, some have tried to get to Sudan or elsewhere, and some have been killed.
2. The source stated that mid- or top-level officials within the TPLF would have reason to fear politically motivated prosecution by the Ethiopian government for their political membership. It is possible that family members to a TPLF leader could also be at risk if the government specifically was looking for that particular leader. The source does not believe that ordinary TPLF party members are in danger of politically motivated prosecution: as part of the TPLF's tight control of the Tigray, anyone working for the government would have been a party member. The new, interim administration in Tigray would very likely be happy to see technocrats and public servants back in their government positions because it needs to run a state.

OLF/OLA/OLA-Shene

3. The OLF returned to Ethiopia from Asmara in Eritrea in 2018 and set up a political party.
4. The OLA - also known as OLF-Shane – never went to Asmara, it stayed in the Wellega region. The source explained that he is not sure whether the OLA/OLF-Shane should be characterised as a political movement or as an organisation involved in predatory asset seizing. The government tolerated OLA/OLF-Shane for a while but in 2019 engaged in a high-level counter-insurgency campaign in which OLA/OLF-Shane fought back. The source stated that if this armed conflict is not a civil war, it is something very closely resembling it. The source also stated that it is difficult to say whether the government's involvement in armed conflict in West Wellega Zone should be described as political persecution or as a legitimate security measure.
5. There is another OLF, which is led by Dawud Ibsa. This is a registered political party in Addis Ababa. OLF supporters say that they are getting harassed, that they can't even get access to their own headquarters any more, that their offices in the countryside are being closed down, and that they are not able to operate as the registered political party that they are.

6. The source explained that there are allegations that the registered OLF political party maintains link to the OLA, but he does not know whether this is actually the case.

OFC

7. OFC is a registered, political party. It is led by Merera Gudina who is a professor at Addis Ababa University. The party's more famous leaders are Jawar Mohammed and Bekele Gerba who are currently in the third week of a hunger strike. The source stated that the hunger strike is cause for serious concern. If the outcome of the hunger strike is bad, the levels of violence in the Oromo Region could be extremely high. The Ethiopian government really needs to field negotiation with the OFC rather than continue through arrest, trials and hunger strikes.
8. There are others than Gudina, Mohamed and Berka in the top OFC leadership who claim they are experiencing harassment: they cannot get access to their offices; they are getting arrested on what they claim are fabricated charges. The source explained he has no reason to doubt to these claims. He also explained that it is possible that the OFC is engaged in criminal activities, but that that is not why its leaders are currently being arrested. The reason the OFC members are being harassed and arrested is because they are seen as a threat to the ruling party and the prime minister. The source believed that the Prosperity Party (PP), the ruling party, is using the judicial system as a way of weakening its political opponents, just as the EPRDF did in the past. He did not believe that the ruling party's assurances that there was solid evidence against those prosecuted and that the judicial system is working independently of political pressure are any more credible today than they were in the past.
9. The source explained that, while there are members of OFC that risk arrest and politically motivated prosecution, there are also plenty of members of the OFC who can move around Ethiopia without any problems. Merera Gudina still teaches his classes at the university and attends embassy receptions. The source explained that many OFC people undoubtedly fear politically motivated prosecution, but that while the feelings were real he doubted that there are many ordinary OFC members who are imprisoned. A high-level OFC member such as a head of a party in a region might have experienced visits by security forces at his home. The source doubted that an ordinary OFC member would experience politically motivated prosecution. Politically motivated prosecution is probably also mainly targeting active political leaders rather than his or hers extended family members.
10. The queerro is still around, and they might be seen as OFC people. It is easy to conflate the two. OFC leader Jawar Mohammed is very popular with the queerro. Even if the queerro are not armed, they are still able to mobilise crowds in the streets, block traffic, chase people out of their offices and seize assets. Especially in Amhara people fear the queerro. So the queerro are involved in activities targeting the state. The state sees them as a threat because of these activities. Someone could be an OCF member but be prosecuted because of his queerro activities. Or someone could be perceived as OFC because of his queerro activities.

ONLF

11. The source stated that until about a month ago the ONLF seemed to be making the transition from insurgent movement to political party without any problems, and there seemed to be political space for the transition and its participation in politics. However, he had seen information – mainly from social media – that ONLF members are now getting arrested and that their offices are getting closed. He believed that it is the incumbent PP in the Somali Region that is limiting the political space. He also noted that he had not seen information that anyone was getting shot, or that there were large-scale arrests or violence. Any arrests taking place would be by the police.

NaMA

12. A lot of NaMA members were arrested following the assassination of the president of the Amhara Region in June 2019. They were close to radical Amhara nationalist armed groups that were implicated in the assassination. While they were not necessarily members of these armed groups, they shared the same militant ideology.
13. Since June 2019, the incumbent PP in Amhara Regional State has become more militant and more Amhara nationalist than NaMA in many ways, and the political views of the hardline Amhara nationalists outside of the ruling party – including NaMA – and the ruling party itself are now very similar. For example, the Amharan Fano militia is actively involved in the Tigray conflict. The source therefore did not believe that members of NaMA have been at particular risk since June 2019 when top-level members were at risk of being arrested by the police – arrests that could be argued to be for legitimate reasons considering the security situation at the time. He believed that neither top members nor ordinary members were at risk today.

EZEMA

14. The source described EZEMA as being close to PP and to Prime Minister Abiy. Their political position is anti-ethnic and pro-unity, and it is a political position that supports Abiy in many ways. Last year EZEMA's leader, Berhanu Nega, publicly stated that Abiy is Ethiopia's last best chance for a peaceful transition. Jawar Mohammed would characterize Berhanu Nega as having been completely coopted by PP.
15. The source stated that he had believed that EZEMA would be fine, but he has just seen on social media that one of its leaders in Bishoftu in the Oromo region has been assassinated a few days ago. Given the assassination, the source stated, the question of whether EZEMA is subject to political violence had become much more relevant. The source explained that it is possible that the queerro could be behind the assassination, as they are fiercely Oromo nationalists and would be unhappy with someone advocating for Ethiopian unity, which they would perceive as anti-Oromo, within their region. He also explained that political violence against EZEMA might not be from the state but from local militants. He noted that even a year ago when EZEMA would try to rally in the region, there were massive demonstrations trying to prevent speakers from speaking or even from

getting to the venue that had been rented. He described EZEMA as “a lightning rod” for Oromo nationalist attention.

Balderas

16. Balderas is associated with a former journalist, Eskinder Nega, who has been arrested. He was arrested by the EPRDF and has been arrested many times in the past. His commitment to multi-party democracy could be questioned. Many people have said that Eskinder Nega engages in hate speech, especially against the Oromo, and he is very controversial. The source explained that it is possible that Eskinder Nega has violated laws and that this is the reason for his current prosecution, but it is difficult to determine since the trial has not been transparent. The source was not sure if the Balderas has a proper party machinery, and Eskinder Nega to him seemed like a “one-person party”. But he can mobilise a significant number of people in Addis Ababa.

On reports that leaders of Boro-Democratic Party, Gumuz People Democratic Movement and the Berta People’s Liberation Movement for Peace and Democracy (all from Benishangul-Gumuz Region) have been detained since the assassination of Hachalu Hundessa

17. The source explained that this is probably the local regional government officials who are taking opportunities to arrest their rivals. The government in Addis Ababa is not particularly interested in the parliamentary seats in the Gambella, Afar and Benishangul-Gumuz Regions since the number of seats are very limited and therefore unlikely to determine who gets a parliamentary majority and becomes prime minister after the election. The number of seats in Somali and Tigray Regions may be more important in this regard.
18. The Benishangul-Gumuz Region is complicated, partly because of the many non-Gumuz people living there. Amhara nationalist movements are also active there. The politics there are very difficult. There has been an upsurge of ethnic violence there recently, especially in Metekel where the ENDF has set up a command post. So the ENDF is there, the Ethiopian national federal police force is there, and they are arresting people. The source questioned whether these arrests are politically motivated.
19. The source explained that when there are upsurges of violence in Benishangul-Gumuz, for example demonstrations that turn violent, there is often thousands that get arrested very quickly. Many young people in the streets will be arbitrarily arrested. The police typically let them go within a couple of weeks, so they are not being held long-term. The source also believed that although conditions in prison were not pleasant, and that some detainees suffered physical abuse, he did not believe that systematic torture was being used.

Southern Ethiopia

20. In southern Ethiopia, SNNPR, there are dozens of smaller ethnic groups, each with its own ethnic party. Conflicts are common but are usually over very local issues of control and resources. The Federal Government typically keeps its distance from these complicated political conflicts. Southerners who are perhaps more at risk are those who object to development projects such as

the massive sugar plantations along the Omo River that have displaced groups that historically used the river for their cattle and for flood plain agriculture.

Ethiopian researcher

18 February 2021, Skype interview

This Ethiopian researcher is specialised in Ethiopian politics and security matters.

Current political situation

21. The interview began by some general remarks by the source stating that in 2018 the population was quite hopeful about the trajectory that the country was following, including the breathtaking political, for example with the release of political prisoners. The political climate has changed substantially since 2018.

Political opposition parties reporting persecution

22. The source stated that a number of accusations have been forwarded by political parties. The main targets of persecutions so far have been the Oromo political parties, those parties operation in the capital city Addis Abeba at a second level; and at a third level some other pan-Ethiopian parties that operate nationwide. The parties that have reported most cases of persecutions are those parties that come from the Oromia Region, including Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Especially OFC and OLF have reported many examples of the government interfering in their activities. Those which are based in Addis, mainly Balderas for Genuine Democracy party, led by Eskinder Nega, have reported violations of their organisational rights. A few pan-Ethiopian parties like the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) led by Lidetu Ayalew and also to a slight extent Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA), led by Berhanu Nega, have also reported episodes of persecution. The National Movement of Amhara (NaMa) has also reported violations of their rights.

Types of persecution reported by political parties

23. The source identified seven types of persecution which have been reported by Ethiopian political parties.
 - a. Arrest: One of the major forms of persecutions is arrest of political leaders and also of members and supporters of parties. It is mostly high profiled persons and people at the leadership level who have been arrested. One example is senior leaders of OLF who have been arrested. The leader of Balderas, Eskinder Nega, has been arrested, the EPD leader has been arrested and so has Jawar Mohammed of the OFC.
 - b. Attempts to disqualify parties from running for elections: Several parties have experienced attempts of hindering them to run for election. The source mentioned one example from before the outbreak of Covid-19 where national elections were scheduled to be held in August 2020. According to the rulings of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), parties running at the national level would have to bring about 10.000 signatures from across the country to meet the registration requirements. According to some members of the OLF, they experienced some of the signatures they had collected were being snatched

away by government security forces. The intention was to make it difficult for the OLF to collect as many signatures as required to run for election.

- c. Banning rallies and demonstrations called by opposition parties: Several opposition parties have reported this type of problem. One example is the NaMa, based in the Amhara regional state, called for a national rally (in November 2020) because of massive persecution that the Amharas were suffering in different regions of Ethiopia, thus the party called for a demonstration. The federal police immediately released a statement saying that these rallies are not acceptable, that given the precarious situation that the country was going through no rally was allowed to be carried out in the Amhara regional state. The same party also called for a rally in Addis Ababa. Again the federal police again made another announcement outlawing any kind of rally called by any party at the time.
- d. Banning meetings: Government official sometimes ban political parties from holding meetings in meeting halls. This has been reported by several political parties. For example, some members of the Freedom and Equality Party (FEP), a pan-Ethiopian party operation in different regions of the country, told the source in March (2020) that they were planning to hold meetings with their members and supporters in different parts of Ethiopia in places controlled by private individuals. They got permission by those individuals to hold the meetings in these places, but after a while when the preparations were on-going, the party officials were being called by the places managers and informed that they were no longer allowed to gather in those meeting places. The same party officials told the source that government officials, instructed these place managers not to give permission to opposition parties to run their meetings in these places. This has been the case for several Oromo parties, including the OFC.
- e. Deregistration of parties: The National Electoral Board of Ethiopia has deregistered several parties, including the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) led by Lidetu Ayalew and Ethiopian National Movement led by Yilikal Getnet. When asked why they have been deregistered the National Election Board of Ethiopia said it had legitimate reasons for doing so, stating that the parties did not fulfill all the conditions to be registered as a legitimate party. The major reason that was cited was that these parties did not collect 10,000 signatures from across the country which have to be submitted to the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. Both of these parties said that the accusations coming from NEBE are false. Lidetu said that the EDP actually collected and submitted 13,000 signatures to the board. However, they received a letter saying that their party had been deregistered from the list and therefore was no more a legitimate party.
- f. Government contribution to internal party divisions: One example of how the Ethiopian government has contributed to internal division in an opposition party was the case of the OLF. According to the source, this party already had its own internal problems since the time when it was operating from Eritrea but when it joined the Oromo political spectrum and started to operate as a legitimate political party in Ethiopia it was moving on in spite of some internal frictions. However, after the killing of the famous Oromo singer, Hachalu Hundessa, the OLF leader was put under house arrest by government officials without being given any specific reasons other than concerns for his security. This led to a situation

where the party was going through severe internal crises and factions within the party were being created which resulted in the leader being side-lined. As of now, the OLF is in disarray. According to some informants, the government has some role in creating this situation of internal division.

- g. Assassinations: The most serious accusations raised by the political opposition parties are assassinations. This is specifically coming from the Ethiopian Citizens' Party for Social Justice (EZEMA), led by Berhanu Nega, who in February 2021 claimed that one of their senior members, based in the Oromia region and who was supposed to be a candidate at the national elections representing EZEMA in a district in the region (Oromia), was killed. EZEMA has accused government officials or security agents of being behind this killing or at least of having a role in it. According to this source it is beyond doubt that this person was killed as it has been confirmed by different sources including lower level state officials. The question of who did it is not clear. The source was asked whether he knew of other cases of assassination of political party members. He said that he did not.
24. Some opposition parties have reported that persecutions are not only committed by government officials but also by other opposition parties. One particular example is the EZEMA party: their members have been persecuted in the Amhara region by supporters of the NaMA party. According to the source EZEMA was trying to rally people in order to mobilise supporters in the Amhara region and immediately before they were about to begin the rally some people surrounded the meeting hall and forced the EZEMA supporters to be dispersed. There was also fighting taking place. This has been confirmed by several informants to the source. This incidence took place in 2020. EZEMA has also reported persecutions in Oromo areas: here EZEMA has been unable to open offices and recruit supporters. They stated that this was not only due to government officials; they accused queero members of being behind this.
 25. This kind of harassment has also been reported by the Prosperity Party (PP) itself, but in 'pre-war Tigray' before the start of the war in Tigray in November 2020. PP reported that their members were not quite safe in the Tigray region. Now that the federal government has apparently defeated the TPLF, the PP has opened freely its office in Mekelle, the capital town of Tigray region.
 26. Finally, the source emphasised that these types of government persecution of parties unfold at different levels of governance, it ranges from the top level, the level of the federal security level or at the support level. There are conflicting reports about this. The prime minister would comment on these reports of accusations by acknowledging some of them but saying that he is not responsible for them and thereby accusing the lower levels of being responsible for them. The prime minister claims that the lower levels have not yet overcome the authoritarian tendencies. One example: The EDP leader was arrested and the court decided to release him; then he was taken back to prison, the prime minister acknowledged this problem and replied that any kind of order coming from the judiciary has to respect by the executive branch of the government as well. So the prime minister admitted the problem but at the same time appears to have deflected any responsibility away from him and directed it to lower level officials/police.