



February 15th - March 15th, 2021

SOCIAL MEDIA HEALTH REPORT IN ETHIOPIA

*A report compiled by the Center for
Advancement of Rights and Democracy
(CARD)*

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INTRODUCTION

This social media health report construes the monitoring conducted in the days between the 15th of February 2021 through the 15th of March 2021. The *Health Report* is aimed at assessing the *key* issues on social media, the overall dynamics of hate speech in the country, and what they mean to the socio-political development of Ethiopia.

The monitoring of this month includes the overall assessment of social media activities through the platform of Crowd Tangle and Brandwatch. Key issues are determined based on the degree of interaction and the attention it received on social media.

FINDINGS

KEY ISSUES OF THE MONTH

During this period, the following issues have been widely discussed:

- ***EZEMA's election-related concerns (February 15th)***

The Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (EZEMA) party began its election campaign in Addis Ababa on the 15th of February. The party complained that their initial campaign activities in Addis Ababa, in a place called Shiromeda had been interrupted by members of the Federal police and Addis Ababa police commission who said, “we don't know if the election campaign has started.”

On the other hand, on February 15th, Girma Moges, a member of the party and the elected representative of Bishoftu town in Oromia State, was shot dead, according to the party's Facebook page. The party added that it would gather more information on the killing. It said in a statement posted on its Facebook page that Girma Moges, was assassinated in an organized manner. The party called for the government to look for the killers and bring them to justice. The party also called for an investigation into party and government officials who had been harassing and intimidating Girma. The party also condemned the attempt by the city police chief to try and divert the matter, knowing full well that the deceased was a member of their party.

On the 24th of February, EZEMA announced that 11 members of its campaign team were arrested on the 22nd of February by the government security forces in Konso Zone of the Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) while conducting an election campaign. According to Deutsche Welle (DW), Hassan Walolo, head of the Konso Zone Peace and Security office, said the arrests were not related to the election campaign but to the unconstitutional flag and attempt to provoke unrest by claiming 'there is no government.'

EZEMA stated that the current atmosphere in the Oromia region will not make the upcoming election a fair one. In the interview, EZEMA has claimed that it is being pressured by Oromia to withdraw from the election. It went on to say that it will withstand these pressures even though the Prosperity party has shown its determination through actions about its plan to be the only party competing in Oromia. It stated that it was unable to register its candidates in 52 Oromia election constituencies because of the difficulties it has been coming across; it asked the board to provide it with a special condition and register the candidates. The party further explained the threats and intimidation it had encountered in the region including the threats that some registered candidates had faced, some were also told to remove their names and resign from the election, while some were beaten and arrested.

- ***OLF's statement regarding the upcoming election (February 19th)***

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) stated that it will not be able to take part in the upcoming 6th national election. Daud Ibsa, the chairperson of the OLF, said *“OLF has been preparing for the election since last year, but now the party has been pushed out not to take part in the election.”* Nevertheless, on the 20th of February, Daud said that the rumours about OLF's withdrawal from the election were false and that although the party had been facing various challenges, it had not yet decided not to take part in the coming election. Daud elaborated that even though the candidates' registration deadline was coming to an end and the government was putting pressure on the party, OLF had not yet decided whether to take part in the election or not.

A few days after the chairperson, Daud Ibsa addressed rumours about the party's withdrawal as false; OLF posted a press release in Afaan Oromo on its Facebook page on March 8, while the English version had been posted on March 9, it listed out major socio-political issues that need to be addressed by the Ethiopian government prior to proceeding with the election. It also stated that the results of the upcoming election were “predetermined” alleging that the ruling party, Prosperity Party (PP), has prevented it from participating in the 6th general election. It further made some demands that were to be fulfilled for the party to participate in the upcoming election.

kedir bedasso @bedasso_kedir · Mar 11


...

[#FreeJawarMohammed](#)

[#FreeBekeleGerba](#)

[#AllOromoPoliticalPrisoners](#)

Supporting prosperity party of Nefteгна to jail leaders of OFC&OLF will not clear the way to be elected in Oromia It will close all your road to power Slaves of Nefteгна will be buried with the system. [#AbiyMustGo](#)

 **Haqa qabna ni moona oromoo tiyaa hin shakkina** @Fat... · Mar 11

Halkan tokko motummaa baleesu mitii sa'atii tokkoo dubadhuu mee Qalma na qopheessa jechuu hedaa dhisii biddeenaa nyaadhu garaa siifan haa gabaatu



Image 1: A [Post](#) associating prosperity party with Amhara [referred to as nefteгна in the post] and threat ahead of the coming election: following contents circulating about OFC and OLF.

- **The killing of Yemane Nigusse, leader of the fenqil movement (February 20th)**

Yemane Nigusse, a leader of the *Fenqil movement* against the TPLF¹, was reported to be killed at a place called Hiwan near the city of Mekelle.

¹ Tigray people's liberation front (TPLF), popularly known as Wayane, is a political party in Ethiopia which made it through 17 years of guerilla fighting to rule Ethiopia as a member of a Coalition it formed with other regional parties. It was the dominant group of a coalition of regional political parties named the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) from 1989 to 2018. TPLF after leaving EPRDF when the latter dissolved to form the unified Prosperity Party and continued to lead Tigray region until November when it went to armed conflict with the federal government and left in defeat.

There were various predictions regarding who the killer was and the blame was passed around. There was also various unconfirmed information coming out about the incident. According to the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, Yemane was shot-dead by the TPLF supporters. Whereas, Amhara and People of Addis Ababa were being blamed for it.



Image 2: Blaming the Amhara [referred as nefteгна in this post] for the killing of Yemane

Post translation: “Who killed Yemane? Why? We Tigrayans knew how they killed him. This is the truth. Only the Ethiopians who do not wake up will just open their mouths and ears and accept what is given to them. It would have been easy if Weyane wanted to kill him, but it did not. When he opened his usual mouth, the neftegnas tore him apart. The answer to the claim why Neftegnas killed him is in the photo below.”

The posts shared by this person show a screenshot of a post in Yemane’s name; the post reads that he is ready to join an armed struggle to return Wolkait and Raya to Tigray. The other screenshot shared is a claim of another person saying that Yemane was targeted because of that message.

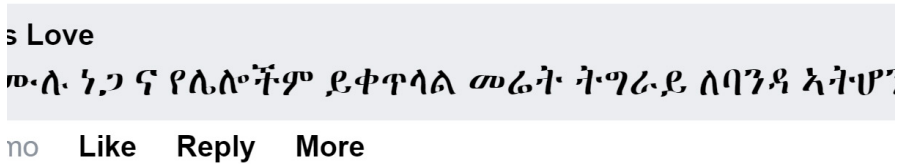


Image 3: A comment threat to kill Mulu Nega [the Chief executive of Tigray Interim administration and others]

Comment translation: ‘The death of Mulu Nega and others will also continue, Tigray will not be the land of bandits’



Image 4: A widely circulated screenshot that sent a message to the people of Addis Ababa to kill Yemane

Although the link to this post could not be found and its originality could not be confirmed, the screenshot above from December 24, 2020 (as shown in the image 4) was circulating in order to show the people of Addis are the killers and they have been plotting it a year ago.

Screenshot Translation: “People of Sheger [Addis Ababa] give this junta what he deserves ... he is the junta creating all the chaos!!! His phone is 093875938 this is his address; call him, get his location and give him what he deserves. Yemane Nigusse..Share it”

- **#StarvingForJustice and #OromoProtests (February 22nd)**

In relation to the oromo politicians in prison, a Twitter campaign using the hashtags #StarvingForJustice and #OromoProtests was created. The hashtags have a total mention of 743,000 by 23,000 unique authors. The campaign aimed at being a voice for the politicians in prison who had been on a hunger strike.



Chart 1: Trend of #StarvingForJustice Twitter campaign



Chart 2: Word cloud of hashtags, locations, keywords, phrases and people mentioned in the hashtags #Starvingforjustice and #Oromoprotests

- **Grant of permission for international media outlets to cover Tigray[1] region. (24th February)**

The government allowed seven international media outlets, including the BBC and Reuters, to cover the Tigray region, according to a statement from the Prime Minister’s Office. AFP, Al Jazeera, The New York Times, France 24 and the Financial Times were also allowed to enter, and more than 125 international organizations were

allowed to operate. Humanitarian assistance has been provided to 34 people in 36 woredas of the state, the statement said. The government added that in the name of supporting the people of Tigray, no efforts should be made to undermine the sovereignty of the government.

Social media reaction: There were reactions against the permission where some people were saying it's a big mistake and it shows we have lost in diplomacy.

A Facebook page with 31,547 followers posted content with some claims and allegations against a journalist for AP and Ethiopian Check, Elias Meseret. The page alleges Elias's involvement in spreading false information and recruiting translators for international media reporting the war in Tigray. The post written in Amharic got more than 1000 interactions.

Such content which might lead to silencing journalists and making them the target of harassment has been circulating since last month.

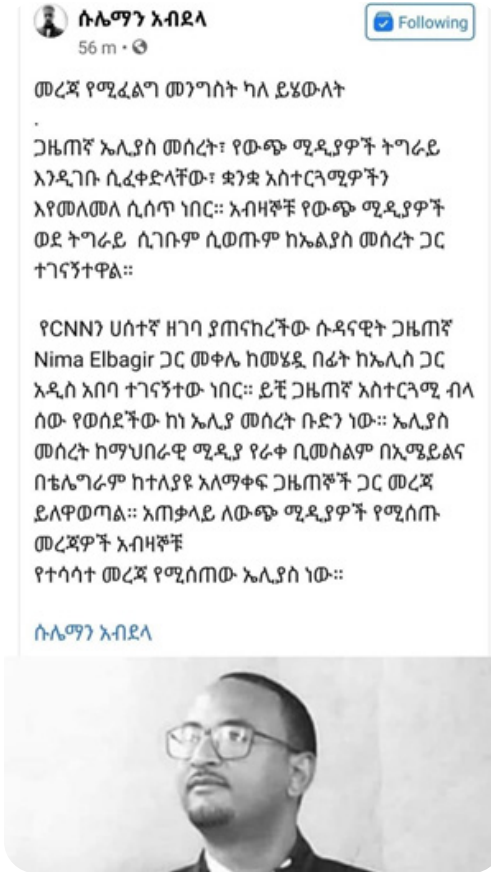


Image 5: Post alleging Elias Meseret has been spreading false information

Post Translation: "Journalist Elias Meseret has been recruiting translators when international media were given permission to enter into Tigray. Nima Elbagir, the Sudanese journalist for CNN met Eliast in Addis Ababa before leaving for Mekelle, she reinforced the false report news. The translator she took along with her is from Elias's

group. Even though Elias has not been active on social media, he has been exchanging information with international Media and journalists through email and telegram. Most of the false information that is given to international Media is from Elias Meseret.”

- **Security concerns in Tigray Region (26th of February)**

Eritrean troops killed hundreds of civilians in Axum on November 19 and 20, Amnesty International reported. The troops carried out indiscriminate heavy artillery shelling, beatings the intimidation of several city men, and looted hospitals and private homes, the report said. Amnesty International has called on the United Nations to investigate allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Axum and the Tigray conflict in general.

On 26th February, Habtay Gebreegziabher, head of the Tigray Prosperity party, told Ethiopian Press Agency that “the disinformation campaign being pursued to mislead the international media community about the situation in Tigray is intolerable and appropriate measures would be taken against the orchestrators and we will identify those who try to spread lies and bring them to justice”.

Ethiopian Human Rights Commission said in a statement posted on its Facebook page that Amnesty International’s report on the extrajudicial killing of civilians by Eritrean soldiers in Axum is significant. Daniel said the report will be a useful input for the commission’s ongoing investigation. “*Our initial investigation shows that Eritrean soldiers have killed an unknown number of people,*” the commission said.

On the other hand, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that although Amnesty's report raises serious issues that should be of great concern, the methodology employed has its own limitations as it depended on scanty information gathered from refugees in eastern Sudan and phone interviews with individuals in the city of Axum. Therefore, the Ministry noted, such reports will not serve the purpose of justice but has the risk of further reinforcing the misinformation and propaganda by the TPLF and its cohorts. A day before the release of the Amnesty's report, the State of Emergency Fact Check stated that the relevant authorities including the EHRC, the Federal Police and the Attorney General had been conducting investigations on the crimes committed and incidents that had occurred in the Tigray Regional State. The statement added that the institutions had also released their findings to the public even as the investigation was still ongoing.

On the other hand, Eritrea denies killing Eritrean civilians in Axum the report's allegations against Eritrea are baseless, Eritrean spokesman Mane Gebre-Meskel said in a statement on Twitter. The informants said that most of the informants who were sheltered in the Sudanese refugee camp in Hamdait were TPLF militants who had fled to Sudan after participating in the Maikadra massacre.

In addition to criticizing Amnesty's report, there was a smear campaign run online against Fiseha Tekle, the East African Research Director at Amnesty East African Bureau, by affiliates of the Prosperity Party.



Image 6: The use of Amnesty International East Africa director’s picture and alleged kinship to TPLF to discredit the report

Left [Post](#) (by an open supporter of Prosperity Party) in Image 6 **translation:** “This so called Fiseha Tekle who is Amnesty international East Africa director. The witness of the mouse is the bird of its partner in crime.

Right Post (by a candidate of Prosperity Party in Selalle) in Image 6 Translation: “The Director of Amnesty in East Africa, Fisseha Tekle, is from Adwa. His wife is a relative to Sebhat Nega [a TPLF old guard who is currently in detention].” - Journalist Abraha Kassa. Sebhat’s dynasty enters through kinship or marriage. This dynasty is still at work. The [post](#) below (See image 7) with 100+ interactions makes a dangerous accusation and allegation regarding the situation in Tigray. It holds Amharic language speakers responsible for what’s happening in Tigray.



Image 7: accusing Amharic speakers of the war in Tigray

Translation: “The main culprit for all this injustice in Tigray is the Amharic speaker, from preparation to implementation and completion, from obscurity to denial and support is primarily played out by Amharic speakers. We know the ones that do out hold this flag. We know who killed us and we will never forget. At Least the rest chose to be silent”

People were also circulating screenshot from a post from November 13/2020 in order to represent the massacre in Axum as a premeditated genocide.



Image 8: Post calling Abiy Ahmed to finish cleaning up what needs to be cleaned in Axum.

Post Translation: “If Abichu [PM Abiy Ahmed] had finished cleaning up what needs to be cleaned, we would have celebrated the celebration in Axum zion church”

Axum massacre neither occurred nor substantiated

• USAID investigation confirms no victim or burial place

BY BELAG BERHIO

ADDIS ABABA The unstaffed office that the Ethiopian government has been working to counter the de facto TPLF economic discrimination campaign, and what the government described it as "their bilateral deal" seems to have persuaded the latter to abandon.

One of the competitors of the troubled business, Deputy Action Director at Human Rights Watch, Ms. Susan, recently visited the "center" but since the company's "Miss Gidder" figure there with a view as justifying why they had not shown a single body or burial place from the alleged "Axum massacre".

It was revealed that USAID's investigation team recently deployed in Axum town could neither find a single burial place nor meet with relatives of the "dead people," one of the TPLF-affiliated media had last Thursday.

The investigation team led by Amehab (PHD) met with the deputy administrator of Axum to St. Mary of Zion Church following Amnesty International's testimony on the alleged incident in Axum.

Accordingly, the church representative failed to show the burial grounds of the "victims" to the investigation team claiming



file feature

that they buried the bodies in different places and at churches of Axum. The investigation

also established

originally, however still cannot find the in the town.

The Ethiopian Herald, a state-run English daily newspaper, published on its cover page claiming that USAID officials responded to Amnesty International's report on the "Axum Massacre" quoting that "Axum Massacre neither occurred nor substantiated, USAID investigation confirms no victim or burial place". After some investigation by Ethiopia check, A USAID spokesperson stated that USAID had not conducted an investigation in Axum and did not send a team to the area. USAID Ethiopia also denied Ethiopian Herald's claim on its Facebook page.

Additionally, there were various videos and photos circulating that led to various misinformation and victim blaming, rape justifying and normalizing such other content. The most widespread story in relation to this was the story of Monalisa Abraha, an eighteen (18) year old girl that had lost a hand and her leg while trying to escape from being raped by an Eritrean soldier. Aljazeera interviewed Monalisa while she was laid in a hospital bed as she told the story of her attempted escape and how she got her hand and leg amputated. Even though, the Ethiopian government reported there is large number of rape cases in the last month, the social media reaction can be categorized into two. On one hand some people have condemned this act, while on the other hand, other people were alleging that Monalisa is a member of TPLF and the story being told is a drama by TPLFites. There was a campaign and the circulation of false information about the identity of Monalisa. A day after her story came out, pictures of a female soldier with a uniform and a weapon next to pictures of Monalisa started circulating. People were alleging that Monalisa is a member of TPLF, there was also a twitter campaign alleging exposure of the misinformation. According to Ethiopia check's investigation, it was found that the picture of the girl with a weapon and Monalisa are two different people



Figure 9: A post claiming that Monalisa Abraha was a member of Tigray Special force



Figure 10: An online influencer, Seyoum Teshome, making a similarity between the girl in soldier uniforms and the rape survivor.

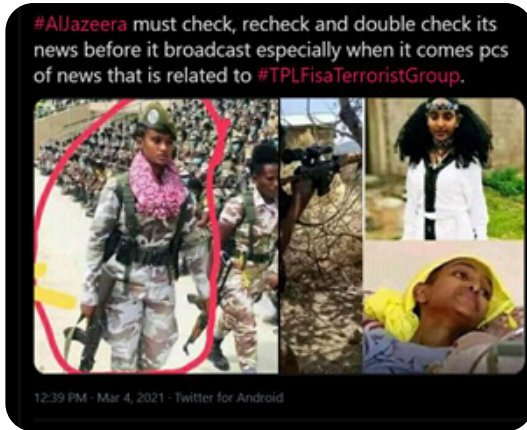


Figure 11: Content that says Monalisa lost her arm and leg while fighting in the war

Translation “The Juntas are at it again with the lies. Monalisa did not lose her arm and leg while trying to escape rape; she lost her arm and leg while fighting in the war”.

- ***Killings in Horogudru welega zone (March 10th)***

The killing of twenty nine (29) ethnic Amharas in Horro Gudru, Jarete district, East Wollega, Oromia Regional state was also an agenda of hot discussion on social media. The attack took place on March 5 in Abo church in Debos kebele where residents and Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo followers were celebrating the beginning of the two months of fasting season. Witnesses say the perpetrators were members of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLF). There had been online campaigns and discussions around the attack using hashtags and the government was called upon to take action. In some of the content, there was a call to organize and take arms. Specifically, the Amhara's were called upon to take action against OLF fighters. It describes Amhars's ability to fight the OLF rebel fighters as well as neighboring countries.



Figure 12: Call for Amhara to organize and take arms.

Translation: “The rebel that kills you only disappears when you become a rebel. You will only be crawling on the ground and slaughtered like a sheep unless you take revenge now. It is obvious that if twenty decisive Amharas are organized and get to the bushes, even neighboring countries would weep and get eliminated, let alone OLF. Amhara get armed and defend.

CONCLUSION

This analysed the online behaviour of social media in Ethiopia by using SM monitoring tools, discourse and content analysis.

During the reporting period, various conversations were underway with the situation in Tigray continuing to be widely covered. The graphic videos that had been circulating during the reporting period were also a big issue of discussion. Some of the claims that followed such videos and the misleading information that came out were amongst the conversations that were widely observed. The circulation of false information by state owned media was also one of the top discussions on social media during the reporting period.

Additionally, threats against journalists have continued to be a concern where content to silence them and make them targets continues to be shared. In addition, the use of screenshots from unknown or unconfirmed sources is being widely observed, this is in order to make a certain group responsible for the killings and violence in the country and instigate further violence.

Election related threats and concerns where political parties were reporting that they were being pushed out and/or pressured to not take part in the pre-election and election period was also a big issue

As observed from previous reports, there was an overlap in what people were talking about and sharing on social media. The usage of different facts might be a contributing reason for the low level of shared credible information. There were varying

realities being shared on social media and therefore people are exposed to different opinions.

The report concludes that the social media engagement during the reporting period was widely unhealthy and filled with misinformation, hateful and incitement content from those that blamed victims of rape, harassed journalists and instigated violence against a certain ethnic group.

Note: This report is developed by the Center for Advancement of Rights and Democracy (CARD) with financial support by DefyHate South Sudan.

