



## EPO Sourcing Methodology

Each week, ACLED EPO researchers review dozens of English, Amharic, Somali, Tigrigna, and Afaan Oromo language sources to code political violence and demonstration events in Ethiopia, in addition to information gathered from local partners. Ethiopia's information environment has gone through several recent shifts, and this document outlines how ACLED and the EPO address those changes.

ACLED finds that it is important to regularly review sourcing strategies for countries, especially as dynamics and information environments evolve, in order to ensure continued reliable information for coding (*for more, see this [methodology primer](#)*). This has been especially true for Ethiopia since the beginning of the conflict in Tigray in November 2020. ACLED has made an effort to expand coverage of events occurring around the country by engaging in consultations with local media experts and in-country organizations, as ACLED's standard sourcing strategy was not able to effectively track events around this conflict. As a result, multiple new local sources have been added to ACLED's source network.

Additionally, ACLED has developed the EPO to further enhance data collection, cover conflicts throughout the country in greater depth, and produce more extensive analysis of key trends. The details of the EPO's sourcing strategy are outlined below.

Prior to 2018, ACLED's greatest sourcing challenge in Ethiopia was overcoming the country's tightly controlled media environment. The absence of free and independent media, the routine arrest of journalists and reporters, as well as repressive legislation curtailed the media's ability to report from across the country — particularly from areas where armed insurgencies and government opposition are strongest. Until recently, Ethiopia was ranked as one of the world's most censored countries ([Reporters Without Borders, 2019](#)), underscoring why, prior to 2018, ACLED's Ethiopia sourcing relied more heavily on diaspora-based sources and international media outlets. Through engagement with local sources, these outlets were able to report on the drastic increase in demonstration activity that preceded the power change in 2018.

With the election of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in 2018, the government began to open Ethiopia's media landscape ([Al Jazeera, 9 October 2019](#)). While his sweeping reforms have resulted in the proliferation of media outlets and have encouraged freedom of speech, several challenges remained, including media bias and government shutdowns of the internet in response to security threats ([Fortune, 2 July 2019](#)). Strategies for sourcing information in Ethiopia have gone through several shifts since 2018: information options multiplied as diaspora media returned to operate nationally, and new outlets emerged. Yet, simultaneously, sources of misinformation also proliferated alongside openly biased media outlets.

Conflict environments are already ‘low information’ spaces, as the identity of perpetrators, victims, the intensity of violence, and its outcomes are difficult to accurately ascertain in real time. Through social and traditional media, a flood of reports, accounts, and rumors can distort the reality of a conflict. Reporting standards for verified information can be subsumed in this cacophony of distortion. Reporting around current Ethiopian conflicts are rife with a high level of propaganda, unsourced reports, reports without reliable sources, exaggerations, contradictory information, incomplete information, and unreported events. Each conflict across the country is affected by one or more of these problems: in several conflicts, information is either very sparse (e.g. Benshangul/Gumuz); distorted and often based on rumor and propaganda (e.g. parts of Tigray); subject to exaggeration (e.g. Oromo Liberation Army [OLA] actions in Oromia); or incomplete (e.g. many parts of Tigray and the Afar-Somali region). Compounding these issues, social media sites have increasingly played a role in pushing mis- and disinformation from well-established diaspora and external communities.

Further, there are specific areas in which the Ethiopian government demands, or the persistence of insecurity has led to, effective information blackouts. In these cases — such as in Tigray between November 2020 and March 2021, and in the Metekel zone in the Benshangul/Gumuz region after 23 January 2021 — there were ongoing accounts of human rights abuse, offensives, rural violence, and evidence of ‘ethnic cleansing’ that could neither be detailed nor confirmed by reputable sources for sustained periods of time.

To address these issues, it is ACLED and EPO policy to engage with local and national partners, journalists, translators, local fixers, and stringers to determine the veracity of claims and the details of activity before coding. If that is not possible, ACLED and EPO will account for the full series of events once a domestic or international news or human rights agency establishes those facts, and will note the limitations of those data in a transparent way for those using the data. This same logic applies to individual events and those that are speculative: the component parts of each individual event must be available in order for an event to be included in the dataset, and in larger analysis. This means that certain events — such as those which are reported as aggregate events, or those incidents without specific information about time and location — cannot be coded by ACLED and EPO researchers. However, researchers keep records of unconfirmed accounts so as to integrate credible reports into the dataset when further sources, information, or confirmation becomes available. Finally, when new information comes to the fore, this is integrated into the dataset to reflect the most updated and accurate information about an event, and a conflict at large. In this way, ACLED is a ‘living dataset,’ with new and historical events regularly added and updated.

In all cases, ACLED prefers to engage and rely on a network of local partners, while being aware that such partners, witnesses, and reporters may not have full stories, or may have their own biases, especially in a context where mis- and disinformation is prevalent. To account for information provided by local or media partners, we emphasize an inclusion standard that all information from conflict zones is triangulated by other available information sources before being coded and published by ACLED. However, there are exceptions to this standard, such as information on conflicts in Tigray and Benshangul/Gumuz (*for more, see this [methodology primer](#)*), and those

exceptions are noted as such. Until triangulation is possible, some parts of conflict reports may remain speculative. When better and more reliable information is made available, ACLED incorporates it. But the lag in reporting, and the integration of new and substantive materials, is to recognize that trusted sources — including local partners and reporters — require time to conduct their own research to separate facts from non-facts in order to extract the best and most reliable information.

In the present Ethiopian context, there are a number of well-regarded and reliable sources of information. These include the independent Ethiopian Human Rights Commission; reporters at national newspapers; the social media accounts of humanitarians and practitioners; regional news agencies (reported in regional languages); and select radio, television, and online communities, which provide a wide range of information on regional and local conflict patterns.

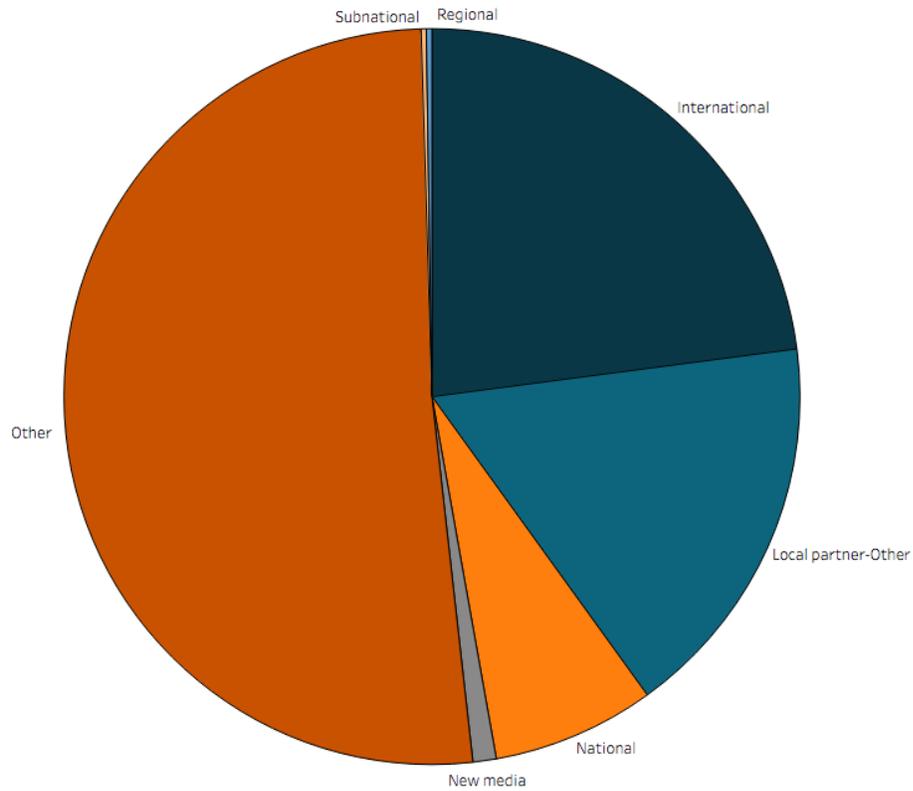
At the outset of the EPO project in early 2021, nearly half of all events come from trusted national media sources. These include sources such as Addis Standard, Wazema Radio, and the government-affiliated Ethiopian Broadcasting Network, which help to provide detailed information on actors and fatality counts from local officials. These sources are coded in the data with a Source scale of 'National.'

Nearly one-third of ACLED Ethiopia data now come from a network of development organizations based in-country, which share information from local staff on reported instances of violence anonymously. Such sources are useful in providing information on the Tigray conflict in particular, where media access has been restricted, and appear in the data with 'Undisclosed source' listed in the Source column, and a Source scale of 'Local Partner-Other.'

A smaller percentage of coverage comes from international sources (e.g. Reuters, Sky News), including those with Ethiopian language programming (e.g. BBC Amharic, VOA Amharic, DW Amharic). Such sources provide information on conflicts and protests happening throughout the country and appear in the data with a Source scale of 'International.'

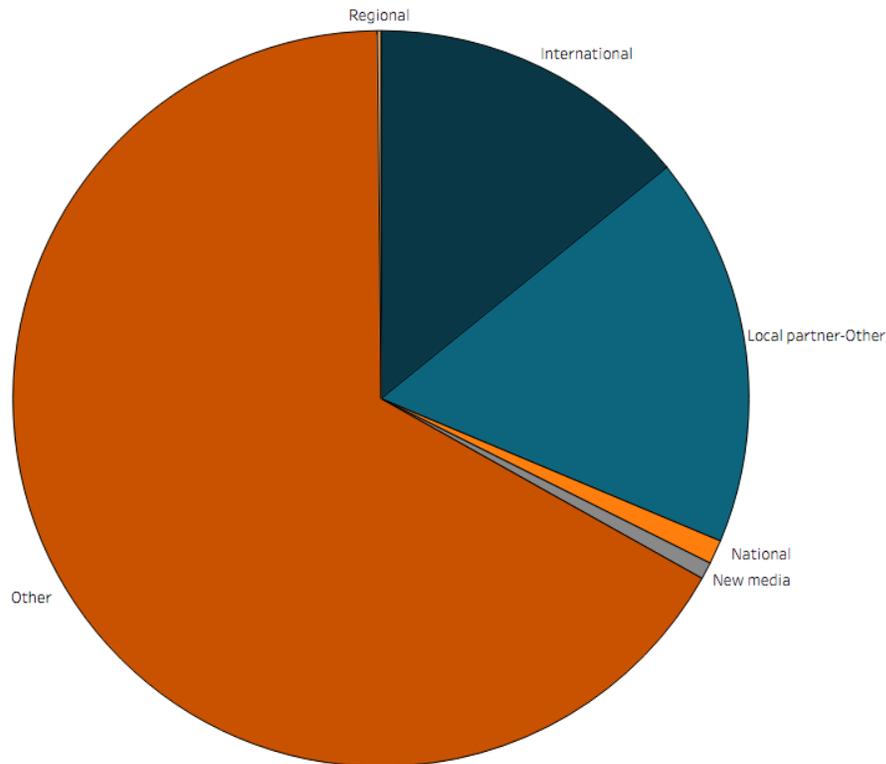
The figure below depicts this source scale disaggregation in the data, illustrating the sourcing profile ACLED and EPO use across the country for coverage. While these sources are the primary source of information for any event coded by ACLED, multiple sources are reviewed and cross-checked in each instance to combat any misreporting and false information. When multiple sources are used to triangulate a single event, it is noted in the 'Source' column so that the triangulation of information is transparent.

Ethiopia Sourcing Profile by Source Scale  
(November 2020 - present)



While this is the sourcing profile for the country at large, the sourcing profile is distinct in certain regions of the country, such as in Tigray (*see figure below*), where a significant proportion of coverage comes from the University of Ghent's Tigray Conflict Atlas (with a source scale of 'Other'). This is described in further detail in the [Tigray methodology primer](#).

Tigray Sourcing Profile by Source Scale  
(November 2020 - present)



The EPO has also aimed to expand coverage to as many regionally specific sources as possible. In 2020-2021, conflicts across Ethiopia have become highly regionalized, and many national sources of information are either limited in their abilities to cover the violence due to government restrictions on access to unstable areas or direct limitations generated by the insecurity. In turn, and after extensive in-country investigations of sources and sourcing, ACLED and EPO integrated government communication bureau webpages (e.g. the Oromia region communication bureau webpage), the pages of political parties, and media in Tigrigna and Somali languages. This is in addition to a new stream of information fed through a network of development partners, as outlined above, reporting on instances of violence. The new EPO initiative brought about these changes, with a shift from the reliance on diaspora-based media to a prioritization of media and local sources who are based in-country in order to increase accuracy in identifying actors, locations, and fatality counts.