Ethiopia Sourcing Profile

Each week, ACLED researchers review dozens of English, Amharic, and Afaan Oromo language sources to code political violence and demonstration events in Ethiopia. The greatest sourcing challenge is 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 have limited 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).

However, in 2018, newly-selected Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed opened up the country'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 remain, including media bias and government shutdowns of the internet in response to security threats (Fortune, 2 July 2019).
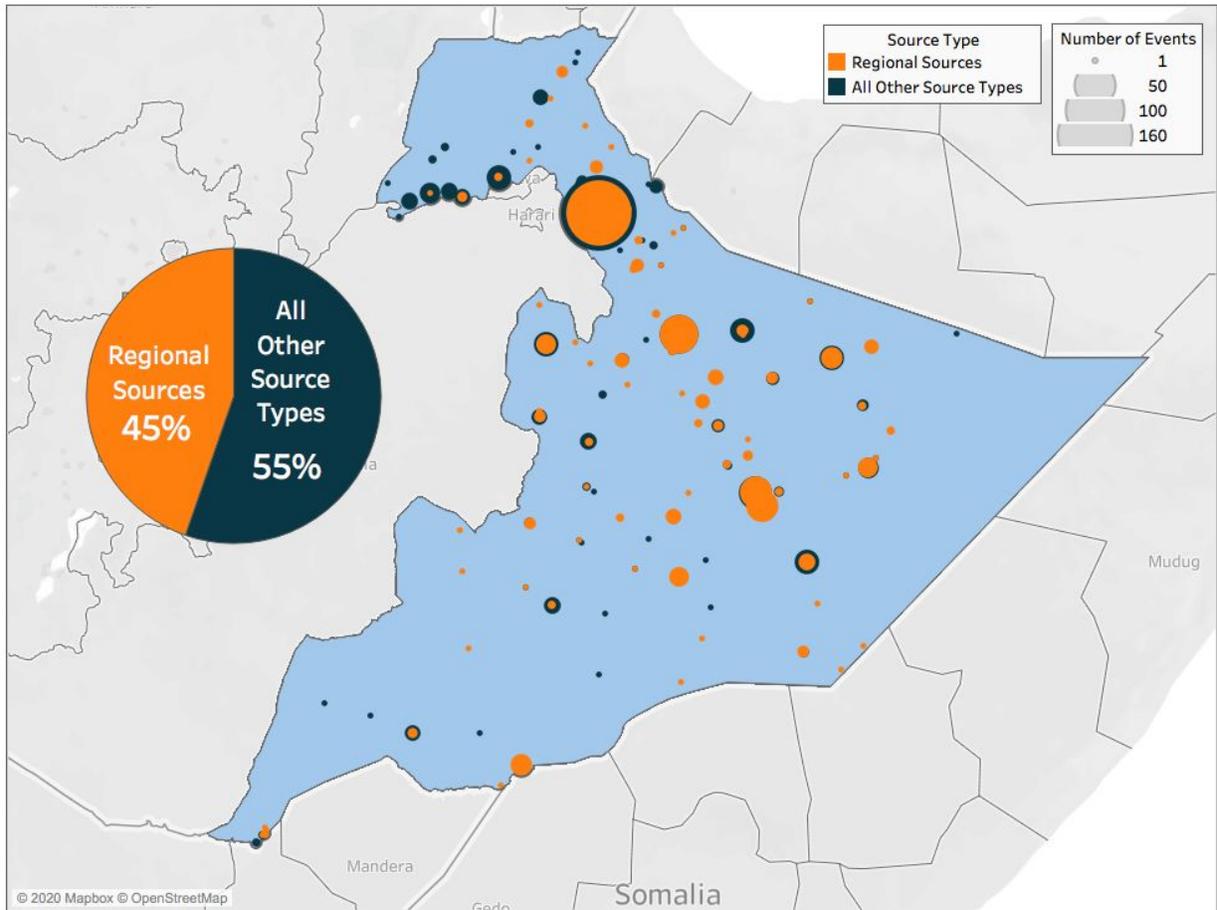
Media bias in Ethiopia occurs as a consequence of weak journalistic institutions – a natural result of decades of government persecution of professional journalists and agencies. Many prominent journalists turn to activism from abroad. As a result, ACLED uses sources reported by the Ethiopian diaspora; approximately one-third of Ethiopian events collected by ACLED contain information from diaspora media. These sources are able to report on events that are not picked up by in-country sources for fear of government reprisals or lack of access to restive areas where journalists continue to be at risk of attack or arrest (Committee to Protect Journalists, 29 April 2019). Diaspora-led organizations – like the US-based Oromiya Media Network, Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT), and Zehabesha – are among the most frequently used media, particularly during coverage of the 2016 protests in Oromiya. These sources have provided crucial information during unstable periods, and perhaps most importantly, their work has not been criticized or retracted now that they occupy an important and open role in a freer Ethiopia. We can surmise from this that the reporting done by these organizations in the 2014 period onwards was accurate in detailing a campaign of widespread dissent and reprisals.

However, it is important to remember that diaspora-run news networks have distinct biases. As such, ACLED triangulates information from these sources with other source types. Other international, regional, as well as respected national sources tend to be favored over diaspora-run sources, when available (for more information on how ACLED deals with bias in general, as well as other sourcing issues, see our Sourcing Methodology FAQ). Non-diaspora international media – such as Agence France Presse, Associated Press, and Xinhua News – continue to account for approximately 13% of total events recorded in Ethiopia since 2018, despite the expansion of independent national media. On the other hand, the use of regional sources has significantly declined in recent years, accounting for approximately only 3% of events since 2018. Prior to that,

regional sources, such as All Africa, were used more heavily to capture primarily battle events in the Somali region between state forces and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) fighters (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Number of Events in Somali Region by Source Type, *1997-2019*

With the recent emergence of more prominent domestic sources, ACLED has increasingly incorporated these into its coding of political violence and demonstration events. National sources now account for approximately 20% of events since 2018. Among national sources, the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) and the Addis Standard have been among the most fruitful. Domestic sources typically include a combination of pro-government outlets and opposition media, with the latter regularly reporting on expressions of dissent and armed insurgencies which the government is not keen on publicizing. Subnational sources like Radio Freedom Voice of the Ogadeni People and Voice of Oromo Liberation provided significant insight into the conflicts in Somali and Oromiya until 2016. However, they have been less useful since then as a result of both ACLED's increased use of the Oromiya Media Network, which captures much of the same
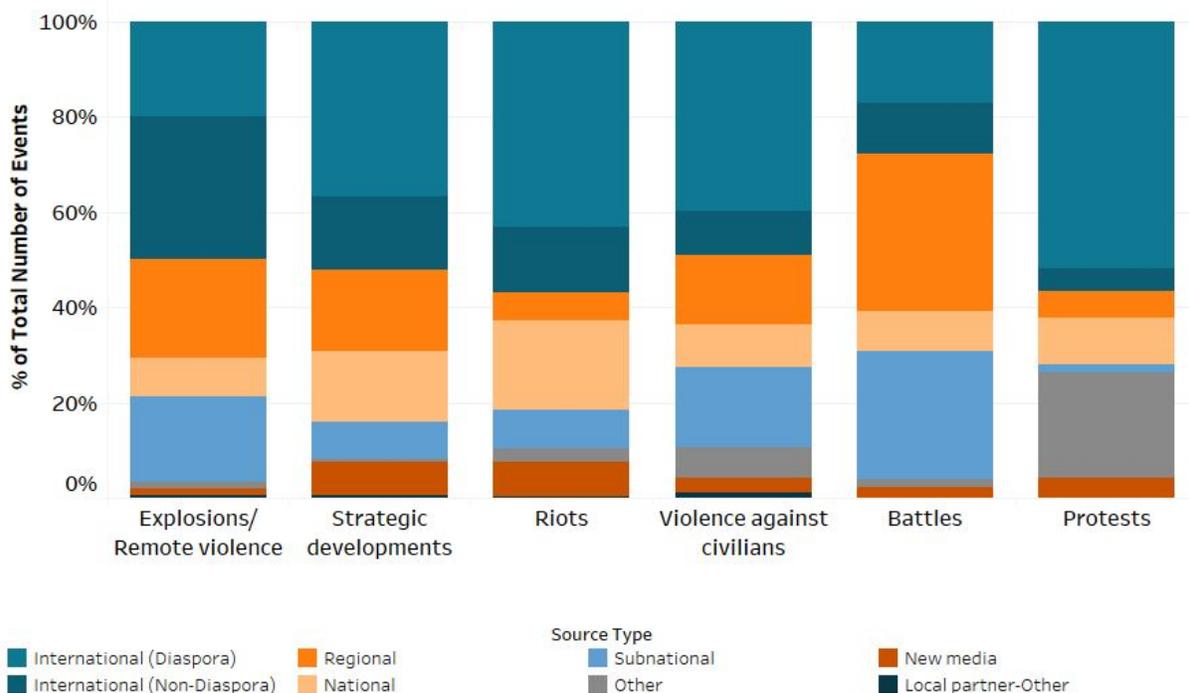
information as these subnational sources, as well as a decrease in violence by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) more largely. Again, while various sources may have distinct biases, they can still be used in the coding of events through a combination of triangulating with other source types, and favoring specifics from less-biased sources.

Additionally, ACLED relies on a number of other source types to improve the scope and quality of its coverage. Of particular importance in recent years are new media sources such as trusted Twitter and Facebook accounts, which local reporters and journalists increasingly use to share security-related information. New media sources have been key in capturing events from regions like the Southern Nations in which other types of sources report few events. Since 2018, new media has provided data for approximately 15% of events. They have been especially useful in supplementing protest activity in the country – over half of the events sourced from new media are demonstrations.

ACLED also regularly uses reports by international monitoring groups like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and local human rights organizations, like the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia and the Ethiopia Human Rights Project. These reports (categorized under 'Other' in the Source Scale column) most often improve ACLED's coverage of violence against civilians and protest events, and demonstrate the advantage of using a variety of source scales and types to create a more comprehensive picture (see Figure 2 below). Some of these sources also release monthly investigative reports (e.g. Amnesty International), which help to improve existing data by adding new information not available during initial reporting. Approximately one-tenth of events in Ethiopia are coded using these sources.

Figure 2: Percentage of Events Yielded by Source Type by Event Type, *1997-2019*

Lastly, data collected by local partners can be a powerful supplemental source to improve data. While ACLED does not yet have a local partner organization based in Ethiopia, data from ACLED's global partners, like the Aid Worker Security Database, help to improve coverage. Issues with freedom of speech have made information collection around disorder difficult by local organizations, whose individual members face great risk in engaging in such activities. With recent improvements in freedom of speech since 2018, collaborations with local organizations are being explored, with the aim of establishing such partnerships in the country.