

# Securitization of Politics in Ethiopia: **Scrutinizing Crisis** in Western Oromia in Post-2018

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## ABSTRACT

The article is aimed to scrutinize security crisis in Western part of Oromia, within the broader context of unearthed securitization of politics in Ethiopia. The post-2018 political situation in Ethiopia is characterized by severe security crises in almost all parts of the country, and these security crises have regional and international dimensions. Politicians build security sectors to secure their political life when the normative political process has stalled. There are also ongoing security crises in the western part of Oromia Regional State, ranging from the displacement of Oromo from Benishangul Gumuz Regional State and border areas in Oromia to the ongoing massive massacres of Oromo in East and Horro Guduru Wallagga by mercenaries from Amhara Regional State, to ongoing human rights violations such as arrests, extrajudicial killings, etc. Accordingly, this article intended to discuss the imperatives of securitized political issues in perpetuated security crisis in Western Oromia since 2018. The research was approached as qualitative research with a case study design to exhaustively discuss the security crisis in West Oromia as a particular case. Both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data was collected through interviews, personal observations, and semi-structured conversations with peers, while secondary data was obtained through a content analysis of the literature. The research found that the failure of the 2018 political transition perpetuated a security crisis across the country. Western Oromia is marked as a sensitive political ecology, and political issues are highly securitized. Geographically speaking, West Oromia is viewed as an outlying area, yet it holds a central position within the national political landscape. Hence, within the examined region, political inquiries are approached through security measures, resulting in a complex security crisis with severe consequences for the local population. Therefore, desecuritizing the political agenda and giving a chance to normative politics or finding a “political solution to the political problem” is recommended as the only way forward in the country.

*Keywords* Securitization, Desecuritization, Politics, Security crisis, Ethiopia, Western Oromia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The first two decades of the 21st century saw an increase in mass demonstrations demanding concrete changes in politics, the economy, and society or the (re)design of the status quo (Sanches, 2022). In Ethiopian politics, mainly since 2014, the growing demand for political change was also reflected in an unstoppable popular resistance to injustice and the extractive nature of institutions. Following a severe mass struggle for democracy and the protection of human rights in Ethiopia, political change from within occurred in April 2018 for the first time in the history of Ethiopian politics (Weber, 2018), paving the way for hope in Ethiopian politics. Political developments since then have been shaped by a more complex picture (Østebø & Tronvoll, 2020), characterized by both hopes for a democratic transition in the country and fear of highly polarized political interests among elites that also threaten the

transition process. Historically, the process of Ethiopian state formation was characterized by coercive means and a highly stratified, hierarchical structure (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003), which placed the country's statehood status on an unstable footing. After 1991, attempts were made under the Ethiopian transitional government to renegotiate statehood or renew the social contract by creating a federal state structure. However, coercive state institutions were retained, and the political changes accompanying the federal state structure were implemented without adequate democratic oversight.

Therefore, political reforms within the ruling regime after 2018 are expected to break the vicious cycle of bloody political strife. Initially, reformers were embarked on several political reforms, including, the release of numerous political detainees within the country and welcoming back of political opposition parties from exile, including, previously designated as terrorist organizations by the EPRDF, such as Ginbot 7 and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Additionally, some legal and institutional reforms were hosted. For instance, the Anti-Terror Law, and leaning towards more economic liberalization, has been made by the government. Concerning international relations, the Ethiopian-Eritrean standoff was resolved immediately after the new prime minister took office in 2018, earning him the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize. Abiy's regime began restructuring various institutions, such as security sector reform and sought to transform the coalition EPRDF party into the identical National Prosperity Party (Webel, 2018).

However, 2020 election was postponed, which was expected to facilitate a smooth political transition in Ethiopia by referring Covid-19 as the causes. Then, several overlapping incidents were happened, for instance, assassination of well-known figures like, Eng. Semagnw Bekele (engineer of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam), a coup attempt at the regional state level in the Amhara region in which several high-ranking officials, including the region's president, were executed in Bahir Dar, and at the same time, the army chief of the National Defense Forces General Se'are Mekonnen was executed in Addis Ababa, popular Oromo singer and human rights activist Hachalu Hundessa was also executed. Famous Oromo political leaders were immediately imprisoned. In northern Ethiopia, full scale war began between the Tigray Region People's Liberation Front and the federal government. Similarly, the western part of Oromia has experienced severe security crisis since 2018. The displacement of more than five hundred thousand Oromo from Benishangul Gumuz and the border area between 2018 and 2020, a severe military operation between the Oromo Liberation Army and government security forces, the emergence of anonymous armed groups committing serious crimes against civilians, and the involvement of armed groups from the Amhara region in the western part of Oromia have led to a tense security environment.

In general, after 2018, Ethiopia embarked on the hoped-for profound political transition to democracy, which, however, was immediately diverted into unnecessary channels, plunging the country into complicated problems ranging from the security crisis, economic difficulties and a high number of internally displaced persons, to the severance of diplomatic relations, etc. In particular, the situation in West Oromia began to develop dynamically immediately after the so-called political reform of the then regime in 2018. These security dynamics were linked to political agendas and led to a persistent security crisis in the region. Accordingly, this article unveils how political issues approached by security measures and perpetuated security crisis in Western part of Oromia and beyond.

## **2. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The study was conducted as qualitative research with a case study design to thoroughly discuss the security crisis in Western Oromia as a particular case. Both primary and secondary data were used. The primary data was collected through interviews, personal

observations, and semi-structured conversations with peers, while the secondary data was obtained through a content analysis of the literature. The study aims to scrutinize securitization of politics in Ethiopia, by giving due emphasis on security crisis in Western part of Oromia National Regional State. The article is dedicated to answering the central question of how political agendas have been presented as security problems, leading to the failure of democratic transition and insecurity in post-2018 Ethiopia. Both primary and secondary data were used, with primary data collected through interviews with scholars and observations and secondary data collected from literature and official reports. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis and presented qualitatively as an interpretivist research paradigm.

### **3. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **3.1. Understanding Securitization of Politics**

After 1991, the concept of security received serious attention in international relations discourses (Browning & Joenniemi, 2013) and the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998), and other theorists of this school developed the securitization theory. (Nye & Lynn-Jones, 1988; Clark, 2001; Crawford & Jarvis, 2001) argued that the nature of security changed during the Cold War period because it was adorned with ethnocentric biases. For example, the USSR was portrayed as a security threat to the U.S. and vice versa. At the same time, security discourses in peripheral regions (others) were also an extension of these framed or reframed security aspects (Ostergard, 2002). However, with the end of the Cold War, interstate aspects of security changed to intra-state political competition, and almost all or the majority of African states began to address political polarization in the sub-national context (Ostergard, 2002). Paul D. Williams (2008) referred to Buzan's sectoral approaches to security studies, which are essential to understanding the "security of human collectives (not just states)" as they encompass military, political, economic, social, and environmental security (Williams, 2008). Accordingly, such a comprehensive approach to security studies remains essential to understanding the nature of security and the dynamic discourses on security. As defined by Ole Wæver (1993:8), 'security' means a situation characterized by the presence of a security problem and an action against it. And this notion of the action-reaction aspect of security is clearly described by (Friis, 2000) when he describes security as a "reaction to a perceived threat" (p. 3).

In addition to security discourses, the concept of securitization was first discussed by Wæver (1995) as it "assumes that some things in hard, material reality do not really exist, but exist only as social constructs in people's minds because people tacitly agree to act as if something exists" (Ugwueze, 2015). This description of securitization provides us with evidence that something is (re)constructed as a potential source of insecurity, which invites security action and removes it from its normative context. Moreover, the concept of securitization is based on the constructivist perspective of how 'security problems emerge and dissolve' (Balzacq et al., 2015), suggesting that security threats are socially constructed in a process called securitization (Rychnovská, 2014). Šulovi (2010) considered security as a process of social construction of threats in which an actor (usually the political elite) declares a particular problem as urgent and as a threat to the survival of the object of reference, which, once accepted by the public, legitimizes the use of extraordinary measures to neutralize the threat (p. 3).

The basic arguments of the Copenhagen School framework are therefore based on the process of securitization by a securitization agent with a reference object (Friis, 2000); (Knudsen, 2001); (Philipsen, 2020). Wæver (1993) characterizes the performance of securitization as;

“...a speech act that is not interesting as a sign pointing to something more real, but the utterance itself is the act: by saying it, something is done (like a bet, a promise to

christen a ship). By saying 'security,' a representative of the state shifts the concrete case to a particular area and claims a special right to use the necessary means to prevent this development." (Wæver 1993:7, cited in Friis, 2000)

Thus, securitization presents itself as subjective and is determined by how it is constructed or reconstructed (Friis, 2000). Knudsen (2001), in his perceptive discourse on the de-securitization of securitization itself, has pointed out that the core aspects of securitization serve to create an awareness of the arbitrary nature of the security 'threat', the basis of any national security agenda, to stimulate the preferences of policy and/or decision makers that are not given by the 'nature' of security threats themselves, and he viewed securitization as the hitherto nebulously perceived process of elevating security issues above politics and making something unquestionable (Knudsen, 2001 p. 359).

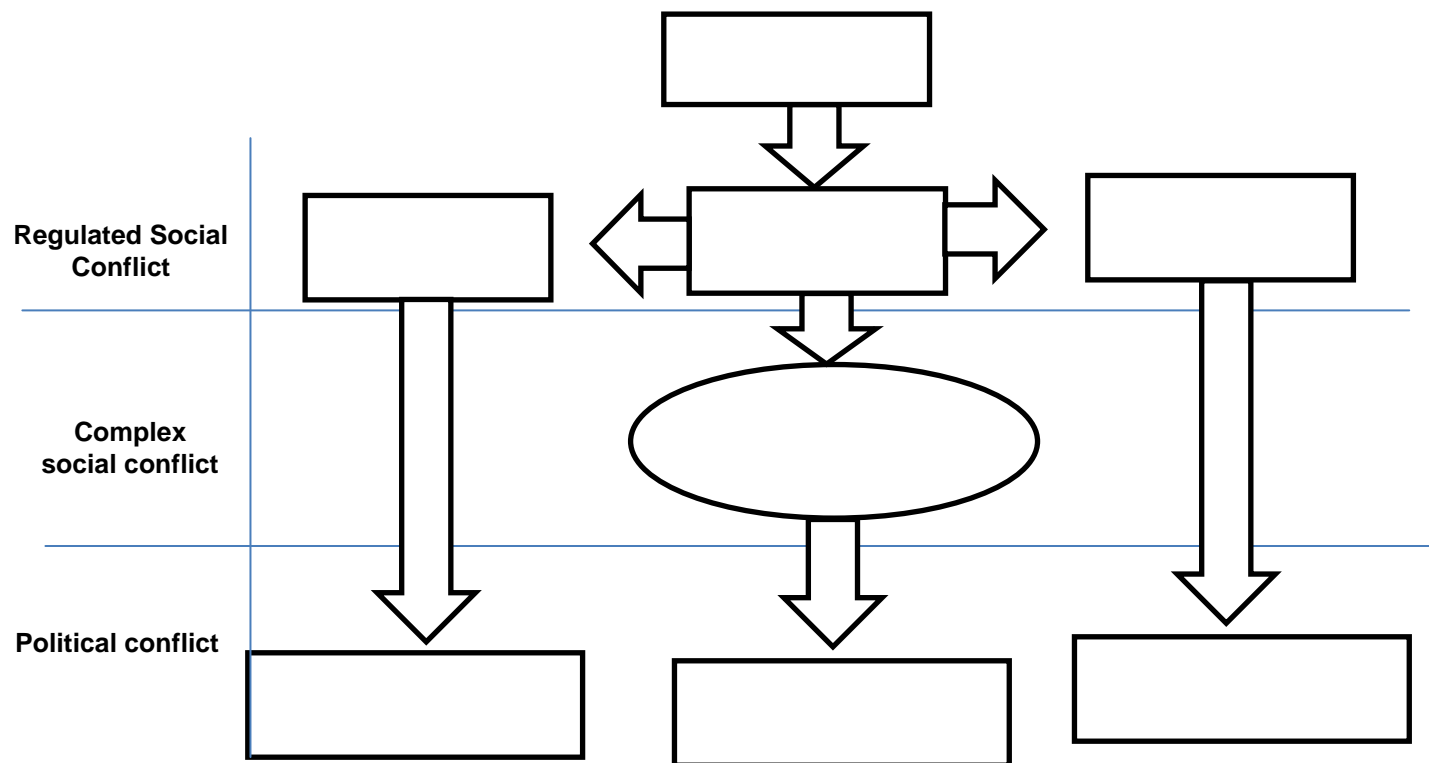
In this context, when political issues are presented as serious security threats, it means that security measures are legitimized to solve political issues or problems. In this article, then, policy securitization stands for the process by which policy issues are placed under security conditions, removed from their normal political context, and addressed through security measures. The securitization of issues or when the issue is securitized and taken out of the normal framework of the democratic political process, it is put on the agenda of "panic politics" (Buzan et al., 1998) Šulovi, 2010, p. 3). This fact was aptly described by Buzan and his colleagues when they stated, "Security is the step that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics" (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 23). In this article, then, the securitization of politics is understood as political issues becoming issues of political (in)security and becoming 'securitized' through semantic processes (Wæver, 1995, 1996; Buzan et al., 1998, cited in Langenohl, 2017).

When political agendas are displaced from normative politics and degraded to 'panic politics' as a serious security scheme, this leads to a double crisis; there could be a crisis of politics (political crisis) on the one hand and a crisis of security (security crisis) on the other. Thus, the decontextualization of political issues would exacerbate tensions and eliminate the possibilities of serious reflection under normative conditions. This fact would aggravate the political conflict and, empirically, could be the reason for maintaining the security crisis. According to the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, a political conflict is defined as:

An incompatibility of intentions between at least individual or collective actors. This incompatibility manifests itself in the form of observable and interrelated acts and acts of communication (actions) regarding certain socially relevant value differences (issues) that threaten (the continuity of) state functions or the international order. Moreover, actors, acts, and issues are the constitutive features of political conflict. (HIIK's, 2021, p. 7)

The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIK) conceptual framework for understanding political conflict is necessary here to capture the actors, actions, and problems in the dynamic security context of Western Oromia since 2018. The conceptual mapping (see Figure 1) includes actors (direct and indirect) as individuals or collectives of individuals and actions as acts and acts of communication performed by a conflict actor in the context of a political conflict. In addition, the core functions of the state that may be affected by conflict include providing security for a particular population and ensuring the integrity of a particular territory and political, socioeconomic, or cultural order (HIIK, 2022).

***Figure 1: HIIK's Basic Concepts of Political Conflict***



*Source: adopted from Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIC, 2022)*

Conflict issues are the issues or materials pursued by actors in conflict through conflict actions. These include system (ideological), national power, autonomy, secession, i.e., the sought secession of a state territory to establish a new state or merge with another state, decolonization, subnational rule, which refers to the attainment of de facto control by a government or non-state actor over a territory or population, division of resources, territorial claims, and more, depending on the context of the conflict.

### **3.2. Heuristic Approach to Post-2018 Political Change in Ethiopia**

‘Heuristic approach’ is essential to understanding researcher’s perspective on discussions of political change in post-2018 Ethiopia. Etymologically, the term “heuristic” comes from Greek and means “to serve to find out or discover something” (Gigerenzer&Gaissmaier, 2011, p. 454). Holton (1988) reports how Einstein included the term in the title of his 1905 Nobel Prize-winning paper on quantum physics, suggesting that the view he presented was incomplete but extremely useful (pp. 360-361). And the concept of heuristics was taken up by Nobel Prize-winning economist Herbert Simon in the 1950s when he noted that although humans strive to make rational decisions, their judgment is subject to cognitive limitations (Gigerenzer&Gaissmaier, 2011). Purely rational decisions would involve weighing all alternatives, e.g., potential costs versus potential benefits (Rachlin, 2003). For simple arguments, people usually apply “cognitive shortcuts or rules of thumb” (Vis, 2019, p. 41). The main argument here is that people always try to get things right in a short amount of time by reducing the mental effort required for decision making. Accordingly, some scholars have defined ‘heuristics’ as “a method or rule for solving problems” (Peyton Young, 2008: 1). Thus, people generally use their experience to draw certain conclusions and interpret their

context and/or text. Accordingly, I took this empirical approach to understand the post-2018 political changes in Ethiopia and develop an 'incomplete but useful argument' about the never-ending security dynamics in Ethiopia in general and West Oromia in particular.

Foucault argued in "Society Must Be Defended" that "a discourse of war has existed alongside and within the context of modern representations of history and politics" (Dillon & Neal, 2008, p. 41). He explains at length the inversion of Clausewitz's argument of politics as "the continuation of war by other means" (Foucault, 2003b: p. 48) and cites "constitutive historical-political discourses of war" (Dillon & Neal, 2008, p. 45). These discourses of "society must be defended" and "politics as a discourse of war" appropriately capture Ethiopian politics in a heuristic approach. This is because political deconstruction and reconstruction in Ethiopia have been intentionally and/or unintentionally categorised under the deft quotation of Clausewitz "politics as the continuation of war by other means." In essence, Ethiopian politics since the founding of the state in the late 19th century has been characterized by the relationship between subject and citizen or subject and master in both political discourses and political practice (Lyons, 2019). This makes the country's political history a serious point of contention or departure, and any policy decision can easily be traced back (i.e., adjusted or confronted) to the country's historical dialectic.

In Ethiopian politics, it is quite difficult to understand history for its own sake without interpreting historical facts. For instance, Mennasemay (2006), in his book *Ethiopian political theory, Democracy and Surplus history*, succinctly described that imported knowledge (i.e., forms of politics or whatever) cannot change the actual state of the country because it pushes aside the historical context of the country which is presented as a "mirror without a train" (to use his words). He discussed the historical facts as an "integrative and disintegrative" process, and I wondered about his labelling when he described them like this, for example:

The decline of Axsum and the wars of Gudit in the tenth century triggered a disintegrative process from which the era of Zagwe emerged, which produced the unique works of Lalibella. The Imam-Ahmad or Gagn wars (1527-1543), while destructive, nevertheless initiated integrative processes that added another dimension to the emerging complex Ethiopian identity by making Islam an integral part of Ethiopian society. At the same time, the Gagn wars prepared the ground for confrontation and integration between Oromo and Amhara. During the ZemeneMesafmt (1769-1853), the Ethiopian state was reduced to rubble by conflicts between the Tigrian, Gondar and Yeju Oromo nobility. However, this disintegration of the old order led to a violent reconstruction of the Ethiopian state under the leadership of Tewedros, Yohannes, and Menelik, culminating in centralization by Haile Selassie. (Mennasemay, 2006, p. 4)

Indeed, these are all facts in Ethiopian history, but my concern is that it is not permissible to label some of these historical facts as disintegrative and others as integrative and/or reintegrative. Because whether it is the wars of Gudit in the tenth century, Imam Ahmad or Gagn (1527-1543), the era of "ZemeneMesafint" (1769-1853) and other discourses that are labeled as disintegrative historical facts, they have their historical integrative contribution to the formation and transformation of Ethiopian states. Consequently, due to the labeling and/or relabeling of historical facts, Ethiopian political history remains a focal point of political disputes, a serious factor of competition and cooperation in the present. Discussing these historical issues is beyond the scope of this article, but the observed facts of the security crisis in Ethiopia force us to look at the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of history and the hermeneutics or association of what is going on and what "should be".

During the military regime, Ethiopian politics was mainly concerned with the land issue (Land To Tiller, popular slogan of the Ethiopian student movement), which was resolved by the 1974 revolution, while the issues of nationhood remained unresolved (Gudina, 2005). In 1991, the transitional government laid the foundation for the resolution of the nationality issue in Ethiopia, and the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia endorsed the adoption of multinational federalism (Tronvoll, 2000). The post-1991 restructuring of the state into a multinational state is viewed differently by different scholars depending on the previous power relations. According to (Aron, 2006), despite the struggle for central power, the political situation in Ethiopia after 1991 led to three conflicts: first, between the notion that citizenship is Ethiopian (what he called being Ethiopian) and the original aspect of ethnic identity; second, between who controls the key sectors of the economy; and third, between whether land policy should be socialized or privatized (p. 55). Indeed, these questions have remained the central discourses in Ethiopian politics after 1991 and have strongly influenced the country's political framework.

After 1991, multinational federalism was introduced in Ethiopia, which in the absence or limited spaces of democracy (Aalen, 2002) would guarantee the success of the reconstruction of statehood in the presence of polarized political interests (Gudina, 2005). Moreover, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (EPRDF) established a developmental state with a highly democratic centralism (Gudina, 2005) in which the executive branch played a central role in decision-making, resulting in weak checks and balances between the branches of government, which later crippled the government's efficiency. The inefficiency of the government, the enormous human rights violations, the unequal distribution of resources (both economic and political), and other related political problems led to massive resistance to the ruling regime. It is undeniable that resistance in Oromia has never ceased since the OLF was expelled from the transitional government (1991-1995) and replaced by an illegitimate political organization (i.e. the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) was formed in 1988 to join the coalition parties that formed the EPRDF to renegotiate Oromo political issues in Ethiopia (Østebø&Tronvoll, 2020), and they sought to renegotiate the "EPRDF version of Oromo national identity" (p. 5).

After the ratification of the 1995 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution, national elections were held in Ethiopia at five-year intervals, in 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015, in which the ruling regime claimed to have won the elections. However, the 2005 elections were immediately followed by mass protests (Aron, 2006), and the same is true for the 2010 and 2015 elections, in which the ruling regime claimed to have won the elections by 100%. This clearly shows us that federalism was introduced in Ethiopia without a genuine democratization process, which has led to an ongoing political crisis. This has greatly increased the tendencies for political resistance or opposition to the government in the Oromia region and has led to numerous human rights violations in the region.

Some scholars have attributed the reason for the limited Oromo socio-political cohesion to the inherent internal division of the Oromo people and have inferred other exogenous factors that have greatly influenced the Oromo nation over a long period of time. For example, (Østebø&Tronvoll, 2020) states that "Oromo unity has always been in tension with inherent internal division and this is a crucial reason why the Oromo have remained vulnerable to fragmentation and outside interference and have been prevented from creating a firm Oromo socio-political cohesion" (4). Linking vulnerability to socio-political cohesion to internal division seems a superficial description, as almost all groups that self-identify with a strong sense of socio-political cohesion, have their own internal divisions. For example, the Amhara are divided in Gojjam, Gondor, Manze, and some parts of Wallo that are Muslim and identify as Amhara, but they are not prone to this internal division if we consider internal division as a cause of weak solidarity.

The failure of the Oromo themselves to develop a strong sense of belonging and cohesion among the Pan-Oromo has nothing to do with internal social divisions but is the result of structural pressures emanating from Ethiopian states, even after the conquests of the Abyssinian kings in the late nineteenth century, who collaborated with the European colonizers in East Africa. (Jalata, 2022) By the Ethiopian state's structural pressures, I mean Oromia's political ecology (which bears almost all of Ethiopia's interests to exist as a state in the Horn of Africa). The relevance of the Oromia in Ethiopia paved the way for direct or indirect superpower intervention in Oromo politics in Ethiopia. And it is ostensibly reflected in Ethiopia's transitional government (1991-1995) when negotiators, particularly the United States, played the OLF out of the transitional government and replaced it with another compliant political organization. The lack of firm cohesion in Oromo socio-politics can thus be attributed to two fundamental reasons: First, to the structural pressures of the Ethiopian state, both geographically (i.e., Oromia is located in the heart of the country and extends geographically from west to east, from southern Sudan to Somalia and from the south (on the border with Kenya) to the northern highlands) and through growing economic interests) And second, Ethiopia's geostrategic location invited major powers to interfere directly (in the negotiation process) and indirectly in the politics of Ethiopian constituent states and to pursue an unfair foreign policy toward Oromo politics (Jalata, 2011). Therefore, extra-societal factors posed a great challenge to the socio-political cohesion of Oromia politics in Ethiopia.

The central concern of the Oromo struggle was to regain the territorial integrity and statehood that Menelik II had conquered during Ethiopian state formation in the late nineteenth century (Jalata, 2017). The fact that the federal state structure in Ethiopia is the least option for the Oromo to remain in Ethiopia (Kumsa, 2019), while some scholars and political activists consider multinational federalism as an existential threat to the Ethiopian state (Mengisteab, 2022). I view the ongoing political crisis in Ethiopia as one that has its roots in the process of state formation, perpetuates extractive institutional and political practices even as attempts are made to rethink and smooth the process of statehood, and ultimately reflects the recurring failure to take up political issues and/or ensure political agendas and label legitimate political issues as "panic politics" and use violence in lieu of political interests.

Since 2014, there have been protests in the Oromia region against the Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan (Finfinnee) (Østebø&Tronvoll, 2020), which includes large parts of the surrounding Oromia Special Zone around Addis Ababa. The plan was met with fierce opposition from the Oromo, who saw it as a systematic land grab and dispossession of local farmers (Benti, 2007) and viewed it as an expansion that would drive the Oromo out of the center. The government attempted to contain the protests by deploying security forces in Oromia but failed to silence them by force of arms. The government imposed two rounds of state of emergency (the first in October 2016 after the Irrecha incident (Irrecha is the Oromo harvest festival, and in 2016, there were mass protests that the government suppressed with violence, resulting in the massacre of hundreds of people in a single day) and the second in February 2018) and the protest remained relentless (Østebø&Tronvoll, 2020, p.6).

In any society, the idea of politics is embedded in the power relationship, or the way power is distributed horizontally between different groups that have the same status and vertically (between the state and society or between the ruled and the ruled). Vaughan &Tronvoll (2003) stated, "The distribution of power in a given society is a function of the knowledge system as it functions in that collective, which in turn is a function of the interaction of all its members, whether they are considered 'powerful' or 'powerless'" (p. 11). The political crisis in Ethiopia is thus rooted in the (re)structuring of power, and the 2014 Oromo protest against the Integrated Master Plan of Addis Ababa and the environs of Oromia Regional State is an



expression of this contestation of the (re)structuring of power. The widespread resistance from the Oromia region organized by “Qeerroo and Qarree” (male and female youth) later expanded to the Amhara region and led to political reform in 2018. In short, the 2018 political reform within the ruling regime was not anchored in the parties but was forced by the masses’ resistance, and some individuals (Team Lammaa) entered the process to increase the pressure within the ruling regime. After an arduous political struggle, political change was initiated on 2nd April 2018, when Abiy Ahmed of OPDO/ODP, representing the Oromo people in the then coalition party (EPRDF), was appointed as the new prime minister.

Erroneously, some articles justified the acceptance of the newly appointed prime minister by stating that “it was the Oromo’s turn.” For example, Østebø&Tronvoll (2020): “...the new Abiy era was widely viewed as ‘now it’s our turn’” (p. 6), but in reality, the Oromo under Abiy’s regime did not perceive that “now it’s our turn,” but rather Abiy was supported by others because of his Ethiopia-centered discourses. Surprisingly, this notion of “now it’s our turn” or (*teregnoch*) was developed by ultranationalist Amhara (i.e., Abiy’s supporters who later withdrew) to delegitimize issues of Oromo self-determination. In reality, the Oromo have no intention of dominating and exploiting others. Instead, the Oromo have fought for their self-determination and put an end to exploitation, human rights violations, and socio-cultural decomposition. Even though there are different views on where the problem lies (in the state or the governmental system) and how to solve it (strategies to solve these legitimate problems), therefore, the Oromo cannot claim that “it is their turn now” under Abiy’s regime. Instead, this claim could aptly describe the morbid competition between the then OPDO/OPD (Oromo Democratic Party) and ADP (Amhara Democratic Party).

Moreover, the post-2018 political reform has been welcomed by almost all Ethiopians and is expected to change the region’s political landscape if the new prime minister accepts the “Algiers Agreement,” which ends the two-decade standoff between Ethiopia and Eritrea. In short, newly appointed Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has attempted to bring positive changes, although the situation has quickly reversed. For example, thousands of political prisoners were released, the torture center (known as Makelawi) was closed, all political parties were brought out of exile, the classification of some political parties as terrorist organizations were lifted, and several legal and institutional reforms were initiated, raising hopes for democratic change in Ethiopia and keeping all eyes on Ethiopia (Addis et al., 2020). However, this highly anticipated political reform was immediately reversed in 2019 when the government deployed security forces to the western part of Oromia to disarm the Oromo Liberation Army, which was closely linked to the crisis in the western and southern parts of Oromia region, by uniting their respective ethnic groups EPRDF into a single national party Prosperity Party (P.P.) under the political rhetoric of Medemer (Amharic word for “synergy”), the whole political situation in the country changed, leading to polarization with the Tigray People Liberation Army (TPLF).

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In order to examine 2018 political change in Ethiopia, researchers used the BTI reports from 2006 to 2022, published every two years, to show political dynamics in Ethiopia. The report identified five dimensions (statehood, political participation, the rule of law, stability of democratic institutions, and political and social inclusion) to assess the status of democracy in each country. The report clearly shows the differences in the status of democracy in Ethiopia (see Table 1 below). For example, looking at the level of statehood, Ethiopia has the lowest score of 5.5 in 2022 (the highest score is ten, and the lowest is 0). Compared to the situation before 2018, a relatively high statehood level of 7.5 was achieved in 2008 and 2006. Ethiopia’s statehood was seriously challenged by the civil war in northern Ethiopia (between the federal government and the Tigray regional state (TPLF)) and the severe

security crisis in western and southern Oromia. The details of the assessment were described as follows:

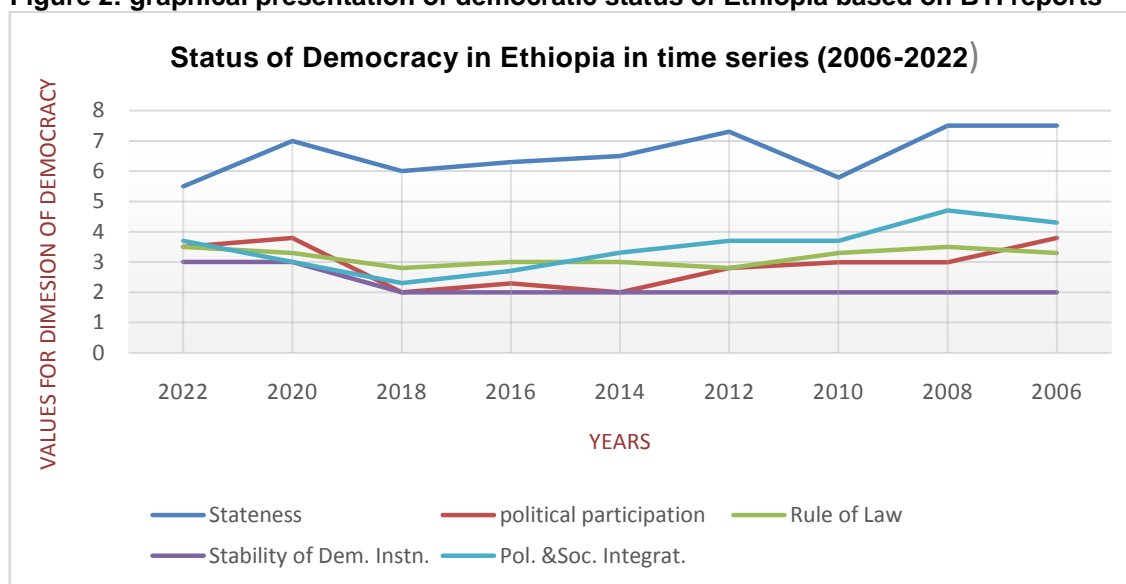
**Table 1: Democratic Status of Ethiopia from 2006-2022 (based on BTI reports)**

Dimension of Measuring Democratic Status	Years (2022-2006)								
	2022	2020	2018	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008	2006
Stateness	5.5	7.0	6.0	6.3	6.5	7.3	5.8	7.5	7.5
political participation	3.5	3.8	2.0	2.3	2.0	2.8	3.0	3.0	3.8
Rule of Law	3.5	3.3	2.8	3.0	3.0	2.8	3.3	3.5	3.3
Stability of Democratic Institution	3.0	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
Political and Social Integration	3.7	3.0	2.3	2.7	3.3	3.7	3.7	4.7	4.3

Sources: Author's Construction based on BTI report (2006-2022)

And graphically, this distribution (see Figure 2: below) shows how almost all dimensions began to move upward (mainly positive changes) and bend downward.

**Figure 2: graphical presentation of democratic status of Ethiopia based on BTI reports**



Source: Author's Construction based on BTI reports (2023)

Years	Democracy Status	Economic Status	Governance Index
2022	3.78	3.36	4.26

<b>2020</b>	4.0	3.67	4.96
<b>2018</b>	3.02	3.64	3.65
<b>2016</b>	3.35	3.23	3.86
<b>2014</b>	3.37	4.07	4.19
<b>2012</b>	3.68	3.96	3.47
<b>2010</b>	3.53	4.11	4.16
<b>2008</b>	3.96	4.13	3.79
<b>2006</b>	4.17	4.21	4.11

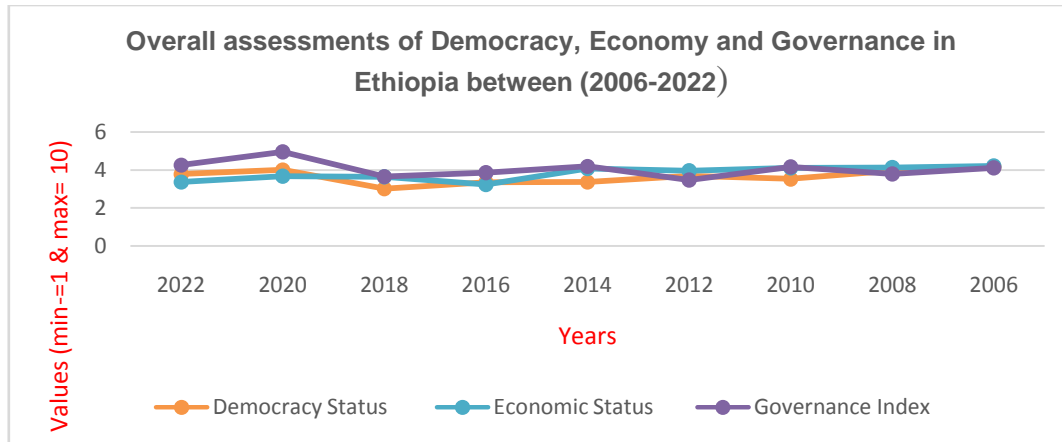
**Table 2: Overall assessment of democracy status, economic status and governance index of Ethiopia based on BTI reports**

*Source: Author's construction based on BTI reports (2023)*

When we assess the political changes after 2018 based on democratic status, economic status, and governance index, there are significant differences between the BTI reports for 2020 and 2022. To show the overall trends in Ethiopia, I have tracked the data from 2006 to 2022 and described them below. Moreover, these data indicate that between 2018-2020, the democracy status increased from 3.01 to 4.0 and the economic status increased from 3.64 to 3.67; the governance index also changed positively from 3.65 to 4.96. However, between 2020-2022, everything started to deteriorate and democracy status decreased from 4.0 to 3.78, economic status from 3.67 to 3.36, and the governance index from 4.96 to 4.26. These data show us that the expected political transition to democracy in Ethiopia was cramped and that the country was inundated with security crises, whether in terms of human security, the high number of internally displaced persons, natural and man-made disasters in different parts of the country, or the high inflation (more than 36%) recorded in Ethiopia. These multi-faceted challenges have their roots, in one way or another, in the country's political leadership. Indeed, the nature of political institutions is essential in promoting political change and improving economic development (Diskin et al., 2005).

The overall situation in Ethiopia after 2018 (see Figure 3 below) shows that the democratization process has changed directly (from a hybrid autocracy to an autocratic government) and that the economic status has deteriorated due to exogenous and endogenous factors. The overall governance index shows that Ethiopia's state is fragile in 2022, which raises a serious question as to why the overall transition to democracy in Ethiopia has failed. State fragility may lead us to consider the extractive institutional structure (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006) and the need for a political culture (Taylor & Williams, 2008) to promote the democratization process.

**Figure 3: graphical presentation of democratic status, economy, and governance index in Ethiopia**



Source: Author's construction based on BTI reports (2023)

To attribute the entire decline of democratic status, deterioration of economic conditions, and failure of governance to the office of the prime minister alone would be minimalist and leads us to disregard some essential factors, such as the interests of the polarized political elite, the established political culture, institutional factors and the overall system of the country as contributors to the total failure. And I can say that the post-2018 political failure is a collective failure where the political elite failed to change the political culture to initiate a democratic transition effectively.

#### 4.1. Security Dynamics in Western Oromia, Ethiopia, Since 2018

##### 4.1.1. Geographical Description of the Western Part of Oromia Regional State

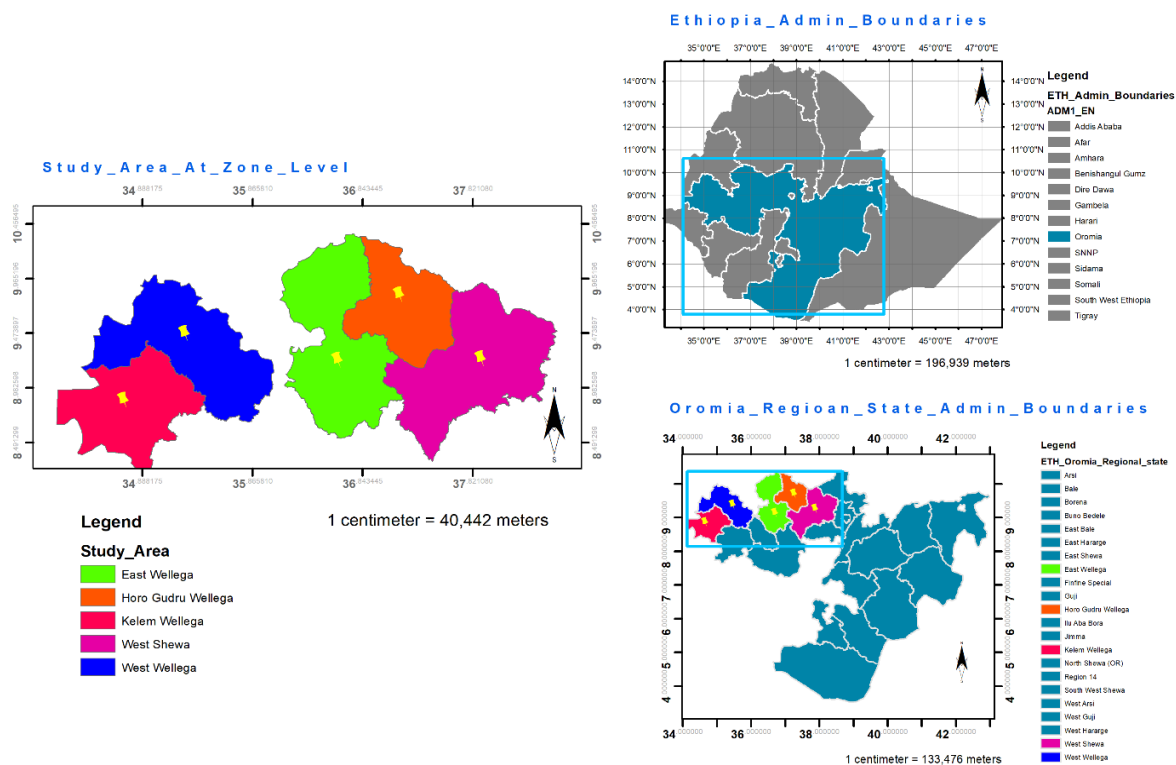
The western part of Oromia consists of several zones of Oromia National Regional States, which lie west of the capital Addis Ababa (Finfinnee), border BenishangulGumuz Regional State to the west, Amhara Region to the north, share a corridor with South Sudan, and border Gambela Region to the southwest. For this study, researchers have identified the typical western part of Oromia, which includes four Wallaggaa zones, namely East Wallaggaa, West Wallaga, Horroo-GuduruuWallaga, QeellamWallaga zones, and part of the West Shoa zone, which are included in this analysis (see Map. 1).

Western Oromia, situated geographically distant from the center, can be categorized as one of Ethiopia's peripheries. Nevertheless, its political significance has elevated it to the core, particularly in the broader context of Ethiopian political discussions and specifically for the Oromo people. The political importance of Western Oromia is attributed to factors such as a sound political conscious of grassroots communities, which enables local residents to engage in center-periphery political discourses of Ethiopia Other contributing elements include the presence of armed freedom fighters, Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), the region's proximity to Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam, historical connections with the international system through extensive missionary activities, and the appeal of the area due to its abundant arable land and natural resources within a vast geographical area.

The area is geographically far from the center and can be considered as one of the peripheries in Ethiopia, but the political importance of the area made it the core or a very relevant place for the political discourses in Ethiopia in general and for the Oromo people in particular. The political relevance of the region stemmed from the high level of literacy, at least compared to other parts of Ethiopia, which paved the way for local people to become familiar with political discourses and develop a political awareness of the relationship between the center and the periphery in Ethiopian politics, as well as the existence of armed freedom fighters in the region (i.e., Oromo Liberation Army/ OLA), proximity to Ethiopia's

considered factors in the region's political relevance. In addition, the region had a high level of arable land endowed with natural resources and a large geographical area that made the area attractive to many people.

**Figure 4: Map of the Western Part of Oromia**



(Source: Author, 2023)

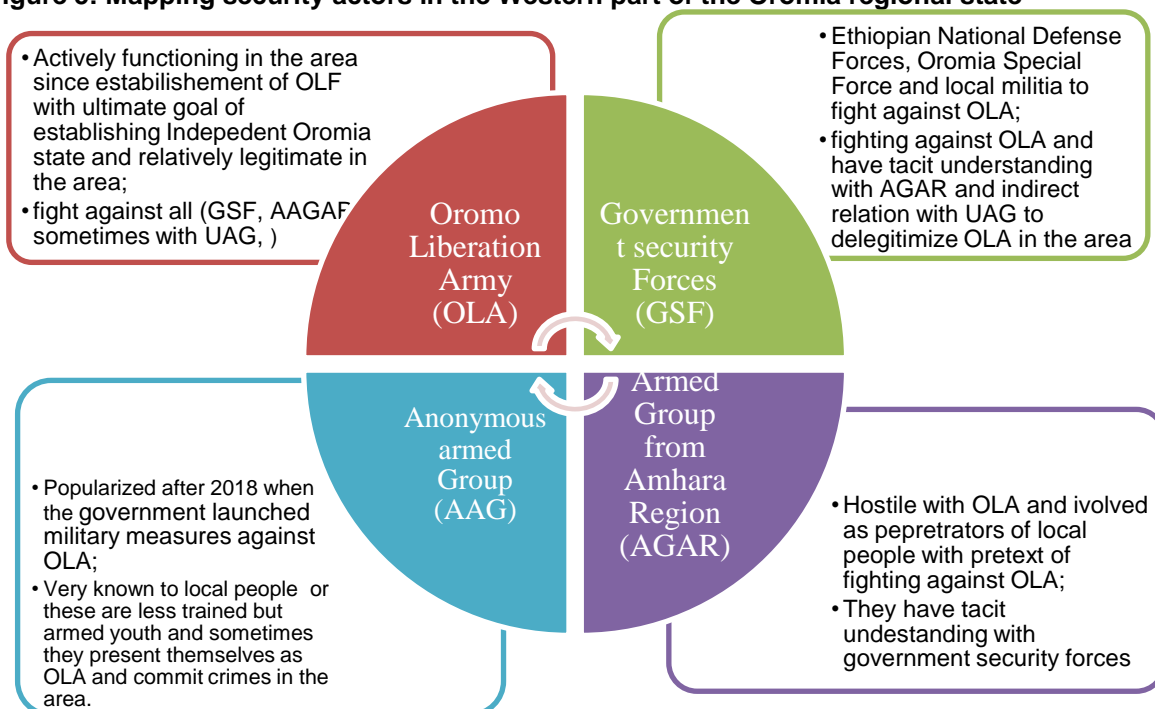
#### 4.1.2. Security Mapping in Western Oromia

Since 2014, the western part of Oromia has been the symbol of the Oromo protest, which was triggered by opposition to the Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan with the surrounding towns/areas of the Oromia Regional State. Since then, there have been many security issues in the region. People in other parts of Oromia and Ethiopia also hoped for the success of the 2018 political reform in the western part of Oromia, but immediately after the appointment of the new prime minister, the region experienced many security crises. For example, between 2018 and 2020, conflict broke out between the Oromo and neighboring BenishangulGumuz Regional State communities. The conflict led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Oromo from BenishangulGumuz Regional State and the border areas of Oromia. According to a 2022 report by OCHA (U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), about 500,000 people have been displaced in the sub-region (western part of Oromia) recently, including thousands who have been displaced from Kamashi Zone (BenishangulGumuz Region, BGR) several times since 2018 and cannot return to their place of origin due to insecurity. Another OCHA report highlights that the population's access to basic services such as education, health care, or water and sanitation has been severely affected by the violence and the destruction of existing infrastructure in recent years. Across

West Oromia, 426 health facilities are reportedly non-functional due to looting and destruction. In East Wallaga, 144 schools are closed and over 62,000 children are not attending school. In West Wallaga, 184 schools are closed and 89,000 students are not attending.

Various actors with different interests are directly and/or indirectly involved in these massive security crises in the region. In fact, four main actors have acted in the region and caused or contributed to the security crisis in West Oromia. These main actors are the Government Security Forces (GSF), the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA /OLF), the Amhara Armed Group (AGAR), and the Anonymous Armed Group (AAG) operating in the region.

**Figure 5: Mapping security actors in the Western part of the Oromia regional state**



*Source: Author's construction (2023)*

The government is responsible for possessing the monopoly of violence in a given territory as a sign of the state (Berger & Weber, 2009), even if we consider the minimal role of the state or the Weberian aspect of the state. In the context of this research, the government security forces, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), the Federal Police, the Oromia Special Force, the Oromia Police, and local militias are involved in security operations in the region. The government is involved as a legitimate actor with illegitimate actions. By 'legitimate actor,' I mean that in principle, the government is responsible for maintaining order and stability among the population of a given area. However, the government is supposed to choose the actions and the best alternative to deal with crises, which leads us to call the government's actions' illegitimate actions". The illegitimate actions of the government have discredited the legitimacy of the government and perpetuated the security crisis in the region. Since 2018, international and regional humanitarian organizations have reported serious human rights violations such as extrajudicial killings of civilians, mass arrests, etc.

Initially, a DDR (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration) process was launched at the initiative of prominent Oromo politicians such as Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, and

the councils of Abba Gadaa. However, it failed due to the political commitment of the government and other parties. The failed attempt at disarmament, demobilization and reintegration exacerbated tensions between the government security forces and the Oromo Liberation Army. This attempt at disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) OLA led to further tension between the political leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front (political wing) and OLA (military wing) and later even a split between the top leaders of the OLF and some individuals who attempted to join the government, some of whom obtained political positions at the regional and federal levels. This shows that the government has double standards and uses all necessary means to remain the only player in the political field in Oromia, using carrots and sticks to divide potential competitors. Unfortunately, this double standard by the government has led to an ongoing security crisis and has closed off or limited the possibilities for deliberative politics that could usher in a transition to democracy in the country.

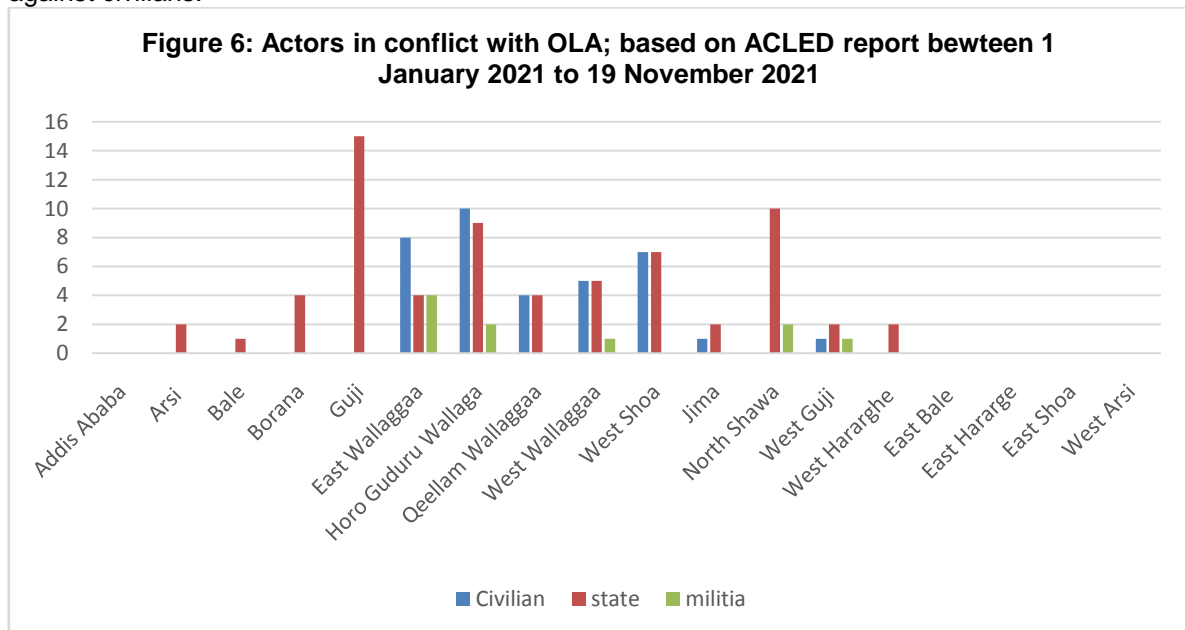
The Oromo Liberation Army was established in the 1970s as a military wing of the Oromo Liberation Army to liberate the Oromo and Oromia from the Ethiopian Empire and allow the people to decide their fate through a referendum, either to be federated with Ethiopia or to establish an independent state of Oromia in the Horn of Africa. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was instrumental in restoring Oromo identity under the leading political ideology of Oromummaa (or Oromo-ness) (Jalata, 2010) throughout Oromia. It structured the Oromo struggle for independence under a unified political organization. It played a crucial role in restructuring state structures during the 1991 transitional government in Ethiopia. As a political organization, the OLF experienced various ups and downs. In 2018, the government called on political parties in exile to return to Ethiopia to create an avenue for political discussion and change the political culture of “gold and wax” (Levine, 2011). Accordingly, OLF leaders arrived in Eritrea with their troops and were warmly welcomed by the population, which shook the ruling regime’s confidence in Oromo legitimacy and triggered a political contest. Soon after, the OLF office was closed and the OLF leader was imprisoned.

During these disputes, the military stationed in the country and the political leader in Addis Ababa (Finfinnee) discussed how to deal with them and called for disarmament. But OLA refused to hand over the weapons without involving a third party to negotiate their cases in a sustainable manner. However, the government pushed for the process and assigned some public figures and local elders to conduct the disarmament process, which failed. Then the government started to take serious measures against them, disarming them by force and labeling them as a terrorist group. In this process, the government ruled out all negotiation options and opted for force to appease the group. However, the group has grown and become stronger than ever because the youth had no other choice and joined the group to defend themselves. Through this process, OLA has become a stronger insurgent group in Oromia after 2018.

On the other hand, armed groups from the Amhara region have intervened in the region under the pretext of providing protection to the Amhara living in West Oromia and have also attacked civilians in the border areas of East Wallaggaa and Horo Guduru Wallaggaa zones in Oromia State. In addition to these conspicuous groups, there is also the Anonymous Armed Group (AAG) in West Oromia. What researchers refer to as the Anonymous Armed Group in West Oromia is a mishmash of groups that are armed and move from village to village to destabilize the local population, kidnap people, and demand money in return. This informal armed group first appeared in 2018 when officials from Kamashi Zone of BenishangulGumuz Regional State were murdered while traveling from Asosa to Kamashi in West Wallagga Zone. This triggered a communal conflict in the region that led to the displacement of hundreds and thousands of Oromo from BenishangulGumuz and border areas. The government described the act as committed by OLA (and referred to them as

“Shane”), while the leaders of OLA affirmed that they did not commit such acts and that the government committed them to justify military action against the Oromo Liberation Army. This double accusation points to two scenarios: first, the existence of another group that committed crimes independently. Second, such blame shows a refusal to accept responsibility for what happened. The fact is that there is another group that sometimes claims to be the faction of OLA and commits some horrible crimes. This group is mainly found in East Wallaggaa Zone and Horo Guduru Wallaga Zone.

To show the trends and some variations between different parts of Oromia National Regional State, I used ACLED data between 1st January, 2021 and 19th November, 2021. The data categorize actors at OLA as civilians, state security forces, and local militias. I used the data to show some trends of incidents within the specified time period, just to support my arguments about mishmash groups (see Figure 6: below). In short, the data shows that OLA is fighting with civilians, but the local data refutes the alleged operations against civilians at OLA. Surprisingly, a high level of data against civilians was reported from Horo Guduru Wallaggaa, followed by East Wallaggaa. These two areas in Oromia Regional State involved armed groups from the Amhara region, resulting in tens of thousands of internally displaced persons in the region. For example, an informant from East Wallaggaa said, “The government troops said, ‘let your OLA protect you and protect you from the armed groups from Amhara region...’ and did nothing while they burned the houses, looted the property, killed the unarmed residents, and drove many people out of their homes.” Yet the incident was reported as if it had been committed by the Oromo Liberation Army. It appears that the government is trying to gain political advantage by delegitimizing OLA through actions against civilians.



Source: Author's construction (2023) based on ACLED report

#### 4.2. The Consequences of Securitized Political Issues and The Fate of Security in Western Oromia

The highly anticipated 2018 political reform in Ethiopia to ensure transition to democracy has seriously suffered from the lack of credible political leadership and adequate institutional support. Indeed, the appointment of Abiy Ahmed as prime minister was due to popular pressure demanding democratic governance in Ethiopia (Blanchard, 2021). Since 2018, several serious political issues have been raised, with some of these political issues only



partially discussed and others completely overlooked and considered or viewed as threats to national security. For example, the national elections that were postponed by the ruling government (Prosperity Party / P.P.) due to the pandemic COVID -19 were partially discussed by the ruling government and the government tried to formalize them through a decision by the Federation House, which has a legal mandate to interpret the Constitution. The decision was not accepted by the other political parties, including the TPLF, and led to severe political chaos in the country.

In addition, the merger of the Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition parties was another serious political decision by the Abiy government. The merger of the coalition parties into a single national political party was seen as a rushed process and inadequate or insufficient consultation with the various political parties. Some key figures in political reform, such as LammaMagarsa, the late president of the Oromia National Regional State, questioned the merger process and publicly announced that he had retired from politics and formed another party. The TPLF, one of the dominant players in the EPRDF, condemned the party integration process and recalled some of the regional representatives at the federal level, which over time led to an intensification of polarization between the federal and Tigray regional governments and a deadly civil war in northern Ethiopia. The Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and other political organizations in the country were also not satisfied with the formation of the government, fearing that the state structure would change from a multinational federalism to a unitary state structure (Blanchard, 2021).

Moreover, the political demands of the armed political groups were not heeded and for the political cause of the armed groups such as OLA, the government-imposed security measures instead of seeking a political solution to the political problems. These ineffective measures precluded the possibility of discussing and proposing possible ways out and reshaping the relationship between the armed group and the ruling regime. The security crisis in the western part of Oromia is entirely the result of this inadequate protection of the political interests of the Prosperity Party and the Oromo Liberation Army. The government wants to maintain at least a minimal state monopoly on the use of force within its jurisdiction (Anter & Tribe, 2014), and OLA is eager to maintain its original goal of fighting for an independent state of Oromia. These political contradictions should be addressed without militarizing the political agenda.

As a result of these and other related political issues, insecurity has increased in Ethiopia in general and in Western Oromia in particular. According to ACLED, 202 violent incidents were reported in Oromia and Addis Ababa region between 1st January, 2021 and 19th November, 2021. The ACLED category of 'violent incidents' includes: Fighting, Explosions/Counter Violence, and Violence against Civilians. Of these 202 incidents, 3 occurred in Addis Ababa and 199 were recorded in zones throughout the region. The relative levels of violence in the 17 zones categorized by ACLED are shown in the table below (see Table: 3).

The data in the Table: 3 shows that the frequency of violent incidents in the western part of Oromia is very high. This shows that the actors involved in violent accidents are pursuing their respective goals. In fact, the worsening of the security crisis in Ethiopia in general and in the western part of Oromia, in particular, has more to do with the strategic failure of the Prosperity Party (PP) or the ruling regime to deal with the competing political interests in the country, especially the conflicting perspectives of ethnonationalism and Ethiopian nationalism. After 1991, ethno-nationalism has fueled the process of reshaping statehood in Ethiopia and disregarding the legitimate political issues of national identity in Ethiopia is the strategic mistake that Abiy's regime has made in Ethiopia's political history. For example, less than three weeks after taking office as prime minister, he said in a meeting with Amhara

academics in Bahir Dar on 21st April, 2018, that “Oromo nationalism reduces this great nation to a local community” Since then, a campaign against Oromo nationalism has spread, with devastating effects for many Oromo and disastrous consequences for the country (Blanchard, 2021).

**Table 3: Distribution of reported violent incidents in Oromia National Regional State to Zones**

<b>Number of events per zones of Oromia</b>	<b>Zone(s)</b>	<b>Total Events</b>	<b>% Of event</b>
<b>1 to 5</b>	Arsi, Bale, Borena, East Bale, Jimma and West Arsi	20	9.9
<b>6 to 10</b>	East Hararge, East Shew, West Guji, West Hararge,	30	14.9
<b>11 to 15</b>	North Shewa	14	6.9
<b>16 to 20</b>	Guji, QeellamWallaggaa, West Shewa	53	26.2
<b>21 and over</b>	East Wallaggaa, Horo Guduru Wallaggaa, West Wallaggaa	82	40.6

*Source: ACLED 2022 Database accessed in 6th June 2022 and customized by Author, 2023*

Another consequence of the securitization of political issues in Ethiopia is the breakdown of state-society relations. Empirically, state-society relations in Ethiopia are subject to the Foucauldian understanding of governmentality, i.e., the notion of power relations in state power (Nilsen, 2015). Thus, the entire political discourses in Ethiopia are linked to power relations and every political action and activism is based on the “cracks and fissures” (Gupta, 1995, p. 394) that have permeated the political discourses in the country. Accordingly, the Oromo Liberation Army and other freedom fighters in Ethiopia were established to renegotiate the balance of power in the country. They have a broad base, and public support/legitimacy in their respective constituencies and OLA has mass support in Oromia.

Dealing with these forces requires excellent care and political awareness because it has significant implications for shaping and reshaping state-society relations. When the government announced the military operation in the western part of Oromia, the public began to perceive the central government as wanting to wage war against its children since the forces in the area had direct relations with the population. In addition, the government downplayed the security crisis in the region. For example, when hundreds of thousands of people were displaced from BenishangulGumuz, the government took no significant action to protect civilians or to assist and reintegrate IDPs from BenishangulGumuz. Recently, armed groups from the Amhara region entered East Wallaggaa and Horo Guduru Wallaggaa, displaced thousands of farmers, looted their property, and burned their homes. Again, the government did not take any reasonable measures to protect the people at the grassroots level but blamed the local government forces OLA to gain political advantage from the crisis. The government failed to ensure the security of its constituency and played a negative role by being a source of security threats.

The humanitarian crisis is a result of insecurity caused by political security issues. The United Nations Organization for Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) released a report in April pointing to a serious humanitarian crisis in the western part of Oromia that has not received the attention it deserves from the government or the international community. The report said that in 2018-2020, violence between the Oromo and Gumuz (BGR) communities and fighting between security forces and armed groups affected humanitarian access, particularly in the West and Kellem Wallaga areas. Since 2021, clashes have spread to East and Horo Guduru Wallaga zones and North, West, Southwest, and East Shewa, resulting in forced displacement within Oromia and into the Amhara region (OCHA, 2022). The report also noted that people's access to basic social services such as education, health care, or water and sanitation has been severely affected in recent years due to violence and the destruction of existing infrastructure. Across West Oromia, 426 health facilities are no longer functional due to looting and destruction. In East Wallaga, 144 schools are closed and more than 62,000 children are out of school. Similarly, in West Wallaga, 184 schools are closed and 89,000 students have not gone to school. Therefore, the securitization of policies in West Oromia has exacerbated the security crisis and distorted state-society relations, resulting in a devastating humanitarian crisis that is still hidden behind the eyes of the international community.

#### **4.3. The Essentiality of Desecuritizing Politics in Ethiopia**

Desecuritization involves the process of normalizing political issues and creating opportunities for political deliberation and consensus building to maintain security. Conceptually, Aradau (2004) defines securitization as negative in that the manner of exceptional politics necessarily both institutionalizes rapid decision-making ('process') and produces categories of hostile others ('outcome'). While desecuritization (i.e., keeping issues in the realm of 'normal' politics or bringing issues back into the realm of 'normal' politics) offers the possibility of a more positive conceptualization (Aradau, 2004), Aradau argues that its transformational potential is severely limited because the normal political mode itself is inevitably subject to the same institutional sovereign authority and rule as securitization (Roe, 2012). Therefore, in the Ethiopian case, desecuritizing political issues and normalization of panic politics is crucial. Indeed, desecuritization involves to stop prescribing security measures for [political issues] and inviting deliberation and consensus on serious political issues.

Without desecuritizing legitimate political issues, finding a way for discussions and political solutions is impossible. Therefore, the desecuritization of politics is the first step to guiding the state's politics in the right direction and putting political engagement in Ethiopia on the right track. It is crucial to rethink security-related issues and manage the issues with discussions. For example, instead of launching a military operation to stabilize the political opposition in the western part of Oromia, the government should discuss with an armed group to end the political disputes through political negotiations. In complicated politics or political issues raised by armed struggle, critical political engagement is needed to remove the causes of armed struggle or the reasons why people use the army to fight. Desecuritization, then, should pave the way for addressing political issues. The process of de-tabooing involves normalizing the language used in the process of securitization and is crucial. The need to be aware of social reality in our discourses was stated by Anatol Rapoport when he said, "Whatever I say, write, or think about the moon may have no bearing on the moon. But what I say, write, or even think about some aspect of social reality becomes a contribution to that reality, indeed is already part of that reality" (Rapoport, 1983, p. 381). Therefore, to maintain security in Ethiopia in general and in West Oromia in particular, it is essential to refrain from blame games and maintain a consistent political standard to discuss and resolve the problem.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The notion of the securitizing politics involves the removal of political issues from the normative political realm and their framing or portrayal as urgent crises; thereby, political matters are treated as security issues. In West Oromia, key actors pursue their political agendas through security measures, effectively employing military means to achieve their objectives. The government, asserting its responsibility for law enforcement in West Oromia and wielding a monopoly on the use of force, aligns with fundamental state policy principles. Conversely, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) actively operates in the region, with a primary goal of democratizing Ethiopia and enabling the populace to determine their destiny through a referendum. As reported by BBC Afaan Oromo on June 24, 2022, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was established in 1976 to combat the imperial regime of Ethiopia, seeking to secure people's rights to self-determination within a democratic system. The OLF, as articulated in the same report, emphasizes the imperative of the Oromo people gaining self-determination and equal rights with other ethnic groups in Ethiopia, warning of the potential for Oromia to seek independence if these rights are not granted. The high command of OLF-OLA, represented by KumsaDiriba (JaalMarro), echoes these political concerns, affirming their commitment to the cause. Despite both major players (i.e., government and liberation army) advocating for political solutions to address their respective causes, an ongoing dynamic prevails where accusations of offensive measures and the perpetuation of security operations persist between the conflicting parties.

In essence, the securitization of politics in West Oromia unfolds as a complex interplay of strategies where political actors employ security measures to pursue their conflicting agendas. Despite both government and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), ostensibly seeking political resolutions to their respective causes, the ongoing discord is characterized by a persistent cycle of mutual accusations. Each party contends that the other is responsible for offensive actions and perpetuating security operations in the region. This perpetual cycle of blame and counter-blame underscores the intricate and volatile nature of the political landscape in West Oromia. Rather than fostering an environment conducive to open dialogue and diplomatic resolutions, the securitization of politics appears to perpetuate a state of heightened tension and mistrust. The failure to break free from this cycle inhibits the exploration of collaborative and non-military approaches to address the root causes of political grievances. As a result, the region remains entrenched in a precarious situation where the pursuit of political objectives through security measures exacerbates the challenges in reaching a sustainable and peaceful resolution. The complex dynamics at play highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive and inclusive political dialogue to navigate towards a more stable and harmonious future for West Oromia.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist

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## ACRONYMS

ACLED: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project  
 BTI: Bertelsmann Transformation Index  
 EPRDF: Ethiopian Peoples Republic Democratic Front  
 HIIK: Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research  
 OCHA: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
 OLA: Oromo Liberation Army  
 OLF: Oromo Liberation Front